

From Captain H D Beard Royal Navy



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ASWI AGM 2013 - PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Friends in ASW,

Sorry I cannot be with you to spend many a happy hour discussing matters directly and indirectly related to Anti-Submarine Warfare, but I am happy to report that the reason for my absence is that I am currently in the Gulf of Oman practising the very art against a formidable foe in the shape of a US SSN. The series of Gulf ASW exercises, or GASWEXes as they have become known, provide an excellent vehicle for developing our understanding and confidence of operating in this area which, due to the nature of the sound velocity profile, is an extremely demanding place to do ASW. Do not be disheartened however. As those of you who were at the dinner last year may remember, I talked about our current capabilities being a step change resulting in a shift in the balance of power. With the combination of our sonar with that of a US DDG, as well as US Maritime Patrol Aircraft and UK and US Seahawk, Merlin and Lynx helicopters, we made life extremely difficult for those 'sun dodgers' and achieved many successful attacks - you would have loved it!

This GASWEX was but one of an increasing number of ASW exercises that are now proliferating our deployment and the wider Fleet Operating Schedule. There is no room for complacency though as the battle is far from won and the opportunities for good quality ASW are still not that easy to find. What is encouraging, however, is that as an ASW community (surface ships, submarines and aviation), we are coming together to learn from each other and take this most challenging area of warfare forward. I have established 'ASW Partnerships' between S2087 T23 Frigates, submarine crews and Merlin MPH squadrons and have encouraged much greater dialogue between all of those



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involved. This is beginning to take root and is providing mutual benefit to operators in all three environments - WESTMINSTER recently conducted an ASW exercise with TIRELESS and achieved cross-pols on each of the three days which proved enlightening to all! Sadly, these opportunities do not always produce the desired positive results. During our GASWEX, my CPO(UW) had the chance to visit the USS BULKELEY for the day and came back rather depressed at the sonar technology that they had at their disposal. His only solace was that their operators are not a match for ours.

The area where I now feel that we can make great strides with not an enormous amount of investment is in training. Too many of our current procedures would be all too familiar to you all. Whilst I am not an advocate of change for change's sake, I do believe that we should critically question whether the training and procedures have kept pace with the technological developments which are enabling us to conduct ASW in a different way than in the past. I am happy to report that there is a raft of work underway to review ASW training across the board and develop a more joint, coherent and complementary approach that learns from best practise, has an eye to the future, but does not ditch all the good lessons and experience that we have accumulated over the years.

We are continuing to drive ASW up the capability agenda and the visibility and level of interest in this area of warfare is continuing to grow. It is a competitive arena, however, and with so few ships and so many tasks we will need to continue to fight to maintain this positive progress and upward momentum. This will also be key if we are to breathe new life and enthusiasm into the branch at the junior level which is a significant concern at this time. The shift in focus towards more general maritime security, including counter-piracy and counter-narcotics operations, and away from some of our core warfighting skills over recent years has had a demoralising affect on those employed in the branch. We are working hard to reverse this trend but I would be delighted to receive any good ideas on how we could improve morale, and retention, from any quarter so if the ASWI Association has any good ideas, please pass them on!

To conclude, ASW continues to be as challenging and rewarding as ever but I firmly believe that it has finally turned a corner in terms of the consciousness of the Navy and is now increasing in prominence. Rest assured, the legacy to which you all contributed



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continues to be valued and we will aim to build towards the future with confidence and optimism.

I wish you all well and know that you will have a very enjoyable weekend at the Portland Heights Hotel of which my wife and I have fond memories. I hope that I, or my relief as Capt ASW (Capt (desig) Simon Asquith), will be able to attend in person next year for this special event.

Yours,

Hugh

