

LAST OF THE WOODEN WALLS

Rob Hoole

"TONs had a well-deserved reputation for rolling, even on wet grass, but despite this and the privations of life in cramped conditions on board, the ships were very popular with all who served in them. Often unsung, certainly uncomfortable and sometimes in danger, the TONs went about their duties round the globe with the Royal Navy and in many other navies as well."

At the end of the Second World War it was generally accepted that the emphasis on mining had shifted from deeply laid moored mines to ground mines laid in the shallow approaches to ports and harbours. A design team was formed in Bath in 1947 and by 1949 had produced two designs of an advanced concept for inshore and coastal work.

The onset of the Korean War and discovery of new, highly sensitive, Russian magnetic mines accelerated production of the non-magnetic Coastal Minesweeper. The result was a very sturdy and flexible craft, with a double mahogany hull over an aluminium frame, with non-magnetic fittings, capable of undertaking ocean passages, and able to sweep both moored and ground mines.

TONs saw action at Suez (twice), Cyprus, in the confrontation with Indonesia, the Persian Gulf and in Northern Ireland. In addition to minesweeping and mine hunting, they carried out roles as diverse as patrol craft for fishery protection duties and to counter piracy, illegal immigration, and terrorist gun-runners. They acted as gun platforms and diving tenders and were the mainstay of the Royal Naval Reserve.

Published in association with the TON Class Association this superbly illustrated volume will appeal to a wide-ranging service audience, from the ex-National Service junior rate to the First Sea Lord. It will also be of interest to readers who may wish to learn more about such an important part of our proud post-war maritime heritage.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

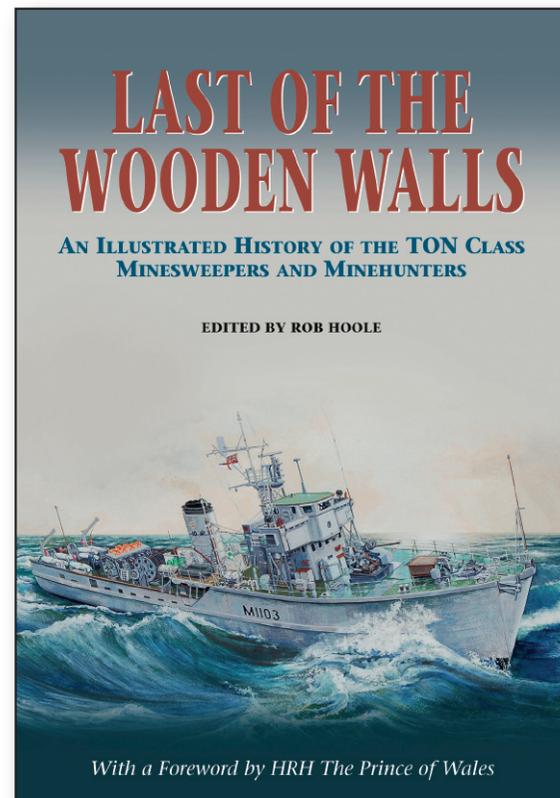
Minewarfare & Clearance Diving Officer Rob Hoole's 32 years in the Royal Navy included service in HMS *Laleston* and HMS *Wilton*. He was also Staff Operations Officer of the Third MCM Squadron of TON Class minehunters based at Rosyth and the first Commanding Officer of HMS *Berkeley*, one of the Hunt Class vessels that replaced the TONs. The compilation of this book was a team effort and Rob is extremely grateful to his fellow members of the Editorial Panel for their tireless efforts and to all other TCA members whose support made it possible.

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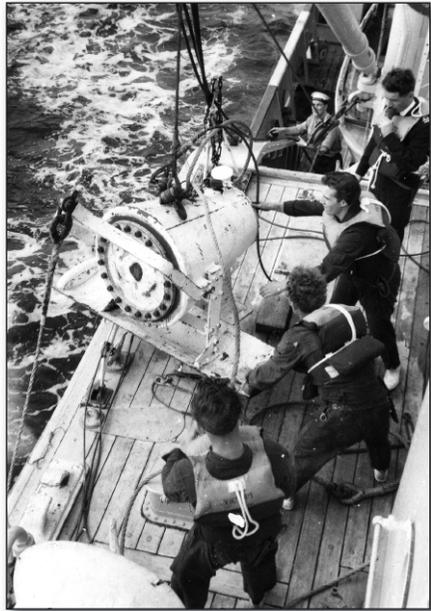
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Above: Sailors from GAVINTON in Cyprus

Left: Streaming the Acoustic Hammer (AH)
(Cdr Peter Wyatt RN)



HMS ABDIEL alongside Suez Canal Company building at Port Said,
Operation RHEOSTAT 1974

TON Patrol Craft with HMS JAGUAR in Mirs Bay, Hong Kong



SYSTEMS AND EQUIPMENT

Facts and Figures

TON Class minesweepers were designed with a standard displacement of 500 tons (440 tons full load). They had a length of 153 feet, a beam of 27.7 feet and a draught of 8.2 feet. Their fuel tanks contained 4.5 tons of Diesel providing a useful radius of action, especially when economical cruising at 10 knots with one engine shut down and the unpowered shaft disengaged and tauting. Fuel tanks were only ever filled to 90% of their capacity, approximately 40.66 tons of Diesel oil. This gave a comfortable range in excess of 2,000 nautical miles.

Depending on role, the normal complement of a TON was between 29 and 38, normally comprising four to six officers, six to eight senior rates and 19 to 24 junior rates. RNR ships tended to be more heavily manned to provide maximum training benefit. 15.3 tons of fresh water enabled the ship's company to exist comfortably for about

a week if used sensibly. As there was no capability for distilling fresh water from the sea, water rationing had to be imposed during longer passages, operations or exercises.

Armament

Most TONs had the Rotors 40/60 Mk VII hydraulically operated single mounting installed on the forecastle. They also had a twin 20mm Oerlikon mounting on the deckhouse shaft the funnel. During the later stages of Confederation, when TONs were used as patrol craft, the Oerlikon was replaced with a second rotor and this configuration was retained when these ships re-located back to Hong Kong. Ships also carried a range of small arms including standard General Purpose Machine Guns (GPMG), Light Machine Guns (LMG), current service rifles (303 Lee Enfield or S&W Self-Loading Rifle), Lanchester or Sterling Sub-Machine Guns (SMG) and Browning 9mm



View over Oerlikon gun passage to Suez (Tony Quick)

pistols. Explosive items carried on board included demolition stores, T Mk 8 explosive cutters for mine sweeping, and mine disposal weapons (MDWs) in minehunters.

Propulsion Machinery

The TONs were initially fitted with two Mirreless diesel engines producing 2,500 brake horse power (BHP). These provided a maximum speed of 15 knots via their two three-bladed screws although this was rarely achieved in practice. Ships were later fitted with two Deltic 18-7A propulsion engines of 1,500 BHP each. At 420 shaft RPM, these gave a maximum speed of 16 knots when running free i.e. not towing anything. At full load, towing wire or magnetic sweeps, the speed over the ground was about eight knots.

The Mirreless Engine

The Mirreless diesel engines, each had 12 cylinders arranged in a 'V' of two banks of six. Each bank had a turbo-supercharger where the incoming air was slightly compressed then cooled before entering the cylinders. At 20 tons each, these engines added considerably to the stability of quite a lively vessel and there was no need for any additional ballast. The pulse generator that provided current for the magnetic minesweeping loop was also a wedge-shaped engine of similar appearance. However, it had only eight cylinders,



Mirreless auxiliary engine

Mirreless main engine (Mirreless Bickerton & Day Ltd)



Mirreless main engine (Mirreless Bickerton & Day Ltd)



A 40mm Bofors in action



BROOKINGTON'S 40mm Bofors



A 20mm Oerlikon in action



ASHTON'S twin 20mm Oerlikon