



The Doc - Richard Couch

I was born in Boston in 1940, went to the village school and then onto Spalding Grammar where despite an uncertainty of career choice (Engineer, Farmer or Vet?) I ended up studying medicine at Sheffield.

I joined the Navy as a Surgeon Sub-lieutenant in 1964. Why the Navy and not the other services? When I enquired about joining Commodore Baskerville sent me an open rail warrant and invited me to see him at the Empress State building. I didn't fancy the Army and the RAF just said "Come and see us if you are in London!"

Qualifying in 1967, I did a new entry course at **HMS Victory**. The two of us on the course were then offered either the Far East or the West Indies — I volunteered for the West Indies — and got Singapore! "**Commodore Amphibious Forces additional**" they wanted me because I was single with no dependants. My first job was to join 45 and 42 commandos for the final withdrawal from Aden. All went peacefully and on the way back to Singapore on Albion an Ordnance Corps major shared my cabin.

My final job in Aden would have been to accompany 400 armed sailors as a "humping party" to remove the contents of the huge ammunition dump if things had gone pear shaped. The self-imposed top secret task was



to blow the ammunition dump. So 400 matelots and a greenhorn medic might have been blown up!

I worked in **HMS Terror** and the Naval Base Hospital until I flew out to Simonstown to join **HMS Caprice**. I had several days before she arrived so got to know the town, the girls and the Afrikaners and their dislike of the Brits. I also had a Uniform made by Manuel's - excellent service, fit and value.

Reporting to Cdr. Tim Bevan on arrival he said, "have a good stay and just be on board when we sail!" The Beira Patrol was generally very boring apart from the phoney mail drop and the Portuguese patrol ship (The "Admirale Gonorrhoea") which sent over a case of Port by Gemini, we gave their wardroom an invitation to "Saturday night at sea". Unfortunately someone sent the invitation by radio not light, it was intercepted by the Admiralty who were not amused!

After returning on Caprice to Singapore I went to Bangkok with Admiral Ashmore. At one party I was talking to a Thai Admiral who gave me details of his favourite Whore "Tell her Sanny sent you and she will give you local rates! His wife was 1 yard away.



After my Bangkok trip I was sent to **HMS Defender**, but she would have sailed by the time I reached Sembawang, so the Admiral arranged a Wessex 5 to fly me back from half way up the Malayan Peninsula - power!

I volunteered for another Beira Patrol as my mate who was to do it had a baby coming. But my trip was cancelled, so I had a choice of how to return to UK.

I joined **RFA Tidespring** for the trip to Auckland. Double bunk-wasted as my girlfriend was not allowed to travel on an RFA and I was ordered to wear 3 stripes as a senior officer. Caprice's skipper was not amused! (not Mark Ruddle at that time but now Chatterton Dixon).

I transferred back to the **Caprice** on arrival at Auckland - the rest of the 1968 trip you know. My **Caprice** trips were the highlight of my naval career!

Back in the UK I did orthopaedics and surgery and then drove out for a two-year married accompanied job in **Malta**. We had a wonderful time until Mintoff kicked us out in 1972. I did more hospital work, and then did 18 months on **HMS Intrepid** one of the last steamers in the RN. It was an interesting

commission with Dartmouth training, Americans, Dutch Marines, tanks and landing craft but too much brass.

I left the Navy in 1975 and did 23 years as a **GP in the Fens** - a great job as a family doctor. In 1999 I remarried, retired, and moved to Dorset with Heather and her family. I did three years with the prison service in Dorset and Devon, learning about drug and alcohol problems, and the difficulty of combining custodial efficiency with caring for inmates.



We had a little trainable canal boat which we towed behind our Land Rover had many happy trips around the Kennet and Avon and the Thames. We later sold the boat but kept the Land Rover.

I have 2 boys; one is in Environmental Health, the other an engineer building the Carriers. Heather has 2 girls and a son who is still at home.

Likes - Music Driving - Brandy - Red wine

Dislikes - Marmalade - Gin - Politicians