

Steve Ritchie - A Living Legend

Many of you will be familiar with our columnist Steve Ritchie, who has been writing his "As it Was"™ columns with great enthusiasm from the very start of Hydro international magazine. It is his gripping style of writing that rivets us to his stories, making us experience hydrographic history as if it happened only yesterday. And as a Russian journalist wrote earlier this year: "If congress organisers hadn't warned me that Steve Ritchie from England was born in 1914 I would never have called this mischievous Mr Pickwick a "patriarch", even less an "elder"."

It was this description of Steve Ritchie that rang a whole lot of alarm bells in our heads. We realised that Steve, born in 1914, would celebrate his 90th birthday this year on the 30th October - a unique opportunity and one not to be missed. We immediately approached some people to write a few words for this very special occasion, which they accordingly did!

A Living Legend in Promotion

90 years is a great and respected age.

Such age gathers in value given how the life has been filled. Steve has always had a great passion for hydrography - and what is more, he still has! From being the first lieutenant of H.M.S. Scott at D-Day to writing his own columns and books, everything he does is with great dedication.

I personally know Steve as a very energetic and knowledgeable man. I know he is appreciated by a lot of colleagues and by many readers of our journals. His inexhaustible reservoir of experience is of interest to everyone and the way he shares this is quite an experience in itself. Rear Admiral Steve provides a welcome contribution to our publications. Not only does he share his valuable experience with our readers; he is also a living legend in promotion. No matter whether it concerns Prince Rainier of Monaco or a visitor to a Hydro event, Steve sells what he sets out to sell.

It is great to work with him. We all wish to continue that for many years to come.

Steve "here" to your ninetieth birthday and to your health!

Johan Boesjes, President, GITC bv

Well-filled

Within days of handing over as Hydrographer of the Navy in February 1971, Steve Ritchie began his paid retirement leave by flying to Trinidad. Here he had arranged his costume as a member of the Mighty Sparrow's steel band in the famous Trinidad Carnival. Dressed as an exotic butterfly, Steve paraded the streets of Port of Spain with his favourite bottle of rum. Very rudely, a local Trinidadian pointed at Steve's well-filled costume and called out loudly: "Dat man sure make baby for next year's carnival", quite unaware that "Dat man" was a serving British Rear-Admiral. Despite his figure, Steve still retains his prowess on the dance floor. Whenever the music starts ladies queue up to dance with him and it is well nigh impossible to drag him off the floor, particularly if a steel band is playing.

Sir David Haslam

Flamboyant

I have known and admired Steve for many years. He is one of that diminishing group of hydrographers who were as much explorers as they were surveyors.

His civilian dress style is flamboyant and his striped blazer, made, I think by the same tailor as that used by Prince Rainier of Monaco, identifies him immediately. However, it is his red socks that really mark his sartorial elegance, and friends in Canada to whom we once took Steve to dinner long ago always remember these.

Talking of Prince Rainier reminds me of his passion for boules. During his time in Monaco he used to play regularly with a local group. At a dinner he was sitting alongside the Prince and discussing the subject of boules. This led to the Prince writing out on the back of the menu card that he hereby certified that Admiral Ritchie could wash his boules in any fountain in Monaco!

Another contact with Steve was through his son Mark, who now lives in Canada. We were visiting a farm near Lake Ontario and our hostess suggested we go and meet their overseas labourers. We met the two young men, and later in the evening we were sitting around the table discussing the Asterix comics when one of them said in a rather broad West-Country accent: "My father has even got Asterix comics in the IHB library." My ears pricked up and then I realised that this was one of Steve's sons getting in some farming experience. Whether the IHB was really on the subscription list I never found out.

Adam Kerr

Stop Tempting Him to Dance

Could you please write a few hundred words about your relationship with Steve Ritchie, asked the editorial manager of Hydro international? For most of us who know him a few thousand words would hardly do, but let's make it short. First of all, Steve, congratulations on this very special day!

When I read The Admiralty Chart in 1969 (a farewell present from the Decca Personnel Suriname/station commander Brian Apsey), I knew that the author was a friend of our Hydrographer, Wijnand Langeraar. Eight years later we first met during the Xth

International Hydrographic Conference in 1977.

What to tell you that has not been said already? We all know about Steve's active and colourful life. The loss of Disa was a terrible blow, but Steve recovered and last year my wife Ruth and I enjoyed his two-day visit to Apeldoorn (The Netherlands) prior to his attending a conference on the history of oceanography in Kaliningrad. We knew Steve to be a wonderful guest because in 1989 he spent a weekend with us at our cottage. Happy to join you in walking the dogs, interested in the countryside, enjoying a simple bed and meal - though the "rijsttafel" (Indonesian rice-table) was not always that simple. And an energy which younger people like myself can hardly keep up with. But don't be fooled. If he visits you, see to it that he gets his rest and please stop tempting him to dance, because he simply cannot refuse, which worried Disa already years ago.

Good luck, Old Hydrographer, we all love you, Ruth and Jan.

Jan Kreffer

Memories of Service

Readers of Hydro international will need no reminder of Admiral Steve Ritchie's delight in a party, and his generous support of the events in the international hydrographic calendar. Indeed, on the morning after his birthday ceilidh in Collieston, he will be starting his travels to rendezvous with David Haslam for the journey to Galway for HYDRO 2004!

There are still a few veterans at the UKHO who remember the colourful Christmas staff parties which Admiral Steve describes so well in No Day Too Long. Similarly, no meeting of the Survey Ships Association would be complete without an old shipmate recalling his gift for improvised costumes at the Trinidad carnival. Less well-known perhaps is his appearance in the unlikely setting of Karachi as a Spanish madonna, complete with black lace and fan.

He has always treasured the encounters with fellow hydrographic surveyors around the world which made his Presidency of the IHB so fruitful. Captain Richard Campbell recalls experiences under Admiral Steve's command in HMS Vidal in 1964 whilst conducting a survey of the western approaches to the Straits of Gibraltar with control by Decca Lambda stations at Sancti Petri and Redondella in Spain. The excellent relationship which Steve established with Admiral Garcia, the Spanish Hydrographer, eased Richard Campbell's reconnaissance tasks, and the successful end of the survey was marked by a magnificent dinner in the company of the Captain General of the Province, at which a footman stood behind every chair.

Admiral Steve's interest in the history of hydrography also found an outlet during this commission, with a visit to the beautiful university city of Coimbra in Portugal to present a set of charts to the great scholar Professor Armando Cortes-Âo. His book records that he flew the 75 miles to the old red-roofed city to take advantage of the new helicopter which had just been allocated to the ship. Richard Campbell recalls the long bus journey which the rest of the party endured, refreshed by bottles of vinho verde!

Mike Barritt

The Union Jack

In 1963 long before G.P.S. Steve Ritchie was Captain of H.M.S. Vidal, conducting a hydrographic survey of the approaches to Gibraltar. I was running a Decca Lambda station providing "precise" positioning from the beach in Sancti Petri, a small tuna fishing village to the N.W of Cadiz.

Soon after the station was operational the Captain was ferried ashore for a site inspection by the dreaded Mike Styles the helicopter pilot. We were all standing around chatting when the helicopter returned to take Steve back to Vidal. The helicopter kind of circled a bit and Steve suddenly realised that we did not have a wind direction indicator of any kind. Probably Styles complained about this on the first trip. Suddenly Steve grabbed this British flag that somebody had conveniently tied on a pole and rushed out to the landing zone. It was almost cinematic to see the Captain of a British naval ship, and a portly figure even then, running into this field in Spain with this large Union Jack streaming over his head. Everybody else was rooted to the spot. I must say Captain Ritchie was much loved by his crew and was very supportive of us Decca guys on the beach.

It was a pleasure to work for him.

Brian Apsey