

## Foreword

Historically, success in battles, campaigns and even wars has relied as much, if not more, on efficient and effective logistics as any other single factor. The RFA (Royal Fleet Auxiliary), which has supplied ships of the Royal Navy at sea with ammunition, stores and fuel since its establishment in 1905, is tangible proof of this truism.

As an organisation, the RFA is still run on merchant navy lines although its personnel come under the Naval Discipline Act during hostilities. Such an arrangement has afforded its ships, unarmed until relatively recently, useful flexibility in accessing ports and other areas normally forbidden to warships. On the downside, the Royal Navy has had to tolerate the occasional strike and work-to-rule in peacetime.

The quasi-civilian status of the RFA has led to certain other incongruities. For example, when a frigate in which I was serving was engaged in receiving stores and fuel during a RAS (Replenishment at Sea) in distant waters during the 1970s, members of our all-male ship's company were often discombobulated by the sight of bikini-clad wives of RFA officers sunning themselves around a makeshift swimming pool on the upper deck of the tanker or stores ship steaming close abeam at 15 knots or so. In the meantime, we toiled under the same relentless sun to fill our tanks with fuel and strike below palletised ammunition, food, naval & victualling stores and spare parts. Perhaps of greatest importance on a personal level were the crates of tinned beer which had a disconcerting habit of disappearing somewhere along the human chain between the dump area on the upper deck and their assigned stowages in the bowels of the vessel.

The most demanding historical challenge for the RFA, and other British and Dominion supply vessels and auxiliaries, was the provision of logistical support for the abnormally far-flung BPF (British Pacific Fleet) in the latter stages of the Second World War. The BPF was no small concern and comprised 6 fleet carriers, 4 light carriers, 2 aircraft maintenance carriers and 9 escort carriers, with a total of more than 750 aircraft, 4 battleships, 11 cruisers, 35 destroyers, 14 frigates, 44 smaller warships, 31 submarines, and 54 large vessels in the 'Fleet Train.'

The unglamorous but no less important 'Fleet Train' comprised the motley collection of vessels supporting the BPF. In his unique fashion, David Bruhn has brought its essential activities to life and woven a rich tapestry of stories ranging from fleet to individual unit and personal level.

Until I read David's typically well researched work, I hadn't heard of the Canadian-built Fort and Park cargo ships, nor realised that they and the more familiar American-built Liberty and Victory ships were all based on the design of the British 'North Sands' type freighter. I also learned more about MOWT (British Ministry of War Transport) vessels which complemented those of the RFA.

Many British merchant ships were taken up by the Royal Australian Navy, including those that escaped Singapore before it fell to the Japanese, and commissioned as auxiliaries including 'stores-issuing ships.' Despite their lack of armament compared to their US Navy equivalents, these ships bravely plied the dangerous waters off northern Australia and Japanese-occupied Papua New Guinea, ever vulnerable to attack by enemy aircraft, submarines and surface craft. While doing their part for the war effort, they suffered grievous casualties from enemy action and this book helps act as a tribute to their amazing efforts as it does for all those allies who stood with them to achieve ultimate victory in the Pacific theatre and thus, with the help of a couple of atomic bombs, bring an end to the Second World War.

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