



1909 – 2002

SM2 SUNSHINE SQUADRON REUNION

HMS AFFRAY MEMORIAL BENCHES

HMS Affray, a British Amphion-class submarine, was the last Royal Navy submarine to be lost at sea, on 16 April 1951, with the loss of 75 lives. All vessels of her class were given names beginning with the letter A; she was the only ship of the Royal Navy to be named after a particularly noisy and disorderly fight. Affray was built in the closing stages of the Second World War. She was one of 16 submarines of her class which were originally designed for use in the Pacific Ocean against Japan.

My interest in Affray was fired up by a dear old friend of mine when I was a member of the Essex Branch of Submariners. This chap was called Herbert (Bert) Allen and he was, at the time, the Branch President - one of the old school, smartly dressed at all times, well mannered, very attentive, had time for everyone. He was a crew member of the Affray and was landed to make room for some of the 'riders' that were to be carried on her fateful journey.

A few years ago as Chairman of the Plymouth Branch of Submariners, I became involved with a group of people who were having a Memorial Stone Plinth erected on the Isle of Alderney in Commemoration of the Affray. This was the nearest point of land to where she was lost in the Hurd Deep. The driving force behind this group of people was a chap called Martin Allen and he turned out to be the son of old Bert. Martin won't tell you this, but he ploughed at least £25K of his own money into the Alderney Project and his dream was to have another Memorial Stone Plinth erected in the UK and the appropriate site, if not on what was HMS Dolphin, then certainly in sight of our 'Alma Mater'. So it was erected on the Gosport side of the Gosport Ferry Landing, approximately 100 yards to the left of it. This is, as far as I'm aware, the only set of Memorial Stone Plinths marking from where a Submarine sailed from and where she perished (the nearest point of land that is).

I was present at the opening/unveiling of the Memorial Stone Plinth Service in Gosport, very touching and very well attended. The Plymouth Branch Standard was on Parade by Albert Warrillow, (affectionately known as 'Albert the Pig') as it has been every year since. A small contingent of the Plymouth Branch of Submariners (4 to 7 of us) makes an annual pilgrimage to Gosport over a couple of days doing what 'Old retired Submariners' do best - meet up with 'Oppos' from way back and tell the same old 'Dits' over again. We're of an age where we can't remember what was said yesterday Ha! Sorry, I've gone off on a tangent, back to business:

Since I took on the role of Lead Organiser from Alan Jones & Co in 2010 of this marvellous gathering of like-minded Submariners (The SM2 Sunshine Squadron Reunion), we have run raffles and sold 'Gizzits' to raise monies for many worthy submarine related causes and one of these was the Affray. Our last donation to the Affray Memorial Trust Fund (now no longer in existence as there is no longer any living dependent relatives from the sinking of Affray) was to help rectify storm damage done to the Alderney Memorial Stone Plinth surroundings a couple or so years back now. This year, there was to be an unveiling of three Memorial Benches sited at the Gosport Plinth. Unfortunately, Martin hasn't been too well of late due to a slight stroke which slowed him down (his words (see the letter below)), although he's now back at work - presumably light duties. He had three sponsors funding the cost of the three benches (circa £1,600 each), but unfortunately, one of the sponsors has reneged for whatever reason.

A second sponsor, (Britannia College), although still going ahead, has requested that the unveiling of these benches be put back until April of next year because the original plan was to have the seats installed this November and that would clash massively with their annual November Ceremonies. This delay would also allow Martin to regain back his health/strength hopefully.

I would dearly love to be in a position to be able to say to Martin that we, the SM2 Sunshine Squadron Reunion, will foot the bill for the third Memorial Bench as this coming reunion in March 2018 will be the last time I oversee the running of the event. I made my intentions known at the Plymouth Branch of Submariner's AGM earlier this month, but its time to hand the baton on to someone much, much younger than me. A Lead Organiser is still to come forward and volunteer, with the Plymouth Branch of Submariners helping out as per usual. By my maths and trusty abacus, I reckon if I use 200 attendees, each paying their normal £2.00 door entry fee (£400), and the raffle sells as per usual £600 worth of tickets, then we're £600 light of a bench target. However, if I can encourage 200 of you to drink one pint less (costing between £3.00 & £4.00 pound) and put those savings in a cheque to me as soon as, then we could have the monies in the bank and pledge £1,600 and save the day.

It sounds so simple, but it's down to you, the attendees, and your commitment and decisions. You may not wish to donate, that's your prerogative, but I'm not shaking a tin in your face, I'm merely asking the question. If I was flush with dosh, I would push the boat out for my old mate Bert, but the truth is I'm not, I'm just plain old Dobson in the street with an idea.

For those that choose to donate, I shall compile a separate list and amount donated just in case we are refused for whatever reason of donating a bench. We could however, have a fourth Memorial Bench paid for, should a new sponsor be found in the meantime.

Hi Billy,

Sorry to be slow in replying.

I have decided we must delay the bench unveiling until April 2018.

I have had a slight stroke which has slowed me down but I'm back at work now. One of the sponsors for one of the benches has dropped out and I have to find a new sponsor now.

The Britannia College would also prefer to delay the unveiling of their bench until April as they are too busy on Remembrance Sunday.

Sorry for the inconvenience but hopeful we can still do the normal wreath laying at the Affray Memorial on 12th November, minus the benches.

Regards

Martin