LEFT: Participants in a charity darts challenge at HMS Fulmar who between them scored a world record one million and one on June 11, 1967. Top row (from left): Ian McCabe, Andy Fleming, unknown, Danny McNeill. Bottom row: Brian (Kipper) Herring, George Lowrie, Ginge Lewis, Soapy Watson.

"It's nice to meet up and see old friends again."
Dave Clark

RIGHT: In the Juniors Mess in 1965/66 are Tug Wilson, Pete Savage, Tom Patterson, unknown, unknown, unknown, unknown, Phil Glover.

With a replica of the rum tub at HMS Fulmar from which they used to get their daily ration are naval veterans (from left) Jim Gardiner, Hugh Williams and Dave Clark. NS Image No. 033921

Navy veterans look back on days at Lossie

By ALISTAIR WHITFIELD
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RATIONS of rum will be on issue at a large-scale naval reunion being held in Moray this weekend.

From all over the UK nearly 100 veterans of the Fleet Air Arm and their partners are gathering at Elgin's Eight Acres Hotel.

A further link between the majority of them is the time they spent at HMS Fulmar, the military base which is now RAF Lossiemouth.

Among the veterans are Elgin resident Hugh Williams (78), and Dave Clark (67) and Jim Gardiner (70), who both have homes in Findochty.

HMS Fulmar was operated for over quarter of a century by the Royal Navy, and Hugh, Dave and Jim knew it as their home for long periods of their military careers.

Jim, who grew up in Portsoy, recalled: "In those days if you didn't manage to find an apprenticeship by the age of 16, you joined the military, which is what I did."

He completed both his basic military training and his initial qualifications as an electrician on the south coast. However, by chance, he then found himself posted back to the north-east.

"They asked for some volunteers to join the Fleet Air Arm," recalled Jim, who served at Fulmar on and off between 1962 and 1977. "Me and four other fellas said we'd think about it.

"Well, that was all it took. The next thing we knew we've all been signed up and are being posted up to Moray."

The usual way of things was that personnel would spend every alternative 18 months with a front line squadron, before staying put at their home base for the next 18 months.

This meant being away from home at sea or abroad for about 12 to 15 months during that period. These periods away saw the three veterans travelling all over the world to dozens of destinations, including Singapore, Australia, The Virgin Islands and The Philippines. They also travelled to idyllic islands in the South Pacific, such as Pula Tioman, which was virtually uninhabited at the time, where they held barbecues, or "banyan", on the beach.

During 1967, while Hugh and Dave voyaged on HMS Hermes to Singapore, the world's news seemed to follow them wherever they went.

First there was Cold War political turmoil in Malta when they docked, then there were riots first in Cyprus, followed by Aden.

A happier memory is of an official air-show in the Middle East, when a Buccaneer jet flew so low over the podium that it panicked the Sheikh of Muscat and Oman. Backing quickly away, the sheikh tripped over his robes and fell flat on the ground.

Meanwhile, all three were men in the Mediterranean on the old Ark Royal aircraft carrier when, in 1970, it accidentally hit a Russian destroyer. The Soviet vessel had been playing a game of cat and mouse – and got too close.

Two Russian sailors were killed, while the Royal Navy had to rescue another five who had been thrown overboard.

Like Jim, Hugh was also an electrician, or "greenie" as they were known, on account of the coloured waistcoats they would wear while onboard.

Hugh, who grew up in Liverpool, joined as a boy sailor, did 20 years at HMS Fulmar and married a Lossie lass, before finally retiring in 1978.

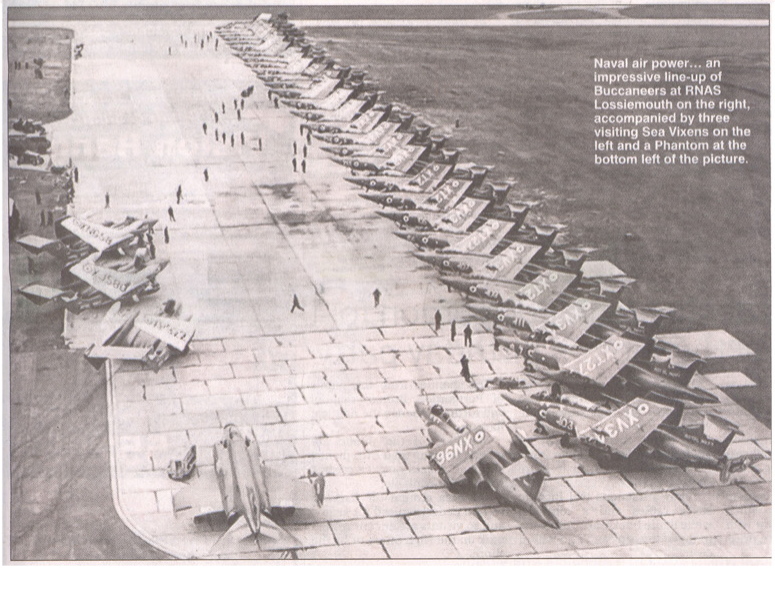
Speaking about this weekend's upcoming reunion – which are held each year somewhere in the UK – he said: "It's like a big jigsaw. Someone starts talking and you remember all sorts of other things that happened."

Dave, who is originally from Derbyshire and served at HMS Fulmar from 1966-71, said: "It's nice to meet up and see old friends again. In some cases it can be strange because you might not have seen them for over 30 years, but you always have plenty to talk about.

"Even if you don't know them personally, you'll find you both know someone else."

A meet and greet is being held from 7.30pm tonight (Friday) at the Eight Acres Hotel, which anyone with connections to HMS Fulmar is invited to attend.

However, the Saturday night function at the same venue is a ticket-only event.



Naval air power... an impressive line-up of Buccaneers at RNAS Lossiemouth on the right, accompanied by three visiting Sea Vixens on the left and a Phantom at the bottom left of the picture.

Train trips were thirsty times

THE veterans certainly "crammed in a lot" during their careers at HMS Fulmar. On some occasions, they did this quite literally.

Dave Clark recalled how the squadron used to commandeer a train whenever a large number of personnel transferred down to Plymouth or Portsmouth.

The 28-hour journey was widely regarded among the men as a deserved break from routine.

However, on one trip south it was announced that they would be limited to six small cans of beers each.

And, in order that a proper count could be kept, these would be issued by an officer at a special bar set up on the train.

Dave said: "We came to the conclusion that this wasn't going to be enough.

"So we enlisted the Ross Anderson taxi firm from Lossiemouth, then lined up three deep in proper military fashion at Elgin train station.

"When the taxis arrived, the drivers opened the boots and they were full of McEwans.

"Ross then called out our names one at a time. We'd answer 'present' then go up and collect a crate each."

Base built in 1939

THE military base at Lossiemouth started life as an RAF facility, opening just months before the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

After the end of hostilities in 1945, Lossiemouth was transferred the following year to the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) and became known as HMS Fulmar or, alternatively, Royal Naval Air Station (RNAS) Lossiemouth.

The base reverted back to the RAF in 1972, but a contingent from the FAA continued to serve there until 1978.

Captain Eric 'Winkle' Brown, who died earlier this year, was HMS Fulmar's commanding officer from 1967-70. He was commonly viewed as Britain's greatest ever test pilot.