



A research note on the history of ships, places, organisations and events associated with the
Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA)

Senior appointments of the RFA

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Content

1. Introduction

2. Shore-based

- The Technical Assistant
- Chief Technical Superintendent
- Chief Marine Superintendent
- The Fleet Manager

3. Sea-going

- Commodore Royal Fleet Auxiliary
- Commodore RFA since 1951
- Commodore Chief Engineer since 1960

4. Honorary Commodore

5. References

1. Introduction

The civilian-manned Royal Fleet Auxiliary commenced its existence as a Merchant Navy shipping organisation under the Admiralty Board's **Fourth Sea Lord**. It was administered almost entirely by Civil Servants largely in the Naval Stores Branch (later to be the Naval Stores Department) headed by the **Director of Stores**.

In 1965 came the creation of a single logistics service – the Royal Naval Supply and Transport Service (RNSTS). This was under a **Director General of Supply and Transport (Naval)** reporting to and accountable to Navy Board member – the **Chief of Fleet Support (CFS)** – successor of the Fourth Sea Lord's organisation. The RNSTS's responsibilities included the provision of general stores, specialist stores, victualling stores, armament stores and fuel to our armed force worldwide. The RNSTS also embraced the ships and personnel of the RFA. The day-to-day administration was undertaken



within the **Directorate of Fuel, Movements and Transport (Naval)** – successor to the Admiralty's Director of Stores organisation.

In 1989 the Chief of Fleet Support undertook a study into the command and control arrangements as applied to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service. The result, in December 1991, was Navy Board approval to transfer command from CFS's organisation to Commander-in-Chief Fleet (CINCFLEET) and incorporation into the then 'Type Commander organisation' under the Commodore RFA (COMRFA).

This reorganisation was to see what was a long-standing Merchant Navy shipping fleet (previously a member of the National Maritime Board, a member of the Chamber of Shipping and now the largest employer of UK Seafarers) integrated into the UK's Naval Service command structure.

On 1st April 1993, at a ceremony in Portsmouth onboard the small fleet tanker RFA GREY ROVER full command of what was then being termed as the RFA Flotilla (RFAFLOT) was accepted by CINCFLEET. Operational command of the ships passed to COMRFA. The exception was the landing ships (RFA EMPIRE GULL and the SIR LANCELOT class LSLs because they had long been delegated to the MoD(Army)).

This change of the status of the Commodore brought new responsibilities to this traditionally seafarer's post. Responsibilities were as a major budget holder with a headquarters organisation forming in London prior to relocation to Portsmouth. Responsibilities that also

included the administrative authority and the operational capacity of the ships.

This convergence with the Navy was to see the dropping of traditional Merchant Navy management language, such as, 'Marine Superintendent'. COMRFA was now to be ably assisted by Chief Staff Officers (CSOs), specialists heading divisions that dovetailed into CINCFLEET's administration. For example, Captain (X) as CSO (Operations and Warfare) managing readiness, deployments, operational standards, navigation, NBCD, weapons maintenance, amphibious warfare and aviation matters. Captain (E) as CSO (Engineering and Systems) managing marine engineering, systems engineering, health and safety compliance. Captain (S) as CSO (Policy and Finance) administering what were traditionally 'Purser' functions – the supply function, financial and budgetary matters, and personnel related matters. At the same time RFA engineering support under RFA Commodore (E) moved to Bath (Foxhill) in and later to Bristol (Abbeywood) into what was then Naval Support Command and is now part of Defence Equipment and Support.

Today the Commodore RFA is a One Star appointment listed as **Assistant Chief of Staff Afloat Support and Head of RFA Service.**



2. Shore-based

The Technical Assistant

Admiralty files are fragmentary and leave many unanswered questions regarding the appointments and role of Technical Assistants within the Naval Stores Department and management of RFAs. Some recent research has helped increase available understanding and correct misunderstandings on these appointments.

The 1914 Navy List records that the Director of Stores (DoS) Sir John Forsey Kt CVO had on his staff a shore-based professional appointment known as his **Technical Assistant** (Richard Murray Esq MVO) – to advise on all technical matters (eg, hull and engines), supervision of all repair work, defect lists, visits to ships during docking, advise as to appointments in RFAs, technical questions relating to the Fleet Coaling Service with four tankers, one collier, a number of yard craft, ten oil fuel depots with a capacity of 446,000 tons ¹. Mr Murray remained in this post throughout World War One. Unfortunately, there is inadequate evidence to confirm if Richard Murray was a marine engineer or a master mariner.

By 1919 there appear to have been three Technical Assistants (T/As) – Engineer Captain J E Haves RN, Mr R Murray MVO and Mr J Wallace MIMarE, supported by a

¹ Three non-tankers were then serving as RFAs – INDUSTRY (store carrier), RELIANCE (repair ship) and MAINE (hospital ship, although she became a marine loss in June 1914).

small number of Naval Stores Department clerical (administrative) staff. But by 1920 the Treasury appear only to have approved two T/A posts – Mr R Murray MVO and Mr J Wallace MIMarE.

Admiralty files do show that establishing an adequate headquarters 'technical complement' within the Naval Stores Department was difficult. One document refers to 'protracted and arduous' correspondence with HM Treasury. In his correspondence with Treasury the Director of Stores equated the management of the Fleet Fuelling Service with that of a commercial shipping company. Explaining that their control and responsibility rested with a General Manager, a role performed by DoS. Such a General Manager has a number of professional Technical Assistants (or 'superintendents' as they are commonly called) who assist with advice and supervision over the repair and upkeep of their ships. At this time the fuelling fleet capital value was put at £4,600,000 with an annual maintenance and repair bill in the region of £328,000.

1921 seen the appointment of the first **Principal Technical Assistant** (PT/A) a position first held by Richard Murray Esq MVO assisted by three T/As. Described in one Admiralty document as – two T/As covering construction, engineering and engineer appointments and one T/A (N), a Master Mariner, dealing with mercantile practice, personnel interviews of officers applying for appointments and questions representing the Board of Trade requirements, such as paying off, life saving gear, navigation issues and representing the Admiralty at National Maritime Board.



By 1926 the PT/A, Richard Murray Esq OBE MVO, had four T/As, including a RNR officer and Master Mariner – Commander William Gregory. Some sources, state that Cmdr Gregory was the RFA's first T/A, there is no evidence for such a claim. Interestingly, at this time, some files record an additional post – held by a Lieutenant RNR – as part of the 'sea store' establishment employed on the amendment of the 'Establishment of Naval Stores in HM Ships' and to assist with the introduction with a central storekeeping system.

By 1928 a Mr W L Coles had been appointed the PT/A assisted by four T/As. By 1930 Mr H E Hodges was the PT/A and assisted by two T/As including Cmdr Gregory who was later promoted to Captain RNR.

By 1936/37 changes were reflecting the Admiralty's recognition that its aging tanker fleet was increasingly uneconomic and to Britain's naval re-armament programme. Mr A J Curtis MIMarE was appointed the PT/A assisted by four T/As. Their responsibilities would appear to have included the construction of new Dale class motor tankers; the transfer of tankers from commercial to Admiralty management; the revision of 'Handbook of regulations and Instructions regarding RFA' (BR875 RFA Regulations) and the preparation of 'Instruction relating to the supply of fuel during war' (CB4029A & B). In addition, following reorganization of the store carrying aspect in Vote 8 of the Navy Estimates – RFA RELIANT (1), RFA BACCHUS (2) and the two Robert class came to be treated in the same way as the fleet attendant tankers.

The Second World War seen many changes and by 1940 the PT/A Mr Curtis was assisted by six T/As including Mr Frederick E Langer who later was to become the RFA's first Chief Technical Superintendent. 1941 seen the retirement of the long-serving Captain William Gregory RD RNR. This was followed in 1942 by an organisational move with the PT/A being assisted by five T/As and a Temporary T/A who was recorded as 'on oil fuel duties'.

1943 seen a further upgrading with Mr J A Brown appointed the PT/A and assisted by two **Senior Technical Assistants**, four T/As and the Temporary T/A on oil fuel duties. During 1945 Mr Brown continued with his two Senior T/As and a staff of six T/As. However, by 1947 the PT/As team and his two Senior T/As had increased to nine T/As although the following year it appears again to have been reduced to five T/As.

In 1949 Mr L McDonald AMIMEchE was appointed the PT/A assisted by two Senior T/As and eight T/As. By 1953 Mr F E Langer MNIA MIMarE RFA was appointed as the PT/A, assisted by two Senior T/As, six T/As (sometimes recorded as **Technical Assistants (Material)**) and two were labelled as **Technical Assistants (Personnel)** (T/As(P)). By 1954 'F E' was being assisted by two Senior T/As, five T/As and two T/As(P). During 1955 his team was reduced by one T/A and in 1956 a further reduction to one Senior T/A, stabilising over 1957-58 with 'F E' assisted by one Senior T/A, three T/As and two T/As(P).



This is when structure and terminology began to change with the introduction of the more established nautical title of 'superintendent'

During 1959/1960 F E Langer as **Principal Technical Assistant** became the **Marine Superintendent (Engineering)** assisted by a Deputy and four Assistants. A further restructuring retitled the post initially as **Marine Engineering Superintendent** and then to **Chief Technical Superintendent**.

At the same time the **Technical Assistant (Personnel)** post was restructured to become the **Marine Superintendent** (Captain D J S Newton RFA) assisted by two Deputies. Later this was retitled to **Chief Marine Superintendent**.

Chief Technical Superintendent (CTS)

Over 1959/1960 F E Langer as **Principal Technical Assistant** became the **Marine Superintendent (Engineering)** assisted by a Deputy and four Assistants. Under a later restructuring the post was initially retitled as **Marine Engineering Superintendent** and then as **Chief Technical Superintendent**.

With Navy Board approval from June 1986 the merger occurred of the sea-going appointment of **Commodore Chief Engineer RFA** and the shore-side post of **Chief Technical Superintendent**. Commodore Chief Engineer Officer officially became 'unformed professional head of the RFA's marine engineers but ceased to be the

traditional senior engineering officer afloat. This latter became **Commodore (E)**. The CTS post holders have been:

F E Langer OBE RFA	<i>September 1953 as Principal T/A</i> /July 1964
H C A Brain CBE CEng MIMarE RFA	July 1964 /January 1973
D G Edgar CEng MIMarE RFA	February 1973 /September 1979
A Webb MIMarE RFA	October 1979 /December 1982
A Forster MIMarE RFA *	December 1982 /March 1989

* With Navy Board approval from June 1986 the merger occurred of the sea-going appointment of **Commodore Chief Engineer** and the shore-side post of **Chief Technical Superintendent**. As the **Commodore Marine Engineer Officer** he officially became 'unformed head of the RFA's marine engineers and ceased to be the senior engineering officer afloat. This later became **Commodore (E)**.

Chief Marine Superintendants (CMS)

As a continuing part of the post-Second World War recognition of the size, status and demands on the RFA, in 1958/1959, the service adopted the traditional Merchant Navy title **Marine Superintendent** for what the Admiralty's Naval Store Department previously termed its **Technical Assistant (Personnel)**. Later the



retitling as **Chief Marine Superintendant** (CMS) was approved with the Deputy Marine Superintendants simplified as **Marine Superintendants**. The post of CMS, as the senior non-seagoing officer, was interpreted until its merger with the post of Commodore, as the 'uniformed professional Head of Service'. The post holders have been:

Captain H M Sinclair OBE RFA	<i>February 1951 as Technical Assistant (Personnel) /October 1958</i>
Captain D J S Newton OBE RFA	November 1959 /July 1965
Captain H G Carkeet CBE RFA	July 1965 /June 1967
Captain N R McLeod CBE RFA	July 1967 /March 1971
Captain I B Roberts CBE RFA	April 1971 /May 1975
Captain J Ditchburn CBE RFA	June 1975 /April 1979
Captain A S McWilliam RFA	April 1979 /October 1981
Captain C G Butterworth CBE RFA	November 1981 /September 1986
Captain B H Rutterford RFA *	October 1985 /1989

* From 27 June 1986, with Navy Board approval, the merger occurred of the sea-going appointment of **Commodore RFA**

and the shore-side post of **Chief Marine Superintendent**. The **Commodore RFA**, later recorded as **Commodore (X)** officially became the 'uniformed head of the RFA Service' (COMRFA) and ceased to be the traditional senior officer afloat.

The Fleet Manager

The RFA management organisation evolved from that inherited from the Ministry of Shipping in the immediate post-World War One period. Whilst sea-going personnel retained their Merchant Navy practices their management evolved into a mix of Admiralty/Civil Service/Merchant Navy/Royal Navy practices. In 1965 a review was undertaken to consider strengthening this management.

The introduction of the Fleet Manager concept of control and communications into the RFA Service was recognised. This system was deemed able to provide a necessary degree of control over the efficiency of personnel, ships and equipments particularly in the face of the introduction of new and important ships. Approval was received to appoint two Fleet Managers – Civil Servants at Assistant Director level.

The Terms of Reference of a Fleet Manager covered:

- responsibility for ensuring the approved operating programmes and policies and procedures for ships maintenance, organisation and crewing for utilisation, cost and refit laid down by the Assistant Director FMT(N) are achieved.
- maintaining close liaison with both the Chief Marine



Superintendent and Chief Marine Engineering Superintendent.

- with ship inspections, refits and repairs direct and coordinate the activities of the Deputy Marine Superintendents, the Deputy Marine Engineering Superintendents, the Radio Superintendent, Catering Superintendent and the Inspecting Officer

The first Fleet Manager was appointed from 1st April 1966. There is no evidence that a seafarer was considered or appointed as a Fleet Manager.

3. Sea-going

Commodore Royal Fleet Auxiliary

Immediately following the ending of World War Two the RFA had serious difficulties with conditions of service, status and manpower levels. In particular many junior officers were leaving. Although pay and conditions had to be agreed between the Admiralty and HM Treasury the Admiralty were prepared to take a determined look at this. By April 1948 the RFA boss, the Director of Stores at the Admiralty, was looking at the practices of other fleet owners and was considering the appointment of a senior Master as Commodore of the RFA fleet. This was perceived as an inducement to and recognition of 'long and faithful' service and a morale builder. It was seen that this would remove one disparity between the RFA and commercial tanker companies.

Following Merchant Navy practice this would involve a special rate of pay and the privilege of flying a distinctive flag. It was also proposed that the appointment be held for about two years by selection from senior Masters approaching retirement with selection by the Director of Stores. It was felt that the additional cost, including uniform and pennant, could be met out of 1948/49 estimates.

In June 1948 with the approval of the First and Second Sea Lords the Admiralty wrote to HM Treasury seeking approval. The Treasury's reply of 16 July 1948 was that it 'was not agreed' and that it should be considered as part of overall RFA considerations then being formulated.

As a consequence it was not until 4 August 1951 that the Admiralty approved the institution of Commodore of the RFA. Nominations for the appointment were to be submitted to the Admiralty Board. Proposals for the uniform and the flags were also to be submitted to the Board and emphasised that it was a courtesy title only.

HM The King George VI approved the Commodore's Broad Pennant – a vertical gold Admiralty pattern (without cable) anchor encircled by a gold rope on a navy blue field. His Majesty also approved the Commodore's distinctive lace – one broad (1½-inch) band of gold lace around the cuff with diamond of ½-inch gold lack immediately above it.

Captain S G Kent OBE (first joined the RFA in 1920) who was then Master of the hospital ship RFA MAINE was selected for appointment as Commodore. He was Master of RFA FORT DUNVEGAN when his broad pennant

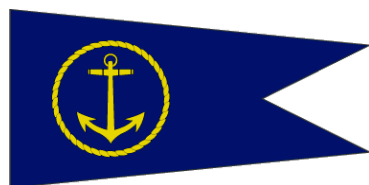


was first broken at noon on Sunday 7 October 1951 at Rosyth.

The ceremony was attended by the Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet, Admiral Sir Philip Vian KCB KBE DSO, the Flag Officer, Scotland, Rear Admiral J F H Crombie DSO, the Superintending Naval Store Officer, Rosyth, Captain H M Sinclair RFA, representing the Director of Stores, Admiralty, and the Cos of HM Ships and RFAs in port.

The occasion was marked by a salvo fired from the Flagship HMS INDOMITABLE as the broad pennant was broken and drummers of the Fleet sounded the Commodore's salute. CinC Home Fleet addressed the company, followed by a reception in the Flagship.

As is the practice with Commodore's RN, and to a lesser degree in the commercial shipping world the Commodore RFA's Broad Pennant is worn on his flagship and/or at his headquarters ashore.



The Commodore's Broad Pennant

The approved dimensions are length 1½ times the width with the points of the fly ½ width apart. According to the Defence Standard 83-77 there is also a Commodore's pennant with 'car fittings' so it can be worn on a motor vehicle.

Commodore RFA since 1951

Since the rank of Commodore RFA was appointed in 1951 the post holders have been:

Stanley G Kent OBE RFA	August 1951 /May 1954
William B Browne OBE RFA	June 1954 /December 1955
Thomas H Card OBE RFA	December 1955 /January 1957
Thomas Elder CBE DSC RFA	January 1957 /March 1962
Albert E Curtain OBE RD RFA	March 1962 /August 1964
Eric Payne CBE RFA	September 1964 /June 1966
Griffith O W Evans CBE DSC RFA	June 1966 /January 1968
Joe Dines CBE RD RFA	January 1968 /May 1971
Henry O L'Estrange DSC RD RFA	June 1971 /December 1972



George Robson CBE RFA	December 1972 /May 1977
Samuel C Dunlop CBE DSO RFA	May 1977 /March 1983
James G M Coull RFA	March 1983 /September 1985
Barry H Rutterford RFA *	June 1986 /MAY 1989
Richard M Thorn CBE RFA **	May 1989 /May 1994
Norman D Squire CBE RFA	May 1994 /March 1999
Peter J Lannin CBE RFA	March 1999 /September 2003
Robert C Thornton CBE RFA ***	October 2003 /September 2008
William M Walworth CBE RFA	September 2008 /September 2013
Robert W Dorey RFA	September 2013 /October 2015
Duncan L Lamb RFA	October 2015 /in post

* With Navy Board approval the merger occurred of the sea-going appointment of **Commodore RFA** and the shore-side post of **Chief Marine Superintendent**. The **Commodore RFA** officially became 'unformed Head of the RFA Service' and ceased to be a traditional senior officer afloat.

** 1 April 1993 became a Type Commander and rank relabelled as to **Commodore (X)** aka COMRFA.

*** Appointment held the executive rank of Assistant Chief of Staff at Fleet HQ.

Commodore Chief Engineer RFA since 1960

The recruitment and retention of marine engineers was a significantly difficult within the RFA. Following a degree of commercial shipping practice the sea-going post of Commodore Chief Engineer was viewed as a recruitment and retention aid. Consideration appears to have commenced in August 1951 with a letter to the Director of Stores from The Navigators & Engineer Officers Union enquiring if they had under consideration the post of Commodore Chief Engineer? Some internal Admiralty correspondence in 1952 shows a preference for one post with the title of 'Senior Chief Engineer' rather than that of Commodore Chief Engineer. Later that year HM Treasury declined to sanction 'due to the National wage restraint policy' and deferred a future response. Following the introduction of more sophisticated ships into the fleet and with the gradual improvement in conditions of service, approval was sanctioned in 1959. Since the first Commodore Chief Engineer RFA was appointed in January 1960 the post holders have been:

David C Leathley OBE RFA	January 1960 /September 1961
Reginald R Darroch OBE RFA	September 1961 /July 1963



J A MacPhearson RFA	March 1964 /May 1966
William E Young RFA	August 1966 /May 1972
Jack R Warne RFA	June 1972 /December 1978
George S Burnett RFA	December 1978 /January 1982
Albert C Hawke RFA	March 1982 /August 1984
Thomas J W Humphrey RFA	August 1984 /September 1995
Alan Forster RFA *	September 1985 /March 1989
Kenneth Lacy RFA	March 1989 /April 1993
Peter W Goodwin RFA	April 1993 /October 1995
Nicholas K Ball RFA **	October 1995 /April 2002
Michael D Norfolk RFA	April 2002 /February 2008
David Preston OBE RFA	February 2008 /March 2014
Ian Schumacker RFA	March 2015 <i>/still in post</i>

* With Navy Board approval from 27 June 1986 the merger occurred of the sea-going appointment of **Commodore Chief Engineer** and the shore-side post of **Chief Technical Superintendent**. As the **Commodore Marine Engineer**

Officer he officially became 'unformed head of the RFA's marine engineers and ceased to be the senior engineering officer afloat. This later became **Commodore (E)**.
** Appointment headed up the RFA Integrated Project Team at MoD Bath, later this became the Afloat Support Team at MoD Abbeywood, Bristol.

4. Honorary Commodore

In December 2006 His Royal Highness The Prince Edward Earl of Wessex KG, KCVO, ADC accepted appointment as Commodore-in-Chief of the RFA. August 2008 seen the announcement of Royal affiliations for the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service and the Maritime Reserves with the appointment of Honorary Commodores-in-Chief. HM The Queen approved the appointment of HRH The Prince Edward Earl of Wessex as Honorary Commodore of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service.



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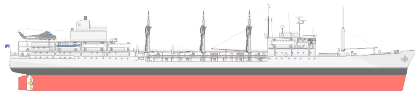
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