Readers may be interested to know that this month, January 2018 is the 60th anniversary of the arrival of RTTL 2757 at RAF Alness and Invergordon. The craft has been featured in several articles in the Invergordon Archives over the years and I hope it is appropriate to make mention of her again on this occasion.

Undergoing speed trials off Invergordon

HMAFV 2757 was an amazing vessel but she had a chequered career. I was one of the ferry crew who collected the launch at Southampton; we sailed up the east coast of England and Scotland to the Cromarty Firth after being storm bound for a few days at Blythe. It was a wonderful trip with no mechanical problems at all. During the journey, as the trainee engineer, I had to learn about starting and running the engines as nobody at the station had ever seen this type of craft with its Rolls Royce Griffon (marinised aircraft) engines. They were quite complicated to start and I was on a fast learning curve; as soon as 2727 arrived at Invergordon, the ferry crew left and I was left holding the very expensive baby and responsible for operating the engines from that point forward!

Some weeks later, I was the unwitting victim of one of the teething problems on 2757. On idle, when the craft was under way at its slowest speed, the engines ran extremely rich which caused clouds of black exhaust to billow from the stern. Once the speed was increased the engines ran normally, quite cleanly. We went out on exercise on one night when the sea was like glass, not a breath of wind. We had been target towing all night, the time came to reel in the target at the end of the exercise and return to base. As usual, the Ford winch engine in the winch bay at the extreme stern of the boat would not start. I was crouching over the thing for ages while the main engines were idling, trying everything I knew to start it.

Sometime during the period I was stationed in Scotland I was sent to RAF Mount Batten, Plymouth again; this time to do a course on the Rolls-Royce Griffon engines. It was rather strange, after having been the sole operator of the launch and responsible for all maintenance on board, to be then sent to learn how to do it seemed a bit odd—rather like shutting the door after the horse had bolted. Eventually I got it going and began to reel in the target, 600 yards of wire had to be guided onto the winch drum. By this time I was feeling groggy with the fumes which seemed to billow over and into the winch locker well. The target was nearing the transom of the boat when I must have had a blackout. The target crashed into the transom and wrecked the target. I eventually untangled the wreckage and staggered up to the bridge to tell the skipper that the target was in but damaged. I then proceeded to pass out on the bridge! The next thing I remember was waking up in the sickbay down below with a couple of concerned crew watching over me. The skipper radioed to base and when we arrived, there was a civilian doctor waiting on the jetty at 3.30 am to give me a medical check-up. He concluded that I was suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning.

As a result of that incident Rolls-Royce sent a couple of technicians up to Invergordon to adjust the fuel system to cure the problem, so it must have been taken quite seriously by the RAF.

The next crisis was when we set off on an exercise in extremely rough weather and we were at sea for a very long time. We noticed that we were taking on water, the loose bilge boards began to float; when we pulled them up it was evident we had a major leak in the hull. We had to abort the mission and head for home with all pumps running. After a long time we got back safely to the pier and tied up. It was evident that the vessel could not be left on moorings overnight so a maintenance crew stayed on board alongside the pier to keep the pumps running and monitor the situation. The next day it was decided that the craft had to be slipped at Alness in the maintenance hangar.

That was a major exercise as all the fuel had to be removed and the vessel towed up to be put on a cradle and pulled out of the water. Once that was done it was inspected to find that major damage to some frames had occurred.

As a result, a team of shipwrights from the builders, Vospers of Southampton, were sent up to examine the hull and begin repairs. Eventually it was found that seventeen frames had broken. At the same time Vosper's men decided to modify the hull slightly so that the vessel would sit much flatter on the water, thus becoming faster and more fuel efficient. The photo above was taken after the repairs and modifications.

Later, I was sent to RAF Mount Batten, Plymouth to do a course on the Rolls-Royce Griffon engines. It was rather strange, after having been the sole operator of the launch and responsible for all maintenance on board, to be then sent to learn how to do it seemed a bit odd—rather like shutting the door after the horse had bolted.

In September 1958 we went Lerwick in the Shetland Islands,. The purpose of the visits was to celebrate the Battle of Britain weekend there, to show the RAF flag and generally join in the special day. We enjoyed amazing hospitality from all the local people, we opened the launch up for the public to visit, took them out on board for "trips around the bay". This was a huge success and the trip home uneventful.

I left the RAF in November 1958 after a very happy nearly 4 years in Invergordon.

2757 continued to be based at Invergoron, later to Portrush in N. Ireland before being sent to Mount Batten. On her penultimate voyage she broke down when on a rescue mission off Looe in Cornwall, my hometown! The launch was repaired and under her "own steam" arrived in London where she was lifted out of the water and transported to the RAF Hendon Museum where she is now on public display; a fitting end for such a historic vessel.

Photo courtesy of Mike Moore, also an ex-RAF Alness/Invergordonian

By Brian Mutton, Tamborine Mountain, Queensland, Australia. 3rd January 2018