

LVRC Visits RFA Fort Rosalie | 27th September 2020

The word boatswain has been in the English language since approximately 1450. The rank of boatswain is the oldest rank in the Royal Navy. They maintained and sailed the ships and were the officers responsible for the care of the rigging, cordage, anchors, sails, boats, flags and other stores. The title has since been abbreviated to Bosun.

We met Steve, the Bosun of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship, Fort Rosalie at 9:00am on Sunday 27th September 2020. In between lock downs! A lucky group from the LVRC walked up the gangplank from the dockside and were greeted by Steve, without a handshake of course.

Fort Rosalie was launched on the 9th December 1976 and was the lead ship of her class of RFA fleet replenishment ships. Fort Rosalie was originally named Fort Grange, but was renamed in 2000 to avoid confusion with the decommissioned RFA Fort George, a change which was not very popular. In February 2014, the ship arrived at North Western Ship repairs in Birkenhead for refit but now remains here until she can be towed away for scrap.

The ship is 603 feet long and weighs 22,800 long tons when full. The ship is powered by a 23,200 brake horsepower engine giving a speed of 22 knots and a range of 10,000 nautical miles. The ship saw service during the Falklands War.



When we went onto the ship Steve explained that as Bosun it was his job to be in charge of the ship until all of the internal fittings and kit had been taken out. When we went on the ship we were in a big corridor that had lots of mattresses and chairs stacked up ready to be unloaded.

Steve explained that by the time we had visited, that most of the equipment on the ship had been removed. A lot of this was lifted off with a crane on the dock. Steve told us that the ship used to have two really good cranes fitted on board but they sold them and had them taken off so they had to hire one for £1 million!

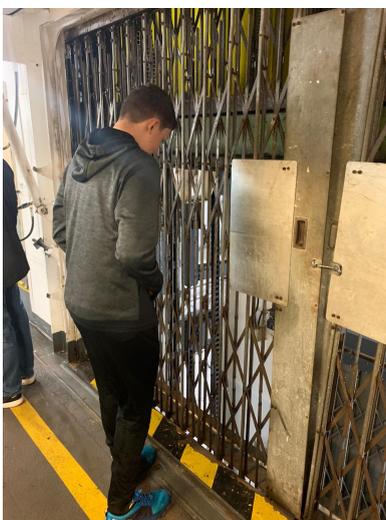
To start off with we went to the kitchens and dining halls. It was actually quite eerie how quiet it was and to know how many people will have been on board the ship cooking and eating there. There must have been thousands of sailors eating millions of food items over 44 years. We swiftly but carefully (having to mind our heads on several occasions) moved onto the laundry rooms. In the laundry rooms were 3 massive industrial washing machines. Steve told us that they were to all go to scrap with the ship. This seemed a bit silly as they were all in perfect working order. He was surprised they had not been sold separately.



We moved onto the bigger rooms on the ship, one of the biggest being the engine room, we were surprised at how clean the engine was.

The next bit was the massive hold. The walls were covered in wooden panels so they could attach things to the walls from every angle. Steve explained how carefully they had to plan how things were stowed so they knew how to get things out at the right time. These holds are 12,800 cubic metres.

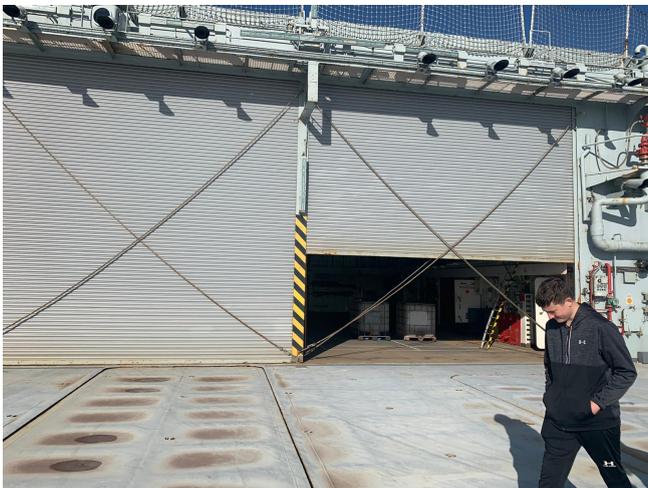
At either side of the ship were 2 massive lifts. These lifts were used to carry big bits of equipment and cargo up onto other decks or down into the hold. The lifts didn't have solid doors, just a cage instead.



At the back of the ship is a helipad. When the helipad is in use, the fencing which you can see in the picture, lowers down. Now I think about it, I trusted my life on some sailors with screwdrivers....



The hanger that was back of the flight deck could hold 2 Navy helicopters. These hangers were full of interesting and a mix of traditional machinery and modern tools. Steve told us that the pilots and helicopter mechanics were not airways on the ship but when they did they lived in the cabins nearest to the hangar.



The bedrooms were a bit of a rip off to be honest. The higher the rank the better the room. If you were the lowest rank you would be lucky to get less than 3 people in a room with you. Middle ranks would get a 1 person only room and it would be standard. High ranks would get a 1 person only small lounge with a TV (Which was a huge luxury).

When we went to the sick bay, it almost felt like an actual hospital or clinic, it even had the smell. It was not as clean or as well equipped as I thought it was going to be. I do have to take in mind that they don't have space on a massive ship for a whole hospital.

When we went through the decks on the outside, all the staircases were see through. A person with vertigo (LIKE ME!) will suffer. The stairs inside the ship were very steep and narrow. I am surprised more people didn't go to the sick bay recovering from falling down them. Especially if they had just come from where we went next.



The bar. I do have to say the best bit was the bar. It was like walking into a 80s disco hall which my Dad would have been in when he was 30. There were 2 bars for higher and lower ranks. One had better seats and drinks.



The captain's cabin was nicer than a standard hotel room. It had everything a captain could and would need. It had a desk for planning routes and a direct line to pretty much every place on the ship. Outside the captain's office is the bridge. This is the most technology I have seen in my life! When the ship is in war mode it must be an absolute bustling metropolis.



Some of this technology was in the radio room. There were a lot of dials and screens but this room then led to another, special room which had "Restricted Access" on the super secure door. In this room there were machines that sent and received secret coded messages. These sometimes gave them their missions sent by the Admiralty in London.

My conclusion is that it will be a great shame to let such a masterpiece go to scrap. I do suppose that all the scrap metal can be made into other ships. I really enjoyed my experience and I want to thank Lesley and the club for picking me to go aboard.

