CLOSING DOWN OF

THE UNDERWATER WEAPONS LAUNCHING ESTABLISHMENT

BY

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As a result of the Way Ahead Committee's recommendations, the following statement was made by the Superintendent to the employees of the Underwater Weapons Launching Establishment on Friday, 31st January, 1958. "Arrangements have been made whereby the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority will take over the premises now occupied by H.M. U.L.E. for precision engineering."

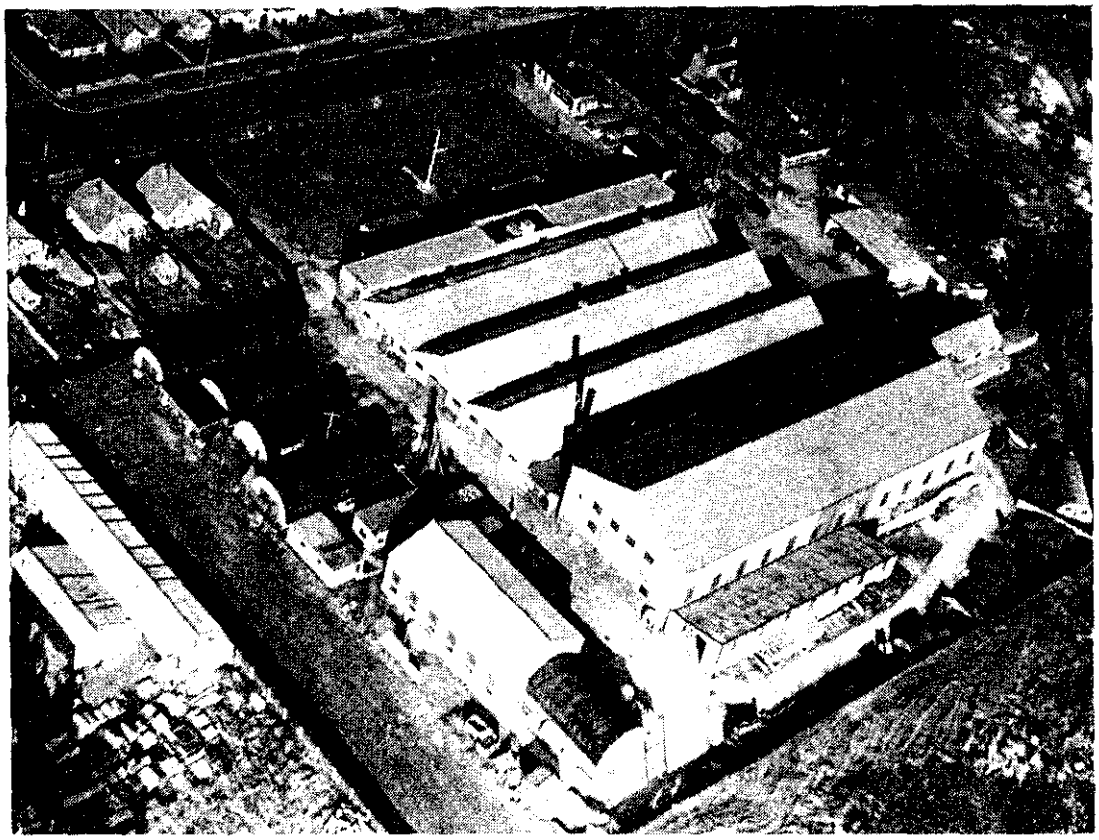

FIG. 1—THE ESTABLISHMENT

Thus will be lost to the Engineering Branch, a Superintendent's post of a research and development establishment which by virtue of its results has proved that the combination of naval engineer officer and R.N.S.S. personnel is an effective and happy one. Apart from general administration, the Superintendent's task has been to ensure that all the equipment being developed was suitable for naval application, and to arrange sufficient trials to prove the reliability and ease of maintenance of the units under development. Add to this an expense allowance, and the fact that the establishment is delightfully situated on a hill five miles from the centre of Bournemouth, and it has all added up to a very popular appointment.

The reader may know the story of the scientist and the flea. After placing the flea on the upper part of his arm and ordering it to jump, it did so and landed on his hand. He then removed its legs and gave the same order. The flea did not move. The scientist came to the conclusion that it was deaf. One can be assured that members of the R.N.S.S. are more logical than this, and in fact they have one feature in common. They are all trying to get the best answer to the user. Of course, it would be wrong to claim that the gear produced is always a success, but everything possible is done to prove the gear before production by making working models and mock-ups, although the production date being tied to a ship's completion date often limits the number of trials and different rigs that can be tested. Also, owing to the rapidly changing era in which we live, amendments to the staff requirements sometimes give the finished article a Christmas tree effect.

Often in the past, the designer has produced equipment to ridiculously high staff requirements which has produced cumbersome and complicated machinery to perform elementary functions. Incidentally, owing to a typist's error, one

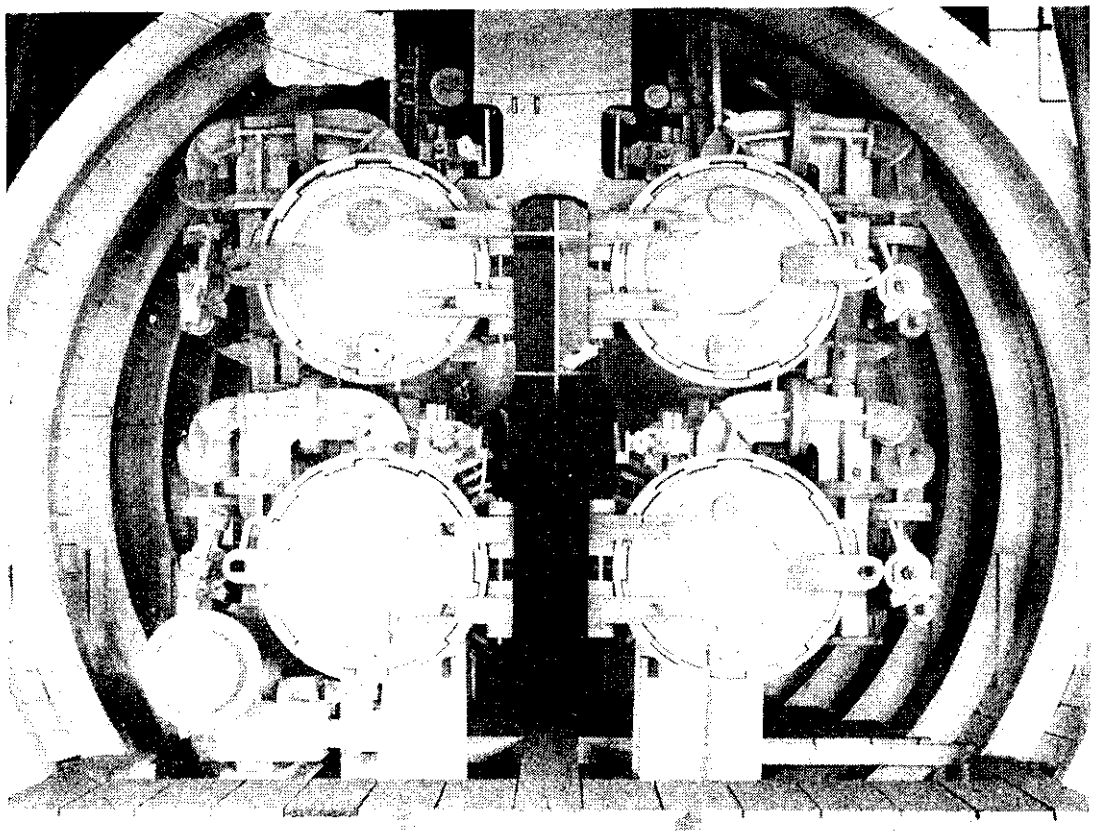

FIG. 2—SUBMARINE MOCK-UP

staff requirement reads 'to load torpedoes at all angles and altitudes of the submarine.'

Nowadays the system is different. The staff target is a statement in broad terms of the type and capabilities required. A design study is then produced which gives possible solutions to the problem and the scientific effort required. From this study the staff requirement is evolved by the Director of Undersurface Warfare.

From the time of arrival of the staff requirement in a design establishment, the task is to get the production drawings completed in order that the appropriate section at the Admiralty can place contracts with industry, and so get the new gear into service at the earliest possible opportunity. So the staff requirement becomes a sketch on the back of an envelope, then finds its way into the project section where it is designed, and a working model is then made. If all goes well, the production section of the drawing office takes over. Finally, the continuous development section deals with the alterations and additions that will be raised during the life of the equipment.

During its eighteen years of life, the U.L.E. has been responsible for the following equipment found in H.M. ships or submarines :—

Surface torpedo tubes and firing gears

Submarine torpedo tubes and firing gears

Power operated torpedo loading equipment

Submarine signal ejectors

Power minelaying equipment

Development of cordite charges

M.T.B. torpedo launching equipment.

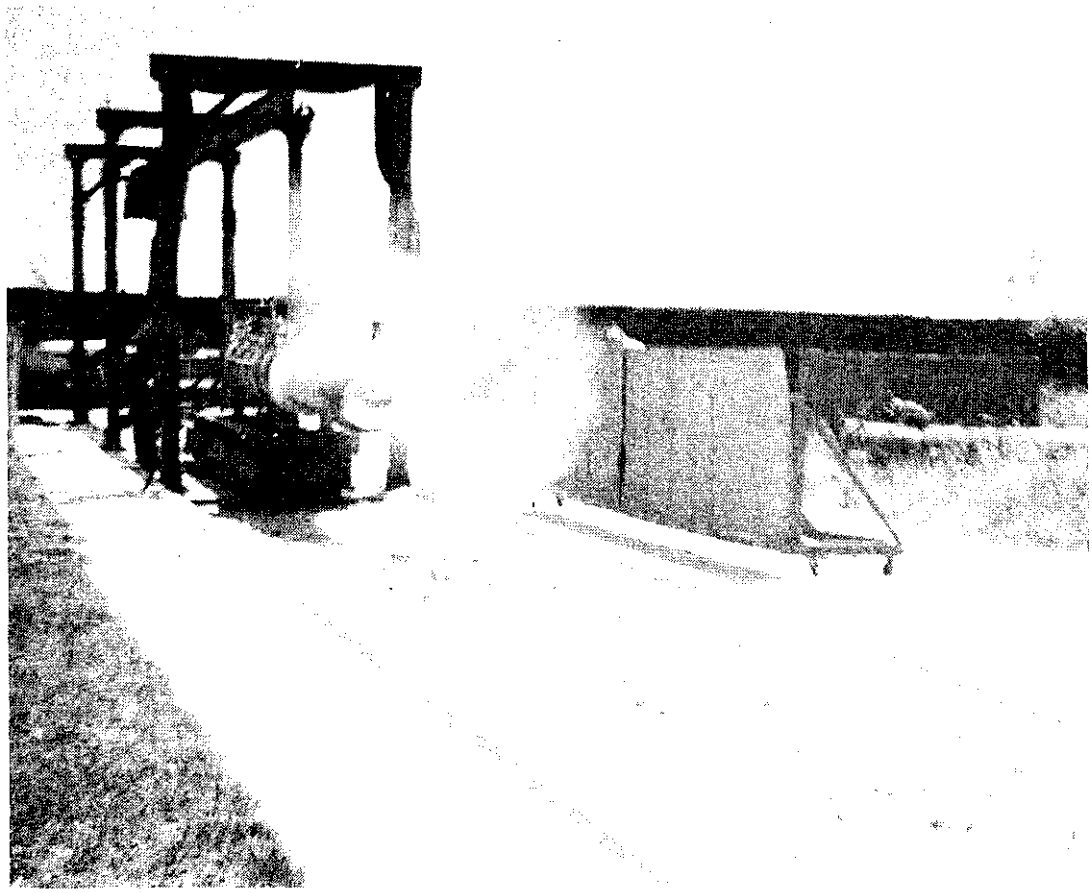

FIG. 3 – FIRING ON THE SAND RANGE

Also, during the war, a considerable amount of torpedo tube production was carried out in the establishment, and in many ways it was a pity that this could not have been carried on in peace-time, as what is often lacking today is the close co-operation of designer and manufacturer. The reliability of tubes and associated firing gears was well towards the top of the list of war-time equipment that gave good service.

At the time of writing, there are in the Underwater World, four main establishments in different places all making their contribution towards the outfit or system, starting off with detection, passing through classification, then computation, then launching, and finally the weapon. In future, there will be two main underwater weapon research establishments situated in close proximity at Portland : the Underwater Weapons Establishment, formerly the A.G.E., and the Underwater Detection Establishment.

The Underwater Weapons Establishment will be formed by combining the following establishments– Torpedo Engineering, Greenock : the Underwater Countermeasures, Havant : and the Underwater Weapons Launching, Bournemouth. More flexibility will be possible in transference of staff from one project to another, and it will be easier to design the weapon system as a whole, i.e. weapon, control system and launching equipment, rather than as individual items as at present. Thus there is obviously a gain in efficiency to be expected from this concentration and probably the greatest benefit will be felt by the submarine service.

A move such as this cannot be accompanied without heartache. The loss of established craftsmen for compassionate reasons, the handing of notices to good hired men, and premature retirement of more senior officers who do not

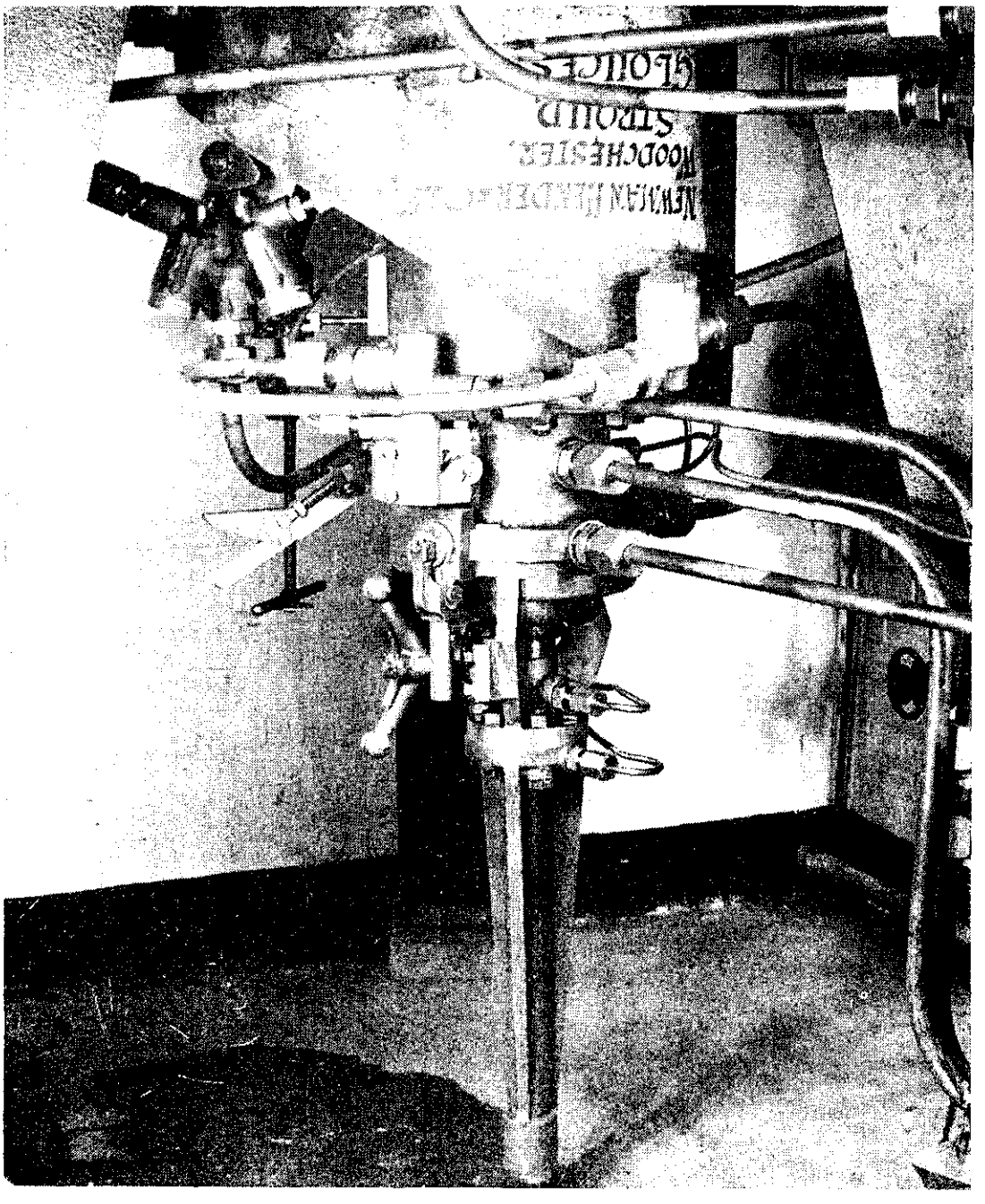

FIG. 4. SUBMARINE SIGNAL EJECTOR

wish to uproot their homes ; all these have to be added up on the debit side. How many years it may take to replace the 'know-how' that will be lost cannot be assessed in the cold terms of finance.

The old sand range where so many bunker shots have been practised will be replaced by the sea firing range at Bincleaves. A new tank for firing torpedoes at depth is in process of being installed at Bincleaves. Mock-up and experimental models are being dismantled for re-erection on Portland Bill. All the best machine tools are being transferred : the remainder are up for sale.

And so the U.L.E. becomes part of the rapidly expanding Atomic Energy empire. What the individual thinks of all this is best described in a poem, author anonymous, which arrived mysteriously on the Superintendent's desk.

A Moving Occasion

T'was on a Happy Christmas Eve,
(Two years ago—I do believe),
That like a bolt out of the blue
Their Lordships said that we were due
To move the works and office, too.
But would it be to North or South ?
The rumours came by word of mouth,
Some said that Greenock was a cinch.
While some said Portland--with a flinch
But after twelve months came a line
Report to Portland—'59.

Another Christmas came around
But greetings had a hollow sound,
' A Happy New Year '—Don't talk rot ! !
Stuck down at Portland with you lot ?
And I can't buy a ruddy Plot ! ! !
The Housing problem is a bind
As all who look are sure to find.
But if you want one on the Hill
Or overlooking Portland Bill
The Council then will surely help you
' At Three Pounds Ten ? No ! ! ! Thank you.'

And now at last the move's begun
Machines and men go one by one.
The story goes—(I love to sneak)
An E.O. for his bench did seek.
He hadn't missed it for a week ! ! !
The C.O. waves a last Good-Bye
To all his Friends as they go by,
Then when they're safely out of sight,
And 'cause he likes to do things right,
Puts gin and glasses on a tray
To Welcome In the A.E.A.