

Ship shape

Capt James Briggs RN (Retd), Trowbridge, Wiltshire

12:01AM BST 13 Sep 2003

Sir - Your lucid report (Sep 12) about the court martial of four of HMS Nottingham's officers has given me much food for thought.

Two days before Christmas 1983, I accepted this warship into the Royal Navy from her excellent builders, Vosper Thornycroft.

Later, Nottingham was described to me as the best of her class that had ever passed through the rigours of a first Portland sea training work-up. Her first captain later became a distinguished First Sea Lord.

I feel deep sympathy for Cdr Farrington in being so sadly let down by three officers in whom he had placed both trust and responsibility for his fine ship.

Having commanded four frigates, of which three had a helicopter, I took every reasonable opportunity to call on local authorities worldwide, often well ahead of my ship, since this much enhanced the important Royal Navy duty of "showing the flag" and creating goodwill. "Got the weight, Number One?" is the sum of any turnover I made on leaving my ship at sea. "All right, James?" was the most that my captain said to me under similar circumstances in HMS Ark Royal, when I was his second in command (1972-74). Cdr Farrington's conduct throughout has been admirable, not least in his loyalty to subordinates who, on this occasion, served him so poorly."

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"FORMER naval Captain James Briggs has retired after 32 years service as a volunteer with the coastguards.

Capt Briggs has regularly helped save stricken sailors off the Dorset coast as an auxiliary coastguard and once assisted in six rescues in one weekend.

He was presented with a certificate recognising his contribution by district officer Mark Rodaway and watch manager Phil Chappell at the coastguards' local headquarters on Weymouth quayside.

Capt Briggs, 77, of Poundbury near Dorchester, said he is happy to have helped over the years but insisted that the full time coastguards deserve all the credit.

He added: "I spend a lot of my time afloat in my 12m catamaran Cavalier and I used to provide updates to the coastguards on any changes that were occurring in visibility and things like that.

"I have a great admiration for the coastguards, particularly the Portland branch, who do a great job.

"It was very pleasant to be recognised with their award."

Capt Briggs, who retired from the Royal Navy in 1984, said he once towed a yacht to safety after it ran aground off the Dorset coast and regularly updated Portland coastguards on a private radio frequency when at sea.

While in the Navy, Capt Briggs used to sail the yacht Marabou, after it was seized from its first owner, Herman Goering, by the Allies following the Second World War.

He has commanded ships for the Royal Navy all around the world and said he spent a lot of his post-Navy years teaching his 10 grandchildren how to sail.

He has also spent a lot of his free time taking disabled people to sea as part of the Royal Yacht Association's Sailability programme.

Capt Briggs said he still plans to spend a lot of time at sea during his 'retirement' from serving with the coastguards and is due to become a great grandfather shortly.

Capt Briggs first worked with the coastguards in the Solent while living in Emsworth, Hampshire, but continued his role as an auxiliary after moving to Dorset around four years ago.

After presenting Capt Briggs with his award, coastguard district officer Mark Rodaway said: "Captain Briggs served for a significant period in the Royal Navy and later served the coastguards as an auxiliary officer.

"He's spent a good deal of his life serving the people of this country.

"It's a remarkable achievement and it's only right that we should acknowledge that.

"He's spent a good deal of his time helping us out, purely because of his ethic of wanting to help the mariner."