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NAVAL HOME COMMAND



Background: The post of Commander-in-Chief, Naval Home Command was created in July 1969 as a result of the merger of the posts of Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth and Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth.

The Admiral and his staff were located in Admiralty House and the Old Naval Academy, which dates from 1733 when it was set up as a school for young Naval Officers.

Where: Admiralty House and Old Naval Academy are in Portsmouth Naval Base.

What they did there: This Command was responsible for Naval Training (except for the Fleet Air Arm), and for the Naval Reserves and Naval Security.

As a Rear Admiral from 1987 to 1989

Jack Howard

In January 1987 I was told by the Naval Secretary that I had been selected for promotion to Rear Admiral and that my first appointment in April of that year was to be Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, Naval Home Command, Admiral Sir Peter Stanford, until he was relieved by Admiral Sir Sandy Woodward.

Since at the time I was the Commodore, *Nelson* this meant a mess-change from Anchor Gate House to Trinity House in the Portsmouth Dockyard. Although my *Nelson* appointment was a very special one and undoubtedly the best job I had ever had, the change, the nature of the role and the range of Chief of Staff duties were, to say the least, very significant.



Admiralty House, Portsmouth Naval Base - Residence and headquarters of Commander-in-Chief, Naval Home Command

As the Chief of Staff, I had line supervision of twenty three shore establishments, ranging from major establishments like *Dryad*, *Collingwood*, *Sultan*, *Mercury* and *Vernon* to the officer training homes at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich and Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth and the Royal Naval Engineering College, Manadon. In addition, there were the ratings training establishments like *Raleigh*, *Fisgard*, *Caledonia* and *Excellent* together with the smaller but no less vital teams at RNSETT, the separate schools for Physical Training, Regulating, Diving and NBCD (Nuclear Biological and Chemical Defence). Other parts of the empire were the Royal Naval Reserve and Naval Home Security.

All of these had to suffer CINCNAVHOME's supervision but their needs were different in nature and scope. The major establishments had both to meet CINCNAVHOME's requirements in training numbers and in standards of all-round efficiency and effectiveness. They also had responsibilities to the MOD departments in London and Bath.

The tightropes that Commanding Officers had to walk, presented major challenges. They were generally at the top of their promotion lists and also had critical roles and responsibilities for their specialisation. Smaller establishments had what were, in some ways, more direct and shorter-term responsibilities to their sub-specialisations. Not the least of these were the beady eyes of their fellow sub-specialists ready with feedback and advice. Many will recognise that these were living icebergs. What outside observers saw were the tips of activities while the majority were carefully managed to deliver the goods without benefit of external fiddling.

A vital role that I undertook for the Commander-in-Chief was the confidential reporting on Commanding Officers. As the Chief of Staff, I had, in addition to CINCNAVHOME inspections, the responsibility for carrying out a programme of formal visits to make sure that Commanding Officers knew that CINCNAVHOME was aware of their problems and successes. My Royal Marine corporal driver and I covered many miles, waited in lay-bys in order to arrive dead-on-time and attended, additionally, quite a few guest nights. Getting essential but informal feedback at 12.30 am was an invaluable source of perspective. In vino, perhaps, veritas? As a former labourer in the vineyards of training and from my subsequent appointments, I knew that we could take pride in the quality of naval training and the teams that delivered it.



Old Naval Academy, Portsmouth Naval Base – the offices of CINCNAVHOME staff

To discharge these responsibilities, we had a CINCNAVHOME staff of some 300. We had to manage the personnel in the Command, both service and civilian, get the resources and budgets from MOD and act as a lightning conductor when difficulties arose in managing men, money and facilities. We also had responsibilities for the Royal Naval Reserve and for the security of the entire naval estate.

This staff had to provide the continuity and stability needed in the face of demands of thrusting Commanding Officers and bean counters. In general our staff had the experience and memories required to keep the Command on a steady and realistic course.

Each establishment had a dedicated staff officer of varying seniority to give us a fair picture of the real needs and to err on the side of the establishment. This meant that failures on the part of CINCNAVHOMER could be blamed on the Chief of Staff!

What was most encouraging was the way in which the staff listened to us Johnny-come-latelies, gave their balanced reaction and then fell in behind when logic and reason failed to change our minds. In retrospect I think the system moved perceptibly but steadily.

Those who have served in many shore establishments will realise that the challenges and complexities faced by their staff were only rarely raised to CINCNAVHOMER level. The inherent loyalties of the Naval Service were – quite properly – used to present confident and positive pictures upwards. Changes proposed from above which caused pain and anguish were, of course, more vigorously challenged. All in all the way in which establishments managed to change, whilst maintaining the confidence and capabilities of their people, was in the best tradition of the Service. When all had been lost, they fell back on the response, ‘Aye, aye sir!’

To become somewhat more parochial in tone, I may remark that Instructor Officers were a significant minority in the establishments of the Command. The combination of experienced specialist officers and enthusiastic young IOs proved to produce a training system acknowledged to be world-class. Specialist officers and senior ratings combined with graduate Instructor Officers have brought to RN training, over the years, vigour and responsiveness to change that has kept our standards as high as they have ever been.

But it is not only in respect of our training standards that IOs have played a vital role. In the social, sporting and cultural activities through the Service, Schoolies have always been a catalyst for change and improvement; wine caterers, Navy rugby captains and ship pantomime producers are eloquent testimony to the Schoolie tradition.

Now to the finale: personal assessments of what an individual has achieved are inevitably myopic. Outside of promotions, they can only be subjective and ‘rose-tinted’. My predecessor as Chief of Staff was a highly experienced submariner; my successor was an eminent Supply and Secretariat one. They brought to the job a wider range of skills and experience than mine. But I had, after all, worked as an Instructor in RN education and training with some exposure to Polaris, H-bomb testing and command. I had also enjoyed my involvement with rugby, cricket and Field Gun training. The most valuable to me, as a person, was the rapport and awareness I developed through involvement with all levels and ranks in the Naval Service across the board. I particularly treasure the times spent teaching a three-badge Able Seaman to pass the ‘Educational Test for Leading Rate’, after his five previous failed attempts, and in teaching celestial navigation to would-be Royal Marines landing coxswains – all this in a brown Army tent on Christmas Island.

I never resented being called Schoolie. With the confidence that the Appointers gave me in many General List appointments, that name summed up the vital essence of what I and the Instructor Branch brought to the Service.

Postscript: The posts of Second Sea Lord and Commander-in-Chief, Naval Home Commander were amalgamated in 1994 following the rationalisation of the Royal Navy after the end of the Cold War.

The new command was based in Victory Building in Portsmouth Naval Base before moving to a new headquarters at Whale Island. There he is co-located with Commander-in-Chief, Fleet.