



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

Roy Cruttenden interviewed by Mary Ingoldby 29th May 2013 at the Travellers Club, London

Track 1

Introduction: first commissioned in the Royal Engineers in 1944; posted to the airborne division; then posted to Italy - en route anchored in the Bay of Gibraltar. Remembers all night long charges being dropped around the troop ship to deter the frogmen from Algeciras; took up anchor and travelled to Italy via the north coast of Africa and landed in Italy to join the 8th army.

Qualified as a civil engineer after the war and joined the Admiralty; worked in The Admiralty Dockyards; posted to Devonport and later on to Admiralty HQ in London; then to Gibraltar in 1958 Travelled to Gibraltar with his family.

Family. RC's Father had his own building firm in Brighton and was in the Sussex regiment in WW1; posted to Ireland and never got to France. At the beginning of WW2 he volunteered for the army again and he worked for bomb disposal in London – defused quite a lot of bombs, he would bring home a fuse to show us.

RC born in 1925, never knew his mother who died when he was 2 years old; got on very well with his step mother and had a sister who was seven years older than him.

Born and brought up in Brighton; still lives there, always been attached to Brighton.

RC speaks about being interviewed for The Admiralty (?) he was asked why he hadn't applied to go into The Royal Engineers, he felt that he didn't agree with service people mixing with civilians in the same department, was chosen to go to The Admiralty

MI: Why did you feel so strongly?

My father was a garrison engineer during the war as a uniform person but most of his departments were civilians and I don't think they mixed at all well

MI: Is that what drew you to civil engineering, your father?

Yes

MI: What was the training?

RC had a year at Cambridge before joining the army; after demob in 1947 he applied to return to Cambridge to finish his degree, he was in his 20s, they wanted him to wait a year; he didn't want to wait so went to the local technical college to take the exams and passed

MI: And what part of civil engineering were you interested in?

Maritime, docks and harbours and sea defences that's why I joined The Admiralty

The admiralty was a good move, sea defence and jetty work all the time, had to be a qualified diver so took exams, learned in Chatham in the dockyard – it was very dark and gloomy there.

Track 2

1958 - 1962

Went out to Gibraltar in a civilian ship in 1958, family came out, young children one 3 and one a baby – family lived in the hotel for a while until they were allocated married quarters

MI: Did you know what you were going to build?

Yes because I worked on the design of it before I left for Gib

MI: Tell me about the concept for the oil depot?

It was a Nato project, the biggest underground oil depot in the whole world. It consisted of five or so long big tunnels, divided up to deal with different types of oil. From the tunnels the oil was by pipe line down to no3 jetty on North Mole which was going to be the tanker depot. Originally the design was to be lined with concrete but they decided that with the hot oil the concrete wasn't sufficient to retain the oil they would have leaks, so they decided later on to steel line the chambers. We had to do a pre design test in the harbour at Dover to check whether the steel linings were suitable. The steel linings had to be pre stressed to avoid buckling in the hot oil. We successful checked it in Dover and then the whole thing was done with steel linings on a 40 foot flat roof because the rock was so good that it would hold up. The only trouble was during the tunnelling we hit some bad rock; the bad rock, it couldn't stand up and had to be steel lined both on the ceiling and the sides, so tunnelled through that until we came to good rock again.

MI: Different type of rock in Dover and Gib?

It's the same its limestone, it wasn't the rock in Dover that was interesting to us it was the steel linings.

MI: Why did it have to be underground?

No room in Gib to put it anywhere else

MI: Hidden?

RC: To some extent – it was bomb proof

MI: The oil was brought in and taken out again

RC: It was to re fuel ships – no direct pipeline, it came in by tanker

MI: Was it for all sorts of ships?

RC: No it was a Nato design for the military – not for civilian, today probably it is for civilian use. The depot is still there and still being used today, operated by Shell now; larger than any of the Royal Engineers tunnels in Gib. The excavation from the tunnels was used to extend the runway at the airport

MI: Is there more underneath than on top in Gib?

RC: Definitely a maze of tunnels

MI: Was it secret?

RC: It was secret – in The Admiralty on the design everything was secret – it was after the war but during the cold war

MI speaks about Gib's strategic position

RC: Gibraltar controls the Mediterranean

MI: Do you think that there was espionage?

RC: Yes, it was inevitable that people would find out as the whole work force was Spanish, they came across the border every day. As did all the workers in the dockyard itself, they were all Spanish

MI: Why no Gibraltarians?

RC: Total population only about 20 thousand so they were outnumbered by people working in dockyard and surrounding works

MI: You'd think there would be some?

RC: We had a drawing office on the site with Gibraltarian draftsmen and some of the supervisors were Gibraltarian. Anecdote about being in the office at the edge of the tunnels on the face of the rock, the north lot of apes came into his office to visit!

RC: Generally the Gibraltarians were office worker, Spanish manual labour

Track 3

MI: Was it dangerous?

RC: Oh yes – foremen specially trained to supervise welding, all welding by British people, manual work and drilling done by the Spanish

MI: How long did it take?

RC: Three years – while we were working on it we extending no 3 jetty on the North Mole to take tankers, the water wasn't deep enough so it had to be dredged. We hit rock underneath the sea which the dredger couldn't cope with it so we had to drill and blast the sea bed – drilling and blasting with Spanish and UK people.

RC often went down in the diving bell to supervise the work.

MI: When you did that work, did you have to take the debris up and get rid of it?

RC: Yes either the dredger would take it up or we had a separate grab dredger to keep the dredging clear and get rid of the rock from the blasting. The harbour wasn't as deep as one would want.

MI: When you were working – health and safety – any accidents?

RC: I can't recall any accidents, doing some tunnelling later on in my second tour, one of the men decided to show off and put the charge in which went off before it should have done and it blew his fingers off. But that's the only accident that I know of in the tunnelling and nothing as far as I know caused an accident in the Kings Lines..

MI: overall area?

RC: The actual path of the tunnel goes all the way from the north face of the rock; there's a tunnel on the north face of the rock which was put in when they had a rock fall and closed the road to eastern beach - the tunnels from the Kings Lines go right the way through to that tunnel that was built then, can't tell you the exact acreage – colossal!

MI: Workforce just civilian?

RC: No uniformed people at all, all civilians, we had a UK contractor – we had to report to The Admiralty every month

MI: Did they come and have a look?

RC: Well they sent me there. They took reports – we had to report on the finances all the time, it was quite a background of people in the admiralty itself that looked after the job, working back in London

MI: How did you feel as it was progressing?

RC: It was very very interesting to see the thing that one had designed come to fruition. This was number one.

MI: it must have taken a long time

RC: Not all that while, we did a certain numbers of tests on the rock and things to see that the rock would hold up

MI: It would have all been done on paper and drawings?

RC: I think the design would still be the same. I don't think you would use computers very much on a design of that

MI: Tell me about what happened when you finished, or was it secret?

RC: Unfortunately it leaked, one of the chambers leaked so we had to empty it which was a bad thing entirely, but it was a small chamber and when we did the testing of the lining we found the leak was coming from one of the brackets that had been welded on to assist the actually welding of the lining and the bracket had been cut off to avoid it being a nuisance and it had caused a hole, a minor thing but quite a job to find it – we empty the thing in stages to see what level the leak was.

MI: How much volume?

RC: A tanker load - Part of the mishaps of a job that size

MI: Then what?

RC: Then it went ahead and it was filled by tankers coming into number 3 jetty and pumping the oil out from 3 jetty.

Track 4

1966-69

The Com-Cen.

RC: The reason I went out there the second time was to build a jetty on the east side of the rock, unfortunately at some stage ammunition ships docked at the detached mole and then by brought the ammunition into the dockyard by barge; transported by lorry through the town to the ammunition depots which were underground. Unfortunately at one stage they had an explosion which did damage so the thought was that they should avoid the transporting of ammunition through the town by taking it from the ammunition ship on the detached mole round by lighter (barge type boat?) round the point of the rock and docking on the east side and then taking the ammunition up through a tunnel to the ammunition tunnels above, so idea was to build a jetty on the east side of the rock, but basically I don't think it has ever been used – too dangerous for the lighters to go round the point with the tides, so fortunately they haven't had another explosion, but there was a jetty which I built there which was no use at all

MI: diving work?

RC: The design of the jetty was with steel piles anchored into the rock, the rock was close to the seabed, had to drill and blast the rock to place the piles, quite a lot of work for divers.

MI: What was the diving like?

RC: You could see well, it was nice and clear, but when the Levanta is blowing the sea is rough, one day a very bad blow whilst still constructing the jetty and quite a lot of the piles got washed over side and we had to evacuate the whole thing whilst the storm blew out. Luckily the jetty work under the sea wasn't affected but we had quite a lot of materials were on the sea bed so we had to grab them and bring them up and start all over again

MI: How many of you?

RC: A half a dozen divers permanently with one Brit in charge of the diving; and as I was the engineer used to dive when it was necessary – it was good thing to dive I got half a pays days extra every time I dived!

MI: How long could they stay down?

RC: All morning – they would be down, it depends on the drilling and the blowing, they would come up while explosive were blowing under water – normally would drill and blast for a whole morning and rest for the afternoon

MI: Was it regarded as an elite job?

RC: They were better paid – they were ordinary workmen who had qualified for diving, The Admiralty had civilian divers in all their dockyards.

MI asks about Buster Crab?

RC: As far as I know Buster Crab wasn't a helmet diver, he was scuba diver type – so in order to work you had the helmet, and big boots to hold you down and big weights to hold you down – he was a scuba diver. They would be like the people from Algeciras when the troop ship was in the bay

MI talks about buster crab and Venice

RC that's surprising because I was in Venice at the end of the war and Venice had been declared an open city so no troops no German troops no British troops anything except for leave, there was no fighting in Venice and I don't think Venice was ever mined. RC very surprised in any mines in Venice.

The Com-Cen (underground communications centre)

RC: After the war the naval commander on Gibraltar was also the Nato commander for the eastern Atlantic, so he had two roles he was in charge of the dockyard and The Admiralty facilities and was also a Nato commander; and he used to do it from the office in the dockyard. But later on they thought it would be better to have an underground depot for the Com-Cen so he could operate for his Nato services underground. At that stage there was already a tunnel from the dockyard through to the east side, and off that tunnel was a smaller chamber which was used by the Gibraltarians for their main telephone base, so it was decided that near that base we would do another chamber to take all the people that were necessary to man the Nato HQ so that was the Com-Cen. And that was channelling two or three chambers - not the radio equipment that was already on north front by the 600 foot masts that were there, that was underground there as well and we also did some tunnelling there.

For the Com-Cen the tunnelling was fairly straight forward; we took most of the rock from there into the infill of the jetty on the Eastside. The one problem with the Com-Cen was we hit an underground lake and it was decided to change the design of the Com-Cen so we didn't interfere with the underground lake which was fresh water.

MI: Had nobody found it before – you were the first ones?

RC: Yes

MI: Were the caves beautiful because it was limestone?

RC speaks about another set of caves where there is a viewing platform, shows are held in these caves; and another set of tunnels that are there naturally that have not been blown by us or the engineers which are closed off to the public.

MI: An Enormous project?

RC: Nothing like the oil depot.

MI: Did you design it?

RC: Yes

MI: How long did it take to build?

RC: Tunnelling took about year, it was lined with concrete blocks and a roof put on – it has its entrance off the east west tunnel in Gibraltar.

MI: Nato still a young organisation had two huge projects in Gib?

RC: The British part of Nato decided that this was necessary, British took the decision and Nato took it as part of their finance.

MI: speaks about James Bonds films at the time, were they influenced by these underground projects?

RC: I doubt if they knew about it, quite honestly, it was kept very quiet.

MI: The Spanish were coming in every day – did they have to sign The Official secrets act?

RC: I think probably they were vetted by security people before they were engaged.

MI: Because Gib so small – wouldn't people wonder what was going on?

RC: They must have known from the fact that the pipelines were going through part of the town to the jetty – they wouldn't have know the actually design and quantities but they knew the Kings Lines was an oil fuel depot.

MI: You weren't aware of any espionage?

RC: No

MI: *Opening of the projects?*

RC: ***It just opened; there was no fuss about it. The First Lord of the Admiralty visited Gib while I was there and he came to see but there was no discussions and no publicity about his visit at all***

MI: *How did you feel when it was finished?*

RC: I went to work in the dockyard then before coming home to work on another project that was separate from Gib – later on when I returned to Gib to do the Com-Cen and the jetty; I also built the desalination works that were on the East side – that was another Nato project.

Track 5

MI: ***When you go back to you want to look around?***

RC speaks about returned to Gib (in the 70s/80s?) with his son Tim; they were given permission by Naval Intelligence to go and have a look at The Kings Lines.

MI: *What was it like in Gibraltar when you were working there?*

RC: ***Different, I don't want to go back to Gibraltar now because when I was there the social life with all the services was absolutely fantastic. almost every night. Social life was good, the schools were good; very enjoyable place to be; now changed entirely. Don't think it is the same. Look back with nostalgia but not interested in travelling back.***

The house where they lived

RC: The rumour goes although I think it has been disproved that Nelson after he died was brought to Rosia Bay, and his body was taken ashore and embalmed in rum and laid on the table of the house I occupied at 4 Rosia parade but I think it has been disproved because they reckon that Nelson was never taken ashore.

RC: In 1958 had just competed in the Olympics in 1956 in Melbourne and was nearing the end of international career (had been 10 years as an athlete) RC decided he wanted to compete in The Commonwealth Games in Cardiff in 1958 – and was selected.

In order to do some training in Gib, there was no long jump pit so I made my own pit at the NOP (Naval Officers Pavilion) which was a hockey pitch and tennis courts – so I could trained for the games, the best of my knowledge long jump pit is still there.....I was a complete amateur – all international athletes were amateur. I worked during the day and trained at night and that work went on for ten years

RC: My wife was a PE teacher and gave up teaching in Gib and had children, she organised the hockey for The Wrens and had a team for hockey at the NOP ground and she used to play and used to play tennis in the tournaments

MI: *Relationship between the military/British and Gibraltarians?*

RC: ***We weren't anti-civilians – I was very friendly with the chief engineers of The Colonial Government and the City Council - always invited to cocktail parties (Gibraltarians). We did mix with them as far as possible, but the social life was largely service.***

RC: ***Not anti- Gibraltarian, not in the slightest got on with them as well as we could – we were part of the Gibraltarian colony when we were there.....The best part of it was the Gibraltarians spoke English, between themselves so relationship simpler than in other British colonies.***

MI: *Gibraltarian identity?*

The Spanish have alienated themselves by closing the frontier and being awkward about it – can't blame the Gibraltarians for disliking the Spanish – imagine work force today is still Spanish – remember going to Algeciras and La Linea and the garages were full of motorbikes used by the Spanish who came over to Gib every day to work – a lot of alienated people working in Gib coming across every day

We had a maid in Gib all the time, she was Spanish, and the second time we went she came back to work for us again, she married a Gibraltarian.

MI: *When you first went there, fairly soon after WWII– what did it look like?*

RC: ***It was completely normal, when we first went there we stayed in a hotel on Main Street and then got a lease on a civilian flat very close to Main Street before we got an Admiralty Hiring and stayed in the town for many months, we had parties there***

MI: *Was it really good fun?*

RC: ***Yes, it was totally different from The Admiralty that I knew in the UK. RC worked out in Pinner in an old emergency army hospital. The Mechanical Engineering side was down in Bath, had to travel down to see them now and again and they had to travel up to us to liaise with the designs we were doing***

MI: *What is your image of Gib when you think about it?*

RC: ***Cheap liquor! Brandy was very cheap about 10 shillings a bottle, the main drink was horses neck, brandy and ginger ale – it was probably smuggled across the border, whisky was only a £1 a bottle, very cheap, you could have a party very***

cheaply; there were Gibraltarians who specialised in organising parties, sorting out the party and the tapas.

MI: Fierce drinking?

RC: I was teetotal in those days – Fundador – the brandy.

Track 6

Athletic Career

RC: When I was at school I was good at sports, mainly sprinters, did the quarter mile as well as the long jump. Did running for the army in competitions, when I was out of the army and went to college again, took up playing soccer for my old school team in the winter and in the summer I did athletics with the local Sussex Athletic Team. Not quite good enough at the quarter mile but doing well at the long jump so they suggested that I go to international meetings.

Captain of Sussex athletic team inter county meetings at White City in 1950. from 1950 onwards competed in the Three Ace's Championships and won and selected for both GB and England; GB used to tour the continent to play two or three matches – toured continent in the summer – by that time I gave up football as was getting injured and that was no good for athletics – during the summer wife got no holiday as was away every weekend competing.

Selected for European in Switzerland, competed in Bern, my wife came out by car and met me and we toured home; also selected for the Olympic Games in Melbourne in 1956 got into the final; and then selected for the Commonwealth against the USA in Sydney at the end of the Olympics and I broke the English native record which was my best jump ever in Sydney Australia.

Now they are professional - I was a pure amateur did it in the evenings at weekends I didn't have a coach at all I did it all by myself.

I broke my own record two or three times- I competed in most of the countries in Europe; France Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Germany.

When we went to Berlin to compete against Germany in 1952 very early 50s the main streets in Berlin were still covered in debris from the bombing.

MI: What was the atmosphere like?

RC: Very friendly, when I was in the army during the war, at the end of the war in Italy in a seaside resort near Trieste and the whole of the beach had been mined by the Germans to stop landings; and there were two German workers who had been left behind by the German retreating army and had got very interested in local girls and didn't want to leave; we didn't hand them over as POWs, we employed them to clear the mines. We fenced it off and that was it – these Germans were very

good at clearing mines, some were anti personnel mines, on a stick with a mine at the top with a trip wire; and they decided to show off one day how these trip wire works, so they pulled the trip wire and unfortunately they hadn't checked what the other end of the trip wire was and there was another mine on the other end and that went off and it severely injured the German worker and we had to take him off to hospital.

Some of the de mobbed soldiers stayed on to work as civilians to teach the locals how to do mine clearance, but the army washed their hands of it.

RC speaks about Trieste after the war, working on claims and hirings; the role of the British, Italians and the partisans from Yugoslavia.