

John Briggs was a cadet on *Chindwara* from 2nd January 1956 until 28th September 1958, and he has very kindly put together a most interesting collection of photographs and reminiscences about the life of a cadet with BI in those bygone days.

CHINDWARA MEMORIES
BY
JOHN BRIGGS

My memories of life as a cadet on *Chindwara* are of working very hard, playing very hard and overall having a great time. I think it was a time of awakening for teenagers and growing up very quickly. We were seeing the world (on the cadetship we really did see the world, as we had long periods in port with arranged excursions and sporting fixtures against other teams) which was all overseen by quite strict discipline and guidance.

We thrived on being given more responsibility as we gained in seniority and experience. For example, for a period I was the regular helmsman for entering and leaving port. Also myself and one other cadet had the responsibility for completely overhauling the heavy derricks and associated equipment while the ship was coasting in home waters each voyage. Of course we believed that we did it all on our own, but the Bosun was keeping an eagle eye on us the whole time and kept on checking whatever we were doing. Another activity that was the subject of great nervousness and great pride was being selected to man the chains entering or leaving harbour and shouting out the soundings to all and sundry. I managed to land the lead on the foc'sle one time!



(1) Cadet Briggs During A Break In The Mess Room

Photo (1) was taken in late 1958, during my last voyage on the *Chindwara*. I was Petty Officer of the Port Watch and was supervising the peggies working in the accommodation. The first trippers were allocated peggying in the accommodation every morning before breakfast and scrubbed cleaned and polished every inch during the hours of 0600 to 0900. There was always a God like Petty Officer (there were two cadet petty officers, Port Watch and Starboard Watch, plus the Chief Cadet Petty Officer) wandering around and picking faults with what was being done, and as a peggy you just prayed that he wouldn't tell you to do something again as time was limited enough to get it all finished. The photo shows me looking very smug and satisfied with myself

while taking a break in one of the dormitories.



(2) Hockey Team Heading Ashore For A Match In East Africa

Photo (2) would have been some time in 1958. The hockey team was a bit of a mystery to me as it was a game I had never played. All the cadets in the team were junior to me as the team only formed in my last year on board and didn't play too many games. The cadet 2nd from the left is Merv Hutton.



(3) Cadet Easterbrook Heading Ashore And Being Checked Off By The Duty QM Cadet Briggs

Photo 3 was probably taken during 1957 in East or South Africa, with cadets proceeding ashore for some sporting activities. At all times two cadets were allocated watch-keeping duties as quartermaster on each watch. At sea we took it in turns steering (there was no auto pilot on the ship) cleaning bridge brass work, lookout duties and making rounds of the ship, which included reading the Walker Patent Log. In port we manned the gangway keeping a strict record of who was ashore and who was aboard, did rounds at night time, stopped unauthorised persons boarding (not possible to check when the wharfies were pouring on board), checked scupper boards, moorings and rat guards.



(4) Cadet In The Chains And Heaving The Lead On Arrival At An East African Port

I am unable to identify any of the people in Photo 4, which was probably taken during 1957 at an East African port. Not every cadet managed to master the technique of heaving the lead but many tried. This was practiced on arrival at suitable ports at the discretion of the Master. The slower the ship was moving, the easier it was to get a good bottom. The lead weighed about 8 lbs and had an indentation in the base for tallow to sample the bottom. We made and maintained our own lead line as follows. At the measured distance from the base of the lead, twist the lay of the rope open and insert the appropriate strip of material, so that the strip extends equally from both sides of the line, then allow the strands to return to their normal position, trapping the strip in the line. Then place whipping immediately at either side of the mark to help hold the strands tightly in place. The line used for a hand lead is 25 fathoms long, and is generally marked as follows:

2 Fathoms – Leather, with two lobes (should look like a flat Milk-Bone biscuit).

3 Fathoms – Leather, with three ends (like above, with 3 "lobes" at each end).

5 Fathoms – White calico (2" wide x 6" long strip) .

7 Fathoms – Red bunting (same size as above).

10 Fathoms – Leather, with hole through it at each end (same as above) .

13 Fathoms – Blue serge (same as above).

15 Fathoms – White calico (same as above) .

17 Fathoms – Red bunting (same as above) .

20 Fathoms – Strand of light line, with two knots in it at each end.

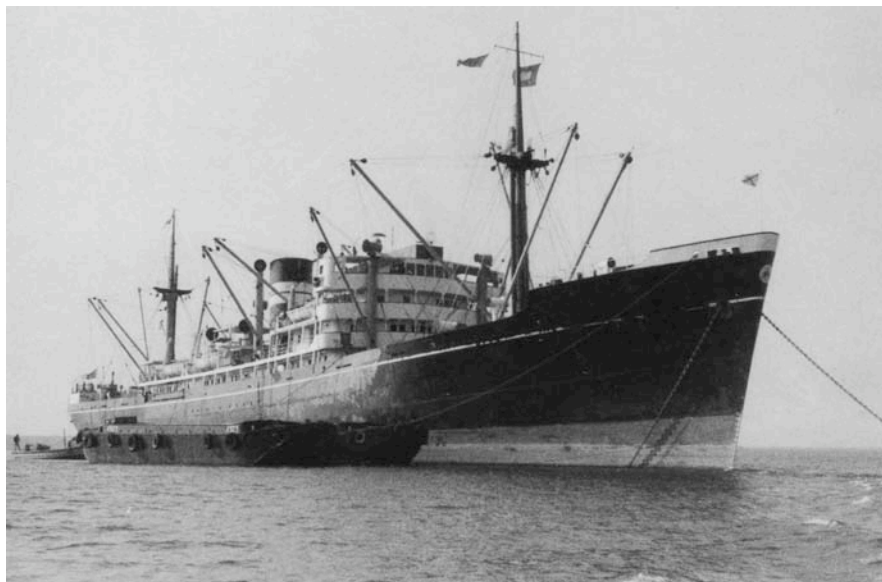
It is possible, by the different feel of the materials used, to tell what mark is in one's hand in the dark. The above depths are called marks; the unmarked depths in fathoms are called "the deeps". Thus, at five fathoms, the leadsman calls: "By the mark five"; in eleven fathoms: "By the deep eleven". He also calls halves and quarters of fathoms i.e. "And a half six" for six and a half fathoms; "A quarter less six" for five and three-quarters fathoms.

To take soundings while under way, the leadsman would take his place in the chain plates, secured from falling over the side by a "breast band" – a wide strip of canvas used like a seat belt tied between two shrouds. The leadsman could then lean forward against the band to heave his lead in the clear. He would then heave the lead round (getting up a good swing just like a pendulum) then heave it as far forward as possible, so that the lead would be resting on the bottom and the line tight, when the vessel passes directly over the lead. It was very tiring work, and, to take a bit of a rest, the leadsman would sometimes let the lead swing back and forth in his hand as though he was preparing to heave the lead. This is where the term 'swinging the lead' came from.

If the lead is hove properly, so that the line pays out with a little tension as it passes through the hands, it is easy to tell when it has reached the bottom by the sudden slack felt in the line. The lead was 'bounced' up and down to get a good contact with the bottom as the ship passed overhead. There is a hollow at the base, or "heel", of the lead, which can be filled, or "armed", with tallow; a specimen of the bottom (mud, sand, or shingle) is brought up with the lead.



(5) Alongside In East Africa Showing The Fine Lines



(6) Working Cargo In East Africa And In A Bit Of A Dirty State



(7) Lifeboat Work

Photo (7) would have been taken in 1957, and it shows the cadets shipping or unshipping the rudder from one of the lifeboats. The cadet on the right hand side is Charlie Clarke, who was Petty Officer Starboard watch on the same voyage that I was Petty Officer Port watch. The rudder sat on pintles and was notoriously difficult to ship or unship.



(8) Rugby Team After Another Tough Match In East Africa

Top row of steps – left to right: Richard Sandeman-Gay, Keith Leverton, Paddy Michaelson.

Bottom row – left to right: Chris Sample, Unknown, John Briggs, Robin Knox-Johnston

Standing – looking towards steps: Max Ranson

Seated at table – left to right: John Rice, Unknown, Jim Thornley

Photo (8) was probably taken sometime in 1957. The rugby team had quite a few matches organised for us against sea schools, police, local teams, armed forces and, sometimes, other ships. We had a reasonable record considering

the fact that we got no training or practice. I suppose we lost about 60% of games and won the others. I couldn't help laughing at half-time when the other team were sucking on oranges, and we were sucking on cigarettes!



(9) Cadet Robin Knox-Johnston Looking After Some "Cargo" Bound For East Africa

Robin Knox-Johnston was knighted for being the first to sail solo around the world – non-stop – and, of course, we should not forget that this great 'first' was achieved by a British Merchant Navy Officer. He recalls that the dog: *"was an RAF Police dog called Prince, which I looked after for the trip from London to Mombasa, I suspect in latish 1958. I remember being paid a £5 bonus for looking after that dog – real wealth when our pay was about £8 a month!"*



(10) Cadets Out For A 'Healthy' Early Morning Row In The Whaler.
From Left to Right: Cadets Cullerne, Briggs (Standing), Michaelson and Weight
and Cadet Instruction Officer Mr. Colley

Regarding Photo 10, *Chindwara* had a traditional whaler stowed on the starboard side of the poop, and in many ports we could take it for a sail or a row. Some memorable days were spent in the whaler exploring, having picnics on uninhabited islands and beaches and partaking in organised races against shore establishments. One very memorable voyage in the whaler was from Zanzibar to Dar es Salaam with the ship overtaking on the way.



(11) Cadet Briggs Wire Brushing Stand Pipes After Chipping



(12) Cadet Briggs With A Pot Of Black Grease.
Just Finishing A Dirty Job Greasing Cargo Gear

With no deck crew the cadets had to carry out all normal routine maintenance on deck. Some of the jobs, like those shown in Photos 11 and 12, were filthy, and a great deal of the time we were trading in the tropics and were totally soaked in sweat. There was limejuice issued every morning, and we were quite aware of the fact that bromide was added to our tea and coffee. It was a

useless drug and didn't seem to worry anyone although I must say, some 50 years later, it appears to be starting to show some effects!



(13) Cadets And Lady Friends Looking A Bit Weary At The End Of A Dance Held On Board
Left to Right: Cadets Killburn, Weight, & Briggs



(14) Our Beloved Bosun Bertie Miller In His Dress Uniform At A Dance Onboard
But Looking A Bit Uncomfortable

The dance shown in Photos 13 and 14 was held in Durban in 1957. Dances were very popular with the cadets, as it was a chance for a little romance. Although the cadets were very worldly and well travelled, most were still a little awkward in the company of young ladies. Photo 13 shows the reaction of some cadets to their failure to induce the young ladies to accompany them to the accommodation to view the golden rivet! Photo 14 shows the Bosun, Bertie Miller, wishing like hell that he was back on deck in his overalls and with a marlin spike in his hand.



(15) Crossing The Line Ceremony – Cadets Adams And Briggs



(16) Crossing The Line Ceremony

As shown in Photos 15 and 16, crossing the line was great fun for everyone except the first trippers. Those who were due to meet King Neptune for the first time were given 15 minutes (from memory) to hide anywhere on deck before the others came looking for them. There were a few prohibited hiding areas due to danger etc., but generally they had the run of decks. There were some ingenious hiding places found, but, in over three years on board and crossing the line on each trip, I never saw a cadet escape the wrath of King Neptune. Punishment from the court of Neptune ran the usual gauntlet of horrors from being covered in revolting concoctions, being half drowned in the swimming pool, and the obligatory haircut. All received their certificates the following day duly signed by King Neptune and the Master.



(17) Cadets Ransom And Briggs Fooling Around



(18) Cadet Dormitory As It Has Never Been Seen On An Advertising Brochure!



(19) Cadet Briggs On The Windlass

Photo 19 would have been taken in late 1957. To the best of my recollections, the cadet undertaking storekeeper's duties operated the windlass when entering and leaving port. Senior cadets were allocated the position of storekeeper, which they undertook for a number of months. There was also a junior cadet who was the assistant storekeeper. The storekeeper was responsible for maintaining the forepeak store, which entailed preparing all tools and necessary equipment for the day-work cadets. This meant mixing pots of paint, preparing brushes, supplying rope, lines, grease, white lead, tallow, etc. Use of all stores had to be strictly monitored, and regular stock taking was necessary to make sure nothing ran short. At the end of the

day everything had to be put away in the store again: left over paint back into drums, brushes cleaned, bosun's chairs and gantlines checked and restowed, etc. The store keeper also sounded around all tanks on a daily basis and entered the soundings on a bridge board.

Driving the windlass was a job I really enjoyed as it did entail a bit of skill and you felt quite some pride in doing it well. The windlass was of course used for all anchor work as well as mooring, and we saw firsthand the strains that could be put on anchor cables at times.



(20) Cadets Briggs, Debarr And Clarke

© 2008 John Briggs

Editor's Note:

As the printed originals of most of these photographs were in a pretty poor state, varying degrees of digital 'repair' work have been carried out on these copies; however, every attempt has been made to refrain from making any significant alterations.