



ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

Hello Shipmates,

Sweden's desire to join N.A.T.O. had Putin, in a T.V. address, declare he would defeat them during his ambition to reclaim all territories lost in the past. He was, I think, talking about the 21 year war in 1700. A breathtaking statement!! But, like all politicians; to say - then do, are poles apart; in light of recent events he could get his nails severely clipped. The world has a cast iron lesson in what the underdog can achieve.

Ukraine's young people thought freedom was worlds apart from that Marxist utopia, converted their thoughts to deeds, although it is costing them dearly to do so.

To a more uplifting subject concerning our own shipmate Brian Turner. His prowess with the paint brush is well known, his modelling - not so.

As you probably read in last month's (October) magazine, a just completed, carrier *Victorious*, of about five feet long is a joy to behold. I'd opine it is a thing of beauty.



At the reunion I asked about aircraft on deck, would he purchase miniatures from the trade? "Goodness. No!". He made a full strike group of 6 Sea Vixens and 6 Buccaneers himself. Where he gets his patience from the Lord only knows.

I asked if his models were exhibited anywhere - he lives in a delightful little harbour town - the answer was no. His city fathers must be a lead-footed bunch if they cannot see interest being stimulated by museum quality work such as Brian's.

Turns out that about a year ago the maritime press had Plymouth's desire to set up a nautical museum. I was surprised such an address did not have such a venue. The one in Chatham drags in thousands of visitors, all spend a couple of bob to gain entry, then pass through the shop and refreshment room; the motive, as all retail outfits, is 'profit'. Take a quid, expand your exhibits, pay for transport and insurance, get new stuff in on long term loan etc.



Launch of aircraft carrier number 3 in China, named *Fujian*, tip the scales at 80,000 plus tons, is their first own design and build. One can notice it's a catapult equipped vessel that nearly certainly benefits from spy cells in U.S.A. pinching electromagnetic catapult technology.

Their first carriers were of that Soviet design built in the Ukraine; neither had catapult or arrestor wires. India followed the same route with ex Ukrainian hull. Now they have a homebuilt design in completion; 'proper carrier' that can hold strike squadrons, quite unlike our vertical take offs, which are heavier, thus shorter range with less offensive load carrying.

Meanwhile we, in the U.K. continue to compound our position as the world's naval laughing stock; our three billion carrier is, again, at anchor off the Isle of Wight. Was headed for a four month deployment to the United States but failed to make one day at sea following (quote) "A string of technical problems". The vessel is recorded having spent 87 days at sea in first two years of service.

At a ceremony in Pompey in January it was named **COMMAND SHIP. N.A.T.O. HIGH READINESS FORCE**. That's at the large end of the scale.

Recall the army rifle in 1985, five years after its inception, M.O.D. forced to report on its fitness for use, found 50 faults; a 'replace' version issued in 1992 found only seven defects had been remedied, and that following the Gulf war.

The 'suits' at M.O.D. did not give a shit about Tommy Atkins or they would not have sent him in harm's way with a sub-standard basic tool - his rifle.



Thinking further about Plymouth's desire for a maritime museum; four or five years back, perhaps less, a Falkland frigate, in very beat-up state was being hawked around various dockyards as an exhibit in need of a home. It was *H.M.S. Plymouth* - the beat-up state being due to her being the recipient of five unexploded bombs delivered by some determined Argie pilots. What better nucleus to build a museum round in that place.

I notice a seismic change in uniform, is it specifically for those matlots hauling H.M.Q on the Gun Carriage or a general mess issue for those in depot, or without a ship ?

Am alluding to their 'cap tallies' which read 'Royal Navy'. Maybe I demonstrate my ignorance again and find they have just become the norm.

Can see the benefit of it for wearers for example who bid their loved ones farewell, sail for the U.S. east coast on that three month exercise but fails to make it beyond Isle of Wight due to multiple poor workmanship problems; must join the queue to enter dry dock for an extended period.



Upside to that is no expensive strike wing was on board, not that we own one; vessel was on its way to 'ponce' off the U.S. Marine Corps, again.

OFF TO BONNY SCOTLAND

HMS Prince of Wales will now be going to Rosyth instead of the U.S.A. on exercise; their wives and children must be bewildered as to where they will see them next. I wondered if the *Prince of Wales* will go up on one shaft or with tugs, I feel the latter would add insult to injury. Repairs are said to take months rather than weeks. I'd wager the powers that be hope the *Queen Elizabeth's* similar drive train does not suffer before the *Prince of Wales* is repaired.

Built as sops to Scottish politics and R.A.F. high brass in a Scottish yard one wonders what our plethora of Admirals were thinking when the names were chosen; the most expensive vessels ever purchased and least able to perform their namesakes' mission. Instead of buttock kissing round Kensington Palace they should have been fighting 'tooth and nail' for proper carriers.

A few nights ago, on T.V., it said the R.A.F. has 172 Typhoons on their books in various stages of storage. The French '*Armée de l'Air*' started out like that with *Raphael*, when the Air Force had its fill the French builder modified the rest with tougher, hardened variant; undercarriage, hooks, flappery etc. the 'strike element' of their nuke powered carrier *Charles de Gaulle* - and thus the only foreign carrier that regularly accompanies a U.S. carrier on their deployments.

The U.K. has been side-lined for some considerable time as one can only talk up a storm for so long, then make an excuse for not showing up before the pretence is recognised, plus, only on rare occasions does our part in an escort group reach fruition, with the billion pound 'D' class destroyers acting as wall art at Portsmouth - again with our duff engines.

To see the new parliament trumpet its support for armed forces, extolling especially how R.N. fortunes are going to blossom on the Clyde, 4000 men extra on labour force for frigate build, several of which, they say, will come from the new hall at Rosyth where multiples can be built, side by side - we shall see!

It is not so long ago a 'noble lord' was lamenting the fact the R.N. is 5000 recruits short to meet planned expansion. The cost of those inactive Typhoons was an eye-watering figure for a nation like ours; it was contained by the Lockheed rep. who pointed out their F 16's were, in comparison - **tuppence each** - his words.

Each time an upgrade is carried out the parts count comes down and performance goes up, at least eight western nations operate them.

IS THERE A CHINK IN THE OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT ?

I am exasperated by a newspaper article showing ex R.A.F. pilots on Chinese air force pay roll at £250,000 per annum, teaching them how to dog fight, shoot down the Typhoons and other N.A.T.O. front line air craft; are we mad? To me that's a treacherous act allowed by the top R.A.F. brass; does not the 'official secrets act' apply somewhere here?

Hundreds of trifling jobs have non-disclosure clauses of long periods or you are hauled through the courts and nailed to the floor.

I also find it sad our ship building programmes rely, to a greater extent, on imported plate. Of course China owns the lion's share of our blast furnace capacity these days. When will we need to just throw our hands in the air and rent the Sceptered Isles to China for whatever purpose it feels fit?

I notice plate prices have slipped a bit with the shipping industry in the doldrums, driven by ship-breaking prices being down.

Apart from bases the U.K. were forced to hand over, those redundant 4-stack destroyers we got in return were \$3,000 to \$4,000 each on the open market if we had had to pay cash for them (then dollars); am too dim to equate that with today's prices for you.

I only ever saw one of those 4-stackers, brought back from Russia with battleship **Royal Sovereign**; it had been on war time loan, tied upstream of the Forth Bridge just off Port Edgar where my boat was. The Scots MFV trot boat crew said both were beyond absolute disgrace; 'Ivan' had defecated everywhere, trash filled compartments, every Gagne clock-face and the like clouted with a hammer, smashed beyond reason.

Moral of that story, I guess, is: never loan a Russian anything.

Since the last letter and this I spent another six days in Medway Maritime Hospital. One has to be prepared to lie, fib and twist to get out of the place; it's about all one hears in the passages.

The local paper is never without a report on lack of beds, yet doctors roam about at random, all times of the day sounding anything but decisive.

A good example of how to do it was when I was in the Catholic hospital at Aachen on the German-Dutch border; had a dislocation at a work site and was taken there at 7 in the morning'

The head doctor came round with his retinue, everyone had an input round your bed, decision made. When doc. moved on action was taken and I bet any bed which was required was available by 10 a.m. Organisation was very apparent. I recall how basic but tasty (and presented well) was the food - an all-round nice experience.

Now! All the foregoing reads to me as a bit disjointed, hope it makes sense so do tell if you would like me to shut up and go away. I enjoy doing it as a means of being a little in touch with us few survivors.