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## Service Story of Lt Cdr Ieuan E. Roach RN

Based on the author's article INSTRUCTOR LIEUTENANT COMMANDER IEUAN ELFED ROACH, RN., HIS "CHRONICLE" ©

My start in life was typical of families eking out an existence in the South Wales Coalfield of the 1920s: a childhood accompanied daily from 1924 by the noise of hundreds of miners making their way to and from the Colliery. Three attendances each Sunday at the Baptist Chapel were as much to ensure parents had a child-free Sunday after a week of shift-working, than for serious religious education, though the old Baptist Deacons put the fear of God into we youngsters, perhaps contributing eventually to a negative effect in my case. Three sons, an older daughter, parents and a grandmother, plus a great-grandmother for a short while, made it a house-full, but I learnt a lot about Aneurin Bevan, family friend and MP, and where babies came from. They came out of the black Gladstone bag carried by my grandmother, the village midwife and district nurse whose meagre salary was paid by the Miners' Federation.

Eventually WW2 brought changes and the Government tried to organise youths, including me. Some were sent directly to the Forces, some to be Bevin-Boys, though most started in the mine at 14 years anyway, and some were picked out to "get in" early teacher-training before starting National Service. In 1942 I was picked out in this way and was persuaded to leave Sixth Form halfway and start training instead at the Monmouthshire Teacher Training College, Caerleon, early enough to get qualified before "joining up". College life was a relief from living at home and I learnt a great deal from other students and from civil defence duties in the village and Newport. It seems I concentrated on developing a taste for physical training, beer, rugby and bits about educational psychology. The scheme for early, shortened Finals in April 1944 was closed to me as, therefore, was my volunteering then to join-up. Some committee or other made me wait for full, main Finals in June. Then the wheels of conscription turned slowly and I was not called to The Navy until early September 1944, when I put on my second uniform to become one of the "men dressed as seamen". "Second uniform" because I had already served for two years voluntarily in The RAF's Air Training Corps and made it to sergeant at College where I enjoyed barking orders on parade.

I still shudder at the New Entry Training at HMS *Duke* (Malvem) and HMS *Royal Arthur* (Skegness); but Radio Mechanic training at Gordon's College, Aberdeen, was pleasant but not successful. It meant re-mustering at the then *Royal Arthur* (in the coldest the North Sea can give) and I was allocated a new rating of Air Mechanic (Air Frames) to serve initially at HMS *Gosling* (Camp 5), commonly known as "Gosling 5", at Glazebrook, Lancashire. It was an Admiralty ruse however, for we all wore khaki battle-dress, boots, anklets and webbing belts for field training, reluctantly aiming to become Naval Air Base Defenders in the Far East. My third type of uniform was distinctly Army-type, and I wore it on 16th March 1945 as a defaulter at the Captain's table. It was surprising (after completing the first day of extra drill) to be recalled to the Captain's table on the 17th when he told me the Admiralty had commissioned me on the 16th and he had no authority to punish an officer. I must surely be the only rating to be legally-punished and commissioned on the same day!

Off to Devonport where, having no Admiralty or *Gosling V* chit to help him, the Duty Officer put me in the Upper Yardmen's Mess, first largely empty but crowded at midnight with hammocks slung everywhere. Imagine trying to assure the Senior Yardman at first light that I was an officer misplaced, when he was insisting that a joiner was automatically Cook-of-the Mess and that was that. Until the Divisional Office opened at 10.00 I had also to join the team for scrubbing out the seamanship room. But there I did what every matelot would like to do. At 09.55 I stood up and, throwing down my scrubber, I strode out and left the Leading Hand speechless. The Divisional Officer sent me on indefinite leave until I

could reappear properly dressed in No. 5 uniform, which I promptly ordered at a back-street tailor in Devonport. On my return there followed some weeks in HMS *Drake's* Depot School where one of my duties was keeping up-to-date the barracks' wall-map of the European Land Campaign. VE-Day was nearly a disaster for me when, walking past Plymouth's Lockyer Hotel, an idiot dropped a full flagon probably from the top floor and, after falling at the usual 32ft per sec per sec, it exploded on the pavement about 2ft in front of me, covering my shoes and (new) trousers with broken glass and beer. Any slight change of direction would have meant you would not be reading this now, unless of course a uniform cap would have been more protective than intended.

Commissioned Warrant Officer Roach, wearing one thin ring of gold lace, blue below, trained in the Schoolmaster Branch, partly in the old HMS *Malaya*, which made a good group photograph under her guns, and alongside the elderly HMS *Ramillies*, both appearing to be lying on the mud of Fareham Creek. Our Captain was Jackie Broome, DSC, forever to be connected with the infamous Russian convoy PQ17 of July 1942, and later becoming a well-known author ("Make a Signal" etc.) and historian.



Schoolmaster Candidates' Summer Course of 1945 aboard the Battleship HMS *Malaya*  
Warrant Schoolmaster I.E. Roach third from right rear row: Source Ieuan E. Roach

As soon as I joined HQ Commando Group (Lavington House & Burton Park House, Petworth) I realised Commando officers could be a wild lot. The Engineer Officer displayed his skill on a tiny airborne forces motor-cycle by riding it on the billiards table. Most had fighting knives, and a knife with knuckleduster handle was passed to me! Sensibly, as WW2 began to become history, all knives and personal weapons were soon piled before the Quartermaster's store, presumably for secret stowage. But not before a couple of anonymous subalterns had "improved", so they said, the Grinling Gibbons carved fireplace at a notable country house. I seem to have been billeted for short periods at that time in a number of country houses, even Goodwood, but only in their stables area! From one such base I went on an evening-trip, Alton to London, "on" (not "in") the most crowded Willys Jeep anyone could have known. Surprisingly, the London "bobbies" did not stop us, perhaps because a large force of Green Berets "hanging on" to a jeep spelled trouble.

With Operation Zipper cancelled and its training base in North India closed, I was posted to 45 Commando (Cdo) RM, which had been formed by amalgamating the wartime 45 Cdo with the remaining complement of 46 Cdo which had recently been de-commissioned. My posting to 45 Cdo was the first posting of an RN officer to a Commando unit for

educational duties. We embarked at Chatham a few days after Christmas 1945, into Atlantic storms which kept HMS *Rajah* bows-on almost to South America before being able to alter course for Gibraltar. Like all escort carriers, *Rajah* was a converted, non-riveted Liberty-Ship, and its welded hull “twanged” like a can under the steel flight deck which covered the entire ship, and to which our heavy vehicles, etc., were chained (some rather too loosely?) on to welded “eyes”. Understandably, in that first week’s rotten weather, the Captain considered jettisoning all deck cargo which made a nonsense of the ship’s normal metacentric height.



Escort Carrier HMS *Rajah* during WW2: Source Wikipedia (public domain)

The rest of the voyage to Hong Kong was normal – except of course for lack of sleep from the old Liberty Ship noisily complaining about her welded plates whilst taking a heavy sea or altering course. There were also open comments about the decision of the Director Naval Education Service (DNES) to send, in my care, a variety of stuff intended for vocational training courses (plumbing, motor maintenance, metal-work, etc.) to be organized in Hong Kong for troops waiting for discharge to civil life in the UK. Most of *Rajah*’s 1,500 embarked troops harboured active and war-like intentions with few thoughts about returning to civil life! But there was certainly no call for the punch which one embarked soldier (not a Marine) landed on the ship’s Executive Officer, felling him just off Kowloon! (Photo below taken in a Hong Kong photographic studio in 1945.)



Immediately post-war even a 21 year-old sometimes had broad responsibilities. As “stand-in” Brigade (Bde) Education Officer, and from a shop-front “office” in the west-side arcade of The Peninsula Hotel, Hong Kong, I controlled resettlement and educational matters for three RM Commandos and our Army comrades which unit was numbered “1st/5th” as it contracted from one and five Army Cdos before final dispersal. There were also small detachments of 3 Cdo Bde RM left in Singapore and even Japan. Obviously, I selected suitable RM Subalterns to be Unit Education Officers. As I recall, DNES’s appointments of Schoolmasters and later Instructor Officers, at Commando level, did not commence until the 3rd Cdo Brigade RM transferred from Hong Kong to Malta.

45 Commando’s HQ was at Fan Ling, almost on the border with China, and Commando anti-smuggling patrols tried to prevent Hong Kong “goodies” being taken into China especially on the rickety single track railway, or via Mirs Bay. Adventure-seeking “Q-ship” junks sometimes came up voluntarily from

Kowloon, to Mirs Bay, strangely on Wednesdays ("Make and Mend Days"?). One or two very odd undercover men used to arrive unannounced at 45 Cdo's HQ Mess, carrying bags of large Mirs Bay oysters in return for a free bar-bill and games of Liar Dice. All this went on amongst delightfully meek New Territories Chinese, who nevertheless recalled grimly the earlier ravages of their homesteads by an entire Nationalist Army which, with or without permission, had passed through The New Territories before being shipped from Kowloon to the north, for insertion behind Communist Army lines, though to very poor effect. It seems the history books are silent about this episode, but I remember being told the story by Fan Ling Chinese whom I had involved in minor cultural activities with our Royal Marines.

My several periods of "stand in" duties at Brigade HQ, whilst detached from my parent unit 45 Cdo RM, were due to the local Naval HQ frequently requiring the services at St. Stephen's College of Warrant Schoolmaster A.E. Curtis B.Sc. who had landed with me from HMS *Rajah* as Brigade Education Officer. Admiral Sir Cecil Harcourt was Acting Governor during the early re-occupation years and if the RN HQ needed someone they took him at will from one of the three Services! Years later, A.E. Curtis, became Instructor Commander and our families were life-long friends, including him being Best Man at my Wedding.

Things were also a bit unusual at Brigade HQ in Hong Kong. The Staff Captain 'A' kept a python named Shorty in his bedroom. It soon outgrew the name and, eventually, Shorty had company from another called Shorty's Oppo. It was a mess joke to send a visitor up to "Captain C.G.'s room" without a briefing about the occupant's curious obsession. When the Brigade left Hong Kong in 1947 the snakes were caged and packed off to London Zoo by freighter which for some time received signal traffic from *Strathnaver*, our trooper, to make sure Shorty and Shorty's Oppo were coping well whilst caged.

And there was the matter of a subaltern who, after a successful rugby match at Happy Valley, took over The Star Ferry, which was always full, and had her steer off course as far as Stonecutters Island before bringing her back to Kowloon-side.

The large force of Japanese Prisoners of War (POWs) being policed by 45 Cdo in the frontier area could not have been more cooperative, despite our colonel's order that a POW had to come to attention, turn towards any passing British marine of any rank, and bow. The swimming pool at the requisitioned Officers' Mess was a frightful sight, stagnant for years, but a force of about 10 Japanese POWs, snatched up full buckets on ropes, working ceaselessly without much of a break. They soon cleared a huge amount of slimy water into the surrounding undergrowth, and then scrubbed clean the pool-sides and bottom. The immense strength of these quite small men was impressive, even to our marines who thought they were super-fit. The Commando also had charge of a detachment of Japanese Imperial Cavalry. Their large, well-groomed horses were popular with experienced Royal Marines riders, but the returning members of the Fan Ling Golf Club complained vigorously about churned-up fairways.

Early re-occupation of Hong Kong must have been a memorable time, with thousands of Japanese POWs, many left in post initially to keep control of an otherwise unsupervised population. Gradually the POWs were shipped back to Japan, minus bootlaces, razor-blades and anything else with which they could harm themselves. At Stanley Prison, 42 Commando guarded the main miscreants, even up to execution for the worst offender although carried out by specialist prison-staff.

At war's end, resettlement advice for personnel leaving the armed forces involved research into possible careers and vocations. This reduced with time, but procurement of suitable correspondence courses continued, under the Education Officer's supervision. During the final years of WW2 and afterwards, the Commando units in which I served had many officers and senior NCOs who had been and were remarkable fighting men, well-decorated for their gallantry in war. Their Staff responsibilities in peacetime, however, were less proficient, and my careful suggestions for better results on paper were generally appreciated by Troop Commanders, Brigade Staff and, occasionally even the Brigade Commander!

Other rank education (including the famous post-WW2 Army Board Current Affairs Discussion Groups) often took place in some strange outposts. Later, organising an in-unit revision-course for officers' examinations (Captain to Major and Staff College entrance) was interesting but I was glad it was a rare occurrence.

My post-war service in Hong Kong, with continuation in Malta, etc., lasted for 40 months and, including frequent moves between 45 Cdo and Bde HQ, it was certainly the longest commission of my RN/RM career. Naturally (for the DNES Appointer) I then served a full commission at the Commando School RM which included "looking after" the educational needs of cliff assault personnel who spent much time perched on the pinnacles of Cornish cliffs. Those cliff climbers were certainly "irregulars" by nature, but much loved by residents of St. Ives.



The Branch-Merger of 1946 meant promotion to Instructor Lieutenant (photo left in Malta with 45 Commando, 1947) and, at the end of National Service, I started contracting for Short Service Commissions which went on for most of the permitted 10 years. I was made Instructor Lieutenant Commander in December 1954 and later transferred to the Permanent List of RN Officers, retiring at my own request in February, 1968. Dark blue uniforms (reefer jacket, mess dress and mess undress) and white ones (shorts & shirt, neck-high tunic, tropical mess and undress, Red Sea rig, Persian Gulf rig) can be counted to be the fourth to twelfth uniforms which I have worn, including of course at least one for service in each of the three armed services. Needless to say, whenever possible I wore Army-type uniform to visit Naval HQ, and "No. 5s" to visit the Army Staff! The new No. 5 uniform and cap, bought for me to wear in the Coronation Procession of 1953, were never the same after the drenching rain, and their Lordships chose to give only minor recompense, especially as a Gieves and Hawkes' advertisement showed reconditioning of a treated No.5 suit after it had been towed across the Atlantic.

With the exception of appointments in HMS *Heron* (RNAS, Yeovilton), HMS *Ganges* (one short-period and one of 2+ years), and HMS *Victory* (RN Barracks, Portsmouth), all my commissioned service was in Royal Marines units. There were the usual duties of mentoring other ranks interested in promotion, especially the Corps Commission Candidates ("Upper Yardmen" in RN-speak). Initially the Corps had their own qualifying educational examinations, but soon transferred to the usual RN versions, especially the Higher Education Test (HET) and GCE. For all my RM service the Corps retained Military Topography as a qualifying HET subject, and it fell to me to write and construct the correspondence course in the subject, which operated for some years.

As peacetime accounting returned, young officers needed coaching in keeping non-public funds (mess accounts, etc..) with auditing systems which were required under the new and strict comprehensive Army regulations. The time-honoured teaching feature "Learn a bit then teach it" applied and, if fortunate enough, eventually won the description of "specialist" on whom others depended. I was frequently called to untangle mangled funds, thus preventing ominous Boards of Enquiry. Operationally, I served in the Intelligence Section, and did roster duties as an Operations Room Officer. Calculating aircraft portability, and tactical stowage of landing craft space, fell to me, as did angle, range and height of rocketed cliff-assault grapnels. As Press Officer in 40 Commando in Cyprus it was not my fault that careful briefing about our "detonating a bomb under the stable" appeared in the newspaper as "a bomb found under a table was detonated and brought the house down".

I served also at RM Barracks Eastney, 40 Commando, another short tour at Brigade HQ, and a full tour at The Depot Royal Marines. Admittedly my personal commando training was brief: just an "acquaint course" at Achnacarry in 1945, but

in those early days it was policy to give in-unit commando training and experience to the three RN officers of a Commando. These were the Chaplain, the Medical Officer and the Instructor Officer. By a Formation Commander's decision The Green Beret could then be awarded when appropriate. In my case, and throughout my 15 years of commando service in the Royal Marines, there was no doubt as to my entitlement to wear The Green Beret with a variety of small-sized RN cap badges, but always RM Cdo shoulder insignia; never the black and white "Royal Navy" shoulder-tabs.

I served in Corps units in Hong Kong (post-war policing, including of Japanese POWs), Malta (twice, for spearhead training), Cyprus (active service), Sardinia ("Combine 1" amphibious training) and Libya (several times, for training and internal security); all this RM Service was integral and not "attached to". Active service in Cyprus was in separate tours, (three of 3+ months, and one of almost six months). It even included being in command of our operational region in Cyprus for a couple of weeks when the Colonel and most of 40 Commando were cordoning General Georgios Grivas in caves north of Limassol. I kept transport moving around Troodos, hopefully convincing our Ethniki Organosis Kypriou Agoniston (EOKA) insurgents that we were as vigilant as ever. I took part in a helicopter-assisted cordon-and-search (with "Officer-Cruft" and dog) of a suspicious village. I despatched a small force to chase a few EOKA men up a sharply-rising re-entrant, luckily being able to warn the guard-force above to hold fire in case it became a "blue on blue".

I also defended at an Army Court Martial which tried RN ratings charged with looting while on active service, the first occasion for RN personnel to be tried under the Army Act, and later at an RN Captain's Table elsewhere where I defended another naval rating on the same charge, thus not by Court Martial. Sentences on each occasion differed greatly - the Navy's attitude to "looting on active service" being less serious than the Army's.

Battle dress with anklets, (later the more comfortable Fox's Puttees) were much the same in RM units, but smarter than the *Gosling V* version; as was the brass-buckled web belt (first green then white, then black). But the accoutrements (red lanyard for 45 Cdo, blue for 40 Cdo and green for Bde HQ, and similarly-coloured garter tabs with tropical rig), were proudly-worn, but duplicate of a sort, so uncounted separately in my list of uniforms. Middle and Far East uniforms (khaki, then jungle green bush-shirts) can count as the 13th and 14th uniforms which I wore while serving. Most important though was The Green Beret which marked one as of a Commando Unit, but "foxed" some RN sentries who presented arms "for foreign officer" instead of my entitled butt salute.



Meeting Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother at RM Deal in 1956: Source Ieuan E. Roach

"Passed Over" by the Admiralty for further promotion, I resolved to develop what turned out to be my final RN tour of duty: that of being in charge of Instructional Technique Training for Portsmouth Command with broader, full-service responsibilities for methods and techniques. My students were Senior Ratings and Officers, often international, who were about to take up training appointments either as instructors or sometimes the Training Commanders themselves. As well as on-job and white-board teaching methods, I researched how the first Overhead Projectors, Audio-taping and Closed Circuit TV, as well as Programmed Learning (later Computer-Assisted Learning) could achieve better results.

I was the RN member of the Inter-Service Committee for use of CCTV as a Training Aid but DNES did not flinch at sending me, a Lt Cdr, to join the Brigadier and Group Captain sent to the Committee by the Army and RAF. My CCTV studio was first of its kind in any RN Training Establishment, and it also involved working with the ASDIC Training Section at HMS *Vernon* which used CCTV from rigs we had designed for recording in surface vessels, television-traces of submarines during various sea-states and depths. Admiralty security officers and scientists attended "How To Lecture" events at their own establishments, where our demonstrator-lecturers used simple apparatus and visuals. The security officers had to lecture frequently to large audiences of dockyard staff and police. The scientists were well known for researching avidly but secretly, and sometimes duplication of effort occurred. After attending our "How To Lecture" events, they reported that (mostly) they lost "stage-fright" and enjoyed giving individual, confidential briefing-lectures to their colleagues. Realising the links between effective training and Work Study, both specialist Training Schools began close liaison in order to draw on the benefits to students and the Fleet. Of our RN instructional films, two won prizes, despite the one where the demonstrating teacher seemingly taught in an eight-sided classroom as he moved seamlessly from one display board to another! At the end of my tour, having headed what had been called the "Instructional Technique School", the Admiralty changed its name to "The School of Training Technology". My efforts seem to have been noted, but still no promotion came my way, so I applied and was accepted for early retirement.....with reduction of my earned retired pay!

At the end of my last "commission" in Portsmouth (and recalling that my mess number at RMB Eastney had remained open for 15yrs since 1953) I was dined-out there at a special, black-tie "family" dinner by the resident Royal Marines officers. That somewhat poignant evening remains much more memorable to me than being dined out almost anonymously by the Wardroom of HMS *Victory* (Royal Naval Barracks) as one of about six such "leavers", led by a retiring Flag Officer on whom all lights shone.

My service "on loan" to the Royal Marines (reflected in the treasured if slightly out-of-focus images below) were the most important years of my life, alongside my continuing happy marriage to Beryl, which will have lasted 71 years by the summer of 2020. Unfortunately, great age means so many Royal Marines friends have now "gone on" before me. Advancing promotions never altered our friendships, however, five friendly mess-mates becoming Commandant General, and others deservedly reaching very high rank.

