

An Introduction to a **A British Sailor's Odyssey**

My comedic skills first emerged in public when I wrote and performed in a series of Monty Pythonesque comedic sketches in English village halls during the 1977 Queen's 25th Silver Jubilee celebrations. If you can make the aged laugh with daytime comedy, you can just about nail any audience with anything humorous.

Although inevitably Royal Navy-oriented as I was in the Navy from 1964-1980, this book is so much more than just a series of what us mariners call '**sea stories**' as we sit around skillfully and persuasively over-embellishing English 'rattling good yarns'. With my 32 UK years and my 43 US years, I am pretty fluent in American and English, with an ability to switch back and forth between. In my books, any confusion between one language over another is reduced by my using **Brit speak/spelling in the first Book 1 and US speak/spelling in Book 2.**

The Book Journey

I will not be taking my readers on a classic, typical, chronological, autobiographical journey such as *"I was born in a semi-detached house in Stratford, East London to a mixed race Muslim-Catholic family. Dad was a plumber always sporting a visible 'crack' and Mum was a topless dancer prancing around in a working men's club to a loyal clientele stuffing bank notes in her g string. My twin sisters both got married at 16 to twin coal miners from Aberystwyth. I got my big break aged 17 when I was spotted performing as the rear end of a Christmas pantomime ('show') horse."*

I am going to take my readers on an odyssey which includes growing up in Great Britain's most famous naval port, Portsmouth; thence to the Royal Navy, Cambridge University, Washington DC, Boeing St. Louis (Missouri), and Richmond, Virginia before I dropped anchor in Jacksonville, Florida. En route, I visited 60 countries, many on business - sojourns which resulted in amusing international experiences.

My book is also a tribute to my long-term friends, who gave me such valuable book input and review. **I need to thank you readers for buying my book. I hope you have as much fun reading it as I did writing it.** I can never understand how I can remember all this long-ago stuff when I cannot find my phone, keys, or wallet. Put this on your UK night table (US 'night stand') or in your British *loo/WC/smallest room in the house/khazi/outhouse/latrine/privy* or in your *American* restroom/ bathroom/crapper/facility/head/john.

FYI 'John' is also a prostitute's (hooker's) client. How did that happen?

Nice Comments

A great US Army friend wrote this:

Martin, you have written a jewel of a book.

*I have laughed myself silly while reading this very entertaining account of your life in the Royal Navy and your very English upbringing. **Your book will appeal to everyone who has served in the military regardless of branch of service or nation.***

It is a humorous account of the life of a young man in the RN that we all can relate to. As a former U.S. Army aviator. I can say this book relates well to the many humorous adventures and misadventures that all who have served in the military will thoroughly enjoy.

You write in a charming and effortless style that is all the more endearing as you are writing about your life. A great read that you cannot put down.

A US Air Force friend wrote this:

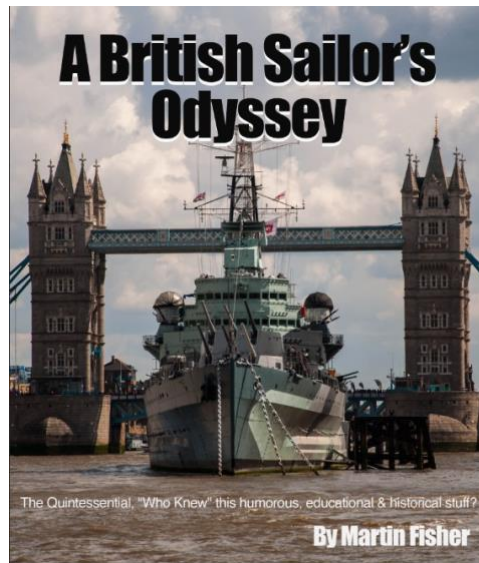
“You have a great ability to make your reader feel as though he was there with you. Some of your stories were so hilarious I found myself laughing out loud and felt as though you and I were recounting events while you told me your story over an adult beverage”.

Icons R Us

Before I start

The City of London had a challenge – build a bridge downstream of London Bridge without disrupting River Thames traffic. Tower Bridge, completed in 1894 after eight years to a design selected from 60 offerings, is the largest ‘bascule’ bridge (French for ‘seesaw’ – how do the French get their language adopted when most of us hate snails) in the world. The huge engines raise the bascules to maximum elevation of 86% in 60 seconds. The Queen and James Bond came through the bridge at the amazing opening of the 2012 Olympic Games.

Why did I choose the World War II **six-inch gun cruiser HMS Belfast** for the cover of my book - photographed against a backdrop of the **mighty Tower Bridge**? The picture is a fabulous blend of two top 10 iconic historic British images.



I think my cover picture is seriously emotionally stirring. I just love it. The black and white view below looks so ethereal and good too.

HMS Belfast is the only World War II warship still in the UK (now called **His (vice Her) Majesty's** Ship with Charles ascension.) Belfast had a glittering WW II career culminating in assisting the 14-inch gun HMS Duke of York in the 1944 sinking of the 11-inch gun Scharnhorst, the last major German warship left. The British "**destroy the entire German fleet**" maxim started with the '**against all odds**' inexplicable scuttling of the 11-inch gun German pocket battleship, the Graf Spee, off Argentina's Montevideo River Plate.

Three British cruisers – Exeter, Ajax, and Achilles – totally outmatched and outgunned by the Graf Spee, but brilliantly deployed, had inflicted enough damage from their relatively puny 8-inch and 6-inch guns that they drove the Graf Spee into port and were waiting outside the port to see what would happen. The Graf Spee Captain Langsdorff convinced himself a big British fleet was outside waiting for him so he gave the order to scuttled his ship and the Captain shot himself.



A propos of nothingthe US Navy has 13 capital ships on display - all four awesome USS Iowa class World War II battleships (Iowa in California, Missouri in Hawaii, New Jersey in Camden, NJ, and Wisconsin in Norfolk), and four older USS battleships (Alabama, Massachusetts, North

Carolina, Texas); and five aircraft carriers - USS Hornet, Intrepid, Lexington, Midway, and Yorktown.

Back to me I have been incredibly fortunate to have had four careers, become a dual UK/US citizenship, learned the American language to the point of being fluent, been a serious business globe-trotter, with really diverse experiences, developed a pretty sharp humour and acerbic observations of history and the world – ah oh, written two commercial books.

Authoring this book – especially the funny, less respectful, parts – is to quote my former Royal Navy lords and masters: *“Exhibiting conduct prejudicial to good order and naval discipline, as deemed by Their Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty”*. You just cannot beat that upscale dialog! I decided I could get away with showing slightly irreverent ‘conduct’ in my book. After all, what could they possibly do to me? **Excommunicate me to the beach resort in St Helena in the middle of the Atlantic, like they did Napoleon?**

I am one of the very few who have been to the five miles by 10 miles island of St Helena. Our one night stop in a frigate was 23 hours too long. No wonder Napoleon died there in six years. I hear they banned topless swimming recently but then, as they had no beach or any swimsuit shop, it was an easy sell.

Oh before I forget.....

This book covers an 82 year period ending with my leaving UK in 1978. ‘A British Sailor’s Odyssey’ is **spelt** in English, one of my two primary languages. In English, brackets (known in America as ‘parentheses’ or ‘parens’), there are American English explanations to help Americans.

I am writing – and spelling – Book 2 “The Americanization of a Royal Naval Officer” in American English with some English English explanations. Suitably confused? Excellent. I don’t want many joining my UK-US bilingual club. As a club member, when you try to ascend to heaven, you will find you cannot get into the Heaven Club Annexe because they will not make porridge (‘oatmeal’) just for one.

To give you a sense of my humourous style, I will start off with a few vignettes, whose humour is indicative of the rest of the book.

Vignette 1 Best Pen Pals: Queen Elizabeth II and Martin Fisher

The Queen valued me becoming a Naval Officer so highly, that, as Commander in Chief, she personally signed in real ink not that ‘biro’ (US ‘ball point’) rubbish, my 1966 officer commission with all that gorgeous flowery script she and Her Majesty’s Stationery Office do so well. Its beautiful font is framed in my office along with 1800s recruiting posters and a great picture of the Falklands War task force.

Only one issue with my commission. Back in the sixties, the Queen did not go to WH Smiths ('Staples') to buy that 70 year 'no fading' ink, so I can barely read her badly faded signature now.

Fast forward from my joining the Navy in 1964, I decided to resign my commission and emigrate to the USA in December 1980. I felt I had to write a nice formal letter to the Queen in similarly flowery Gucci prose that she used in her commission to me. I felt I owed it to her to tell her how sad I was about resigning my officer's commission (I decided not to say 'it was because I had a better offer in a warmer country, with more space, cheaper housing, and better paying jobs').

As I wrote to her personally, I am almost certain she opened my letter and gasped "**Oh my God (OMG), Martin Fisher is leaving my Navy. What on earth will we do, Captain?**" as she turned to her aide, Naval Captain Turner. "PS. It makes it even harder for me because my two naval officer sons were nowhere close to Martin's calibre ('could not carry his books')." Captain Turner, obsequiously standing by her desk, probably said "I know your Majesty. It is absolutely tragic. Martin was a one of kind officer. In 1965, we nearly transferred him to the Italian Navy to greatly advance our Mediterranean Strategy. Things will never be the same. Your Majesty, please use my handkerchief".

Adjunct 0.5 of a vignette - Another "Queen" story This time not QE II but Bohemian Rhapsody's Queen: Freddie Mercury

"I hate it when people compare Freddie Mercury to God. I mean, he's great and all, but he's no Freddie Mercury."

Vignette 2 Unplanned Pregnancy is so hard

I was actually pretty lucky to be born at all. I was 17 when my 'always tell absolutely all/no secrets' Mum ('Mom') suddenly said 'Martin, I feel it is time to let you know that you were the **third child in our two-child family'. Huh?** Mum then told me I was born as the result of a failure of the London Rubber Company. To this day, it makes me feel so special.

I fought back by tracking my father's condom use, when I found out where he kept them in his sock drawer (not very frequent in use I might add). I thought about putting a hole in one of his condoms – what goes around comes around – but they could not afford three let alone four children.

Vignette 3 Wedding Night Strategy Mystery

The night before my sister, Lynne's, first wedding, our Mum counselled her about the lovemaking 'strategy' on her wedding night. Mum said "**Remember, you always need to keep a little bit of mystery back**". My sister never figured out what was the mystery she needed to

keep back for the next 30 years. I am sure her two divorced husbands would have wanted in on that secret. The only secret my Mum ever kept.

Vignette 4 (This is my favourite) The Facts of Life

"**The Birds and the Bees**" is an English-language idiomatic expression and euphemism that refers to explaining simplistically relationships/intercourse to one's children. I thought the "Facts of Life" were a more adult and sophisticated way of explaining the "Birds and the Bees". No one actually used either phrase with me so why do I have these two books both on the Best Seller lists for so long?

In 1961, aged 15, I was playing table soccer on the dining room table, when my father summoned me into the family room to tell me "**The Facts of Life**". Drum roll. "Oh God" I am thinking. "**This is going to be absolutely excruciating**" and it was. My father was so embarrassing. It then became such fun torturing him by pretending ignorance to make him explain more. **His lead phrase to which he frequently returned was "and the old member (he used another word than member but this is not an R rated book) springs up"**. Thank God he did not have graphics to support his presentation. Now that would be cause for throwing up.

I had hoped he was going to give me an aide memoire reminder of the Facts in the form of maybe a leather booklet, with maybe 6-10 of the really Big Facts of Life spelled out with graphic drawings – sort of the difference makers. (The 'old member springing up' revealed secret had to be no. 1 or 2, it was so important). If you were not told in advance, how would you know later when the action started?

I am thinking that, if this was my father's best stuff, my Mum might again have been mixing up "**the lie back and think of England**" strategy with a dash of "**keeping a little bit of mystery back**" tactics. The possibilities are endless. I love it.`

I assume each sex had their own closely guarded, never to be released, set of Facts of Life – maybe it had a 'brackets' ('parens') "M" or "F" on the blue or pink leather cover. If us guys could get hold of the Facts of Life (Female) booklet, **I am thinking we could clean up with the opposite sex. Now I would even pay extra to get Amazon Prime to send me quality 3D graphics of the female naughty bits (NBs) complete with labels, so I can put them in my booklet for extra credit.**

It is so sad that I am probably the last of the Fisher line ever to get **The Facts of Life** lesson. The secrets will be lost forever when I die. Should I put them in my will? If there had been a leather-bound booklet available, I could have educated my son with the booklet but he seemed to know most of the Facts already, even "**the old member springs up**" but he used different language.

Vignette 5 Leaded or Unleaded?

In the US in 1986, we had leaded and unleaded gas (petrol) available in well-marked pumps. Leaded was being phased out as not ecological. The size of the car filling hole is different for the

two types of gas. The leaded petrol ('gas') nozzle is deliberately too big for the unleaded car tank filling hole so there can never be a mistaken fueling the wrong stuff. Sure.

When my son turned 16 and had been driving for four months in Virginia, I asked if he knew what made the car run. Rob is a bright kid – he immediately responded "Petrol (Gas)". So I decided to take this one step at a time. **"Do you know where you find petrol?"** More smarts **"A Petrol (gas) station"**. This is going well. "I think it is time for you to go to the petrol station 1 mile away and give them your greenbacks in exchange for petrol so that you can still drive".

Well over an hour passes. He returns. **"I have had a hell of a time. The petrol (gas) pump filler nozzle would not go into the (smaller unleaded size) car filling circle."** But he is a smart kid. "So I figured out how to do it. I pumped a pint at a time into the fuel well. Then I used my finger to push aside the metal circular plate at the bottom of the fuel well, and let one pint drain in at a time. I only got two gallons in before I got really fed up."

And now for the best bit.

Me "Did you think of asking anyone at the garage for help?"

"Dad, I did not want anybody to think I was stupid". Very good point – who could possibly think that?

Vignette 6 Hitting a Police Car is a tough 'get off a ticket' even at Christmas

On the last day of work before the 1992 December holiday shut down at the McDonnell Douglas, St Louis missile factory, workaholic Martin is the last one out the door. I am acutely conscious I am now in big trouble back home.

So I am going really fast down Interstate I-370. As I come to drive up the slope to merge onto I-270, St Louis police's finest flashes my little Honda CRX two-seater with manual transmission. I have had a couple of tickets before in St. Louis but you go to a lawyer and he fixes the tickets with a charitable donation. Besides it is Christmas, who is going to ticket me?

Nevertheless, I am parked on a slope and very unhappy. I am sitting there with my head in my hands not believing my bad luck. Suddenly, there is a thump. I have forgotten to put on the hand ('parking') brake in my angst and I have rolled back down the slope into the police car. This must be a first for St Louis finest. So I get out and wordlessly, he gets out his torch ('flashlight') and shines it up and down near my rear fender ('bumper') and his front fender now together as one, assessing damage. Fortunately, there is no damage as my car is really light.

I had been feeling good about getting off with a warning – it being Christmas and all that. Now I am thinking..... probably not a winning tactic running into the arresting officer's car and sure enough it was not a win. Now I am even later home and a lot poorer.

- ❖ Lawyers believe a person is innocent until proven broke.
- ❖ Home cooking. Where many a man thinks his wife is.
- ❖ The first piece of luggage on the carousel never belongs to anyone.
- ❖ The only reason they say 'Women and children first' is to test the strength of the lifeboats.
- ❖ When a man opens a car door for his wife, it's either a new car or a new wife.
- ❖ In hotel rooms I worry. I can't be the only guy who sits on the furniture naked.

To my readers – enjoy - this is a unique journey worth going on with me. Book 2 – The Americanization of a Royal Naval Officer – is 43 years converting from an upscale English gentleman to a damn Yankee.

Let me end this Introduction by giving you an insight to the arcane world of Military Book Publications.

Before I decided to Amazon self-publish, I had discussions with two UK and one US military book specialists – thinking, naively, that **my Royal Navy stuff would find a landing**. How dumb was I? There was some initial heavy dating and the UK specialists both made me offers but then they reneged on their offers.

Breaking good faith must be a common publisher thing - part of the autocratic master-slave relationship publishers seem to like with prospective 'naïve' first-time authors. I include below one of the email rejections from Publisher X. I hope you find it as illogical and as ridiculous as I did. I just wish I had never given these autocratic organisations an ounce of my time.

Publisher X Rejection Rationale - I can see funny in anything. There is a lot here.

*"I've reviewed the material you sent me, and my honest opinion is that **neither of your book projects is a good fit for us**".*

*"Publisher X is **not an innovative publisher**, and **your books are too unorthodox for us**. We have a tried-and-true publishing formula that has worked well for us for decades. While **you have led an interesting life and have some humorous stories to tell** (WOW I DO – I AM SURPRISED?), the **memoirs we publish usually involve high-ranking officers with long, accomplished military careers in the U.S. Armed Forces or are US Medal of Honor winners**". **Note:** AS I DID NOT WIN THE MEDAL OF HONOR NOR ATTAIN GENERAL RANK, I AM A COMPLETE NOTHING REALLY WHO NEEDS TO BE PUT IN HIS PLACE.*

*The Vietnam chapter from your second book is well done, but it is also **outside the norm for us. We don't publish takes on Vietnam or other military history topics written by non-academics**". UNBELIEVABLE*

ARROGANCE. *It is also unusual for a memoir to **include a chapter on a conflict the writer wasn't personally involved in***. I SHOULD HAVE ASKED FOR A LEAVE OF ABSENCE FROM THE RN SO I COULD HAVE FOUGHT VALIANTLY IN VIETNAM FOR THE USA.

To summarize Publisher X's rejection of my books on six grounds:

1. ***"Too unorthodox"*** **RESPONSE:** UNORTHODOX AND INNOVATIVE ARE MY BOOKS. THEY WERE WAY MORE INTERESTING AS MY CAREER HAS A TON OF INNOVATIVE SUCCESS.
2. ***"Not a high ranking (US) officer"*** **RESPONSE:** DARN. IF I WAS A HIGH RANKING OFFICER, I WOULD NOT HAVE HAD FOUR AMAZING CAREERS OF INCREDIBLE DEPTH/BREADTH WAY – ACHIEVING WAY BEYOND ANY GENERAL'S CAREER.
3. ***"Not a Medal of Honor winner"*** **RESPONSE:** DARN. I REALLY BLEW THIS ONE. BIT DIFFICULT FOR A RN OFFICER TO BE GIVEN THE MEDAL OF HONOR IN VIETNAM.
4. ***"Not acceptable that Vietnam writing come from non-academics"*** **Response:** SERIOUSLY OFFENSIVE. BIT DIFFICULT FOR A RN OFFICER. MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE STUDIED VIETNAM AT CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY. OH NO, THE VIETNAM WAR HAD ONLY JUST STARTED AND THE RN WOULD NOT HAVE AGREED FOR ME TO STUDY VIETNAM.
5. ***"No chapter on a conflict if the writer not involved in it"*** **RESPONSE:** DARN. BIT DIFFICULT FOR A ROYAL NAVAL OFFICER TO FIGHT IN VIETNAM. THE RN WOULD HAVE SAID "NO WAY".
6. ***"Not an accomplished US armed forces career"*** **RESPONSE:** DARN. BIT DIFFICULT FOR A RN OFFICER TO ENLIST WHO DID NOT GET A GREEN CARD UNTIL HE WAS **37 YEARS OLD**.
EACH BRANCH OF MILITARY AGE LIMITS TO ENLIST IN ACTIVE DUTY ARE: LATEST SIGN UPS - AIR FORCE, NAVY, SPACE FORCE: **39 JUST 2 YEARS LEFT FOR MARTIN TO ENLIST**

IT WOULD BE EASY TO SAY THIS WAS AN INCREDIBLY INAPPROPRIATE AND TACTLESS EMAIL. IT IS TOO FUNNY.