

## Malcolm Simpson 'Larning'

Eight 'o' clock in the morning, not much happening, two fishing boats approaching the beach, the radio scanning twenty channels. Tees Pilots giving instructions to foreign Masters approaching the Fairway Buoy, in well modulated English. The Tyne Tees Coastguards come on giving navigational warnings about salmon fishing between Holy Island and the Humber. A lady with a lovely Tyneside accent. Then two voices in the distance, sounds like German to me, I have a good ear for language. Wait a minute, I recognise some words, then the other speaker comes on. They are speaking Geordie, but not the Tyneside with which I am familiar. Must be from one of the fishing villages further north.

Funny, it brought back many memories from when I was young and how I learned 'Geordie'.

I had an elderly aunt from north of the river who spoke rather quickly and was a whiz at cards. She visited on a fairly frequent basis but I hardly understood a word she said. I smiled, nodded my head where I thought appropriate and lost another half penny at 'Newmarket'.

Eventually I set off to join my first ship at Smith's Dock, North Shields wearing my brand new brass bounders outfit. It was a nightmare, but I won't go into that. There were a few relieving people on board, no crew, everything being taken care of by the shore side riggers. Soon the sailing staff began to arrive - the Master didn't look like a Shipmaster to me. More a Bank Manager, had definite views of the appearance of Shipmasters. The Mate joined, you could say my boss. He was a Welshman, a very broad accented Welshman who called me Geordie for some unknown reason. But that was about the only word that I ever understood him to utter.

The day before sailing, we all presented ourselves at the Shipping Office and a full crew engaged. Articles signed, allotments arranged, advances for new gear duly consigned over the bar counter of "The Jungle" i.e. "Northumberland Arms" and a jolly time was had by all.

The next day was just a blur. Tugs made fast, lines gone, Pilot whistling, telegraph ringing and out through the Tyne Piers for a voyage of about ten months with a full Geordie crowd. Arriving home for leave, blackened by the Sun, many lessons learned. Here I was full of it - a rough - toughy sailor boy using rough - toughy sailor boy language.

My father was still alive then, a Master Mariner who knew the lingo well. "Don't talk like that in this house or ever in front of your mother". That was the end of that although I don't think poor mother had understood a word.

My elderly aunt called to see us, I could understand every word and we got on famously but she still whacked me at cards. Really I had not learned Geordie, it had just been absorbed through the Med, down the Red Sea, Indian Ocean, Atlantic, Baltic Fogs, et al.

M.J.S.

SSG Coastwatch Redcar