

The UK's Independent Deterrent – a glimpse inside the secret world of HMS Porksword

By [Julian Jackson](#)

Your intrepid PO.com correspondent gets aboard a British Nuclear Submarine (SSBN).

H.M.S. Porksword (it's long, thin, and full of seamen) is a Procrastinator Class nuclear missile submarine, tasked with guarding the UK, as it ceaselessly slips through the lapping waves and subterranean clefts, in search of Her Majesty's enemies, who with the true cowardice of the evildoer, fiendishly hide their dastardly selves on land.

Cost to UK taxpayer: £136,986.30 per day. Terrorists killed = 0.

Commanding Porksword is Captain Jonny "Birdseye" Merton, one of the new breed of highly professional, classless, meritocratic Royal Navy officers; this also means that he has been a Captain for 17 years, and will get one more promotion, then spend 10 years in the basement of the Ministry of Defence stamping underwear requisitions till retirement. Unless he has the sense to leave the Navy and become a....what's it called....umm Arms Procurement Consultant. Big Moolah. But Jonny has firm principles: shooting missiles = good; selling missiles = bad.

He summons the First Officer, handsome 24 year-old Lieutenant The Lord Humphrey Poddleston (who will be fast tracked to being a Rear Admiral in about 16 years). *(Note to landlubbers – how I love all this clipped military jargon!, in the US Navy Poddleston would be the XO, but in the RN he is First Officer, or No1.)*

Captain Birdseye: SitRep, No1?

Lt. Poddleston: All systems fully functional, and in A1 condition. Chewing Gum within acceptable parameters, Sir. The Duct Tape's gone a bit slimy, but it always does.

Captain Birdseye: Good show, carry on No1.

HMS Porksword is equipped with FlashFish homing torpedoes*,

[In tests 9 out of 10 FlashFishes failed completely. The tenth turned round and hit the submarine which launched it, which counts as success of a sort. They're a snip at only £4.5 million each, terrorists killed = 0]

Bottom-Sucker Intelligent Mines, Tomahawk Cruise Missiles, and Trident II D-5 SLBMs. (The ballistic missiles are made in Lockheed Martin Space Systems Co., Sunnyvale, Calif, and have a small sticker: "Guidance System

guaranteed by Wong, Wing and Infiltrator, Inc, San Diego: your money back if not satisfied. Excludes certain cities: Beijing and Shanghai.”)

Total cost to UK taxpayer £12.57 billion. Terrorists killed = 0.

In the humming gloom of the Combat-Information-Centre highly-trained personnel watch their screens. Porksword is equipped with so-fuckin-not-state-of -the-art radar, sonar, comms**** and surveillance equipment. Britain can never afford the best so behind the flickering panels, green screens and slinky flashing red lights, the equipment is actually held on with chewing gum and Duct Tape.

At about £735 per screw, angle bracket and jubilee clip, the chewing gum has saved the British taxpayer:

£180,745.13. Terrorists killed = 0.

As part of Britain's Independent Deterrent the nuclear missiles are very accurate (CEP**=Shoe Size 8), and are capable of being targetted on Victoria Beckham's Fendi Bag. Unfortunately, with the demise of the Cold War, this makes about as good a target as any, some would say better than most. So they are still pointed at Russia....after all, we have to point them somewhere.

Terrorists don't stand still, and when they do, they are on the London Underground system, where there would be unacceptable collateral damage using ICBMs, as well as lots of killed urban foxes, which would clearly be illegal, as hunting foxes is now banned, and certainly blasting them with nuclear weapons is in breach of the Hunting Act 2004 (SCHEDULE 1 Section 2 EXEMPT HUNTING, makes no mention of Nuclear Weapons as acceptable for killing any wild mammal). Lord Lieutenant Humphrey⁺ Poddleston, Bart, of Broomturton, (Lt Poddleston's Uncle), says: "An ICBM is never the choice of a gentleman hunter, even against farm vermin."

In the C-I-C, just alongside the Ultra-Low-Frequency-Encryped-Comms Console is the Missile Firing Array. Normally manned by a Senior Rating with 15 years service, but he left to become a car salesman, so it is under the control of 19 year old "Fatty" Plimkin, who is currently picking his nose, an activity he does a lot, as he cannot fire the missile on his own authority, or at least that's the theory, unless some of the chewing-gum falls off.

The Missile Firing Array can only be activated in a A Very Special Way.

(imagine you are reading this in a Hushed Voice)

1, An order comes over the M4B Encrypted Comms system (eventually, after about 6 attempts, and some careful resticking of Duct Tape) from Royal Navy Chief of Joint Operations (CJO), CINCFLEET HQ[^] in Northwood, to prepare the missiles for firing.

Cost to UK taxpayer: £5489.22. Terrorists killed = 0

2. The Captain goes to his safe and opens a sealed order which confirms the code in the message. He summons the First Officer, the lantern-jawed Lieutenant The Lord Humphrey Poddleston. Each of them has a key, which must be turned simultaneously to activate the Missile Firing Array.

All the red, orange and green lights go on. And flash, and go “beep”.

Able Seaman Fatty Plimkin stops picking his nose(which costs the UK taxpayer about £17 per hour, and does not kill any terrorists) and prods a few buttons on his console.

3. The missiles go through their activation sequence. For security reasons I'm not going to tell you how this happens. *So there.*

But at one point Able Seaman Plimpkin pulls a switch, which falls off the console, with a horrible snickety sound. He takes out a roll of sticky tape, and tapes the switch, which says Missile No 4, back in place. This roll of sticky tape is exactly the same as you would buy in a stationery shop, except for two differences:

1. It Says Top Secret Military Grade Tape, a Halliburton Corp service, Partnering with the Royal Navy Since 1997.*****

2. It costs £400.35 per roll.

4. Beside the Missile Firing Array is a standard US Payphone – which only takes US currency.

Captain Birdseye: “Bring me the Quarters”.

WHOOOP WHOOOP WHOOOP! GENERAL QUARTERS! GENERAL QUARTERS!

Captain Birdseye: Bloody shut that alarm off, I said bring me the Quarters. Find the Purser.

The Purser comes into the C-I-C, bringing a plastic bank teller bag full of US Quarters.

He hands them to his First Officer: who feeds in lots of coins.....and dials A Top Secret Number in the USA.

Cindy Sheehan can't come to the phone at the moment because she's been arrested under the Patriot Act again for possession of a T-shirt. Please leave a message after the tone, if you dare.

Lt. Poddleston: Sorry Skip, wrong number again. He redials.

Secret Pentagon Base: *Hi, this is Secret Pentagon Base 166B, Cherine speaking, where may I direct your call?*

Lt. Poddleston: This is HMS Porksword, can we have StratCom Command? Tony Blair wants to get his missiles off.

Cherine: *Are you the British Navy, Mr Porksword?*

Lt. Poddleston: Er...yes, but my name is Lt Poddleston. You sound nice Ma'am, you can call me Lord Humphrey.

Cherine: I'm just checking here under P. I have Operational Order 1264c, Sir: No British missiles to be launched without written permission from your mother and Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld. Do you have this ready?

Lt. Poddleston: P for Porksword?

Cherine: No Sir, its our Military Codename for our British allies. In our phonetics P is for Poodle. No letter, no missile firing, sorry.

Capt Birdseye (Grabbing Phone): How dare you stop us firing OUR missiles..... we paid for them, they're ours!

Cherine: I think you should check the Terms and Conditions, they're on the missile just below the tailfin in very small print: we got them from Microsoft. The missiles actually belong to the US Government. You don't own them at all. Thanks for your time, Sir. Please call again. Have a nice day.

(click).

Cost to UK taxpayer £77,008,978.62 Terrorists killed = 0

Notes:

*

<This is made up. But last time a British sub (HMS Conqueror) used a torpedo, to sink the Belgrano in 1982, they used an old WW2 torpedo because the "high-tech" Stingray couldn't hit a rowing boat!>

** CEP = Circular Error Probability, that is claimed accuracy.

**** I scarcely know how to tell you this, but the comms equipment in British Nuclear Subs is so crap, that they need another sub, Trafalgar Class to communicate with HQ if they go too far away. SO THEY PROBABLY DO NEED CHANGE FOR A PAYPHONE IF THEY ARE TO LAUNCH NUKES. I

thought I was making it up, but I found out it that truth is truly stranger than fiction.

***** Yes, another bit I added: Halliburton own Devonport Naval Dockyard in Plymouth (UK). I couldn't believe it when I read this. It's only costing £650 million to service our submarines, and they get the dockyard thrown in too....

^ I didn't put in more than 20% of the mad acronyms. Northwood appears to be staffed by a whole lot of scrambled letters. Would you trust something that's called CINCFLEET? Say it out loud.

* * *

QUIZ:

†Is there a difference between a Lord Lieutenant and a Lieutenant Lord?

Answer:

A. Er, no.

B. Of course there is you pusillanimous bounder!

Answer B is the correct one: it wouldn't do to confuse the two. If you answered A, you are quite wrong, but can take comfort in the fact that you must come from somewhere that these crazed social divisions don't matter.

Author Biog:

Julian Jackson is a British writer/consultant on technology and photography;
website: <http://www.julianjackson.co.uk> E-mail: info@julianjackson.co.uk
Creative Writing website: <http://www.julianjackson.net>

© Julian Jackson 2006. Creative Commons Licence: it may be freely reproduced and distributed for a non-commercial purpose, without modification, with acknowledgment.