



Written memoir to aide interview of Mr Gerald Larkman, Royal Navy Veteran

Interview took place at Gerald's home in West Wales on 21st June 2023

The interviewer was Mr Neil Davies of Age Cymru Dyfed Veterans

The film and audio were by Mr Steven Munro, Age Cymru Dyfed Veterans project volunteer

Pre- Service

Gerald is a proud Welshman, was born in Port Talbot in 1955. His childhood was spent in Wales attending comprehensive school in his beloved South Wales. Gerald was 20 years of age when he joined the Royal Navy in December 1975. Gerald describes how he was watching Television at home when a recruitment advertisement for the Royal Navy came on the screen. He specifically remembers that the theme tune to the advertisement was a version of the popular 1975 number one hit pop song by music group "Typically Tropical" entitled "Barbados". This song and the advert content interested Gerald and in no time he was inside the local Royal Navy recruitment office, enlisting for service in the Royal Navy.

Recruit training

On the 9th December 1975 Gerald walked through the gates of the naval recruit training college at HMA Raleigh and his journey began. Upon completion of his basic recruit training, Gerald moved on to the maritime warfare school at HMS Dryad. Here, he was to learn his chosen trade of Radar Technician.

HMS Euryalus

Upon successful completion of his trade training, in 1976, he found himself joining his first ship HMS Euryalus, fleet number F15. This was a Leander class Frigate, which had just undergone an extensive refit, before Gerald joined the ship's company. Gerald and the ship were soon underway and full filling the promise of travel to the Caribbean that had enticed Gerald into the recruitment office. The ship sailed to the West Indies, undertaking guardship duties to the Commonwealth Islands on behalf of the United Kingdom. Gerald describes visits to many of the islands that make up the archipelago, apart from Barbados! The ship exercised in the Atlantic Ocean, travelling to Brazil, where it docked for a week in Rio. This is a week engrained in Gerald's memory. As a young Sailor, he undertook his first duty on the "Gangway". Acting under orders Gerald undertook a specific task, which led to a rather

unfortunate incident, which he describes with some humour. Following the short stay on Rio, the ship returned to patrol duties and Gerald received his next move.

HMS Birmingham

Gerald was posted onto the Gibraltar squadron, supporting the coastal security mission.

Gerald describes his shore-based duties. He explains how he sustained an injury during a sporting event, which resulted in permanent knee disablement.

Gerald's naval career then took another step forward, when he was posted to join the ship's company of HMS Birmingham, fleet number D86. Nicknamed "The Brum", this ship was a type 42 destroyer, armed with a 4.5" gun, two Sea Dart missile launchers and a Westland Lynx anti-submarine helicopter. Gerald describes "The Brum" as a "fantastic ship".

The Falklands war

On 17th June 1982, Gerald was on board when HMS Birmingham was called to task. The mission was to support Operation Corporate, the operation to retake the Falkland Islands from Argentine occupation. Although hostilities officially ended on 14th June, the Argentine navy and Air force were still considered a real and present threat to UK armed forces. Upon arrival in theatre, HMS Birmingham was tasked to provide "picket" duties, to protect the Task force naval fleet. The ship had been prepared for war and many of the ship's company had lost friends, who had died in Argentine attacks upon the Task Force ships. These damaged or sunken ships included the Brum's sister ships HMS Coventry and HMS Manchester.

Gerald mentions that as the ship came on to station the mood on board ship was indeed sombre. He recalled that indeed, the Argentine Navy and Air Force did not disappoint. Gerald describes how the ship was brought to action stations warning red and how he and his nearby colleagues felt when two specific incidents occurred. He comments on his feelings towards the Royal navy Sailors, who had faced down these threats, when hostilities were at their worst.

As the British military presence wound down, HMS Birmingham set sail for the UK. However, there proved to be drama on the return voyage back to the UK.

"The Brum" was called to assist a civilian vessel that was on fire in middle of the ocean in rough seas. Gerald describes how "The Brum" steamed to the stricken vessel's aide and recounts his own experience of fighting the fire on board the vessel.

Upon arrival back in the UK, another move was in store for Gerald.

He next found himself aboard another type 42 destroyer, HMS Nottingham, fleet number D91. Gerald describes an interesting experience he shared with a comrade, during a visit to the Russian port of St Petersburg.

HMS Manchester

Gerald's final ship was to be another type 42 destroyer, HMS Manchester, fleet number D95. With upgraded armament to HMS Birmingham, the Manchester boasted Oerlikon guns and a Phalanx close support warfare weapons system, in addition to the 4.5" gun and Sea Dart missile launchers. It was a potent ship indeed and was soon deployed on operations in the Persian Gulf, with Gerald on board, an experienced Leading hand and skilled Radar Technician.

Gerald describes how the ship came under close attention from Iranian war ships in the Straits of Hormuz and how the Manchester's Captain countered these threats. Gerald gives an interesting account of an air experience flight with the Royal Air Force and time ashore in Iraq, during four deployments to the Gulf region.

Gerald returned to St Petersburg with HMS Manchester and gives an account of visiting UK war graves in Russia. Further tasks including a visit to Northern Ireland are described by Gerald.

Discharge

After 22 years of service Gerald's career in Royal Navy came to an end in October 1999.

Following his naval career, Gerald settled back into life back in Wales, where he now lives with his wife, Eleri. Gerald continued to serve his country before his retirement, working in the NHS and private sector.

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- Our thanks to the National Library of Wales for assisting in the producing and retention of the film material.