

The Bunting's Dit



“Bunting” is Royal Navy jargon [aka Jack Speak] for a Signalman and derives from the material used for signal flags.

A “dit” is a story told by a sailor, sometimes true, but often exaggerated.

The flag hoist depicted is Jack’s favourite signal: read top down, Alpha Delta Two Eight – “Splice the Mainbrace”.
Double issue of rum to all hands.

Image courtesy of Pusser’s Rum

Unofficial Flags from Brunei 1962

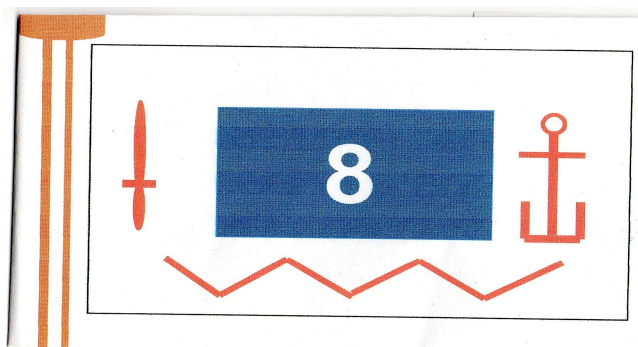
W.O Comms Dave Morris

Dave was a young Signalmen at the time aboard HMS DARTINGTON. The Communications Department of a TON comprised two Signalmen who dealt with flashing morse and flag hoists used for short range communications and one Radio Operator (the Sparker) who worked pre-determined shifts to keep us in contact with HQ in Singapore, who also relayed signals from Admiralty in London. The Radio Operator and Navigating Officer handled encrypted signals. Some Signalmen could also assist in the Radio Room.

Bridge watchkeeping officers were expected to read morse, albeit slower than a professional signalmen, and also operate the short range ship to ship voice radio used for manoeuvring. They would also learn to recognise the most frequently used flag hoists.

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8th Assault Squadron



After the action at Limbang, this unofficial and completely unauthorised flag was devised by Leading Signalmen Hugh 'Jock' McLintock of HMS Fiskerton and flown by the two ramp loading river lighters attached to HM Ships Fiskerton and Chawton on subsequent operations in Brunei in December 1962.

The lighters had been commandeered by Lima Company 42 Commando and, crewed by volunteers from the two minesweepers, were used to transport 80 Royal Marine Commandos upriver for the assault on Limbang, Sarawak to free hostages on 12th December 1962.

This operation was quite unique for the sailors, who had not been trained in amphibious operations. Enthused by this experience they christened their scratch formation, which soon included several other, smaller river craft, an "assault squadron" and the flag was devised on the day after Limbang to be flown by these craft on future operations.

It is based on the signal flag S (Sierra) with a white figure 8 in the centre. The red symbols are a commando dagger at the hoist and an anchor at the fly. The zig-zag bars at the bottom represent the rivers on which most of the operations took place.

The title of squadron to which the two minesweepers belonged had very recently been changed from 104 MSS to 6 MSS, so the craft were unofficially designated as a sub-unit. The sweepers in Malta, formerly 108 MSS had become 7 MSS, hence 8th Assault Squadron was the next free number.

The two minesweepers were relieved by HM Ships Dartington and Houghton in Brunei on 20th December and the collection of river craft, with their distinctive flag, were transferred to them. The craft and their flag continued in use during the period that DARTINGTON was in Brunei during December 1962 and into January 1963.

HMS Fiskerton flew the flag of the 8th Assault Squadron when she returned to Singapore naval base, but since it was Christmas Eve and after dark, no one remarked on this breach of RN signals protocol.

The 8th AS flag regularly reappears at gatherings of the Limbang Old Hands, usually at TCA Reunions.

OPCOMBRITNAVFORBRU



In December 1962 HMS Dartington arrived in Brunei in company with HMS Houghton to relieve HMS Fiskerton and HMS Chawton. Although HOUGHTON was the leader of the 6th Minesweeping Squadron, her Commanding Officer Cdr William Staveley (later Admiral Sir William, First Sea Lord), was ill on shore, so the ship was commanded by her First Lieutenant, Lt Martin Griffiths, who was junior to Lt. Cdr Andrew Marx, Commanding Officer of HMS Dartington.

Apart from the two minesweepers there were various RN personnel based ashore in Brunei but Marx eventually realised that he was the Senior RN Officer present. He instructed his signalman, TO1 Dave Morris, to think about a suitable title and eventually decided to adopt a title that he himself devised - Operational Commander British Naval Forces Brunei (OPCOMBRITNAVFORBRU), a totally unofficial and unauthorised title.

Morris tried to discourage his C.O. from using the title in signals and other official correspondence but, not to be deterred, Andrew Marx then tasked Morris with producing a flag for him to fly. Morris designed the flag, loosely based on the 8th Assault Squadron Flag and the signal flag P (Papa), with a version of the flag of Brunei at its centre.

Having no suitable onboard resources, Morris had the flag manufactured by a Chinese tailor in Brunei. DARTINGTON continued to fly the flag on suitable occasions, even after the ships left Brunei and the minesweepers transferred their patrol base to Kuching, Sarawak.

At some point, long after they had left the service, Commander Marx donated his flag to Admiral Sir Jeremy Black who, as C.O. of FISKERTON, had been Senior Naval Officer in Brunei at the start of the period.

Admiral Black loaned the flag to the Limbang Old Hands for a Commemoration of the 40th Anniversary of the Limbang Operation, held at the Imperial War Museum in Manchester in 2002, which was attended by Major General Sir Jeremy Moore, who had commanded Lima Company at Limbang and, in 1982, was Commander Land Forces for the re-occupation of the Falkland Islands.

The Chinese tailor had used a very attractive light blue silk for the flag, but not knowing the provenance, the troops present in Manchester rapidly fell to speculating about whose girl friend may have sacrificed her nightie in such a noble cause