

Hello Shipmates,

Robin's newsletter once asked for tales of other ships we've been on. At that time, chewing the fat with late shipmate Pete Tasker, reminiscing about my holiday in north Germany, he mentioned once having been a crew on a landing craft on the Rhine - sounded exciting - I pressed him to put the experience on paper; it was off-beat and interesting. Alas! another intention down the drain for want of time.



HMS Antelope in San Carlos Water  
1982

I learned recently that the only sinking in the Falkland's war, whose wreck had never been located, is a Royal Marine crewed landing craft, sunk by a bomb; four upper deck crew, marines, perished.

In the engine room was Royal Navy chief M.E.M. and A.L.E.M. who also perished. The craft in question had, in days earlier, taken in excess of a hundred men off *H.M.S. Antelope*

before it blew up and split in two. I am unable to detail the type of landing craft amongst a family of, at least, a dozen, but a smaller type of Landing craft tank fits the scene. I do know its call sign was Foxtrot 4, her captain Colour Sergeant Brian Johnson. Each anniversary of the sinking of Royal Marine No. 4 Assault Squadron hold a memorial for them.

Thinking of the average ages at that time I assume the bulk of *Antelope* rescued must still be alive - and - eternally grateful.

My own brush with landing craft was a Landing Craft Mechanised whilst drafted to mining trials at Vernon. This vessel is large enough for one tank or a large lorry. The wheelhouse was about the volume of a sentry box with a single window on each flank. It was no slouch when moving over water empty; propulsion was provided by two Hudson Invader inline six cylinder 'petrol' engines. Should you be of a better memory than this chicken - the 'petrol' - dyed red to prevent use in your motor bike etc. at that time was a heinous crime. The name tells you motors were U.S. lorry type. The craft spent its time, when not in use, on a tiny jetty in the Severn estuary up the Bristol Channel, sort of behind Weston-Super-Mare, upstream towards Clevedon. Our area of operation, a vast, lovely, flatish pure



sand bank with slight undulations; the title on the chart is Langford Bank, it was an M.O.D. restricted area. In its centre was a very large buoy target big enough to lay on with one's head at centre pole on balmy days, waiting for the tide to go out!

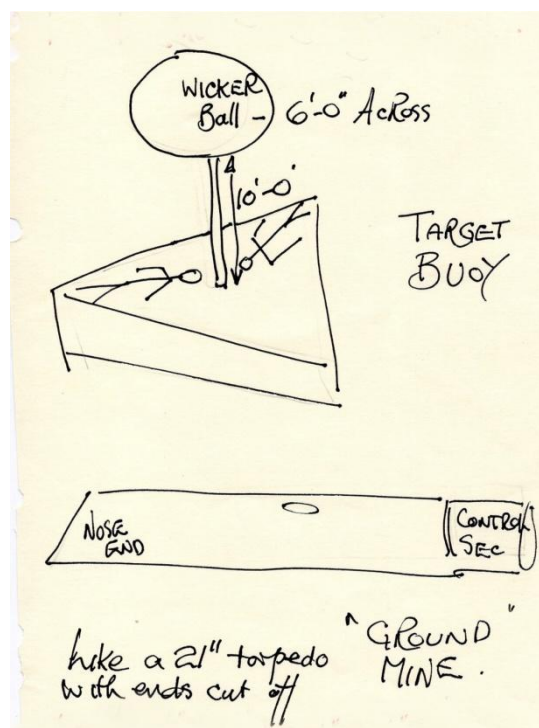
We Royal Navy people lived in a tiny square formed by three Nissan huts surround with barbed wire on an R.A.F. airfield outside Weston - I think it's now the site of the Helicopter National Collection. When required for a trial we got there by train from Vernon - Pompey. Half a dozen 'inert ground mines' were delivered to the R.A.F. field by lorry, to wait the arrival of a Lancaster bomber for loading. Could not resist a perch on the end of the runway when it was due, meet the crew and view the plane while the R.A.F. people loaded the plane; them called Erk's?



The following day to Langford Bank, in a lorry, to wait for the Lancaster to drop height to prevent pulling drogue off, which must have been two or three hundred feet at a reduced speed. Aim point, the 'basket buoy' with 'built in error', so as not to sink the buoy; a lovely sight that made the hair on the back of the neck tingle. Following the drop a wing waggle and a wave the Lancaster went back up north, home.

Crank up L.C.M., sail out and mount buoy to await low tide to expose dropped mines. Hop off buoy and scatter to find mines, each with a coil of wire and a small Dan buoy to fix location for when the tide is back up; L.C.M picks up wire, hauls mine on board then back, by lorry, to Vernon's Boffins. Anti-mining, shock loadings were their interest, control section of mine was 'surprisingly sophisticated'. A three-barrel squid mount was also on a concrete pad on the foreshore, same reason.

On one memorable trial the ground mines were spaced on the beach in a star formation, ordinary 'depth charge' - live, on the end in the centre. A surveyors 'boning rod' alongside the depth charge to measure the water depth as the tide came in, the charge was to be blown by the wire from our 'gunner' ashore. A Scout pack, camping along the foreshore, was invited by our gunner; had the chief scout herd them up the hill behind us so the whereabouts of all were accounted for. The blow was in exactly nine feet water depth, the spectacle was memorable with a dull boom that seemed to rock the universe. The rising tide had several merchant men on their way up to Avonmouth; all must have asked "What the hell was that?" signal lamps clacking away on overtime. I would wager those



boy scouts talk about it to this day.

An unbelievable posting; the civil boffins, for whom we laboured, were the cream of people, always willing to teach, always in the midst of any skylarking.

Shore leave each evening, was a short bus ride to Weston; a regular ferry to and from Cardiff with holiday makers and day trippers provided a surfeit of Welsh pulchritude. Scrumpy was on tap in all pubs, cheaper than beer, it's what the locals consumed; a glass or two had half the naval contingent was hell bent on stamping out chastity in south Wales.

Another spectacle which we enjoyed were trips to Worthy Down near Winchester. During World War 2 it had been a naval air station, I have forgotten the name of the bird it was named for. In a large Quonset type hanger, a single limbo barrel sat in the centre on a fabricated trunnion, the barrel a few degrees off vertical. We loaded the projectiles as requested ...Half a dozen sheets were removed from the roof. The boffin loaded the propellant case, screw plug on breech, took a polished copper disc of half palm size, above that a steel ball bearing. After firing disc removed width of indent made by ball measured by micrometer to arrive at correct required charge. Simplicity of some methods was a surprise.

On firing the 500lb-ish limbo bomb flew out of the roof hole to impact down field on grass runway. Anyone on the top deck of a bus on the Winchester Road, who looked in the direction of the report, may have seen a bomb fly skywards out of the roof; bet they also asked "What the hell was that?"

A strange tribe occupied Worthy Down, it being the school for the 'regulating branch'. All their movements, class to class, square bashing or just going anywhere was done in Crusher style, hands clasped behind back, slow measured tread with 'tuff' scowl on face, exuding a 'commanding presence', meant to make you 'frit'.

The final landing craft in my life was Landing Craft Infantry, the sort seen in documentaries which hit the beach with about twenty soldiers. To cut out how and why - at the war's end they were on the mud in great numbers downstream from Gillingham Pier. My father, resident in Midlands, who knew absolutely F.A. about boats bought one for less than peanuts; in the hull was



an aluminum dingy of riveted construction, a little beauty. Landing craft engines were removed, cooling water 'in and out' blocked with a wooden bung, all else remained; two brass propellers and shafts, bilge pump in brass, plus other assorted stuff, just left. A top was erected. Spartan fit out houseboat style.

Afloat on the Thames just below Reading; setting idyllic for parents holidays and weekends. Motive for

acquisition was not love of boating; parent was a steam devotee, location a stone's throw from elevated section of Great Western Railway line, Paddington to Bristol. (G.W.R.) God's wonderful railway; kings, castles, manors plus all freight types passing all day.

Family boats did not end there, 'Father's' flock of ducks lived in an R.E. boat section for bridge building. They must have enjoyed it, egg production kept rural barter alive and highly active.

I know - gone on too long.

**(Photographs from Andy's collection)**