The submarine HMS M2

Introduction

Among the many postcards with military motifs offered for sale via the Internet auction universe eBay, I saw a card with a quite unusual motif, namely a "hangar submarine". Here is a bit of the history of this unusual vessel.

The submarine HMS M2 (1916-1932)

The submarine HMS M2.
From Source 1.

The M class *(M* for Monitor) comprised a total of 4 vessels, each armed with a 12" (30.5 cm) gun and intended for bombardment of enemy coastal fortifications.

The 4 submarines were ordered in 1916 (converted from the K-class) and equipped with the fairly powerful guns for submarines.

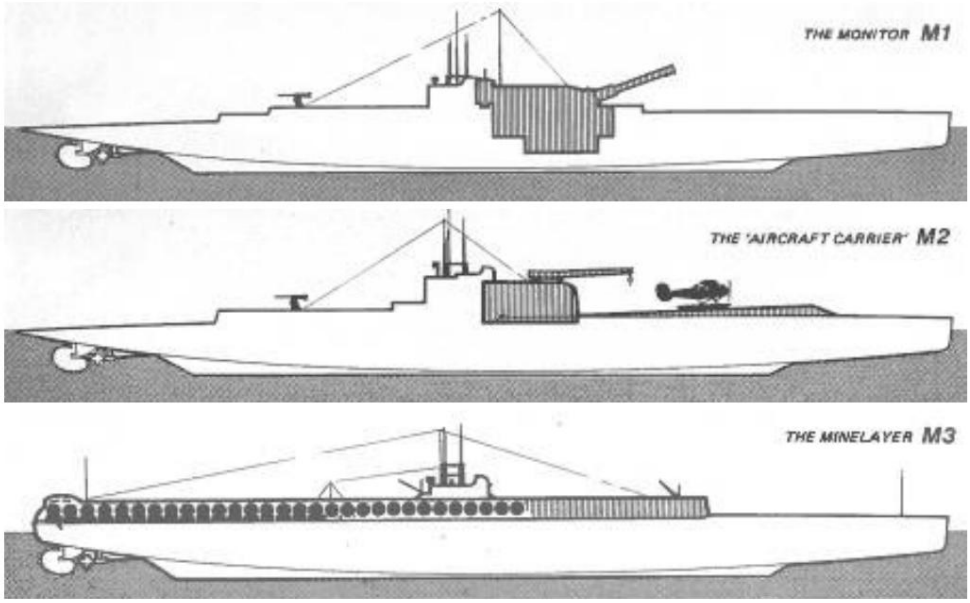
Only the M1 was completed before the end of World War I, but was not used.

The navy's management judged that the risk of a German copy of a possibly lost submarine being used against the English coast was too great to outweigh the benefits of using the weapon system.

After the war, M2 and M3 were completed, while M4 was chopped up before completion.

The Disarmament Treaty from 1920 (Washington Treaty), which i.a. set limits on the size and armament of warships, led to the removal of the heavy guns.

M2 was instead equipped with a hydroplane from 1927 to 1928 and M3 as a minelayer.



The submarines in the M class.
From Source 2.

However, the three M-class submarines were marked by accidents, and thus HMS M1 was lost on 25 October 1925 when she was rammed by the Swedish freighter SS Vidal in the English Channel.

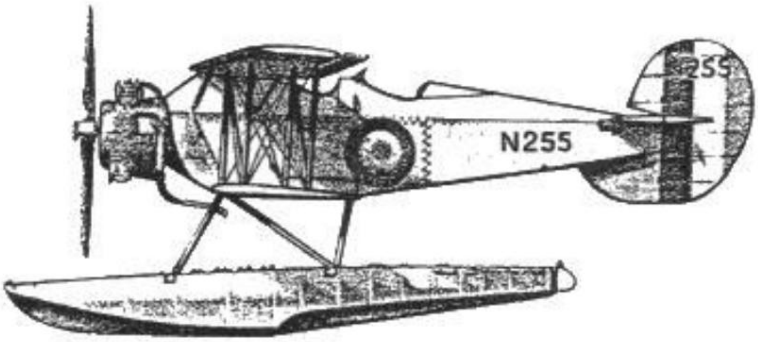
HMS M2 sank on 26 January 1932, off Portland. The crew of 60 perished; a Parnall Peto hydroplane was lost along with the submarine.

M 3 survived until 1939 when she was scrapped.

The idea of an English hangar submarine died with the loss of HMS M2, but the French Navy also experimented with a similar project (the Surcouf submarine).

The Japanese navy built three hangar submarines of the Sen Toku class, intended for, among other things, to be able to attack the Panama Canal; two were sunk by the Americans, while the third surrendered.

Parnall Peto hydroplanet



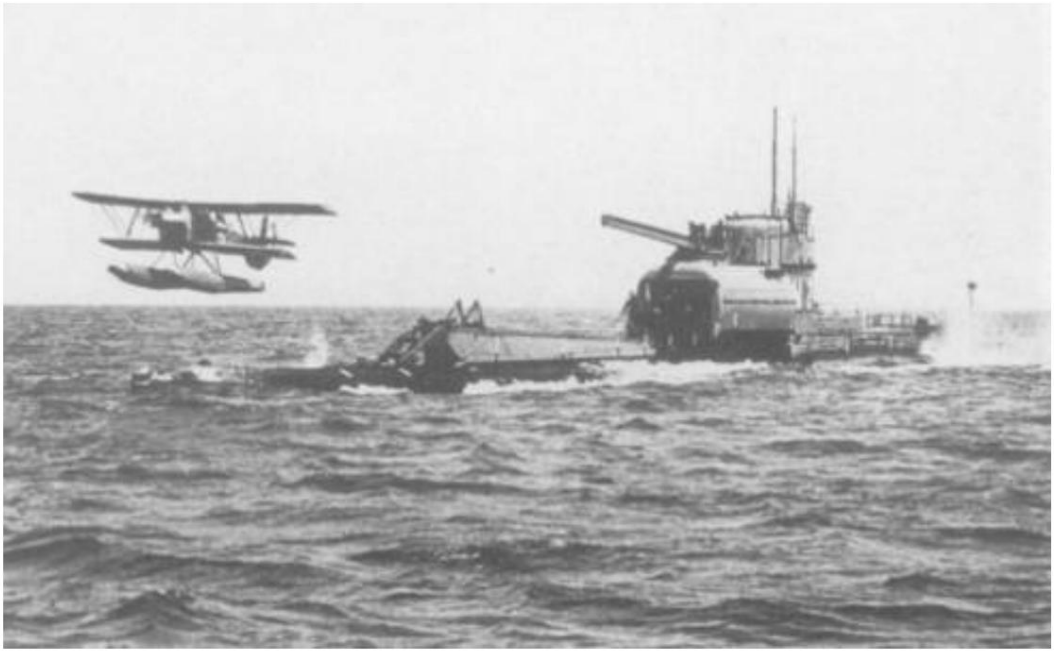
Parnall Peto hydroplane.
From Source 2.

The Parnall and Sons aircraft factory in Bristol developed, in close contact with the Admiralty, a number of special aircraft and during the First World War produced a further number of aircraft designed elsewhere, e.g. Avro 504.

Parnell was commissioned to design a two-seat hydroplane that could be launched from a catapult on the submarine M 2.

Parnall Peto hydroplane.
From Source 6.

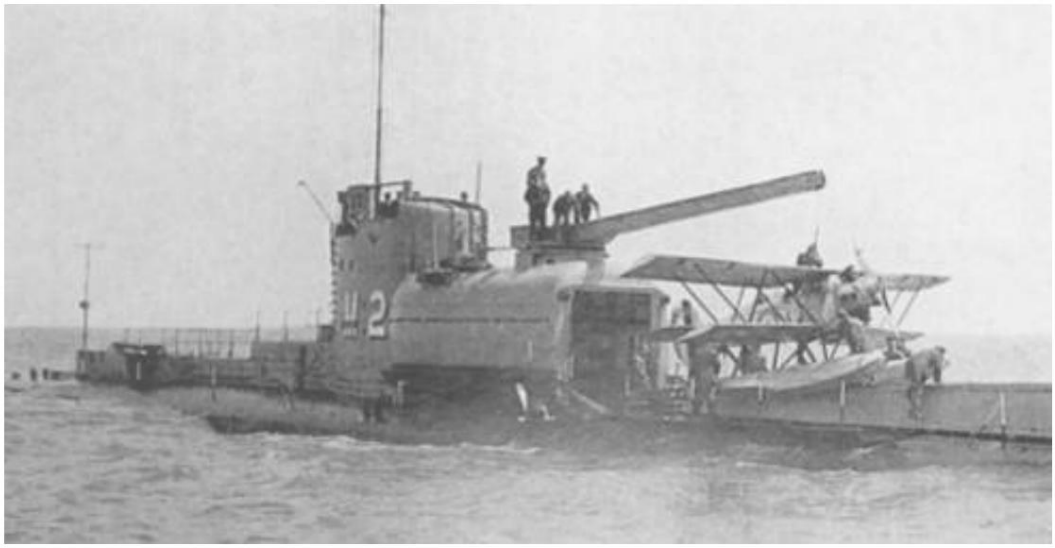
The Parnell Peto hydroplane had a 135 HP engine and a flight time of approx. 2 hours, at a speed of 125 km/h.



The submarine HMS M2 and a Parnell Peto hydroplane.
From Source 2.

The operative idea was that the submarine should work as the vanguard of a larger naval force and, with the help of its aircraft, reconnoitre against enemy naval units.

From almost periscope depth she had to open her hangar doors, launch the hydroplane from a catapult, close the hangar doors and then dive again - all within 5 minutes!



Embarkation of a Parnell Peto hydroplane on HMS M2.
From Source 5.

After completing the mission, the hydroplane landed next to the submarine and was hoisted aboard using a crane.

The wings were then folded back and the hydroplane returned to its hangar, after which the submarine could dive.

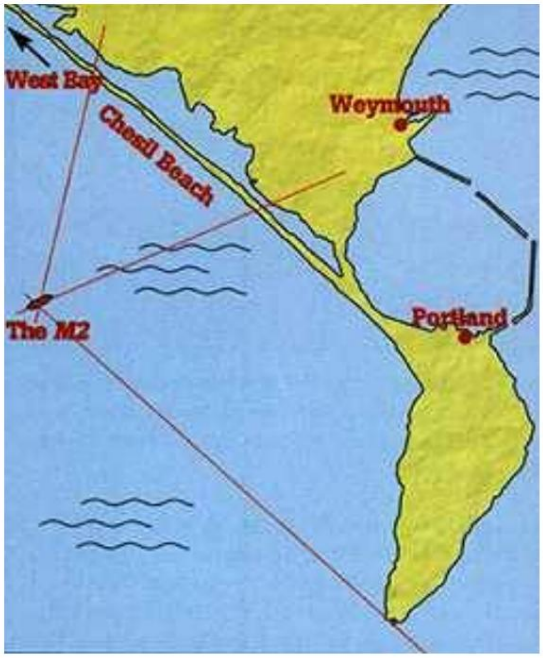
About the sinking of HMS M2

The submarine mother ship HMS Titania, approx. 1938.
From Source 10.

On 26 January 1932, HMS M2 left Portland harbor for a training cruise in West Bay.

In the last radio contact between the submarine and its mother ship - HMS Titania - it was stated at 10:11 that M2 would dive at 10:30.

HMS Titania served as a submarine mothership from 1915 to 1949.

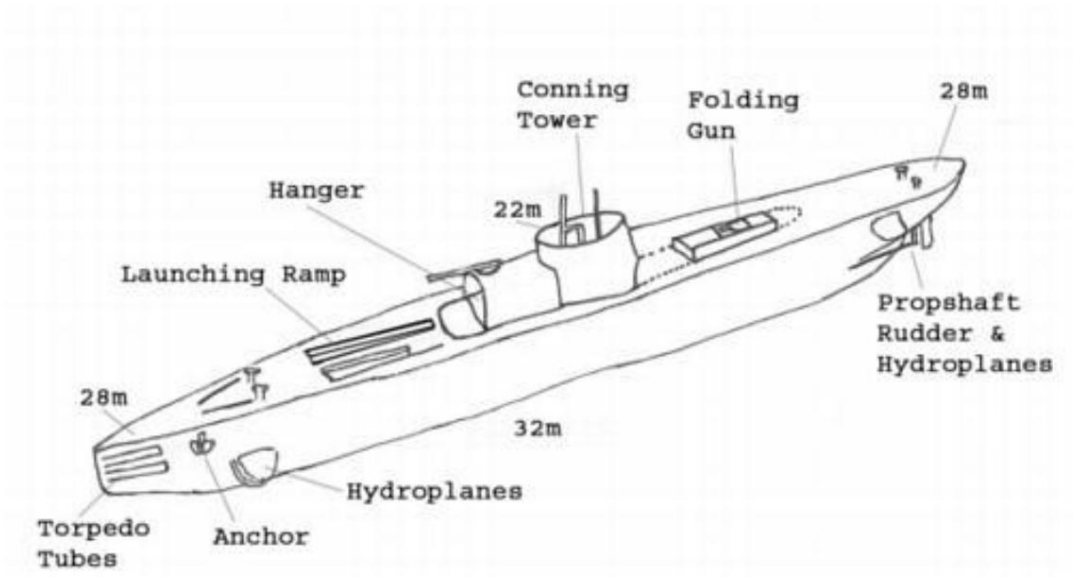


The position of the wreck of HMS M2.
From Source 6.

Captain AE Howard of the Coaster Tyneside, who passed the submarine at 11:15, subsequently reported that he had observed a large submarine dive, stern first!
The captain was not aware of the significance of what he observed and therefore only reported it when he arrived in port.

The wreck was located on 3 February 1932 and numerous attempts were now made to salvage the submarine.
After 1,500 dives, on December 8, 1932, they almost managed to get the wreck to the surface, but with the submarine only six meters from the surface, a storm blew up, and the salvage attempt had to be abandoned.

The wreckage was found with the hangar doors open, and two theories as to the cause of the sinking have been put forward. After one, the crew - in an attempt to beat their own record for launching the seaplane - allegedly opened the hangar doors too early.
The second theory suggests problems with the ballast tanks. If there was an imbalance between the forward and aft sections - a proper equalization of ballast and pressure could take up to 15 minutes - it could cause the submarine to sink, just as observed from the coaster Tyneside.

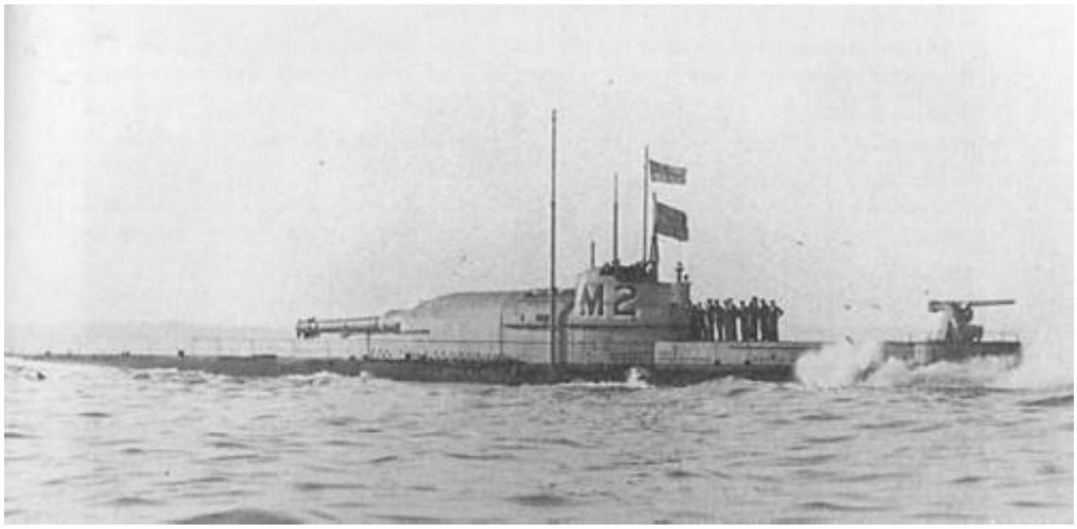


Sketch of the wreck of HMS M2.
From Source 6.

The wreck of HMS M2 today lies at a depth of 32m and Source 4 gives the position in Lyme Bay should anyone care to look it up.

Closing

If you are interested in the postcard with HMS M2, it can (still *(20/9-2005))* be bought for GBP 2.50, or you can bid on it, with a starting price of GBP 0.99.



The submarine HMS M2, before the conversion to "hangar submarine" in 1927-28.
From Source 5.

Similarly, the image of HMS Titania can be purchased from Battleships-Cruisers.co.uk.

In both versions, the submarine was equipped with 4 pcs. 45 cm (18") torpedo tube, and carried a total of 8 torpedoes.

On the stern is the secondary armament - a 76mm (3") gun.

Sources

1. M2 submarine submersible aircraft carrier postcard 2. M Class submarines *(Submariners Association, Barrow in-Furness)*

3. M Class submarines *(Dave Hallas)*
4. Submarine aircraft carrier 5. HMS M2
6. Wreck Tour 5: M2 7. Parnall and Sons.
8. Parnall Historic Aviation Photos.
9. Parnall Peto.
10. Royal Navy Depot Ships

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