

The Voyage of HMS Cook **March 1957 - August 1958**



In 1957 I was serving on a Survey ship HMS COOK which at that time was considered a "Private Ship" and not part of the Fleet, all Survey Ships being painted overall white with a buff coloured funnel. Now the Survey vessels are all considered an integral part of the Fleet and Task groups and are painted light grey.

HMS COOK was "laid down" as HMS PEGWELL BAY at A Pickersgill and Sons Ltd Sunderland, in 1944, then became HMS LOCH MOCHRUM, finally becoming HMS COOK completed in July 1949 at Devonport Dockyard. At that time most Ocean going Survey ships were converted LOCH/BAY Class ships.

The Hydrographic Office was formed in 1795 its job to provide the Admiralty with up-to-date charts to be made available for use by the Fleet. This is done through information obtained by ships such as HMS COOK who not only obtain info but also produce amended Charts onboard for forwarding to The Hydrographic Dept at Taunton. Other Navies and our own Merchant Navy are supplied with these charts, at a price, it is a fact that the Hydrographic Service was/is the only Naval Dept to earn money.

The Ships complement was 14 Officers and 135 Ratings, the Commanding Officer and most of the Officers belonged to the Hydrographic Branch of the Service, we did however carry a Surg Lt Cdr, a Supply Officer, an Engineering Officer, an Electrical Officer and a Bosun. Most of the Junior and Senior rates belonged to the Survey Branch, but we also carried Senior and Junior rates in the Mechanical Eng, Electrical, Cooks, Stewards and Supply Branches. I was the Stores Petty Officer (PO Jack Dusty) responsible for all Naval Stores.

There was no air conditioning onboard, portholes were open and a wind scoop was pushed out to scoop up the what "air" there was to create a "breeze", you had to be careful whilst at sea that the scoop didn't scoop up the "oggin" and drown anyone who was seated below. All crew members with the exception of Officers "slung" hammocks, slept on mess tables, lockers or stools. Once out in hotter climes nearly everybody slept in camp beds on the "upper deck".

Victualling for the Ships Company was what the service called "Modified General Mess". This was where the Senior victualling rating together with the Senior Cook rating drew up weekly Menus to be kept within the monetary budget, allowed by MOD(N). All meals were cooked in the galley and collected at the appropriate times when meals were taken, by "Cooks of the mess", or mess men from the Senior rates mess. The Wardroom had its own system of catering and its own galley but the daily messing allowance was the same as the Junior/Senior Rates, but was supplemented by additional charges paid by each officer.

The ship Commissioned in Plymouth Dockyard on 13th March 1957 when relatives and friends of the Ships Company were guests onboard for the Ceremony and were able to look around the ship which was to be our home for the next 18 months.

The Ship cast off at 1020 on Tuesday 19th March 1957 and the First Foreign Service Commission of HMS COOK began to the Central Pacific. We ran into some extremely "heavy" weather in the SW approaches which included the Land Rover being torn from its "secure lashings" which then proceeded to career around the Foc'sle smashing into and damaging boats and life rafts before it was finally secured.

To add to our misery the Asian Flu epidemic which had just started in the UK followed us at sea and approx. 20 of the ships company went down with it. The Sick Bay was only fitted with 2 cots and so the remainder were bedded down in hammocks around the ship in Messes and Passageways.

There was a Medical Emergency on board when our First Lt, Lt Cdr John Paton accidentally spilled ammonia on his face. Airlift was requested from the USN to ensure early hospital attention, he was initially transferred to City of Oxford inward bound for Panama and thence to a US Flying Boat. Colon hospital reported there was no permanent damage to his eyes and would rejoin the ship after completing the treatment.

We arrived in KINGSTON JAMAICA on 7th April where we took some well-earned shore leave, recovered from the pounding, put right what we were able of the damage, and refuelled. Sailing on the 11th April for Colon where our passage through the Panama Canal was to begin.

On Saturday 13th April we commenced passage through the Canal, with most of the ships company on deck to witness the sights and wonders of the Canal. We were hauled through by mechanical mules/donkeys arriving at the US Naval Base at Port Roman but as we arrived after 1630 we were required to wait until the next day before we could fuel!!

We remained there until PM the following day when after refuelling we sailed for Christmas Island in a calm sea.

A day to be remembered was Thursday 18th April when HMS COOK crossed the equator for the first time. In keeping with tradition their Majesties King Neptune and Queen Amphitrite honoured us with a visit, attended by their full court. Initiation of the ships company was soon progressed and everyone had a most pleasant bath in a mixture of salt water, paint and duresco, compensated by a most impressive certificate. The remainder of the day was declared a holiday at the request of their Majesties,

At 0900 on the 6th May 1957 the ship arrived at Christmas Island in the Pacific and for the next few weeks joined up with Grapple Squadron where the NAAFI had set up a "tent" on the Island and opened a "bar" which was operated as far as I can remember by one NAAFI employee.



Awaiting detonation of the H bomb, Malden Is



Eyes front!

The culmination of our stay with Grapple Squadron was on the morning of 15th May when we witnessed the dropping of the first Hydrogen bomb, the first in a series of nuclear tests at Malden Island. All the ships company wore Action Working Rig, together with anti- flash gear and darkened goggles, plus the sensitised badges supplied, to detect whether we had been subjected to radiation and which were pinned to our AWR shirts. We were then mustered on the upper deck, sat down with our backs to the explosion and waited. After the explosion and fireball we were allowed to face the direction of the explosion. The burst was most impressive and all present were of the opinion that COOK had been quite near enough. After the excitement had died down we handed in our badges, each one with a serial number shown against each name. Having heard nothing for 46 years I have come to the conclusion we were radiation free!!

On the 22nd May we said our farewells to Grapple Squadron and set course for Suva, Fiji, surveys were carried out en route before finally arriving on 6th June where we were greeted by the band of the Fiji Military Forces, playing with much vigour until long after the ship was secured. This was to be our refuelling base whilst surveying in the Fiji area.

The morning of 13th June 1957 was fine and sunny and a guard was landed to take part in the Queens Official Birthday Parade.

The parade took place at Albert Park where other contingents taking part were Fiji RNVR, Fiji Military Forces, the Royal New Zealand Air Force and Fiji Police. The Ceremony was a great success and COOK's detachment was well received by the thousands who watched the parade.

After a pleasant stay we sailed for New Zealand and the ship secured alongside in Auckland on 19th June 1957. The weather in NZ made a noticeable change after several weeks in the tropics and was not unlike that which we experienced during our last week in Plymouth.

All too soon our short refit period came to an end, many friendships had developed ashore and we formed the impression that the Kiwi Navy were not a bad crowd, collectively and individually, we were to see more of them later on in the year.

Next on our programme was some earnest surveying and after a short call at Suva for fuel the ship "nosed" into Natewa Bay on the Island of Vanua Lavu the second largest in the Fijian Group. This was to be our survey ground for the next three months.

A week after our arrival in Natewa Bay an official ceremonial visit was made to the ship by some local Chieftains. During the ceremony a Tambua (Whales Tooth) was presented to the ship. This is the highest mark of respect that a Fijian can show to a visitor

Very soon friendships sprang up between ship and shore and hardly an evening passed without "visitors" arriving to share our cinema shows or just sit on the foc'sle with their guitars and break into song; the harmony achieved by a group of Fijian singers is to be heard to be believed.

At weekends spent on the survey grounds banyan parties were landed on some of the numerous and handy beaches. Other weekends visits were made to Suva or Levuka, the later was a small place on the island of Ovalou where the COOK was the centre of interest to the local population who made us very welcome and once again we appreciated Fijian hospitality at its best.

The survey of Natewa Bay completed we sailed for Tarawa Atoll in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. The grim reminders of the Pacific War were still present in the form of wrecked and rusted war machines of every nature. These were slowly being cleared away. During our stay many parties of school children visited the ship and seemed to enjoy their visit.

Surveying was now at an end for 1957 the next item on the agenda being a refit and lie-up period in Auckland. After arrival on the 19th November last minute touching up and polishing were completed in preparation for the ships annual inspection. This was carried out on the 26th November 1957 by the Naval Officer in Charge, Auckland.

For the following 4 months we sampled KIWI hospitality, so much in fact that seven of the ships co were married before we sailed, one member of the ships co and his bride having the Petty Officer of the Patrol sent to "accompany" him back to the ship, acting as best man!!

During our stay we had 6 deserters, 2 from our first visit in June we learned later that they managed to get jobs ashore, all returning voluntary before we sailed in March 1958 with the one exception who required a Petty Officer plus 2 to fetch him onboard. The CO then gave him permission to get married in the forenoon (accompanied by the Patrol) with the ship sailing an hour after his return onboard.

The refit at an end we carried out sea trials and sailed for the Solomon Islands the send off from Auckland was very emotional for some (those newly wed) and a happy occasion for most it meant we were on our way home.!!

Our first call was at Honiara on the island of Guadalcanal where we started taking our anti-malaria tablets. It was a picturesque little place and very quiet, quite different to the scenes of war a few years previous.

We landed a camp party to carry out an inshore survey; from Honiara we called at Gizo where yet another camp party was detached to survey the harbour approaches. Having discovered that some of the Solomon Islands were incorrectly charted the need for fuel and fresh provisions made a trip to Port Moresby, New Guinea, necessary. We enjoyed a pleasant weekend and a liaison with the Australians ashore was established.

More surveying followed in the Solomons area when again our need for fuel resulted in yet another call at Suva. This was to be our last call during this commission which made the saying of farewells necessary, the ship would return but not this ships co. We finally left on a wet afternoon with a rather subdued crowd to see us off. One day some may return but if not, we are left with many happy moments well spent.

Course was now set for the Solomons once more where we progressed with the survey, on the 12th June 1958 a guard was landed to take part in the Queens Official Birthday parade at Honiara, the author being the Petty Officer of the guard. From reports received a good showing was made also on this occasion.

A few more days were spent in and around Port Moresby, we then started passage to Singapore where the ship was due to recommission on 30th July 1958. On arrival at Singapore all our reliefs had not arrived, mine included, and so we sailed for Hong Kong where the remainder of reliefs were waiting for the ship.

Turn over to our reliefs, then to HMS TAMAR to await flights home on 14th August 1958. Time away from home 18 months.

HMS COOK remained in the Pacific for the next 7 years, carrying out surveys throughout and also acting as rescue vessel during Royal Flight at Phoenix Island, March 1963, and were at Suva for the Royal visit in December 1963. Ships Companies were changed by Air Trooping. Left UK March 1957 arrived back in Devonport (UK) February 1964. Placed on disposal list May 1964 sold to a Greek Company 1968 for breaking up.

RAY HUNT

Lieutenant Commander RD RNR