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## Joining through Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth in 1971

Tony Mizen



Married with a second child on the way, the decision to join the Royal Navy was a big step for the Mizen household. As the postal strike meant that mail was not getting through Lieutenant Commander 'Jock' Ambrose, the Appointer, rang me to say that I should hand in my notice at the school, where I was teaching in Derbyshire, and join Dartmouth in September 1971.

A grant for my uniform was forthcoming, and Gieves in Leicester did their very best to kit me out with their finest No 5s and Mess Undress.

On that day in September 1971, 27 other budding Instructor Officers and I arrived at Newton Abbot station, loaded our baggage onto a lorry and boarded the Pusser's bus, which would soon become a very familiar mode of transport.

Over the next 48 hours we were shorn, kitted out with various items of naval attire, including that very itchy battle dress, allotted to a Division – mine was Jellicoe – taken on a tour of the establishment, given introductory lectures in Casper John Hall and initiated in the wonders of the parade ground. Our mentor throughout the term was Lieutenant Commander Dermot Dorrian; he and his wife were charming hosts and, more importantly, his door was always open for a friendly chat when any of us felt the need.

I suppose the most indelible memory embraces all those Early Morning Activities and how they impinged on an otherwise pleasant timetable of events. It was during the morse and flashing classes that we teamed up with the Graduate Entry, which included Prince Charles amongst its number.

I soon made friends with fellow members of Jellicoe Division, one of whom said it was sensible to fail the swimming test and spend the rest of the term preparing for a last-gasp success in a warm pool instead of freezing on the autumn cross-country runs. These were wise words that I, along with a few other wiseacres, gladly put into practice. Come the end of term, we had all passed the swimming test, somehow. For our parade training we enjoyed the direction of Colour Sergeant Smith, whose best line was, 'Don't call me Colours as I am not an 'effing' rainbow'. He was certainly talented, and our time on the parade ground became reasonably pleasant, even for the long-suffering, clockwork oranges amongst us.



Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth – the Parade Ground  
by permission of BRNC

Having joined the Royal Navy, our expectations about sea time were, not surprisingly, on the high side. However, after the seemingly endless ‘river tests’ and our three days in the Ton class minesweeper *Walkerton*, I am not so sure that everyone still hankered after a life at sea. My sea trip was to Saint Malo, but my memory of the voyage is restricted to the confines of my bunk and the close-to-hand bucket, as a howling gale kept most of us off the bridge. Our second trip was to Jersey, and for one Instructor Officer it became a great success as, at the cocktail party, he met his future wife.

Another trip involved us being thrown around the skies in the BRNC Wasp helicopter, so much so that one IOUOT grabbed the ‘don’t touch’ black and yellow chord and fell out with the door onto the landing strip.

I recall many other occasions when we were tested and, amongst these, I should mention the Dartmoor Leadership exercise; this appeared to involve us getting very wet, with little sleep and feeling somewhat downhearted at our lack of ingenuity when faced with a simple task of traversing from A to B. Nobody failed, so we must have made the right sounds when it was our turn to take charge. Relaxation for me came in the form of sports activities and, soon after joining, I found myself captaining the college basketball team under the guidance of Lieutenant Commander J J Hogan III US Navy. It does seem strange now to think that the Dartmouth team included three Iranian Naval Officers under training.

Mess life was always on a grand scale, as we ate our way through the generous portions on offer and kept the Gunroom bar in profit. Formal mess dinners were especially memorable events; at one of the dinners the racing driver Graham Hill, still bearing the scars of a recent accident, not only spoke well but joined in the after-dinner mess games. On another occasion we listened to Lord Carrington for 20 minutes and, to this day, I still have no idea what he was talking about; no doubt a politician doing what he does best.

The Christmas Ball was a phenomenal event, one that allowed us to show off our second stripe in the company of our wives and girlfriends on the Passing Out Parade weekend.

Like many IOUOTs before us, we then bomb-burst onto the Naval training world at *Ganges*, *Collingwood*, *Sultan*, *Daedalus*, *Fisgard* and *Caledonia*. Fit as a fiddle and raring to go, I had planned to stay for a Short Career Commission but stayed the course for 28 wonderfully fulfilling and challenging years.



#### **Postscript (2018)**



**Schoolie intake BRNC Dartmouth, 1971 (Lt A.E. Mizen RN first row second from left)**

After Dartmouth my career as a Schoolie began in earnest at HMS *Ganges* where, after a term of teaching NAMET (Naval Maths and English Test), I took up the role of Assistant Divisional Officer to RODNEY Division, where we had up to eighty 15-year old boys to nurture and develop into men ready for their sea drafts and Part 2 training. From there I was appointed to HMS *Osprey* (Portland) and it was during my time here that I realised how much I was enjoying the naval career and, consequently, I applied and was granted a 16-year appointment. There then followed a series of training courses to prepare me for a longer career and, more importantly, for sea-time as a Frigate Meteorology and Oceanographic specialist. At the end of 1976 I joined HMS *Ambuscade* (Type 21 frigate) and completed 15 months at sea during the ship's attachment to the Standing Naval Force Atlantic (STANAVFORLANT).

At the beginning of 1978 I met with the appointer and it was agreed that I should specialise in Educational Technology and, amazingly, they allowed me to undertake a year's post-graduate training at Birmingham University. The 'pay-back' was to sign on for a full career commission and accept that I was now a marked man and RNSETT became my target. Before ending up as Commanding Officer (CO) of RNSETT I completed quite a few roles, namely; organised the closure of HMS *Pembroke* Supply School (Chatham) and its transfer to HMS *Raleigh*, headed up RNSETT's Training Design team, completed 3-years in the MoD as part of the Director Naval Education & Training Support (DNETS) team based in the Old Naval Academy in Whitehall, took on the role of CINCNVHOME's Training Support officer and ran his vast training budget, got promoted to Commander, took the lead role on all training matters for the RNR, joined HMS *Dryad* as Training Support Commander and led a 2-year project set up to advise the Second Sea Lord on the recruitment & training of Officers. Undoubtedly RNSETT was the pinnacle and my 3 years as CO were the icing on the cake for my 28-year career.

After leaving the Navy I was the Director of Training for the Tax & Legal section of Arthur Andersen for 18 months before taking up an offer to train and prepare Civil Servants in Cambridge for promotion. I did the latter job, one which I thoroughly enjoyed, for 6 years before fully retiring.



Lt A.E. Mizen RN serving in HMS *Ambuscade*, 1977