

Martin Fisher's PegasusLexicon

A Really Special Language: 'Royal Navy Speak'

Many organisations have their own insider language/slang. **The Royal Navy (RN)'s slang is as good as it gets.**

The slang travelled the world gathering inputs from the likes of the then exotic, now terribly dull, ports in countries like Gibraltar, Hong Kong, Kenya, Malta, Mombasa, Singapore, and Sri Lanka. The table below shows the different languages between RN speak and how a civvy ('civilian') might speak.

With a few differences and unique words, **the RN's sister Navies - Royal Canadian Navy, Royal Australian Navy, Royal New Zealand Navy, and South African Navy spoke – and still speak** – a similar dialect to the RN as part of the Commonwealth Navy bonds that still bind today. When we meet any of these Navies, we have instant connection. Of course, it helps we shared a serious love of alcohol and would laugh at each other's killer sea stories.

Other Navies - notably the US Navy (USN) - have their own Navy slang. What surprises me is that the USN slang has little commonality to the RN and is quite a bit more profane, crude, graphic, and not very funny. Maybe George Washington gave the orders to filthy up the RN slang after the war ended.

Being at sea for all those 100s of years gave matelots (sailors) too much dead time. Way too much 140° proof pusser's rum time facilitated those matelots developing a descriptive language, which goes back 400 years and is totally intertwined with the Royal Navy's traditions.

I used this language as a Midshipman when HMS Bronington nick-named me 'Sid the Mid', and when HMS Cleopatra nick-named me 'Danny (Fisher)' – after Harold Robbins' novel "A Stone for Danny Fisher". Both times, I was the only officer playing football with my sailor shipmates and as a result, both times making me the recipient of a wet, gulpers, or sippers of firewater 140° proof Pussers rum.

My absolute favourite RN slang is "**It is cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey**" - for short "**Brass Monkeys**" = really cold. Right on the gun deck by the cannons of a sail warship sat a brass square, with round indentations, known as a 'brass monkey'. On top of the monkey was balanced a square pyramid of cannonballs three high ready to be loaded and fired. When it got really cold, the brass contracted, and the cannonballs would roll off the monkey. You may have to agree that having one's sailors chasing their balls all over the gun deck would be funny.

The following are common examples of the slang I spoke (selectively) in the Royal Navy. I say selectively because there is much left out that is very coarse and too graphic.

OK, this is enough chuff chaff. Let us cut to the chase (wherever that is).

Royal Navy Slang 350 words and phrases

Royal Navy Slang	Translation		Royal Navy Slang	Translation
A's & A's (of a ship)	Alterations & Additions	1	Mainbrace	Longest line in the rigging
Ace	Excellent	2	Make & Mend	Afternoon off
don't come the old Acid	(don't speak) Sarcasm	3	also 'Make & Mend'	PM off to mend clothes
Adrift	Late	4	Marine shower	Deodorant vice a shower
Agony bags	Bagpipes	5	(The) Master Race	Seaman/Executive Branch
Airy Fairy/Brownsheo	Fleet Air Arm personnel	6	Matelot	Sailor
All above board	All things out in the open	7	Meat and two veg	Male genitalia
Anchor-faced	Navy hardcore enthusiast	8	Mess/mess deck	Sailors' quarters
Ar*e bandit	Homosexual	9	Mick	Hammock
AWOL	Absent without leave	10	MRU (to invitation)	Much Regret Unable to attend
Babies' heads	Steak & Kidney pudding	11	Mufti	Formal civilian clothing
Banyan	Beach party	12	NAAFI rating	No ambition& f*** all interest
Baron (CTP target)	Very rich to befriend	13	NAAFI shop	Navy/Army/Air Force Institute
Baron strangler	Manipulator of Barons	14	Nap hand	Gonorrhea + syphilis + crabs
Bash	Party or event	15	NATO standard	Milk + 2 sugars- in tea/coffee
Bird farm/Flat top	Aircraft carrier	16	Navy cake	Homosexual
Black ham	Mombasa lady of night	17	Neaters	Straight rum to POs, no mixers
Blue Liners- marked RN	Navy issue cigarettes	18	Nigerian lager	Guinness
Bollocking	Major telling off	19	Nine o'clockers	9 pm buns & sandwiches
Bombay runner	Large cockroach	20	Noddy	New entry at Lympstone
Bo'ness beastly	Lady of S. Queensferry	21	Nutter	Crazy idiot
Bootneck	Royal Marine	22	Nutty	Sweets/chocolate
Bosun's call	Pipe for announcements	23	Oily Qs	Officer Like Qualities
Brass monkeys	Very cold weather	24	Oppo	Friend
Bravo Zulu (aka BZ)	Well done!	25	Oggin'	Sea
one brick shy of load	Pretty stupid/dim	26	Oh crack sparrow	Very early in the am
Brilliant	Superb BZ	27	Oh dark thirty (0030)	Middle of the night
Brills	Brilliant; superb	28	On your jack	Alone
Brothel creepers	Soft soled shoes		Other ranks (ORs)	All who are not officers
Brownhatter	Homosexual, woofter	30	Out pipes	Back to work
Brownhatter's overalls	Pyjamas	31	Over the wall	In detention quarters (prison)
Brownosser	Officer or sailor suck up	32	Ovies	Overalls
Buffer	Chief Bosuns Mate	33	Paraffin Budgie	Helicopter
Bugis Street (w/ Kytais)	Was Singapore Red Light	34	Pash (passion)	Girlfriend
Buggers' grips	Tufts of hair on cheeks	35	Perks (usually of job)	Benefits
Buggin's turn	Rotating promotion	36	Pierhead jump	Draft at very short notice
Bulkhead	Internal ship wall	37	Pig	RN Officer (impolite)
BS/Bullsh*t artist	Lie/Liar	38	Pillow Fluffer	Steward
Bunting tosser	Signalman	39	Pilot	Navigator
Bum fodder	Toilet paper	40	Pipe	Bosun's whistle blown
Buzz	Rumour	41	Pipe down	"Out lights" and turn in to bed
Cackleberries	Eggs	42	Piping hot	Food straight from galley
Canteen Damager	NAAFI Store Manager	43	Piso	Cheap/tight

Captain's Table	Disciplinary hearing	44	Pit	Bunk/hammock/bed/rack
Cat is out of the bag	Secret is out	45	Play the white man	Do the decent thing
Check, check, check	Cease firing immediately	46	Plebs (Latin Plebians)	Common people; riff raff
Chippy	Shipwright	47	Pompey	Portsmouth
Chit	Authorising bit of paper	48	Poncy	Pretentious, effeminate
Chokie laundry	Chinese laundry on ships	49	Poofter	Homosexual
Chokka	Upset (Indian derivation)	50	Porridge guns	Bagpipes
Chock-a-block	Rope and pulley system	51	Problem to his tailor	Looks terrible in his uniform
Chop one off	Salute	52	PSB	Please Send Boat
Chop chop	Quick quick	53	Mind your P's and Q's	Mind your manners
Choppy	Somewhat rough seas	54	Pub crawl/Pub run	Sequentially visit many pubs
Chuffed	Very pleased	55	Pulpit puffda	Vicar
Chuffs & Puffs	Chiefs and Petty Officers	56	Push the boat out	Extend hospitality; buy drinks
Civvies	Non-military clothes	57	Pusser	The Navy
also Civvies	Non-military people	58	Pusser's Hard	Navy soap grated for washing
Clockwork orange	March same leg/arm	59	Rating	Sailor
Club swinger	PE Instructor	60	Queens	Grog left over after tots issued
Clusterf***	An evolution gone awry	61	Quiet number	Cushy job
Cockers P (also "CTP")	Cocktail party	62	Quiet run	Civilised run ashore
Common Dog F**k	Commonsense	63	on the QT	On the quiet/unofficially
Covered wagon	Sausage roll	64	Rabbits	Gifts
Crab	Air Force person	65	Racing snake	Skinny person
Crab Air	Air travel - courtesy RAF	66	Rack	Bunk/hammock/bed/pit
Crabs	Venereal Disease (VD)	67	Rattle, in the	Up on a disciplinary charge
Crusher	MP (Military Policeman)	68	RBG	Rich brown gravy
Cross the line	Cross the equator	69	RDP	(ship) run down period
Defaulters	Sailors under remand	70	Red grenade	McEwans Export tin of beer
Demob	Demobilisation	71	Retread	RN transfer to RAN (Aussies)
Dhoby/Dhoby Wallah	Laundry/Laundry person	72	Repair to (a place)	Go to... (used with press gang)
Dhoby dust	Washing powder	73	Rig	Clothes you are wearing
Dip in	Do unexpectedly well	74	RN Dhoby dust	Use baby powder vice shower
Dip out	Lose out	75	(drop of) Roughers	Rough weather
Dip stick	Idiot	76	Rugrats	Kids (usually young)
Dip your wick	Male sexual intercourse	77	Rum rat	Sailor wants more than his tot
Dit	Story or tale	78	Going on the run	Deserting
Dog Robbers	Civilian clothes	79	Run ashore	Leave ship for a night on town
Doggo	Ugly woman	80	Rose cottage	Venereal disease ward or clinic
Doocotting in RN base	Share bed with wife	81	Sand crab	Civil servant (scuttling to side)
2 bagger-1 for ugly	1 for me - hers comes off)	82	Scab lifter	Medic
DQs	Detention Quarters	83	Scran	Any meal
Draft	Sailor job appointment	84	Scribes	Writer
Dragon	Sailor's wife	85	Scuttle	Porthole
Duff	Pudding	86	Scuttlebutt	Rumours
gyptian AFO's	Badly spelt pornography	87	Sea dust	Salt
Egyptian PT or PE	Sleep	88	Sea stories	Tales of navy life
Enamel mechanic	Dentist	89	Secret squirrels	Intelligence people
Engines	Marine Engineer Officer	90	Senior Service	Royal Navy (oldest service)

Essence	Really good	91	Sew Sew	Ship's tailor (Chinese)
FAA	Fleet Air Arm	92	Shear legs	Two-legged lifting device
FAA is US Federal	Federal Aviation Authority	93	Shipping it green	Heavy seas over ship's bow
Fanny	Metal container for Rum	94	Sh*t on a raft	Diced kidney + gravy on toast
Fanny rat	Womaniser	95	Sh*tehawk	Seagull
Fast black	Taxi	96	Shoot through	Fail to keep an appointment
Father	The CO	97	Shufti	Take a look
Field order	Pork pie	98	Sickbay ranger	Malingerer
Fill yer boots	Take as much as u can	99	Sickbay tiff (artificer)	Medic; nurse
Fishhead	Surface warfare officer	100	Sin Bosun	Padre
Flags (Flag Lieutenant)	Navy aide-de-camp	101	Sippers	Sip of rum
Flat top	Aircraft carrier	102	Slack hammock	Badly lashed hammock
Fleshpots	Prostitute hangouts	103	Slide	Butter
Float test	Throw overboard	104	SLJO	Sh*tty Little Jobs Officer
FOD (around aircraft)	Foreign Object Debris	105	Slops	Basic uniform for sale
Food spoiler	Navy chef	106	SNAFU	Situation Normal, All F***d Up
Foo foo/ Phoo-phoo	Baby powder	107	Snorkers (Bangers)	Sausages
Four o'clockers	Officer-like tea for sailors	108	Snotty	Midshipman
Foxtrot Oscar	F*** off	109	Sods opera	Ship's amateur concert
Franger	Condom	110	Soup jockey	Steward
Fruit salad	Row of medals	111	Spanner wanker	Fleet Air Arm mechanic
Gannet	Greedy	112	Sparks	Radio Operator
Gash	Rubbish	113	Spin a dit or ditty	Tell a tall story
Gashbin	Rubbish bin	114	Spinning a yarn	Telling a far-fetched story
Gen	Intelligence	115	Spithead pheasant	Kipper
Get your head down	Go to sleep	116	Spitkid	Gashbin/Rubbish bin
Getting off at Fratton	Withdraw – pre- ejaculate	117	Splice the mainbrace	Give additional rum
Give the X a fair wind	Pass the X	118	Sports pages	Love letter
Gnat's p*ss	Weak beer	119	Sprog	Child or baby
Go around the buoy	2nd helping; repeat	120	Square rig	Junior ratings uniform
Gofer	Spectator	121	Squeeze up	Experience VD
Goffa	Soft drink	122	Stand to	Prepare for action
Golden Bowler (hat)	Very good retirement	123	Stand easy	AM or PM Break
(show me) Golden rivet	Last rivet to be 'shown'	124	Station Card	Identity card for going ashore
Gong	Awarded medal	125	Sticky greens (drink)	Crème de Menthe for bar girls
Gouge	Inside scoop	126	Sun dodger	Submariner
Grappling irons	Cutlery	127	Sun is over yardarm	Now we can start drinking
Greased weasel sh*t	Smooth and fast	128	Swinging the lamp	Telling sea stories
Green rub	Unjust /unlucky	129	Swinging the lead	Lazy, going through motions
Greenie	Electrician	130	Tea and stickies	Non-alcoholic hospitality
Grenade	Scotch egg	131	Technicolour yawn	Throw up
Grey Funnel Line	The Royal Navy	132	Tell that to Marines	I do not believe you
Grimmy	Ugly lady	133	The Andrew	The Navy
Gripe	Complaint	134	(drops of) thickers	Condensed milk
Grog	Sailors 66% diluted rum	135	Thrash	Party
Ground bait	Box of chocolates	136	2 bagger (woman)	One for woman & one for me
Gulpers	Good swig of rum	137	Three sheets to wind	Drunk and/or out of control

Guns	Gunnery Officer	138	Tickler	Navy issue tobacco
Gut, Valletta, Malta	Strait street – Red light	139	Tiddy Oggie	Cornish pasty
Guzz	Plymouth	140	Tiffy/tiffie	Artificer (Technician)
Hand Grenade	Scotch egg	141	Tilly	Dockyard utility vehicle
Home and Home	Sports game-both grounds	142	Tin fish	Torpedo
Head or heads	Toilet	143	Tits Up	Everything is a disaster
Holystoning sandstone	Scrubbing wooden decks	144	Toe the line	Conform to rules
Hong Kong haircut	Bl*w job	145	Toggle and two	Male genitalia
Hook	Anchor	146	Toothwright	Dentist
Hot bunking (2 folks)	Alternate sleep/same bed	147	Top notch	the very best
'Hussif' or 'Housewife'	Sewing repair kit, 'etui'	148	Tot	A measure of rum
Ickies	Foreign currency	149	Totty	Attractive woman
Jack(tar) -Jolly Jack tar	Sailor	150	Train smash	Ketchup
JB	Johor Bharu (Malaysia)	151	Trap/trapping	Hunt(ing) down women
Janner	Person from Plymouth	152	Trick cyclist	Psychiatrist
Jaunty	Master at Arms	153	Turn and burn	Speed up/on
Jewish march past	Check £, post run ashore	154	Turn in	Go to sleep
No 1	First lieutenant	155	Turn to	Start work
Jimmy the 1	First lieutenant (subs)	156	Two and a Half (2 ½)	Lieutenant Commander
Jolly/Jollies	Pleasant experience	157	Up funnel-down screw	Furl sails, proceed on engines
Joss or Joss Man	Master at Arms	158	Up Homers (incl sex)	At wife, lady, girlfriend house
Killick	Leading Seaman	159	Vasco (da Gama)	Navigating Officer / Pilot
Kip	Sleep	160	WAFU	Wet and f***ing useless
Kipper	Torpedo	161	Wanchai burberry	Umbrella (Hong Kong)
Kye	Very thick hot chocolate	162	Wet as a scrubber	Useless individual
Kytai (on Bugis Street)	Singapore transvestite	163	Wet (of rum)	Sip or gulp of rum
Lash up and stow	Tie hammock & put away	164	White mafia	Navy Cookery Division
Let the cat out of bag	Prior to lashing the guilty	165	Widows Hop	Plymouth weekly dance
Liberty boat	Boat shore transport,	166	Willy woofter	Homosexual
Lid	Officer or sailor cap	167	WMP (invite answer)	(accept) With Much Pleasure
Lifebuoy Ghost	Sentry	168	Woofter	Homosexual
Limers	Lemon drink – vs. scurvy	169	Wooly pully	Military navy blue sweater
Lower deck	Sailors/sailors messes	170	WR also MRU	With regrets (to an invitation)
Lower deck lawyer	Sailor quoting rules/regs	171	WTFO	What The F***, Over
Lurgie	Awful illness	172	Yaffle	Food pig out
Mackers	Lollies or sweets	173	Yellow peril	Poached smoked haddock
Magic	Superb	174	Yeoman	Signaller
Mainbrace	Longest line in the rigging	175	Yours aye (letter end)	Navy ending of private letter

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