

PUSSER'S® RUM

History, Facts, Folklore & Nelson



Gold Medal, International Wine & Spirits Festival, London 2004
Double Gold, World Spirits Competition, San Francisco 2003, 2005.
International Rum Festival 2008, Rum Masters, London 2009

BRIEF HISTORY BRITISH NAVY PUSSEY'S RUM®

There are few spirits with as colorful and so long a documented history than PUSSEY'S NAVY RUM.

Rum and the sea are inseparable, and no rum is more akin to the sea and the seaman than PUSSEY'S. For over 300 years, the jack tars of Great Britain's Royal Navy were issued a daily ration (tot) of Admiralty rum by the Purser (known to the Navy as the "Pusser"). From 1640 to July 31st, 1970, rum was dispensed on board ships of the Royal Navy. It was one of the few daily comforts afforded those early seaman as they fought and sailed the globe to keep Great Britain's sea lanes open.

It is quite incredible that the issue of PUSSEY'S in the Royal Navy should have continued for well over 300 years until it was finally abolished on July 31st, 1970. The reasons for abolition were much the same as for reductions in the past, that is the seamen were much more efficient without it, and the Admiralty Board concluded that in a highly sophisticated navy no risk for margin or error which might be attributable to rum could be allowed.

BRITISH NAVY PUSSEY'S RUM is the same Admiralty blend of five West Indian rums as issued on board British warships. In 1979, Charles Tobias, the Pusser's Chairman, was given the rights to blend, bottle and sell Pusser's Rum. It is with the Admiralty's blessing and approval that PUSSEY'S is now available to the consumer. The Royal Navy Sailor's Fund, a naval charity more commonly called the 'Tot Fund' receives a substantial donation from the sale of each bottle of BRITISH NAVY PUSSEY'S RUM. Aside from the Fund's original bequest, the Pusser's contribution has become the Fund's largest source of income. The Fund was originally established by the Royal Navy to compensate the jack tars for the loss of their rum ration. An amount of money equivalent to that which would have been spent on a two years' supply of rum was placed into a sinking Fund, and the interest earned spent annually on amenities ashore for those serving on active duty.

And the name PUSSEY'S? A corruption of *purser*. For hundreds of years the jack tars of the Royal Navy have referred to the *purser* as the *pusser*—and anything which came from the purser was called *pusser's*—and still is today!

PUSSEY'S is the *original* navy rum, the father of all navy rums. It has a full rich flavour that is unique to PUSSEY'S. It is both a sipping and a mixing rum with a natural flavour that is pleasantly discerned in any mixed cocktail that employs it. A mixed drink made with PUSSEY'S has its own distinctive flavour that is unique to PUSSEY'S, and the substitution of any other rum is readily detected. PUSSEY'S uses no flavouring agents. It is all *natural*.

The gold medals it has recently won at the International Wine & Spirits Festival,

London, 2001; and the *Double Gold* at the San Francisco World's Spirits Competition, 2003 and 2005 attest to the quality of the product.

PUSSER'S WOODEN DISTILLATION

The unique, natural flavour of PUSSER'S RUM derives from its wooden distillation. It is still distilled in wood as it was centuries ago.

The rum in a Pusser's bottle has been distilled in the same wooden pot-stills that were used to supply the Admiralty's rum for more than two centuries from the days of Nelson and the great sailing navies. It is the world's only rum or spirit that is still distilled in wood as opposed to the modern, metal column-stills in use today.



The wooden pot-stills in which PUSSER'S RUM is distilled.

'Navy' or 'Admiralty Rum' is not just a name for dark rum, but rather the name given to the Royal Navy's rum that evolved into a blend of several pot-stilled rums of which the major constituents were distilled in wooden pot-stills in lieu of the normal metal ones. The distillation of rum in wood imparts a flavour so full and rich that other rums are bland by comparison.

Like single malt whiskeys, whose distinct and rich flavours are the product of pot-stills (and not the modern continuous still), this handcrafted wooden distillation is the bedrock of PUSSEY'S RUM, the vital part of the process that makes it so distinctively flavourful and different from those dark and golden rums that are distilled in metal. Unlike metal, wood soaks up the flavour of whatever it contacts so that continuous usage of these wooden pot-stills has impregnated their wooden staves with 200 years of esters and congeners - the organic compounds that impart flavour to wines and spirits.

Following distillation, all rums are aged for some time in wood to impart smoothness and flavour. But PUSSEY'S has a head-start over rums distilled in metal stills because it begins the aging process with an extraordinarily rich and complex flavour already in place from its wooden distillation. Thus when the aging process is completed, the natural flavour of PUSSEY'S surpasses by far that of other rums.

While the rich flavour of PUSSEY'S RUM is natural, most major rum brands add flavouring agents to increase smoothness and body. One or two may even add miniscule amounts of what is claimed to be wooden pot-stilled rum to imply wooden distillation. However the amount added is so small as to have little or no effect on flavour.

Like malt whiskeys that are also pot-stilled, PUSSEY'S is significantly more costly to produce because pot-stills are inefficient and expensive to operate, and a wooden pot-still the more so. The modern continuous stills of today are very efficient, easily stripping out to the legal limit of just under 95% alc/vol. from the wash compared to a poor 67% for a wooden pot-still. This greatly increases the cost of producing PUSSEY'S. However, if PUSSEY'S wasn't distilled this way, it wouldn't be a real Navy Rum; it wouldn't be PUSSEY'S, and most importantly, it wouldn't taste the same! In respect to flavour, it is fair to say that PUSSEY'S is truly the single malt of rum. It is the most naturally flavourful of all rums, one of the few rums in the world whose flavour can still be enjoyed through the mix of a cocktail. But it is also a fine sipping rum, especially when slightly chilled to about 13-16°C/55-60°F and sipped from a cognac glass. It is the quality and the unsurpassed richness of the Pussey's flavour that makes it the paragon when it comes to rum and flavour.

No history of PUSSEY'S RUM would be complete without the mention of *grog*. Grog is nothing more than PUSSEY'S RUM, fresh lime juice, sugar and water. It came about this way. There was an admiral by the name of Vernon who was much loved by his men who had named him affectionately *Old Grog* on account of the grogram cloak he oftentimes wore. (Grogram is a rough hewn fabric of mohair and silk).

In Vernon's days, the sailors received a pint a day of PUSSEY'S RUM, neat, that is without water. He was concerned with what he called *the swinish vice of drunkenness* which ensued from drinking so much neat rum at one time. Thus, on August 20th, 1740 he ordered that the men's rum should every day be diluted with two parts of water to one of rum, and that lime juice and sugar be added to "make it more palatable" to them. The men were furious that he should have diluted their daily *tot*, and thus named the mixture *grog* contemptuously from the name they'd already given him. Unknown to Vernon, Grog was to become the world's first cocktail!

How did all of this start commercially since there was never a commercial BRITISH NAVY PUSSEY'S RUM? It was the brainchild of Charles Tobias to commercialize the Royal Navy's rum tradition by offering for sale the same rum that they had issued on board their ships for so many years. He created the brand, the packaging and the entire marketing strategy that was built around the history and folklore that so completely surrounded the issue of PUSSEY'S RUM in the navy. This in 1979, Charles Tobias set out to resurrect the Royal Navy's Pussey's Rum tradition with which he was familiar. After numerous trips to England and much persuasion, he convinced the Admiralty Board to give him the blending formula, and the right to use the Royal Navy's flag, the White Ensign on his label along with the name BRITISH NAVY PUSSEY'S RUM. The Royal Navy is the oldest, continuously operating military organization in the world. Its charter dates back to 1585 and the time of Henry VIII. The Navy is known to abhor commercialism of any kind, and so it was a coup for Tobias to have been able to obtain these rights. Soon after, Tobias formed Pussey's Ltd. in the British Virgin Islands where he erected a blending and bottling plant. In November 1979, PUSSEY'S RUM was being shipped commercially for the first time.

At Tobias' insistence, the Royal Navy Sailors' Fund, a naval charity, receives a significant annual donation from the worldwide sales of PUSSEY'S RUM. This Pussey's contribution has become the Fund's largest source of income aside from its original bequest. This Pussey's donation has served to cement close ties between Pussey's and the Royal Navy which has helped to actively promote the brand on board their warships around the world. All messes on board RN ships have bars where social events are held regularly when in port. Pussey's is always featured which again authenticates the brand and its authentic ties to the Royal Navy.

As with most new ventures, the company's initial capitalization was limited, and so budgets for promotion and advertising were severely restricted. Consequently, Tobias determined that on the Company's limited budget, the most effective way to build the brand in the early stages would be through promotion focused on the many visitors to the British Virgin Islands, considered to be the charter boat capital of the world. Tobias concluded that the best way to do this would be to get people to taste the product. Thus soon after launching the rum, Pussey's opened its first bar, a small affair of only four seats, in combination with a modest retail establishment, on Main Street in Road Town, Tortola in the British Virgin Islands. Tobias, a compulsive collector of most things nautical, jammed the place full of interesting pieces of nautical flotsam and jetsam. Free rum tastings were offered, and only PUSSEY'S RUM drinks were served. The retail section consisted of a very limited selection of proprietary apparel, Pussey's tin mugs, T-shirts, pennants, caps and hats. Having spent five years sailing around the world, Tobias was acutely aware of the need for more functional tropical and nautical clothing and so he designed a few garments, such as the still popular Pussey's Sailing Shorts, that fit the conditions under which he had lived. The quality, fit and unique design of these Pussey's products became known and hence, the apparel business was born in concert with the rum. The PUSSEY'S apparel helped to increase brand awareness for the rum, and to provide earnings for increased spending on the

promotion and advertising.

The notoriety of the Pusser's Pub and Store, and its unique tropical rum drinks – including the Pusser's Painkiller which has since become world famous and continues to grow – spread throughout the Caribbean by word of mouth. Pub fare and Caribbean food in combination were added to the venue of rum drinks. The Pusser's Pub and Store were soon profitable, rum sales started to pick up, and the whole enterprise moved forward as brand awareness for Pusser's began to spread throughout the Caribbean and into the U.S.

Pusser's is also developing a strong presence in Great Britain, Germany and Australia.

PUSSEY'S RUM HISTORY, FACTS, FOLKLORE AND NELSON

For 330 years, from about 1640 through July 31st, 1970 Great Britain's Royal Navy issued a daily rum ration to their ships' crews. The rum was not a commercial brand, but rather a specific blend of rums that came from Admiralty specified stills in the West Indies. The rum was carried back to the naval victualling yards in Botley and Deptford, England where it was blended and stored to a unique Admiralty formula. The unique blend was officially called *Admiralty Rum*, but the sailors called it *pusser's*.

On July 31st, 1970, the First Sea Lord issued an order that terminated the issue of rum. The Admiralty Board stated that the days of intrepid eyeball-to-eyeball combat had passed, and that a modern navy needed a clear brain and mental alertness which the daily issue of rum was not known to induce. So the issue of PUSSEY'S RUM ceased, and in its place, the money that would have been used to purchase a one year's supply of rum was instead used to establish the Royal Navy Sailor's Fund, or *Tot Fund* as the sailors call it. The income generated by this Fund is used to provide amenities to actively serving sailors.



PUSSEY'S RUM was never sold or offered to the public, and if a connoisseur obtained a tot or two, it was valued for a very special occasion. In 1979, Charles Tobias saw the opportunity to commercially revive the PUSSEY'S RUM tradition that he had been familiar with through his lifelong interest in the Royal Navy and Admiral Horatio Nelson. In 1979, the Admiralty Board granted him and his small company in the British Virgin Islands the rights to sell PUSSEY'S RUM commercially for the first time. The Royal Navy Sailor's Fund, more commonly called *The Tot Fund*, receives a substantial donation from the sales of the rum. This Pusser's donation has become the Fund's largest source of income aside from the Fund's original bequest.

Aside from being a superb product, Pusser's is unique in many ways. There is no

other brand that has such a colourful and documented history than does PUSSEY'S RUM. Many of the traditions and much of the terminology that has grown up around rum and drinking, have their origins with PUSSEY'S RUM. Rum is one of those spirits that conjures visions of pirates, naval battles, parties, far away tropical islands, blue lagoons, all somehow related to escape, romance and revelry. Rum is fun. Pussey's as a brand can authentically trade on all of its history and folklore like no other. Its colorful has been found to be fascinating to many who partake of the "Liquid History" that PUSSEY'S RUM represents. It is the stuff of Patrick O'Brian and the stories and traditions he wrote about in books like *Master and Commander*.

Some of that folklore follows.

- **The name PUSSEY'S.** Nothing more than a corruption of the word *purser* by the sailors after the seaman responsible for the issue of the rum.

- **Grog.** This most traditional of all rum drinks is a rich part of the early history of PUSSEY'S RUM. There was an Admiral by the name of Vernon who was the hero of the Battle of Porto Bello, the main area for Spanish trade in the Caribbean. He had selected it for attack because he learned that a large assignment of gold and silver had been sent there from Panama. The remarkable sequel, which followed the town's capture, was Vernon's decision that all public money found was to be divided fairly as prize



'Grog' being issued from the grog tub on board the Battleship HMS ENDYMION, 1905

money among those British crews which took part in the engagement. This was a brave step, in defiance of the regulations, but general delight at home in England over the victory caused it to be overlooked. No act could have done more to win the sailors' hearts as on most occasions they received nothing. The men had affectionately nicknamed Vernon *Old Grog* on account of the old grogram cloak he wore when the weather was bad. In Vernon's time, the men received one-half pint of rum a day which they drank neat, that is without water. Thus there was a lot of drunkenness and disobedience on board for which many of the men were brutally disciplined. He was very much concerned with what he called, "the swinish vice of drunkenness". He believed that if the rum was diluted with water that its effects on the senses would be reduced – even though the men were to receive the same amount of rum.

On August 20, 1740 he issued his Orders to Captains which stipulated that, ". . . their half pint of rum should be daily mixed with a quart of water . . . which they that are good husbandmen may (mix) with sugar and

limes to make it more palatable to them. . . The rum should be mixed in a scuttled butt (a cask with a lid) in the presence of the Officer of the Watch to make certain that the men are not defrauded in having their full allowance of rum”.

The men were incensed that he should have ordered that their rum to be diluted, and named it contemptuously *grog* from the name they had given Vernon. Thus true *grog* is PUSSER’S RUM with water, limejuice and brown sugar.

- ***The Grog Tub.*** Sailors have a way of embellishing their surroundings during their long stints at sea. The scuttled butt in Vernon’s order was a simple cask with a lid. Soon after he issued his order, the entire British Fleet adopted his procedures for watering the rum. Eventually, the scuttled butt gave way to the Grog Tub, an oak cask banded with polished brass or copper hoops and covered with a fancy lid. The side of the cask was emblazoned by the brass letters THE KING (or QUEEN, whomever was the reigning monarch) GOD BLESS HIM! ~ the daily toast at noon when the rum was issued.



- ***The Framework of Hospitality.*** It was common practice for the sailors to retire to their sailors’ mess with their grog. Grog on board ship became currency, and was used to repay a debt, or as payment for a favour. It was even used as currency in playing cards and other games of chance. The currency of the *tot* (the daily ration) went like this:

3 ‘wets’ (a tiny, tiny sip) equaled 1 sip.
3 sips equaled one gulp.
3 gulps equaled one tot.

- ***Traditional Royal Navy Toasts.*** In the early days, up until about 1900, the officers also received rum. In the Ward Room of the Officers Quarters, the daily dinner ritual (at noon) was to toast the reigning monarch, and this was followed by the toast of the day. This ritual is still followed. The toasts of the day were:

Monday: Our ships at sea.

Tuesday: Our men.

Wednesday: Ourselves.

Thursday: A bloody war and quick promotion.

Friday: A willing soul and sea room.

Saturday: Sweethearts and wives, may they never meet.

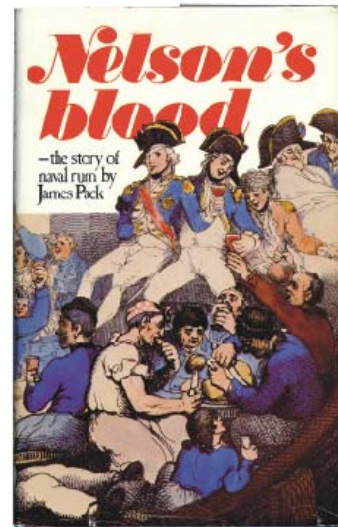
Sunday: Absent friends and those at sea.

- ***“Splice the Main Brace!”*** The great sailing ships were propelled only by the wind in their sails which were attached to spars called *yards*. The lines to trim the sails were called *braces* and ran from the ends of the yards to the deck. The *main brace* was the largest



and heaviest of all the rigging being up to 20" diameter on the big ships. To splice it was one of the most difficult tasks on board ship. Sometimes in the heat of battle, the braces were shot away making the ship unmanageable. To those that "*Spliced the Main Brace*" went a double issue of rum. It became customary to always "*Splice the Main Brace*" before battle, always after victory, and to reward a ship's crew, or sometimes the entire fleet, with the order to "*Splice the Main Brace!*" which meant a double issue of rum for a job well done. The ritual was always preceded by hoisting the flag signal to "*Splice the Main Brace!*" In recent times, to say to a friend, "*Let's 'Splice the Main Brace!'*" is akin to saying "Let's have a drink!".

- ***Nelson's Blood.*** Another popular name appended to PUSSEY'S RUM is "Nelson's Blood". Vice Admiral Horatio Viscount Nelson was the greatest fighting admiral in the days of the tall ships. He was Great Britain's greatest hero, and is still revered today for his courage and victory at Trafalgar which ceded control of the seas to Great Britain for the next one hundred years. On October 21st, 1805, Nelson commanded the British fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar where he defeated the combined fleets of France and Spain. Outnumbered two to one, he sank or captured 19 of their ships to not a single loss of his own. Unfortunately, he was mortally wounded by a French sharpshooter. As he lay dying, he requested that his body not be thrown overboard as was the custom in those days. At the end of the battle, legend has it that they placed Nelson's body in a large puncheon (cask) of Admiralty rum to preserve it for the long trip home. Upon arrival at Portsmouth, his pickled body was removed, but most of the rum was gone. The sailors had drilled a small hole at the base of the cask, and drank all the rum, thereby drinking of "Nelson's Blood" which became synonymous with the name PUSSEY'S RUM. The expression is still popular in the Royal Navy today when alluding to PUSSEY'S RUM. And a book has even been published chronicling the history of PUSSEY'S RUM in the Royal Navy, and the book's title is *Nelson's Blood!*



- ***The Forward from "Nelson's Blood"*** authenticates the Pussey's claim as the Original Navy Rum so vital to the ownership of the navy rum category. It was Admiral of the Fleet Lewin, then the First Sea Lord, that gave permission to Charles Tobias to commercialize the Royal Navy's rum.

Foreword

The sailor's rum ration, so much a part of the life and image of the Royal Navy for over 300 years, has become a nostalgic memory. In this fascinating and comprehensive book, Captain Pack sets the story of the tot against a background of our maritime history throughout that period — wars, bloody battles, keeping the peace, long voyages of exploration and scientific research — a period that saw the rise of Empire and transition to Commonwealth.

Life at sea was hard and tough; the daily tot not only compensated for the cold and wet, the hard tack and ships biscuit, but also helped to keep Jack's morale high — and it was by the fortitude and strength of such men that the seas were kept free for our seaborne trade. However, as steam replaced sail, social changes ashore and afloat and the increasing sophistication of equipment continually called into question the need for the daily issue of grog. I join those who believe that its abolition was at least twenty years too late.

I was first introduced to the tot as a midshipman during the last war. When the Mediterranean Fleet battleships were in Alexandria, their picket boats would carry out anti-submarine patrols at the seaward end of the Great Pass — the

channel leading to the harbour — and, being detached for the statutory twenty four hours, the crews took their rum ration with them. It was clear from the eagerness with which they offered to sloop a tot of their rum for a bottle of my gunroom beer that not all sailors considered rum to be the only desirable drink — and I'm glad to say that it is now too late for me to be arraigned for this offence against the regulations!

Many years later, command of an aircraft carrier finally convinced me that rum was an anachronism in the modern navy. The ship and her aircraft were packed with complex systems requiring a clear head and steady hand for both operation and maintenance. A well-drilled flight deck crew demonstrates the highest degree of team training and professional skill demanded from any group of servicemen, and there is no place for slow reactions or bad judgement. Rum was not issued until flying was over for the day and all understood the reason why.

I was at sea again in the Far East Fleet when the fateful decision was announced — no more rum. I have in my scrapbook a photograph of the then First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Michael Le Fanu, on a visit to the Fleet and surrounded by cheerful sailors with 'Save our Tot' emblazoned on their T-shirts — he didn't take the hint. When the day arrived, my flagship, HMS Blake, like many other ships, gave the tot a fitting farewell with a full ceremonial 'Up Spirits', the participants in a variety of imaginative rigs.

From the start of the new regime, all but the saltiest of old salts among the senior rates appreciate the freedom to have a gin and tonic at mid-day or a whisky and soda in the evening

— or indeed nothing at all — instead of the obligatory 'neaters'; while the junior rates, able to buy up to three cans of beer a day, found this more than ample.

The Sailors' Fund, established by the lump sum compensation for giving up the tot, contributes enormously to the well-being of sailors and their families; swimming pools, sports gear, disco equipment, coach trips in foreign ports, even a golf course, have all been financed from the Tot Fund. This book reveals (to me for the first time) the names of those who so skilfully conducted the negotiations with the Treasury on Jack's behalf. If ever two men deserve a statue erected by grateful sailors they must surely be Admiral Sir Frank Twiss and Sir Michael Carey.

Pusser's Rum isn't dead. Thanks to the imagination and initiative of Charles Tobias; the Admiralty Board who permitted him to use the formula; and not least E D and F Man, the original Admiralty rum broker, old sailors — and modern ones — can still have a nostalgic tot of Nelson's Blood. As they savour the unique flavour and feel the warm glow they can take added satisfaction from the knowledge that the Tot Fund benefits from the royalties.

In today's ships the spirit room is full of beer whilst the tot, like HMS Victory, has become part of naval history. For today's navy that is its rightful place.

Terence Lewin

ADMIRAL OF THE FLEET
Chief of the defence staff

