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**Views and opinions expressed in the R08 are those of the contributors and unless stated are not necessarily those of the Association.
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to Spring 2002 issue. This issue is also a Bulwark launch special with articles and photographs featuring the occasion which I hope you enjoy. A new membership list is enclosed which cancels all previous lists. No prizes for spotting my deliberate mistake in xmas issue, Suez was of course 45 years ago(in 2001)not 55, it took my wife to spot it after the checks and double checks had been done with the copies back from the printer - my apologies.

As promised part one of Mike Bridges story of Albion at Suez is included plus part two of Leigh Eastons memories as a Royal Artillery gunfire support observer. See you all at the AGM.

Deadline for Summer edition: 30th June

**Mike Noonan
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IN MEMORIUM

**Rear Admiral Philip (Percy) Gick RN OBE DSC Died 16 January 2002
Bert Pack (1509) Former Sgt RM Died 11 February 2002**

R I P

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From the Membership Secretary

Would the following members please confirm their email address with our webmaster (me Leigh Easton) at bulwarks@lineone.net :- James Wilson(454) Edmund Jones(1538) Stuart Wood(1556) Arthur Green(1571) David Jagger(1581) Robert Seaman(1659).

I am receiving an increasing number of emails contaminated with a virus. It is often not possible to repair the infected email, accordingly no reply will be transmitted.

Anyone who requires changes of their address to be registered with the association please tell me.

***Don't forget our own association website is at :-
www.bulwarkassoc.plus.com***

**My address is:- Glenmoray Hayford Place Cambussbarron Stirling
FK7 9JX**

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Please note that Mike Bridges email address is : MikeB6024@aol.com

Something a little different – “personalise your phone the military way” if you would like your mobile to play such tunes as Rule Britannia, A Life on the Ocean Wave etc try www.militarymobiles.com

YOUR COMMITTEE

President

Vice Admiral Sir Patrick Symons KCB

Vice Chairman

Mick Dunnington

Secretary

John Truscott

Treasurer

Robert Cowan

Social Secretary

Tim Holt

Membership Secretary

Leigh Easton

Editor R08

Mike Noonan

Archivist

Mike Bridges

Committee Members

Mick Toman

Dave Crees

Please note the above list includes Membership Secretary and Archivist both are new positions and require to be confirmed by members at the AGM.

The following three committee positions are up for election : -

Chairman Vice Chairman Social Secretary.

Subs

A final reminder that if you have not yet paid your subs you have until 1st of May to send them in to Bob Cowan at 10 Hereford Road Southsea PO5 2DR . n.b. subs are now £8.00 p.a.

Can You Help ?

From Ian Roberts

“I wonder any of your members would be able to assist me in my inquiries. The incident in question is an operation from HMS BULWARK by Fleet Air Arm pilots in 1956.

This involved a problem with an aircraft flown by S/Lt Gordon Meredith. He had to bail out, but due to a problem with the ejector seat the parachute did not open.

The aircraft crashed onto rocks and S/Lt Meredith was found dead after having crashed through a roof in Mallieha, Malta.

He was taken to Hal Far but his final resting place is unknown.

His family lived in Croydon however none of his surviving relatives can be traced.

The operation was in support of military action in the Suez Crisis.”

Ians' address :- 47 Glenfield Road Ashford Middx TW15 1JJ

John Hume is looking for anyone who remembers him from Centaur 1965-65 in particular Ted Stone killick of 26 mess, Mick Bowden Allan Winch Barny Barncoate Colin Northcott or Shady Lane.

Ron Alder (686) would like to know if anyone remembers the first commando commission ties and whether anyone entitled would be interested in obtaining one if an order went in for a new batch??

Anyone with a suggestion for an association tie please let the sec know

LAUNCH OF H.M.S. BULWARK

**By
Mike Bridges**

The second of a class of two large and powerful Amphibious Assault Ships for the Royal Navy under construction at BAE Systems Marine shipyard, Barrow-in Furness, was launched on the 15th of November 2001 by Lady Victoria Walker, wife of the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Alan Walker.

The first ship of the class, HMS Albion had been launched on March the 9th 2001 at Barrow by Her Royal Highness, the Princess Royal and is at present fitting out in the yard.

Both of these ships, known as Landing Platform Docks (LPDs) have been designed to transport an embarked military force of around 300 people, plus their equipment, vehicles and stores, across open oceans and land them on hostile shores using landing craft and helicopters. They are also able to co-ordinate amphibious operations through their integrated command, control and communications systems.

Both Albion and Bulwark are 176m in length, have a deep displacement of 18,400 tonnes. They are fitted with diesel-electric propulsion and have an estimated operational range of 8,000 nautical miles at a speed of 15 knots. They will both carry a crew of 325.

Albion will be fitting out until March 2002. Her contractor's sea trials are scheduled for May 2002, with a handover to the Ministry of Defence in September. Bulwark will be fitting out until her contractor's sea trials commence in February 2003 with her handover scheduled at the end of March of that year.

These two ships are the latest of a long history of vessels built at the Barrow Yards. There is evidence of small craft being constructed at Barrow from 1667, but the first building of warships commenced in 1877 with the building of two Gunboats, 'Foxhound' and 'Forward'.

In 1886 the yard built the first submarines, one for Turkey and the second for Russia. Neither of these were a great success but they were the fore-runners of a long history of submarine construction at Barrow.

In 1888 the yard was taken over by Naval Construction and Armaments Company Limited and secured their first order in 1889

for three cruisers, followed by HMS Powerful, the biggest cruiser in the world.

Vickers Sons and Company purchased the yard in 1889 and over the following ten years built such ships as Euryalus, Hogue, Dominion and King Alfred for the Royal Navy. Construction of submarines for the Royal Navy began in 1901 with the launch of the Holland class of vessels. In the 1930's the aircraft carriers Illustrious, Indomitable and the cruiser Jamaica were ordered. During WW2, 87 submarines and 18 X Craft Midget subs were produced between 1941 and 1945.

Warship production suffered a decline following the end of the war and the yard turned it's skills to building ocean liners that included the Oronsay, Oriana and Chusan.

With the emergence of the Cold War, submarine construction once more became essential with the first nuclear submarine HMS Dreadnought being launched in 1960 followed eventually by the Polaris submarines.

Eventually, shipbuilding at Barrow was taken over by VSEL Limited and on the 18th of July 1996, the then Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Portillo announced that due to the need to replace the ageing HMS Fearless and Intrepid, a new class of ship would be needed to enable the Royal Marines to increase their ability to mount amphibious operations. He announced that he was placing a contract with the yard to design and build the two new LPDs which would be named HMS Albion and Bulwark. These names were last used for two Centaur Class Light Fleet Carriers which had been converted to Commando Carriers in the 1960's.

Steel cutting for both ships commenced on November 17th 1997 and Albion was laid down on the 23rd of May 1998 at Barrow with Bulwark being laid down on January 27th 2000.

Albion and Bulwark are the largest ships to be built at Barrow since HMS Invincible and when completed will be based at Devonport, together with the Amphibious Carrier HMS Ocean.

Albion will carry the pennant number L14 and Bulwark L15.

The new vessels will have both a greater troop and greater vehicle capacity than the ships that they will replace. In addition to a ships complement of 325 they will normally be able to carry 305 troops but in emergencies will be able to accommodate up to 650. They can also carry up to 67 vehicles, 6 light guns and 9 main battle tanks.

The large flight deck will be able to support 2 large helicopters (either Merlin or Sea Kings) or one large Chinook or V22 Osprey.

They could also support a Sea Harrier in an emergency.

Armaments consist of four 30mm guns and two Goalkeeper weapons, electronics will include the ADAWS 2000 Combat Data System.

Like their predecessors, the new ships will have an internal dock which can be flooded to carry four LCUs, (Landing Craft Utility's Mk10s) . Albion and Bulwark will also be fitted with side ramps for rapid loading and unloading in port.

The new ships have been built in seven 'blocks' constructed in the Ship Hall from about 20 sub units before being assembled on the slipway.

Members of the HMS Bulwark, Albion and Centaur Association were kindly invited to attend the launch of the Bulwark and this offer was gratefully taken up by the Association. Fifty-seven members, coming from all over the UK attended and most arrived either by coach or via their own transport in Barrow on the 14th of November. They were accommodated in a total of eleven hotels and a Campsite with forty-eight of those members attending a Gala Dinner in the White House Hotel that evening. This was a great success and allowed members to become acquainted and share former experiences.

The following morning, bright and early! we mustered at the shipyard gaining our first sight of Bulwark towering on the slipway framed by two ship halls. In addition to ourselves, some 8,000 members of the public, shipyard workers and their families were present for the launch in addition to a large number of local school children waving their Union Jacks.

A contingent of Sea Cadets with Guard and Band marched proudly into the arena and a Royal Naval Sea King Helicopter appeared and hovered over the new ship.

Following a short service relayed from the launch podium and a speech from the Director of the Shipyard which included a welcome to members of the HMS Bulwark Association to the launch,

Lady Walker was invited to name the ship. As the bottle of champagne shattered against the bow, the seventh HMS Bulwark slid gracefully down the slipway and into the Walney Channel to the cheers of the vast crowd and the sirens and water cannons from the

waiting tugs. As the tugs turned the ship broadside on to the slipway, the RN Helicopter returned and made a low pass over the new vessel as if about to land on, before rising up to face the watchers on shore and giving a salute by ‘bowing’ to the podium. A very emotional moment for us all.

We watched as the ship was taken under tow to the fitting out basin which will be her new home for the next few months. Members of the Association then assembled at the rear of the launch podium, resplendent in our blazers bearing badges and medals of former days and careers now a distant memory.

We were there to greet our Association President, Vice Admiral Sir Patrick Symons who had been specially invited as being the last Captain of the last ship to bear the name of HMS Bulwark. We little expected what was to happen next! First, Lady Walker came over to us shook hands and chatted with us, she was followed in quick succession by the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Nigel Essenhig and several other senior Naval and Royal Marine Officers including the Commandant General Royal Marines as well as our President. They stood talking to us for nearly half an hour and gladly posed for camera shots and local TV Crews who, like us, were having a field day.

To our further delight, one of the Senior Naval Officers introduced us to Captain Keith Winstanley, the designated Captain of Bulwark. He stated that he was delighted to see us at the launch and firmly believed that an affiliation between his ship and our Association was an important future development.

On leaving the Yard we could not resist the chance of paying our respects to our other named ship, HMS Albion, obtaining a good view of her in the fitting out dock, where she was shortly after joined by Bulwark.

After all this excitement, there was only one thing left for us to do – as expected of old matelots – we adjourned to the nearest pub to toast the new ship and say goodbye to our new friends from the Association before dispersing on the long journey home.

Since those heady days, we have accumulated quite a collection of photographs of the occasion, plus a CD Disc kindly donated by BAE illustrating the building stages and launch of the new ship. We hope to display much of this material at the AGM in April in Portsmouth.

We have also learned the name of the new C.O of the Albion, Captain P.D. Hudson RN, who will take up his new appointment on the 14th of May. No doubt that our Secretary John Truscott will be following this one up in the hope that we may also have an affiliation with this ship also.

Finally, there cannot be many Associations who have two new ships in the water at the same time – Watch this space!

Yours aye, Mike Bridges

From Clare Pollard

Reminiscences of the launch of HMS Bulwark brought back vivid memories. It began in February 2001 with the successful move of the 2,100 tonne combined bow unit for Bulwark to the berth next to the Albion. Where it was butted up with the rest of the ship they sat there side by side, it was a delight to see them together on the berth, and they looked fabulous.

A few weeks later on Friday 9th March 2001 10,000 people gathered to witness the launch of HMS Albion by HRH The Princess Royal.

The ship slid down the slipway into the Walney Channel at 1015 four minutes ahead of schedule. Tugs had to act smartly to stop the 12,000 tonne Albion being carried away by the gusty wind and tide.

A thousand schoolchildren attended with balloons and flags handed out, the crowds were entertained by a Sea Cadet bugle band and the BAE systems brass band.

Two helicopters flew over, one RN flying a white ensign and one RM with a union flag.

In November the same year I stood in a busy motorway service station waiting to join the very well organised associations transport.

This time not alone as I was for Albion but with a good natured group going somewhere special.

At dinner that evening were the ships' badge dominated proceedings I felt the pride, patriotism and comradeship of this group of Bulwark Albion and Centaur men and women together with their aim of

supporting their new ship Bulwark who's launch the next day at 1022 was wonderful .

We were within yards of the new vessel, a light wind good vis, good tide, flags fluttered, the Sea Cadet Band were on top form, the new ship oised majestically, crowds everywhere the atmosphere was electric, it was excellent simply excellent.

Close to the viewing enclosure Vice Admiral Sir Patrick Symons detached himself from his party and came over to chat with us. The attendance of association members was particularly mentioned during the speeches and the Padre The Rev Di Hervey asked for thanks for those who in past days, some at the cost of their lives brought honours to the ships of the Royal Navy.

An air of expectant hush fell over the crowd and the suspense became too much for some.

The naming and crack of the champagne bottle along with the movement of this magnificent ship as she was released brought a gasp from the crowd (The previous Bulwark, launched in 1948 had hesitated on the slipway) within a minute she was cutting the water and afloat. No sooner had the hull come to rest assisted by 11,500 tonnes of drag chains then the tugs Trafalgar, Waterloo, Collingwood and Nimble secured to move the ship to her fitting out berth. 850 workers will begin fitting her out for sea trials in 14 months time and delivery in 18 months.

Before leaving the shipyard for a celebration drink we were able to meet and talk at length with our President, Lady Walker Bulwarks sponsor was especially pleased to meet Association members and denied calling BINGO as the ship moved down the slipway (someone did !)

The 1ST Sea Lord Sir Nigel Essenhigh looked impressed by our turnout and spent some time with our group and renewing his acquaintance with Wally Waltho.

Our President has written saying "November 15th 2001 was a very special day to be remembered by all luck enough to witness the perfect launch of the new Bulwark. Excellent weather, a large and enthusiastic crowd of local families and many other associated with the design, building and future of the new ship.

For the members of our association it was much more than that. It marked the culmination of 20 years of hoping and lobbying for a new ship to carry forward the history, traditions and great reputation of

the old ship, capable of going anywhere and doing anything asked of her.

We had an opportunity to meet the new team, which now forms the nucleus of the next commission. They will help us ensure the association has a real and exciting future with a supply of new members from a capital ship, certain to be at the heart of the Royal Navys joint operations in the 21st century”.

And from Dave Besant

On a cold Wednesday in November I mustered at a service station on the M5. My first run ashore with the association. I waited with bated breath not knowing what to expect. No worries, my first meeting with the gentlemen from Gloucester. What branch I asked? Stoker was the reply. If the engine branch is putting in an appearance its got to be a good run.

Coach arrived full of greetings and good spirit. I was meeting up with old ships. One we had been on a reunion to Malta, so off we went lots of lamp swinging and up spirits.

We booked into our Hotel, plenty of time to Dhobi and get ready for the evening dinner pre drinks, meeting up with old mates again.

One lad came from the Shetlands, its got to be good. Meal was excellent, I got to sit on the table with the committee, always a bit of a creep. Sharing wine with a Hairy Fairy, did it go out of fashion?

Time to stagger back to the Hotel too quickly.

Cometh the day. Fully booted and spurred, clean cap badge off we went to the shipyard. What was a pongoes wife doing the launch ?

Was Phil the Greek not good enough? Still it went off very well. Great to see they are keeping the old names going. It was over all too quickly. So it was another excuse to retire to a local ale house and sample the brew. Saying our farewells we boarded our coach for home.

To sum up I think the event was superb and well organised. My criticism was why we could not all share the same Hotel? I am being greedy but I would have like an extra day.

Thanks to you all . Sandy Bottoms to the next run ashore.

From your editor

To follow on from Mikes' article I would like to mention some points that stick in my mind of the occasion.

Arriving at the hotel the owner informed us that one of our shipmates had arrived 2days earlier and was waiting for us in the bar – where else. Going to investigate we were delighted to meet Dave Huggard from Orkney, and we thought we had travelled a long journey from Portsmouth !

It was also good to meet our membership sec Leigh Easton and to hold the first ever committee meeting outside Pompey.

Pre dinner drinks, the dinner itself with copious quantities of wine, and all that followed passed by in a pleasant haze with lots of lampswinging and plenty of ale being quaffed. It was great to see old familiar faces and meet so many new ones. A very good evening, one hopes the first of many.

Launch day, up at 0600, breakfast ,before transport at 0800 to the shipyard. Cold weather soon cleared alcoholic vapours away. Weather conditions ideal for the launch : spring tide, no wind, sunny day, the ship slid down the ways into the Walney channel without a hitch, a sight to remember.

As Mike has mentioned we then met and chatted to virtually all of the VIPs aswell as 1st Sea Lord, CGRM, Lady Walker ,Vice Admiral Blackham and Rear Admiral Guild we were also delighted to meet the whole of the ships' company of Bulwark, i.e. CO(desig)Captain Keith Winstanley MBE, the current SNO /MEO Commander Trevor Gulley and Warrant Officer Barry Pamplin who is propulsion manager otherwise known the chief Tiff. Crossing the bridge from the yard to the pub we had a good view of Albion fitting out. Tot time in the Sheffield (named after the destroyer lost in the Falklands) provided a fitting venue as the pubs' walls were covered in pictures of warships past and present and we were made very welcome.

A truly memorable day.

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The following article was submitted by Colin Taylor (208) and is reproduced by permission of the Editor of The Globe and Laurel

“The future HMS Bulwark launched at the end of last year is the second of two Landing Platform Dock (Replacement) (LPD(R) type vessels built by BAE Systems Barrow in Furness. At 18,400 tonnes fully laden and 176m x 32.3 x 7.1m. She is powered by two 6.25MW and two 1.56MW diesels generators driving two motors through two shafts, and has one bow thruster. She has a well dock, a large stern gate and side ramp access, two helicopter spots and is built to Naval damage control standards.

Her future Assault Squadron Royal Marines (ASRM) will be 4 ASRM which will leave HMS Fearless in December 2002 and join Bulwark in March 2003 after a period of training with 1 Assault Group RM at Poole and Instow.

4 ASRM will operate four land craft utility Mk10 (LCU 10) from the dock and four batch 2 Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel Mk 5 (LCVP5) from davits.

Its amphibious Beach Unit (ABU) will be equipped with the new HIPPO Beach Recovery Vehicle (BRV), 2 x CASE Tractors Wheeled Forklift Rough Terrain (TWRFT) and 3 Inflatable Raiding Craft Mk2.

The ship will have an 8,000 mile range, a speed of around 18 knots and a complement of 325.

The LPDs will be fitted out as joint command platforms for the Commander Amphibious Task group (COMATG) and the Commander of the landing force (Usually Commander 3 Cdo Bde RM) with a Combined Operations Room from which the Naval and Military Staffs mount and control the progress of Amphibious ops. The ships will have up to date communications facilities.

Each ship will be able to billet up to 305 troops, including battle staffs and embarked aircrew for extended periods, or 710 troops for shorts periods in overload conditions.

Approximately 60 vehicles and their trailers could be embarked.

Weapons systems include 2 x 20mm gun mountings, 2 x GOALKEEPER Close in Weapons Systems and offboard decoy launchers.

Bulwark is due to be accepted into service in March 2003 and complete her trials by the end of the year.

Bulwark and Albion will both be Devonport based ships.”

**Albion Bulwark & Centaur alongside in Pompey Autumn 2001 ?
No I was not dreaming, in this case three sailing dinghys bearing the names of our favourite carriers painted on their respective hulls appeared on a jetty close to Semaphore Tower. On investigation it appears they had been returned from Kosovo where they had been based at Split and provided recreation for members of 845 squadron during their long deployment out there.
The dinghys had been generously provided by Sir Donald Gosling of NCP fame. Sadly by Christmas they had been disposed of.**

Leigh Eastons Memories
Part II

“Lack of agility and physical co-ordination”.
But I suspected it had more to do with a lack of killer instinct in the boxing ring. Back to Poole.
“You’re back” said Geordie Bilton, from Newcastle, of course.
“Chopped” I replied
“I never thought you’d last as long”
Praise at last I thought.
“Where do you want to go” said the Adjutant.
“Hong Kong” I replied. The regiment had HQs in Poole, a Battery in Malta and a Troop in Hong Kong.
“I think we might manage that” said the Adjutant.
December 1960. The Bristol Britannia of Hunting-Clan Airlines landed at Istanbul Airport. We all rushed off to get to the heads. All we found was a tap and a hole on the floor. We all waited till we got back on the aircraft. An entertaining trip though. Lightning danced along the wings as we passed from Bombay to Singapore. Finally we were there. Hong Kong, and Jock Reid from Aberdeenshire was there waiting for us. We were now part of 3 AOTRA.

A trip round to see the sights? Why not? Four of us hired a car. Up to the New Territories and back down to Kowloon. Threading through the side streets and suddenly we were waved down by a constable from the Royal Hong Kong Police. Unfortunately there were no red tabs under his shoulder number. He could not speak English. A crowd of interested locals began to gather. For some reason which I was never able to fathom out Jimmy (who was decidedly musical) had a clarinet with him in the back seat. The back window was already open so he stuck his head and shoulders out and proceeded to play a tune to the rapidly assembling crowd. They did not appear to appreciate his undoubted musical talent. Another constable with red tabs appeared. He got in and gave directions. This was beginning to look serious. The tall Station Inspector was from County Cork. The constable gave a long explanation in Cantonese. It looked bad.

“Who’s is the car”

“How long have you had it”

“Where did you get it”

“Who did you hire it from” and so on.

It turned out that it had been involved in a hit and run six months previously.

We were organised in parties of five. Captain, AOPA, 2

Driver/Operators and an RO2 from the Navy. The RO2 was the gen kiddie on Morse at 25 wpm none of us asked any more . Perhaps the Editor can check this out. I never enquired further. (*no problem to any self respecting sparker..ed*)

January 1961. “Cast off Forrard; Cast off Aft; Cast off Midships” and

I was bound for the Philippines on C Class Destroyer HMS Cavendish.

This was wonderful - I especially remember the Sunsets on the South China Sea and the Flying Fish zapping along beside us, out and in of the waves, leaving darker furrows. Apparently delicious grilled, but I never did find out, none of them coming high enough to get on deck.

We were winched up from the after deck into the Helicopter. Over what appeared to be Coral Reefs and into Nazasa Bay - beautiful white sand. The FOP this time unusually comprised of Capt. Whitmore, Petty Officer Telegraphist McKay (POTS), “Cheyenne” Body (RO2), and myself. POTS had an immaculate scar down the right hand side of his cheek - no one asked where he had got it. Cheyenne’s Shoot was superb - he was on target with classic bracketing. I didn’t do so well - I was aware that Capt. Whitmore was none too pleased.

We were greeted with a USMC Band playing Colonel Bogey as we tied up alongside in Subic Bay. This was impressive. The run ashore was spectacular as well - every second shack was a bar with cowboy film swing doors. Someone's drink (it might have been mine) spilled on the table - my cigarette end touched it and the spirit ignited. Powerful stuff, whatever it was. We then purchased some Kebabs from the locals which were terrific and I vaguely remember having grave difficulty saluting the Officer of the Watch as we boarded Cavendish.

And so the return trip to Hong Kong. Along with Uckers, Chess was a firm favourite on the lower deck (Seaman's Mess). You had to watch the board though. If you turned away there was usually a mesmeric movement of pieces not to your advantage.

The grog issue was a total surprise - for me anyway. It was in fact the finest quality Jamaican rum. Watered down for the seaman's mess, of course, only the petty officers got it neat. I particularly remember "sippers" or "gulpers" ie someone had a birthday and a trifle extra was passed around the mess.

Suddenly POTS was on the blower. This was Cavendish's first entrance to Hong Kong with her current complement. Her skipper invited POTS to give the matelots (they referred to us as pongos - and probably still do) some words of wisdom. Advice from an expert.

Football and Deck Hockey were staple sports for us at Whitfield Barracks in Kowloon. I actually made reserve goalkeeper for the troop side - amazing.

A source of contention was the B grading for AOPAs. The only A grading we knew of was for Artillery Surveyors. Apparently the difference was that they had to use theodolites. We never did resolve this one.

Suddenly we were Forward Air Controllers for Navy Aircraft as well. The task had just been transferred from the Royal Signals. This was exciting. As I recall it the pilot reported strike details from the contact point some 40 miles out. We then passed target details, course to steer and time to Pull Up Point (which was at right angles to the target) to the pilot. The Buccaneers then soared to 5000' at the Pull Up Point, swept round through 360 degrees and came in low over the OP and delivered. It certainly generated job satisfaction.

Three of us decided to have a proper Chinese meal in a proper Chinese restaurant. Local info directed us far up Nathan Road. We climbed the stairs and sat down at the only free table. It certainly was Chinese - we

were the only Europeans there. Stolid stares greeted us all round. The table was not set. Eventually a waiter arrived, ignored us and put one knife down. Fifteen minutes passed and he came back, put a second us hadn't a clue what he was talking about.

To be continued....

‘OPERATION MUSKETEER’

SUEZ 1956

A Personal Recollection

By

Michael A. Bridges

It was a cold October morning in 1949 in Rosyth Naval Dockyard, when I saw HMS Albion for the first time. I was a fifteen year old Storehouseboy working in the Dockyard and like many other listeners to BBC Radio, had been following the gripping story of a tragedy at sea involving the Albion and her first eventful voyage.

Although launched in May 1947 by Mrs Attlee, wife of the then Prime Minister, at the Swan Hunter Shipyard in Wallsend, due to a Government policy of giving priority to replacing merchant shipping lost during World War 2, Albion lay as a hulk on the Tyne for two years until the decision was made to resume the work needed to complete her. However, before this work could commence, she would have to be towed to Rosyth for drydocking and maintenance carried out to her hull. Rosyth was the nearest yard that had a dock big enough to take her.

Not only was this to be her first voyage, it was very nearly her last. Not long after the tow commenced and on leaving the shelter of the Tyne, severe weather conditions were building up and the three tugs towing her, were soon experiencing difficulties with the heavy seas and gale force winds. During that first evening, when in a position close to the Farne Islands, a collision occurred between the Albion and the 2,000 ton collier Maystone. The collier began to sink almost immediately and although the shipyard members of Albion's crew threw lines to the colliers crew, tragically only four members of the Maystone's crew of twenty-five could be saved.

Badly holed aft, the tow was continued ,but due to the huge volume of seawater entering the large hole in her hull caused by the collision, Albion was rapidly reaching a critical condition. Thankfully, later during the night, the gales began to ease and the tow was eventually completed with an otherwise safe arrival at Rosyth the following morning.

As I stood on the dockside that morning gazing in awe at the enormous gash in her hull and wondering how she had managed to stay afloat, I little realised at that moment, that one day in the future, I would sail into action onboard this ship.

Albion returned to Wallsend after repairs to the hull had been completed and the planned maintenance carried out. Thankfully the tow back was uneventful on this occasion. She was completed and on the 26th of May 1954, Commissioned and formally entered service with the Royal Navy. One of a class of three ships built, originally there had been plans to build eight, but again due to cutbacks, only the Centaur, Bulwark and Albion were completed. Hermes was a half sister to the class, but she did not enter service with the Royal Navy until 1959.

It was some six and a half years after I had watched the arrival of Albion at Rosyth and now with nearly four years service in the Royal Navy behind me, I was drafted as a Leading Supply Assistant, to 802 Naval Air Squadron which, under it's new Commanding Officer, Lt.Cdr Roy Eveleigh, was forming up at HMS Fulmar, RNAS Lossiemouth. I was not new to the Fleet Air Arm world, as my previous draft had been with 826 NAS onboard HMS Eagle.

I travelled up to Lossiemouth via Perth on a cold January winters night in 1956, arriving in a blinding snowstorm and finding myself at the wrong end of the train on what proved to be a very long platform covered in two feet of snow. I struggled with kitbag, hammock and suitcase to where the transport was waiting with a very disgruntled driver who was not amused at having to come out at 0400 hours in that weather, only to find that the train was running an hour late. After a somewhat perilous journey through the ice and snow, we eventually arrived at Lossiemouth. I checked into my new mess and promptly went down with flu.

802 Squadron had been allocated to a hangar complex on a remote corner of the airfield. In the neighbouring hangar, 804 Squadron was also newly forming up. Both the squadrons were equipped with single

seat jet Seahawk fighter aircraft, which were a bit different to the lumbering three seater Mark 1 Gannets of my former squadron.

Over the months that followed, the squadron worked up to becoming fully operational. During the intensive flying programme, we tragically lost two of our pilots, Sub Lieutenant William Manson on the 10th of August 1956 and Lieutenant Lisle Madan, who had been my Divisional Officer, on the 4th of September. Both crashed into the Solway Firth on night flying, regrettably no trace was found of either of them. Bulwark to carry out deck landing exercises. As this little jaunt was to include a visit to Copenhagen, during that summer season, we were informed that the squadron would embark onboard HMS were not too upset about the temporary detachment. After embarking on a fishing trawler in the Port of Buckie, we were transported out to Bulwark which was laying about a mile offshore and sailed almost immediately.

One of our pilots was a young Flight Lieutenant George Black on transfer from the RAF. Of course, he had never made a deck landing for real, onboard a carrier, so naturally we were all very interested to see how he would make out. Half the squadron was up on the 'goofing deck' to view this phenomenon, we waited with bated breath and with a few unsporting comments about 'Crabfat' pilots doing a mans job! - flying with the Senior Service. Needless to say, he had a good launch and had a perfect approach, landing back on the flight deck to the rousing cheers of the 'disbelievers'. He had gained his (water) wings and had become immediately accepted as an Honorary Fleet Air Arm pilot. I have no doubt that he found himself 'in the chair' at the wardroom celebrations that evening. Being with the Navy must have must have done him the world of good, I saw in a book recently, that he made it to at least, Air Vice Marshal.

On arrival in Copenhagen, the ship was opened to the public and we received many thousands of visitors who also enjoyed a spectacular 'Beat the Retreat' ceremony performed by the Royal Marine Band that we had onboard. The run ashore was also a great success with our squadron personnel holding court with an impromptu sing-song in the Tivoli Gardens, surrounded by about two hundred Danes and some very bemused 802 pilots who tried, without success, to get in on the free beers we were earning from our choral efforts.

Back in Lossiemouth once again, the extensive flying programme continued. Originally 802 Squadron was destined to join Ark Royal, but political events conspired to change that plan. For some time, events in Egypt had been causing some alarm in Government circles. We had recently pulled the last British soldiers out of the country following years of guarding the Canal Zone and confrontations with the Egyptian Police and other forces. Quite a large number of British soldiers, mostly National Servicemen had been killed during the conflicts and it is topical to record that it was at this time, the Islamic Fundamentalist Movement was formed in Egypt.

When Colonel Gamel Abdul Nasser replaced Mohammed Neguib as President of Egypt, he gave himself sweeping new powers and on the 26th of August 1956, announced the immediate nationalisation of the Suez Canal. The British Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden summoned the Chiefs

Of Staff to draw up plans for a possible re-occupation of the Canal Zone to counter what was being seen in Whitehall as a threat to this vital waterway.

Consequently, it was decided that 802 Squadron would embark in HMS Albion whilst 804 would join Bulwark. I clearly recall that on the day 804's aircraft were to fly out of Lossiemouth, our groundcrew were to see them off as their own crew had already moved south to join their ship.

Once all their pilots had been strapped in and were ready to go, the hangar doors opened and out came our pilots clutching paint brushes and pots of red paint. The helpless 804 pilots could only sit fuming as the 'Tigers Head' logos on their aircraft received sets of bleary red eyes to fly off with to their new home.

.....to be continued.