

BEER IN THE R.N.

BY

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Before 1815, when the fitting of metal water tanks in naval vessels was made a design requirement, potable water was only available for the first few days at sea. Thereafter the sole liquid refreshment available to the seaman in home-based ships was beer (plus the daily ration of watered spirits or 'grog') although this was usually more or less unfit for drinking! The allowance, laid down in Cromwell's day, was one gallon per man per diem. The ale itself was supplied by contractors but in the early nineteenth century, in an attempt to improve matters, the Navy Commissioners set up as brewers with a brewery in the new victualling yard which had been established at Deptford in 1801. The regular supply of beer was discontinued, however, once satisfactory means of storing water had been devised and from the eighteen twenties on supplies of tea and cocoa were made available.

In the *Regulations for Service at Sea* (the predecessor of *Q.R.R.N.*) issued in January 1844, the substitute list of victuals should normal supplies not be available included, in lieu of $\frac{1}{4}$ pint of spirits (rum), 2 quarts of strong beer or 1 gallon of small beer. By 1903 the spirit substitute (in lieu of $\frac{1}{8}$ pint of spirits) had been reduced to 1 pint of porter.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, ships serving on foreign stations were permitted 'wet' canteens whence beer and porter might be purchased at about 4d. and 5d. a pint respectively, a relatively high price for the day but this had to cover the cost of transport and losses through deterioration. Supplies were delivered every six months or so. The beer would have been of the 'Export' or I.P.A. (India Pale Ale) type.

In the twentieth century, 'wet' canteens were moved ashore and the authorities played no further part in supplying beer for sailors until the fast moving war in the Pacific took the fleet away from the normal amenities of life. In order to alleviate the situation the Admiralty fitted out two former Blue Funnel cargo liners, the *Agamemnon* and *Menetheus*, as Amenity Ships to serve the Pacific Fleet. Both vessels, which sailed with merchant service crews under the Red Ensign, were equipped with breweries run by NAAFI and were thus able to provide an essential service. The *Menetheus* commissioned in February 1945 by which time the War was in its final phase but she did serve for some months at Manus and elsewhere before being returned to her owners in 1946.

Since the abolition of the rum ration, junior ratings have been allowed to purchase two 16 oz cans of beer daily, the allowance for senior ratings being 2 pints per day. However, one can be sure that the quality of the ale supplied today by NAAFI will be far better than that of the beverage served out in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
