



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

Senior appointments of the RFA

Thomas A Adams MBE

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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 they emphasised that it was a courtesy title only.

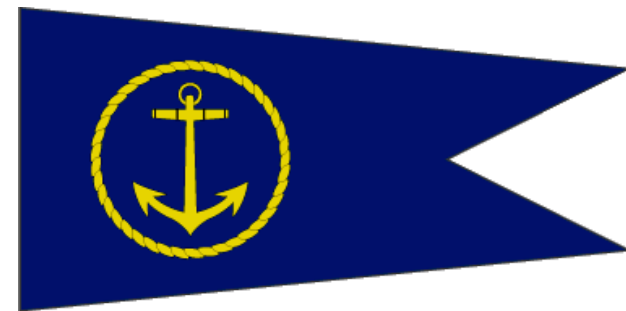
HM The King George VI approved the Commodore's Broad Pennant – a vertical gold Admiralty pattern (without cable) anchor encircled by a gold rope on a navy blue field. His Majesty also approved the Commodore's distinctive lace – one broad (1½-inch) band of gold lace around the cuff with diamond of ½-inch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

Captain S G Kent OBE, who first joined the RFA in 1920, and was then Master of the hospital ship RFA MAINE was selected for appointment as Commodore. He was Master 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.



The Commodore's Broad Pennant

The approved dimensions are length 1½ times the width with the points of the fly ½ width apart.



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.

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.

Commodores 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 Brown 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

George Robson CBE RFA	/December 1972 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

Chief Marine Superintendants RFA

As a continuing part of the post-Second World War recognition of the size, status and demands on the RFA the appointment of a Chief Marine Superintendant (CMS) was approved. As the senior non-seagoing officer this



was interpreted, until its merger with the post of Commodore, as the 'uniformed head of Service'. The CMS post holders have been:

Captain H M Sinclair RFA	February 1951 /November 1958
Captain D J S Newton 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

* With Navy Board approval from 27 June 1986 the merger occurred of the sea-going appointment of Commodore RFA and the shore-side post of Chief Marine Superintendent. Commodore RFA officially became 'uniformed head of the RFA Service' and ceased to be the traditional senior officer afloat.

** 1 April 1993 became the Type Commander RFA and rank changed to Commodore (X) aka COMRFA.

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

Commodore Chief Engineers 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 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 rank of 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 /still in post

Chief Technical Superintendants RFA (CTS)

As part of the post-Second World War reorganisation and peacetime demands on the RFA the appointment of a senior Chief Engineering Officer as the Chief Technical Superintendant (CTS) was approved. Until the merger with Commodore Chief Engineer the CTS post holders had been:

F E Langer OBE RFA	September 1947 /July 1964
H C A Brain CBE RFA	July 1964 /January 1973
D G Edgar RFA	February 1973 /September 1979
A Webb RFA	October 1979 /December 1982
A Forster RFA *	December 1982 /March 1989

* 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 Marine Engineer Officer RFA officially became 'unformed head of the RFA's marine engineers' and ceased to be the traditional senior officer afloat. This latter 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.



Honorary Commodore

In December 2006 His Royal Highness Prince Edward The 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 Maritime Reserves with the appointment of Honorary Commodores-in-Chief. HM The Queen approved the appointment of HRH The Earl of Wessex as Honorary Commodore of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service.

Footnote

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 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. As a result in December 1991 the Navy Board approved the transfer of command from CFS to Commander-in-Chief Fleet (CINCFLEET) and incorporation into the Type Commander organisation under the Commodore RFA (COMRFA).

This reorganisation was to see what was a Merchant Navy shipping fleet (previously a member of the National Maritime Board, a member of the Chamber of Shipping and one of the largest employers of UK Seafarers) integrate into the UK's Naval Service command structure.

On 1st April 1993, at a ceremony in Portsmouth onboard the 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, except for the landing ships because this had long been delegated to the MoD(Army).

This change of the status of the Commodore to that of a Type Commander 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.

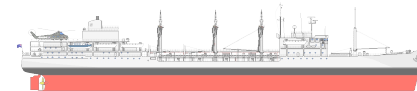
This convergence with the Navy was to see the dropping of traditional Merchant Navy management language, such as, 'Marine Superintendent'. COMRFA was now to be ably assisted by Chief Staff Officers (CSOs), specialists heading divisions that dovetailed into CINCFLEET's administration. For example, Captain(X) 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.**



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