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As a Lieutenant Commander from 1976 to 1979

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Joining *Dolphin* submarine base after two years on the staff at Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth was a sort of culture shock. The tight professionalism of an officer training establishment presented a widely different environment to the equally professional but more relaxed submarine world.

My duties as Base Education Officer were, in the main, quite standard in that I had to cover the education and resettlement needs of the submarine base personnel. However, in addition, I was the Submarine Squadron Education Officer, which meant I covered similar needs for the operational submarines based at *Dolphin*. This meant that I had to examine the educational records of each submarine's nominated Education Officer; he had many other duties and so his education responsibilities were low on his priorities.



HMS *Dolphin* with submarines alongside and the escape training tower in background
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In order to understand the Education Officer's duties and problems, I spent four days on board *Orpheus* sailing from Dartmouth to London. This was a fully operational trip during which I experienced a dive and witnessed the true meaning of 'hot bunk' routine. I quickly appreciated the minimal free time and the limited space available to carry out any extramural activities. I understood, therefore, why on returning to base the

Education Officer usually had a pile of notes and lists regarding his education duties and the needs of the submarine's crew.

My role was to assist the Education Officer and deal with particular needs of individuals. The way that I was able to operate with the individual submarine Education Officers worked well and, from my personal point of view, my understanding and respect for the submariner increased enormously. However, for me this task was much easier in the comfort of a well-located and attractively appointed office within *Dolphin*.

The Base Education Officer's resettlement role was clearly important for those coming to the end of their service. This was particularly so for submariners, as the opportunities to utilise specific submariner skills were quite limited. Consequently the refreshing of other latent skills, as well as learning new ones, were essential considerations. In general the Training Services Agency Opportunities Scheme was often a popular choice for officers and senior ratings. This scheme offered many facilities to enable the submariners to retrain and prepare for civilian life and a second career.

The pre-release Vocational Training Course, for up to 28 days, was a popular opportunity, particularly amongst junior ratings. At *Dolphin* we were fortunate to have an excellent RN Vocational Training Centre located in Portsmouth. As a result submarine personnel were within easy reach of courses covering everyday skills including domestic electrics, carpentry and bricklaying. These were all very popular.

Occasionally some personnel would prefer to advance their academic qualifications by taking a GCE course. This could be done through commercial outlets or by using the RN Correspondence Course Section based in *Nelson*. This was another advantage for *Dolphin* personnel, as the service was prompt and of great benefit to many users.

The whole resettlement service offered by the Royal Navy was high-class and, apart from courses, there was a steady stream of information and advice provided by a number of publications including Service Resettlement Bulletins and Resettlement Notices. Some personnel in *Dolphin* would be seen waiting in the Education Centre early in the morning on the due date of publication.

Another important facility for *Dolphin* personnel was the ship's library. Apart from a huge selection of lending books for leisure, there was an excellent Reference Library that was used a great deal. As the Base Education Officer, I was responsible for the Library's upkeep and security. However, the base was always well served by leading WRNS (Education) who dealt with an enormous amount of administrative tasks, including the organisation of the library.

There was always another IO in *Dolphin* in the Submarine School as the Training Support Officer. During my time it was Lieutenant Commander Ralph Thomas whom I eventually relieved in that job.

Postscript: *Dolphin* closed as a submarine base in September 1998, although the last submarine had left there four years earlier.

The RN Submarine School remained there, however, until December 1999 before moving to *Raleigh* in January 2000. The Submarine Escape Training Tower still remains at Fort Blockhouse (2012).