

ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

Greetings Shipmates,

Late '47 when I joined *Shotley Annexe*, a few *Arethusa* boys were amongst us. Their 'common bond' was always evident and leaves me wondering who is still amongst us. *Arethusa's* time as a haven for boys is an important part of our heritage.

Medway's local newspapers never carried a whisper of her return to Europe where she was built at Blom & Voss yard in Hamburg. Mid-July heavy lift ship *Combi Dock 3* departed New York Seaport Museum collection with *Peking*, minus yards, strapped to its back; a four-masted barque built in 1911.



Sold to Shaftsbury homes in 1932, to be renamed *Arethusa*, the boys' training ship, moored at Upnor opposite *Thunderbolt Pier* on the river Medway. She served that purpose until about 1970 before sale to the above named collection in 1974, and towed across the Atlantic.

Fast forward to 2015, she had been put up for disposal, but was saved from breaking by the German government who purchased it for 120 million Euros. Large parts of the tax payers protested loudly about that, but by now I would think it's tied up in Hamburg and will be retuned, restored in German fashion. I do hope those 'Ari boys' who are around visit that splendid city for a nostalgic trip back down the mess decks.

I'm thinking two eclipses took place last month. The first took Sky Watchers of the United States by visual storm on its transit Pacific to Atlantic, mostly in clear skies, an awesome sight. One quakes to wonder what medieval man would weave into that event.

Reading accounts of the War Graves Commission, their vast reach to small obscure plots from wars long forgotten, in places a tongue twister to pronounce, and their dirt poor tenders in those places. At least one government-supported undertaking seems to be devoid of graft, and earn? are worth?, their corn!!!

My thoughts wandered to the United States, which I've been fortunate to visit widely over the years. Always very conscious of the history I have visited grave plots, large and small, Confederate and Union, casualties of the Civil War and War of Independence. Never to my recollection found one for Brits who died in the latter. Both insane conflicts dedicated to slaughter of folks with the exact same gene pool.

When Cornwallis put up his hands I feel it was a realisation the French Fleet was anchoring in Carolina with an abundance of stores and men, things he no longer had; a blessing in disguise, ending the killing. The French of course eager to join anyone anti-English, even the Scots, with their so called Auld Alliance.



I did wander into one remote churchyard, cannot remember the location, that had a fair swathe of Hanoverian dead interred; King George's ancestral locals!! Historically speaking Yorktown was a French victory, much aided by the siege going on at Gibraltar, where they, and the Spanish absorbed a large chunk of England's capacity to wage war for three long years. No one doubted our eventual defeat there, ask any Royal Marine who won.

Am conscious of Henry Ford's words 'history is how you tell it', and the desire to demolish statues in the U.S. south. It is open record that Robert E Lee agonised over which side to support in that blood bath and held the view, widely known, that 'slavery was an institution morally and politically evil in any country'. Had the south been victor he doubted slavery would survive for more than 20 years. Alas, end of that war was did not end subjugation.

Went off at a tangent then but experience tells me you will forgive me.

Harking back to mention of the French Fleet's arrival in the U.S. at that time, a celebration in Brest last month commemorated that event between those allies with a mini fleet review. Super carrier *George Bush* attended.

Our worth in the pecking order brings me to what I'm certain is the second eclipse, of much interest to me, it being eclipse of our Royal Navy. That eclipse glaringly obvious when M.O.D. included in Fleet Equipment List. 14 in number, P2000 Archer Class, plastic cadet training boats, unarmed, un-armable and 30 years old. M.O.D listed them as patrol Ships.



I include a photo, taken by Shipmate Turner, of one such boat when it visited his home town of Whitehaven recently; Showing the flag. If a brace of fishing boats had been in at the same time the nation's Patrol Ship would be virtually invisible. What fruitful contact can such a boat have in any locality, U.K. or near continent?

The publication entitled U.K. Forces Equipment and Formations 2017 claims a navy of 73 vessels. This really is cloud cuckoo land. Fleet Auxiliaries are lumped in with the plastic patrol ships. That makes 23 in simple arithmetic of nil fighting value. When the *merde* hits the fan of the six type 45 D's, 2 are reported tied up at Pompey as Stores Spares Source.

3 L.P.D's are on the list, one is for sale *Ocean*, one is laid up near derelict. All types across the Noble First Lord's fleet follow a similar script. Remember when the first Super Carrier had an initial operating capability of 2018? Public pressure stopped second of class being offered for sale. That could clew up as a bad move as No. 1 has insufficient crew of the right specialities and no aircraft for the foreseeable future.



On current form declarations are either deliberate lies for a gullible proletariat or uninformed comment by the 'nation's elected' and their grandiose assistants, consultants on vast salaries, bonused annually for lack of performance or coherent direction.

Defence minister Sir Whatsisname Fallon, booted and suited, on high podium in B.A.E.'s Clyde shipyard last month declared first new vessel to be named *Glasgow*. He speaks of TYPE 26 so called Global Frigate! Steel scheduled to start cutting shortly !

Initially announced a class of 13, then cut to 8, now down to an order of 3. When they will join the fleet is in the clouds, smoke and mirrors will be utilised extensively... All those involved still over frigates will become cheaper following Global sales. To you computer boys check world 's 'war ship' building; who's doing what, their budget price, delivery dates, crucially specification.

We lag behind Singapore, Spain, Columbia - yes, Columbia! Hardly a group of industrial colossi.

In some parts of the world 'cow pats' are high value fuel to keep the yurt flies burning. Military types in the U.K. know it as 'bull shit' M.O.D.'s super abundance of that commodity would propel our 76 ship fleet round Mars and back once a quarter.

We would, of course, switch to Auto there being an engineer shortage. We are totally eclipsed - by our near neighbour who tradition ever told us is our traditional enemy - France. At this very time that navy is cross decking a proper 'strike squadron' with U.S. magnificent *George Bush*.

Escorts for that task group provided by France include Airborne Maritime Patrol, hunter killer nuke subs., A.A. Frigates and destroyers. When we cannot attend a commonwealth nations historic fleet review I contend R.N. as known to us is eclipsed - totally and absolutely.

Our £ two trillion debt alone, plus production rate per man 40% below that of French yards - this from international records 'sets the seal'. However, we are 'gung-ho' on diversity in its myriad forms.

I used to think a 'transgender' was like a shaft in a gear box. Following the Admiral's speech last month all is abundantly clear. What's called the 'demographic revolution' indicates Anglo-Saxon types will soon be the minority due to birth rates, US - 1.5 per pair, THEM - 4 to 6, so they will be at liberty to 'Blow Nellie Up' very soon.

Imagine all that effort beneath the duvet to achieve Nelson's demise.

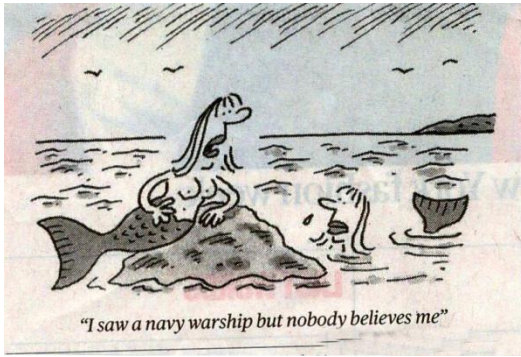
Don't take it all too seriously.

The sudden resignation of Sir Whatsisname Fallon as Defence Secretary for 'inappropriate behaviour' - alleged - with a female on his staff had me hope a new appointee would be R.N. friendly. Alas, the new face, Gavin Williamson, young, inexperienced in lifemanship or the services, has consistently voted, as a back bencher, against strengthening the Military Covenant.

In 2011 he opposed a 'binding Military Covenant' set out in law. His disdain for the service will do nothing to halt the published decline in morale brought about by 'short manning', 'under equipment'. His opening speech confirms the fact; his 'red dispatch box' contains only bullshit.

A legitimate question, 'does it matter anymore?' One learns the R.N. stopped teaching its own history to new officers a generation ago. Collins English dictionary has "A generation" as 'approx. 35 years'. The course for 'new entry officers' is only 6 months.





In late 1946 the snot-nosed son of a pleb took 12 months to get the gist of things, becoming a 'Boy First Class', well versed in his trade history, and an overriding urge to do violence to the Queens' enemies.

Is the lack of marination in our nautical culture the reason R.N.'s higher echelons consistently fail to fight their corner?

In particular the R.A.F. leads them by the nose. They (the R.A.F.) are currently pushing for the committed order of R.N. jump jets to be curtailed in favour of the land-based variant for the R.A.F. The over-priced 'super carriers' look a very good deal if compared with the R.A.F. Typhoon programme.

It stands at (deep breath) £90 billion with $\frac{1}{4}$ operational at a time. To cite only the most recent full-blown war, Falkland Islanders would be conducting business in Spanish if R.N. had had no jump jets providing air cover, shooting down enemy aircraft - the later thing not done by R.A.F. planes since WW2. Check it out.

'Does it matter?' - the yellow press reported.

'Vigilants' (nuke sub) Captain and 1st Lieutenant had been; 'Removed without prejudice' - cannot imagine what kind of sanction that is. Possibly the chronic shortage of 'nuke captains' makes firing him a foolish move.

The five officers who threatened to resign over their superiors' 'love affairs' must be on thin ice, it sounds 'slightly mutinous'. The ultimate crime must be the crewman of that vessel who hired a working girl, sometimes called a harlot. While she was getting dressed he stole back her fee.

These events took place at the 'Polaris' depot in King's Bay, Georgia, U.S.A. I feel the 'officer story' will wane. Stealing from the working girl will live in local history and taint the relationships when the next sub. visits for its renewals.

'Does it matter anymore?' - if shame is brought upon the R.N. by Class A drug-fuelled parties in nuclear submarines, or sexual peccadilloes exercised in wardroom cots, patently obvious to the great unwashed further down the tube. 'Asdic Cabinet' (sorry) 'Sonar Suite' reporting rogue pings, find, following close analysis, it was the twang of knicker elastic the other side of the wardroom curtain. I wonder if the oxygen-rich atmosphere is exacerbating the situation that could be alleviated by injection of a little more Co2.



Relaxed dress code in boats account for what 'Herr Sigmund Freud' categorises as 'Nipple Fixation', a malady sweeping the decks unchecked. Did 'our noble lords' at M.O.D. think their rules could thwart 'Mother Nature' and her 'built in at birth' - prime reason for our being - the urge to procreate. Mankind's rules prove puny defence, even behind steel water-tight doors, with six clips on.

As one with an interest in ship design I feel the headlong drive for equality, diversity, et al must pose a major problem. Gender specific 'spaces' for ablutions, sleeping etc. puts pressure on size. If the drive continues, transgenders are next with strident demands for recognition and

'own space'. What about the poor lesbians, homosexuals? Soon Buddhists and Episcopalians, Scientologists plus those who revere 'stone heads on Easter island' will need - be entitled to - 'own space'! Design for all and sundry will become insurmountable and there lies termination of vessels with the prefix H.M.S - 'lack of loo room kills off Royal Navy'.

I declare the subject closed, lest our readers of delicate nature take umbrage where none is intended. With hand on heart I say 'vive la difference'.

Whilst on the subject of service shortages, I wondered how the supposed head count reduction at M.O.D. was going. Published to be reduced from 57,050 down 30% to 41,000. It transpires they have hired a further 630 bodies, what their disciplines are is not stated.

The mooted loss of a further 1,000 Royal Marines at next defence review is not hard to explain.

This may come back and bite us in the arsis before many moons.

U.S.S. Ponce about to be retired by U.S. Navy, with a deal to sell her Argentina, is expected soon. This able landing platform dock can put down 800 fully armed troops, carries 6 large helicopters, plus 2000 tons of stores.

Barack Obama always referred to the Falklands as Malvinas in his public speeches, his aide says he regarded the 'special relationship' as a joke - so do I - that does not mean I am anti U.S. I have filial connections and friends whose interest in my family is humbling.

Anyway, the long-term plan seems obvious, I would suggest the next Parish council meeting in Port Stanley concentrates on the purchase of land-based mobile Exocets.

A French purchase simply because the U.K. 'do not have such a useful item on the market' or on our own ships! China and Russia have such a deterrent on the world market, supersonic in China's case. What they term their 'carrier buster'. Marketed with vigour and much, much cheaper, Falklands are not without options, perhaps a straight swap for berthing rights. Council meetings could become the highlight of the month.

Loss of Argentina's sub with all hands is a sobering event. At least ten 'navies' gathered to aid the search, alas to no avail. How sad to know such cooperation needs catastrophe of this magnitude to talk to each other, to share their cutting edge sounding equipment on a cause directly opposite to their intended use. I read, yesterday, the search is much scaled back with three navies persisting with the search - Argentina, Brazil and Britain. I will them to succeed.

A sunbeam in this gloom is an uplifting tale the night after that ghastly fire that consumed Grenfell Tower, as told by a 747 airline pilot, taxiing his aircraft to the runway for the return flight from Washington D.C. to London.

About to change controller frequencies when controller transmitted; 'Just before you go, we know London is going through a tough time at the moment. We want you to know that we are praying for you all, God speed for a safe flight home and God bless the Queen'.

A display of humanity on a 'business air traffic frequency' heard for miles around is most humbling and touching.



A double welcome home to our web masters Libby and Brian. A message from 'High Commissioner' of Gondwana land' reports they were paragons of virtue, leaving 'our association name' enhanced and in high repute. OLD SAILORS know how to conduct themselves!!

Tatty Bye the noo, Shipmates, and a Happy New Year.

Andy Brierley

