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Ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliaries

Supply of the British Fleet has posed a logistic problem that is virtually as old as the Royal Navy itself. In the days of wooden warships the requirements were relatively simple - powder, shot, timber, canvas, victuals and, of course, rum. But as the Navy grew in size and complexity its logistical needs became evermore diverse. By the end of the 19th century, wooden hulls and sails had given way to ironclads and steam.

The Royal Navy's supply chain was spread across the world with a network of base ports, coaling stations and depots. These were serviced, in the main, by Merchant Navy ships, owned or chartered by the Admiralty. Then, in 1905 the Lords Commissioners issued an instruction that stated: "Auxiliaries which belong to the Admiralty will be styled Royal Fleet Auxiliaries'... those on charter will be styled Merchant Fleet Auxiliaries'." Thus the RFA came into being.

Despite having this network of re-supply and refuelling stations, the Royal Navy wanted the facility to refuel and resupply its ships while at sea, and this was initially carried out with stores and bags of coal passed from the stern of the supply ship to the bow of the warship by a system of ropes and blocks. Later, techniques were developed for the transfer of fuel oil, still using the astern method, but with oil pumped over through a flexible bronze hose.

It was not until the Second World War that replenishment at sea (RAS) became well established. The German method of transferring fuel in rubber hoses was adapted, and experience, particularly gained from Pacific operations, led to the abeam method of fuel replenishment and the heavy jackstay method for transfer of stores. Today, replenishment at sea is a routine operation, carried out from RFA ships in operations, exercises and deployments throughout the world. It remains, nevertheless, an evolution calling for the highest standards of seamanship as the ships sail in close proximity, linked together, in daytime or at night and in all weathers.

WAVE CHIEF, RFA (A 265) (oiler)

Tristan da Cunha # (2003) 60p
1946 - British Navy; Harland & Wolff, Ltd., Govan, Glasgow, England; L. April 4, 1946; Displ. 4,750 tons light, 8,200 standard, 16,650 full load, Gt. 8,447, dwt. 11,900; 492,5' x 64,5' x 28,5'; double reduction geared turbines, 6,800 shp, three-drum type boilers, 14,5kn.

One of a number of **WAVE**-class oilers, this one was originally built for the Ministry of Transport (MoT) as the **EMPIRE EDGEHILL**. At the end of the Second World War, they transferred to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) and adopted **WAVE** names. Five were built by Laing at Sutherland, three by Harland & Wolff at Glasgow and twelve by Furness Shipbuilding Co. at Teeside. **WAVE BARON, WAVE CHIEF** and **WAVE RULER** were used as replenishment tankers, while the others were employed as

freighters.

WAVE BARON, WAVE CHIEF, WAVE COMMANDER, WAVE CONQUEROR, WAVE DUKE



and **WAVE LAIRD** were fitted with Metrovick-type geared turbines while the others had Parson-type geared turbines.

She ran aground in Jahore Straits and suffered damage to the bottom of her hull. She served in the Korean War and the First Icelandic Cod War (1958-61). Decommissioned in 1974, the last of her class, she was scrapped at Inverkeithing.

Source: www.btinternet.com/~warship/Postwar/RFA/index; *Jane's* 1972-73.

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