

Fort Burgoyne - A Different Role

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It is a while now since Fort Burgoyne fulfilled its original role of defence against attack from France, but its strategically well-designed location has afforded 'The State' opportunities in times of stress. One of these occurred in the summer of 1972, in the second year of the Heath Conservative government, when members of the Dockers' trade union declared their intention to mount a national dock strike just as 'The travelling public' were planning to take their holidays away from the UK.

The background to this was the unexpected defeat of the Wilson government in 1970 and the expressed continued frustration of the largely Labour-affiliated trades unions. Militants, including Jack Dash of the London Dockers and Arthur Scargill of the National Union of Mineworkers, had openly declared their intention to 'bring down' the relatively unprepared Heath regime and many will remember the 1970-71 3-day weeks and enforced power 'outages' which this action delivered. There were some silly scenarios, of course, including the amusing (for some) spectacle of HM Customs officers trimming

the tops off imported candles to render them 'non-decorative' for tax reasons! (This was, of course, before European Economic Community membership, achieved in 1973).

Our story begins, on the Thursday in July 1972, as English and Welsh schools were about to break for the summer holiday and parents were packing their cars for a quick get-away to the Continent. Dover was the principal departure port at the time, but Folkestone, Sheerness and the Sussex ports also contributed to a general exodus through the Southeast counties.

On the Thursday evening, the BBC announced that there would be a national dock strike starting on the following Monday and so if anyone wished to go to 'The Continent' for any reason they should do so by that Monday. They did (or they tried to)!

The result was a complete gridlock on the roads in Kent and a collapse of the ferry booking system because booked passengers were unable to make their booked 'slot'.

The Kent Police, as always, were very cooperative and quickly arranged for a liaison between themselves and the ports, represented principally by Dover staff, led by General Manager Ken Davis. My boss, Terminal Manager Brigadier Pat Leeper (himself a Royal Engineer) delegated me to handle operations outside the port estate.

On the roads, it was immediately apparent that there three principal problems:

1 Perishable goods were being held in conditions prejudicial to their needs.

2 'Unaccompanied' freight vehicles were unable to be separated from their 'prime mover' towing units, delaying their turn-around.

Troops ready to move into the docks

With the docks dispute in deadlock, the Government is expected today to declare a state of emergency, allowing troops to be used to move essential goods.

The Government, however, may postpone for a day or two an emergency order to give Mr Robert Carr, Secretary for Employment and Productivity, another chance today to get talks going again.

As he left the Department of Employment and Productivity last night, Mr Carr said he would "almost certainly" be calling a new round of talks today. He described the situation as grave and very serious, adding: "They have now reached a position of deadlock." It is thought that Mr Carr may attempt to find a formula

By JOHN TORODE

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3 Passenger vehicles containing children and (sometimes) vulnerable adults, as well as the bulk of freight vehicle drivers, were being held in queues without adequate food or toilet facilities.

Accordingly, three sorting/decision points were set up, manned by Dover Harbour Board staff with police liaison:

- 1 At Lydden Hill for A2 traffic.
- 2 At Farthingloe for A20 traffic.
- 3 At the Fort Burgoyne barracks parade ground for interchange of 'unaccompanied' freight vehicles.

At each point, telephone communications were established by HM Post Office staff and catering was provided by volunteers from the Salvation Army. 'Portaloo' toilets were provided and marshalling of traffic was arranged by freight specialist and traffic management staff from the Dover Harbour Board, accompanied by police staff for any public order issues which might arise. This enabled passenger and driver-accompanied traffic to be passed swiftly to the port(s) for handling by shipping operator personnel, perishable goods to be afforded precedence and unaccompanied freight to be sent to the Fort Burgoyne parade ground, where the tractor units could be released for their next cycle and port operator tractor units could pick up the parked freight as required.

The area in front of Fort Burgoyne itself could not be used for heavy freight, as the bridge over the moat was insufficiently strong. Back-up facilities and communications were sited there instead.

These arrangements allowed traffic flows to return to normal quickly despite picketing by London dockers, who had alleged 'stealing' of London traffic by freight hauliers. London Dockers' leader, Jack Dash, was taken around Dover's Eastern Docks by taxi, accompanied by General Manager Ken Davis and myself so

that he could identify any 'stolen' traffic. None was seen and the pickets returned home.

At the entrances to the port, Kent County Constabulary worked with Dover Harbour Board Police to ensure public safety. Pickets and demonstrators were told that if they stepped on to the road (past the barriers) or threw any missile they would be arrested immediately and taken before a specially convened magistrates' court. This was very effective and defused what might easily have become a very disruptive mob.

Of course, we were very fortunate in that the Northern Ireland 'Troubles' had not yet imposed restrictions on the use of Army property but the exercise proved to be vital to the development of 'Operation Stack' (the forerunner to 'Operation Brock') which was developed by a group headed by myself and Assistant Chief Constable Coe of Kent County Constabulary and which served the port community well until after the construction of Junction 11a on the M20. The rest is recorded elsewhere.

What did the Army get out of it? Well, they gained a lot of positive PR from their rapid response to the call for help by the port community and the parade ground was resurfaced by the Dover Harbour Board at a cost of £20,000.

Subsequently, after security issues had been seen off by the departure of the Army from Dover, the parade ground was used for the 2012 Queen's Diamond Jubilee Tattoo, largely financed by the Army but organized by a staunch group of loyal volunteers.



2012 Dover Military Tattoo - Courtesy Mike McFarnell