

# ASSISTANT NAVAL ATTACHE (TECHNICAL)

BY

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Engineer officers have, in recent years, occupied the posts of Assistant Naval Attachés (Technical) in Paris, Rome and Stockholm. The appointment to Paris also includes similar duties in The Hague, Madrid and Brussels, that to Stockholm, duties in Copenhagen, Oslo, and Helsinki and that to Rome includes an appointment as Attaché for Naval Questions (A.N.Q.) in Switzerland, Austria and Czechoslovakia. These appointments last for about two years. The writer served as an A.N.A.(T) in Rome and the following account will largely relate to this post, though much can be taken to relate generally to all three.

More formality than usual attends the appointment of naval and assistant naval attachés since their proposed appointments have to be approved by their prospective Ambassadors and by the Ministries of the countries to which they will be accredited. This process takes time and can lead to some frustration particularly regarding the financial outlay, both official and private, required for many of the preliminaries. The latter fall roughly into three categories—language study, briefing and personal affairs (overhaul of kit, purchase of new uniform, car : packing and timely despatch of heavy baggage : disposal of house, etc.).

From the point of view of the appointment itself the most important of these preliminaries is language study. Current Admiralty practice appears normally to be to allow a cash sum (but not the time, which must be found during the previous appointment or leave) for lessons in the United Kingdom. On occasion, however, if time permits, officers may obtain approval for more serious study. It is important to have at least a working knowledge of the language before beginning the appointment, since there is little time for organized study afterwards. For full efficiency an attaché should be able to speak the language like a native, and a working knowledge should be regarded as the minimum acceptable.

‘Briefing’ consists of visits to various Admiralty departments, specialist naval establishments and possibly some engineering works. Much of this process appears to be a waste of time. It cannot be avoided, however, since an A.N.A.(T) is expected to be able to observe and report intelligibly on all technical matters and an attempt must be made to learn at least something of the jargon and the current state of progress in other specialities than one’s own. The writer was later to compose learned reports on (for instance) electronic equipment and refer to such things as klystrons : he still has no idea what these are, nor, be it said, does he know whether such reports were in fact intelligible. Time can usually be found during briefing for prosecuting one’s personal arrangements.

Arrived ‘en poste’ an A.N.A.(T)’s first preoccupations will almost certainly be with his accommodation and allowances, and a word on these will not be out of place here.

In the past naval attachés, and presumably A.N.A.s, were expected to have private means but this is no longer necessary (in theory). A.N.A.(T)s also receive

better allowances than A.N.A.s. Allowances are equated, though in a dubious way, with Foreign Office rates and these are on a very much more generous scale than Service overseas allowances. On the other hand, expenses are heavy and the net result, in the writer's case, was that he broke approximately even, while living in a style to which he would like to be accustomed. The Admiralty pays the rent, within a limit, of accommodation but this must be found by the officer concerned, often a difficult task.

One week's turnover is usually allowed and this is ample to induce the bemused state in which the best jobs are started. The budding A.N.A.(T) is forced to meet several hundred new people (to whom his predecessor is making a desperate last attempt to repay hospitality) and spends the next six months trying to fit names to faces. It is not normal, at least in Rome, to give other than a paper turnover on the subsidiary countries and the new A.N.A.(T) will, in due course, have to introduce himself there and repeat the process of meeting crowds of new people. Meanwhile, he will probably forget three-quarters of the names in the previous capital.

An A.N.A.(T) owes allegiance in several different directions. He is responsible, primarily, to his N.A. and through him, to his Ambassador, to D.N.I., with the A.D.N.I.(T) as his immediate sponsor, through him again to the Joint Intelligence Bureau, Ministry of Defence and to E.-in-C. or any other Admiralty Departments and, in the case of Rome, to C.-in-C., Mediterranean. In addition, he has similar responsibilities in each of his subsidiary countries. In the case of A.N.A.(T), Rome, he is his own N.A. in these countries. He has, or should have, no N.A.T.O. responsibilities. Whether these directions conflict or not depends partly on the N.A. and partly on circumstances. An A.N.A.(T) should not be tied by office routine to his chair in his principal capital and an effort is required to avoid this. Sometimes it cannot be avoided.

Most of an A.N.A.(T)'s work is, in any case, that which should be done by an ordinary A.N.A. and the only difference is one of emphasis: the former concentrating more on technical matters than would the latter. An A.N.A.(T) should, in fact, be able to do all that an A.N.A. can do, while the converse is unlikely to hold true.

The following is a summary of an A.N.A.(T)'s duties, many of which will be repeated in each subsidiary country:—

#### *Visits by H.M. Ships*

Diplomatic clearance must be obtained for all H.M. ship visits. In the case of friendly countries like Italy this is merely a necessary formality. Detailed arrangements for these visits are the responsibility of the British Consul in whose district they occur but the N.A., and A.N.A.(T), is always involved as well, particularly for visits within striking distance, by leave parties, of the capital. The organizing of ship visits involves much work for Consuls and N.A.s and their small staffs, but this is cheerfully done because it is realized that such visits are a valuable contribution to international, naval and consular relations. The visits themselves are greatly enjoyed by the local British and native communities and attendance at them was always welcomed by the writer as a happy break from routine work. On the other hand, N.A.s also apparently enjoy attending them and the occasions when an A.N.A.(T) can be 'spared from his technical duties' to do so, are correspondingly rare.

#### *Visits by R.N. Aircraft*

Many of these merely touch down in transit, but in Italy they aggregated over 400 aircraft per year and all require diplomatic clearance. They are a bore.

### *Visitors*

In these days of international conferences and air travel there is an unending stream of official naval visitors to, and through, places like Rome. Though many would deny it, they usually expect to be met and often entertained and shown round. An A.N.A.(T) can expect his N.A. to do the lion's share of this, but he will also have to do his part. This duty is usually pleasant, sometimes expensive and takes up quite a lot of time.

### *Official Ceremonies*

These range from full scale military reviews to 'Vermouths' in honour of some new official. Attendance is normally obligatory. They are all interesting the first time but, in a friendly country like Italy, they tend to degenerate into merely another social occasion. Not so, however, in Iron Curtain countries. The writer was fortunate in attending a big military parade in Prague and it was diverting for A.N.Q. to watch all his Military and Air colleagues strenuously taking notes at this, their only opportunity during the year to see military equipment.

### *Intelligence*

Service attachés are not supposed to be spies and the intelligence they collect is known as 'overt' intelligence. Whatever may be the newspaper stories about attachés in and from Iron Curtain countries, this arrangement is generally honoured between friendly countries. There is no point in jeopardizing a regular exchange of freely given information by trying to uncover something which is not permitted. Cloaks and Daggers are for sartorial purposes only.

It is in the Intelligence field, however, that a technical attaché should be able to do more than a non-technical officer. Even where the information is to be had for the asking, since so much of it is technical, the technical officer may be able to phrase the question and judge the completeness of the answer more accurately. An A.N.A.(T) spends a lot of time visiting factories and shipyards and here both his language study and powers of observation are put to the test. It is often only during such visits that the existence of a particular item of equipment is revealed which can subsequently be followed up officially. Much of the information obtained on these visits is of no direct naval interest, but may be of interest to J.I.B. (Joint Intelligence Bureau)—an inter-Service organization which collects general strategic information.

### *Naval Information Required by the Ambassador*

The Ambassador is kept informed by the N.A.'s annual report and *ad hoc* information, as required, on the naval affairs of the country to which he is accredited. He also requires information on British and other naval personalities in connection with official entertainments. A.N.A.(T) is usually involved.

### *British Naval Information*

This is generally supplied in London to Foreign attachés but British attachés do, on occasion, supply background information within the security regulations.

### *Assistance to British Industry*

This mainly falls to the Commercial Department of the Embassy and Service attachés should not be required to act as salesmen. They can, however, sometimes be of assistance, particularly where contact with naval authorities is required.

### *Fostering Good Relations*

Most professional diplomats acquire a near-real smile and a line of genial talk which can be turned on when required. Service attachés must do the same through countless cocktail, lunch and dinner parties all given ostensibly to further good relations somewhere. Many of these parties will inevitably involve numbers of English or American speaking colleagues but the real object should be to improve relations, preferably in their own language, with the people of the country to which the attaché is accredited. Though the N.A. and the Ambassador should do most of the official naval entertaining, the A.N.A.(T) must also do his share and he will, in addition, have to do some out-of-town entertaining on his visits round the country. This is one of the reasons why an A.N.A.(T) receives better allowances than an A.N.A. of the same rank.

The Corps of Attachés in each capital holds functions, such as an annual Ball, regular dinners, etc., designed to bring the Service attachés of all countries together in an amicable way. The A.N.A.(T) will attend these and will make a good show of enjoying an animated conversation, in a language foreign to both, with, for example, a Rumanian seated beside him throughout a long-drawn dinner.

Attachés can, of course, obtain drink and tobacco free of duty and the consumption of both is prodigious.

Regarding A.N.A.(T) Rome's subsidiary countries, Switzerland is the most interesting technically and many of her engineering and armament factories are outstanding. It is also possible to combine business with pleasure and even to ski on duty, e.g. during the Inter-Services Ski Championships at St. Moritz, which A.N.Q. considers it his duty to attend.

Austria has been added to the list since the withdrawal of the occupying forces, but only one visit was made by the writer. The Austrians, however, are willing to show what they have and the country has great possibilities for its A.N.Q. Czechoslovakia is another story, of course, and, in his only visit there, A.N.Q. saw little besides the above-mentioned parade—not even a shoe factory as did one of his predecessors. A periodic visit is, however, worthwhile 'just in case' and also to help to keep up the morale of those stationed there.

### *Wives and Transport*

Two important matters remain to be mentioned : Wives and Transport. A wife is an asset to a Service attaché : she is invaluable, as ever, at organizing household affairs and entertaining. She will, in addition, remember many names and faces which her husband should not have forgotten, she will learn the language better and she will probably get to know many of her husband's contacts better than he will. The writer's wife, however, would never tell him what she found out.

The Admiralty provides a Service car for use on official business, which covers a wide field. This is a great convenience but allowances are reduced and by comparison with using his own car an attaché is out of pocket. Provided the car is reliable, however, it is an economical arrangement for the Admiralty and the writer, at least, had no objection to driving himself around an appreciable part of Europe.

### **Conclusion**

The writer very much enjoyed his time as an A.N.A.(T) and would confidently recommend it to anyone who is careless of what happens to his liver. Regarding the future of such appointments, it is sometimes asked whether Service Attachés are still necessary in N.A.T.O. countries. The answer is that, although there is

undoubtedly some duplication of effort, they are still required in order to look after national interests, which N.A.T.O. being international or almost a new nation in itself, cannot do. It is noted with interest that, with the introduction of the General List, a start is being made with the appointment of an engineer officer as a Naval Attaché. There seems to be everything in favour of such a step and the writer has probably already indicated that he thinks engineer officers capable of carrying out the duties of an attaché. On the other hand, there is no good reason why our electrical colleagues should not also be brought into this field—at least they would know all about klystrons. Technical officers, however, should not be 'wasted' in countries where there is little of technical interest. The answer might well lie in the rotation of a number of posts between officers of different specializations.