

CHAPTER ELEVEN -- CONNECTICUT

Shirley and I decided that she should stay in the UK until I found a place to live in the New London area. I managed to get someone to take over the lease on our house in Halifax, and arranged to put the furniture in storage, as we were not allowed to take it with us for a posting of less than one year. My posting to New London was for just over six months.

At the beginning of August 1964, I set out for New London in our new Morris Oxford. We had the new car because Shirley had been rammed by a car going through a red light the year before. She had received head injuries, but luckily was not seriously hurt, whereas the Mini was a total loss.

A few years earlier, the Royal Navy and Royal Canadian Navy were new to me -- now here I was entering the home of the United States Navy Submarine Force in New London. Sometimes I had to pinch myself to really confirm in my mind that this ex-Merchant Navy officer was now going to be part of the mightiest navy in the world. What made it even more unlikely was that I was the only Canadian officer among twelve thousand personnel on the base.

When I first arrived in New London, I moved into the Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQ). After completing an administrative in-routine, I was told that I was not required until the day after Labour Day (8th September). This gave me plenty of time to find a house or apartment for Shirley and me. The Base Housing Office gave me a list of addresses to investigate, so during the next couple of weeks I became very familiar with the area.

One house I particularly liked was an "olde-worlde" house in Stonington. The village of Stonington is a pretty New England fishing village, with several old houses with such names as, "The Captain Edward Brown House." They were lovely old homes. For North America, old meant eighteenth century. The house I was interested in was owned by a famous author. I was very taken with it, but I wanted to look at one other house closer to the Base before I committed myself.

The other house was in a privately owned area called the Mumford Cove Colony. It was a big, modern house on the water, overlooking Long Island Sound. It was in an area of beautiful homes. The house was owned by a vice president of Texaco, who only used it occasionally.

He had other homes in New York and Paris. Governor Dempsey, the Governor of Connecticut, had a house there, just a few doors away.

I knew Shirley would love this place just as much as I did, so I became the occupant of 79 Neptune Drive in Noank. Luckily the Navy

paid half the rent, otherwise we certainly wouldn't have been able to afford such luxury. Our neighbours must have thought the Canadian Navy were paid very well to have this two-striper living in this location.

A week or two later, I started the course. In the past, I had been on courses where there may be twenty or so people on it, but I was not prepared for the hundred and sixty-five officers on this course. Most were Ensigns or Lieutenants (Junior Grade), in their very early twenties, who had come straight from either the Naval Academy at Annapolis, or from Nuclear Power School in Idaho. There were four other Lieutenants on the course, who, like myself, had some sea experience. I was in one of the two diesel submarine syndicates -- the rest were nuclear syndicates.

Shirley and Lindsey arrived in Providence, Rhode Island, on a beautiful sunny Saturday afternoon in mid-September. They had flown from London, via Boston, so I drove up to Providence to pick them up. On the return trip, as we approached Mumford Cove, I asked Shirley to cover her eyes as we were coming to the crest of a hill.

As we crested the hill, I had her open them. We were high up overlooking Long Island Sound, and the view was magnificent. After Halifax, Shirley must have thought she had died and gone to heaven.

She loved the house and the back garden, where there was a transition from lawn to beach, leading down to the water's edge in Mumford Cove. The house was nicely furnished, but it didn't have a television. We didn't miss it at all, because we spent so much time doing other things. Our next door neighbours (about three hundred feet away) became our very dear friends. In many ways, they also became surrogate parents and grandparents.

Betty and Bill Ingalls were the warmest, kindest people you could ever meet. Betty took a great liking to Lindsey, mainly, I think, because Lindsey was so well mannered for a one year old. Shirley and Betty had many of the same interests -- and they also shared the same set of values. Betty treated Shirley as a daughter, and Lindsey like her own grandchild.

Bill had a boat, as did most people in Mumford Cove. We spent many an enjoyable time in that boat -- as we have done for the next 30 years in its successors. Occasionally, I would go out fishing for Bluefish in the Sound with Bill and some of his friends. I never brought anything back, but you should have seen some of the ones that I almost had. Swordfish, great white sharks, marlins -- the lot! Honest !

While Bill and I were out in the rough weather off Race Rock, Betty and Shirley would sit in a rowboat, just off the jetty behind the house, and fish for bottom fish. It was very embarrassing when we came back with nothing, and they would have caught half a dozen

flatfish.

One evening, after the course had been in progress for about six weeks, there was a Ladies Night at the School. The staff showed the wives everything, and let them fire simulated torpedoes and missiles. When Shirley was telling me about her evening, I found out that she had been in the missile building and fired a simulated missile. I was not allowed to enter that building because I was a foreign student. It was for US eyes only. Being with the wives, and not wearing a uniform, nobody thought to check about a "foreign" wife. When I asked her for other information about that evening, she would say, "Sorry, I'm not allowed to tell you!" She loved that.

I found it interesting that we were half way through the course before we did our escape training. Although I felt confident that my ears would be all right this time, I still had a lingering doubt. We did the pot, and things were fine -- and then to the tank. There was no doubt that I was a little apprehensive looking up at that tower of water for the first time. Later, when we carried out escape training regularly every two or three years, it was easy -- but I was a little worried the first time I did it.

The actual escape training is a very interesting evolution. About ten students in swimsuits, stand in the dry escape chamber at the bottom of the hundred-foot tank. There is a canvas skirt, or trunk, extending downwards from the top of the chamber to about chest height. Only a hatch at the top of that trunk is keeping the water out. The heavy side door is secured and water is then flooded in through a four-inch pipe at about knee level. It is warm water, which makes it hot and sticky in the chamber.

When the water level is just above the bottom of the canvas skirt, the flooding is stopped, and high pressure air is bled in, to equalize the pressure in the chamber with the water above. The noise of the high pressure air is deafening and quite frightening the first time you hear it. Once the pressure in the chamber is equalized, an instructor dips under the skirt and opens the hatch at the top of the chamber. Once the hatch is open there is only one way out -- up!

The requirement is to take a big breath -- fill your lungs with air, which of course is now compressed at the equivalent of a hundred feet of pressure, duck down under the trunk, then start to blow out as you ascend. It takes about fifteen seconds from top to bottom, and you must breathe out the whole way up until you reach the surface.

If the instructors in the tank, who are in scuba gear, see that you are not breathing out, they will hold you until you start to breathe out again, then let you go. There are instructors all the way up. If you don't expel the compressed air in your lungs, you

would most certainly have an air embolism on reaching the surface, and probably die. It's certainly an exhilarating feeling when you've made it!

With that out of the way it was back to academics. Most of my classmates had degrees in nuclear and/or electrical engineering, so the standard was very high. If you averaged less than 2.5 out of 4.0 you were called before the Academic Board, to explain why you should not be removed from further training. Luckily I was never called before them, but we lost over twenty officers via the Board.

The whole course was very technically oriented, with a certain amount of operations included. The aim was to teach you the basics of submarining, so that you wouldn't be dangerous when you went to your first submarine.

During the course we went to sea twice. The first time was to practice what we had been taught in the shore trainer about diving, controlling, trimming and surfacing a submarine. Various types of emergency situations are simulated, to see how you cope under stress. We lost about another twenty students after the first trip underway. The second underway is near the end of the course when you do everything you have been taught in the classroom, from paralleling generators, operating the diesels, and firing torpedoes. We lost some more officers there too.

At least a couple of my original doubts about submarines had now been satisfied. I thoroughly enjoyed the underways in the submarines. Claustrophobia was not an issue. Nor were the living conditions and cramped quarters. I felt very comfortable in my mind about the decision I had made.

We met some marvellous people when we lived in Connecticut. When we first arrived, we had the typical British jaundiced eye when dealing with "things American." The British attitude was, and still is, in some cases, that Americans aren't completely civilized yet. As more British people travel to the States these days, I believe that these myths are being dispelled. At least I hope they are.

I don't intend to dwell on this subject, but having lived on this side of the Atlantic for over thirty years, nothing more annoys me when somebody uses the expression "typically American." Having lived there, and travelled extensively in the States, and having so many Americans I call friends, there is no such thing as a typical American. A cabby from the Bronx bears no resemblance to a cowboy from Cody, Wyoming -- a shopowner from Biloxi bears no resemblance to a farmer from a small town or village in Iowa. I will say this without any reservation -- Americans are the most generous, friendliest and kindest people I have ever met. Of course, there are exceptions, as there are anywhere, but I have a very warm feeling when I am in the United States among my American friends.

My brother Geoff, who had been married three weeks before Shirley and me, now lived in Peru. He came to see us on his way through New York en route to London. That was in November 1964. I was not to meet him again until August 1988, in London, when we met for about an hour over a drink. I never saw him again after that, although we would miss each other by only a day or so during visits to London, when we would be visiting our mother. We just never managed to be there at the same time. I think that was very sad. He died of liver cancer in September 1990.

All too soon our sojourn in Connecticut ended. When we graduated on 4th February 1965, Betty accompanied Shirley to the ceremonies. Our class was now down to less than one hundred officers. We had lost slightly less than a third through various problems of one sort or another along the way.

I had received a posting to the submarine, HMCS GRILSE in Victoria, British Columbia. We decided to make a vacation of the drive across country, including a visit to Mexico. As it was winter, we decided to head south, and generally stay down there until we arrived in California -- then head north again.

Leaving Connecticut was bittersweet for us. We were looking forward to going to the West Coast, and at the same time we were sorry to be leaving Connecticut, where we had made so many friends. We said then, and I feel the same today -- the best time we had in North America was the six months we spent in Connecticut.