



Gary Doyle Group Harbour Master

Can you tell us about your Service in the Armed Forces?

Varied, exciting, occasionally 'interesting', lots of fun, lots of travel across the globe with a chance to serve with some great people and meet other fantastic people from differing cultures and countries. I was presented with some fantastic opportunities and learnt many skills – diver, deck officer, warfare officer, aviator, command and diplomat! There were good times, some bad times and some terrifying times but the good far outweighed the bad. 15 ships, 3 air squadrons, over 50 countries visited and 38 years – it was a blast.

What was your primary job after training?

I was an officer of the watch and the ships diving officer onboard a Frigate, a patrol vessel, a carrier, and a dive support ship. From there, I underwent flying training and various appointments in the Fleet Air Arm before qualifying as a ship's warfare officer and subsequently moving on to command units.

Where did you serve the majority of time in service?

It's difficult to be specific, but I spent a fair part of my time at sea and was lucky enough to sail all the world's oceans, as well as the Caribbean, Mediterranean, and, of course, the Persian Gulf. I was also fortunate enough to find myself operating ashore in Africa and elsewhere in the Middle East.

What rank are you most proud to have earned and why?

I was proud, if not somewhat amazed, at achieving all ranks I was fortunate enough to be promoted to. However, receiving my first commission, signed by the late Queen has to be up there.

What has been your proudest moment in your career related to your Military Service?

Passing out successfully from Britannia Royal Naval College, being presented with my Naval Wings and joining the Fleet Air Arm have got to be up there, but nothing compares with walking up the gangway of a ship to take command of it and realising you have the responsibility for a multimillion-pound bit of kit and the lives of your ships company.

What skills do you think you developed whilst in the Forces that you have utilised most during your career

Something I have always asked myself. A mixture of leadership and management skills, some of which don't always translate to civilian life! Adaptability, planning ability and a desire to build a team and move forward. Also, a degree of wanting to mentor your team, and, for those that want it, to see them develop. Resilience, particularly when things went wrong, with the ability to adapt and move forward.

You do a lot of work within the Armed Forces Communities locally which must be very rewarding have there been any stand out moments for you?

It has got to be delivering, as Chairman of the Battle of the Atlantic Charity, with a small but great team of fellow trustees, the memorial to that Battle and seeing the faces of the veterans during that commemoration weekend in May 2023 when they realised their gargantuan efforts had finally been recognised. It is an often-overlooked battle, but it is one that facilitated all others and was maritime focussed, reminding us we are an island nation.



Are there any veteran networks or charities you attend/socialise with /support which you would recommend to other Veterans?

I would say to get involved in your own specific group, whether that be ship grouping, regimental or squadron affiliation. There are a myriad of charities that appreciate help, you need to decide what is important to you. Locally the Sefton Veteran's Association does a lot to support local veterans. Tom Harrison House is a humbling experience, it helps former service personnel who have found it difficult to adjust to civilian life and have fallen on hard times in respect of drug dependency or alcoholism. Also don't forget the cadet organisations they really do help shape the young person's future and you probably have a lot to give.

Tell me a funny story you experienced that could only happen in the military.

There were many! A topical one may be when my ship visited the Black Sea and we called into Russia and Ukraine. After an official function in Russia, I was walking back to the ship with two of my officers in full uniform when two men jumped out in front of us and proceeded to try to hold us up at gunpoint. I then uttered those immortal words 'do you know who I am, I am a visitor in your country' – the men looked at each other and ran off! I was feeling quite (relieved) impressed with myself when one of my officers tapped me on the shoulder and pointed behind us – there were two men with Uzis pointed at the two men as they ran away. We had not spotted the 2 FSB (Russian state police) who had been allocated to follow me!

How did your military experience affect your life today?

Some positive and some negative. It developed a particularly useful sense of humour, a resilience when things don't go to plan and a sense of perspective. It probably also developed a slight impatience when people do not necessarily pull in the same direction or indeed want to but on the contrary a strong sense of responsibility for your team. The military also developed a particular work ethic and a sense of loyalty to the unit you are working in, which is common to all veterans.

What was the best and worst 'military' food you were served, and why?

It is difficult to say, you would be surprised by the general quality of the food produced by armed forces chefs under some difficult circumstances, at sea or in the field it is amazing. Even the Potmess (stew) produced on a small patrol boat in a South Atlantic storm was welcome! The worst, a squirrel and a pig trotter that we had to cook ourselves on a survival course!

