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Dear Eric

After leaving school at Easter 1952 I started work at Airworks Ltd at RAF Digby, as a apprentice fitter, but, as we were flying about 100 Tiger Moths most of our time was taken up with ground staff duties and very little with engineering, most of the work was starting and retrieving the air craft as, if there was any wind at all the fact that they had no brakes meant that we would have to run out on to the field and guide them in by holding on to there wing tips, this kept us very fit but did not teach us much about maintenance. At the end of 52 Airworks left Digby and as they were going to use more modern aircraft at Weston Super Mere we were given our marching orders.

I then started at Bass Malting but as it was only seasonal, I left there to work on Frank Kymes farm on Leasingham Moor, it was while I was working for Frank that I received my call up papers for National service. I had every intension of signing on, but the shortest time to sign in the navy at that time was nine years, and as both my brothers; Phil and Roy were both in the army at the time advised me against it, so I decided to go for the two years national service.

At the medical in Lincoln drill hall I was told that very few NS were sent to the navy so I decided to put down Army as my second choice, and so I was pleasantly surprised when on receiving my call up it was for the Royal Navy. At the interview I was asked what branch I would like to join ,and, as I had worked with air craft I plumbed for the Fleet Air Arm as a air mechanic, there for I was a little surprised when I received my call up papers to find that I was to train as a Mechanical Engineer( stoker), so at the age of eighteen I had been called up to do National Service.

So on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 1955 with tooth brush and a change of cloths I set out from Sleaford to report at HMS RALEIGH Torpoint North Cornwall. The warrant ordered me to report on or before 1600hrs and not to take to many civilian cloths as they would all have to be returned home, I set out on a pleasant May day in a very light summer suit and managed to find my way through the London under ground and on to my train to Plymouth, all was going well, I reported to the Naval patrol on the station who directed me to a bus and to make sure I got of at the Torpoint ferry were a naval transport would be waiting on the other side, on boarding the bus I asked the conductor to let me know when we arrived at the ferry terminal, needles to say he forgot and so there was I in a light weight suit in pouring rain having to walk back to the ferry, on reaching the other side I was met by a very angry MT driver who had been waiting for over an hour, so I started my naval service two hours adrift ,soaked to the skin, to be met by the officer of the day who was not at all impressed and informed me that I had missed dinner to boot, what a way to start my Royal Naval career?

The national service divisions were segregated from the regulars on a island with a bridge joining us to the main part of the barracks, the regular trainees and most of the instructors were not very impressed with us n/s lot. I joined my class in Granville division and so started our three months training with the first two weeks mainly square bashing with the instructors (who were mostly ex war time vets ), their main job was to hammer blind discipline into us, I was called names that I had never heard before, we had to do the assault course that was in a tidal river bed and at low tide we had to slog through two to three ft of mud and still parade for divisions next morning spick and span. Our instructor was a P/O Matty who had had a bad time in the war having been sunk three times, this had left him with a very mean streak, we soon realised that any thing we did was wrong and that the impossible had to be done at once and that miracles took a little longer. At least once a week I would be woken in the middle of the night for some silly reason and made to carry my kit locker the quarter of a mile to the quarter deck to have it inspected and then carry it back to the mess, if on the parade ground we were getting better he would put us down by ;" you lot are swinging like the balls on a Hereford bull"; Every morning the



whole barracks had to parade in your best uniforms all spick and span for daily divisions, on the first morning I was pulled up by the officer of the day for not wearing the best uniform, but I managed to convince him that it was the one I had been issued with, and so he gave me a pass to go to the civilian naval tailors in Plymouth and have one made, lucky me, this I found out at a later date was all a fiddle as the tailors used to give the officers a back hander for all the trade they sent to them. At that time I was very fit having worked at RAF Digby where most of our work was running over the flights to retrieve the aircraft, and what with football most weekends I was in good shape and as the annual sports were getting near, I along with some other sporting types were aloud to miss divisions to go training, once around the track then back of the pavilion for a fag, as luck would have it, the NS division did win the inter divisions sport day with me wining the eight eighty yards, as a reward our divisional officer gave us a trip up the river with drinks at one of the river side pubs. The food at that time was horrible, most of the cooks were ex war time navy and they were making a fortune out of all the fiddles, for the first week or two hardly any one ate in the mess hall but after a time being spent up in the NAFFI we had to give in as hunger set in, on one occasion the dinner was so bad that we all slid the plates of the end of the table on to the floor in what was actually a mutiny, the duty officer called out the guard and we were all locked in, but after a while they thought better of it and we were aloud to return to our messes with nothing else said, after that the food did improve for a day or two but it soon reverted to the old rubbish, it made us wonder how any one could turn reasonable food into such rubbish, after that they got rid of the old cooks and got new ones.

After three months training we were passed out as mechanical engineers (stokers) and after leave I received a draft chit to join "HMS Striker" a LST or Landing Ship Tanks part of the Amphibious warfare squadron Mediterranean based on Malta. On the flight out I had a bit of a run in with a Commander who was taking his family to Malta. On my arrival in Malta I learned that the ship was at sea and so I was billeted at a shore base 'HMS Recasuly'.

My first trip on HMS Striker was to Port Said to withdraw our troops to Cyprus where there were problems with the Turks, Greeks and EOKA, after that we spent most of the time on exercises doing landings at such places as Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily, Gibraltar, and Cyprus who at that time was deemed to be a war zone where we were not allowed shore leave, at that time brother Phil was serving in Cyprus with the Royal Horse Guards and so I asked for permission to go ashore to meet up with him only to be told that he had left the day before to take the officers polo ponies back to the UK. We also visited Izmir in Turkey where we had some good runs ashore visiting such places as Mount Ephesus and the temple of Artemis one of the seven wonders of the world. We also did exercises with the Italians working out of Naples with more very good runs ashore! In Naples I visited the museum where they have a lot of exhibits from the ruins of Pompey, with a packet of fags as incentive I managed to visit the pornographic room and believe me there was some eye openers as to what the Romans got up to.

At this time the amphibious squadron was made up with the ex river class frigate HMS Meon as HQ ship, two LSTs, HMS Striker and HMS Reggio, two LCTs, HMS Bastion and HMS Redoubt, with the Motor launch 2583 making up the squadron.

During the summer of 1956 it became obvious that Nasser intended to seize the Suez canal and so we started to build up the squadron with more ships being taken out of reserve, about this time the Egyptian Frigate DOMIAT paid a visit to Malta and we were ordered to stop her leaving by boxing her in next to the jetty, until the UN in all their wisdom ordered that she should be set free, not long after that we heard that she had had a run in with HMS Newfoundland and the Daring class destroyer HMS Diana, and after a short battle she had been sunk with most of her surviving crew being picked up by the two British ships. We then started a big build up of ships and troops both in Malta and Cyprus, where at that time was deemed to be a war zone, also on the 4<sup>th</sup> November it was announced that the Russians had attacked Budapest and so we were not sure where we may be going until we were at sea. Once at sea at the end of October we were given the news that we were heading for Suez, on the way the convoy was shadowed by the US sixth fleet, by this time the Israeli army had swept aside part of the Egyptian army, the RAF



and the fleet air arm with the French air force had badly mauled the Egyptian air force and so in the early dawn of November 6<sup>th</sup> the Amphibious fleet with our destroyer escorts preceded to the assault beaches where we lowered our LCAs (landing craft assault) filled with our marines and they made for the landing grounds, on the way in, we in the engine room were given a running commentary by one of the bridge party who would say something like "there is a gun opened up on the beach" there would be a bang from one of our destroyers and he would say "that gun is now out of action".

After the marines had secured the area we were able to dock at the fish docks to offload the rest of our troops with their tanks and support vehicles,

What with the amphibious landings, plus what was at that time, the biggest helicopter assault from our air craft carriers, it was a very successful military operation, until the politicians took over and messed it up.

Never the less, we and our French allies were successful and were in control of the canal and could have had it open to ships within twenty four hours! As it was, after the UN and Americans took over it took over three months.

After the canal had been taken, Striker was used as a ferry between Malta, Cyprus and Suez. On one trip we had to take all the captured arms and artillery to sea and dump them at sea, being the navy we had a race between the branches for the fastest time to drag the field guns down the tank deck and out through the bow doors, as the LCTs were smaller, they were used to ferry troops and stores around the fleet.

Most of the allied troops had left the canal by the middle of December, HMS Striker was left behind as depot ship to the salvage fleet, and on 25<sup>th</sup> we watched as the Egyptians tried to blow up de Lesseps statue, and, after three or four failed attempts they pulled it over with a lorry. We then became attached to the United Nations force, where we were not allowed to wear our British uniform or even fly the white ensign, as I was boat driver it was our job to transport the senior officers to their destinations up and down the canal, at this time we were using one of the LCAs and it was my job to be in charge of the Bren gun we had as defence, I am pleased to report that it never became necessary for me to use it. We were one of the last RN ships to leave, making for Malta at the end of January, and as I had leave due to me and was overdue for relief, I was soon back in the UK and demobbed.

I had some bad times doing my national service but I would not have missed it for the world.



Late in 1954 I received my call up papers to do national service, at the medical in Lincoln I was passed fit and was told that my first choice of the Royal Navy was very unlikely as very few NS were taken in. there for I was very surprised when my call up papers arrived to find that I was to serve in the Royal Navy.

On 16<sup>th</sup> May 1955 I joined HMS Raleigh at Torpoint in Cornwall for what was to be three months of hell on earth basic training to pass out as a mechanical engineer(stoker), after passing out I received a draft chit to join HMS Striker a LST, "Landing Ship Tanks" part of the amphibious warfare squadron Mediterranean based at Malta.

My first trip on her was to withdraw our troops from Aden to Cyprus, we spent the rest of the year on training exercises with our own Royal Marines who were part of the ships company plus 40,42 commando , with other tank regiments, plus Turkish and United Nations troops doing day and night landings on such places as Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily Gibraltar and Cyprus who at that time was deemed to be a war zone.

During the summer of 1956 it became obvious that Nasser intended to seize the Suez canal and so we started to build up our fleet with many more ships and troops, during the summer the Egyptian frigate DOMIAT paid a visit to Malta and Striker was ordered to make sure she did not leave by berthing along side so that she could not leave with out us knowing, then the UN in all there wisdom ordered that she should be let free, not long after she left we heard that she had a run in with HMS Newfoundland and had been sunk, many of her ships company being saved by the Newfoundland and HMS Diana..

We then started a big build up in Malta and Cyprus and as at this time there was problems in Cyprus with the Turkish and Greeks, the Russians were invading Hungary and we had no idea were we may land until we were at sea heading for Egypt, on the way we were shadowed by the US 6th fleet.

While we were at sea the Israeli army had swept aside part of the Egyptian army, the Royal Air Force with the Fleet Air Arm and the French Air Force had badly mauled the Egyptian Air Force and so in the early dawn of November 6<sup>th</sup> the assault fleet with our Destroyer escorts made for the beeches were we landed our marines, they soon managed to secure the fish docks so that we could land our tanks and there support teams straight on to the docks, By this time our salvage fleet were getting to work lifting the block ships to the canal .they thought they could have had it open to ships in 48 hours, as it happens the UN and Americans took over and it took over three months in mid November we were dispatched to Haifa to pick up UN observers.

.HMS Striker was left in the area as depot ship to the salvage fleet under the UN flag and we were not aloud to wear British uniforms, we were their until the end of January and because I was late home I was demobbed as soon as I arrived back in the UK..