

WW2

John Stanley GARDINER *The War Years*

Royal Navy Service No:

JX 395-855



John's Story

Life on the Ocean Waves - WW2

Royal Navy Establishments attended	
	HMS Glendower
	HMS Wellesley
	HMS President III
	HMS Raleigh
	HMS Defiance

Basic Facts		
Called up for training	HMS Glendower	1 December 1942
Passed out	As a DEMs Gunner	
First Ship	ss BELGIAN CAPTAIN	Canada
Other ships	HMS EMPIRE COPPERFIELD	Mediterranean
	ss SAMSTRULE	Middle East
Demobbed from	HMS DEFIANCE	31 May 1946

Places visited	
Canada	Quebec - Halifax, Nova Scotia & St John, New Brunswick
Egypt	Port Said & Alexandria
Sicily	Siracusa
Italy	Naples - Bari & Taranto
Gibraltar	Gibraltar
Palestine	Jerusalem & Bethlehem

John's Story – Part 1



John Stanley Gardiner received his calling-up papers just before Christmas in December 1942. He was working as a milkman at this time and was looking forward to sharing his Christmas with his girlfriend Sylvia - also known as Rum - whom he met at the Express Dairy where they both worked.

His brother, Arthur, was already serving in the Royal Navy, therefore it meant that John would join the Royal Navy too. It was government policy that siblings should be in the same service. Arthur was serving in the *Signals Division* working on landing craft using semaphore in Singapore.

John was only 18½ - too young to go to war - but he was told to report to **HMS Glendower**, in **Pwllheli, North Wales** for his basic seamanship training.

John arrived in Pwllheli in Wales on a cold wet morning after he had been travelling for hours. One of the other milkmen at the Express Dairy, Ken Austin, had received the same letter but unfortunately they had missed each other at the station.

As John disembarked from the train, he saw hundreds of other young men walking through the iron gates ahead. He was confused – it wasn't what he was expecting. It wasn't a ship at all - it was like a huge holiday camp!

He was to find out later that **HMS GLENDOWER** was one of several Royal Navy bases (*sometimes referred to as a 'land ships'*) which were being used as a Royal Naval training base to train Royal Navy DEMs Gunners. Apparently, at the outbreak of the WW2 Billy Butlin (*holiday camp owner*) agreed a secret deal to build an Admiralty training camp near Pwllheli which would be turned into a holiday camp once the war was over.

John's first experience of Naval life was the bellowing voice of the Naval Petty Officer who could be heard shouting at the other young fellows gathered in the reception area some way ahead. With each step it got louder and louder as he took his place in line behind the other "new" recruits. He wanted to turn round and go home but he knew that the others were feeling just as bewildered and anxious as he was. His life in the Navy had begun.

They "*fell in*" where they were and waited for the next orders. They were counted and had to give their name before being marched off to their "Chalets". The other chaps looked as bewildered as he felt but they were friendly enough. Of course, John would have been happier if he had been able to share with his chum Ken Austin. He had spotted him way in front of him in the queue earlier but he was unable to push his way through the crowd. John hoped that he would bump into him later.

The new recruits introduced themselves and found out a bit about each other joking that they would be sick of each other by the end of the week. After unpacking their belongings they all decided to try out their bunks. John was lucky he got a top bunk and as they had all travelled a long way that day they just closed their eyes for a few minutes. Suddenly, they nearly jumped out of their skins when a very loud voice blasted out from the public address system.

"All men who arrived this morning report to the Clothing Stores - at the double".

John was thankful that he was on the top bunk as the lads on the lower bunks both banged their heads on hearing the booming voice over the loud speakers!

They joined the other lads outside and made their way to the Clothing Stores - a large building quite a way away. There were hundreds of lads everywhere. Outside the door they were brought to a halt by an even louder voiced *Chief Petty Officer* telling them to smarten themselves up, stand up straight and get into a straight line – they were in the Navy now!

There was silence as the young men formed an orderly line and one by one they moved forward to the long counter where a line of the Wrens waited to get them kitted out.

Here are some of the things in their kit:

- 🍷 1 large khaki kit bag - (*thought to have been made by prisoners!*)
- 🍷 1 sewing kit (*containing darning wool, cotton, needles etc*)
- 🍷 1 'Dog' tag
- 🍷 1 Military gas mask

plus the following clothing:

- 2 Navy blue single breasted jackets with black buttons
- 2 pairs of navy bellbottom trousers
- 2 sets of underwear
- 3 white shirts with separate collars and studs
- 3 pairs of thick black woollen socks
- 3 handkerchiefs
- 2 black ties
- 1 navy blue peaked cap
- 2 white cotton cap covers
- 2 navy collars
- a pair of big black boots and black shoe polish and brushes

They were also handed a giant piece of canvas with large brass eyelets spaced evenly at each end, a mass of rope – which was the hammock – together with two rough woollen blankets.

Before being dismissed they were given a large wooden rubber stamp with letters about 1" high with their name on - as this photo shows - complete with a large ink pad.



Before John could even begin to wonder



what he had to do with the large stamp the loud voice of the Chief Petty Officer was heard again telling them that they were lucky as they had a '*make and mend day*' for the rest of the day. They shrugged their shoulders turning to each other with a puzzled look. What on earth was a '*make and mend day*'?

The loud voice continued, "Get your kit sorted out and stamp your names on your kit bag, hammock, blankets, shirts and underwear etc then when that is done - get into uniform. You are now in the Navy so let's see you all looking like it!"



They went back to their chalet and as luck would have it John saw Ken on the way. How good it was to see a familiar face - what a shame they weren't in the same chalet. They joked for a few moments before John returned to his appointed chalet where the other lads had already started trying their best to carry out

John Gardiner's Navy Service - WW2 - 1942 - 1946

instructions and stamp their names on their clothes and on their gigantic kit bags etc. It wasn't as easy as it sounded!

They laughed and joked while they carried out the required stamping exercise saying if only their mothers could see them now! It was hard work and some faired better than others as it was a bit tricky to get a good result - especially on the kit bag!

Someone tried to work out what to do with the pieces of canvas and ropes they had been given but they had to give up after getting into a hopeless mess. Obviously it was part of a hammock but what did they need a hammock for when they had bunk beds to sleep in!

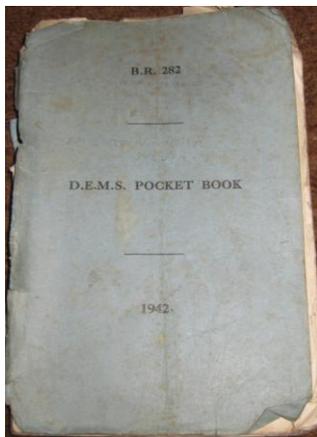
They later found out that a "make and mend" was the term used in the Navy for an 'afternoon off' which derived from the time of sailing ships when sailors would be allowed time to 'make and mend' their uniforms which were not then supplied by the Royal Navy.



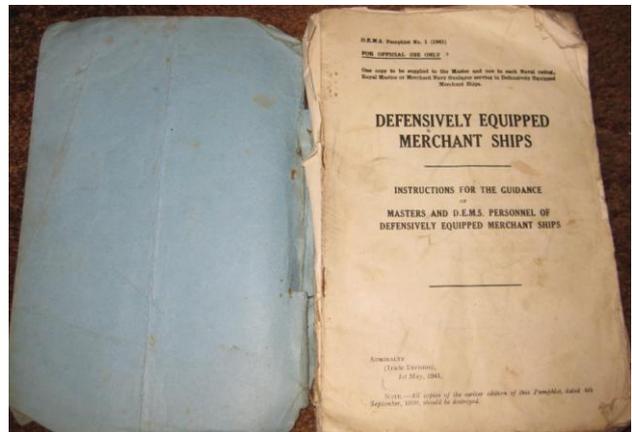
Eventually John and his new room mates changed into their uniforms and for the first time that day in December 1942 they all felt as if they were really part of His Majesty's Royal Navy.

The boots seemed so heavy and the clothes so strange. They all laughed at the large bell bottom trousers and helped each other with the strange naval collars! But by the time they were all wearing their uniforms they felt a little of what it was like to be a real 'sailor' - admiring each other with a laugh and a joke about the girls they would meeting and leaving in each port and saying that their lives would never be the same again!

They were told to pack all their civilian clothes into heavy bags and complete the labels which had been provided. These bags would be sent back to their home address by the Navy.



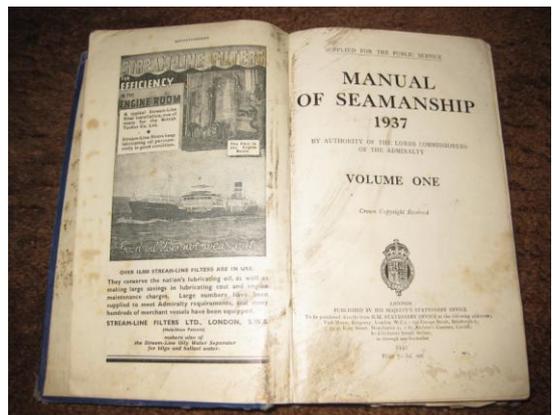
Their medicals were to take place the following day and they were not looking forward to it. Naval medicals were very strict. They turned down anyone who was not 'A1'. Ken Austin was found to have a damaged ear drum and subsequently he

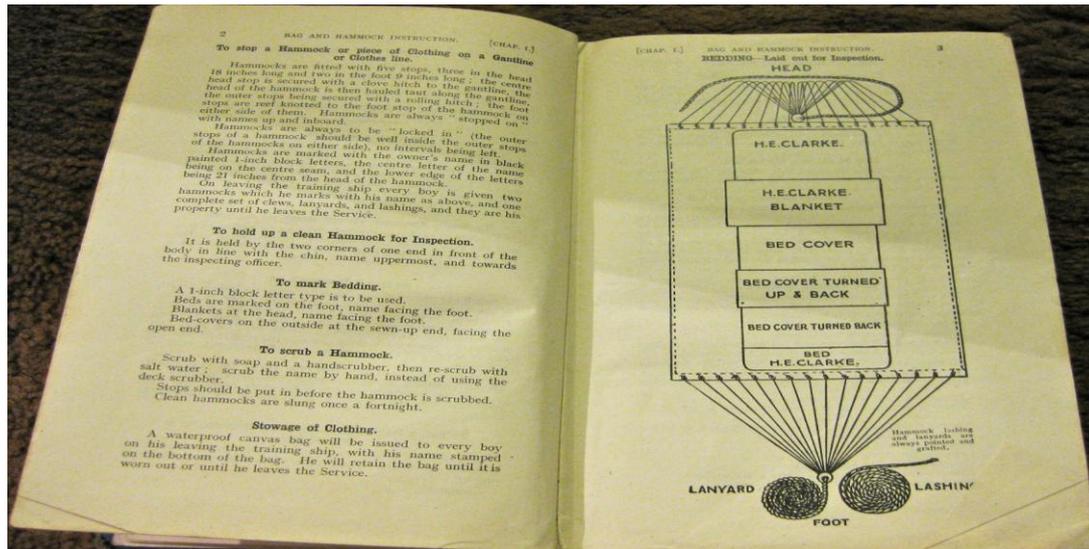


was not accepted and was sent home. John was very disappointed to see his chum go home - and



probably wished he was going back with Ken - but he was pronounced as 'fit' and passed his medical 'A1'.





They were issued with countless manuals and books about the Navy a few of which are shown here.

At first it seemed strange that they should be housed in a large holiday camp but despite being a little homesick

John slowly began to adjust to the regime. There was great camaraderie with all the other young chaps as now they were all in the same boat!

The training including a lot of marching and instruction into naval discipline and management of rifles and guns and soon taking orders became part of life. Their days were full of learning new disciplines which sometimes meant it was quite overwhelming for these young lads who came from so many walks of life and differing backgrounds.

Apparently, they even enjoyed visits from ENSA concert parties and, of course, it was always good to get mail from home. They wrote back with enthusiasm about the new skills they had learned but they were always aware that their mail was being censored and in truth the lives of those back home which was once so familiar to them seemed so far removed from their new life in the Navy.

3 months later it was time to say farewell to Pwllheli as John's basic training was complete and his stay at HMS "Glendower" was over. He successfully 'passed out' from his training as a 'Royal Navy DEMs Gunner'. Royal Navy DEMs Personnel manned the guns on Merchant Ships rather than on Royal Navy Ships.

DEMs stood for DEFENCE OF THE EMPIRE MERCHANT SHIPS or DEFENSIVELY EQUIPPED MERCHANT SHIPS and although members of the Royal Navy - and not the Merchant Navy - the Royal Navy DEMs manned the guns on the Merchant Ships which entitled them to extra weekly pay of 1/- (one shilling). Some viewed this extra payment as 'danger money' as so many Gunners were killed on the merchant ships. The extra pay was paid by the Merchant Ship which meant that by paying them they were lawful members of the crew. The RN DEMs had to sign articles in the same way as the Merchant Navy crew and were under the orders of the Captain of the ship at all times.

John was drafted to the base at Devonport to await his first sailing. As he took the train to Devonport - where more training awaited him - he wondered what life would bring in the coming months and what would become of him and his new mates.