

Patron: Lord Cobbold DL
Ivry, Lady Freyberg

MATILDA (TILDA) WOODARD

June 2018

Back in December 2015 we wrote about **Captain Jolyon Woodard #875** on the family tree following his appointment as Captain at **Britannia Royal Naval College** in Dartmouth.

However, at that time we only told you part of the story so now to complete the tale of a truly amazing duo, here is an abridged version of **Steph Woolvin's** interview with **Tilda Woodard** for *By the Dart* magazine. "In years gone by some might have expected a Royal Naval Captain's wife to be seen and not heard – on the arm of her husband politely chatting to important guests at formal dinners. Not Tilda Woodard! She is a tough, headstrong Lieutenant Commander who spends time on training exercises in the mud on Dartmoor and is an accomplished triathlete with numerous trophies to her name.

When she was at school, Tilda wanted to be an astronaut, stuntwoman, secret agent or a pilot; her teacher said she couldn't possibly be any of those things and should pick a sensible career! Ten years later she became a Royal Air Force pilot. Tilda was one of the first female RAF pilots; 'In the military we tend to use only our rank and surname on paper so people don't know whether we're male or female. When I arrived at one base people were a bit surprised as they hadn't realised I was going to be a girl!'

She was desperate to fly helicopters so after completing her basic flying training at RAF Linton-on-Ouse she did her rotary wing training in Shropshire. She was sent to Search and Rescue where she experienced some of the most challenging and diverse flying she has ever confronted. She started as a junior pilot and progressed to Operational Captain rescuing stranded climbers, fishermen and even a cow. Life on the front line came next when she undertook an exchange on a Royal Navy Commando Squadron flying the Sea King Mk4 in support of the Royal Marines. During this tour she deployed to Bosnia, the Caribbean, Cyprus, Oman and the Indian Ocean. In Bosnia she recalls that if troops get stranded in a minefield the best way to extract them is to winch them out by helicopter.

At this time she met and married **Jolyon Woodard** now Captain of BRNC. Her next assignment was flying Pumas in Northern Ireland which luckily is where Jolyon was stationed but because of different shift patterns they didn't see much of each other; 'Jolyon was a higher rank than me so I had to call him "Sir" in public which everyone found quite amusing!' After 16 years in the RAF she decided it was time to return to civvy street. She and Jolyon moved to Bristol hoping to spend more time as a family, only for Jolyon to be deployed to Afghanistan.

After a few years out, including a trip to New Zealand, Tilda decided to join the Royal Naval Reserve. She returned to the Sea King Mk4 as an instructor at RNAS Yeovilton. In 2016 when she heard that Jolyon would become Captain at BRNC she discovered they needed an Assistant Trainer Manager so she applied for the job before her husband's appointment had been announced. 'When I visited the College someone asked if I would be staying in married quarters on site! I mumbled a non-committal answer and a few months later moved into the Captain's House!' Her role includes training the officer cadets in leadership, much time being spent on Dartmoor. She gets to know the cadets well which makes the passing out parades much more meaningful. Off duty Tilda is often in training for a Triathlon and is a member of the Royal

Navy Triathlon Team. Her love of sport ('a bit of an addiction') is spreading to her two daughters; **Anastasia** doing well in the Plymouth Cross Country and she and Jolyon both run for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity.

It is almost like Tilda has a dual personality. If she's in uniform the cadets salute her but in mufti, as the Captain's wife, they call her 'Ma'am'. 'I enjoy both roles – most Captain's wives only see the cadets in the corridors or at ceremonies – I get to work with them and see what makes them tick'

They are a truly remarkable duo; very hard to replace!



Lieutenant Commander Tilda
Woodard



The Captain and his wife run for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines
Charity