

COMMODORE ROBERT JAMES ASTLEY BELLFIELD CBE (K81-83)

He was at the College for 6th form and has spent a career of over 30 years in the Royal Navy.

His career has largely been at sea and supporting operations, much of it based in the West Country. His early career included time in minehunters, fishery protection vessels and frigates; operating in every sphere of RN maritime operations in UK waters, the Far East, the Gulf, South Atlantic and the West Indies. He went on to command of the Type 23 frigates Grafton, Portland and Argyll, and second-in-command of Sutherland.

His last sea appointment was as the Executive Officer of Ark Royal for her final commission, which involved the regeneration of the UK's maritime fixed wing flying capability with the Harrier, until her retirement in late 2010.

He spent a fascinating year at the Royal College of Defence Studies in London, where he studied global security, stability and prosperity at the National Strategic level, along with students from 57 different nations. This course built upon other staff training on the Advanced Staff Course at the Joint Services Command Staff College and an MA with King's College London.

Shore appointments have been demanding and varied; including the planning and execution of covert anti-submarine, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism operations from the Fleet Operations Centre at Northwood; training young officers at BRNC Dartmouth, with specific responsibilities for leadership, seamanship and navigation; on the strategic planning staff in the Ministry of Defence in London (with particular responsibility for Africa) and the Capability Manager for all surface ships, weapons and sensors in Navy Command HQ in Portsmouth. He also commanded HMS Raleigh in Torpoint, leading a first class multi-school training establishment that produces the fine young sailors to operate and maintain our ships, submarines and aircraft.

In 2013 and 2014 he spent 9 months in Bahrain as the Deputy Commander for all RN maritime operations in the Gulf and Middle East, working closely with the United States Fifth Fleet staff to integrate RN and USN warfighting capability in a highly intense operational theatre.

In August 2017 he took command of the Devonport Flotilla in August 2017.

He is Chairman of the GBR 420 class youth dinghy association, dedicated to producing future Olympic medallists, and a qualified RYA Yachtmaster Offshore and Dinghy Race Coach. He is also a Liveryman of the Honourable Company of Leathersellers, an ancient trade guild in London, a Freeman of the Honourable Company of Shipwrights and a Freeman of the City of London.

On 30 April 2020, he was appointed commander of CTF Sentinel. This is the operational arm of IMSC, which was established 7 November 2019, with a mission to deter state sponsored malign activity throughout the area of operation in order to reassure the merchant shipping industry.

He transitioned the task force from an emergent effort to an established regional presence and employed over 58 ships during his tenure. He expanded the original scope of CTF Sentinel operations by leading continual efforts to improve the credibility of task force deterrence measures, and by directing the execution of several operations in the Arabian Gulf that improved industry partners' perceptions of maritime security. He oversaw more than 16,000 collective hours of coverage by major warships and partner nation patrol vessels and over 13,000 hours of aircraft reconnaissance flights, ensuring the incident-free transit of over 1200 IMSC-flagged merchant vessels, totalling over 500,000,000 tons through the highly contested maritime choke points of the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait during a period of significant international political unrest.



On 19 November 2020 he (pictured left) handed over command to Royal Navy Commodore Craig Wood (pictured right) during a change of command ceremony onboard Naval Support Activity Bahrain, Nov. 19



In December 2020 he was made a Life Rear Commodore of the Royal Naval Association. His citation is included below.

In Queen's birthday honours in 2021 he was made a CBE for his work as Commander of the Devonport Flotilla and then as Commander of the Coalition Task Force Sentinel in the Gulf.



CITATION FOR ROYAL NAVAL ASSOCIATION LIFE REAR COMMODORE

COMMODORE ROBERT BELLFIELD

Commodore Rob Bellfield joined the Royal Naval Sailing Association in October 1983 and has been an integral part of it throughout his Naval career. A keen offshore and dinghy sailor, who enjoys both racing and cruising, he stepped up to take on the challenging role of the Service Sailing Association Chairman and Vice Commodore for the period February 2018 to December 2020. Throughout this time, he has led from the front, supporting the many sailing events, either by competing, encouraging from ashore or driving the organisation behind them. He has also supported the Rear Commodores and other volunteers strongly, believing in their initiatives and quietly enabling their efforts where necessary, always with a view to maximising opportunities on the water for everyone. A genuine believer in grass roots sailing and development pathways, Rob has looked to help mentor and guide those with less experience to have fun, gain in confidence and ultimately become a better sailor.

During his tenure Rob has overseen the transition of RNSA from its historic unincorporated mode to that of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. He has worked closely with the Chief Executive and Trustees to help shape this work and find the right balance in terms of delivery and governance. He has skilfully chaired the various management committees, navigating sensitive issues with empathy and purpose. With a strategic eye, Rob has cleverly blended innovation and change with pragmatism and tradition, thereby maintaining RNSA's heritage whilst generating momentum for the Association to succeed as a charity. He has been instrumental in the development of the relationship between RNSA and the RN Sports Board that is at the heart of the future model.

There have, of course, been many notable successes on his watch, including the RNSA being recognised as the RN Team of the Year in 2019, the winning of all the Inter Services trophies, establishing a new partnership with the Andrew Simpson Foundation to support overseas development training camps, the purchase of a new SB20 and the continued roll out of the dinghy replacement programme. This has all been achieved whilst holding down busy roles in the Royal Navy, including a 6-month operational tour in Bahrain. A valued deputy to RNSA's Commodore, Rob's experience, strength of character, ability to engage with and motivate sailors of all abilities and above all else, sheer love of sailing, underpin what has been an exemplary period leading the Association.

In recognition of these achievements and indeed of the expectation of more to come, it is an absolute pleasure to award Commodore Robert Bellfield the honour of becoming one of our very select band of Life Rear Commodores.

Vice Admiral CR Gardner CBE

16 December 2020

The following interview appeared in The East Anglian Daily Times on 16 July 2022.

Heaven & Hell: Commodore Robert Bellfield CBE ADC

Robert is naval regional commander for eastern England. Born in Paddington, he moved to the east aged 12, with water and boats featuring strongly in his life. He left Framlingham College for Dartmouth Royal Naval College in 1983, returning to the region in 2020. Robert is married to Zoe and has two daughters. He talks to Gina Long...



What is your connection to East Anglia?

My mother was born in Fornham St Martin near Bury St Edmunds, and I used to spend summer holidays staying with my grandparents in Hessel, where I was introduced to my grandfather's love of the countryside - he taught me to fish and shoot. My parents decided to relocate from West Sussex when I was 12 and we moved up to Clopton, near Woodbridge in 1978 - the year of Ipswich Town's FA Cup win! We also had a week every year on the Norfolk Broads as children, where I learned to sail in the little tender that we would drag behind the boat.

What is your East Anglian heaven?

It is set by the people that live here. The understated and simple approach to life by East Anglians is so enduring - hard working but never in a hurry and always having time for chat. It is only when you spend so much time away from the region that you really get to appreciate the beauty of the landscape and its people.

What is your East Anglian hell?

Going anywhere that involves the M25! Having spent so much of our married lives in the West Country we are always being invited down to stay with friends in the south west but we would rather stay at home!

What are your favourite local restaurants?

Having moved back during the pandemic, we haven't had the chance to enjoy the great offerings from the restaurants in East Anglia, although The Unruly Pig in Bromeswell did live up to its fantastic reputation.

What's your favourite East Anglian landmark?

It must be the River Deben in Woodbridge. I had a painting of the Tide Mill by Judy Mattin, the mother of a friend at school, in my cabin at sea, which reminded me of my home county as we sailed around the world.

What's the best thing that happens in East Anglia every year?

The Easter Egg Regatta at Waldringfield Sailing Club. A good way to start the season – in sun or snow!

What is your specialist Mastermind subject?

I would like to say Thomas the Tank Engine stories by WD Awdry – but that would let out a secret.

What is always in your fridge?

Milk. I cannot survive without a cup of tea and a bowl of cereal in the morning. There might be a bottle of rosé too. And Primula cheese is a very unhealthy obsession.

**What's your simple philosophy of life?**

It is easy to just say have fun – but it is to have the right work/life balance and time for others, to have fun. And stay young.

What's your favourite film?

There are some iconic naval wartime films such as 'The Cruel Sea' and 'In Which We Serve' that junior officers have to watch as a rite of passage, but it must be the first James Bond film I saw in a cinema, 'Live and Let Die'.

What was your first job?

I had a holiday job at Eversons Boatyard in Woodbridge, I painted the front of the office shed!

What is your most treasured possession?

A difficult question to answer but probably our yacht Jemima – a family treasure that takes up far too much of our time and our money, but she is a classic.

Who do you admire most?

Even if it wasn't the Platinum Jubilee year – I would still say Her Majesty the Queen.

What is your biggest indulgence?

Boats – we have more than we need!

What do you like about yourself most?

I think I can talk to anyone and I hope that I appear interested in others and their lives.

What's your worst character trait?

Sometimes I put myself first and then remind myself that it is not always a good thing.

Where is your favourite holiday destination?

Salcombe in Devon, outside the peak season, closely followed by the Norfolk Broads. Abroad would have to be the Caribbean, or a secluded farmhouse in France.

Best day of your life?

Our wedding day must top the bill. One of many memorable days.

What's your favourite breakfast?

I would like to say a healthy continental breakfast with cheeses, hams, and fine breads, but it would have to be a classic English – so predictable.

What's your favourite tipple?

It depends on the occasion. A gin martini cocktail is a family speciality. My parents used to hold a Christmas drinks party with martinis and guests would regularly fall into the Christmas tree. But a refreshing pint of Adnams Southwold, or Victoria Bitter, after a day on the water, is an East Anglian speciality. Although I discovered you could buy Adnams in Bahrain!

What's your hidden talent?

Not dancing! Probably a small amount of musical talent, as those who I played the tenor horn with in the Woodbridge Excelsior Band will recognise. When I brought my ship into Ipswich the Woodbridge Excelsior Band played at the reception – a lovely touch.

What's your earliest memory?

The memory bank starts at about the age of four – a having a crush on a French girl on holiday in Portugal. Or maybe a bit younger playing in the paddling pool in the garden. The second answer is probably more appropriate!

What would you like played at your funeral?

'What shall we do with the Drunken Sailor'.

Tell us something people don't know about you?

That my other 'best day of my life' was being invited to travel in the driver's cab of an express train on the West Coast Main Line from Crewe to Euston and back to Birmingham. Don't tell anyone.

Tell us why you live here and nowhere else?

Having lived in Devon (several times), Dorset, Hampshire, Hertfordshire and Cornwall – that fact that we have returned here is a message in itself. Returning to family roots is important to both of us and we are loving being back in East Anglia with family and friends.

What do you want to tell our readers about most?

I wouldn't change any of my life choices. Serving in the Royal Navy for almost 39 years has been an honour and I frequently remind myself that it is a privilege to hold the Queen's Commission and to work with so many wonderful people. I hope I have made a difference for others in my life so far. For those 'wanting to make a difference, joining the Royal Navy is a career that doesn't just set you up with skills for life and a good wage from day one. You'll experience travel, adventure, friendships and challenges - no two days will be the same. A career with the Royal Navy offers you more than any job you'll find in civilian life, you'll go places you've never been, experience things you wouldn't anywhere else, and develop skills you don't even know you have yet.
royalnavy.mod.uk/careers/why-navy