Bryant (Commodore, RN) is Director General at Seafarers UK, a welfare charity that has been helping seafarers and their families since 1917. What has been your focus for this Centenary year?

Our chosen Centenary theme has been ‘Past, Present and Future’ and we designed and promoted three very different but successful projects: a major extension to the Trinity House ‘Hall building’ in Mariners’ Park in Wallasey for older seafarers, a royal and ongoing support for the International Port Welfare Project to set up National Port Welfare Boards and Port Welfare Committees in all the major ports of the world, for today’s serving mariners; and finally to supply six mobile maritime Engineering Pathway vehicles, known as ‘Pods’, to persuade Sea Cadets and other young people to take an interest in a technical maritime future.

What are the most common challenges faced by men and women at sea, and how do you support them?

We deal with all seafarers, from Royal Marines in combat zones, to commercial crews with their problems of isolation, communication and multi-culturalism, through to lone fishermen working off the UK’s beaches, providing vital support to seafarers in need and their families.

What charitable events are planned over the coming months?

In terms of challenge events, we will continue to concentrate on the London Marathon and our very own ‘24 Peaks’ event where teams, often from maritime companies, attempt to climb 24 separate peaks in the English Lake District, all over 2000m high, in 24 hours. It’s a remarkable test of endurance and team-building, but much enjoyed by all. In a new initiative, we shall be trying to gain more substantive and enduring support from the industry by showcasing what we do in terms of career awareness and promotion, as well as our more well-known welfare and personnel support work.

Tell us about your most memorable shipping experience and favourite ship.

A difficult choice, given the hugely varied and enjoyable 34 years I had in the Royal Navy, but I suppose my favourite ship would have to be my last one, in command of HMS ENDURANCE for two wonderful seasons in the South Atlantic and Antarctica. It was good to make much closer acquaintance with the Falkland Islands and South Georgia without being shot at! The ship had three main tactical defence priorities, reinforcing the Antarctic Treaty regulations among the many nations operating in the UK claimed territory, hydrographic surveying, often in uncharted waters with a seabed that could go from 2000m to 10m within a few hundred yards (that keeps you awake), and support for the crewing heroes of the British Antarctic Survey, where our Lynx helicopters could often insert their scientists onto glaciers and mountain tops which otherwise they could not have reached.

Despite surviving the Falklands conflict and a major helicopter ditching earlier in my career, I think perhaps the most memorable experience was also in Antarctica, when we were sent that a huge floating iceberg rather larger than Gibraltar (but not as welcoming) was about to cut off our escape route and possibly crush the ship into the ice shelf. We had to notify the helicopter to find a route out - an interesting half an hour, as we contemplated sharing the fate of Shackleton’s original ENDURANCE over eighty years previously!

In summary, after such a rewarding career in the Royal Navy, it’s been a huge privilege to serve today’s maritime community at the helm of Seafarers UK for the last 15 years, and I look forward to spending the next couple of years ensuring the charity is fully ready to face the challenges of our next century.