

FAW 1 PORTSMOUTH DOCKYARD

DRIVING FROM A TO B

Introduction

Being a transport enthusiast, mainly railways but also buses as well, I always fancied being a driver in the Dockyard on one of those little diesel runabouts called a Lister, and also on the Mercury trucks. I put in my application for a transfer from the Patternmakers Shop in 1967. Mr Hutchings, the Inspector of the Patternmakers and of the old school, a real terror like my secondary schoolmasters, groaned in despair at my leaving. This meant I had to train up someone to take my place in knowing at any time where EVERY SINGLE wood pattern was, either on the shelf in the stores or in the Foundry casting shops; this was not an easy task. All records had to be kept bang to date on the index cards, and so on. Mr Hutchings would try to catch you out - he would ask you where pattern so and so was, and then ask you to show him the said pattern; GOD HELP YOU if it was in the wrong place, for you would incur his wrath!

But I wanted to progress, get on with my career, so in went my application. I had no idea where I would be going and awaited the reply to my application. When I did get it I was surprised that I would be posted to the FAW1 section located in Ivy Lane. So I was not all that far from my old home and haunts, and could pay a visit from time to time as and when it allowed to do so. Little did I know what fates and the future held for me at the start of the 1970s and a further advancement up my career ladder as you will see, but also a shock as to where I eventually ended up! Prior to all of this and before I became a driver, I had to have medical, and an eye test to see if I was colour blind. Being pronounced fit in wind and limb I was more or less on the road (sorry about the pun) to a driving career in Her Majesty's Dockyard, Portsmouth. I had to report to a place up the road just past the Unicorn Gate, and my test was to be with an examiner from no less than the British School of Motoring or, as we call it these days, BSM.

The Lister Truck

So we come to the Lister Truck. I am not sure of the amount of fuel it carried; it must have been only about 2 gallons. The Lister main engine sat in a round ring at the front, which also housed the front wheel. On the top were the twin fuel tanks, 2



inlet valve levers and, on the right side, was the starting handle shaft. You kept the start handle in your tool box and if you lost it you were up the creek without a paddle - not to mention the wrath of your Chargeman for you losing it. Joe Graham, the garage Chief Mechanic, would also denounce your carelessness to boot! To stop the Lister engine there was a small turn off switch about half way down the vehicle front.

These days the Lister truck is a museum piece but there are still some around, and their owners take them to rallies and the like.

The steering wheel as such for these Lister`s was not what you would think in the conventional sense i.e. round, but a square bar. On this was also mounted, the gear box -forward 1 & 2 and reverse - throttle, hand brake; whilst the engine of course had twin fuel tanks mounted side by side on top. Inlet valve levers were on the right side,

the starting shaft, and the engine stop button at the front. On the floor was the foot brake, and an “AAAUOOGHA” foot claxon or warning horn. A fire extinguisher was located either of the front side panels under ones legs or on the support that held the leather-sprung saddle which you sat on. The Lister model was either very short, which meant it carried its loads on a separate towing trailer, or was of the longer version which one could carry loads without a trailer but also had a towing eye at the back of the chassis, from which you could also pull a loaded trailer. The model I drove on my test, and eventually with F A W 1, was the LD1, Lister Diesel 1, which replaced the old petrol model. True they were a lot faster than the diesel but also had



solid tyres and, in cold weather, trying to start them if one did not watch out when cranking the start handle, it could kick back and injure your wrist quite badly. The Lister was steered as said by the bar - YOU TURNED THE WHOLE ENGINE set in the ring to go round corners. To start it up, one made sure first the inlet valves were away from you, and then you cranked the engine as fast as you could with the start handle. When there was sufficient momentum, you pulled the levers towards you so that the engine fired. To stop it, you just pulled the little button at the front - although some folk stopped it by the

inlet levers, which strictly speaking was against the rules.

Learning to Drive

Anyway, the BSM instructor took me around the Lister, showing me what was what and then how to start it. “Right Oh, David, start it up” said my instructor. “Okay” I replied, at the same time wondering what I had let myself in for; it was NOT going to be a doddle as one thought. I cranked the handle as fast as I could, then silly fool, I had not put the inlet valve levers in the right direction with the result that the handle came back and gave me a thump on my hand. “OUCH!” I yelled as the handle fell to the floor with a small clang. My poor hand throbbed painfully, but I had to carry on as instructed. The instructor groaned in despair. “What DID I JUST TELL YOU?” “Er, make sure the inlet levers are correct before I start up the engine” I replied guiltily. “EXACTLY, LISTEN TO WHAT I TELL YOU! Right, start again!” By this time my hand was not so painful, so I cranked the engine making sure the inlet valves were correct first. Once the engine was going fast enough, I flicked over the valve levers and the engine roared into life with a stink of blue diesel exhaust. Then I was ordered to sit on the leather saddle seat. “Okay then, put in the clutch, into first forward gear only.” I pulled in the clutch bar and put the gear lever into first. “Good, now let it out slowly”. I did so but I had committed a cardinal sin - I forget to release the hand and foot brake. The trucks wheels gave a low groan and then the Lister sort of kangaroo hopped before stalling the engine!

“What did you do wrong David?” “Sorry, I forgot to release the brakes” I said sheepishly and going red with embarrassment. The Instructor thought I must be a right wally here and would NEVER make the grade to pass as a driver. “Let’s try it ALL AGAIN from the VERY BEGINNING - and TRY not to make any more mistakes” sighed the Instructor. I was determined to make a good impression this time; of course one learns from ones mistakes and 2nd attempt I got it right at last. “Hooray! You did it right that time David, well done” replied the Instructor with a wry smile.

“Now then, let out the clutch slowly and the truck will glide smoothly away. Only go for a few yards and then stop, okay?” I nodded. I did as was told and luckily I did it right, stopping just a few yards down the road. The Instructor came up to me. “Well done, David, you are gradually getting the hang of it. Right! I now want you to go into second gear and travel up the road till I tell you to stop okay?” I nodded. “I cannot ride with you as you have no second seat and they are only meant for one. In any case, carrying passengers on these trucks is totally against the rules, so I shall have to walk alongside you, or run.” I nodded again. “Right! Off you go then.” I put the Lister truck into second gear after going in first, careful that I did not take off like a scalded cat in the process. I carried on up the road till he told me to halt. “Good, David. Not bad, not bad at all, after the first few attempts. That’s quite Okay - I will forget the first lot of mistakes you made; it is not easy I know for a novice like yourself first time on the road”. I was quite pleased that would be the case, but I knew I had hardly started yet. “Okay then, lets us practise reverse now.” Going in reverse? I was worried I might clobber something - and if you were also backing in a loaded trailer, the load often obscured your vision of what was behind you, which made the job even more difficult. The Instructor showed me where to park the Lister. I had to drive the truck forward for a few yards first, stop, and then select reverse gear. Gingerly I went backwards, looking also over my shoulder to see which direction I was heading. Not all that easy as one tends to look forward, seeing how you are steering the truck backwards. The Instructor bellowed. “NEVER MIND looking FORWARD; Look OVER YOUR SHOULDER, don’t worry you will automatically steer the truck going backwards the way you want to go. I know it’s not easy”. I duly parked the Lister in the right spot but at a slight angle. The Instructor sighed. “You are supposed to go IN BETWEEN the WHITE LINES NOT at an ANGLE. RIGHT do it AGAIN.” I did so - this time making a much better effort. After all practice makes perfect as they say.

The rest of the day, was spent going up and down and reversing with the Lister truck, the next day I would be tested towing a small trailer, and backing it in reverse. This I dreaded but it had to be done if I was to become a driver in the Dockyard. The day of the towing test arrived. Driving forward with it was not too bad, but I had to remember that I was towing something, and to turn a corner you had to take it on a slightly wider sweep; or else the trailer could mount the pavement, knock someone over, or worse off their bike if on the road. “Right! Let’s see you reverse the trailer then in this spot here, between the lines parked nice and neat.” I gulped - easier said than done. I gingerly backed the trailer with the Lister. “Not too SHARP an angle” said the Instructor. “Back the other way. NO, YOU CLOT, the OTHER WAY! STOP!” I did so. The Instructor strode up to me. “Look! I know it’s not easy; just remember this - all you have to do is steer the Lister opposite to the way the trailer is going; that way you will get it in square first time or more or less. This is the easy bit; you wait until you have a heavy load on. Right, try again.” I tried several more times and in the end after much effort I more or less had a favourably parked trailer between the parking lines, even if at a tiny angle. The Instructor said not to worry I had more or less mastered the Lister, and it would not be long before I went on the Mercury. I was also asked a few Highway Code questions, which I felt I answered correctly.

It was to be the following fortnight that I would be trained on the Mercury truck. I later found out that the truck I was trained on, I would be also using in the job as it belonged to FAW 1. The same Instructor showed me all the controls and how to start the vehicle. The GOLDEN RULE was: NEVER starts the truck up before CHECKING that you were in NEUTRAL GEAR FIRST; otherwise the consequences were too

terrible to contemplate. "Right, David, I will show you how to drive this vehicle and then it's your turn" said the Instructor. I nodded in agreement. "ALWAYS LOOK in your MIRRORS too, BEFORE you move off, and don't forget your hand signals, even



FAWI RELIANCE MERCURY TRUCK
(Not fitted with flashing indicators)

though the truck has flashing indicators." I nodded again, having understood. "Now then, we check first we are in neutral gear" said the Instructor feeling the gear column. "Now we can start the engine - we turn the key thus." The engine fired and ticked over steadily. "Right, release the hand brake, we go into first gear; oh wait a moment, what have I done wrong?" "You did not look in the mirrors first before you

went into first gear" I replied politely. The Instructor beamed. "Well done David, you spotted that mistake; always remember that". The Instructor looked in the mirrors and then showed me how to change gear, after releasing the hand brake first. "Another GOLDEN RULE: DON'T forget to release your hand brake before you change gear, or else you will kangaroo hop when you start." Again I nodded. "Right, put the clutch pedal right down with your left foot, change to first gear, off the clutch and on the gas pedal with your right. Not too much speed; when the engine note reaches high pitch, you change again until you reach top or 4th gear." I followed his actions intently as I knew my turn would come next. "Don't forget to change down gear when you come to the road junction, and also put on your hand brake. You need not go into neutral; just keep it in first, and when you can pull out into the turn you release the hand brake of course. You also stop the vehicle with the foot brake - that's the middle pedal. Oh and always give the gas pedal a bit more boost when you change gear or else you will stall the engine". All these instructions were giving me dread, would I pick it up? I was determined to give it my best shot.

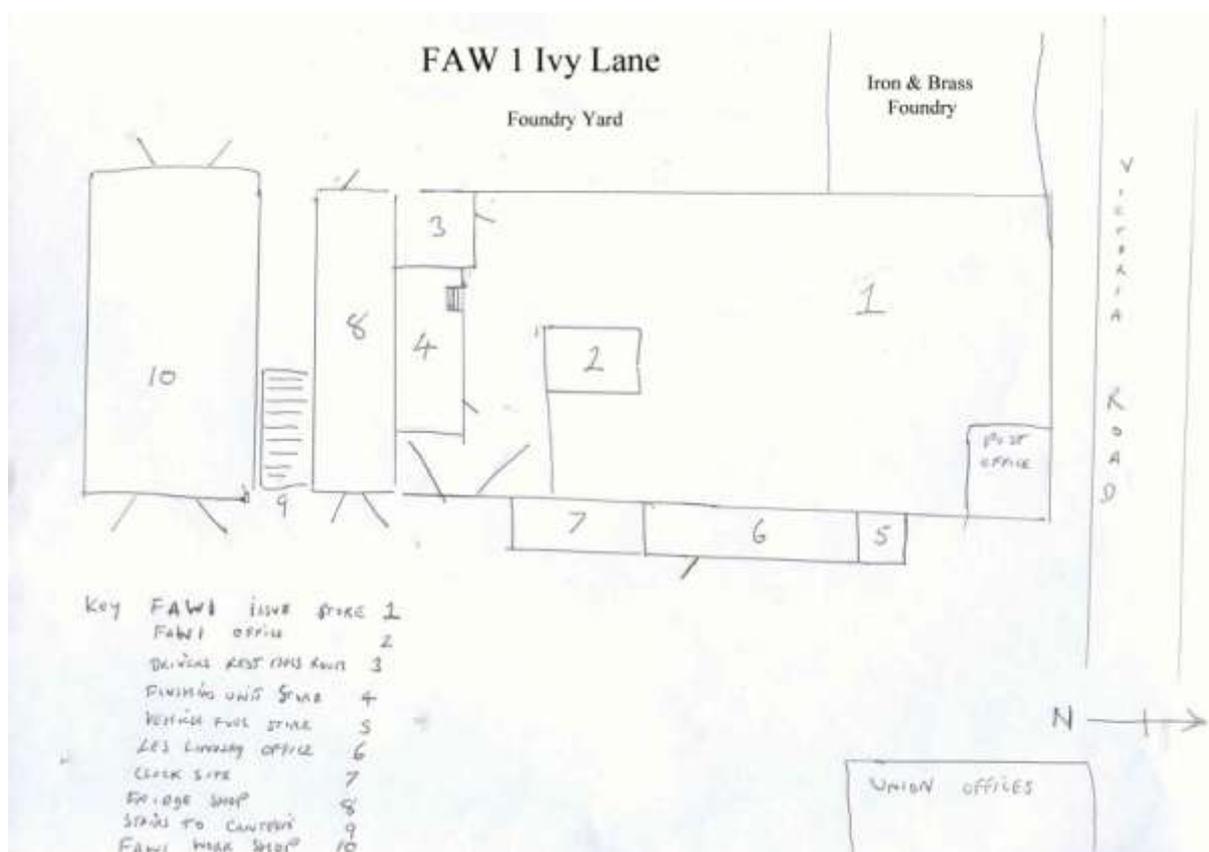
"Don't worry about reverse yet, we will deal with that when the time comes." We cruised up and down the road for a bit, I intently watching all his actions; then came my turn. Feeling rather nervous, I went to the driver's side and got in and sat down. I first felt the gear lever was in neutral, switched on the engine; I then looked in the mirrors, released the hand brake, and found first gear. I did not push the clutch pedal far enough, so the gear grated. The Instructor winced. "Right actions first time, but you MUST put your foot on the clutch pedal right to the floor to change it smoothly" said the Instructor. "Okay, sorry about that, feeling a little nervous" I replied. "Understandable, you will get used to it in time; it will become second nature after a while". I was wondering if that would be the case! Off we went at a dead crawl. "Now up to second gear." I changed; only thing was, I did not give the throttle enough gas so the engine stalled. The Instructor sighed. "Why DON'T YOU GIVE IT MORE GAS AS I TOLD YOU! Right, start again from scratch." I did so and as the day gradually passed I was getting more and more proficient in my efforts. "Not too bad, David, you have started to learn quite well; a few more turns on this, and of course reverse,

and I think I shall be happy to pass you". "Thank you very much" I replied. Of course unbeknown to me at that moment, I had parked on the railway line. A sudden asthmatic watery screech of a steam whistle rent the air. The scrap ground steam rail crane was trundling swiftly up the track, going back to the sullage dump located by the East Gate area. These cranes also travelled and shared the railway lines with the Dockyard Hunslet and Planet diesel 0- 4- 0 shunting locos that hauled loaded trucks, either from British Railways (from the main marshalling yards by Unicorn Gate and the rear of the huge Factory shops) or Dockyard wagons, open or van type, which were painted black with S N S O (Senior Naval Stores Officer) in white and the letters "Internal Use Only"; they were not permitted beyond the Dockyard boundary. Of course there were Peckett Steam saddle tank 0- 4- 0s, but these had been relegated to static steam heating boilers on the dockside -when a ship was in refit, for steam heating warmth, cooking the food, and later boiler flash up trials. The wagons contained stuff for the ships in refit or items for the workshops, as well as sending out said items by British Railways. But all that is another story so let's get back on track, sorry about the pun. The Instructor nudged me into action. "David, there is a crane coming. Quick! Get out of it!"

The Instructor was starting to fret as I fumbled around with the ignition key in trying to get the Mercury truck to start. His reactions did not help matters either; they only resulted in my also getting flustered. The steam crane was getting closer and closer! "For GOD'S sake David, MOVE!" The Mercury truck's engine burst into life. Then the gears crunched a little as I forgot to press the clutch pedal right to the floor. At last! I selected first gear and released the hand brake but drove forward only to stall the wretched thing a few yards to the left -luckily clear of the railway tracks but was the gap wide enough for the crane to squeeze through? The crane whistle screeched again and the Instructor shut his eyes as the crane came past the Mercury truck dead slow. But the base of the crane with the cab squeezed past with a 3 inch gap - JUST! Good job the Mercury truck cab roof had a sloping profile; otherwise it would have wrapped itself around the base of the crane and us with it! The steam crane, with white smoke puffing from its spark arrester-covered chimney, chuffed softly to a halt and a squeal of brakes.

Residue water trickled from an overflow pipe somewhere on the crane forming a small puddle on the ground. One could smell the unmistakable aroma that sends all railway steam locomotive enthusiasts mad with passion - hot oil and steam. Only, in this case, it was not a steam loco, it was a crane. The crane's driver descended down the crane's small vertical ladder backwards and, after getting off the lowest step, made his way towards me. He was short and a bit rotund around his waist, wearing filthy overalls and a flat greasy cap. A reddish weather-beaten face with 2 days silvery growth of stubble filled my side driver's door window of the Mercury. He spoke with a voice that almost sounded like the screeching whistle of the crane. "OI! WOT THE `ECK YOU FINK, YER PLAYIN` AT? DIDN`T YER SEE ME COMIN`?" "Frightfully sorry, I tried to get out of your way but no harm done" I enjoined. "It's all right driver. He is my new pupil and I am teaching him to drive" replied the Instructor. The crane driver rolled his eyes to heaven and shook his head. "GAWD `ELP US! IF YER WANT TO MEET ST. PETER AN` THE PEARLY GATES, YER GOIN` THE RIGHT WAY TO DO SO! ALL I `OPE IS, I NEVER BUMPS INTO YER WHEN ON THE ROAD. KEEP OUT OF MY WAY!" With that remark ringing in my ears the crane driver re-boarded the crane and softly chuffed away back to the sullage ground. The Instructor sighed. "Oh dear, David, you were DAMNED LUCKY THERE! Right let's try again shall we?" The rest of the day passed uneventfully,

thankfully. Next day was my test on driving the Mercury in reverse. It took some getting used to, having to glance in my mirrors to judge the distance and NOT hit anyone. That same afternoon I did more tests and then was asked some Highway Code questions. Finally after the day's tests, I had to drive the Mercury back to FAW1 in Ivy Lane as it was their vehicle. Of course I had no idea that I would be soon joining them. As I drove slowly back, the Instructor seemed to brighten up considerably. "That's right, David, nice and steady". Suddenly, to my horror, a Dockie in a hurry ran right in front of my Mercury. I never reacted so fast in my life, slamming on all anchors and squealing to a stop. The sudden stop threw me and my Instructor forward a bit so that we were a bit shaken up. But, thank goodness, I did not hit the Dockie. He apologised. "Oh sorry, pal, did not see yer." "Are you okay?" I asked. "Yes not to worry" and went on his way. The Instructor beamed. "GOSH! WELL DONE, DAVID, EXCELLENT REACTIONS!" I eventually arrived back at FAW1 and handed over the vehicle and keys. It was to be another week before I found I had passed and would be joining the FAW1 crowd. As I was a newcomer, I was not allowed to go off on my own at first but had to go around with driver Ray Barber (no relation) to see how the job worked and where one had to go. But I was certainly looking forward to going off on my own and the jobs I would be given to do. Now we come to the FAW1 organisation - their buildings being located in Ivy Lane.



I Start Work with FAW 1

The FAW 1 store was under Tom Guire and Dinger Bell (I have forgotten his Christian name) and then ex-shipfitter Bill Davis who looked after the flushing units. The Fridge Shop chageman was Fred Cocking; whilst in charge of the F A W1 workshop was Dave Curuthers. Progress men, Horace Oakford and Harry Rogers (and two others) went on board ships and chased up the work for us to take to either the large Factory shop or the FAW1 workshop. Les Lindsay was in charge of us on the transport side, and the drivers were as follows: myself, Ray Barber (no relation), Mickey Brown, and a nut case we had called Derek. I will deal with him first - he was a nutter with a liking for guns who one day brought in a small revolver. He waved it about with a mad laugh and I thought he was going to shoot me, as did other folk. I was genuinely scared and not ashamed to admit it. How he got that passed the Police at the gate I shall never know - or how he got it out again. One day he went too far - it went off! Luckily the gun had a blank in, but the bang was tremendous. Of course this caused uproar in the FAW1 store. Dinger Bell racing out of his office and bravely tackled Derek to the floor and held him there. "YOU BLOODY FOOL, YOU COULD HAVE MURDERED SOMEONE!" "I DIDN'T MEAN TO; IT WENT OFF ACCIDENTLY!" yelled Derek who also had a wild look in his right eye. "Tom! Phone 222, the Police." "Right oh!" said Tom. In no time with sirens wailing and blue lights flashing the Police van arrived, and two burly Police arrested Derek and took him to the Unicorn Gate Police office. What he had done was a very serious offence. Of course he got the book thrown at him and was instantly dismissed from the Dockyard there and then, also later ending up in court and a prison sentence. I was glad to see the back of him. Anyway, on to happier matters. Chagemen of the Fitters were Dinky Ward and Johnny Rolf, amongst others whom I forget for it's over 40 years ago. Johnny Rolf was a lovely guy who went on to become a top Foreman in the Dockyard.

The vehicles the FAW1 had were as follows: a blue CA Bedford van, 66RN63; the Mercury Truck, 67RN70, in yellow; and my Lister LD1 in yellow, 66RN64, plus another, 62RN60. There was also an assortment of trailers which the Mercury and Listers towed about - the longest being 16ft . The trailers were also yellow with black RN on the side and fleet numbers. Of course they went in rotation when due in for servicing up the Garage; although sometimes the van would go up to the long-gone vehicle repair depot HMS Phoenix, Northern Parade, Hilsea.



The Listers were out in the open all night. During the spring and summer to autumn months this was not too bad; it was the winter I always dreaded. Although one put a sort of PVC coated canvas bag over the engine to try to keep it from getting too cold at night, the following morning, after my lift up to the compound with either Mick or Ray, upon seeing the heavy frost over the bag I knew I would have a fight on my hands to try and start the blasted thing! I inwardly groaned as I lifted the PVC-coated canvas bag off the motor; the bag fabric crackled as the frost fell away and it was iron stiff. I placed the bag to one side and spat in my hands, rubbing them together with a cry of "Nil Desperandum", grabbed the start handle and inserted it

into the motor shaft. Making sure I had the inlet valves in the right direction, I swung the handle as fast as I could so that the 2 cylinders made the compression stroke to fire the engine into life. The Lister engine gave a rough cough and tried to tick over, before it died into a stuttering silence. "Oh DAMN AND BLAST IT!" I swore. Try again! It took me quite an effort. "For the LOVE OF GOD, FIRE!" Still mute! I was getting quite puffed out with my efforts and I had not even started my days work yet. "OH, FOR THE LOVE OF MIKE!" I yelled. Talk of the devil, Mickey Brown who had run me up to the compound this particular morning came over to me, grinning wide at my tale of woes. "Useless piece of JUNK!" I roared further and gave it a hefty boot with my right foot - which only resulted in my hopping about on one leg with the pain, despite my steel-toe-capped boots. Mickey put a friendly arm on my right shoulder. "Davey, me ol`china, don't get upset. You are going about this the wrong way." "How?" I queried. "You're supposed to treat your Lister with love and affection; treat her right and she will respond. Speak to it nicely and it will fire up first go".

I was taken somewhat aback; was Mick SERIOUS? "You have got to be KIDDING!" I replied. "No I ain't; now watch." "Hello Lister truck! Sorry you have had a very cold night, awfully sorry. Can you very kindly start up for my dear pal, Davey, so that he can start his work? Thanks a lot." I was hearing things; was he daft? How could an inanimate object have a mind of its own? Mick put in the starting handle, swung it round vigorously and, after a few faulty coughs, the engine roared into life with a blue cloud of stinking exhaust fumes. My jaw dropped in disbelief. This was either a very lucky fluke or Mick had done something underhand to make the Lister start. "How did you---?" The words died on my lips. "Poor old DAVE, I GOT YER! YOU FELL FOR THAT, HOOK LINE AND SINKER!" said Mickey, grinning wider than ever. He then showed me an aerosol can of Start Pilot or Auto Pilot or something. "Always carry a can of this stuff in your Lister tool box under the saddle seat, Dave. In this very cold weather, just give it a few squirts in the air filter on top of the engine, wait 5 min for it to take effect and you should then fire first or second time." It was an engine primer for difficult early morning starts. "You cunning devil, well I never" I said. "Don't worry, I will you get you a can later and you won't have any more bother." "Thanks, Mick." "Right oh, best be getting back; work will be starting soon." Mick drove back. I followed after getting the Lister outside the cage compound, stopped, locked the gate, and carried on back to FAW 1.

I should mention here that during the winter months, when it was dark first thing in the morning, the Lister trucks were not permitted out on the road as they were not provided with lights or flashing indicators. Likewise during the long dark evenings, which everyone knows, come early in winter. Neither were the towing trailers permitted with the Lister, also having no lights -although the longest one we had, the 16 ft, had 2 red reflector triangles on the end tail board. However with the Mercury truck, if towing a trailer, this did not matter, since it had proper head and tail lights, and indicators, the trucks tail lights could be seen. So one had to wait until sun up before you could drive your Lister truck on the road. Technically speaking, these Lister trucks were REALY meant for working around the factory shop floor and within the confines of the factory site; not to travel around the roads. But the Dockyard was a different kettle of fish, with all large departments (apart from the fleet of P S T O (N) lorries, tankers, single deck buses and coaches and staff cars) having to transport their work from A to B using their own Lister and Mercury trucks. The Foundries had their own Lister trucks but they rarely strayed from the confines of the Foundry works - apart from having to go up to the garage for routine servicing. The FAW1 Mercury truck originally did not have a cab; this was built by

the joiners up in the Pattern Shop when they were the M E D joiners. I know because I was the Yard Boy in that section and watched it being built. After completion, it



went to the garage to be fitted. Another long-chassis Mercury I recall seeing also had no cab. This belonged to the EEM big workshop, at the back of the large Factory building, and was driven by a rather chubby driver with a reddish sort of face who always wore a battered brown trilby hat.¹

However some bright spark, (no pun intended) thought up

the idea that the Lister trucks could take lights after all. These would be ordinary bicycle lamps enabling them to travel in the dark on the road during the winter dark mornings and early evenings. True, a lot of the main road lighting was very good and bright but there were areas around the Dockyard where lighting was quite poor, for example around the dry docks and going across the caissons - 3 basin and 2 basin end, South West Wall, North West Wall, the 240-ton crane promontory, and the scrap or sullage ground near the East Gate. One had to be very careful driving a Lister round these areas as either you could drive off over the side into the dry dock (Nasty!) or into the 'oggin (sea), getting a nice ice cold bath; provided you did not drown first! I got a set of bicycle lamps for my Lister. One had to make sure you fixed them real tight on the brackets provided. If you did not, the truck being a bit of a rough rider and liable to bounce around, the lamps would fall off. You did not know your rear red lamp had fallen off until you got back to base. Besides the misery of you losing your red lamp, you did not endear yourself to your Chargeman either, getting the wrath from him for being careless and more expense for the department in having to get another lamp. They were fine with new batteries fitted but later became useless! Dim as candles when the batteries ran down! So it was important that you made sure, soon as your batteries were starting to run down, you got a new lot.

Mickey Brown, I may add, had a full car driving licence so from time to time went outside the Dockyard with the Bedford CA van to other Ministry of Defence establishments in the Portsmouth, Gosport and Fareham areas. This was work attached to the FAW 1 dept. We also had a rival, FAW 2 (E). This section was up by 12 dock, their place under the old long, long gone 12 Dock canteen. Our working hours were the same as the rest of the Dockyard but with one small difference. Overtime was COMPULSARY. The outmuster was at 6 pm and all day on Saturday,

¹ (For those who do not know what the initials stand for, I shall enlighten you: PSTO(N), Principal Supply & Transport Officer (Navy); MED, Manager Engineering Dept; EEM, Electrical Engineering Manager. The two latter were Naval Officers who resided in the official houses of the Dockyard in The Parade or in Short Row. The MED joiners moved out in 1964 to the MCD joiners' shop across the way; and the MCD Pattern Makers (Manager, Constructor Dept) who were with the MCD joiners joined the MED Pattern Makers. The MCD joiner shop is no more, having long been demolished to make way for the Second Sea Lord's offices in Victory Building.

8am till 4 30pm. The reason was that, such was the nature of ships refits (always very urgent), a service had to be provided for the fitters working afloat - taking items of gear for them, their tools, valves, pumps, and so on. Infrequently, I was called upon to work very late in the evenings. But on one occasion, HMS Eskimo, the old Tribal class frigate, was in with her boiler soot blowers a red-hot urgent panic job. These had been repaired in the huge Factory shop and I had to stop until the job was done, driving the Mercury truck of course. I finished near about 10:30 pm. As the last bus had gone I had to get a taxi home, managing to reclaim my expenses from the Dockyard Finance Dept. after filling a few forms in triplicate! The following week my wages were a bit more generous than usual; even so I was always careful to save as much as I could. We all did the overtime in rotation - so we would say it was Mickey's turn, then mine the following week, and Ray the week after that. Occasionally there were 2 drivers on overtime, but only if the workload warranted it. We always used the Mercury truck on overtime, since of course it was fast; the Lister trucks could make only 8mph, if that!

Radio control or VHF contact radios were installed later on the Van and the Mercury. The van call sign was M for Mike, very apt as Mickey drove it, and the Mercury truck F for Foxtrot. We Lister drivers did not have radios until we were issued with portable ones; my call sign was naturally D for Dave, being permitted, although really it should have been D for Delta. I always made sure that the radio, which one charged up every night on the battery bank (and woe betide you if you forgot), was fixed firmly by its clip in the top right pocket of my overalls; only getting it out to speak to Les, my Chargeman - job done or delayed - or to the other drivers if I got stuck with some problem or other. Les had the main control set in his office. The radios were manufactured by the old electronics firm, Pye of Cambridge, remember them? One Lister truck was reputed to be the fastest in the whole Dockyard. This was owned by the Coppersmith Shop up near the East Gate end or to be more accurate, just past the garage. Bill Davy was its driver. It was fast too, giving me a cheery wave and smile as he overtook mine. I have no idea how this was since all Lister trucks should be the same speed. I could only guess that somehow he had the skills to re-tune the engine a bit and the truck would shoot off like a rocket. Also I heard there was the annual Lister truck race around the Dockyard but I never saw it, perhaps it was held on Navy Days. On the wall of our cubby hole in FAW1 were bulldog clips on which our jobs were allocated. Les would get the phone call in his office for what job was wanted doing, where from and to, and time of the job. Whoever was free first got that job, then the next one may be yours, followed by the 3rd driver and so on. Sometimes the workload was light, but more often than not we were really rushed off our feet.

I enjoyed driving in the summer, spring, and autumn on my Lister truck but it was the winters that I hated most. As the trucks were open to the elements it could be sheer hell. More often than not the wind would be a howling gale, the rain really lashing down, and you got wetter and colder as you carried out your duties. The oilskins felt like lead and the cuffs and neck rubbed you raw. I should have had a Sou'wester rain hat, silly fool I, with the result that my hair was wet through, and I liable to catch a cold. Also the rain trickled down ones neck, making it most uncomfortable; and to top off everything, the rain misted up my glasses, streamed into my eyes, making it hard for me to see, and sore and red as well. I had to pull in by the kerb sometimes and stop so that I could wipe my eyes and glasses before setting off again in the murk. Sometimes if there had been a heavy shower and the sun came out after, the road surface was a blinding glare, which was highly dangerous - the sun reflecting off the wet tarmac. I vowed to resolve this problem by

getting a pair of sunglasses so that at LEAST, I would be prepared. Of course the other drivers took the mickey out of me for doing so; but I did not care, I wanted to play safe and not get involved in an accident, which did nevertheless happen to me - more on that later. Heavy rain I more or less tolerated, at least it was mostly sharp and short: it was the fine drizzle that was the worst. On top of that, the vehicle in front of you also kicked up a spray from its rear wheels, adding more to your discomfort. But it was sheer purgatory for me if it was really biting cold, stuck out at Fountain Lake Jetty area, exposed across the water all the way to Porchester Castle. I got colder and wetter by the minute and, if I got delayed loading or unloading by the refit labourers or Dockyard slingers on board the ship they were working on, it was 10 times worse! I wanted to be unloaded and away; get back thaw and dry out, have a big mug of hot sweet tea so that I would be ready to face the outside again. It was not my fault if I got delayed though I did try to keep things to the minimum. This then resulted in my jobs to do starting to pile up. The other drivers may have done all their work but they could not help me out because they might get called out to do an urgent job and, if Mick or Ray were helping me out, their next job would also be late.

Of course the person who asked for transport, and Les who had written out the job chit with my name on it, time and what job it was, got a very irate phone call from the person who had booked transport. Les picked up the phone with dread, as he knew what was coming next. "Hello FAW 1 transport, can I help you please?" "WHERE THE HELL IS MY TRANSPORT? I ORDERED IT HALF HOUR AGO!" "I am sorry for the delay; what was the job?" asked Les. "A SET OF UNDERWATER VALVES FOR HMS PHOEBE IN 15 DOCK. SHE FLOODS UP TOMORROW; THEY HAVE TO BE INSTALLED ON BOARD ON NIGHT SHIFT. IF WE DON'T GET THESE VALVES TODAY, THE RUDDY BALLOON WILL GO UP! SHE WILL NOT COME OUT OF DOCK, AND THE SHIP REFIT WILL BE DELAYED IN 3 BASIN, WHERE IT IS GOIN'. IF I DON'T GET THIS TRANSPORT, I SHALL TAKE THIS FURTHER!" "Yes, all right leave it with me. I will find out what has happened to your driver." The irate caller slammed down the phone, ringing harshly in Les left ear. Les called me up on the radio. "Base to Dave, Base to Dave, come in please". "Dave receiving" I replied, wondering what was wrong? "Where the HECK are you?" "I am stuck over Fountain Lake Jetty waiting to be unloaded." "WHAT! HOW ON EARTH ARE YOU STUCK THERE? I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN UNLOADED BY NOW, AND ON YOUR WAY BACK HERE!" Poor old Les, he sounded most upset; if I was delayed it was not my fault. "Do you KNOW your jobs are piling up back here? And I have just had a very irate customer, about a set of red hot urgent underwater valves you were supposed to have picked up half hour ago to go to 15 dock. WHAT IS GOIN` ON?" "I have been held up by other stuff being unloaded first; they say I must wait my turn and they will unload me as soon as they can. Over." Les exploded in his office. "Base to DAVID, COME IN PLEASE," crackled my portable hand-held radio. I knew what was coming. "David to Base, receiving, over". "RIGHT! GO ON BOARD THE SHIP WHERE YOU ARE, FIND OUT WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THIS UNLOADING, AND GET WHOEVER IT IS TO TALK TO ME VIA YOUR RADIO!" "Dave to Base, okay Les, will co, over and out." I duly hunted down who was in charge and told him my situation and would he speak to my Chargeman on my radio. "WOT the `ECK do I WANT TER SPEAK TO `IM FER? NO SORRY MATE, `E CAN PUSH OFF, YOU WILL `AVE TER WAIT MUSH! WE HAVE ALL THIS LOT TO UNLOAD YET BEFORE YOU," came the reply. I just paled as another big lorry load of yet more items arrived to be unloaded; he had only just come up behind me in the queue, but he would jump it. "Look here," I said. "I have a very

urgent job to do next, a set of underwater valves to take to 15 dock. If they don't get delivered for the night shift to install tonight the balloon will go up and the ship will not undock as planned tomorrow. I am nearly three quarters of an hour late already." "COR, LUV A DUCK!" came the reply. IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS!" "ALL RIGHT I'LL TALK TO `IM!" "Dave to Base, Dave to Base, come in please." "Base Receiving, over." "Okay Les I have got the person in charge who is causing me to be delayed. He will talk to you shortly". "Thank God for that, put him on!" I did so. At first there was a fierce exchange and a battle of wills between Les and the person in charge of the loading. But afterwards he backed down when Les threatened to report his actions to Mr Clayton, our Foreman, who in turn would complain to the Foreman of the person in charge of the unloading. After that argy-bargy I got unloaded in no time and told Les I was on my way to collect those valves that all those in 15 dock were screaming out for. Of course poor Les got the same irate caller yet again on the phone in his office but this time Les was ready for him! "OI! BIG BONCE! MY BLEEDIN VALVES, (bleedin' was mild to what he had actually said) HAVE STILL NOT ARRIVED! OH, JUST A MO, E`S `ERE. THANK GAWD FOR THAT; TRY AN` BE ON TIME NEXT TIME!" The caller slammed the phone down his end again jarring Les' left ear. After all the fun and games, weary, cold, dying for a warm cuppa, I arrived back at base. Les upon hearing my Lister chug back into Ivy Lane came outside the office door and watched me turn the truck round ready to go out again on the next run. I switched off the engine and went to Les. "David! What on EARTH HAS BEEN GOING ON?" "NOT MY FAULT, LES!" I snapped back. I was tired, irritable and chocker - fed up to the back teeth. Les could see that I had been put upon. "All right Dave. Go and get warm and have a cuppa, and do the next job when you are thawed out - 2 nice easy ones for you." "Ta Les, sorry I snapped just now but some people get right up my back. I was waiting ages!" "I know, okay Dave". Les went back into his office. Despite my efforts I got told off if I was late, and even though it was not my fault. I just could not win. ²

Towing trailers with the Lister could be easy, or sometimes quite difficult. It all depended on the weight you were moving. Of course if something was exceptionally heavy, for instance - steam astern manoeuvring valves that could be up to 1 1/2 ton a piece, you knew you were moving something quite substantial. GREAT CARE had to be taken and you also went DEAD SLOW. One could certainly feel the weight behind

² Of course with me it is both, as well as the lovely old paddle steamers, sail barques, Thames sail barges, and the VIC Clyde puffers, and last but not least, the old Gosport Steam launch ferries, and the grand old lady the Alexandra floating bridge. Another Progress man I recall, who was also attached to the Fridge Shop, was Barry Mellon. He was a great transport enthusiast as I was, though he was more into buses than trains. There was also another vessel I liked, which belonged to the Ministry of Public Building and Works dept, or MPBW for short. This was the Government department responsible, for the upkeep of all Government buildings and the Royal State Palaces, their lorries in light grey, although their Mercury trucks were navy blue with MPBW in white on the doors, I don't think they had a Lister. The vessel I also liked was the Servitor, do any of you remember her? She was a crane grab Dredger attached to the MPBW, grey hull, grey upper works, but the bridge was varnished wood, as was the forward mast with a white top, the engine room aft, the funnel a long thin one in black with a white diamond and a black "W" (works) on it. Long cowl ventilators, painted red on the inside, and 2 grab cranes facing each other in the centre of the ship's hull. I would assume the hull of course, had bottom doors which opened and all the dredged mud and silt, could be dumped once the vessel was out in deep waters away from the main shipping channels and the area she had just dredged to make a deeper passage for the shipping channels in use. Barry was a member of the Bus preservation group locally, and often informed me on various Bus rallies or bus depot open days that were taking place. I suppose he still is a member these days, it would be nice for me to get in touch with him again.

you as you towed the trailer along. When turning a corner you had to make a gentle but wide turn, looking over your shoulder briefly, making sure that the trailer was following you nicely, and that you had not caught a pedestrian or someone on their bicycle. Going down a GRADIENT, however shallow, WAS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN, even if the trailer was a light load, for the trailer could pick up speed and start pushing you faster and faster, a runaway, with the inevitable result. LIKEWISE going UP a gradient; except that you would be dragged backwards. It was just not worth the risk and, if it meant you had to go the long way around to get to where you had to go, despite the wrath you might incur of the people awaiting your delivery if you were late, so be it. Better that than have a terrible accident. Of course, silly sod, I once tried to do a 3-point turn with our 16ft trailer in the Factory Shop loaded with a large astern manoeuvring valve. I thought I could do it but realised I had bitten off more than I could chew. I was damned lucky that the trailer did not jack knife, which could have tipped my Lister, rearing up horse fashion. “WHOA! YOU BLITTHERIN IDIOT! DO YOU WANT TO GET YOUR SELF KILLED! WHAT ARE YOU TRYIN` TO DO?” This from Chargeman, Reg Totton. He was the planner that saw all new work coming into the Factory Shop, as well those completed and going to where it had to go. “Sorry Reg, I don’t know what I was thinking about for the moment,” I replied. “You are NOT kidding! DON`T EVER let me see you do something like that ever again.” Reg then calmed down. “Right, who is this lot for then?” I showed him the paper work. “Right, park your trailer over near bay 5 and leave it; when it’s unloaded we will inform you so you can collect it”. I did as was told. Of course I had another ear bashing from the lifting slinger, Taffy, who unloaded all work coming in, and all work completed going out. But they were both right and I should have had more sense than to try the manoeuvre that I did. We all learn the hard way.

I must mention here that the Factory shop was the biggest covered machine shop in the whole of the South of England. The Factory did everything from repairs to ships engines, turbine fans, prop shafts, soot blowers, or whatever; to making new stuff and of course machining and assembling the new castings that arrived daily from the Foundries. It also had a boiler house (of which there were several in the Dockyard) that supplied steam heating and hot water around the Dockyard, for warships tied up along the jetties or in refit in dry dock and all Dockyard buildings.

A Flag Officer’s Commendation!

I liked to keep my Lister looking spick and span as possible, for what one uses, and the look of it can make or break a reputation with ones department. A scruffy vehicle may intone that the dept. it works for is also shoddy or below standard. We had some cans of vehicle yellow paint with which we kept the Mercury and Lister trucks neat and tidy; also the trailers should they become somewhat scruffy. Of course, they were not your own home vehicle, e.g. the family runabout, or ones car, they were there to do work and were bound to get bumped and scraped in their line of duty. But keeping them as neat as possible also prevented deterioration and rust setting in on the metal or rotting the woodwork of the truck sides and tailboard; so it was essential that the paintwork was touched up from time to time. This could only be done when it was fine, and secondly if we had not much work on. The toughest bits to do on the Lister, paint job wise, were the engine case at the front - down by the turning ring the engine sat in, and the exhaust pipe end. The latter had a flat round silencer of sorts with a lot of holes rather like a pepper pot shaker. The exhaust gasses emitted were filthy dirty, not to mention being greasy as well, and would coat this front area in filthy grime of diesel exhaust. It took some shifting as well, having to use plenty of

hot water in a bucket, a de-greasing detergent and an old scrubbing brush. Wearing a stout pair of rubber gloves, one tackled this area with a good deal of vigour until all traces of the muck was removed. Due to the rather strong corrosive nature of the detergent it was essential that one thoroughly rinsed it off with fresh water after the cleaning procedure had been carried out; otherwise the paint work would bubble up and peel away, revealing bare metal of the engine casing - which would never do! Another problem area was the exhaust pipe itself, which of course got red hot during the days work. The yellow paint would turn orange brown over time with the heat. There was not much one could do about that; just touch it up as and when it got too burnt.

Of course yours truly, being a transport fanatic, also painted on my now gleaming-like-new yellow Lister truck a set of square dashboard dials - white with black numbers and hand, as on the Leyland buses at the time, with the word LEYLAND in script red below on the gearbox, and then Leyland on the Lister front. Lastly, I added the double arrow logo of British Rail in red on the sideboards and Lister front, just above the word Leyland. I thought she looked smashing but poor Les thought I was barmy, and Ray and Mickey ridiculed me as well. I did not care. However all this was my undoing when I had to take my Lister up for a routine servicing in the garage. Joe Graham, the chief mechanic, who looked like and spoke like the wonderful late actor, Will Hay, and wore gold pince-nez glasses, went barmy at the sight of my truck. "You CAN'T have all that stuff on there; TAKE IT ALL OFF!" "Why Joe, what is wrong with it?" I queried. "WHAT'S WRONG?" "It's a Ministry of Defence vehicle; NOT British Rail or Leyland. It SHOULD BE just PLAIN YELLOW with black RN on the vehicle sides; NOTHING ELSE!" Joe gave me a further lecture. "Oh and another thing - STOP pullin' on that throttle cable, tryin' to get a few more knots of speed out of the engine. I know you lot! You will NEVER get any more speed out of it." "Well how come that the Copper Shop truck is the fastest one in the Dockyard then?" I queried. "I would not know anything about that," retorted Joe, going back to his office. But I defied Joe, as I had a most unlikely ally in the form of the Port Admiral no less! He stopped me one day as I was heading back to FAW1, commenting on my vehicle, and how smart it looked, a credit to my dept. I was flabbergasted; you could have knocked me down with a feather. But I told him reluctantly I was to paint out all the things I did -to become plain yellow on the orders of the Chief Mechanic, Joe Graham, stating that my vehicle must be plain yellow only, and with either black RN on the sides, or not at all. "Nonsense lad, your vehicle is a credit to your department. Where does this Joe Graham hang out anyway?" "In the Garage, Sir, just up the road." "Can you take me there?" I was supposed to be on my way back to FAW1 and urgent jobs may be waiting for me. Going on a jolly without permission would likely incur the wrath of Les, not to mention the Foreman; Port Admiral or no Port Admiral. But as he was my Boss overall in charge, I had no choice; orders were orders. If and when I got back and was late, and told them I had been waylaid by no less than the Port Admiral, they would never believe me or my story! "Sorry Sir, you are not allowed to ride on my truck, but if you would care to walk alongside me I will escort you to the Garage," I replied respectfully. "Right ho, carry on lad". I carefully turned the Lister truck round. As luck would have it, I was not too far from the garage so I might not be all that late back after all. Upon arrival at the garage, I pointed Joe Graham out to the Admiral. Trouble was, I now dreaded that I had made myself enemy number one. I did not want to Joe get into trouble, and to be truthful I had been wrong to add those items on the Lister paintwork but I would see the outcome. Joe almost bit through his pipe he was smoking in shock as the Port

Admiral strode into the workshop. "Are you Joe Graham?" "Yes Sir." "I have only just popped into say this lad here (oh what is your name?)." "Barber, Sir". "No, your Christian name; you are not in the Navy." "Oh, David, Sir." "David here has my permission to carry the livery that he has painted on his truck; it is a credit to him and his department. I wish more employees were like him. Carry on David back the way you were going; you must not be late for your next job". "Yes Sir, thank you, Sir". Back I went as quickly as possible. Joe was speechless but glared after me as I left. To have been given permission on my paint job from no less than the very top of the tree was really the icing of the cake. Of course I kept silent about it all and poor old Joe could do nothing about it. He was most miffed! The only thing I could conclude was that the Admiral was a bit of a transport enthusiast himself - more likely in his line, Bentley sports cars, or Ferraris or whatever!

Near Calamity

Now for the nasty accident that happened to me when driving the Lister. That morning I had to go up to the Factory (this was in April 1969 by the way) to collect a small turbine on a shaft, rather like those to a jet engine. Although stubby and short, this shaft was quite a bit of weight. The shaft was a red-hot panic job for the ocean going tug, RFA Reward. These days sadly she is lying on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean, having gone down in a storm. I had vee- notch cut out in wooden cradles for the shaft to be lowered into, to hold it steady, making sure that the shaft was also DEAD CENTRE. I lashed it down as tight as possible and, after making sure all was secure, started up the truck. It was not long to go before tea break at 0930 but I would have to arrive late back and have it after I arrived at FAW1. With this brute resting on my truck I was not taking any chances; I would drive back at a snail pace. I approached the Factory airlock gates. Sounding the Lister klaxon hooter, the doors rose upwards like a stage curtain and closed behind me after I had passed through. I gingerly turned the Lister truck to go left, back to FAW1. The next thing I knew was that the sky was where the road should be, and where the sky should be was the road! I had flipped right over without warning. How I never got killed I shall never know; I think the saddle seat on its long stem saved me somewhat. Luckily a MPBW grey Bedford TK lorry was right behind me, and so its driver and work gang were key witnesses to the accident. The Bedford screeched to a stop. Its driver and his mate rushed to my aid. "Cor! Stone me mate, I thought you were a goner, you okay?" Strong hands lifted me to my feet but I was a bit dazed and shaken up. The Lister engine was roaring away lustily, diesel fuel and lubricating oil poured out. I managed to stagger over and turn the engine off. Seeing my truck wheels uppermost shook me rigid to the core. By rights I should be DEAD! But luckily I had had my guardian angel with me that day. The shaft with the impact had got bent slightly, plus a few turbine blades snapped off as well. That meant it had to back inside the Factory to be repaired a.s.a.p., and whoever had the job of getting it fixed tout suite would go barmy as it had only been just refurbished; and now it would have to be done all over again! The driver of the Bedford asked who loaded my truck, whom the job was for, and what section I was from. Shaking somewhat with slight shock, I told him. He told his pal to pop in the Factory and see Reg Totton. Upon hearing the news, Reg flew outside to where I was. "S, S, Sorry R, Reg," I stuttered still in slight shock. "Oh NEVER MIND about the JOB, DAVE; NOT YOUR FAULT." "I always SAID these Lister trucks were NOT SAFE; NEVER meant to GO on MAIN ROADS; only meant for FACTORY shop floors." As they were 3 wheel vehicles, one in front, 2 at the rear, they could tip over if you were not careful - even when empty. That is why they eventually died out, the Health and Safety Act getting rid of them. I then felt

agonising pain in my right foot. Luckily I had on, my steel toecap boots but the turbine shaft had pinched the top, luckily not enough to keep me trapped but enough to cause an injury. I also felt something wet and sticky. BLOOD! I was by now very thirsty and wanted a mug of hot sweet tea but that was out of the question; I might have to have an operation and anaesthetic. A small crowd by now had gathered but Reg shooed them away: "This is NOT a BLOODY PEEP SHOW, you KNOW!" Then to one of the Factory workers: "Bill, go and phone for the ambulance quick so Dave here can get taken to the surgery." "Right oh." "Don't worry, Dave, I will tell Les what has happened; you will be all right". Up came the ambulance with siren wailing and blue light flashing. The ambulance crew supported me on either side and carried me into it, shutting the doors and whisked me tout suite to the Dockyard Surgery in Sampson Road. I was placed in the emergency treatment room, lying on a trolley in my dirty overalls.

Of course my truck had to be lifted and turned over the right way up by a small mobile crane, then taken to the garage for repairs. The diesel and oil was covered over with sand and, when soaked through and absorbed, swept up off the road. All this not until photographs were taken first for the records and statements given by the witnesses to the Dockyard Police. The surgery main assistant and receptionist, Mr Murday, came in and saw me first to get all my details: clock number W362304, if I recall it (my very first original one, and you never forget it, was 36275); my home telephone number; my work dept; who was my Chageman, his telephone number, etc; and last, by no means least, the accident details. Having gave him all my details I awaited the nurse, who would attend to my injury. I had a nightmare vision that my big toe was a smashed mangle wreck and would have to be amputated, and that I would be a cripple for life! Meanwhile poor old Les Lindsay nearly had a heart attack when he heard the news and rushed round to the surgery; saw me lying on the trolley with my right foot covered in blood at the toe end. "Oh MY GAWD, he is DEAD!" "NO I am not, Les, alive and kicking," I said. "Thank God for that! How are you, Dave?" said Les with genuine and kind concern. "My foot throbs like hell Les, I think I may have squashed my right toe to a pulp," I replied. "Well you take it easy. Don't worry we will get your jacket and bag and things and give them to you to take with you. You hurry up and get well. You will not have to worry about not clocking out, you were hurt on duty". "Sorry I messed up the job Les" I said with a worried concern. "Oh that's nothing to worry about; not your fault. All the lads wish you well Dave, you hurry up and get back on your feet; we shall miss you." Les left me in the surgery. A few moments later the nurse appeared - very attractive, by the look of her she was from Jamaica, one of our former colonies. She looked a real picture in her navy blue dress uniform, a silver buckle black belt at the waist over the starched white cotton apron. She really made my day, and I was beginning to feel a little better already. "Hello, Mr er----," she paused to read my records, "Barber, and how are we feeling?" "My foot throbs like hell," I answered.

"Can you tell me what happened?" "Yes nurse, I was driving my Lister truck and just as I had left the Factory shop, turned left, the next thing I knew I was upside down. The truck had flipped over, the load trapping my right foot". "I see," she said softly. "Well, I don't think you have any major injuries as such, but we will X-ray your right foot and see that nothing is broken." "Right ho," I rejoined. "Now this may hurt a little. I am going to have to remove your sock." My boots had been removed already. Good job I had had a bath 2 days prior, so at least my feet were nice and clean. She was as gentle as possible but the last part of the sock had to be cut away where the injury was. "Right, I will clean up the wound and then get your foot X rayed. Then

the Surgeon will come and assess you and give you treatment.” “Thank you nurse.” Getting on rubber gloves, some surgical spirit, cotton wool and a kidney dish, she bathed my right foot until it was nice and clean. At first the spirit made me gasp, as it was ice cold but afterwards it was very soothing. I did not want to look at my right big toe where the injury was; I was scared to look. “All done, Mr Barber. Right let’s get you X-rayed. Feeling better are we?” “Yes nurse, especially the nice rustle noise of your nurse’s uniform; that is a real tonic!” I said with a cheeky broad grin. “MR BARBER!” she said in mock horror but with a twinkle in her eyes as she swept out of the treatment room for the moment in a rustle of starched cotton. My foot was X-rayed and I awaited the results. Half hour later I heard footsteps, thinking it was the nurse come back, but it was the Naval Commander Surgeon. “And I will NOT have you, Mr Barber, ogling my nurse! She is NOT part of one of those ‘Carry On Nurse’ films; is that clear?” I nodded. “Right lad, what have you done to yourself?” I explained what had happened. The Surgeon looked at my X-ray and then put it on the clip and switched on the light. “Hmmm, yes, well you were damn lucky my lad that you had your boots on; all you have done is damaged your right big toe nail which I will have to remove okay?” “Do you mean the root and all?” I queried. “Oh dear me no, just the nail on top, don’t worry it will re-grow in time of course.” “Oh charming,” I thought. “Right, I am just going to make your foot numb with a local anaesthetic; you will not feel a thing.” The Surgeon asked the nurse for the hypodermic needle. Rubbing my big toe with antiseptic he then proceeded to inoculate. Trouble was my skin was rather tough - tough enough to bend the needle like a BANANA! The Surgeon exploded just like Sir Lancelot Spratt in those Doctor films. “GOOD GOD MAN! WHAT HAVE YOU GOT HERE? ELEPHANT HIDE?” “YOU have TOTALLY RUINED a good needle; I shall have to do you again!” I stifled a giggle. “And it is NOT a laughing matter; they cost £ 3.10s each”. The Surgeon injected me again and this time all was well. I never felt a thing and later the RN ambulance took me to the old Royal Hospital emergency dept to have my toe sewn up. A lady surgeon attended me this time; she was so gentle I never felt my big toe being sewn up. Eventually another ambulance ran me home. I got indoors about 2:30pm. My late Mum was there along with my late Sister. My late Dad, although retired, had a part time job to supplement his state pension, which was not all that much, so he would be home later. Poor old Mum, she had no idea why I was home early until I told her. I was a little annoyed though that the relevant people had not contacted my parents about what had happened to me. I suppose they thought my injury was not a great emergency or life threatening. Anyway to cut a long story short, I was laid off for 8 weeks; luckily no longer than that.

Tales from the Truck

Now finally I would like to relate some very funny incidents that happened to me. Looking back one can see the funny side but, at the time, I was in very serious hot water over those of a more serious nature.

- (1) The first was a series of practical jokes I carried out on Ray and Mick. Of course Les, my Chageman, was not really amused at my jokes, saying “Useless wild youths, bone idle, having nothing better to do than play silly jokes!” my head full of nonsense! The jokes were with toy balloons, all shapes and sizes. I managed to buy a few packets on the way home from the dear old long-gone store of Woolworth down Commercial Road in the City centre, and brought them in to work the next day. During the lunch break, after I had a good lunch in the Marlborough Gate canteen, I sneaked outside with one

packet of balloons and blew up several large ones. These I fixed right under the wheels of Ray's Mercury truck, lastly fixing a large long caterpillar or wiggly-shaped balloon on the truck exhaust pipe. I crept back into our FAW 1 cubby hole and carried on reading my paperback novel until the siren blew to re-commence work again at 1pm. Poor old Ray little suspected the shocks that were to come. Of course Mickey had noticed my grins and wondered what I had been up to. "You LOUSY SOD ,DAVE!" said Mickey with a broad grin. Ray got into his Mercury and started up his engine. Mick and I watched with wide grins through the window of the wicket door let into the double blue doors of the FAW1 store in Ivy Lane. Ray moved forward. "BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!" Talk about a 21-gun salute! Poor Ray was frightened to death and then glared through the small window at me and Mickey, curled up, weak and helpless with laughter. "I JOLLY WILL HAVE YOUR HIDE FOR THIS!" yelled Ray as he shook his fist through the cab window of his Mercury truck. But it was not over just yet. As Ray moved down the road towards the end of Ivy Lane to turn right into Victoria Road, the long wiggly balloon on the exhaust pipe blew up enormously and rapidly stretched to breaking point. "BANG!" The balloon's bang this time was enormous! Ray pulled up thinking the engine had backfired so he stopped to get out and looked underneath the truck.

Of course he saw the ribbon-torn and shattered remains of rubber, dancing in the Mercury exhaust with a soft farting noise. "DAVID, I WILL KILL YOU! WAIT 'TIL I GET BACK!" yelled Ray, red in the face and shaking his fist. Trouble was the hot exhaust had melted the neck of the balloon on the exhaust pipe so there was a vile stink of burnt rubber which almost gassed poor Ray! When Ray got back he confronted me. "Enjoy your 21-gun salute Ray? You used to be in the Navy," I said with a grin. Ray just exploded. "YES! YOU HORRIBLE HEATHEN! SCARING ME TO DEATH LIKE THAT." "I thought it was your Birthday, Ray, so I thought I would give you a treat." "Well it AIN'T MY BIRTHDAY; you can SOD OFF!" "Yes, Ray," I said with a wider grin. Of course it was Mickey`s turn to suffer next when I placed a few under the wheels of the van and one on the exhaust pipe, which I tucked up inside so that it could not be seen; otherwise Mickey would have known. Mickey started up the van and drove out of FAW1. There was a series of very rapid and very loud bangs; the van wheels squashed flat all the balloons, followed by a huge bang. The balloon hidden inside the exhaust pipe, rapidly inflated to a large 24 inch pear shape before it exploded into multi-shards of red rubber. All that Mickey saw for a fraction of a second in his right wing mirror was a flash of red followed by a huge bang! Mick stopped the van, got out and went round the back. Seeing the shards of shattered rubber, Mick guessed what I had been up to. All Mickey did was to raise his eyes to heaven, sadly shake his head in disbelief, get back in the van and drive away to his next job.

On return from my next job, Mickey was waiting for me. He grabbed me by the chest, and hauled my face close to his. "You put anymore of those blasted balloons on my van and I am goin` to get one, an` blow it right up till it bursts right in your kisser! Savvy?"

Nodding in the affirmative, I gave Mickey a sickly grin. Of course one can take practical jokes too far. Although these were harmless up to a point, putting the balloons on the exhaust pipe was really absolutely daft since it could cause the motor to blow back or seize up whilst trying to vacate its exhaust gasses. But

Mick and Ray gave me my comeuppance - for they had found the other balloons in my bag, blew them all up, and hid them under the wheels of my Lister. Totally unsuspecting, off I went to my next job. As I moved off, there was a series of rapid very loud bangs that made my heart leap into my mouth. I stopped my Lister for the moment and noticed Ray and Mickey with wide grins on their faces. "You ROTTERS!" I yelled. "Serves yer right, Dave," said Ray. "You can dish it out but you can't take it can yer?" replied Mickey. I said no more, opened up the Lister throttle and roared away to do my job.

(2) One day after the night before, I had parked the Mercury truck in FAW1 as usual in front of the Bedford CA van we had, having been duty driver on overtime. However I had committed a rather grave cardinal sin. I thought I had put the Mercury truck ignition key back in the key cupboard located in Dinger Bell's office. I had not; it had been left in the Mercury truck SWITCHED ON and ALL NIGHT! This resulted in the starter magneto becoming red hot, not to mention the Mercury battery being totally drained. It was also damned LUCKY that I did not cause a fire as well. Poor old Ray, unsuspecting that his truck was in serious trouble, went to get in it and start up as usual. He found firstly that the spare ignition key was still in it, and worse it was still on. Ray grabbed the key, which was red hot. "OUCH! DAVID!" "Yes Ray?" YOU were on DUTY LAST NIGHT. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY TRUCK?" Ray was really upset. "Nothing so far as I know; it was working fine when I used it last night," I replied. "Well, THANKS TO YOUR INCOMPETENCE, I DON'T HAVE ONE ANYMORE!" "You BLITHERIN` IDIOT! YOU left the IGNITION on ALL NIGHT! It's BURNT OUT THE START COIL and drained the battery flat!" Mickey, upon hearing the commotion, came out into the FAW1 store where we kept the van and truck. "What has David done Ray?" Ray told him. Mickey was rightly very angry with me. I had now caused a problem; we were one vehicle down and all of Ray's work had to be rescheduled, not to mention that he had to use our second Lister for a bit, which he hated driving, until his Mercury truck had been fixed up the garage. On top of that, I did not endear myself to Joe Graham, the Chief Mechanic, who gave me a blistering ear bashing for being careless. There were two more rollickings from: a. Les, my Chargeman, and b. Mr Clayton, the Foreman. I certainly learnt my lesson the hard way.

(3) As I mentioned, towing the trailers we had was either easy, or could be rather difficult, depending on the load on board. If it was reasonable, or heavy. In my case on this job I was doing, it was the former. I had to tow the 16ft trailer from FAW1 in Ivy Lane to No. 3 basin where HMS Fife, the old County Class guided missile destroyer, was berthed. She was moored on the eastern side but alongside the long 12-dock building. The items I had to take were valve sets from the FAW1 workshops, plus a few pumps, copper pipe work, gas bottles from the Fridge Shop, and the fitters' tool boxes. Starting up the truck I went on my merry way. I crossed into the main Victoria Road, taking care before I pulled out, looking over my shoulder briefly to make sure the trailer was following me all right and that I had not caught anyone off their feet or bike, and settled down to enjoy the ride, as it was a lovely sunny day to boot. I chugged on merrily down the road. Of course I was also travelling on the rail tracks let all over the Dockyard in the tarmac like the outside old tramways.

Far as I was aware there were no trains about and, if there were any, the loco would sound its hooter so I could get out of the way in time. Trouble was, the road curves going up towards Unicorn Gate, and there is a slight blind spot due to the buildings at the end of 15, 14 and unlucky for some, No. 13, dry docks. As I rounded the corner by 13 dock, I had a shock, for coming down the road with 2 van wagons in tow was a Planet 0-4-0 diesel loco. I never even heard it over the chug of my Lister truck, although strictly speaking it was not that too loud but, with other vehicles at a distance away, I suppose it could drown out the noise of the approaching engine. I moved smartly out of the way, the trailer following suit, but not before the loco had just missed me by a few feet. The driver of it slammed on its brakes, the loco squealing to a stop, with the vans behind making a clatter of clanging buffers. With the loco quietly ticking over, the driver got down off his loco and made a beeline straight to me. "OI! NUT CASE! WOT THE `ECK YOU FINK YER PLAYIN` AT? COR BLIMEY, YOU!" Out of ALL train drivers in the whole Dockyard, it WOULD have to be the VERY ONE that I confronted during my road test with the Mercury truck! "I never heard you coming, honest," I retorted. "You should have sounded your hooter coming around the bend. I do not know if you are coming round it do I?" "AN` YOU," to emphasise the phrase prodding me in the chest, "SHOULD KEEP OFF THE RAILWAY TRACKS! I CAN`T MOVE OUT OF THE WAY CAN I?" "IF YER COULD NOT SEE ME COMIN`, YER NEED NEW GLASSES!" "Look here it is not always easy, I have to keep to the right side of the road; I can't avoid going over the tracks sometimes. What about all the other road vehicles in the Dockyard?" I retorted. I could see this was going nowhere; and an impasse looming. "YOU woz in the blank, blank WRONG!" he thundered. "Sorry I have to go I can't stand here gossiping with you, I have this lot to deliver, good morning," I replied, revving up the Lister engine and slowly pulling away. "OI! WOT THE ECK DO YER FINK YER GOIN? COME BACK! I GOT FRAGILE ITEMS IN THEM VANS BEHIND, IF ANYFINK IS BUST, YOU WILL BE SORRY!" I just raised my right arm with a 2-finger salute. But as no damage had been done it was all just hot air and we all settled down to running the Dockyard daily routine again. I duly arrived at the dockside of 3 Basin to drop off my trailer load. Trouble was the dockside was scattered with all sorts of junk, dropped artic. lorry trailers, huge packing cases, oil drums, some bits of ships machinery; not to mention the numerous air hoses, water hoses, oxygen/acetylene hoses, a portakabin and, on top of that, 3 more obstructions. Railway 10-ton wagons, the old open coal type of which 3 were parked against the buffer stop, so making the road way much narrower. Secondly, there was a drain gully between the road and the edge of the jetty; if one got the Lister truck front wheel stuck in that it was a hell of a job to get it out - you had to drive your Lister along it until you came to a bit that was totally flat; then you could drive it out, rather like ones push bike tyres caught in the tram lines. Last but by no means least, the dockside crane running up and down its tracks and its power cable, which sunk in another gully as it unwound but coiled up on a large spoke wheel drum when being picked up. I parked as best as possible, causing the road to be even more congested, and went on board to see the duty QM, showing my Dockyard pass and asking for him to pipe for the Fridge Shop fitters. They soon came topside and down the gangway, and showed me where to park the trailer. I nodded my acknowledgement and proceeded to back the long trailer in where it was required. Going very

gingerly indeed, I did not want a second confrontation this morning, but trouble always comes in threes as they say, only for a change this time it was 2! “ WHOA, WOHA, WOHA!” bellowed a very loud voice from somewhere. “COR ! NOW you BIN an’ DONE IT!” I slammed on the Lister brakes, put the gear in neutral and switched off the engine. I went to the back of the long trailer. “COR! I wouldn’t like ter be in yer shoes mate fer all the tea in China! E`s goin` to luv you!” said the voice again. Following the sound of the voice, I found it belonged to a rather fat Dockie worker with a red round face, greasy flat cap, filthy overalls and hobnail boots, lighting up a rather bedraggled remains of a roll-up cigarette. He pointed with his outstretched right arm to the rear of the long trailer. I followed his gaze and found to my dismay under the back wheels was a BRAND NEW DOCKYARD-ISSUE BYCYCLE! Only it was not pristine anymore; the front wheel tyre had burst, and it was buckled and bent; the bike frame was like a banana! “Oh CRIPES!” I muttered. “Yeh, `ees goin`ter LOVE YOU! That bike only belongs ter the FOREMAN OF THE WHOLE DOCKYARD! ‘E only `ad it issued to `im 3 days ago an’ all!” That was ALL I needed! Of course really I had been a prize clot. I SHOULD HAVE had someone guide me back with a long trailer on such a congested jetty. “Ee`s on board at the moment, looking` at the progress of the refit. Oh! just a mo, ee`s finished; `ere e comes nah.” Talk of the devil, a tall dark-haired individual in snowy white overalls, except for a couple of dark grease and oil streaks, and a white hard hat came briskly down the gangway but talking to someone out of sight. “Yes smashin` the refit is going first class, very impressed. Cheers!” The Foreman of the whole Dockyard³, a VERY SENIOR POST, made his way to where he had left his bike only to find it had now vanished! Had some Dockie stolen it for a joy ride to go back where he had come from to save him a weary walk back? This was not uncommon a practice. Then he spotted the bike under my long trailer. “My, my BIKE!” He rounded on me in an instant! “Are YOU the BLITHERING IDIOT that DID THAT?” I could not deny that I had done it, as I was caught red-handed and my vehicle and trailer were the evidence. I was dumb struck for the moment. “I erm, erm, I erm.” “SPEAK UP MAN, ARE YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT?” The Foreman of the Yard pointed to the remains of the bike. “Er yes, Sir,” I admitted, going bright red. “Sorry Sir.” “Is THAT all YOU CAN SAY, you’re SORRY MAN?” “You SHOULD HAVE TAKEN MORE CARE! Got someone to guide you back. I know the jetty is a congested mess but YOU HAVE NO EXCUSE!” “WHO is YOUR FOREMAN and what is his TELEPHONE NUMBER?” I told him. Later on that day I had a right rollicking from Mr Clayton in his office. Les of course with me as well as he was in charge and also responsible for his drivers. I had added another million grey hairs to poor old Les’ hair!

- (4) The next incident concerned my taking a flushing unit. These were to lubricate and flush some of the warships hydraulic or lubricating systems on board. They were filled up with about 20 gallons of thick lubricating oil, like treacle, and then pressurised to about 140psi. They looked like the pressure cooker one uses on the gas stove, except they had an inlet and out let pipe, a

³ Editor’s Note. “Foreman of the Yard” was the title accorded to Shipwright Foremen working “Afloat” (i.e. on board a ship rather than in a workshop). Prior to the introduction of Project Managers, their responsibilities included the inter-trade co-ordination of refit and repair work. They reported to a Manager in MCD (Constructive Department).

vacuum gauge, hand wheel, and were made of aluminium. The top was screwed down tight by butterfly or wing nuts.

In charge of these was the ex-shipfitter Bill Davis who, nearing retirement, had been transferred to light work, since he could not climb up and down ship ladders when the warship was in refit. When empty the units were fairly light but when full of oil they weighed quite a bit. After use Bill would strip down the unit and thoroughly clean it up, inside and out, until it was spotless and ready for its next use. His workshop was under the top landing of the FAW1 store and next to our cubbyhole. On this occasion I had to rush a unit for a very urgent job in HMS Rothesay in 14 Dock, a Type 12 frigate. Bill told me that, although the job was in a hurry, I should be careful as driving along the road, as the flushing unit was quite heavy. I nodded. Taking it easy and carefully I made my way to the left side of 14 Dock and parked my Lister truck.

The only thing I should have done was to have switched off the engine and applied the brakes securely. I was in a slight hurry to get the job done and totally forgot to do so! Whilst I was on board waiting for the guys who the unit was for to pop up topside, I got a shout from the dockside. "OI! YOUR LISTER IS RUNNING AWAY MATE!" I glanced in the direction of the caller and paled at what I saw. "OH CRIKEY!" I tore over the gangway as fast as I could but I was too late! Although the Lister was going only at a snail pace, the front of it hit a bollard with a loud clang as a bell. At least my truck had stopped but what happened next was a nightmare!

The impact had caused the ropes I had tied down snug and tight to unravel and, on top of that, the flushing unit began to wobble in the fashion of one of those child toys where you could knock it over but it would spring back up again. Only in this case it did not! There was NO WAY I could have stopped it either; not with all that 20 gallons, or should I say 20 litres of oil in it. Aghast I watched it roll off my Lister truck on its side and crash to the floor with a thump. The next result was inevitable! With all that air pressure charged up and the oil swilling around as well, the contents were like a shaken-up bottle of fizzy lemonade! "BANG!" 20 LITRES of best grade flushing oil shot out of the top as the impact sprung off the lid of the flushing unit, the wing nuts or clips also having broken, flying in all directions; but worse, the oil flying high in the air came down and spattered all over a rather posh looking car parked near the gangway. Thick gooey treacle-like oil slowly trickled down the cars bodywork before it formed little puddles underneath it. I was in REAL trouble now and my stomach had butterflies as I knew what punishment I would get for my actions. Although Bill would go bananas at the damage to the flushing unit, that was NOTHING to what I would get later.

It got worse when I found out who the car owner was - a very smart-suited civilian coming over the gangway, only to be saluted with a squeal of boatswain's pipes! NONE OTHER than the SHIPS CAPTAIN! He had no idea what was awaiting him and when he saw the state of his car he stared in disbelief. "What the----? MY CAR!" He rounded on me as he saw the Lister truck, the trail of oil, and the now empty but battered and bent flushing unit. There was nothing I could say; I had been caught red handed again. "ARE YOU RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT?" he thundered at me, right arm pointing to his car and a face with bright red anger. I nodded silently. He gave me a blistering tirade about what he thought of ordinary Dockie personnel in

general. "My WIFE is expecting me HOME shortly. TODAY OF ALL DAYS, it's our WEDDING ANNIVERSARY. I was taking her to LUNCH at the Queen Hotel, Southsea; now I CAN`T THANKS TO YOU!" But luckily for him, the First Lieutenant let him borrow his car. The oil was slightly corrosive which meant a possible and expensive re-spray of the Captain's car. He warned me that he would take legal action and sue me for damages; I had not a leg to stand on. But to the Captain's dismay, it was found that personnel brought their vehicle in AT THEIR OWN RISK and could not claim a penny. Far as I know this still applies today.

Bill of course went hopping mad at my damage to the flushing unit but that was nothing to what I got from the Foreman, Mr Dick Clayton. Because what I had caused was a bit more serious, I was suspended from driving for 2 weeks - which meant more jobs for Ray and Mickey to do; they were a driver down and that did NOT endear me to them either!

- (5) I had to take some gear to the Royal Yacht, Britannia berthed in 15 Dock, having an annual refit ready for one of Her Majesties overseas tours. I walked aboard with the gear I had to take after showing my pass to the duty QM and asked for the fitters to come topside for the gear I had delivered. When I had done so, I decided to take a peek at the rear grand saloon toward the stern. Looking through the windows, the long table was polished like glass and the soft pink, hidden coving lighting glowed from the ceiling. "OI YOU!" yelled a voice, "COME `ERE!" I turned round. A burly CPO with a bull type neck and tight reefer jacket summoned me forthwith. "What's YOUR GAME THEN, SONNY?" "I was only having a look; it's beautiful inside," I said all innocent. "LOOK WHAT YOU `AVE GORN AN DONE!" he screeched aghast. He pointed to the spotless teak decking; only this time it wasn't. Somehow I had trodden in a spillage of white, top quality lead gloss paint used on the hulls upper superstructure and left a trail of white footprints! "That is WHERE HER MAJESTY WALKS; IT'S OUT OF BOUNDS!" "YOU SHOULD `AVE kept to walking on the HARDBOARD!"

The Chief PO, or to the Matelots on board "the Buffer", went aghast and white-faced at what I had just done. Not only had I committed a serious cardinal sin but, what was worse, an ordinary Dockyard common employee HAD WALKED WHERE HER MAJESTY, THE QUEEN TREADS. NO one but NOBODY apart from Her Majesty ever trod that part of the quarter deck - apart of course from Britannia's crew, Heads of State, etc. I had trodden on the holy of holies. "That area is OUT OF BOUNDS, young shaver," intoned the CPO. "What the HELL, am I goin` to do about all these white foot prints?" "Oh never mind, Chief, a lot of turpentine, bit of elbow grease with some clean rag and it should come off in no time!" I replied brightly. The CPO almost had a heart failure at that remark, and went a shade from white to almost purple! "COME OFF? COME OFF?" he screeched even more aghast. "You do not understand; THAT IS TOP GRADE WHITE LEAD ENAMEL weather proof paint. It's a NIGHTMARE TO GET OFF THIS SPOTLESS TEAK DECKIN`." "Well, you had better organise a cleaning party Chief and quick; that stuff sets in no time," I rejoined. "AND DON'T I KNOW IT! I WISH YOU WERE IN THE NAVY UNDER ME; I WOULD MAKE YOUR LIFE HELL I WOULD!" said the CPO. "As YOU made this mess, I've a GOOD MIND TO MAKE YOU CLEAN IT ALL UP!" "Yes, Chief, only too glad to do so; I should have looked

where I was treading on deck,” I replied with a smile. “OH NO you DON’T. YOU have caused enough disaster already. I WILL sort out this mess. GET OFF THIS YACHT!” “ Yes, Chief.” I left him to it. Of course that duty CPO would have the responsible sailor’s guts for garters for failing to put up a barrier with a notice: “KEEP OFF” or “KEEP OUT”! “OH just a mo’.” “Yes Chief?” “Keep what you saw in the state room under yer ‘at. They are a STATE SECRET!” “I never knew that,” I said. I made my way back to my Lister truck wondering how a beautiful long table with a polish like glass, matching chairs all round, a cocktail cabinet, a grand piano for the party sing song use of, some pictures and damask curtains, a Persian carpet wall to wall were STATE secrets and came under the OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT! I suppose it did not do to advertise too many things of Her Majesties possessions; they may be of use to an enemy or terrorist group, the layout of the yachts interior. If those foot prints failed to shift off the teak decking, it would mean the whole quarter deck would have to be rubbed down to the bare wood and re- varnished to boot, thus tripling the refit bill! I never heard more about it so I could only assume they had come off all right. I bet that sailor, though, had 2 weeks CB and 7 days No. 11. His life would have been made merry hell!

- (6) The last faux pas I made was when I went on board HMS Leopard, a Type 41 frigate, in refit in No. 14 dock. I was delivering a load of gear for the Fridge Shop Fitters. Going across the gangway from the dockside amidships of the vessel, showing my pass, I asked the duty QM if he could pipe for the Fridge Shop fitters to come up from below deck and get their stuff. “Sorry mate, I am just off for a quick smoke, won’t be a tick; you can do it if yer want. Just press the mike button an’ yer broadcast will go all over the ship and below decks”. He handed me the mike. “Yes but I---- .” The words died on my lips as the QM darted out of sight for the moment. For one thing he had NO RIGHT to leave his post until his relief turned up, and even worse leaving one of Her Majesties WARSHIPS TEMPORARILY UNGUARDED! He would be in very serious trouble upon his return. “Oh well, I don’t suppose he will be a moment; it won’t hurt just this once,” I said to myself.

I grabbed the mike to make my broadcast. I made the first mistake by pressing the “to broadcast” button with the mike right by the speaker. This resulted in a deafening howl and screech of a feedback in the acoustics. Lifting the mike off its clip holder and pressing the button, I made my both my maiden and last time speech over a ship’s tannoy system. At the CRITICAL moment my lips WOULD have to go and get knotted! You would think it was so easy to say such a simple message - asking for the Fridge Shop fitters to come up on deck to receive their gear. The result ended up something like this. “Do you hear there?” “Will the Fridge Chop Chatters, er no, that’s all wrong. Ahem! The Frat Chap Shippers, OH DAMN AND BLAST IT! Will the Fridge Shop Chippers, er I mean Fitters, please come to the gangway where their store requisites have now arrived.” AT LAST! Trouble was, unbeknown to me, below I had suddenly stirred up a hornet’s nest! On board was the C in C Portsmouth! My ULTIMATE BOSS of BOSSES, along with the Manager of the ship’s refit programme. The C in C had paid a surprise visit to see how Portsmouth Dockyard, with a reputation of “can do” even if over burdened with work and done UNDER TIME and UNDER BUDGET, did ships refits. I knew that I had most likely totally ruined that reputation. The C in C’s wife was also on board but having a coffee morning

in the ship's wardroom. I knew my name would now be MUD! Not only might I get the sack but also no doubt HUNG AT DAWN from HMS VICTORY'S HIGHEST YARD ARM! The C in C was furious. "WHO the HELL made that GHASTLY PIPE?" "I have no idea, Sir," said the duty Lt Commander. "WELL FIND OUT MAN AND BRING HIM HERE!" "Aye, Aye, Sir." The Lt. Commander chased up the duty Officer of the Day who in turn chased up the duty Chief Buffer. Despite extensive searches the person concerned seemed to have vanished. "Very sorry, Sir, but it seems whoever it was has vanished into thin air" "WHAT? POPPYCOCK! HE CANNOT JUST HAVE VANISHED INTO THIN AIR? SEARCH AGAIN!" "Yes Sir!" The Lt. Commander saluted smartly and shot off bawling orders to find out who it was that made the ghastly pipe. Despite an extensive search no person was traced. The duty Lt. Commander reported back and smartly saluted the C in C. "WELL?" "No joy, sir, sorry sir, he seems to have vanished." The C in C then concluded that the strange voice must be a civilian. "If it was not a sailor in this ship, then it must be one of the dockyard workers. I will find who it is if it's the last thing I do!" "Yes, Sir!" Of course meanwhile the QM who had nipped away for the moment for a crafty smoke came back rather agitated and ear wigged me as I waited for the Fridge Shop fitters to come topside. "GAWD mate! WOT DID YER DO?" "You told me to make the pipe so I did," I replied. "YEAH, but NOT LIKE THAT! Do you want me to get HUNG?" Of course as luck would have it the Officer of the Day was within earshot of our conversation and briskly strode over to both of us. "Oh so it was YOU who made that broadcast?" he eyed me rather angry. "You had NO RIGHT to DO SO! Who said you could?" "The QM gave me permission," I replied. The duty QM, who had slunk off, paled as I had now dropped him right in it and up to his neck! The Officer of the Day, or OOD, rounded on the duty QM. "I shall DEAL with YOU LATER!" "He was busting a gut to go to the heads," I lied, hoping that his sentence would be slightly more lenient. "I could not CARE if he was queuing to go to the local cinema! He should have waited till his relief turned up; you are on a very SERIOUS CHARGE!" "Yes, Sir." The Officer of the Day went below to find the C in C who swiftly popped up topside like a cork out of a bottle! I just stood there, red in the face, rigid to attention, as the C in C gave me a blistering ear bashing with the final remark: "this is NOT BBC BROADCASTING HOUSE, PIRATE RADIO or ANY OTHER BROADCASTING ESTABLISHMENT! It is HER MAJESTY'S SHIP OF WAR! You DO NOT make broadcasts of that nature in future; they must be done only by the service personnel on board. Is that clear?" I nodded silently. "Don't let me catch you doing that again! It is a pity you are not one of the crew in the Service. All I can do is to admonish you. Right, carry ON!" "Yes, Sir." was all I could say. I wondered if I ought to salute him as well as he turned on his heel to go below deck again. I was in enough trouble already and if I had done so, it would have added insult to injury!

Eventually the Fridge Shop fitters appeared topside and unloaded their gear off my Lister and trailer. "Gawd Dave, what have you done now?" remarked one of the fitters, with a broad grin on his face. I explained what had happened. "The way you are goin` on, you will get drummed out of the Dockyard!" I said nothing further and having been unloaded went back to FAW1. Of course I was in further hot water with Les, my Chargeman, and also once again up before Mr Clayton, my Foreman. The jungle telegraph

must have been working overtime; how quickly the news of what I had done had spread - like wild fire. Mr Clayton was aghast that, of ALL people, I had upset the C in C Portsmouth! "This is the 4th time you have been up before me Barber! It had BETTER BE THE LAST or ELSE!" "Get OUT of my Office!" With that ringing in my ears I went back to FAW1. I could see I was becoming a liability and I thought I should apply for a transfer. But Les was short of drivers and, if I did go elsewhere, it would cause him no end of headaches. However an opportunity presented itself in the guise of becoming a Progressman Non Technical and more money. What the job entailed was making sure that the jobs allocated out by the Progressman, who was an ex-tradesman, were carried through to completion. I had to inform him of any delays and the reasons why. Also I had to tie labels with the details on the jobs in hand and carry out general office routine. It was more money and, as I thought, no more hard physical work. So I applied much to Les' dismay, but he could not stop me going if I so wished. To be honest I had had enough; the driving of the Lister was now getting very tiring. Also the dreadful weather in winter was a part factor in my decision. I was getting tired having to wait to be unloaded in the pouring rain, getting wetter and colder by the minute. I thought when I applied for the new post that I would still be attached to FAW1 and reside in the offices over the Light Plate Shop, between 8 and 11 Docks, going out with the Progressman on board ship to label up the items, and then go with the drivers to where the stuff had to go. Les warned me and drummed into me to find out more about the job; if I went to the interview board with no knowledge of it, I would NOT pass the board.

The day of the interview arrived, this being held in the Central Office Block 1, now demolished, up on the 2nd floor. I answered all the questions they fired at me to the best of my ability, only flunking on one. "What is a bar chart?" I SHOULD have known. It was a chart of colour pegs or lines showing the state of jobs that were being carried out, what their position was in the planning offices or work shop floor: complete, nearing completion and so on. I could have kicked myself and gloomily I knew I have must have blown it. But to my joy and surprise I found later that I had passed with flying colours, but with one shock. I would be transferred to, of ALL places, the DOCKYARD FOUNDRIES! You could have knocked me down with a feather! So for me, sorry about the pun, the wheel had more or less turned full circle!

So prior to my leaving FAW1 I said my farewells but I would not be all that far away and would pop back to see the lads from time to time, as and when it permitted to do.

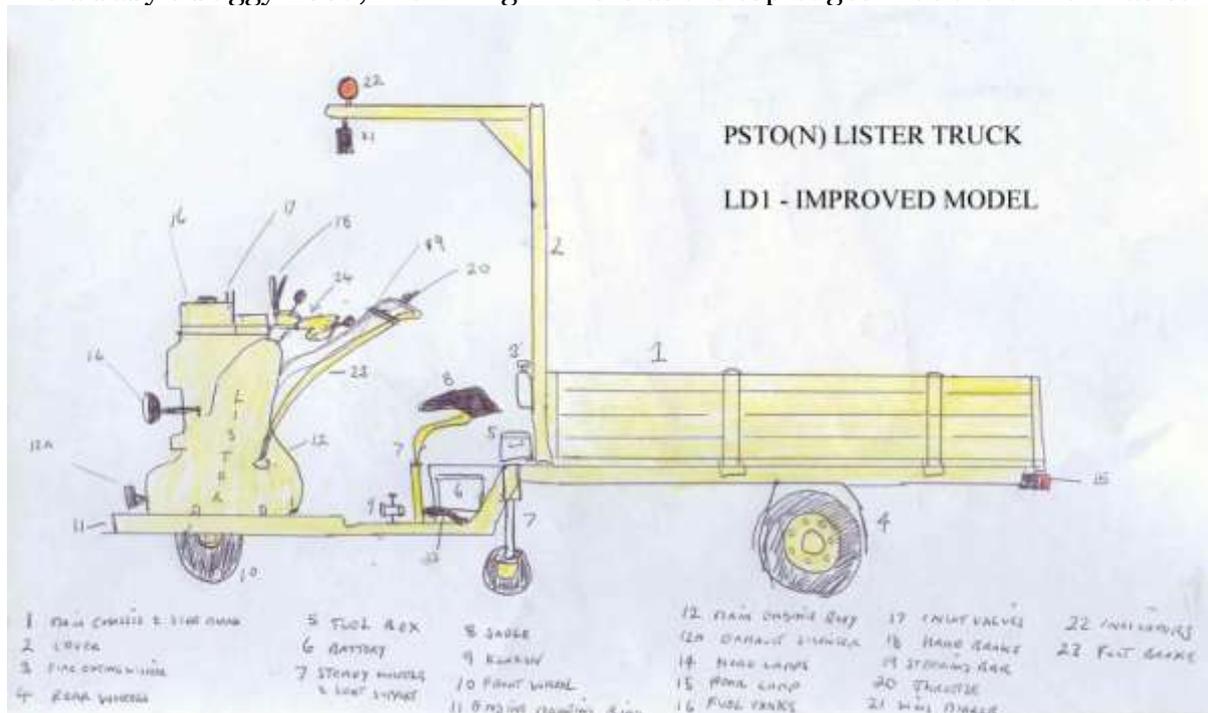
Finally I must mention that a lot of the folk I knew in FAW1 have sadly now died. However I still see Mickey Brown who lives in Monmouth Road, North End with his dear wife, Sylvia. He left the Dockyard in 1970 to become a self-employed painter and decorator, which he is still doing but soon up for retirement. What of the FAW1 organisation and the buildings as well? They have all vanished years ago. Even Dave Caruthers workshop has been demolished, also the old clock site buildings and Les Lindsay's office alongside, they too have been demolished. Where the FAW1 workshop was is now part of the former Iron and Brass foundry yard, which is a car park. No doubt the former Fridge Shop has been gutted out along with the FAW1 store place and used for other purposes. Even all the canteens have vanished,

including the then new Top Deck Restaurant and bar, opened in 1972 by Rear Admiral P G La Niece, which replaced the old wartime Victory Canteen in Marlborough Road. But I look back with affection, and also recall that I could not have worked in a more exciting wonderful place with the finest bunch of work mates that one ever wished for - in Her Majesty's Dockyard, Portsmouth!

Footnotes

I may mention one or two things more.

The stores section tried out a new type of Lister truck. It was the same LD 1 model but with additions, also in the livery of RN yellow. This Lister had a canopy over the driver's area; not a cab in the conventional sense like the Mercury trucks but more like a baby's buggy hood, with wing mirrors at the top edges. But the driver was still



open to the elements, so I suppose really it was a waste of time. Also fitted were road head and taillights, and on the top corners of the canopy were round flashing indicators! For safety and extra balance, each side were also steadying wheels, mounted in a hydraulic piston to take out the bumps and lurches along the Dockyard roads. This Lister was something of an eye opener, and I wanted to have a go at driving it. Would this new vehicle be issued? Alas no, it was only an experimental type and after a few months trial with the PSTO(N) dept. it vanished never to be seen again. I often wonder if it might have been saved and is now in a museum somewhere. If anyone knows of its whereabouts, please drop me a line via the Historical Trust Group, thank you.

The FINAL Lister truck that was issued looked like a lawnmower on wheels and sounded like one too. I never drove one, so to be fair I had no idea what they were like to work on. But to me, they looked as if they could not pull the skin off a rice pudding!

I was shocked at learning the price of new Mercury trucks, as well as the Lister - £27,000 each! I thought about £1,500 to £2,000. I would have liked to have bought one of the Lister trucks to have as my own runabout, rather like those Indian Tuck-

Tucks. But I was told they were not strictly street-legal and that I would have got DONE for having it on the road, despite all my efforts to equip it with all the legal requirements.

I knew of one Mercury truck driver as I went on my rounds daily. That was Phil, never knew his surname, but a very nice guy who lived with his widowed Mother in Frencham Road, Southsea. His yellow Mercury truck looked like a small van and he was based at the stores located by Short Row. There was a large notice warning drivers that they were NOT to let their engine idle or rev loudly as they were in the vicinity of official residences for Naval Officers of the Dockyard Depts.



Les Lindsay, my Chorgeman, I was DELIGHTED to have discovered was an accomplished jazz organist, having a Hammond or Lowry model at home. He made many organ recordings and tapes for me from his collection of which I still have both Jazz and Classical, though Les was more or less into the Jazz scene. He was also a DJ on one of our local radio stations, and he let me know when the top jazz organists came to the Guildhall. I went one evening to hear the late Jerry Allen; he was the organist for the old ATV programme called Lunch Box. He came to show and demonstrate the then new model organs by Hammond. I wanted an organ too, but it was way out my price league and we had no room for it at No. 7 Rochester Road. It was not until very much later, in 2003, that I got one - a Marlborough for only £50; these days it's all electronic key boards. The model I wanted, a Lowry Genie, had gone. Still I am happy with what I have – it's a nice tone and can play not too bad. But I try not to disturb my neighbours too much. I shall have to get it fixed as the swell pedal is stuck at full blast! Les was also the regular organist at the now long-gone "Black Prince" pub of the 1960s in Winston Churchill Avenue. This was then one of the more trendy pubs for the 1960s where the "In Crowd" would socialise their evenings away. The last time I saw Les was about 2005. Sadly he does not play anymore due to an accident but I hope that he is well and wish him all the best.

David Barber © April 2012

Annex

STAFF OF FAW 1 & Others (as known by David Barber) 1967 - 1970

Foreman: Mr Dick Clayton

Chargemen:

Transport: Mr Les Lindsay; **Fridge Shop:** Fred Cocking

FAW1 Workshop: Mr Dave Caruthers **Ship Fitters:** Mr Dinky Ward & Mr Johnny Rolf

Ships Refit Progressmen: Mr Horace Oakford; Mr Harry Rogers; Mr Barry Mellon

FAW 1 STORE IVY LANE

Mr Dinger Bell; Mr Tom Guire; Mr Bill Davis (Ex shipfitter in charge of Flush Units)

FAW1 DRIVERS

Derek C. (dismissed on conduct); Mickey Brown; Ray Barber; Dave Barber;

John Justice (replaced Derek C.)

FAW1 WORK SHOP SLINGERS

Bert Seaman; Nobby Brown?

FACTORY SHOP

Progress and Planning, Work in and out of the Factory: Reg Totton

Factory Dispatch / Receipt Bay Slinger: Taffy (surname unknown)