

S.E.A.C.

South East Asia Command

Over the years my memory has faded, place names and dates have been forgotten but here is my story.

After two years serving on H.M.T. Dorinda keeping the shipping lanes clear of mines on Channel approaches I received an overseas draft. In those days you were never told where you were going but, having been issued with tropical equipment, we guessed it was somewhere hot! Sailing from Falmouth and ending up at Columbo, our shore base was H.M.S. Mayina. Here we were given medicals and lots of injections, the worst one being a bloody great needle in the stomach for Cholera. Two days later I was drafted to Mantapan in India (couldn't even find it on the Map) leaving Columbo by train at about 1600 hrs. We travelled up through Ceylon and over on the ferry to India and 24 hours later we arrived at Mantapan - all it was was a signpost in the desert. We sat there on our kitbags for about an hour then, in the distance amongst a cloud of dust a lorry appeared. This conveyed us to the RN base where we were given a bed for the night. Next morning we were kitted up with two Jungle green uniforms, two Khaki and an Australian bush hat, I began to think I had joined the Army. My ship which I had come to join was laying alongside the quay, ML 1334. I stood looking down at her, 72 foot long, 14 foot beam, 6 pounder gun forward, twin Lewis either side of the bridge, and AA Oerlikon aft. It was powered by two 8 cylinder Gardener Diesel engines with a top speed of about 15 knots. I thought to myself "this doesn't go very far" but was soon to find out otherwise. Having reported to the Skipper he said "we have been waiting 6 months for someone trained in minesweeping" and we would be sailing that evening. The rest of the day was taken up preparing the ship for sea taking on food supplies, diesel fuel and, most important, fresh water for 14 men. We left just as it was getting dark and I thought it was about time I found out where we were going. To my surprise I was told, "across the Bay of Bengal". We were about 4 1/2 days going out, refueling at sea, returning to Mantapan approximately 10 days later. On the return of our second run over we were ordered to proceed to Trincomalee in Ceylon. The Skipper told me I would be leaving the ship and returning to minesweeping.

As we sailed into Trinco harbour it was full of RN ships. There must have been about 8 to 10 Aircraft Carriers, Cruisers, Destroyers and Frigates with many Landing Craft and Supply Ships and it was very obvious something big was coming off. Arriving at Cod Bay we were ordered straight onto the dockyard slip where work immediately started on fitting us with minesweeping gear and smoke canisters. I was also ordered to remain with the ship. After that it was weeks of hard training, in sweeps and out sweeps in front of landing craft. Out of the blue the crew was told "7 days leave at Kandy", on return we were on 24 hour sailing orders, had a run ashore in Trinco and were on the way back to Cod Bay when the night sky was lit up with very lights, tracer bullets and all the ships were sounding their sirens. We wondered what the hell had happened. Entering the RN base we were told the Japanese had packed up so it was back to the ship and out with the Rum bottle. Next day we sailed for Singapore. On arrival it was escorting landing craft and clearing areas of mines. After a couple of days with a landing craft we were sent to North Sumatra to take the surrender of the Japanese army but I cannot remember the name of the place. Back to Singapore and normal work.

Our next job was to take on board an Australian Major who worked for war crimes investigation, a captain who dealt with war graves and also a Sergeant and interpreter. We sailed for Siam and also a lot of offshore islands where our guests were gathering information ashore. This took about 3 weeks and, after a spell of normal work, our guests returned to us and we then sailed

Kuching (Sarawak) Borneo. Here the Major asked the Skipper if some of us could help with their work ashore. Six of us went into the jungle with them because they were informed there were some Japanese hiding up there but we did not see any. Returning to Singapore the flotilla was paid-off and all the crews were dispersed to other ships or back to the UK. I received a draft after a few weeks to return an American minesweeper to the USA. I was quite looking forward to this but then it was cancelled. Orders came out to re-commission the old ships and this took about 4 days, bringing on stores, ammunition, cleaning guns and

getting the main engines to work again. My draft was to ML 1333. It was a mixed crew, only 3 of us had served on these ships before. Sailing for Palembang in Sumatra and taking up station at an oil refinery a few miles downstream of the main town, our orders were to patrol 52 miles of river which was, in some places, up to two miles wide and less than 1/4 of a mile in others to support the Army escorting ships that were dumping Japanese arms and ammunition. This was an impossible task for one ship so we were joined by another ML. Also we rearmed some Japanese to help with the escort work. There were times when we were fired upon in the narrow part of the river, we also returned fire helping the Army ashore. I believe the regiment was the Lincolnshire. At one time we had to go right in to Palembang and take around 100 or so Dutch Nationals out to the island of Banka. We were well overloaded, they were all over the deck and down below. Thank god we didn't get attacked going down the 52 miles of the river. Eventually we were rammed by an Indonesian tug which caused a great deal of damage in the engine room. We carried out repairs as best we could before being ordered to return to Singapore, but we had our last action as we were going downstream when fired upon. Many more things happened in the two and a half years I served out there, like a good run ashore in Singapore, going to the Great World and the New World, also duty patrols round the brothel area where we had to remove all the sailors from their evenings pleasure! Then it was time to come back to the UK and I found myself a passenger on an Aircraft Carrier arriving back in England only to take up duties again, minesweeping in the North Sea, then demob.

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