ROSYTH FLEET MAINTENANCE BASE

BY

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Introduction

On 18th September 1975 at Rosyth, the first of the new fleet maintenance bases was opened. Conceived in the 1960s, approval to proceed with the development of naval bases at Portsmouth, Devonport and Rosyth was given early in 1970. At that time, a comprehensive guide was produced detailing the antitipated size and scope of the tasks of the bases and giving details of how these tasks would be met.

Concept

It may seem to many readers that there is nothing new in the concept of fleet bases—dockyards have always provided base facilities for the fleet, so it may be thought that the new buildings and men will merely supplement existing services providing nothing new. This is not the case. New bases do, of course, supplement existing facilities in some respects by providing modern amenity, administration and accommodation facilities to crews of ships in dockyard hands, but the principal need filled by these new bases will be more direct support of operational ships.

In this past quarter of the twentieth century, we have watched the amount of 'automatic' equipment in ships increase at a staggering rate. Simple mathematics indicates that the more we have, the more will be defective at any given time.

Old-timers yearn for the good old days when everything worked for ever. Even our modern cars seem continuously defect prone, apparently breaking down three times as often as the 'well'-remembered old banger. But memory plays us false here—we forget that we have thirty times as much gadgetry in our modern vehicles. Individual part reliability is much higher, but that is no consolation when the thing will not start on its transistorised ignition.

Modern ships, like modern cars, are full of complex equipment and, if our ships are to maintain maximum overall effectiveness, first-class servicing, planned maintenance and spares support for the individual elements of this equipment must be readily available.

It is impossible to pack all the repair and servicing manpower and equipment into the ships themselves, so we have done the next best thing by putting these facilities and men in suitably equipped shore bases through which the ships rotate on regular patrol and maintenance cycles.

The new facilities at Rosyth now allow the full provision of the necessary service for the first time.

History

Initially the afloat maintainer concept held the field with the ships' skilled artificers able to make, even at sea in the limited workshops available, most of the spares the ships needed to support their operational running between periods of major refit in the dockyards. Small ships and submarines could not carry all the artificer support they needed, so they were backed up by depot ships, a particularly useful form of on-the-spot assistance which could, and did, follow the ships around the world in their pursuit of the Empire's business right up to the 1960s.

By 1945, however, the picture was already changing. Even the best depot ship in the world could not make you a new radio valve. The change crept up on us slowly and this author has 'fond' memories of a Commander (L) telling him one day to 'make a new one' when a large transmitting relay, full of coils, balance springs, weights, platinum contacts and all, had suffered a Viking funeral. Fortunately, that difficult encounter was overcome by a little tact. Gradually, however, the scale of the R.N's dependence on specially manufactured equipment has taken us out of the DIY repair era into a new world of diagnosticians, spare gear specialists, and setting-to-work experts.

Slowly the changes have filtered through the system. The old *Girdleness* was one day missing from her familiar berth at 'O' Jetty in Rosyth, and in her place —it was whispered—a bright new custom-built support base would arise. Meanwhile the fleet maintenance group (FMG) concept had been born and Rosyth came to have a mixed group of seventy men and four officers who formed the nucleus of a mobile FMG.

The *mobile* in the title was very much to the point. In an average year, assisted maintenance would be given by this group in places as far afield as Trinidad, Malta, and Hong Kong. Six or seven times a year, the mobile FMG deployed by air to foreign parts to give up to 100 man-weeks of specialist support to a frigate or a GMD undergoing assisted maintenance.

Interesting though these trips abroad were, they were not, however, the whole story. At Rosyth, a base workshop facility had been formed from the old wooden huts belonging formerly to the Captain of the Port. From this base, assistance was given to all visitors to Rosyth, including ships going to and from the adjacent exercise areas and ships detailed for assisted maintenance periods (AMPs) at Rosyth. These priority tasks took most of the labour. Any spare hands were used in ships in refit, providing the assistance particularly necessary during setting to work and harbour acceptance trials (HATs). Up to the late 1960s, men were commuting daily from the minesweeping base at Port Edgar (H.M.S. *Lochinvar*) to MCMVs refitting at Rosyth. As the work of this group was concentrated in Rosyth Dockyard giving refit support to MCMVs and R.N. patrol craft, it was logical to transfer them to Rosyth as a craft group of 30–40 men, based on the FMG, the major day-to-day element of MCMV support staying at Port Edgar.

By the early 1970s, therefore, Rosyth FMG was established as a support force of over 100 men with numbers swelling occasionally to 200 as supernumeraries joined for brief periods in their preference drafting area. This useful force of men provided an excellent service, in particular supporting the ships engaged in the second 'Cod War'. This was despite limited workshop accommodation and a totally inadequate electronics maintenance capability but helped as always by its friendly big brother, Rosyth Dockyard.

Chief among the incentives to all who worked from Rosyth during those years was the promise of better things to come. By 1972, the plans for the new fleet maintenance base were issued and site clearance started soon afterwards. All round the tidal basin, roads were ripped up and a new finger jetty ('P' Jetty) began to be built 50 yards east of the old *Girdleness* berth. Then, in 1973, the building foundations started to go in, followed by steel work and concrete in 1974.

The Buildings

The five major buildings of the new base are clustered around the northern end of the main tidal basin to the east of the main dockyard complex.

A new office block for Captain Mine Countermeasures/Fishery Protection (CMCM/CFP Block) has been built at the head of the tidal basin. It houses CMCM/CFP and his staff and contains the planning room, communications

centre, and registry.

East of CMCM's new offices is a weapons and mine-warfare (loop) workshop equipped to repair loops, noise-makers, hydraulic systems, and small gunmountings. Facilities for dunking noise-makers to give complete underwater checks will be provided. This building, being right alongside the jetties, also houses the duty watch who provide the 24-hour support service.

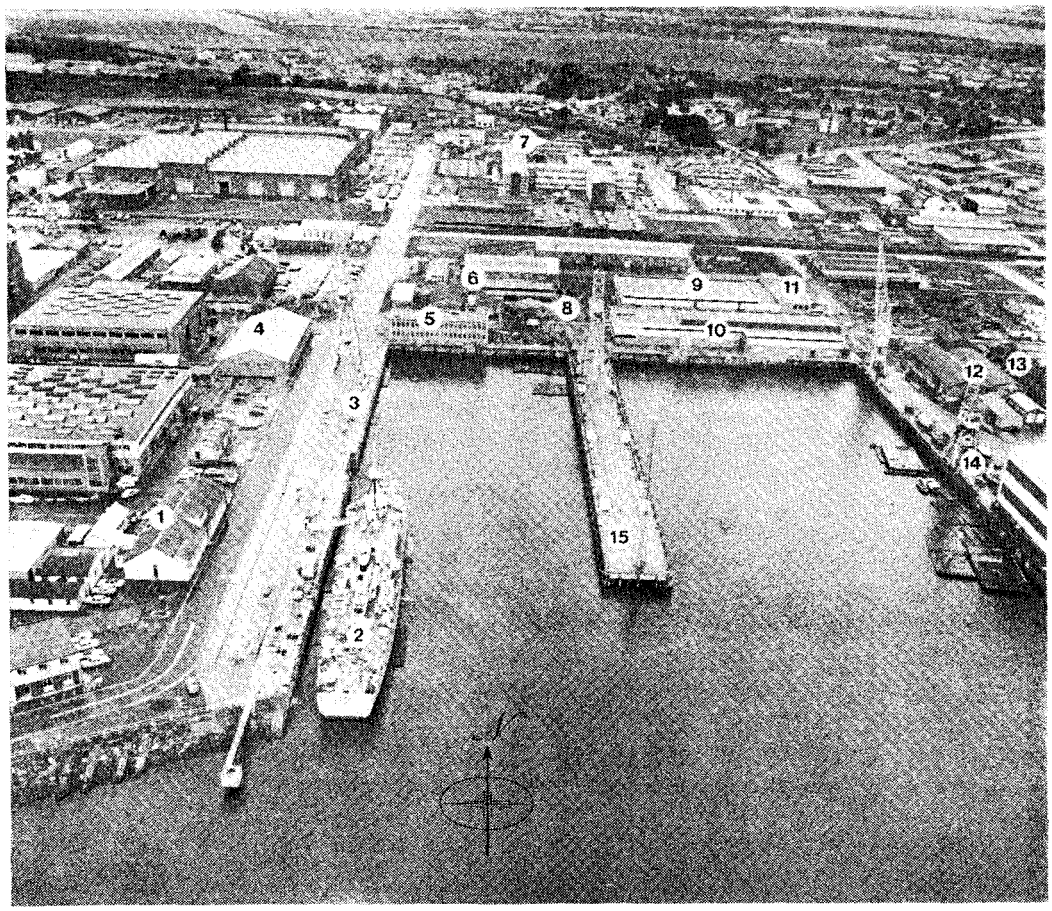

FIG. 1—ROSYTH TIDAL BASIN FROM THE SOUTH SHOWING THE BUILDINGS OF THE NEW FLEET BASE

Key:

(1) Old F.M.G. building, now removed
(2) H.M.S. *Abdiel*
(3) 'O' jetty
(4) Multi-purpose store
(5) CFP/CMCM new offices
(6) NAAFI tavern
(7) To main gate
(8) NAAFI shop
(9) Main workshop
(10) Weapons workshop
(11) CFM's offices
(12) Lay-apart store
(13) Bulk store
(14) 'R' jetty
(15) 'P' jetty

Behind the weapons workshop is the main workshop. Here are located shipwright's shops, painting shop, light-metal workshops, welding bays, pipe repair facilities, a machine shop and fitting section with facilities for repair of Johnson outboard engines, together with specialized facilities such as an injector test and cleaning bay and a pneumatic controls shop. Weapon and electrical facilities consist of a radio/radar maintenance room and adjacent to it a control electrical maintenance room with full facilities for sonar, ECC and auto-amplifier testing. Outside these EMRs, 'dirty' handling rooms for cleaning and repair of electric motors, etc. are provided.

The whole of the east end of this workshop block is equipped as a suite of offices for Captain Fleet Maintenance, Rosyth, and his staff. It also contains the craft technical office and a large work-control and planning office built on

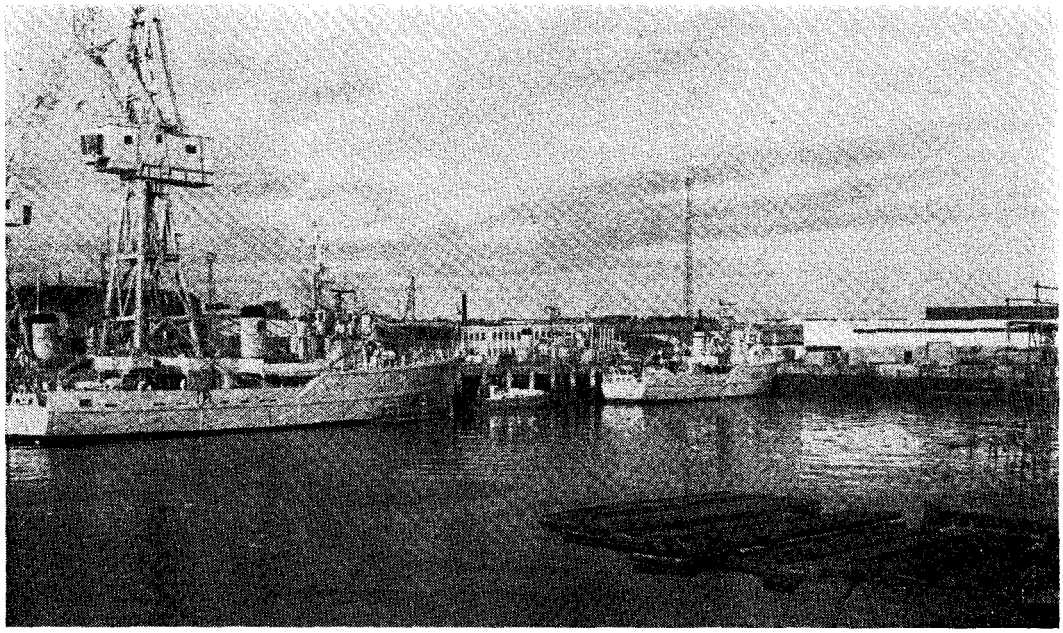

FIG. 2—LOOKING NORTH TOWARDS 'P' JETTY AND THE WEAPONS WORKSHOP

the open plan principle housing central staff, planning staff and support staff, FOCAS's representative, regulating staff and a dockyard PTO who co-ordinates the requirements for cranes, slingers, berthing parties, cleaners, etc.

NAAFI have extended their small shop behind CMCM's office and have added a large stores building and a new tavern bar for senior and junior ratings. Hot pie and drink facilities will be available from an automat, and a brisk counter service in hot pies and drinks is anticipated at lunch time in both the bar and the shop.

The needs of the ships for stores, spare gear and victualling support will be met by a new multi-purpose store which has been built on the west side of the tidal basin. In addition, existing buildings east of the tidal basin have been modified to provide covered lay-apart and bulk storage facilities.

The Task

Conceived as a standard fleet maintenance base for the support of all classes of ships, the actual role of the base has broadened considerably since the initial guidelines were written. North Sea oil has come to stay as a vital economic and political factor, and Rosyth is superbly placed to afford a home base for the new classes of patrol vessels operating around the oil and gas rigs. The end result of this has been a substantial enlargement of the task of the small ship (craft) group of the base. From an original 14 or 16 hulls (MCMVs, Bird Class patrol craft, and *Abdiel*) the operating load has swelled to include *Jura* Class, *Tenacity*, and *Reward* and will eventually include up to twenty-seven ships.

The recent closure of the MCMV base at Port Edgar has swelled the numbers working at the fleet base from 120/140 up to a new level of about 250. Full operational, assisted maintenance, and DED (docking and essential defects) and refit support is given to all minesweepers and patrol craft. In addition, mobile support teams follow groups of mineweepers to exercises all around the U.K., the Continent and, recently, Suez where a R.N. force backed by men of the support team based in H.M.S. *Abdiel* gave the world a very effective demonstration of their capabilities when faced with the real thing.

Closer to home the continuing need to maximize the time a ship spends on patrol has led to a gradual extension of mobile support in wake of operational defects (Opdefs). Every week small groups of men journey to Kirkwall, Ardrossan, or Aberdeen and other distant spots to provide on-the-spot assistance.

Against the interesting world of oil rigs and pipelines, the other half of the task of the fleet maintenance base may seem less glamorous. However, in the next few months Rosyth FMG will deploy mobile support teams from its new base to a guided-missile destroyer at Sydney, Australia; a frigate at Gibraltar; and another at Trinidad, whilst simultaneously supporting a host of visiting ships involved in major exercises.

Rosyth's proximity to the exercise areas of the North Sea and the Norwegian Sea have resulted in the location of the Joint Maritime Operational Training Squadron nearby at Turnhouse, with the result that large bodies of ships regularly use Rosyth as a staging point both before and after exercises. This type of activity tends to maximize the requirement for highly skilled support for weapon systems; this Rosyth FMG does its best to provide from its new facilities.

One new facility which may be strange to some is the support office. The concept is a simple one—to provide the customer with a single point of contact through which he can obtain the assistance or services he requires at any time in the 24 hours of the day, and then to follow up with visits to the ship and contact with the suppliers to make sure that the service meets the requirement fully.

Provision of this type of service is not in fact new. Clyde Submarine Base Faslane and Portsmouth FMG have been doing it for some time. Naturally there are those who criticize this 'pampering' of ships' staff but no one who has met a frigate, in Rosyth for six hours, before departing on a six-weeks deep-water fish patrol of the Barent's Sea or the Newfoundland Banks will consider it wasteful or excessive pampering. Follow-up of ship's logistic requirements (Logreq) and their outstanding stores demand signals is an essential service that no one has provided until the advent of this type of support service. This level of service is also provided to the visiting R.N.R., R.A.F., and foreign ships.

The Future

With the resurgence of fishery-protection duties off Iceland and the possible introduction of a 200-mile exclusive economic zone with all its implications for the Navy, the picture for Rosyth's future looks anything but dull. On the support side, increasing evidence must be given to exploring better ways of providing forward support for craft and patrol vessels, if necessary by the regular periodic manning of forward bases with all that this means in terms of facilities and portable equipment.

Even in its simplest terms, traffic in the North Sea can be expected to multiply greatly in the next decade, and services provided at Rosyth will have to change to meet the new demands—in this field the new base can be expected to feature prominently.