

A Week aboard TS Foudroyant in August 1959



THE LOG OF T. S. FOUDROYANT

By P. F. Clifton

1st to 8th August 1959

(This is a record of a visit to TS Foudroyant by the Nautical Training Corps. The ship was moored at Portsmouth. It now bears its original name, HMS Trincomalee, and is still afloat at Hartlepool in north-east England.)

Saturday 1st August 1959 Weather fine and sunny.

I took the London party, consisting of myself, and 3rd Officer Vic Collings, P.O. Furlong, Coxswain Campbell and 14 Cadets of T.S. Enterprise, 3 Cadets of T.S. Emerald and Coxswain Davies of T.S. Ajax from London to Portsmouth Harbour station without incident. At Pompey we were met by 3rd Officer Harry McGilvray of T.S. Zealous who had been left behind by Brighton party to pilot us to Gosport. He saw us safely to the Dolphin Pier where we were ferried by motor boat and dinghy to the Foudroyant.

Whenever you join a new ship everything aboard is always strange. Here was a completely new ship's company comprising 10 Officers from 4 Divisions and some 80 Cadets mainly from Brighton, Hammersmith, Patcham and Hove. But the Foudroyant's First Lieutenant had it all organised. Watch and Station Cards were swiftly issued to the Cadets who then went below and stowed their gear. The Officers tossed their dunnage into cabins and went to the Wardroom for tea.

I looked around me in the Wardroom. I knew most of the Officers aboard – the Vice Commodore was an old shipmate; Chief Officer Basil May and 3rd Officer Jack Perren were from T.S. Attentive, the Enterprise's chummy ship and we had met often before; 1st Officer Eric Pilbeam from Patcham I had known for a very long time; 1st Officer Derek Rowson from Hove was an old friend and I had met 3rd Officer Harry McGilvray for the first time at Pompey station; 2nd officer Maurice Cowell was a new but very happy face and it was obvious that this would be a happy ship.

Tea over, we heard the hands detailed for fire drill and then took an Officers' Gig away to try it out. Everything went well, we didn't hit anything and so returned aboard for drinks before supper. This is memorable for me, not because the Vice Commodore brought me a drink but because of the chewing gum episode. I had lectured the Enterprise Cadets on rules of behaviour aboard, including no chewing gum. Apparently the previous week's course (not N.T.C.) had not heard the rules. Anyway I had sat on some lovely sticky bubbly gum whilst out on the whaler. I found this out when I tried to get off a chair in the Wardroom. Anyway I finished up having my bottom scraped with a pusser's dirk by Eric Pilbeam, much to everyone's amusement.

After supper all cadets went away pulling. I took a gig with Vic Collings and 14 Cadets and we did some instruction in pulling before sunset, when we all repaired aboard and watched and assisted with great amusement the antics of Cadets slinging and getting into

hammocks. Eventually this was achieved and we returned to the Wardroom after 'pipe down' for a yarn with the Ship's Officers. Turned in about 23.45 – an irate Foudroyant Instructor still trying to make the little dears keep quiet!

Sunday 2nd August Weather – fine and sunny, fresh breeze.
N.T.C. Duty Officer - 1st Officer Rowson.

The Duty Officer set an excellent precedent by bringing a cup of tea when giving the officers a shake at 06.30 – although he forgot Basil May and Maurice Cowell who were sleeping in the sick bay on the upper deck. Future D.O.s please note! Still, the D.O. has a busy time of it; he has to get the duty P.O. to take away a gig for the milk, send away other duty hands to bail out all boats and get the non-duty Cadets to P.T. at 07.30. Eric Pilbeam volunteers to take P.T. so that's one thing less to worry about. Clean ship at 07.30, fall in for prayers and Colours at 07.45. Jack Perren takes on responsibility for getting Church Pendant hoisted every day. Then hands to breakfast and fall in afterwards for instruction etc. Breakfast is memorable only because the Vice Commodore and Maurice Cowell shared a mullet which Maurice had caught the previous evening. Basil May said that it was so tired that it obviously gave itself up. Anyhow, Maurice never managed to catch another one.

As it was Sunday, the Ship's Company cleaned into uniform and went away to H.M.S. Dolphin, first to have a look around H.M.S. Spiteful – one of H.M. older submarines – and then to Church. We nearly filled the Church. The service was Matins, one of the lessons being read by a rear admiral, and then we fell in outside Church just as 'Up Spirits' was being piped. To add to our misery a hand carried a tub of the stuff right past us. It was just as well that he was being escorted by a P.O. or our Officers may have rushed him.

We returned from Church in time to man the upper deck of the Foudroyant. The Commodore was about to arrive. He was brought off by the Queen's Harbour Master's launch to the starboard accommodation ladder, where the Captain of the Foudroyant was waiting to meet him. An N.T.C. piping party did the honours. Then the Senior Officers adjourned to the Captain's cabin for a drink, followed by drinks in the Wardroom, a visit by the Commodore to the Gunroom and lunch.

After lunch, more boating; away sailing lifeboats on a nice fresh breeze. I took the P.O.s away in the whaler and had a nice trip along past Fort Blockhouse and Haslar Hospital towards Gilkicker point – very pleasant, but I envied those who were sailing in such nice breeze. The Commodore went away in the Captain's 'Victory' class sailing boat, complete with the Vice Commodore and some beer. They were so busy sailing that they brought the beer back. After tea more boatwork and after supper we took the Commodore ashore to catch his train. Memories of one Senior Naval officer being marched under close escort of ten pirates from the local to the station. Also, memories of draught Bass and pickled eggs in the 'Isle of Wight Hoy', which proved too much for Peter, the Swedish Rover scout who accompanied us on our run ashore.

Monday 2nd August 1959 – weather, fresh breeze, changeable
N.T.C. Duty Officer - 3rd Officer Collings.

After breakfast the hands went away boating. I had a gig's crew. The afternoon is memorable for the fact that we all joined in the Gosport Carnival Procession. We landed a

detachment consisting of Patcham Division Bugle band with a uniformed contingent of bigger Cadets under Chief Officer Basil May, followed by a contingent of small Cadets in pirate rig wearing life jackets and carrying oars, rope, and the Foudroyant's tiddly lifebelt. I was in charge – to prove it I had a notice attached to my big end! Music for this contingent which answered to the name of 'Shambles' was provided by two fifes played by Cadet Coombes of Hammersmith and myself, with a mouth-organ as relief. 3rd Officer Collings carried the Foudroyant's ensign for the uniformed party (ask him why he got the job) and Jack Perren and Maurice Cowell carried a large pendant with the name Foudroyant for the Shambles.

The Carnival procession, which contained some lovely floats including one called "Nights in a Harem" (how we wished we could have marched behind it) started from an Army Barracks and went on for mile after mile. I haven't got the slightest idea where we went – it is just a blur – all I can remember is swapping over oars and ropes and bits and pieces from one shambler to another. We were all pretty tired when we arrived at a large fair ground after doing at least 4½ miles. By then those life jackets were slung over oars carried between two shoulders. But those nippers stuck to the job and not one of them fell out. An hour's break for a look around the fair and a glorious cold drink and then we all marched back the short way, that is, not more than 2 miles.

The return trip is memorable for the great spirit shown by all Cadets on this march that seemed as though it would never end. Band instruments and other gear had been taken by the Vice Commodore in his car. The uniformed party led off and the shambles ambled after them. Music was of two sorts, vocal – I remember a young man from Brighton who sang about his Flight Sergeant who descended from his aeroplane without a parachute – and was also provided with an accompaniment by Chief officer Basil May who played the mouth-organ in the midst of the shambles. This provided a pretty problem for the sentries of the various barracks we passed on the way home. They had never seen a Lt. Commander playing the mouth-organ in full uniform to a gang of pirates and they didn't know whether to turn out the guard, salute, spit, or drop dead. Following their old and well tried practice the Army sentries saluted this apparition! We didn't drop dead. The Vice Commodore's car picked up parties of shamblers from time to time on the way home but there were still enough left to double past the uniform party and get to Dolphin Pier first. What a tough bunch our Junior cadets are!

After that, a very welcome swim, a combined tea and supper, and a trip out to Spithead in the "Scott-Paine", the Foudroyant's tender. One or two of us remained aboard to write letters and to revel in the peace and quiet whilst nursing our poor feet. It was on this evening that the Sultan of Zanzibar and Fourth Officer "Gus" Angus of Hammersmith made their appearance. For details of the former see Chief Officer Basil May who is a personal friend of the Sultan's. On that first evening I recollect that Gus needed a haircut; poor Derek Rowson had to go home and so missed all the fun.

Tuesday 4th August 1959 weather – cloudy but bright
N.T.C. Duty Officer - 3rd Officer Perren.

During the forenoon we all paid a visit to H.M.S. Victory and marvelled at the ship and her many guns. We also looked over the Victory Museum and enjoyed the relics of those inspiring days. In the afternoon there was more boat-work – I had the P.O.s in the whaler again – and in the dogs I sent the P.O.s away with 2 gigs to play tag with heaving lines.

They promptly incurred the Captain's displeasure for standing in the boats, but he was quite understanding when I made my explanation. After supper the Captain took the Officers for a run ashore to a place called Wickham – which Basil May insists is on the road to Bournemouth. The Vice Commodore drove his own car for us and after one or two stops for refuelling we had a fine drive back over Portsdown Hill. Did Gus get his hair cut whilst we were ashore? I can't remember, but we were impressed and what's more it suits him to have his hair "en brosse" but what will Ann say when she sees it?

Wednesday 5th August 1959 weather – sunny little breeze
N.T.C. Duty Officer - 2nd Officer Cowell.

After waiting for what might have been a nasty squall to pass over we sent away the boats. With Harry McGilvray I manned the "Gina" - a 20ft. Open sailing dinghy – and after mucking about up the creek for a few minutes to get the feel of her and incidently impeding a submarine which was trying to get under way, we sailed out of the harbour and into Spithead, joining the lifeboats which also went out there. We had a great thrill when the "Bremen" passed close by on her way to Southampton, and on turning for home the breeze vanished and we lay becalmed. The motor boat came out and towed the lifeboats in and Harry and I thought we had been left to find our own way home – not that we minded at all it was perfect just drifting along without a care in the world. Eventually we were towed in, a little late for lunch.

In the afternoon, Southern I.T.V. took a film of us all for their newsreel. This involved cleaning into uniform again, but who cares when there's a chance that your face may be on the 'Telly'! The cameraman knew his stuff and by tea had taken shots of all our activities from spud bashing to making sail.

The Wardroom dinner took place that evening. It was a uniform affair with five courses and the Captain presiding. Three volunteers from the Senior Cadets were stewards and did very well. One of them, and I am sure that he would prefer to remain anonymous, achieved undying fame by tipping fruit and cream all over the Captain and the Vice Commodore. His face was a study whilst waiting for the atomic explosion which he was sure would occur. However, both of these gentlemen took their christening in the best of spirits and assured the blushing lad that such accidents had been known to happen with the best of stewards. The other memory I have is of Gus, who from the second course onwards kept the company amused with a constant stream of jokes. The piece de resistance concerned a Guardsman on duty outside Buckingham Palace – for details see Gus. We turned in at midnight and all slept very well indeed.

Thursday 6th August 1959 weather good, light breeze, sunny.
N.T.C. Duty Officer – SCO. Clifton.

We left for the Isle of Wight at 10.00 – all four sailing boats were manned. The two lifeboats took their quota of 25 Cadets apiece, four of the P.O.s Course went in the Franklin, a half decked sailing dinghy, and Harry McGilvray and I with Brum, one of the Hammersmith seniors, took the Gina. The remainder of the ship's company went in the Scott-Paine, with two pulling gigs in toe for landing purposes on arrival. Destination – Seaview; E.T.A. - as soon as possible. The Gina, whose bottom had been scrubbed only that morning, was first away and was well out in Spithead before any of the other boats left harbour. We had a good sail and then, on seeing a lifeboat astern, went back to join it for a

sail in company – which was just as well, as we found that we had been heading in the wrong direction! The Scott-Paine came over and dished out some welcome refreshment and then left us to it. The breeze was light, but we made good headway and outsailed the lifeboat. Poor old Franklin, whose bottom was really dirty, lagged behind like a lame duck.

Sometime after midday we all arrived and went alongside the Scott-Paine, which was anchored some 100 yards off shore. The cadets were landed with packed lunches and told that we didn't want to see them before 16.00. The officers had lunch in the foc's'le of the Scott-Paine, Gus saying that he could not manage a thing and then eating twice as many sandwiches as anyone else. Some of the officers went ashore, but one or two preferred to lie on deck in the sun. The afternoon is memorable for the fact that despite all the boats available at the Foudroyant, as soon as they were ashore at least half the ship's company hired dinghies and went for a row. If only their mums could have seen them. Perhaps it's as well they didn't. The other thing I remember is the taste of peppermint rock supplied by a kind Cadet who brought it off to take home and then had to go ashore again to buy some more after we had eaten it for him. At 16.00 we ferried all the Cadets off in the gigs and the Armada started the return journey, those who had sailed over going back in the Scott-Paine and vice versa. During the afternoon we had seen Queen Elizabeth and the United States outward bound and on the return journey we saw the Pretoria Castle outward bound for South Africa.

After supper there was regatta training by messes, interspersed with instructional classes. Then peace and quiet as a tired ship's company got their heads down – except for an obstreperous P.O.s Course who were turned out on the upper deck at 23.00 to learn the lesson that silence is golden. After that, we all slept.

Friday 7th August 1959. weather warm and sunny
N.T.C. Duty Officer - 4th Officer Angus.

Hands to clean ship during the forenoon – a real scrub out. I took a run ashore to Pompey to buy a souvenir for my wife and to revive old memories. Half the ship's crew saw themselves on T.V. at dinner time and the other half in the evening.

The Ship's regatta was held in the afternoon – a knockout competition between messes rowed off in gigs, the losing crews going straight into a hot bath. I was the starter, the Vice Commodore was the judge, Basil May was the marshal, Vic Collings the scorer, and a team of strong arm men headed by Eric Pilbeam were the bath attendants. The regatta was won by 6 Mess, leading hand of the mess, Stratton. Then the P.O.s challenged the Officers to a gig race. The started made the course twice as long as before by going right up the creek, through a right-angled bend marked by a buoy. Both crews threatened to duck that starter if they lost. The P.O.s had the inner berth but by clever tactics by the coxswain of the Officers' boat – Basil May – forced them to foul by cutting the corner inside the marker buoy. The motor boat which was following the race with the starter's dinghy in tow, followed by the P.O.s crew and cut the corner in order to declare "no race" if the P.O.s won. Imagine the consternation aboard the motor boat when she slid smoothly aground on the mud, with a falling tide. What a lesson to the three experienced navigators aboard who chose to ignore the channel markings and paid the price! They jumped and rocked, towed with the dinghy, laid out kedge anchors fore and aft – but all to no avail. So they made a sweaty starter row them back to the ship in the dinghy. The P.O.s, who lost the race, swore that the starter had gone aground deliberately to avoid a ducking.

After a combined tea and supper, a Gosport ferry boat, hired by the captain came alongside and lifted the entire ship's company, complete with an apple and a bag of crisps, to take them to Cowes to see the fireworks marking the end of regatta week. This was a wonderful show, duly applauded by an Officers' "ooh" party, conducted by Gus. We got back to the Foudroyant about 23.45 after a perfect evening's cruise and the hands turned in swiftly. Half of them had been asleep on the return journey anyway – the other half had been in the foc's'le of the ferry boat where there was a bar, proving to an amused publican and his wife from Hammersmith (strange coincidence) that there is no limit to the capacity of small boys for lemonade and ginger pop. The experiment must have been very costly, as the cadets won. When we went alongside the Foudroyant, Chief Officer Don Webb and First Officer Bert Goucher of Woodingdean, who had come down for the weekend, were waiting for us. No 1., Gus and I went away in the dinghy at 01.00, to recover the motor boat, which by this time had floated off the mud, and after biscuits and cheese and cups of coffee, we went to bed.

Saturday 8th August 1959, weather – hot
N.T.C. Duty Officer – First Officer Pilbeam.

The hands are called at 07.00 and the usual routine applies until breakfast. Then we cleaned into uniform, after one last attempt to empty the scran bag which had grown to enormous proportions during the week, and so ashore for the last time. The lucky lads staying on for the second week are given shore leave until 18.00. Eric Pilbeam sees us aboard our train after saying goodbye to the Brighton mob, which leaves on an earlier train, I hand round the cigarettes I had confiscated when we arrived at Pompey, but after a while the carriage is quiet – they are catching up on their sleep. Maybe they are dreaming about next year?

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