



Photo: Cloud Observers

Travels with my Plotting Pens Clement Olliver

On the 18th January 1949 I packed my bags and took a bus from my home in Greenford Middlesex, to Acton in West London to join the Royal Navy.

A group of us young lads were assembled and we started our journey to HMS Royal Arthur, the new entry training establishment at Corsham in Wiltshire.



Photo: Source Unknown



Photo: Trevor Miles Collection

The next six weeks were spent kitting us out, teaching us the rudiments of life in the Royal Navy, square bashing and rifle drill. I remember that our pay was then four shillings a day. On completion I and other ratings enlisting as Naval Airmen were sent to HMS Illustrious, a Fleet Aircraft Carrier for four weeks basic sea experience.

After this we were drafted to HMS Seahawk (RNAS Culdrose) near Helston in Cornwall for 8 weeks training in Naval Airmanship where we were introduced to all the various sections, i.e. Safety Equipment, Photography, Aircraft Handling, Fire fighting and, of course, Meteorology. I had wanted to be a photographer but was selected (the only one in a class of twenty) to be a Meteorological Observer.

I was then drafted to HMS Daedalus, the Royal Naval Air Station at Lee-on-the-Solent, the then 'home' of the Fleet Air Arm. As at this time (August 1949) there seemed to be an over supply of Met. Observers I was sent to the Boat Section near the slipway that was an emergency service in case any aircraft ditched in the sea. Finally on 6th January 1950, almost a year since I first joined, I was drafted to HMS Harrier, the Royal Naval Direction Centre on the Pembrokeshire coast, where radar plotters were trained that was also the home of the School of Meteorology.

There was much to learn over the next two months, observing all weather conditions, plotting charts, sending up and tracking pilot balloons and the theory of meteorology.

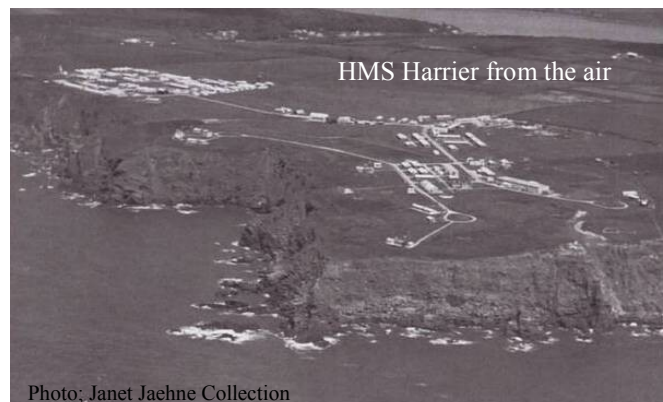


Photo: Janet Jaehne Collection

Now trained as a Meteorological Observer 3rd class, I was drafted to my first real job at HMS Peregrine (RNAS Ford) in West Sussex on the 7th March 1950. The air station had just re-opened after major improvements including concrete runways for jet aircraft like the Meteor that were entering naval service.



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On the 9th August 1950 I was drafted to the light fleet carrier HMS Glory, then in the Mediterranean. I went by troop-ship from Liverpool to Malta and joined HMS Glory on 18th August. The ship spent about a year in the Mediterranean during which time I passed for Meteorological Observer 2nd class.



HMS Glory

Photo: Wikipedia

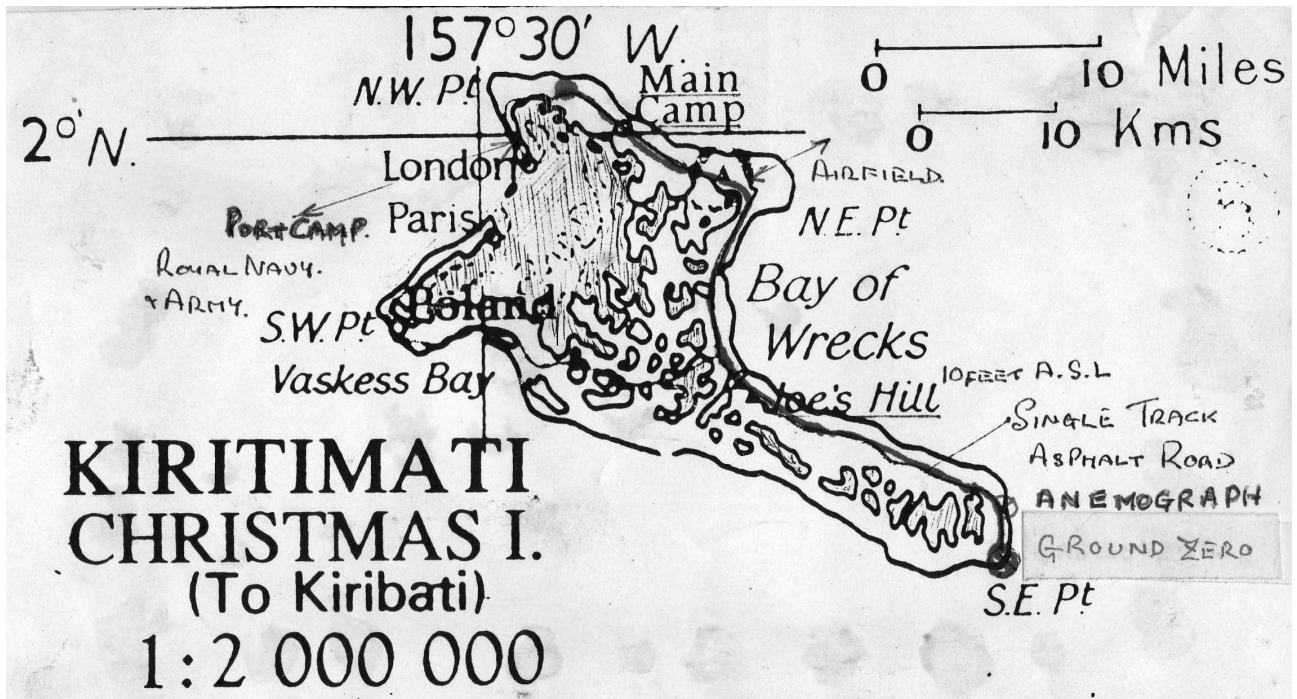
Around the middle of 1951 we were sent to the far east to participate in the Korean war. Our aircraft were Furies and Fireflies that were undertaking missions against the Russian built MIGs that were considerably faster than our piston engine fighters. Some of our pilots were Petty Officers, the last of the non-commissioned men to fly in the Royal Navy as recruiting had ceased in 1947.

To provide some respite for the ships company, HMS Glory went to Australia and the Australian carrier HMAS Melbourne went to Korea. The Australian visit included Perth, Fremantle, Sydney and Jervis Bay where our aircraft flew of to RNAAS Nowra (HMAS Albatross). I also went to Nowra and spent a short time working in their Met. Office. I even managed a most enjoyable two weeks leave that I spent at Wentworth Falls.

After an adventurous two and a half years aboard HMS Glory I returned to barracks at RNAS Lee-on-the-Solent and on the 29th October 1952 was drafted to HMS Hornbill (RNAS Culham). I was promoted to Leading Airman in December 1952, and drafted to the Met. Office at Lee when Culham closed in mid 1953.

From August 1954 I spent a few months aboard HMS Illustrious, when she was involved in some special aircraft landing trials and in January 1955 I was drafted to HMS Nuthatch (RNAS Anthorn) in Cumberland (now Cumbria). This was an important period in my service for I met Norah who was a nurse at Carlisle Hospital and we subsequently married in 1956. I also passed for Meteorological Observer 1st class and was promoted to Acting Petty Officer on 31st December 1955. I stayed at HMS Nuthatch until July 1957 when as a Petty Officer I was drafted to the Admiralty Forecast Section at Whitehall, Norah and I staying with my parents at Greenford.

Then, in March 1958 a 'bombshell' draft hit me. I was being sent to Christmas Island in the Pacific Ocean as Petty Officer in charge of a small team of Royal Navy Meteorological ratings to provide specialised Meteorological services for the Atomic Bomb tests. We had to learn all about 'Radio Sonde' operations, at that time new to RN Met. Observers.



We left in May 1958 flying to Christmas Island via New York and Hawaii, conditions on arrival were very primitive, we lived in tents with plenty of problems as well as having to deal with the fierce heat and the irksome land crabs. Later some temporary huts were erected.

My year on the island was far from pleasant and the work was quite arduous, we had to read instruments placed near to the site where the explosion took place with no protective clothing whatsoever. I did get a short break of a couple of weeks at an American rest camp in Hawaii. Finally I came home flying via Canada in February 1959.



Christmas Island photographs from my own collection.

During this time Norah had stayed at our house that we had purchased in Kent, so I was not best pleased to be drafted to HMS Sanderling (RNAS Abbotsinch) in Renfrewshire, Scotland, after a tough year on Christmas Island, but that's the services for you. I spent two years there as Petty Officer in charge of the Met. Office, with a long journey home to my family. I finally left in October 1961 and came south to RNAS Lee-on-the-Solent, now renamed HMS Ariel.

I was then in a 'strange job' as assistant to the Command Meteorological Officer whose office was at Wykeham Hall. I occasionally went to other Naval air stations to maintain the anemographs, that involved climbing up the tall support masts (good job I had a head for heights). Otherwise I had very little to do. It was during this time that Norah and I relocated to Gosport.



Photo: Clem Olliver

All good things come to an end so in June 1963 I was off to the far east again on HMS Victorious. However at this time I was keen to obtain a commission as an SD (AV) Officer, as by then the Navy had relaxed the requirements for eyesight, back in the fifties I had tried for a commission but lots of chart plotting in poor light had made it necessary for me to wear glasses. I passed all the required examinations for promotion, then in May 1964 I was rated Chief Petty Officer and shortly afterwards sent back to the UK to begin training for SD Officer at Portsmouth, being promoted to Sub Lieutenant in February 1965.



Photo: Clem Olliver

I then commenced a further 10 years service, my wish to become a photographer did now occur. I did the 2 year long photographic course and enjoyed several appointments using this experience, and was promoted to Lieutenant in 1968. However, being a special duties officer involved other appointments away from photography, the last being in Portsmouth Barracks as Accommodation and Blocks Officer, I decided I had had enough and retired early in 1975.



*Written by Peter Claridge in conversation with Clem Olliver
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