This is Part-5 of 6 of an RFA Deck Cadet's 1st Trip Journal from 1974 ~ 1975

Start of Journal, from 24th October to 28th November 1974 can be found here
Journal from 28th November to 19th December 1974 can be found here
Journal from 19th December 1974 to 17th February 1975 can be found here
Journal from 17th February 1974 to 6th April 1975 can be found here

[each opens in a separate window, each filesize < 1.5Mb]

April 6th 75 arrives NORFOLK.

Early calls at 05:30 for entry into NORFOLK but this was postponed and instead RAS stations were called for a replenishment with Resource, rig 11. I was on the bridge most of the day as another RAS with Ark Royal took place at 11:00 on rigs 8 and 16 (FFO only). The Master decided not to take the ship in as the winds were too high for berthing, however at 15:30 the conditions had improved greatly and the ship proceded into port. I kept the movements book. We had 5 tugs, 2 on the port bow, 1 port quarter, 1 starboard quarter and one on the starboard bow. The ship came alongside, starboard side to and she berthed with the bow approx. 20ft from the end of the dock.

The mooring arrangements were 4 x 2 x 2, with springs fore and aft.

April 7th 75 CTU to ANNAPOLIS.

During the morning we prepared for our departure to ANNAPOLIS and at 10:05 I went over to Resource to meet Cadet King and bring him to OLWEN. The CTU awaited transportation but due to mechanical problems it was delayed and we weren't on the road until approx. 12:15. We arrived at the U.S. Naval Academy at 18:00 and we were greeted by our hosts who showed us to our temporary residences.

After dinner, I went to a lecture on "Graduation and the Life Ahead". The commander explained to the senior class what to expect and how to react to the new posting.

April 8th 75 CTU at ANNAPOLIS.

The cadet training unit assembled outside the building and boarded an Academy Bus and we went to the Nations Capital for a tour. We were allowed to go on our own and myself and 5 others took a guided tour. It proved very informative and educational as we went to the Bureau of Engraving, Whitehouse and Capitol. There was a senate meeting in progress on future power resources and it was a very worthwhile visit.

The historic buildings and museums were a tour themselves with items on display ranging from moon rocks to whales and for those who have studied history, the tour was as valuable as 100 lessons.

We left the District of Columbia at 15:45 and returned to the Academy.

April 9th 75 CTU at ANNAPOLIS.

A tour of the Naval Academy revealed its independence from the "outside" world. There are excellent sporting facilities with an indoor artificial track and field establishment. Also on the premises are:- a church, museum, post office, shops etc.

Today was the first chance that we really had to watch the operation of the Academy. It is quite a military establishment, with 3 formations per day which are held for checks on absenteeism. After this, they march to the daily meals.

I attended several classes today some of which proved very dry and rather monotonous – Soviet History! However the Anti-Submarine class was quiet interesting given by a pilot of a P3 Orion Anti-Submarine Class.

April 10th 75 CTU departs ANNAPOLIS.

The Training Unit mustered at the Greyhound Bus Station in Annapolis and travelled back to Norfolk via Washington D.C. The journey was quite long and we arrived back at the ship at 18:30.

This brought to an end, a highly educational trip – certainly worthwhile.

April 11th 75 at Norfolk.

After a cabin clean, the Port watch studied and I managed to complete the majority of my project.

In the afternoon, we started preparing the derrick equipment, and bringing out of the foreward hold.

The "blocks" have a "Safe Working Load" of 11½ tons and it takes 3 people to move them. The topping gear consists of a 3 fold tackle, which in itself is extremely heavy. I find it hard to imagine the size of the equipment for a JUMBO DERRICK.

In the evening I went to Norfolk to see the John Denver Concert.

April 12th 75 at Norfolk.

During the morning Port watch were allowed to study and I completed the Mathematics Section of lesson six, just before noon.

In the afternoon, I went ashore to "downtown Norfolk".

[AUTHOR NOTE: no entry for Sunday 13th April]

April 14th 75 at NORFOLK.

We all assembled in the centrecastle and started to get out all the equipment for the derrick, but due to excessive noise, this was called off. We restored the equipment and Port Watch continued to find the other required parts such as shackles. A large complement of the required parts were later found buried under all the empty beer kegs so rather than remove them, we devised several instruments to remove the shackles.

When they were out, we wire-brushed the pins and greased them, so that they are ready to go.

April 15th 75 at NORFOLK.

Starboard watch had study, while two cadets from Port Watch continued derrick maintenance – greasing shackles etc. We also went on a hunt for the appropriate shackle for the big block and a 38 ton pin and forelock was located and installed, only to find that it was of no use. In the afternoon we practised morse for 45mins. and the started to wire brush the guy wires for the ten ton derrick. After this we secured for the day.

April 16th 75 at Norfolk Virginia.

This morning we did the regular CABA checks and found 2 faulty sets – 4 empty cylinders. These were changed automatically. For the rest of the morning I finished brushing and light greasing the guy pennants.

Officers from Olwen were invited to USS.Vulcan for lunch and the CTU attended. After the meal, we had a tour around the ship which was very interesting. The workshop facilities cater for fitting and turning, calibration of instruments, radio repair, welding, and other associated jobs.

April 17th 75 at NORFOLK.

Port watch were given study today and I concluded the account of the Annapolis visit. For the rest of the morning I worked on some Mathematics.

The lecture after lunch was on Lifeboat Sailing and the terminology involved. The way in which the wind pushed the vessel ahead was also discussed. After the lecture we continued study until 16:00 when we practised Morse. Todays attempts were rather feeble; however it clearly showed the important role that the "writer" played, when receiving morse !

April 18th 75 at Norfolk.

Cabin clean this morning, prior to the final inspection by the present captain.
[AUTHOR'S NOTE 2013: last rounds by Capt. GEB Harcombe. Capt. JGM Coull took over command]

On completion, I continued the unrewarding search for a 2½" shackle and strategic hunting came to a close at 11:30 as the bosuns dingys were along-side and they had to be secured and brought inboard. Electrical winch problem increased delays, but at 14:00 both boats were successfully on deck and we cleaned them and secured the vessel on deck.

On completion of this task, I did a little of our correspondance course and then went ashore.

The weekend was given free, and after CABA, I assisted in the construction of an electronic kit and then went ashore.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE 2013: the kit was a Sinclair Scientific calculator that used RPN. Assembled in the R/Os workshop with Cadet D.Waters]

On Sunday the ships Softball team played Vulcan and lost; however the spirit was high and I think everyone enjoyed the afternoon.

AUTHOR'S NOTE 2013:

RFA Olwen vs USS Vulcan

Back row L to R: USN, USN, CTO P.J.Lannin, UNK,1st-Off J.Carew, UNK, UNK, Purser, 4th-Eng, USN, Cadet(Eng), USN, UNK.

Front row: Cadet(Deck), Cadet E.Durkin, USN, USN, Cadet J.Burrows, UNK, UNK, 4th-Eng, 3rd-Off Alastair, Cadet(Eng)

April 21st 75 at CRANEY ISL.

The ship was scheduled to leave Norfolk Pier 3 and go to Craney Island to load. I was on the bridge and kept the movements book, as well as operate the telegraph.

The ship singled up to 1 x 1 fore and aft and we let go soon after. The tugs pull us clear of the pier and we went slowly astern until in the channel. From

this point we went slow ahead and steamed the 2 – 3 miles to the fuel depot. Again, with the assistance of tugs, we were pushed alongside pier 'C' and moored 4 x 2 x 2 FWD and 3 x 1 x 2 aft.

Port watch did the initial cargo duties and we prepared and connected up the fuel hoses. The appropriate tank lids were opened and then we started pumping.

During the watch, we walked around the tank deck to watch and check as the tanks were filled. Port watch also had the 22:00 to 04:00 watch and then calls were at 05:00 so it proved a long day. For harbour stations I was on the poop, and we singled up to 1 x 1 and then finally let go.

The tugs again cleared the ship of the jetty and then we made our way through the channel and out to sea.

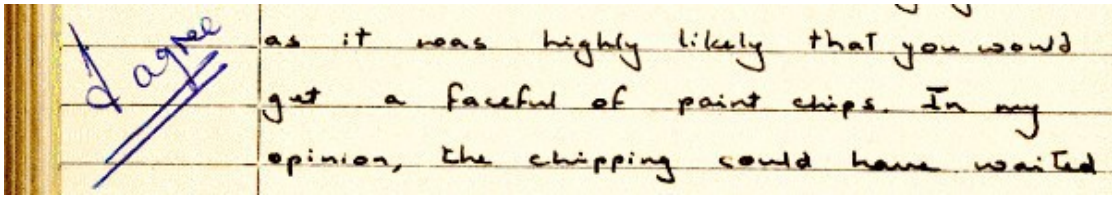
During the afternoon we replenished Ark Royal and Lyness. I was on the bridge keeping the RAS log and keeping a general lookout. Also in the mid afternoon, flying stations were called and the aircraft log had to be filled. A Sea King finally landed and was secured in the hangar. The replenishments were completed at 18:00

April 23rd 75 360 WSW Bermuda.

At 09:00 I was on deck for replenishment with the Resource and fuel Oil was transferred. We continued the regular work, taking care of the messengers and hose lines etc. Approx. 900 tons FFO was transferred and we finished and were all clear just before noon.

After lunch we had a lecture on emergency procedure and "abandon ship". This was followed by a dry stores RAS with the RELIANT. There were approx. 43 loads transferred on the Heavy Jackstay and I worked in the centrecastle.

The Safety Aspects were somewhat ignored and in the centrecastle there were no safety hats and in many cases no hard capped boots. Due to the hastiness required by the Bosun, people were walking under swinging loads for various inevitable reasons. Other hazards included chipping above which resulted in paint flakes and fragments falling into the centrecastle. In some instances it was best not to look up for swinging loads as it was highly likely that you would get a faceful of paint chips.



In my opinion, the chipping could have waited three hours. Nevertheless, no accidents occurred and the transfer was completed at 16:00. We replaced the

railings and secured for the day. At 18:45 signals were held and the message was sent at approx. 6 WPM.

April 24th 75 420 mi S. Bda.

Port watch had study today, and I attacked the last of the Physics and then the Navigation.

In the afternoon we had morse and semaphore, which both went fairly well; the semaphore being quite simple to read.

During the evening I read over the Rule of the Road etc. in preparation for the regular weekly test this Saturday.

April 25th 75 130 N. Puerto Rica.

For the first two hours we were engaged in the cabin clean and after this, two cadets from Port Watch were detached to work with the First Officer, sorting out stores for NBCD, FIRE and DAMAGE CONTROL. The equipment was quite varied with items ranging from files to splinter boxes, the latter being used for temporary repairs on the ships hull, should it become punctured.

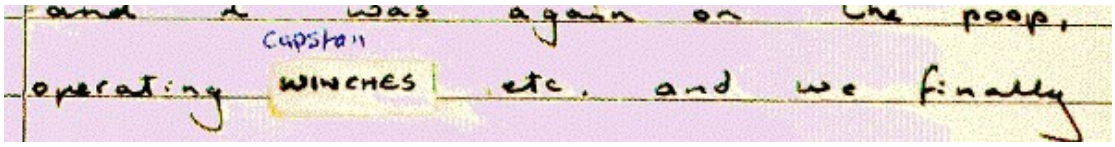
This job lasted all day, as we had to transfer equipment to the FWD and aft lockers.

In the evening we worked on deck for RAS with Ark Royal which lasted for three hours and then secured for the day.

April 26th 75 ANTIGUA.

Due to new regulations, Rule of the Road was not tested this morning, only compass and flag signals.

At 13:30 Harbour Stations were called and I was again on the poop, operating WINCHES etc. and we finally moored with 4 stern-breast lines, two springs and 1 further spring from the tank deck.



We were to load FFO and DIESO, at the rig 4 deckpoint but loading was delayed and the island-jetty had no idea when to start the fuel. Apparently the delay was caused by an inspector who had not turned up. The 22:00 to 01:30 watch proved very boring – as soon as we had cleared the fresh water hoses

away there was nothing to do:- The crew of the island said:- "Go to Sleep – we may start next week!"

April 27th 75 ANTIGUA.

The loading of fuel finally began during the 01:30 to 05:00 watch and I was back on watch at 11:00, after having the weekly record book check. During the watch we had a walk around the tank deck every 10 mins. to see how the loading was progressing. By this time we were topping up 5 wings and 1 centre and when we handed over the watch there was approx. 12ft. in each tank to fill.

The ship left ANTIGUA at 19:00 and I had gangway duties. We secured the after fore spring and then helped stow the gangway. After this, the pilot ladder had to be rigged and when we were finally on passage, we restored the equipment.

April 28th 75 130mi. E. ANTIGUA.

The replenishment with Hampshire on Rig 3 (DIESEL) began at 08:00 and after setting the distance line I drive the winches. At 15mins. to breakaway I returned to the deck and helped secure the rig.

For the rest of the day I continued life-boat maintenance, scraping and sanding the oars which were covered in paint. It's rather a lengthy procedure as the paint has impregnated the grain.

The oars are made of ash, which is strong, fairly light and quite flexible.

April 29th 75 ESE. Bbdos 260mi.

Port watch had study throughout the day and I managed to complete April's correspondance course and start next months'. We had a lecture after lunch which concerned "Man Overboard Procedure".

The four basic initial actions for the officer of the watch are to stop engines, release a lifebuoy with an affixed float which ejects smoke or light, order the helm hard over on the side the person has fallen, and post lookouts in strategic places.

Later in the afternoon we had signals and semaphore.

April 30th 75 Headed South.

We had lengthy replenishments this morning with Ark Royal and Hampshire and I spent most of the time setting the distance line and resecuring the rigs. The Hampshire took diesel on 3 and Ark Royal had Avcat, Fuel Oil and Fresh water. I worked on Rig 8, sending it out and also securing it. The replenishments took the entire morning and we knocked off at 12:05.

During the afternoon we scraped and sanded the last of the oars and boathooks. Tomorrow they should be oiled and the steering oar painted white.

MAYDAY ONE SEVENTY FIVE. 360, N. AMAZON DELTA.

Probably the most interesting event of the day was the lecture on hatchways. The older cargo ships used wooden hatch board coverings, resting on two King Beams with Sister Beam supports.

This method was rather longwinded as each board had to be removed individually and then stowed on deck. Before going to sea the boards had to be replaced and covered with tarpaulins held in by wedges.

Modern design and technology had now led to a self-stowing type – Macgregor, one of the popular names in such design, produce watertight, self-stowing covers suitable for all cargos, including OBO carriers.

The modern design has its own rollers and this allows rapid access to the hatchways. The watertight feature is possible by use of rubber or synthetic gaskets, on which the hatch sides rest when lowered.

Method of Securing a Hatch:-
Heave covers over the opening, care taken if the coming is down hill as rapid acceleration could result. The eccentric rollers are turned through 180^{O} to allow the hatch to rest in the rubber seating.

Cress wedges are hammered in, forcing two sections of hatchway into the gasket, making a seal. Finally, secure all quick acting cleats.

MAY TWO SEVENTY FIVE. 520 E. AMAZON DELTA.

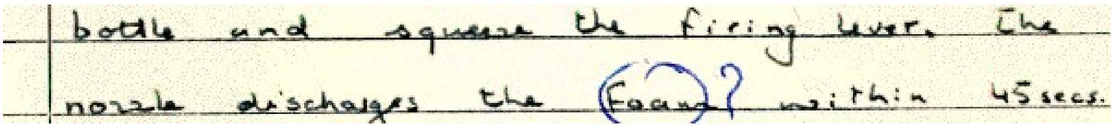
A demonstration was today given, of the firing of dry powder fire extinguishers. The dry powder extinguisher is painted blue, and is carried by all ships operating aircraft. The P-12 contains a 28lb dry chemical powder which is ejected by the pressure applied by a CO_2 cylinder as a jet or a diffused cloud. It is used for high speed extinction of inflammable liquid fires, especially for fire cover during rescue operations from crashed aircraft. Although efficient for temporary extinction of fire, it should be backed up by

major foam appliances. The chemical powder is non-toxic and also is a non-conductor of electricity.

Operation of the P-12 is simple as only a CO_2 charge has to be opened. On squeezing the discharge trigger, it will discharge in approx. 45seconds.

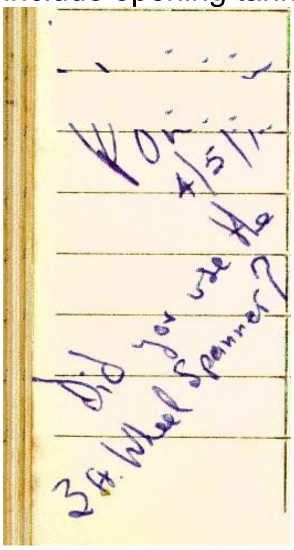
Another demonstration was today staged, that of firing a PD 150. This is again a dry powder extinguisher containing 150 lbs. of chemical and a 10lb CO_2 bottle.

Operation is simple, remove the safety pin on bottle and squeeze the firing lever. The nozzle discharges the foam within 45 secs. as a cloud or a jet.



MAY THREE SEVENTY 5. 41mi. EAST Cape Roque.

A pumpover was held today, with the Pearleaf. As always the initial jobs include opening tank lids and this job becomes more longwinded every time.



Each time, something new has seized up and more and more force has to be used. On some of the lids, the "dogs" are missing or the threads shreded away. If this isn't so, then maybe they just don't pivot about the hinge. Occasionally they have to be hammered to loosen up, but this could cause sparks and then the tank tops will be no more. Probably the worst to open, is three port - has had a bent peg or spindle since refit. To open this obstinate lid, a five foot lever is required on the end of a wheel spanner. Yet one of the basic safety rules regarding spanners etc. is to use them the length they are, as metal fatigue or fracture could result. Nevertheless, they all open in time, but is this what counts. Safety First or what ? However The Pumpover was successful and we managed to top up.

MAY FOURTH SEVENTY FIVE . N. SALVADOR.

Quality control of Avcat saw a change with no more water in three centre. After this we spliced wire and then stood down. I finally managed to get started on the next correspondance course and accomplished a fair section by noon.

In the afternoon, saw the carrying out of the maritime tradition of the "Crossing the Line Ceremony".

I think I will appeal against the charges laid foreward – I firmly believe I'm the most legal person to be in this part of the world. Sunshine is my [*unreadable*] of country! The second charge of assaulting the carpenter should be reversed: he's the criminal !

It was all taken in good jest and made good entertainment for the afternoon.

MAY FIFTH SEVENTY FIVE.

There were replenishments with all British ships in company and Ark Royal and Hampshire were first at 06:40. The rigs used today were rigs 3, 11, 16, 8 and 4.

In the afternoon, Port Watch started to re-store Number Two boat with water and provisions. It was compulsory to change the milk as the tins had rusted severely. It will be better to store the milk in the spare provision container which is watertight and should slow down deterioration.

6th May 1975 – RFA Olwen near Rio.

After quality control, I worked in the 36' workboat cleaning it up and equipping it with available gear. The job was slowed down considerably by continuous rain. At 14:45 flying stations were called and I was then on the bridge for vertrep and replenishments with Ark Royal and Hampshire. The task finally ended at 19:40. The Captain explained, when he had time, how to use the sextant to measure vertical angles. The distance from an object can be found by measuring the vertical angle of an object of known height, and then applying the formula:-

$$\textit{distance in miles} = \frac{\textit{object height in feet} \times 0.565}{\textit{vertical angle in mins.}}$$

Other methods discussed included the running fix, when the course and distance run of the ship are known and an object is visible of which to take a bearing.

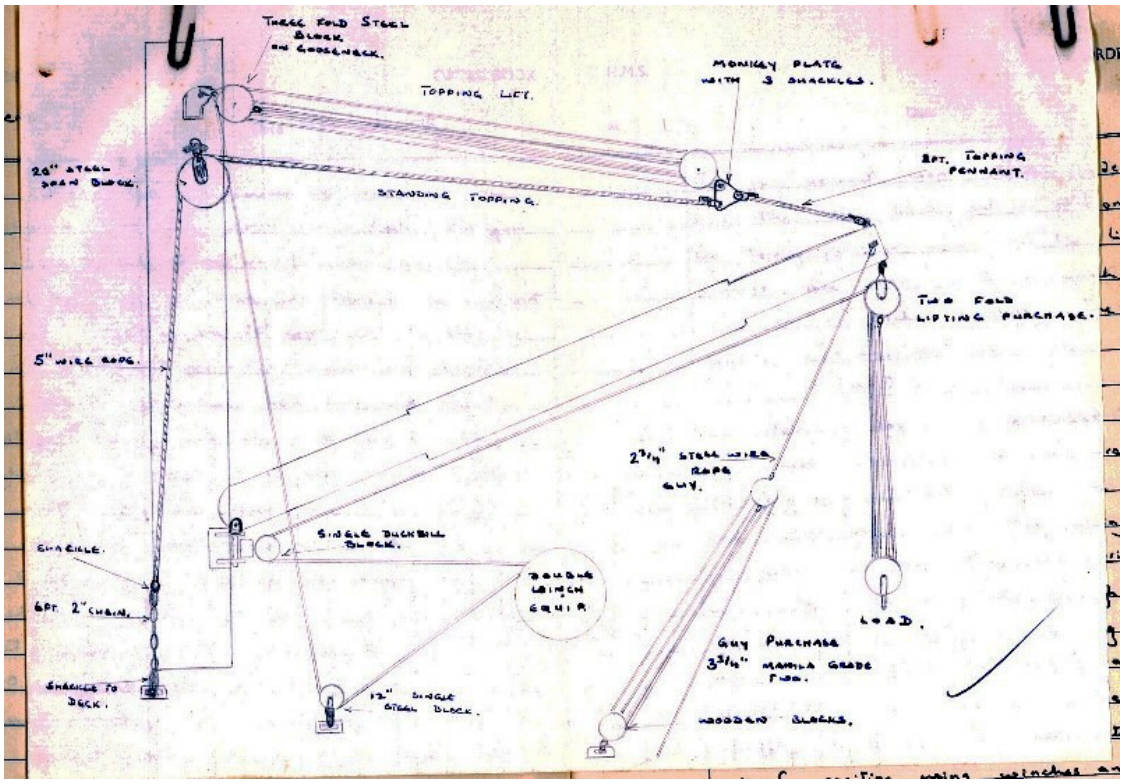
7th May 1975 at anchor at Rio.

The ship anchored about 1 mile outside the city of Rio and we prepared the accommodation ladder and finally rigged it. After this, the 36' workboat was lowered and then we proceeded to lower the FMB. The 'green' wire rope was unshackled off rig 15 and this was secured to the boat's bridle. Using this, we were able to lower it safely to the water.

In the afternoon we went thru the rigging warrant – the information contained therein was somewhat contradictory to the equip. taken out and we spent considerable time searching for the new equip. One of the guy purchases disappeared and another was brought up.

8th May 1975 at anchor at Rio.

We prepared and removed the equipment from the fwd. hold and put it on the focsle (this gave chance to operate the crane). When all the pallets were on deck we prepared the equipment and hauled up the 20" span block on the deck winch. All safety aspects were considered with safety harnesses used throughout. This was shackled onto the gantry and then the treble fold tackle blocks were hauled up in a similar manner and shackled to the gooseneck. The remainder of the job was carried out on the deck. The 8' topping pennant and the guys and the lifting purchase were all shackled to the appropriate place on the derrick head. The monkey plate was affixed to the pennant and the standing topping and purchase were shackled in position. The majority of the rigging was now complete.



The guy pennants were shackled on deck and the deck blocks put in position. The topping purchase wire and the lifting purchase wire led to the winch via deck or foot blocks respectively. The 10 ton derrick was now ready for use.

The following day we dissembled the rig and started in reverse procedure. The guy pennants and blocks were removed and coiled up then the lifting purchase was taken from the derrick head and stowed on a pallet. Although it sounds relatively easy in writing it is somewhat different in practice as the blocks themselves are of considerable weight and have to be hauled in position using winches and gantlines. We then attacked the topping assembly, releasing the shackles at the monkey plate and working from there. The 3 fold purchase had to be hove-to and coiled – this alone took approx. 45mins. The standing topping was lowered using the winch and once the 20" span block was free, this was relatively simple.

When the gear was all on deck, it was coiled and lashed on the pallets, then lowered by crane into the hold.

[AUTHOR'S NOTE 2013: no entries for 10 -11th May 1975]

12th May 1975 – The Olwen at Rio de Janeiro

At 06:00, I was on the focsle and we brought up all the mooring ropes and prepared for harbour stations later on. After the early morning fog had disappeared, we weighed anchor and proceeded upstream to the island fuelling point.

After securing alongside, Port Watch had loading duties and I went ashore to witness the gauges. The depot is very modern with a computerised ullage system of the tanks. The pumping capability was 220PSI. After obtaining the particulars I returned to the ship and finished the watch at 15:30.

Harbour stations were held again at 21:00 and the ship left the berth and returned to anchorage at 23:40.

13th May 1975 – same ship, same place.

Number six boat was lowered and we took out the Radio equipment to test its operation. While preparing for the test we rowed the boat around at an unnoticeable rate of knots, finally reverting to the mechanically propelled machinery.

The radio was rigged using a vertical antenna and after some tuning a signal was finally radiated. However reception was hampered as harmonic radiation from an AM transmitting station was heard on frequency.

On completion of the test we secured the boat to the falls and hoisted it up. The gripes etc were fastened and we secured for the day.

14th May 1975 – Olwen departs Rio

The anchor party was called at 08:45 and we hauled in the cable slowly as the ship turned on the anchor. The cable was leading astern, long stayed. When it was sighted and clear we hosed off the mud and later secured it for sea. During the day I worked with AB Martin and we unblocked several scuppers and then started to grease the gearing mechanism on the winches. In many cases they were initially seized solid but after applying a cleaning solvent and lub.oil they freed. They were then worked for a while and then greased properly.

In the evening we RAS'd Diomede and Lowestoft – I was on deck.

15th May 1975 – Olwen at sea

Port Watch had study throughout the day and I spent most of the time determining the subject of "determination of laws!" The topic is somewhat deeper than any of the previous lessons.

16th May 1975 – Olwen BRAZEX

I spent the first few hours of the morning working with AB Martin and we had to take apart a loading manifold and check the valve. It was so rusted together that the bolts were eventually chiselled away. The operation was interrupted by the RAS with Leander on rig 12. This continued until noon. After lunch there was a second RAS with Lowestoft and after setting the rig, cadets on deck worked on the 36' boat davits – chipping, linseeding and painting them.

The final part will be transcribed ~ early January 2014.
