



LONDON FLOTILLA BULLETIN

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Naval activity on the Clyde

Her Majesty's Naval Base Clyde, at Faslane and Coulpport, is home to the United Kingdom's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent. But it is much more than that. She is the largest military establishment in Scotland and the biggest single site employer in the country. It is the base port to the ships and submarines of the Faslane Flotilla – whether deployed at home or abroad – and supports scores of other visiting UK and overseas vessels every year.

HM Naval Base Clyde is located eight miles north of Helensburgh, in Argyll in the West Coast of Scotland and, with more than 6,000 civilian and naval personnel at work, is, in effect, bigger than many a West Highland town. The Base is widely, and erroneously, known as Faslane naval base. But you will not find Faslane on any standard map or atlas. A sea chart, yes, for the name actually relates to Faslane Bay, acquired by the Ministry of War and Transport in 1940.

The Royal Navy needed sheltered waters with close access to the Atlantic Ocean – Greenock, Gourock and Clydebank were all ruled out because of the intensity of German bombing. The Gareloch provided the answer. Submarines and their mother ships were refitted there throughout the war but it was not until 1957 that Faslane took the name Clyde Submarine Base, with the permanent posting of Submarine Force Three and the arrival of HMS *Adamant*, a depot ship.

In 1963, the UK's first nuclear submarine, HMS *Dreadnought*, was posted to the base and the nuclear age had begun. HMS *Dreadnought* was an SSN, a ship submersible nuclear, that is a submarine powered by nuclear energy but armed with conventional weapons. It was 1967 before the first SSBN arrived, HMS *Resolution*, a submarine

powered by nuclear energy but also armed with nuclear weapons. She was a ship submersible ballistic nuclear – the carrier of Polaris missiles.

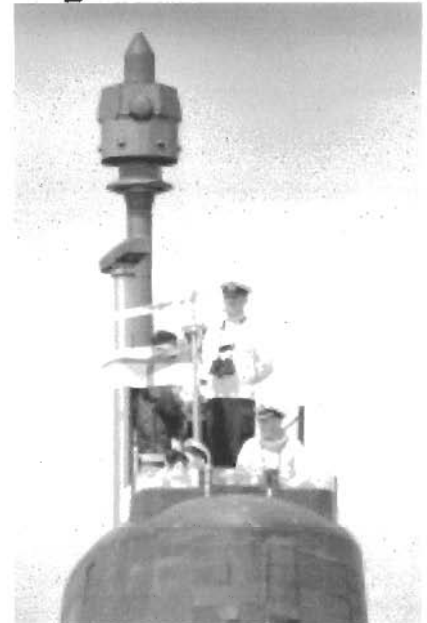
The Cold War had stepped up a gear

In 1984, the Vanguard Class was proposed – the carrier of the new Trident missile. Work started on HMS *Vanguard* in 1986 and she arrived at the Base in 1994. In 1995, the Clyde Submarine Base became HM Naval Base Clyde, a unique and priceless asset in the Ministry of Defence and the United Kingdom's strategic Defence of the Realm. Among its support facilities are a shiplift, and an explosives handling jetty which are on a world class scale, comparable with only two or three others in the world. Its massive workforce is fully integrated and comprises of Royal Navy, Ministry of Defence Civilian, Babcock Naval Services, the MoD's commercial partner, and regular contractor personnel.

The 6,000-plus who are directly employed are joined by another 3,000 plus who are indirectly employed – meaning that the base contributes around £270 million a year in the Scottish economy.

The main output of the base is the maintenance of the UK nuclear deterrent in the shape of the four Vanguard Class SSBNs. They are formidable vessels in every sense, at 16,000 tonnes dived, and 150 metres in length. Submerged, they can go in advance of 20 knots and they are capable of carrying 16 Trident missiles. The submarine service is known as the silent service and the V boats are the most secret and silent of all the UK's defence systems. One is deployed at sea continuously – every second of every day.

The Base is also home to three Swiftsure Class SSNs – smaller than Vanguard at 4,500 tonnes and conventionally armed. But with a submerged speed of 24 knots and an endurance of 90 days they are the true hunter killers of today's Royal Navy. Armed with Tomahawk missiles and Spearfish torpedoes they can go anywhere in the world, undetected, and can strike at naval or land based opposition with awesome firepower and pinpoint accuracy. The Royal Navy's submarines are all nuclear powered – it makes sense. One 'tank' of fuel allows a submarine to operate for more than 12 years at 500 nautical miles a day and at a speed of 20 knots. That measures up to 180,000 nautical miles per year or more than 100 times around the world.



HMS Vanguard

In the new Astute Class hunter killers being built at Barrow in Furness, their Core 'H' reactors will work for the lifetime of the submarine, and will be among the most sophisticated vessels of its type in the world.

HM Naval Base Clyde is also home to a squadron of Sandown Class MCMVs – Mine Counter Measure Vessels. The MCMVs are not considered to be large vessels – they measure only 52.5 metres long and weigh 470 tonnes. But their five officers, seven senior rates and 25 junior rates, carry out essential work. They keep Britain's waterways clear and they are first into a combat zone to clear the way for the Royal Navy's bigger ships. Their hulls are made of a glass-plastic

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Vanguard Class submarine



MCMVs leaving the Clyde

material that doesn't interfere with their high technology equipment – hulls that make them inch for inch the most expensive warships in the world.

HM Naval Base Clyde could be seen as a garage for the ships and submarines it has in their care – and a very large hotel for the crews of those ships while they are alongside. But it also has additional units, known as lodgers which are located on the base on a full time basis. The most senior of these is the Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland. He is known as FOSNNI and is the only Royal Navy admiral north of London. He is also the Flag Officer Reserves. Other lodgers are the Captain of the Faslane Flotilla and the Flag Officer Sea Training. All Royal Navy submariners are trained at HM Naval Base Clyde and the Perisher course – for would-be submarine commanders – is operated in West Highland waters.

The Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines is a stand-alone unit based on the Clyde – their principal task, to protect the nuclear deterrent. But when a British warship is in hostile waters anywhere in the world, members of the FPGRM will also be there, trained to deal with fast moving terrorist attack.

The Northern Diving Group is the Naval side of Britain's elite bomb disposal units. Basically, the army deals with anything on land; the NDG does its work from and below the high tide mark.

Another lodger is the Ministry of Defence Police and Guard Service. They form a line of security and defence at outer fence level, before Royal Marines would need to become involved.

The Naval Base is constantly evolving. The new Astute Class submarines, mentioned earlier, will be based on the Clyde. The keel of the first of class was laid in January, 2001 and they are due in service by the end of the year.

The Ministry of Defence has already confirmed orders for *Astute*, *Ambush* and *Artful*. There is an option for three more. An exciting new floating jetty is already under construction at Hunterston in Ayrshire and will be floated up the Clyde next year to provide state of the art mooring facilities for the new Astutes and all SSN class submarines.

On the Base, demolition of a section of quayside has already started and the new jetty and its location are part of a three year £150 million programme of reconstruction.

HMS *Neptune* is the land based heart of HM Naval Base Clyde, and it will be home to the officers and sailors of Clyde based Royal Navy personnel for generations to come. Under construction is a new super mess and a whole array of accommodation blocks, all of which will be single occupancy, en suite and internet linked – the best military living accommodation in the UK. On completion, the new HMS *Neptune* accommodation will have room for 64 senior officers, 128 junior officers, 530 senior rates and 1,022 junior rates – a massive 1,680 room living space – with all mod cons.



Submarine in the dry dock Clyde

The NATO Submarine Rescue System is currently being built by Rolls Royce and its new home will be at HM Naval Base Clyde.

Two years ago, when a Russian mini-sub was trapped beneath the sea off the far eastern Russian coast, the value of such rescue systems was demonstrated, when all seven Russian submariners emerged alive after a Royal Navy led rescue operation.

The senior management team at HMNB Clyde, led by the Naval Base Commander, Commodore Chris Hockley, is well aware of the contentious nature of its business and are open and transparent in the way that the base is run.

Where consultation is possible, it is carried out and the Naval Base is heavily regulated by several outside bodies, including SEPA, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency. In fact, some of the best conditions for wildlife are to be found inside the protective curtain provided by the base and there are officers whose job it is to look after the birds and animals which live alongside the nuclear submarines.

(We wish to thank the Press Office of the Clyde Naval Base for contributing this article)



HM Naval Base Clyde