

HMS AMAZON F169



Memories of her first commission

**By LCEM Robert Timson
1974-75**

March 18th 1974 - Southampton

Whilst serving on HMS *London* in Portsmouth Dockyard a draft chit came in for me, I was to join HMS *Amazon*, the first of a new type of frigate (the type 21) at the Vosper Thornycroft yard in Woolston near Southampton. Having completed my joining routine, I met some of the crew in the junior rates mess in the yard. The ship's company was considerably smaller than that of my last sea going ship the *Scylla* (177 compared to 250).

[Amazon was one of eight type 21 frigates built by Vospers. Two of these, Antelope and Ardent were sank by the Argentines in the Falkland conflict, the remaining six including Amazon were sold to the Pakistan Navy in 1993].



Amazon "fitting out" at Vosper-Thornycroft in Southampton 1973

During that first week I was to meet Taff, one of the seamen who fancied himself as a top chess player. He would sit in the mess with his chess set ready to go, playing for beer or cigarettes. I watched him beating all comers and racking up his winnings. After a few games he noticed my interest and challenged me to a game for a bottle of whiskey. I agreed to a game but for 100 cigarettes, by now I had an idea where his weaknesses were, and I beat him quite quickly.

"*Must have been luck*" he said, setting the pieces up again. We had a second game on the opposite colours and the result was the same as in the first game. He couldn't believe he had lost again, so we went into game three. This lasted a bit longer, by now we had a sizeable crowd watching the game, and they were enjoying seeing their tormentor humbled.

As the pile of cigarette packets grew into a mountain on my side of the table, he began to realise he had been shafted and was playing a hustler (well he needed a lesson I thought) after he had lost three hundred cigarettes he was more cautious with his challenges. He realised that he had to give me some more respect on the board too. I played many games with him over the next two years, winning the majority of them.

I also met a stoker called Mick Gibbs [*Gibbo*] who hailed from Leicester. We found out that apart from being "Townies" we had one or two other things in common. Firstly, he had also done the Office Writers course (this was to be his job on *Amazon*) as I had, and even more bizarrely his married quarter in Rowner was next door to ours! Our paths seemed to cross in different ways and I would be meeting Mick and his wife Ali again years later in Leicester. They were newly married and were a bit younger than us.

HMS *Amazon* was different in a lot of ways. For the first time in my experience some thought had gone into the junior rates accommodation. The sleeping quarters had been separated from the main communal area, which meant you could get your head down early if you wanted to with some modicum of privacy. Each mess was fitted with a colour television - another first!

The ship's propulsion was by gas turbines, I believe yet another first for a frigate. The gas turbine engines had only recently been fitted in to warships and I think we were the second ship to have them after HMS *Bristol* a type 42 Destroyer. I was issued with a toolkit. All of my tools were marked with a unique number and had a luminous stripe on them. Each tool fitted into a foam recess inside the box. It was explained to me that even a small tool could severely damage the gas turbine this system would identify me as the culprit if one of my tools went into the turbines!

My job on board was to look after a brand new communications system called "RICE" (Rationalised Internal Communications' Equipment). Basically it encompassed all the internal communications on the ship. On older ships the intercoms, broadcasts, telephones etc were all separate. The newer vessels had the lot inbuilt into consoles. Another difference from the Leander class

frigates (like *Scylla*) was that a Leading Hand ran this department instead of a Petty officer. I met my new boss C.C.E.A "Jack" Frost who set me to work with a CEA (Petty Officer Artificer) commissioning the R.I.C.E equipment. We worked with the Vospers' engineers commissioning the systems they helped us with the wiring layouts and how the system worked.

The ship was in an advanced state of fitting out. Everything was geared up for the Commissioning ceremony on May 11th 1974 in the presence of H.R.H Princess Anne. The Royal Guard had to be drilled into a machine that moved and thought as one. This meant a regular trip to Whale Island (The Gunnery School) and long periods of drill, polishing up the guard. I was unlucky and got pinged. We practised the ceremony time after time until we started to get it off pat.

The great day came around, and as it was raining, the guests, ship's company and the guard were moved into a large warehouse at Ocean terminal (the QE2 berth) at Southampton. The day went well until the Lt. Commander in charge of the Royal Guard forgot to tell us to shoulder arms before moving off, and we had to do it independently. This looked a bit of a shambles, but fortunately H.R.H Princess Anne had moved to the buffet by then and didn't see it. The Royal Guard was dismissed and I was able to meet up with my wife Bev at the reception. I didn't meet Princess Anne but we were very close to her. She wore a lime green outfit and seemed a lot smaller than I had imagined.



JCEM S. Courtnadge [youngest man onboard] assists H.R.H to cut the cake

We spent the next few weeks 'day running' out at sea "shaking down." This meant checking out the operational effectiveness of all the various equipment and signing the acceptance forms from Vospers to the Royal Navy.

My brother Tony, who was an Air Engineer in the Fleet Air Arm, had contacted me about his forthcoming wedding in Brecon, Wales on July 6th 1974. He was marrying Sian a young lady he had met whilst serving at Yeovilton Air station in Somerset. I checked the ships' programme and found that *Amazon* (as part of the trials) was circumnavigating the U.K that weekend.

Amazon would leave Portsmouth and travel up the east coast calling in at Rothesay on the Firth of Clyde in Scotland, and continuing down the west coast back to Portsmouth. I went to see my Divisional Officer and asked permission for leave to attend the wedding. He in turn went to the Captain who refused permission. I even suggested leaving the ship in Rothesay, and travelling by train to Brecon. I would then have to return to Portsmouth from there. But this request was also denied. I was required onboard and that was that. This was another disappointment I had to accept whilst serving in the R.N.

I recall us taking onboard a number of young sea cadets, some came down our mess and after some shyness, soon began swearing and acting like "old seadogs." They quickly scrounged some spare Navy gear and settled in for the trip up the east coast. Unfortunately the weather turned for the worst and we hit some roughers. Our young sailors soon started to turn green and had to hurry up top to find somewhere to throw up!

July 12th 1974 - Rothesay

In the event, I went ashore in Rothesay. There was hardly anything there as I remember. We had a couple of pints in a small hotel on the sea front and then went back onboard. The next day the big talking point was that our Leading Regulator had gone missing. There were the inevitable rumours that he had deserted, been murdered, or tripped and fell overboard, in fact all sorts of other theories. The police visited us back in Portsmouth and interviewed a number of the crew. I often wondered what had happened to him. *[I found his name listed in a Royal Navy Casualties website in 2011. His listing simply said :- Leading Regulator P.J.Askew died Friday 12th July 1974"]* R.I.P shipmate.

July 1974

As usual at the beginning of the commission, the ship was required to go through an extensive work- up. As with HMS *Scylla* two years earlier we went to Portland in July to be the guests of F.O.S.T. We were at sea most days working through one disaster scenario after another. Luckily there was the odd weekend leave for the lucky few. I managed to get permission to use the ship's radio telephone (whilst at sea) to book two hire cars for the weekend. Through the static I somehow made the Garage owner in Portland aware that I wanted two cars for the weekend so that ten of us could go to Portsmouth.

Sure enough when we arrived at the garage late on the Friday afternoon two Austin Maxis were fuelled up and ready for Mr.Dickinson?? (Lost in translation I reckon!)

I was designated driver for car number one and we blasted off with the intention of being in Portsmouth before the other car. With a good navigator beside me (Mick Train) we somehow got there an hour earlier than the other car. *[They must have got lost]*

After a great reunion with Bev and some relaxation for a change, I picked up the others at midnight on Sunday and we drove back to Portland. It was a long drive through fog and rain and I didn't get to bed until 0330 on Monday morning.

We were relieved to get out of Portland and back to Portsmouth as on the following Friday I went on summer leave.

It was around this time that I decided to apply for Premature Voluntary Release (PVR). A request had to be made for early release from your contract with the R.N. The Admiralty look at numbers and crewing requirements and then inform you of their decision. Bev and I had suffered a lot of separation and we were keen to start a family. I wanted to be there with her when our first born came along. Fortunately the news was good and I got my wish. However, I would not be released until August 1975 *[in just over a years' time]* and it would cost me £100. I guess with only two and a half years left to serve, the Navy thought they had got their money worth.

In the Caribbean

We sailed for the Caribbean a couple of weeks later, and began the long business of the engine trials.

[I can honestly say that if given the choice, I would not have gone - this sounds remarkable now, but at the time I was fed up of sailing away even to such exotic places as the Caribbean. In retrospect I can say I was glad that I went, it was a great experience.]

This would involve sailing up and down using different combinations of engines and shafts. First the two "Tynes" (for cruising) were harnessed, and then the two "Olympic" turbines (the marine equivalent of the Concorde' engines) for speed. We would then mix the engines, connecting a different one on to each shaft.

The power these engines could generate had to be seen to be believed. From a dead stop the ship would almost stand on end and took off like a speed boat. Her aluminium decks and lack of steel armour on the hull reduced the weight of the ship and gave her speed and manoeuvrability. We had some occasions with over-inquisitive Russian warships where that speed came in handy.

I hadn't been getting on too well with my immediate boss, I noticed Jack was usually agitated and always impatient, everything needed to be done in a hurry. I tried to keep out of his way as much as possible, but it was obvious to me that we didn't like each other.

It all became clear to me some weeks later when Jack (who had been under a lot of pressure) eventually suffered a nervous breakdown and had to go home from the West Indies. After he recovered I got on with him a lot better and even managed to beat him at chess - which perhaps surprised him.

Sea

We sailed for the West Indies on 27th August 1974, and covered the 3,100 miles to Bermuda [our first port of call] in a week. The passage was a rough one and we went through heavy seas for most of the trip. I am one of the lucky ones who don't suffer too badly in rough sea. When the sea becomes really heavy, we strap everything down and non essential personnel are allowed to lie on their bunks if they are feeling ill. The upper-deck is "out of bounds" and anyone who needs to be up there has to have a safety rope attached. I would

get a queasy stomach sometimes, but either lying down or standing watching the sea (if allowed) usually sorted it out. Thankfully we never lost a man overboard in rough seas on any of the ships I served on.



HMS Amazon - The Porsche of the Royal Navy

August 31st 1974

I wrote a letter to Bev on 31st August and wished her a happy 25th birthday, I wish I could have been there with her. The good news was that we had found some sunshine and we were all enjoying the trip more. We utilised the good weather by playing volleyball and badminton and had a bit more time than we originally thought due to making a fair sized detour to avoid hurricane 'Becky' that was directly in our path.

I had saved the maintenance of the upper deck communications equipment for the better weather, and we enjoyed some "bronzy" time cleaning and greasing as much of the loudspeakers, microphones etc that we could find. I received a draft chit this week telling me I would be drafted to R.N Barracks in Portsmouth for discharge on 2nd August 1975. Only another eleven months left to serve!

During this trip my interest in chess began to develop further. I had bought some chess books and began to learn the techniques of the game. I also

enjoyed playing through some of the Grandmaster games in the books and learning their moves and the thoughts behind them. I had started to teach two of the lads in the mess how to play and gave a book to one of them (Steve Nield) who showed the most promise and interest. Taff and I had by now started a "series" and we enjoyed a lot of close hard fought games. The last mention of it (in one my letters to Bev) had me winning 6-5. This was the start of my fledgling chess career, I went on to play competitively in the Leicestershire Chess Leagues for another 30 years!!

Apart from chess we played a lot of card games, Dominoes and the Naval version of Ludo which we called "Uckers". Usually someone from the mess would make an Uckers set, the counters were a sawn up broom stick, and the board much bigger than the conventional Ludo. The game always generated a lot of interest in the mess, invariably people would watch and shout advice from the sidelines.

September 3rd 1974 - Bermuda

We docked in Bermuda on September 3rd and I went ashore with some of the lads to a small cove. The sea was gorgeous, a warm 80F. We only had one day here, so made the most of the time ashore swimming and sunbathing.

September 5th 1974 - Freeport, Bahamas

The ship entered Freeport in the Bahamas two days later. I went with some of the lads for a few hours snorkelling, we borrowed the ships' snorkelling equipment and a ball and found a little lagoon quite close to the ship. I'd never been snorkelling before, and after a trying it for a short while I was hooked! The sea was crystal clear and I spent a very enjoyable couple of hours going round and round the lagoon looking at all of the many coloured fish. The session was brought to an abrupt end when someone shouted Barracuda!! I was out of there very quickly!



Alongside in Freeport, Grand Bahamas

It became almost a tradition to discuss last nights' run ashore with anyone who showed some signs of interest at the morning tea break. One such young man went into great detail about his exploits with a "lady of the night." Most of the mess were listening and realised a lot of it was just bravado, but one individual thought he needed teaching a lesson.

And so after the young man had turned in for the night he found the poor lads' boxers and smeared some green "Swarfega" (engineering hand cream) in the gusset.

The poor lad nearly passed out the next morning when he saw the unmentionable substance in his pants. He showed them to his mate who confirmed his worst fears:

"Its Siff mate" [Syphilis]

In a state of shock, he reported to the ships Medical Attendant that morning. As always, someone had got there before him and tipped off the Doc. The poor lad had a full medical examination, a lecture on venereal diseases, the possibilities of amputation etc.etc. When he got back to the mess his mug had been quarantined and nobody would touch it. He got the full leper treatment for a few days until he realised he had been set up.

The other news on the ship was of casualties. One of the crew came off a motorbike he had hired ashore, he was a bit shook up and messy but otherwise o.k. Another had strained his neck playing rugby and was walking around in a neck brace. Following Jack's breakdown another chief had been detailed to take over his duties and I now reported to him.

I went ashore the following day with some of the lads. I couldn't believe how expensive it was in the Bahamas, even the Americans were complaining about the prices. I had considered going across to Florida for the day as we were very close.[About 80 miles] However it never materialised due to the cost. It would be another twenty years before I managed to get to America.

In the town we found an expensive hotel with a most inviting pool. As we have done before, we commandeered some sunbeds and pretended to be guests. For the first time in my life I had a notion of how the film stars lived, if this was the good life - bring it on!

The only down side of the day was when I lost the crown on one of my front teeth in the pool and couldn't find it. I bought some postcards and went back onboard for supper.

After an enjoyable week in Freeport (apart from the prices) we sailed for Trinidad. On leaving the harbour one of the seamen was injured on the flight deck. Whilst slipping the ropes, one whiplashed and trapped his leg against the guard rail, this resulted in him having a compound fracture just above the ankle. He was rushed off to hospital, and made a full recovery.

September 15th 1974 -Trinidad

On 15th September we arrived at Trinidad. The mail came onboard and I received mail from home and a letter from Royal Navy Barracks Portsmouth telling me what kit and paperwork I needed to hand in on my release.

A social night had been laid on for us at the Mariners club on the first night in. I remember hearing the sound of an orchestra coming from the inside of the club. So imagine my surprise when I found out it was in fact a steel band - fantastic sounds! This was another first for me.

There was also a limbo dancer and flame eater. The Trinidadian locals made us feel very welcome. The next day a party went on a Banyan (*picnic on the beach*) at a nearby island, I had a good time but cut my foot on something.

The following night I got pinged for shore patrol. I didn't mind this, when I had done this duty before, I'd had a good time. We went down town with the cops at 7.30pm and toured the night clubs and bars until 1130pm. No trouble at all, the boys were all behaving themselves. We had a coffee and hamburgers and then back on board. A very quiet night, just what you want on a shore patrol.

I was enjoying being my own boss. Since Jack has been sick I've been left alone to get on with it. Also getting on well with the new CCEA, and I've had good support from the WEO [*Weapons Electrical Officer*] who had handed out some rollickings in the Wardroom over the condition of some of the comms equipment we get asked to repair. The officers were leaving them out of their covers when we went to sea and they were filling with sea water. I was pleased that my section was on top of all the outstanding snags.

Earlier that day I had been over to HMS *Intrepid* in the Dockyard. She was a large Assault ship that had a Dental officer on board. He managed to fit me a new crown.



Bequia September 1974

September 20th 1974 - At sea on exercise

We were soon back at sea carrying out exercises. We were closed up for hours in Defence watches. Being a relatively new ship's company all aspects of warfare have to be practised and tested. We closed the ship up to its highest level of damage control and manned our action stations. We practised gas attacks, wearing gas masks for 30 minutes in sweltering heat.

I was in charge of a small electrical switchboard and managed to get some respite by hiding behind the board and getting my mask off every now and again.

Three days later by way of a reward, and to have some much needed relief from the war games, the ship called in to Bequia in the Grenadine Islands. Almost the whole ships' company went ashore by boat for a banyan. Volleyball and swimming, and the chefs got the steaks on, we had a great time.

September 27th 1974 - Antigua

We moved on to the island of Antigua the following week. This was another great place to visit and once again I thought how lucky I was that I had been to these beautiful islands for free, albeit on the "Grey Funnel Line".

Somebody saw a draft chit in for Jack in the Ship's office. The buzz was that he is not coming back to *Amazon*. (This proves to be unfounded when he returns a few weeks later) My foot has healed up, but I'm suffering from sunburn through wearing trunks instead of shorts on the banyan.

Four of us took a taxi from the Dockyard gates - A large Pontiac turned up, it was the biggest and most comfortable car I had ever been in - and we went off for the day exploring the island. We found a lovely beach and I spent another couple of hours just snorkelling around the reefs. I was in a world of my own looking at the fantastic array of different fish. This experience hooked me on the joys of snorkelling and I have since spent many happy hours enjoying this pastime. I was struck with the beautiful beaches in the Caribbean, the best I'd ever seen.

On the trip home I spent some time in the main electrical switchboard learning how to control the ships generators. It felt rather nerve wracking switching large loads from one generator to another. At one point I had some 220,000 watts of electricity at my fingertips! We called into the Azores to fuel the ship for the last leg, and arrived back in Portsmouth on October 7th. I was able to get off the ship on the first day in for seven days station leave.



Northern Europe and Civvy Street

"The best laid plans of mice and men!" .. During this leave Bev and I had made plans to go home for the weekend around my birthday on November 8th. We would go out for a meal and celebrate. However the unexpected happened again and I was informed that *Amazon* had to proceed to Amsterdam by November 14th 1974.

This meant that my birthday weekend was out of the window, and instead I had a rough passage across to Holland. I was pretty fed up missing my 25th birthday, but it was the nature of the job and I couldn't complain. The Captain (Commander Bingham) explained that we had to go instead of HMS *Bristol* - the only other ship fitted with gas turbines at the time - which had got problems and wasn't sea-worthy.

November 1974 - Amsterdam

The *Amazon* tied up alongside in the city centre to the strains of a military band welcoming us to Holland. I spent most of the day with the other electricians fitting the floodlights to the side of the ship so that we would be fully illuminated on the shore side that night. This is quite a long winded job, it involves lowering booms over the side and securing the floodlights, we then have to wire it all up and test them all. Once that was completed I had to look at some comms equipment that had got water logged in the bad weather.

I went ashore the next day to get some "rabbits", Bev wanted a pair of clogs, so I was on the lookout for them. I took in a canal trip with a mate, I couldn't believe how many miles of canals there are there, something like 1,000. We saw loads of bicycles and I found the place quite interesting. I managed to find some clogs and have a look around the famous red light area before going back onboard.

February 14th 1975

My final year in the Navy saw the ship heading for the "ice" in February. We sailed on February 14th and made our way up the Kiel Canal heading for the Baltic sea where we have some cold weather trials planned before a run ashore on Friday 21st February in Kiel.

My old nemesis Jack Frost was back on board fully recovered from his breakdown. He seemed a lot calmer and left me alone quite a lot, something that I was pleased about. Jack had organised a chess knockout tournament on board, I decide to enter and see how I fared. I also put an application in to grow a beard for the second time. My first game was against the Chief Caterer. He didn't last long after losing his Queen on move five. Jack lost his first game to an Ordinary seaman, so he went out early. I lost in the next round to FCREA Hughes.

I heard from the EEPTU (Electricians Union) I had started paying Union subs before leaving the service so that I could apply for jobs in Civvy street.

February 21st 1975 - Kiel, Germany

I went ashore on Saturday to watch the ships' rugby team get beat by a German Navy team, the ensuing post match piss up and celebrations were most enjoyable and we all came back on board semi- paralytic in the early hours. Unfortunately this had an unhappy ending. The first thing I knew on Sunday morning was getting a personal shake by the Joss [*Master at arms*] at 0830!! I was told to report to the Regulation Office where I found I wasn't alone. Half the ship's company seemed to be there.

The Joss decided to teach us a lesson and had the Petty Officer G.I doubling us up and down the jetty! I thought my head would crack open. The German sailors watching from their ships thought it was hilarious.

Jack has asked me to do some typing for him, it turned out to be quite a lot, I quite enjoyed the change, and I'm sure he appreciated it.

February 26th 1975 - Malmo, Sweden

The ship visited Malmo in Sweden on the following Wednesday for two days. I went ashore and met some of the very friendly locals, they told me that electricians were earning big money in Sweden. Engineers of any kind were highly respected here and were on the same social standing as Doctors. I did some shopping although some of the prices were ridiculous. I enjoyed the short visit to Sweden a country I'd never been to before.

March 1st 1975 -Oslo - Norway

On the Friday we sailed again, this time for Oslo in Norway arriving on Saturday 1st March 1975. The weather had been slowly getting colder the further north we went. Our run ashore meant getting into rig and wearing our Burberrys (*raincoats*). The attire didn't suit a lot of the establishments who wouldn't let us in. However we persevered - as all sailors do- and found a bar willing to admit us. We struck lucky in there, we managed to "Grippa" and get some free drinks. One of the lads swapped his hat for a Russian style fur hat! The only other notable event that happened at Oslo was the sea in the harbour freezing over. I had never seen this before, the ship was frozen in and would not have sailed if the temperature hadn't risen the next day.

March 9th 1975 - Sunderland, England

We left Oslo on the Tuesday morning and crossed the North Sea to Sunderland on Saturday 9th March. After the previous expensive ports this one was a pleasure to visit. The beer (as always returning to the U.K) was great and at an affordable price, also the people could not have been friendlier. My experiences in the northern towns Liverpool, Newcastle and Sunderland were all the same. If you were in the rig, you couldn't go wrong. People wanted to talk to you and buy you drinks.

Apart from the visit to Perth on the *Scylla*, I can't remember a better run ashore than Liverpool or Sunderland. We had two days in Sunderland before making our way back to Portsmouth for Wednesday 12th March.

After Easter leave and a trip up the line to see the family, the ship sailed again in April in what would become my last deployment before leaving the Navy.

Before sailing we had a family day at sea. The wives and other guests were taken out into the Solent and the ships' capabilities were demonstrated.

The Captain ordered full speed from a standing start and the *Amazon* sat down at the aft end and shot forward like an Olympic sprinter. It was an impressive sight but Bev in common with a few others felt sick by the ships motion and had to lay on my bunk for a while until we came back into more sheltered waters.

April 19th 1975 - Gibraltar

We sailed down to Gibraltar arriving on April 9th 1975. I had managed to get moved from Internal Comms to Sonar. I'd been on the Comms section for almost a year and I felt it was time to learn something new. In charge of the Sonar section was a Chief CEA called Ray and I would be his assistant. We got on well from the start. Another LCEM was moved into my old job and I was happy in the tranquillity of the Sonar section. It didn't last long! Mick my townie had gone sick on shore, and I was informed that I had to do his job in the Office. Alison his wife was pregnant and reading between the lines, she didn't want to be in Portsmouth on her own.

The Electrical Office was shared with the engineers and I had to learn their filing system before I could do anything. *I didn't appreciate it at the time*

but it would be good experience for me one day in a future profession as a College trainer. I got to know the Chief Engineer and the MEO (Marine Engineering Officer) as well as the WEO (Weapons Electrical Officer) a lot better. Surprisingly, the work is hard in the office. There seemed to be a lot of catching up to do and effectively serving the needs of the different people in there.

Jack bless him was a revelation, he did his utmost to get me out of the office and when that failed he got me a blue card (excused duties) and also one of the lads to help me in the afternoons. In the end the WEO told me that I had done more in a week than Mick had managed in all the time he had been on *Amazon*! It's always nice to feel appreciated, but I secretly wished I was outside on the upper deck with Ray maintaining the Sonar equipment.

I had a couple of good runs ashore in Gib. The place was like a second home to me after the weeks we spent there on *Scylla*. One of the bars we liked to frequent was "The Hole in the Wall," this was run by two gay gents who were so camp it needed to be seen to be believed.

Once they accepted that you were "queer" [*preferred women*] they were great fun. Charles, one of the owners insisted I had one of his signed photographs. I've still got it today, on the back he wrote:

*"To Rob, awaiting until your period of being 'queer' is past. Hopefully
.....yours, Charles"*

I went ashore on a shopping trip, I enjoyed the haggling, with the usual insults and sob stories from the shop owners, it could almost have been down the village in Singapore again. I bought myself a new lighter and a Beatles tape. The ship had put on a "Rock race" and some of the lads had entered including Jack. I watched them come back, some of them could barely walk up the gangway.

On April 22nd we had to pull in to Gibraltar again for two days due to engine problems. This was quite fortuitous for me as Gibbo had flown in and was able to take up his duties again in the Office. I was released to go back to the Sonar section again.

Jack also gave me permission to attend the R.N Chess Championships at HMS *Collingwood* in May. This would be a four day draft to Collingwood and home every night! I didn't need any persuasion to get my application in.

April 26th 1975 - L'Orient, France

The ship arrived at L'Orient a sea port and Naval base on the west coast of France. During the war the Germans built a large submarine base there. As we sailed into the port we could see the large concrete enclaves that had housed the submarines. We were advised not to mention the war as the town had almost been levelled by the R.A.F trying to destroy the U boat base.

I was in big demand for my linguistic skills. I could string together a few sentences in French and would be required to help with some chatting up. Of course I managed to get a few words wrong here and there, mentioning the wife and the six children back in England etc etc, but it was all good fun.

I had been trying to give up smoking but finding it difficult. I had cut down to five a day, but kept sneaking another one. I think the fact that we got them so cheap in the Navy didn't help. I eventually managed to give them up for good in 1976 when our first child Chris came along.

May 1975

The *Amazon* arrived back at Portsmouth a few days later and I played in the Chess Championships in May. I went on leave in June. After that the weeks flew by quickly and suddenly it was August and I was leaving the ship to join R.N Barracks in Portsmouth for discharge.

Jack and Ray called me round to their mess for a few farewell drinks and to thank me for my efforts during my time on *Amazon*. I remember staggering through the dockyard that afternoon and somehow finding my way to our flat in Rowner. That brought to an end my time on the *Amazon*, I enjoyed my time on her and had some good runs ashore.

The Ships Company of HMS Amazon at the Commissioning Ceremony May 11th 1974

HMS AMAZON Ship's Company on First Commissioning

COMMANDING OFFICER

Commander W J Bingham

OFFICERS

Lt-Cdr S D J de H Larpent Lt-Cdr B J McD Gowans Lt-Cdr F C Bartlett Lt R J L Corser	Lt H S Draper Lt J K Roberts Lt M Bird	Lt A I McDonald-Watson Lt B B Perowne S/Lt A J Brawn S/Lt D Walton
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FLEET CHIEF PETTY OFFICERS & CHIEF PETTY OFFICERS

MAA B T Charlton OEMN 1 R Dowty MEA(P) 1 K Digweed MEA(M) 1 A Davies CCEA M J Frost MEA 1 M G Foster OEMN 1 D Grandison	FC REA B M Hughes CPOSA P Hall CPOMEM N R Jackson RMECH 1 R A Lumb MEA 1 B Murphy	CEA 1 P Reeve REM N 1 M Stevens COEMN J R Turner CPOCA D J Topliff CPO L A Williams CMECH S J Wright MECH 1 A Warby
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PETTY OFFICERS

PO A Carlisle MECH 3 E Fryer POMEM S C Giles POSTD R G Hanmore POREL L E Jones POCK B R Knox	POMEM R Lawton PO J Kelly POREL M S Kelly POOEL R D Mouncher POMEM D Melling PO H A Peters	POGI E D Sykes RS S A Smith CEA 2 R C Spenceley MECH 3 J F Tarbox PO M J Whyte PO R Wood
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LEADING RATES

LRO J Allen LREG P J Askew LS M B Burstow LCK I Bradley LOEM P A Browne LS G S Croud LMEM Coomes LMA C H Cooper LMEM A Denneny LMEM M De-Roeck LWTR J H Ford LSTD A Farrugia LS J Ferguson	LCK A Hill LREM E C Hall LMEM R Gibson LSA A Harvey LOEM R J Kinally LSTD T H Lowry LRO G Morris LRO H McMillan LREM P G Mills LREM B Mitchell LS N Pilkington LOEM R A Palmer LS M Patterson	LS J Rockett LSA P Rabone LS F L Smyth LS D W Southwell LSA R Savaker LCEM R C Timpson LWTR C Tait LOEM M D Train LREM A C Wilson-Rudd LMEM P E Wilkin LCK W P Williams LCK J W Willerton LOEM C Waldram
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JUNIOR RATINGS

RO C Anderson	AB R R Fry	AB P G Marks
AB D J Aylen	JMEM E J Figgiest	REM M N Moore
JS G Appleton	AB G Gardiner	MEM 2 S J Macey
REM C J Ashton	REM G D Gibb	AB D J Noyce
AB R Ball	REM J A Green	JREM S Neild
AB R C Broad	OEM Greensmith	MEM G Orr
AB T Buckley	MEM M J Gibbs	AB J Pilkington
RO K R Buckingham	JS A C Gilmore	AB K W Proud
RO H Bradshaw	AB P A Harris	RO M Preston
JS S J Bethell	SA J Hoard	JS M Price
AB G J Cooper	ORD R A Hobson	ORD P Roberts
AB K Chatburn	JCEM J T Haylor	CEM Richards
CEM S C Cressey	JREM P J Huntley	STD P M Spry
MEM N W Chapman	REM D A Hogg	CEM S A Shrimplan
JCEM S N Courtndage	OEM R Jackson	JMEM K R Roser
OEM J Craig	MEM G J Knowles	ORD K J To'eland
JS G Craig	ORD P G Kerley	ACK R G Tillman
JS D A Deacon	ACK T D Longley	JSTWD Underhill
MEM J F C Downes	OEM G P Leer	AB A Whitehead
MEM J Drewitt	AB A P Meyer	RO N A Wallace
MEM W P Down	JRO Haldin	RO A L Whyte
ORD K Edwards	JRO Hubbard	JMEM I Watson
MEM L Earp	JMEM K Jones	JMEM S Wilson
AB S Flynn	CEM Shrimplin	JREM S Withington
MEM B J Ford	AB W H May	JS I Walton