



NAVY NEWS

NOVEMBER 2019

Back in the game



THE first of the UK's F-35 Lightning jets line up aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth during the Carrier Strike Group's Westlant 19 deployment. Type 45 destroyer HMS Dragon is accompanying the ship. (see pages 2-3, 5 and 7)

Picture:
LPhoto Dan Shepherd

MERLIN STORM • MILESTONES FOR HMS PRINCE OF WALES • SPEY COMPLETES OPV FAMILY





LIGHTNING

STRIKES



IT'S all coming together as the Royal Navy moves towards having one of its two aircraft carriers in full operation.

While one of them, HMS Prince of Wales, continues sea trials in the North Sea (see page 17), the other, HMS Queen Elizabeth, is at the centre of the UK's Carrier Strike Group on the other side of the pond, flexing her muscles off the east coast of the USA on Westlant 19.

Up until now, one thing that had been conspicuous by its absence on the deployment was the certain lack of F-35 Lightning jets. Pretty vital for an aircraft carrier to have planes and all...

That all changed in the middle of October, as three fighter jets with lightning bolts down their fins left RAF Marham and flew some 4,000 miles to the eastern seaboard to join three jets from 17 TES and touched down on HMS Queen Elizabeth's vast flight deck, ahead of testing their war-fighting abilities from the carrier.

This was the first time a UK Lightning jet had touched down on a UK carrier and it was an undisputable indication that Britain's carrier capability is sharpening and is nearly ready to exert air power all over the globe.

Following the fanfare of the jets' initial arrival, Queen Elizabeth's aviators tested take offs in the pouring rain and, using the ship's lift, then stowed the carrier's precious cargo in the hangar for a brief rest before the navy and RAF fliers from the UK Lightning Force prepared to really put the £78m aircraft through their paces on more than a month of trials.

This deployment is all about being confident in the Carrier Strike Group's ability to sail into operations. In 2021 this will all be happening for real and all carrier units need to be swept up and ready for the challenge.

It's about getting the ships, the aircraft and Royal Marines working seamlessly. All the units have been toppers on Westlant and that certainly shows in this month's paper. We've got coverage of HMS Dragon on page five and 845 Naval Air Squadron on page seven, each training in their specialist carrier support role.

"Getting to this point of embarking UK F-35 jets into our British-built carrier has been a significant joint undertaking by industry and military – both ours, and those from the United States," said Commander of the Strike Group, Commodore Mike Utley.

"We will take the jets from the successful developmental phase we achieved last year through to a more operational footing, so we are confident that the jets, the carrier and our destroyers and frigates will function seamlessly together."

The F-35s are now right in the middle of the full array of tests to make them match ready. Call it pre-season, if you like.

During last year's deployment, jets from the USA were used for developmental trials over 11 weeks at sea.

This time around it's about planning sorties, arming the aircraft using the carrier's state-of-the-art weapons handling system and debriefing on the success of each phase with UK jets.

Before the Lightnings arrived, HMS Queen Elizabeth sailed into Mayport in Florida and was welcomed with some fanfare. It was QE's second visit to the port in Jacksonville and the local community were completely enamoured with their 65,000 tonne guest.

Their affection was so that a plaque was presented to the ship, naming 11th October 2019 'HMS Queen Elizabeth Day'.

The plaque reads: "HMS Queen Elizabeth has twice visited the Mayport Naval Station in 2018 and again in 2019, and the citizens of Jacksonville Beach were proud to welcome the officers and crew to our beautiful city."

William Latham, the Mayor of Jacksonville, proclaimed 'HMS Queen Elizabeth Day' and added: "I hope the ship and her crew will consider Jacksonville Beach their home away from home while operating in and around the state of Florida."

Captain Steve Moorhouse, Queen Elizabeth's Commanding Officer, said: "You can't get a much more positive welcome than having a day named after you."

Following their Mayport stop, the carrier and supporting ships sailed nearly 100 nautical miles off the coastline to start carrying out the F-35 tests.



Pictures by LPhot Kyle Heller and LPhot Dan. Shepherd

During this phase, the aircraft carrier is escorted by Type 45 destroyer HMS Dragon, submarine hunter HMS Northumberland, tanker RFA Tideforce and Merlins from 814, 820 and 845 Naval Air Squadrons, Wildcats from 815 squadron and Royal Marines from Lima Company, 42 Commando.

The UK will declare initial operating capability for Carrier Strike by the end of 2020. The first operational deployment for HMS Queen Elizabeth, the UK Lightning Force and a group of US Marine Corps Lightning jets is due to take place in 2021.

Work with the Americans has once again been a key feature of the Westlant mission and will continue to be.

While HMS Dragon worked with the USS Dwight D Eisenhower Carrier Strike Group (see page five), HMS Northumberland and her fellow sub hunters of 820 Naval Air Squadron worked with a US submarine.

They gained invaluable information on tactics and skills required to protect an aircraft carrier from the threat beneath the waves while working with the allied sub.

Type 23 frigate Northumberland used her specialist sonars, including the powerful towed array sonar, to hunt the submarine at range, keeping tabs on it before 'destroying' the target in training exercises.

Joining in the chase was the RNAS Culdrose-based Merlin Mk2, the aerial submarine hunting experts on Queen Elizabeth. The navy fliers utilised sonobuoys to cover a large area of ocean to prevent the submarine getting a clean shot at any of the UK Carrier Strike Group ships.

"The challenging environment has been a hurdle the team and I have had to overcome and adapt to but it has been a hugely valuable exercise period, allowing me to utilise my submariner experience, helping to forge the tactics we will require for the Carrier Strike Group in 2021," Principal Warfare Officer, Lieutenant Commander Kris White, said.

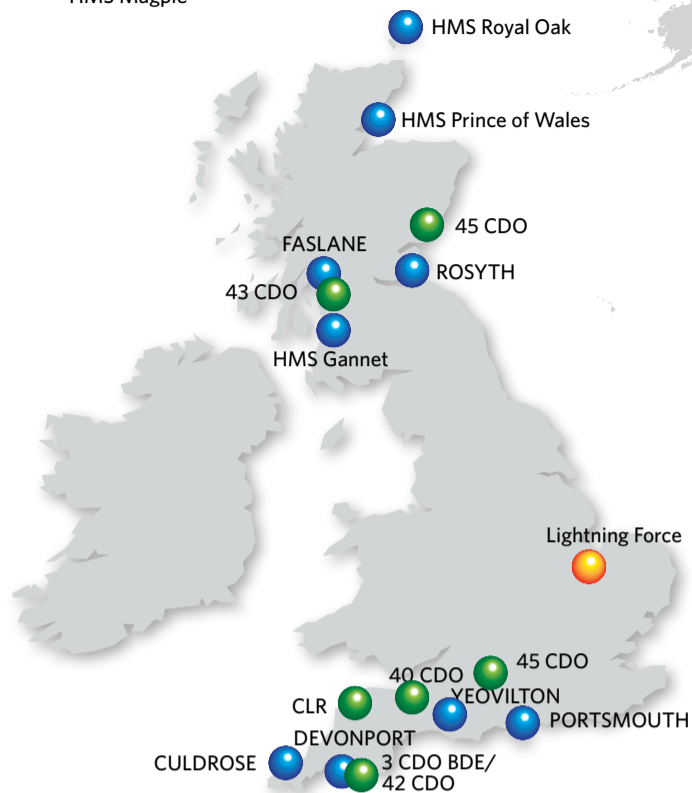
» The second Atlantic Future Forum will take place on HMS Queen Elizabeth this month. The aim is to bring US and UK industry and military together in the face of changing warfare and the fight against growing cyber threats, both at home and abroad.



Training or on patrol around the UK

HMS Forth
HMS Medway
HMS Mersey
HMS Tyne
HMS Maggie

HMS Hurworth
RFA Tidesurge
820 NAS



17(R) TES

Lt Joe Mason

HMS Queen Elizabeth
HMS Northumberland
HMS Dragon
RFA Tideforce

RFA Mounts Bay

HMS Clyde
NEFI

HMS Cattistock

HMS Sutherland

Gibraltar Squadron

UKMCC
NSF Bahrain
COMUKMCMFOR
HMS Montrose
HMS Kent
HMS Defender
HMS Brocklesby
HMS Shoreham
HMS Ledbury
HMS Blyth
1700 NAS
RFA Cardigan Bay
Naval Party 1023
Forward Support Unit

HMS Enterprise

Naval Party 1022

On patrol somewhere beneath the Seven Seas is one Vanguard-class submarine and an undisclosed Trafalgar or Astute-class boat

FLEET FOCUS
Protecting our nation's interests

THE biggest warships ever built for the Royal Navy dominate this month's *Navy News*.

HMS Queen Elizabeth is currently Stateside for her Westlant 19 deployment, along with Type 45 destroyer **HMS Dragon**, Type 23 frigate **Northumberland** and tanker **RFA Tideforce** (see pages 1, 2-3). The carrier welcomed her first UK operational F-35 Lightning jets on board and is conducting flying trials.

HMS Dragon also teamed up with the American carrier USS Dwight D Eisenhower (see page 5) for a week of exercises.

Commando Helicopter Force's 845 NAS are also onboard HMS Queen Elizabeth and carried out a downed pilot training serial (see page 7) to test the response times of both the ship and squadron.

Meanwhile younger sister **HMS Prince of Wales** (see page 17) has marked a number of milestones on her journey to the frontline. Currently in the North Sea, the carrier is testing system upon system ahead of her arrival into Portsmouth.

The Royal Navy also welcomed the fifth and final new patrol ship as **HMS Spey** nears completion in Scotland (see page 11). Her naming ceremony almost closes the chapter on a seven-year programme which gives the Senior Sevice a flotilla of patrol ships ready for deployment around the globe.

Sister ship **HMS Medway** joined up with the oldest vessel in the Fishery Protection Squadron, **HMS Tyne**, for a sea day off the Isle of Wight (see page 11).

Tyne's sister **HMS Mersey** spent three days keeping a close watch on Russian warships (see page 6) passing UK shores.

Off to the Gulf and British and French frigates **HMS Montrose** and FS Jean Bart bagged a huge haul of drugs (see page 6). The two ships worked together to intercept a dhow.

Montrose, along with sister frigate **HMS Kent** and destroyers **HMS Duncan** and **Defender** have so far accompanied more than seven million tonnes of British shipping through the Strait of Hormuz (see page 6).

Loved ones flocked to Portsmouth to welcome home destroyer **HMS Duncan** from her demanding deployment (see page 16).

The ships in the Gulf were supported by the **Naval Support Facility** in Bahrain, where personnel enjoy a full range of amenities (see pages 30-31). The revamped facility is home to around 200 personnel, but can accommodate around 500 for short periods of time, such as crew rotations.

Heading out of Portsmouth was **HMS Cattistock** as she deployed on a whistle-stop NATO assignment around the ports and inlets of the eastern Baltic (see page 16).

HMS Sutherland enters maintenance this month after being one of the busiest ships in the fleet this year, spending more than half the year at sea, culminating in last month's Joint Warrior exercise (see page 9).

We get a glimpse of the exciting lives of Royal Navy aviators. Firstly, fast jet pilot **Lieutenant Joe Mason** talks about his world as an exchange pilot with the US Navy in Virginia Beach (see page 23). Then, secondly, we look at the intense and pressure-filled world of Commando Helicopter Force pilots (see pages 14-15). Fourteen naval aviators from **846 NAS** spent an action-packed week living in the field on Exmoor for Exercise Merlin Storm.

Royal Marines from **45 Commando** took to Salisbury Plain with their Vikings and Jackals for exercise Blue Steel (see centrepages). The abandoned village of Imber was the setting for the marines assault, which enabled commandos to hone their skills ahead of deployments to the jungle, desert and, early next year, the Arctic.

Finally, in this the month of national remembrance, we report on the 80th anniversary commemorations of the sinking of the mighty **HMS Royal Oak** (see pages 26-27). Ceremonies were held in her native Portsmouth and in Orkney.

Our new Navy

VIEW BRIDGE from the



BACK in September, we introduced the Royal Navy's Command Plan, which sets out five priorities for transformation; the North Atlantic; Carrier Strike; the Future Commando Force; Forward Presence; and Technology and Innovation.

These areas are what we need to change if we are to remain a world-leading Navy.

Now, we have set out more details on how we are going to do this. This plan will make sure that we can deliver these changes at pace, affordably and with real benefit to Defence.

Over the next few months, we will take these transformation areas in turn and examine in more depth what they mean for your Royal Navy. And this month there is no better place to start than with Carrier Strike.

September 19 2019 was a momentous day for the Royal Navy and for the nation.

As **HMS Queen Elizabeth**, *main image*, was crossing the Atlantic on the Westlant deployment, **HMS Prince of Wales**, *pictured right*, slipped her moorings for the first time and headed out to the Firth of Forth for sea trials.

Britain had become only the second nation in history to have two supercarriers at sea at the same time.

And **HMS Queen Elizabeth** has just embarked the first British examples of the F-35B Lightning jets that they were designed around.

These are piloted, maintained, administered and handled by Royal Navy and RAF crews. This is truly a joint initiative.

And the whole group is designed to operate alongside and in conjunction with our allies.

We are used to thinking of the US as having enormous power with its 11 carrier strike groups.

But even with all that power, it usually has only one carrier group in an area at once.

When we can add to that force flow, it makes a tremendous difference.

Of course, Carrier Strike is about more than the amazing Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers, it's about the new Type 26 frigates and their upgraded anti-submarine warfare capabilities, the new Astute-class submarines that are coming into service now, as well as the Type 45 destroyers, autonomous vehicles and aircraft that accompany them.

But more than that, it's about a new way of working. The move towards being a

Carrier Strike Navy gives us the opportunity to change the way we generate, train and operate across the Royal Navy.

We will be looking at the composition of the Battle Staffs and Headquarters to make sure they are fit for purpose.

We will be examining how training is carried out by the Maritime Warfare School and FOST.

And we will be looking at how the Maritime Warfare Centre operates to make sure it is supporting Carrier Strike in the best way possible.

Delivering this will require a genuine shift in mindset across all these areas, and more.

New technologies and new ways of working will allow us to deliver a world-leading Carrier Strike Group, ready to deliver on a wide range of operations, on behalf of Defence, the nation and our allies, anywhere in the world.



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Pictures: LPhoto Dan Shepherd

THE DRAGON'S LAIR

A LOT of the focus on Carrier Strike Group work has been on F-35 Lightning jets on the deck of HMS Queen Elizabeth.

That is, of course, a significant milestone, but there is serious work going on elsewhere which is more about nullifying the threats from the air than welcoming them on to flight decks.

The UK's carriers will always be accompanied by a destroyer, designed with world-class kit to thwart attacks from the skies. They bring specialist air-defence capabilities to carrier missions, using high-powered surveillance radars to scope out potential enemies and, if needs be, eliminate them.

On Westlant 19, HMS Dragon is responsible for just that and, as HMS Queen Elizabeth works on carrying the punch of aerial threats, the Type 45 trains in countering them.

This is the Dragon's Lair.

She recently teamed up with the American carrier USS Dwight D Eisenhower for a week of exercises off the east coast of the USA,

Dragon protected the air, learning how air-defence operations are conducted within a US task group, and reaffirming bonds with the US Navy.

The destroyer can take on aircraft, missiles or drones to protect carriers using the warship's Sea Viper missile system. It is a vital role when undertaking CSG operations.

During her exercises with the USS Eisenhower, members of HMS Dragon's ship's company headed over to the USS San Jacinto, working closely with US counterparts and tasting life on an American cruiser. Some US sailors also joined Dragon to sample life in the RN.

"We've been very closely linked with the USS San Jacinto which is the air and missile defence commander for the USS Eisenhower seeing how they conduct air-defence operations, and taking some very valuable lessons back to the UK Carrier Strike Group," said Commander Giles Palin, Commanding Officer of HMS Dragon.

"It's also been a really good opportunity to get our sailors across to our US colleagues, so that they can experience life in the US Navy – whilst, at the same time, inviting some of the US sailors over to HMS Dragon, so that they can see what life is like in the Royal Navy."



With additional knowledge and experience gained from working with the Americans, HMS Dragon returned to the UK Carrier Strike Group and was patrolling alongside Queen Elizabeth as the UK's Lightning jets touched down on the carrier's deck for the first time.

Portsmouth-based HMS Dragon will be present throughout during the important operational testing phase of the Westlant 19 deployment,

"We're really honoured to be the first Type 45 operating with Queen Elizabeth. It's a really key responsibility because we've got to learn how the two ships work together in a task group," added Cdr Palin.

"We're making sure communication works between the two ships and, indeed, the war-fighting tactics. This will allow us to deliver operations effectively in the future."

The Americans will also be involved in Westlant 19, continuing the relationship between the UK and US. Units from the US Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps will be involved, proving further the partnership between the two NATO allies.



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Ships net huge haul of drugs



● The view from HMS Montrose as seaboats approach the dhow, with the FS Jean Bart in the background



BRITISH and French frigates HMS Montrose and FS Jean Bart have bagged \$1m (£784,000) of drugs in a bust in the Arabian Sea.

The two warships worked together to intercept a dhow carrying 94kg of heroin and 76kg of crystal methamphetamine. Narcotics smuggling in the region is linked to major criminal networks and terrorism.

The suspicious dhow was initially located by FS Jean Bart's helicopter and boarded by a team from the French ship who secured the vessel and conducted an initial investigation. Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel from HMS Montrose then took over the search of the vessel and the team located and seized a large number of packages containing the drugs.

The Commanding Officer of HMS Montrose, Commander Ollie Hucker, said he and his ship's company have been training hard for this type of mission: "We were conducting a replenishment at sea with a US Navy Tanker in the early morning when I received the news of the suspicious dhow; we were ready to commence a successful counter-narcotics operation with the FS Jean Bart in the afternoon."

"This demonstrates the flexibility and professionalism of the Royal Navy and French Navy and the very close interoperability with our coalition allies."

"I am immensely proud of my ship's company who have all played their part in tackling the international drugs trade from the sea and have prevented the landing of these drugs in other countries, perhaps even the streets of the UK. Seizures like these put a dent in the funding of wider illicit and illegal activity."

The two warships were operating as part of the multinational task force, Combined Task Force (CTF) 150. This is part of the 33-nation coalition Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) and has responsibility for counter terrorism and counter narcotics across a large area of the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean.

CTF 150 is a joint command shared between the Royal Navy and French Marine Nationale and is led by Commodore Ed Ahlgren of the Royal Navy, who took over in August of this year.

Cdre Ahlgren said: "This interdiction is testament

to the outstanding teamwork and collaborative co-operation within CMF that has been demonstrated in my area of operations. I am enormously grateful to French Ship Jean Bart for initially locating and securing the vessel in preparation for handover to another coalition unit.

"HMS Montrose then responded in a tradition I would expect from the Royal Navy. Her ship's company showed true professionalism and grit in the manner in which they conducted the boarding – collectively as a UK-French endeavour, we have now successfully stopped this particular illegal cargo reaching other regions of the world and probably prevented well over a million dollars of funding for those who would wish to do us harm."

One of the rigid hull inflatable boat drivers, Advanced Tactical Coxswain Able Seaman, Seaman Specialist Ben Davies, said: "Working at night was particularly challenging. Once my training kicked in, I was able to manoeuvre the sea boats successfully alongside the dhow to allow members of the boarding team to embark safely as well as recover them and the drugs, back on to HMS Montrose."

This brings the total of drugs seized by CMF warships in 2019 to over 2,000kg of heroin, just over 130kg of crystal methamphetamine and nearly 50,000kg of hashish.

Locally, this would equate to around over 46 million US Dollars and is ahead of the total achieved in 2018 at this stage of the year. By the end of the 2018, CMF warships had seized narcotics worth over 75 million US Dollars.

HMS Montrose is operating from Bahrain for three years and is supported by personnel from the Royal Navy and other Services working as part of United Kingdom Maritime Component Command (UKMCC) and CMF.

Since arriving in April 2019, she has undertaken a wide range of operational tasking ensuring freedom of navigation in the region, protection of merchant shipping as well as tasking in support of CMF.

At home at the NSF, see pages 30-31.



RN oversees transit of 7 million tonnes of shipping

OVER seven million tonnes of British shipping – the equivalent of around 20 wartime convoys – have been guided safely through the Strait of Hormuz by the Royal Navy.

Four warships – HMS Montrose, her sister frigate HMS Kent and destroyers HMS Duncan and HMS Defender – have accompanied British flagged and registered merchant ships in and out of the Gulf amid tensions with Iran.

Grateful seafarers have labelled the Royal Navy vessels 'guardians of the Gulf' for their efforts providing protection in the narrow waters separating Iran on the north shore and Oman and the UAE since the beginning of July.

The four warships, plus their helicopters, have been used to accompany and watch over merchant shipping to ensure they can pass into and out of the Gulf safely, keeping international trade – especially oil and natural gas – flowing in the face of taunts and attacks by Iranian forces.

The bulk of the escort duties have been carried out by HMS Montrose, she alone shepherded around five million tonnes of British shipping... that's akin to 75 HMS

Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers.

Duncan was dispatched to the Gulf to bolster the RN presence and made 29 runs through the Strait, watching over 1,287,209 tonnes, before turning for home, see page 16.

As for Kent, she has spent three weeks on escort duties after leaving her native Portsmouth in August, providing safe passage for 21 British commercial ships over that period: in excess of 800,000 tonnes of shipping.

"We are a close-knit team and I am extremely proud of what my sailors have achieved over the last few months," said Commander Andrew Brown, HMS Kent's Commanding Officer.

"This has tested our skills and resilience – and every single person onboard has delivered for me professional excellence throughout, providing invaluable reassurance to merchant shipping in a key waterway."

The ship uses her Wildcat helicopter to scour hundreds of square miles of the Gulf for any signs of danger.

Kent is due to return to Portsmouth before the end of the year.

Mudryy waters for Mersey

THE Royal Navy spent three days keeping close watch on Russian warships passing UK shores as HMS Mersey monitored a task group.

The Portsmouth-based warship was patrolling off the Norfolk coast when she was dispatched to shadow a three-strong group of Russian vessels, headed by the frigate Yaroslav Mudryy.

HMS Mersey met up with the Mudryy, plus her supporting tanker Yelnya and the seagoing tug Viktor Konetsky as the trio entered the UK's area of interest – and stuck with them as they continued through Dover and into the Channel.

She completed her shadow mission when the Russians left UK waters.

The Mudryy is a Neustrashimyy-class frigate believed to be heading from the Baltic to the Indian Ocean to participate in exercises with the Indian Navy.

It is standard practice for Russian warships to be accompanied by support vessels when heading out on prolonged deployments.

Mersey was conducting a fishery enforcement patrol, ensuring trawlermen abide by fishing rules in UK waters when she received the task to meet up with the Russians.

"It is a testament to my ship's company's



professionalism and commitment that such a small team can switch focus to successfully achieve whatever the nation requires of them," said Mersey's Commanding officer Lieutenant Commander Will Edwards-Bannon.

"I am very proud of the way they responded to this short-notice change in Mersey's tasking. The Royal Navy is used to working alongside our allies to uphold the rules-based international system, both in home waters and around the globe."

"As ever, I am very grateful to the friends and families of all of us who serve in Mersey for their continued support as we work hard to protect our nations' interests."

Although devoting most of her time to safeguarding UK fishing stocks, HMS Mersey has had a varied and busy year, including escorting various other Russian warships, exercises with the Irish Navy and offering support to Border Force in dealing with illegal migration in the Dover Strait.

Picture: LPhot Belinda Alker

Why the long face, Pony?



ANYONE fancy volunteering to be stranded in the middle of the Atlantic?

No, well I suppose I'll have to do it.

And so the training officer from 845 Naval Air Squadron, Lieutenant Jonathan 'Pony' Moore, found himself being unceremoniously dumped into the sea – although the ocean was 30°C – and very calm – and he had a liferaft. Don't know what the fuss was about.

Lt Moore was the focus of a 'downed pilot' scenario, aimed to test the rescue skills of both HMS Queen Elizabeth and the Commando Helicopter Force during the Westlant 19 deployment, see pages 1,2,3, and 5.

The duty search-and-rescue aircraft from 845 NAS was scrambled to rescue the downed pilot. Once on scene, the aircraft was able to use its onboard equipment as well as put the full sea-search skills of the crew to the test to rescue the survivor.

Life support jackets, single-seat liferafts and a range of rescue beacons were tested, including the COSPAS-SARSAT.

Testing the communication lines from the beacon back to the ship, aircrew then launched and honed

onto the 'downed pilot's' beacon to swoop in and pick him up.

Chief Petty Officer Survival Equipment Technician Paul Netherway said: "Aircrew are taught how to escape from the aircraft and surface, along with how to assist with their own extraction.



"This training was invaluable both to the ship's survival equipment section, proving they could deliver this training in the future from the carrier and further support the aircrew training requirements whilst away from the UK, and also to the squadron as they further hone their Deployed Search-and-Rescue skills and explore the impressive capabilities of their new aircraft, the Merlin Mk4."

The search-and-rescue Merlin is at an hour's notice to cover the carrier and her task group, comprising HMS Dragon, HMS Northumberland and RFA Tideforce.

845 NAS have three Merlins on board the carrier, with B-Flight operating under the call sign of Furious Flight, so named after HMS Furious, the first British warship on which a deck landing was conducted at sea.

Pictures: LPhot Kyle Heller

RN divers share their knowledge

ROYAL Navy divers have shared vital expertise on mine clearance with the Ukrainian Navy.

Instructors from the Defence Diving School on Horsea Island in Portsmouth headed to the eastern Ukrainian city of Berdyansk, on the coast off the Sea Azov, to deliver mine counter-measures training.

It was the first time sessions like this have been delivered by the UK in the region and is part of an ongoing international effort to support Ukraine.

The small UK team taught various techniques, from the preparation of diving equipment to practical lessons in mine clearance. This now gives the Ukrainians the ability to pass on the knowledge and train their own people in this essential capability.

"We hope this will go some way to help train their divers so they can protect their shores," said Warrant Officer Simon Murray, who, alongside colleague Petty Officer Simon Days, delivered the course.

"We are proud to be working with and building the capacity of our allies and partners, and by doing so supporting our own national interests."

The Ukrainian Navy is looking to recover following heavy losses to its personnel and knowledge as it faces the real threat of Russian-laid sea mines along its shores.

This latest training follows on from a course delivered in June by Royal Navy instructors at the Naval Training Centre in Mykolaiv, near the Black Sea, which was the first course of its kind since the extension of a UK joint training mission.

Captain Olexei Nesterov, is one of the few remaining diving specialists in the Ukrainian Navy and hosted the training in Bardyansk.

"I'd like to say thank you very much for our international colleagues especially the UK. There is no way for us to do everything by ourselves, with your help will we be able to change our situation."



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BUSY-NESS IN GREAT WATERS

THERE was a Pakistani, Singaporean, Chilean and a Malaysian on board a British warship...

Not the opening gambit of a comic from the 1970s, but just one episode in a hectic 2019 for HMS Sutherland, possibly the busiest ship in the Fleet.

How busy? Well... There were new anti-ship missiles attached to the 30mm cannon successfully tested against fast-moving speedboats.

There were 200 rounds of high explosive which came crashing down on earth and rock from the ship's main 4.5in gun (and no jams/stoppages).

There were 20,000 rounds spewing from the Miniguns and machine-guns and 460 from the automated 30mm weapons.

There were star shells which turned night to day for 30 seconds at a time.

There were winds of 60mph, and calm estuary waters churned up by swarms of fast-attack craft.

There were 77 sorties conducted by the Merlin Mk2 helicopter, callsign Highlander, requiring 135 hours in the skies.

There were more than 23,000 nautical miles added to the odometer (average speed, 11 knots).

There were 1,923,000 litres of F76 fuel... all used up.

There were 8,304 rashers of bacon, 13,840 sausages, 722 loaves of bread, 884 large tins of baked beans, 84,750 potatoes, 14,834 pints of milk... also all

gone. There were two tweets a day, reaching as many as 140,000 people at a time.

And there were 190 men and women making it all happen.

HMS Sutherland enters maintenance this month after spending half of 2019 at sea - none of it in glamorous or far-flung locations, and just two foreign runs ashore (the definitely-not-glamorous Narvik and Den Helder).

Instead, her 2019 has been devoured by duties in and around home waters, each one demanding - and each one important.

The past month has probably been the most intensive of Sutherland's year, beginning with giving PWO students a taste of real, rather than simulated, action... and ending with an action-packed fortnight on Joint Warrior.

The four warfare students had already 'enjoyed' five months in the classroom and simulators at HMS Collingwood before they joined Sutherland for a week of tests in the three dimensions of naval warfare: above, on and below the water.

They were called upon to deliver naval gunfire support with rounds from the frigate's main 4.5in gun hammering targets, fend off an air attack off Plymouth, then cope with the all-out naval conflict that is a Thursday War.

"The quality of training we have received at HMS Collingwood equipped us for a fulfilling week at sea onboard HMS Sutherland.

This year I ar bin mostly...



- Fleet Ready Escort - the on-call frigate/destroyer needed for operations around the UK;
- training vessel for navigators/international warfare officers/RAF Chinooks;
- test-bed for new missiles for fending off 'swarm' attacks;
- hunting submarines with NATO for ten days in the Arctic;
- surviving a battering from Storm Gareth (winds of 60mph);
- paying my respects to my namesake county;
- popping into Belfast, Narvik and Den Helder;
- participating in the last major war game of the year off north-west Scotland.

"We were deeply impressed by the professionalism, 'can do' attitude and warm welcome received," said Lieutenant Commander Zeeshan from the Pakistani Navy.

"We truly appreciated the support provided by the highly-experienced instructors and sailors onboard."

With the students disembarked, Sutherland made a bee-line for Faslane to join 15 other warships mustered for Joint Warrior 19-2.

Sailors from NATO navies made up three quarters of the 3,725 military participants in the exercise.

Sutherland was attached to an Anglo-French task group led by FS Tonnerre and Britain's flagship HMS Albion for Exercise Griffin Strike, testing the ability of the two navies to work side-by-side - ready for next year when the idea of a joint task force becomes a reality.

A mixed staff under the RN's

Rear Admiral Andrew Burns embarked on Tonnerre took charge of the many moving parts.

Before the Fighting Clan could join the group, however, she had to make it safely out of Faslane, running the gauntlet of fast-attack craft swarming around shipping, testing the response of gunnery teams.

Sutherland launched Highlander to scout ahead of her and provide timely warning of the 'swarmex' (swarm exercise), as boats emerged from a small inlet, intent on causing havoc.

"We really dialled up the complexity of this 'beat-'em-up' exercise - multiple fast-attack craft, the close proximity of land, our helicopter providing machine-gun support and a minehunter for us to protect - this is realistic and highly-valuable training," said Lieutenant Commander Tom Knott, Sutherland's Second-in-Command.

"It isn't as simple as bringing

guns to bear, however. We must consider Rules of Engagement and the implications of opening fire versus the escalation of diplomatic tensions. It's tense but this is what the Fighting Clan thrives on."

Warning messages were broadcast over the radio, but when these were ignored, the onus fell on the ship's protection teams on both ships to fend off the swarms using machine-guns and Miniguns (hand-held Gatling guns), with Sutherland also able to weigh in with her 30mm automatic cannon.

And Highlander added to the hail of steel raining down on the fast inshore attack craft with her aircrewman manning a 50 calibre machine-gun picking off the enemy from on high.

From small arms to crowdpleasers. Off Cape Wrath, Sutherland was called on to provide Naval Gunfire Support with the help of specialist spotters

from 148 Battery Royal Artillery by day and night.

"Naval gunfire support is an advanced operation involving teams ashore and on board," explained Operations Officer Lieutenant Commander James Mitchell.

"It requires accurate information from the observers ashore, accurate gunnery from us so the shells land in the right place."

The 4.5in was in action for 18 hours. When darkness fell, 60 high-explosive shells were guided thanks to para(chute) illum(ination) flare bathes the area in an eerie greenish-white light for about 30 seconds... and infra-red shells, invisible to the naked eye, but visible to friendly forces wearing the appropriate eyewear; night becomes day and, more importantly, the enemy has no idea he's being lit up.

Reward for plastering Scotland with TNT was a short break in Den Helder passing HMS Prince of Wales (see page 17) as she crossed the North Sea.

"On reflection it has been a busy 2019," said Commander Tom Weaver, Sutherland's Commanding Officer. "The Fighting Clan has sailed to every corner of our home waters - and beyond to achieve UK maritime security operations."

"I am hugely proud of my ship's company for their professionalism and enthusiasm in delivering some of the Royal Navy's highest priority tasking."



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Spey has her day

Naming of fifth new patrol ship boosts oldest squadron

THE fifth and final new patrol ship for the Royal Navy has been formally named as work on HMS Spey nears completion.

The shattering of a bottle of whisky from the affiliated Speyside Distillery as it struck the hull of the £127m Offshore Patrol Vessel marked the formal 'baptism' after Spey's sponsor Lady Alison Johnstone had uttered the historic words "I name this ship..."

The ceremony almost closes the chapter on a seven-year programme which will give the Royal Navy a flotilla of brand-new patrol ships ready for deployment around the globe.

Constructing the vessels has directly supported 1,700 jobs north of the border and a further 2,300 jobs around the UK in the supply chain.

And they have helped maintain key shipbuilding skills – vital now work has started on the first Type 26 frigates, also on the Clyde.

Days later first and second generation fish ships linked up for the first time as the Royal Navy's most historic squadron held its annual exercise.

HMS Tyne – the oldest vessel in the Fishery Protection Squadron at 16 years old – and brand-new HMS Medway (commissioned only last month) joined up off the Isle of Wight for the 'sea day' of the Portsmouth-based unit's yearly get together, *pictured top right*.

As with her sisters, HMS Spey was built at BAE's facility at Govan, then moved down the Clyde to their Scotstoun yard for fitting out.

She takes her name from Scotland's third longest river, famed for its salmon and natural pearls – both reflected in the ship's badge – while her motto of 'Mack sicker' ('make sure') can be traced all the way back to Robert the Bruce and comrades more than 700 years ago.

The Royal Navy has been using the

name since 1814, with the most recent HMS Spey, a minesweeper, sold to Brazil in 1998.

The latest incarnation is 90 metres long, equipped with a 30mm main gun, a flight deck which can host Merlin and Wildcat helicopters and space for 50 Royal Marines/soldiers for specific missions.

Spey will be used for general patrol duties, counter-terrorism/anti-smuggling missions, provide disaster relief where needed, act as the UK's eyes and ears on the high seas and fly the flag for Britain's global ambitions.

At present, the 2,000-tonne warship has a handful of sailors assigned to her, with more joining over the winter and first Commanding Officer Lieutenant Commander Ben Evans due to arrive in late April, just as his men and women move on board to breathe life into Spey and prepare to take her to sea for the first time.

He joined VIPs at BAE's yard on the Clyde for the ceremony. "The official naming is an



important milestone – it marks the true beginning of the life of HMS Spey," he said.

"As she's the final ship in the class, Spey has benefited from many of the lessons learned building and testing Forth, Medway, Trent and Tamar. They have blazed a trail for us, so I'd like to think of HMS Spey as last – but best. "There is still a long road ahead of us – it will be at least 12 months before Spey makes her debut in Portsmouth. It will demand a lot of hard work from both the hundreds of shipwrights, engineers and technicians completing Spey and her ship's company when they join. We are all

determined to make her a success, proudly carrying the name of a great river around the world for many years to come."

Of the four ships ahead of Spey, HMS Forth is preparing to sail for the Falklands, after maiden helicopter trials Medway is conducting fishery and security patrols, HMS Trent has completed sea trials and is in the final stages of fitting out, and HMS Tamar is gearing up for her first spell at sea.

Tyne and Medway conducted Officer of the Watch manoeuvres in close formation for guests and affiliates who'd been invited aboard for the day to get a feel for life at sea with the squadron while enjoying their hospitality.

"The exercise has been a great success today, demonstrating to our affiliates, supporting government agencies and senior military officers what a capable and effective offshore patrol force the UK has," said the squadron's Commanding Officer Commander Simon Pressdee.

"We are looking forward to deploying HMS Forth shortly on her mission to the South Atlantic where she will support the Commander British Forces based in the Falkland Islands, replacing HMS Clyde which has been on station for over 12 years.

"This will be the first of the new class to start the forward presence mission which is a new and exciting role for these much improved and capable ships."

The squadron can trace its history back to 1379. In 2019 it performs a mix of tasks from standard fish boardings to ensure quotas are not being exceeded to general maritime and security patrols, and safeguarding home waters.

KEEP UP WITH THE SQUADRON

Follow @hms_tyne, @HMS_Medway, @CdrFPS and @RoyalNavy on Twitter

Top award for RFA officer

A DECK officer who always dreamed of going to sea has been given the Maritime & Coastguard Agency Officer Trainee of the Year Award.

Dr Ewan McNeil, from Fife, who also has a PhD in Cancer Research and FdSc in Nautical Science, is currently serving as a Third Officer in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

He has received the award at the Marine Society and Sea Cadets' Fifteenth Annual Court at Trinity House, London.

Ewan was nominated by Blackpool and the Fylde College, along with his sponsoring company, the RFA.

He said a career at sea had always been on his radar although after leaving school, he had initially pursued a career in cancer research because of his interest in the scientific.

"The draw of the sea was never too far away," he admitted, "So in 2015, I sought a new challenge and embarked on a Cadetship with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary."

Ewan said he was delighted to have been nominated and then to have been chosen for the award.

"This is a tremendous achievement for my company, college and myself, and acknowledges all of my efforts throughout my Cadetship."

"I hope that this award will open opportunities for me throughout my career," he added.

Divers tackle WW2 bomb

ROYAL Navy bomb disposal experts have destroyed a 987kg German World War Two bomb found in the wreck of a 17th century warship near Southend Pier in Essex.

Civilian divers with Historic England discovered the device during an archeological dive on the 350-year-old protected shipwreck of 'London' which lies in two parts near the pier.

A bespoke eight-man team of Royal Navy divers from Portsmouth were dispatched to the area where they towed the device out of the estuary to safely destroy it at sea in a complex six-day operation.

Lieutenant Ben Brown, Officer in Charge of Southern Diving Unit Two based in Portsmouth, said: "The complexity of this task should not be underestimated. Dealing with one of the largest pieces of German Second World War ordnance in the Thames Estuary presents some of the most challenging diving conditions there are to work in."

"With nil visibility underwater and significant tidal flow, the diving windows are extremely limited and all work on the ordnance must be done by touch."

"The deteriorating weather conditions also added another layer of complexity, and all whilst working next to one of the busiest shipping channels in the UK."

"However, these conditions are exactly what Royal Navy Clearance Divers are trained to work under and my team did an excellent job of keeping the public – and other mariners – safe."



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● HMS Albion aircraft handlers Ryan Burchall and James Bird join the Fab Four



Crowds turn out in Liverpool and Chester for Fleet Flagship Alb be back!

SIXTEEN years to the day since they were first granted the honour, the men and women of Britain's flagship marched through the streets of Chester.

The Princess Royal watched on as hundreds of well-wishers turned out in inclement weather to watch HMS Albion exercise her right of the Freedom of the City.

With bayonets fixed, flags waving and drums beating, the sailors and Royal Marines pounded the rain-soaked streets of the historic city – the first time they've had the opportunity to visit in nearly eight years.

Princess Anne launched the ship in Barrow back in 2001 and has followed the assault ship's deeds ever since.

She told the massed ranks of immaculately-turned-out military personnel: "As HMS Albion's lady sponsor it is a very important association for me. Your programme remains busy, hence this third attempt at holding the freedom parade."

"I would like to add my thanks to the City of Chester for this impressive occasion and to all of you on parade."

"The interest and support from the city of Chester is much appreciated. This is not something that ships do very often and let me congratulate you on how smart you look on parade."

"The Royal Navy is frequently out of sight and sadly that means also out of mind. These events are so important to re-engage people with the Royal Navy."

Albion's Commanding Officer Captain Peter Laughton thanked Cestrians for their "unstinting support and commitment" to his ship, which completed a nine-month deployment to the Far East last year.

He continued: "It is a great honour to be here today – it is approximately eight years since Albion last exercised her last freedom."

"This event has three times been rescheduled and rearranged and it is indicative of the very high demand of the Royal Navy across the globe. It is therefore a huge honour – and rare privilege – for us to be here in Chester."

"The depth of our affiliation with Chester city is more than a link between the ship's command and the link with city council."

"We have paid a visit to Claire House Children's Hospice – our adopted charity – and we are proud of their affiliation with the ship."

"My sincere thanks today go to the chairman of the council and to the Lord Mayor and to all our affiliations here in Chester and to thank the people of Chester who have turned out to see your affiliated ship exercise the Freedom of the City."

The parade came at the end of a six-day visit to the north west. Albion berthed at Liverpool's cruise liner terminal ready for a series of high-profile events.

More than 2,000 visitors jumped at the chance to tour Albion, which is capable of landing Royal Marines and their kit on hostile shores by day and night using landing craft or commando-carrying helicopters.

Once the public had left, the flagship hosted more guests as 120 VIPs from the region came aboard for a demonstration of what the 350 men and women on board are capable of, followed by ceremonial sunset.

Pictures: LPhoto Barry Wheeler



Best foot Forward in Wolverhampton

HMS Forward, the only Royal Naval Reserve Unit in the West Midlands received the freedom of the city of Wolverhampton.

Reserved for military units, the honour saw the ship's company of the Birmingham unit march through the city with their swords drawn, bayonets fixed, bands playing and colours flying.

Despite its distance from the sea, HMS Forward has a large naval footprint and is an important training facility providing vital skills to the 150 Royal Naval Reservists and Royal Marines Reserves who live in the West Midlands area.

"It is a huge privilege for HMS Forward to be granted Freedom of the City of Wolverhampton," said HMS Forward's Commanding Officer, Commander Phil Sparke.

"HMS Forward hugely values its relationship with the City of Wolverhampton, and I hope that today's ceremony will cement that for very many years to come."

Community leaders, dignitaries and council officials, along with senior Naval officers, watched on as the Mayor of Wolverhampton, Councillor Claire Darke, thanked HMS Forward for its duty to the community.

She said: "For more than 20 years you have been a regular presence, forging strong links with Wolverhampton and Wulfrunians, developing relationships and supporting us at many events across the city."

Royal Marines Brigadier Jock Fraser, Naval Regional Commander Wales and Western England said: "The presence of so many members of the public here in Wolverhampton city centre highlights the fantastic support that the Royal Navy and Royal Marines continue to enjoy from the people of Wolverhampton."

Taking part in the parade was Leading Diver Robert Powell who has been a reservist for 12 years.

He said the unit had worked pretty hard getting their kit and drills correct before the parade.

"It has been a great honour for me to be here today. Everyone is really, really chuffed at receiving the Freedom of Wolverhampton."

Unit Warrant Officer Steve Bland, who was retiring at the end of last month, carried the Freedom scroll through the city.

"It was so special for me to be part of that and receive the scroll and march it through the city – it is the biggest honour of my career which started in 1977," he said.

Petty Officer Chris Aspin said: "I had the responsibility of bearing the White Ensign on behalf of HMS Forward. It's not an honour that's bestowed lightly, it's a great honour for the unit."

"Even the weather was working with us, but to be honest, even if it had been pouring down we would have still proudly marched."

Pictures: LPhoto Unaisi 'Mai' Luke



BLADE RUNNERS

FLIERS OF 846 NAVAL AIR SQUADRON EARN THEIR WINGS



Picture by: PO(Phot) Des Wade



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THIS is the intense and pressure-filled final stages of qualifying for pilots hoping to fly the Royal Marines to the front lines around the world.

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Fourteen naval aviators of Commando Helicopter Force's 846 Naval Air Squadron spent an action-packed week living in the field and flying helicopter sorties around the south coast of the UK on Exercise Merlin Storm.

This was all to test them to the limit of their abilities, flying their Merlin Mk3 battlefield helicopters day and night, before they take a huge step towards earning their coveted wings.

It included night flights with and without night vision, low-level navigation and picking up underslung loads for delivery, as well as casualty rescue sorties.

There is also a tactical element, where the fliers must think about what it's like to operate in hostile environments. They also lifted a rare fossil on the Jurassic Coast and moved 80 tonnes of gravel to Exmoor to repair a pathway.

It's the culmination of five years' work. The end result – if the aviators make the cut – is earning their wings and the ability to fly Merlins all over the world; off aircraft carriers, in the frozen Arctic, the desert, jungle, or wherever the Royal Marines are needed most.

"Exercise Merlin Storm is the final training evolution for students going through the operational conversion flight of 846 Naval Air Squadron," said Lieutenant Commander Phil Wray of Yeovilton-based 846.

"It's a chance for them to put into practice all the skills they've learnt on the OCF so far from pairs landing to underslung loads, low-level navigation and operations at night and with night-vision glasses.

"The students have had to cope with all manner of challenges that are new to them, including a tactical overlay, where we've been getting them to try and think about operating in a hostile environment, right through to the very nature of the Exmoor environment, which has often closed in on them."

Eight pilots have been on this year's exercise. Four of those are qualifying for the first time, while the other four are converting from other aircraft to the Merlin. Six aircrew were also put through their paces.

"This is the end of five years of flying training before we qualify as pilots and aircrewman," said Lieutenant Matt Gordon.

"The beneficial things we've been able to do, like mountains in Norway, deck landings on RFA Argus and coming on Merlin Storm for the tactical stuff, those are the best parts."

As part of Merlin Storm, fliers were called in by conservationists to help restore a National Park beauty spot. Rather than guns, ammo or military vehicles slung beneath their Merlins, two crews from 846 NAS – normally used to ferry commandos and their kit into battle – carried 80 tonnes of crushed stone to a remote spot on Exmoor.

The Commando Helicopter Force was asked to help Exmoor National Park Authority repair a two-kilometre stretch of the Tarka Trail in North Devon which had been badly eroded.

"It cannot be replicated in routine training and the variable, quick-changing weather on the moor adds a significant dimension to testing competencies and capabilities.

"Working with the National Park means we are able to contribute something to the region in which we also live and train." Said Commander Ed Vaughan, 846 NAS's Commanding Officer

The 'lift and shift' operation was a test for trainee pilots and aircrewmen undertaking their final assessment – Exercise Merlin Storm – before earning their 'Wings', allowing them to deploy on front-line operations with the marines.

The stretch of bridleway in question is popular with walkers, horse riders and mountain bikers, but its exposed location means the route is typically wet and subject to erosion – so much so that authorities are often forced to close stretches to prevent horses becoming stuck.

The eroded stretch sits a good 1,500ft above sea level with the terrain and remote location ruling out park wardens delivering such a mass of stone – resulting in the request to the squadron from RNAS Yeovilton.

"Before 846 Squadron stepped in, we had no way of getting such a quantity of stone up there," said a grateful Dan Barnett, the national park's access and recreation manager. "It's great they have been able to help us as part of their training exercise."

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Delighted to see you Duncan

CHEERS, joyful cries and applause greeted destroyer HMS Duncan home to Portsmouth on a bright but blustery afternoon after nearly seven months away.

More than 500 friends and family were waiting with banners, placards, balloon animals, matching T-shirts and fancy hats to welcome 250 sailors and Royal Marines who'd completed one of the most varied – and demanding – deployments by a Royal Navy warship in recent years.

The final month of Duncan's tour of duty was spent safeguarding British shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.

The Type 45 destroyer passed through the narrow waters 29 times – protecting 1.28m tonnes of British merchant vessels (tankers, liquid natural gas, container and cargo ships) from interference.



"When we arrived in the Gulf it was extremely hot, there was real uncertainty and a genuine threat. In protecting shipping, we did what the Royal Navy has done for hundreds of years," said Commander Tom Trent, Duncan's Commanding Officer.

"It was rewarding because we could measure what we achieved: 29 transits of the Strait, 26 ships accompanied and not one ship was taken on our watch."

The mission Duncan completed her deployment performing was very different from that which she set out to perform back in March.

The destroyer joined French aircraft carrier Charles De Gaulle as part of the multinational Carrier Strike Group GAN 19 operating off Syria on Operation Inherent Resolve; HMS Duncan provided air defence to the group as part of operations against ISIS forces in the region.

May and June saw HMS Duncan committed to various NATO exercises in delivering humanitarian aid and countering human/arms-trafficking before joining Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 for Exercise Sea Breeze in the Black Sea where, once again, she was employed in her air-defence role and hosted the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky.

Little more than two weeks later, she found herself in the Gulf as part of the UK's response to rising tensions with Iran and the threat to merchant shipping legally plying its trade.

Duncan stepped in while HMS Montrose, which has performed the bulk of the escort duties since July, underwent a short period of maintenance.

Ten friends and family of Lieutenant Jo Peacock were eagerly awaiting the junior officer's return. They donned feathered hats and unfurled a banner: 'The peacock has landed' to catch Jo's attention before disappearing for a large family meal of chilli con carne once reunited.

"When we heard she was going to be a month late coming home we were disappointed," said mum Gill from Aylesbury. "But we're a Navy family – I'm ex-Navy, Jo's Tim was in the Falklands, you get used to it. Jo has done us proud."

Able Seaman Ben Clarke said: "The highlight of the deployment was the visit to Ukraine; an opportunity to showcase the Type 45 destroyer – and the Royal Navy – in the Black Sea, welcome the President of Ukraine and experience the culture and delights of the city of Odesa."

Duncan's sister HMS Defender, plus frigates HMS Montrose and Kent remain in the Gulf accompanying British-flagged vessels through Hormuz.



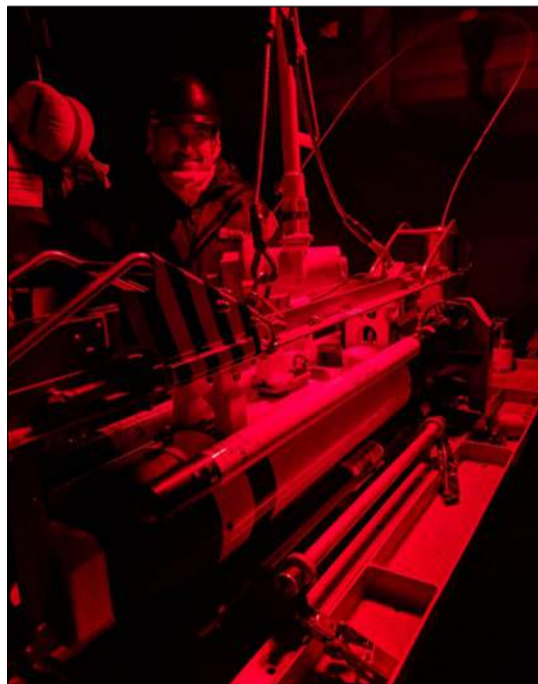
● PO Andrew Richman and his family

Baltic blast

Cattistock heading east for NATO tasking



● Above, Cattistock's general-purpose machine gun; below, launching Seafox at night



OFF on a whistle-stop NATO assignment around the ports and inlets of the eastern Baltic for seven weeks is minehunter HMS Cattistock.

The veteran Hunt-class ship departed not her native Portsmouth, but the less-familiar surroundings of Her Majesty's Naval Base Clyde after completing a demanding month of pre-deployment training.

She headed into Copenhagen for a brief stop before linking up with Standing Mine Countermeasures Group 1, the NATO force dedicated to keeping the waters of northern Europe free of mines and historic ordnance.

Half a dozen vessels – Danish, German, Latvian, Norwegian and Belgian – are assigned to the force, currently led by the Danish Navy, which has most recently been dealing with unexploded wartime mines and bombs in the narrows separating Germany and Denmark – where construction on the world's longest road tunnel begins next year.

And dealing with the detritus of past conflicts still peppering the bed of the Baltic will be the principal task of HMS Cattistock, her team of divers and dedicated mine warfare specialists/Seafox remote-controlled submersible operators, but during port visits in the eastern Baltic the divers will share their experience and knowledge of explosive ordnance disposal with bomb disposal experts from other countries.

To prepare for the NATO mission, Cattistock – the second oldest ship in the Royal Navy at 38, but with the latest minehunting systems crammed inside her plastic hull – left Portsmouth for Loch Goil for engineering trials before undergoing a fortnight of intensive training and assessment.

All Royal Navy ships deploying on front-line duties must pass Operational Sea Training – 'pre-season training' for warships. Frigates and larger are assessed off Plymouth; smaller vessels, irrespective of where they are based, head to western Scotland.

There the team from the Flag Officer Sea Training put the 45 souls aboard through their paces; they were expected to save the 750-tonne vessel from fires and flood, fend off fast attack craft and, of course, find, identify and neutralise mines – either using Seafox and its detonation charges, or calling on the divers to safely trigger any devices found by placing small explosive charges and retreating to a safe distance to watch the bomb/mine/torpedo blown apart.

"We only returned from operations in the Gulf earlier in the year, so preparing has been hard work but the whole team are looking forward to visiting many new places, working with a number of different NATO nations and generally taking part in such a rewarding deployment," said Cattistock's Commanding Officer Lieutenant Commander Claire Thompson.



● HMS Cattistock with the Belgian minehunter Narcis; below in Tallinn



Kites and talons keep NavyX on their toes in Portugal



THE Royal Navy team behind the rapid delivery of future technology has worked with NATO to deliver its largest ever exercise involving unmanned systems.

NavyX went to Portugal to work with a dozen other countries to develop joint tactics, techniques and procedures so autonomous vessels can be effectively deployed on future operations.

Hosted by the Portuguese, the exercise known as REPMUS brought together NATO nations who are part of the Maritime Unmanned Systems (MUS) initiative. Led by the UK and United States, it sees industry partners work with navies to put the newest technology through its paces.

This is the first time NavyX, the Royal Navy's Autonomous Hardware Accelerator launched in April, has worked with international partners.

Commander Sean Trevethan, Fleet Robotics

Officer for the navy, said: "NaxyX has been at the heart of this exercise – delivering multiple unmanned surface vessels and the Command and Control Architecture known as Maple.

"This is the Royal Navy learning by doing, delivering in the real world and developing capability that will be ready for operations."

The first week of the exercise saw the countries use HeliKites and the US navy's Towed Airborne Lift of Naval System (Talons) to conduct extended "line of sight" communications. This allowed the Royal Navy's Maple to co-ordinate command and control from a Portuguese operations centre to two UK unmanned boats.

These boats were thoroughly tested after being tasked to shield the US destroyer from "attacks" from small boats at ranges of up to 17km with aerial support from a US-operated drone.



SMALL STEPS TAKEN BY A GIANT

BECAUSE even Britain's biggest warship (she's slightly heavier than her older sister...) has to start somewhere.

That somewhere is the North Sea. And like her sister Queen Elizabeth, HMS Prince of Wales is testing system upon system as she sets off down the long road to becoming the UK's second operational 'big deck' carrier.

We left the ship last month with a mixed company of 600 Royal Navy personnel under Captain Darren Houston, plus over 400 civilian contractors from across the Aircraft Carrier Alliance, the collaboration between industry, the MOD and the RN which has delivered the two leviathans, on board and the first helicopter (a Merlin Mk2 of 820 Naval Air Squadron), on the flight deck.

Since then, the trials team have been notching up the milestones, such as testing the last line of defence.

No foe – missile, aircraft, fast boat or submarine – should be able to penetrate the ring of steel formed around the future flagship.

A Type 23/26 frigate should protect her against submarine and surface foe, a Type 45 destroyer should down any missile or aircraft which threatens her.

If the ring is broken, however, Prince of Wales and her older sister Queen Elizabeth can call upon automated Phalanx Gatling guns to throw up impenetrable 'walls' of bullets at a ferocious rate to shred any incoming fast boat, missile or aircraft.

The carriers are also equipped with decoys to steer torpedoes and missiles away from the target.

All of which should protect the flat-top... but if a fast boat should somehow evade each layer, the onus of protecting the ship falls on her gunnery team.

Among those whose marksmanship on the machine-guns was assessed was Able Seaman Alex Derry, who said: "Not only I was the first sailor on HMS Prince of Wales to go under the Forth Bridge during our departure from Rosyth, but I also had the great honour to be the first gunnery rating to take part in a live machine-gun firing."

"Being able to take part in both historic events fills me with a great sense of achievement and makes me proud to be part of such a momentous time in the ship's life."

Senior warfare officer Lieutenant Commander Grahame Flint said installing and testing the guns was the first successful trial of HMS Prince of Wales' "suite of weapons and a significant milestone on the road from being a 'ship-in-build, through a trials platform, to a commissioned warship."

"I know that, after a long time focussing on the ship's material state, and training in firefighting and damage control, my above water weapons section were very keen to demonstrate their own capabilities."

CHECK LIST

- ✓ The first test of engines at full power (reaching a top speed of over 25kts);
- ✓ The first test of long-range radar (courtesy of two RAF Typhoons from Lossiemouth), followed by the successful calibration of the air and surface sensors;
- ✓ The first port visit to take on supplies (fuel/stores) in Invergordon (like Queen Elizabeth before her);
- ✓ The first test of the ship's rugby union side (against Ross Sutherland RFC, who play in the sixth tier of Scottish rugby) – a 20-20 draw with man-of-the-match AB Jack Rutherford bagging three tries;
- ✓ The first launch of a weather balloon by the meteorological team; it reached 70,000ft – more than 13 miles up... and 20,000ft higher than the ceiling of the ship's F-35 Lightning jets;
- ✓ The first test in rough weather (Sea State 6 and waves of up to 20ft which the carrier coped with quite easily);
- ✓ The first test of small-calibre guns.

Equally eager to show off what their department can do were the marine engineers.

They have 109 megawatts of power (enough to meet the needs of a city the size of carrier's home of Portsmouth) at their disposal.

And what better use of that power than driving 65,000+ tonnes of battleship grey through the ocean at full speed?

Yes, the six engines and generators were gradually turned up to the max... and Prince of Wales gradually increased speed, topping out at over 25kts.

And having reached full speed and conducted the appropriate manoeuvres, the great ship had to be brought to a stop.

Such is the momentum generated by 65,000 tonnes of warship moving at 25kts, it took two miles of clear sea to bring the 280-metre-long carrier to a halt.

"I felt privileged to be the first Propulsion Warrant Officer to take HMS Prince of Wales to full power making use of the majority of her 109 megawatt generation capacity – but this couldn't have been achieved without the considerable effort of the whole department," said WO1 Rob Firth, overseeing the engine trials.

The carrier is powered by four diesel generators and two gas turbines, run by the 170-strong marine engineering department – one third the size of the equivalent department on the navy's last conventional carrier, HMS Ark Royal, which left service 40 years ago.

Rather than be covered in oil and grease like stokers of old, the engineers in Prince of Wales are more likely to be found typing on a keyboard or using touch-screen technology to control the Integrated Platform Management System.

It monitors and operates the generation, propulsion and fluid systems that provide the ship's company of up to 1,600 people with the 'hotel services' (fresh/hot/

cold water, electricity, air-conditioning, sewage and rubbish systems) as well as powering the engines, sensors and weapons systems on the UK's most advanced warship.

"I feel more like a computer operator than a marine engineer at times, but to be part of the first marine engineering department on Prince of Wales is very exciting," said Engineering Technician Connor Cope.

"The ability to operate the myriad of complex systems on such a huge scale with so few people is highly dependent on modern technology."

Air and surface sensors have been tested and calibrated: one of the carrier's sea boats fitted with GPS tracking was put in the water to ensure the surface trackers were bang on the mark... which was repeated with a Falcon jet to test the various aerial sensors to ensure the radar picture was similarly accurate.

And at many million pounds a pop, you don't want to mistake a Merlin Mk2 or Mk4, to say nothing of an F-35, for an enemy jet or helicopter so Prince of Wales' IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) system has been put through its paces to, er, distinguish between friend and foe.

Key to the success of the radar tests has been CPO 'Eddie' Grant's team of weapon engineers.

"In my whole 19 years in the Royal Navy taking HMS Prince of Wales out of build has been the proudest moment. Being part of the production, build and delivery of HMS Prince of Wales has been challenging but rewarding," he said.

Among his most junior engineers is ET Harry Hopson: "I have thoroughly enjoyed taking part in these trials as it gave me the opportunity to learn more about the radars on board."

"It really feels exciting to be at the forefront of testing and preparing the world's newest aircraft carrier."

And some things never change, even with technology. 'Out all gash' remains a labour-intensive task for the ship's company, and among the first duties when alongside in Invergordon.

And as the rubbish was dumped so over 12 hours, fresh supplies were taken on: 79 pallets of food, plus 18 'cages' of milk... 2,800 litres/nearly 5,000 pints of cow juice, plus 6,000 cod and six tonnes of spuds. In short, enough fresh food for 15 days of trials.

Those trials are due to end before Christmas and the ship's debut in Portsmouth, where new jetty and support facilities to support her were completed just last month.

Pictures: LPhotos Alex Ceolin and Pepe Hogan

KEEP UP WITH THE SHIP

Follow @HMSPWLS and @RoyalNavy on Twitter



Supporting the Navy

RING roads.

A magnet for petrol stations. Furniture stores. Supermarkets. Car dealerships. Motels. World-leading centres of oceanographic science and understanding.

Yes, mostly hidden behind a Mercedes Benz garage in the northeastern suburbs of Somerset's county town sits the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office.

It moved here during WW2 – wartime-era brick buildings dominate much of the site.

But earlier this year, the Princess Royal opened a sparkling new complex – a more modern, airy and glassier version of Leach Building (pictured below) – in the UKHO grounds which much better suits the age of information.

"For over two hundred years the office's business has been focussed around paper charts. Now it's rich data which is much, much more valuable to decision making – and the Royal Navy is only scratching the surface of the information at its fingertips," says Captain Pat Mowatt, the senior RN liaison officer at the Taunton-based organisation.

The now-disused brick buildings – currently awaiting redevelopment – were geared towards the traditional view of UKHO with their print shops and storage space for Admiralty charts covering every inch of the Seven Seas.

No more than one fifth of the new offices is devoted to mapping the oceans. The rest of the building is dedicated to our understanding of them. As for the military presence, of the 850 or so staff, only a handful wear uniform. Yet the bulk of the hydrographic office's work is driven by the Fleet's requirements.

"We get you there from A to B with world-leading, accurate electronic Admiralty

charts and, depending on your tasking, we provide the geospatial data to support that mission," Lieutenant Commander Mark Wilton says succinctly.

"That means the ship and submarine command and navigational teams understand the environment, weapons and sensors are optimised for where you are operating and understanding the underwater battlespace all the way down to the sea bed."

Before deploying, ships and units ask UKHO for up-to-date maritime data on the waters they'll be working in and information on coastal areas. They also ask for data from other specialist geospatial centres that UKHO work closely with, more than 300 such requests were submitted last year.

RFA Mounts Bay for example wanted detailed charts, not just covering the waters of the Caribbean, but also details of the many islands and their infrastructure: schools, power stations, water works and supplies, police stations, hospitals and helicopter landing sites. It will prove invaluable should a natural disaster bludgeon its way through the region.

Each deploying unit receives one of over 40 special geospatial laptops (two for capital ships) – "a one-stop shop" featuring all the information the office possesses about a particular area.

And there it stays. Locked in time. But what if the information could be updated daily? What if rather than rely on hard drives, CDs and DVDs for storing charts and other vital data, the data was available in a data warehouse and was network-based and a ship could tap into it at will? It would ensure the ship

has the most up-to-date information imaginable, not just charts, but the latest shipping movements and analysis, oceanographic data, the recent laying of underwater cables and so on.



The UKHO is working hard to make 'data on demand' through web services at sea a reality and has already undertaken trials to prove it can be done despite the limited bandwidth at sea – the system particularly came into its own when HMS Queen Elizabeth sailed into New York last autumn (pictured), with UKHO feeding the carrier with up-to-the-minute information on one of the world's busiest harbours.

It's not just limited to the surface fleet; submarines could also make use of it when they make contact with the wider world and download the latest oceanographic information in a 'data RAS'.

"The idea ultimately is that everything is delivered through data-enabled networks – ships no longer have to take CDs, DVDs and

hard drives with them on deployment," enthuses Bob Croft, the UKHO's Defence Data Manager.

All of which is a far cry from the navigator turning up at Taunton pre-deployment to collect all the charts he or she might need – and more – while away. Navigators like Mark Aspden, who now works for the UKHO.

“““

Ocean environments are changing – what we knew 20 or 30 years ago doesn't apply now.

CAPTAIN PAT MOWATT

"Twenty years ago you would have folio after folio, a huge updating regime, a major planning burden and maintaining the charts was a huge issue," he said.

"And there was a lot of waste – you would order a lot more charts than you'd actually need."

The navy and RFA have been using the electronic charting system WECDIS – and variations thereof – for 15 or so years.

There is still a demand for print charts, mainly in the civilian seafaring world. But there's no warehouse of charts – these days they are printed to order.

A team of 60 cartographers are at work updating and tweaking a body of work which goes back more than 200 years for some parts of the globe.

"The world is constantly changing, mainly through human development, such as port complexes, but natural

disasters cause a lot of work and demand new charts being made," Mark Aspden explains.

"Ships Hoover up a huge amount of data, but if they find something particularly interesting or potentially dangerous to navigation, they'll send through a 'hydrographic note'. That's the moment when you get the 'wow factor'."



Such as mine warfare operator AB Tash Kennedy locating the wreck of a dhow on the approaches to Abu Dhabi port (pictured).

And then there are the scratching-your-head moments.

"During the search for MH370, we had nothing to compare data against – it was part of the world we just didn't visit," Mark explains. "The old adage about knowing the moon better than our own oceans rang true."

Some patches of water are surveyed and charted over and over again – HMS Magpie went over every square inch of Portsmouth Harbour this spring.

The information she gathered will not merely be used by the cartographers to update the standard Admiralty charts, but also provide unique, high-quality situational awareness products for the bridge teams of HMS Queen Elizabeth and Prince of Wales, including enhanced visualisation to ensure they can negotiate the harbour and approaches safely.

For all the visionary ideas of tablets on the battlefield and roll-up mats which double as maps, Royal Marines still largely rely on maps – particularly special rugged, durable versions for use in the field.

Royal Marines are big fans of CHAPS – half chart, half map – used heavily for amphibious training around Plymouth and laminated for use in the field. They're not accurate enough for navigation, but good enough as a general overview.

Given their unique amphibious role, the marines can call on their very own team in Taunton, a dedicated littoral and riverine section.

Amphibious exercises and operations pull heavily on the UKHO's resources, although there's a tremendous repository of information to fall back on.

Country reports, for example, are based on information which goes back to the days of empire in some cases, provides information on pretty much every beach in the world... although some of that data may date to the 1950s and 60s.

"We provide them with the background information to allow them to work out where's the best place to make a landing – this year that has meant supporting two major exercises: Joint Warrior in Scotland, and Baltic Protector, which was a major collaborative effort," explains Sara McGourty.

The marines want charts. Maps. Chaps. Overlays. Photographs. Details of environmental hazards (including anything which might sting, bite or choke them...). Tides. Satellite images. 3D images. Gradient. Consistency of the sand. Previous rece reports.



data day business

The UKHO has it all; it is an outstandingly rich data base, but as Sara points out: "You never know until the day comes what a beach is like, despite receiving it for all its worth."



Old data can be bad data because the oceans are an ever-changing environment. Oceanographic factors – water temperature, salinity, clarity, currents, marine life – are forever changing, and all impact on naval operations.

"Ocean environments are changing – what we knew 20 or 30 years ago doesn't apply now in many areas because salinity, sound velocity, temperature have all changed," Capt Mowatt explains.

"And we need to know these accurately. I want us to understand more and more about these so that we have the confidence in what is going on and how this effects the performance of ships and submarine sensors."

He joined the navy in 1992 as a warfare officer and when he saw the important work the survey ships of the time were doing to support operations "that got me hooked".

Nearly 30 years later and with much more modern ships and systems, the RN's survey squadron are entirely focussed on military data gathering to update UKHO databases and

increase understanding of the Oceans.

Hydrographic, Oceanographic and Meteorological specialists (*HMS Enterprise's HMs Sean Gunn and Stephen Carpenter are pictured left training for O-Dips – tests to measure conductivity, sound velocity and temperature*) are focussed on tactically exploiting this information to ensure the Royal Navy can operate freely and globally and successfully carry out their operations, having a full understanding of the environment.

Nowhere is it more important to fully understand the maritime environment than in the newly-reinvigorated North Atlantic theatre.

"The North Atlantic is probably one of the most complicated and challenging bodies of ocean," Capt Mowatt explains.

"It's big for a start, challenging to operate in, rough, the topography is challenging – from shallows to deep ravines, thousands of metres deep – and there are shifting tectonic plates. It's also our backyard for submarine operations."

Which is where the Ocean Environmental Team come heavily into play. It provides "what basically amounts to an encyclopaedia" about the oceans, according to marine biologist Harriet Bolt, "covering every conceivable factor which might affect equipment and personnel, a complete picture of the environment from the acoustics of an area of ocean, the salinity, the temperature, to the geology of the region, the make-up of the sea bed, the biological life you might find there."

This encyclopaedia extends to an audio library of oceanic sounds, calls and cries of

marine life, the sounds you'd expect to hear in a particularly area of ocean – which allows a ship's or submarine's sonar operators to filter them out.

And there are strict guidelines when it comes to the use of sonar – where and when it can/cannot be used (*a Merlin MK2 is pictured lowering its 'dipping' sonar*) – guidelines backed up by software provided to Royal Navy vessels. The Senior Service takes its environmental responsibilities and protection of marine life extremely seriously.



But why would you need to know about the sea bed – other than where it is so you don't hit it? Well, what does it consist of, what's the sediment? Will it absorb sonar, or possibly distort it? More key information for sonar operators in the eternal underwater game of cat and mouse.

One curse which can plague surface ships at night is bioluminescence – the light

created by tiny sea creatures. It generally signifies the presence of marine mammals, but quite often reveals the tell-tall wake of an otherwise blacked-out ship. It is, says Harriet, "very hard to predict"...

Prediction is most definitely the realm of the hydrographic office's data scientists, whose groundbreaking research straddles the military, civilian and environmental worlds.

Remember when submariners got excited about the 'digital periscopes' on the Astute class? Pops up, takes a snapshot of the world in an instant then disappears again.

Imagine if it could record a short video which would then be analysed not by one of the crew but a computer equipped with artificial intelligence ship tracking – the ability to identify vessels and their roles. It's been tried in Singapore Harbour. As ships scurry about the busy waters in a time-lapse video, the computer labels them: ferry, lighter, bulk cargo carrier, tanker.

Yes, you could do it manually, but it would take time. The same goes for the fate of mangroves – the dense thicket of trees and shrubs typically found on the waterline in the tropics.

Working with experts from Exeter University, the scientists have 'taught' computers to identify mangroves. You can direct a satellite's 'gaze' at a particular spot on the planet and get it to identify the coastline automatically using AI. Ordinarily, it would be done manually... but the computer is 98 per cent accurate.

There is a limited military use should commandos have to conduct amphibious operations in the tropics, but far more useful is the study of mangroves over time and the long-term impact on the

environment.

Mike Hudgell, one of UKHO's data scientists, is applying these techniques to calculate the extent of kelp in the Falkland Islands.

"It is entirely feasible to assume that had HMS Glamorgan known the true extent of the winter kelp around the Falkland Islands, she could have had more room to manoeuvre than what she thought she had based on the charted maximum summer kelp extent, which is what she had at the time," Mike explains.

“““

If we didn't exist, you'd have to mine hunt continually. It would be like trying to get to the other side of a room in the dark without knowing what's in the way.

ANDY READ

"This could well have helped her avoid the Exocet arc of fire."

If mangroves or kelp aren't your thing, what about mines? The Royal Navy is regarded as a world-leader in mine warfare.

That reputation is not solely down to the minehunters and the men and women in them.

The UK Mine Warfare Data Centre at the hydrographic office gobbles up all the latest information on the sea bed, oceanographic data, minefields past, present-day threats to create what amounts to the ultimate 'mine map'.

"If we didn't exist, you'd have to mine hunt continually. It would be like trying to get to the other side of a room in the dark without knowing what's in the way. That's how important what we do is," explains Andy Read.

One key method of locating mines – 'change detection' – doesn't involve Hunts or Sandowns at all: charts and data with previously-gathered information are compared; where sand has shifted on the sea bed, for example, might actually be hiding a mine lying in wait for a passing ship.

Reports from ships – "we're still learning about the Gulf," Andy points out – the activities of mammals and oceanographic data going down a couple of hundred metres (roughly the depth of the continental shelf... and the maximum depth of mines currently in use) are all fed back to Taunton.

"In 30 or 40 years we've gone from tracing paper with latitude and longitude and marking things on charts, to advancing in leaps and bounds – especially in the past five years," explains Andy's colleague Robin Ponting.

Which also neatly sums up the advances made across the UKHO to the advantage of the front-line Fleet.

"In naval warfare – especially anti-submarine warfare – there is a narrow margin which gives you the tactical edge on your opponent," says Lieutenant Commander Wilton.

"To give our people the battle-winning edge, you need to have the maximum amount of information about the area in which you're operating, its got to add value, be up to date and available when and wherever the Fleet want it. That's what drives us, that's why we exist."

Report by Richard Hargreaves



HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT



'WHERE the bloody hell are they? They're not exactly inconspicuous.'

We finally caught up with the Royal Marines of 45 Commando about a mile outside of the village of Imber, in an isolated area of Salisbury Plain.

X-Ray Company and 45 Commando's heavy weapons experts were dismounting from Vikings, preparing for an assault on the village – a settlement abandoned during World War Two to create a training area for troops preparing for the invasion of Europe.

It had been a thankless morning, chasing the commandos without actually seeing anything. Only the distant rumble of their armoured Vikings and Jackals and the crack of gunfire across the valley offered evidence that we weren't just on a wild goose chase.

Stood on high ground above an enemy position, we were playing the waiting game. The driving rain which had battered the area had subsided, but it left behind sticky, clayey, mud, which clung to your boots like glue.

We had already got stuck in the mud trying to track down the marines.

The plan was to catch up with them as they attacked the first of ten enemy positions on a day-long assault in the Berrill Valley area of the plain. We never made it. Our civilian 4X4 getting bogged down and stuck, the chassis lodge on the centre of the track. It left us playing catch up until lunchtime.

In a way, it's probably a reassuring thing we weren't able to find them for a good few hours. They were so damn covert and ahead of the curve that we wondered if there was any point continuing the chase. As the new Royal Marines advert says: 'You won't see us coming. You won't see us leave'. Not great if you're there to watch them, take pictures and write about them, but good for war fighting.

We went to high ground to establish their location. Hearing the thud of machine gun fire in the next valley suggested they were probably just over three miles away. We decided to wait for their approach, sitting in above a small hamlet, made up of a barn and a few outbuildings, that was being held by the enemy.

It eventually became clear that the noise was becoming more distant, as 45 Commando pushed their adversary back towards Imber and, after that, to two strategically important bridges, which they were tasked with taking.

Finally, on the edge of Imber, a collection of Vikings rumbled through the undergrowth, stopping to dismount heavy weapons troops and allow X-Ray Company to gather up and head silently towards the enemy positions, where they were holed up in buildings throughout the nearby village.

All day – not that we'd seen anything – the heavy weapons specialists of the Fire Support Groups (FSGs) had linked up with X-Ray and armoured vehicles on the battlefield, tasked with clearing 10km of enemy territory.

The FSGs are the specialists in some of the most potent anti-armour weaponry the Royal Marines have. They have the heavy machine guns, grenade machine guns, Javelin anti-tank weapons and more. These guys will take position nearby and lay down suppressing fire for assaulting troops. It's a vital asset for combat companies.

"Our role is to provide support to the troops from a nearby position. We'll suppress a target from a distance, so we've got stand-off from their weapons systems and capabilities," said anti-tank expert Marine Lewis Boateng of Zulu Company's Fire Support Group.

"Once we've supplied that suppressive rate of fire that's when the troops sweep through into positions.

"We're due to go to the jungle soon. We haven't done any anti-tanks for a while, so it's great to blow off the cobwebs."

This battle was the fiery end to the middle week of a three-week exercise, named Blue Steel (not a nod to the film *Zoolander*, unfortunately). In the first week, FSGs from around 3 Commando Brigade joined up for the live firing element before 45 Commando's heavy weapons troops used the second week to link up with X-Ray and the Armoured Support Groups of the Commando Logistics Regiment with their Vikings and Jackals.

"Now we're on a tactical exercise we want them to use the ground in a tactical sense. As you can see the conditions, it's all about route selection and also staying out of view from the enemy," said Colour Sergeant John Cowie, of 45 Commando FSG.

"They've done the live firing last week and this is the opportunity to put it into practice with vehicles and assaulting troops."

Commando units need this capability. The ability to counter armour is essential, especially with the expectation now that any enemy the commandos face will have tanks and more.

"It's important to shake out when we can improve our ability to conduct those operations and avoid skill fade," said Captain Oli Crow, Officer Commanding of 45 Commando FSG.

"Each commando has a selection of FSGs which are a part of each close-combat company and they provide the direct fire support capability to enable close-combat troops to engage the enemy.



"It goes back to fighting a near peer enemy. You can expect them to have heavy armour which is a far cry from the previous decade when they haven't.

"We have to ensure we can combat such a threat. It's a really important aspect. We can't predict what will happen but there are adversaries out there with high-tech equipment that matches or surpasses our own, so need to clearly know how to combat it."

Once we'd found the marines, we had to stay with them. We didn't want to lose them after all of this. We moved along tree lines and through fields towards Imber, before the first volley of machine gun fire rattled through the valley from an enemy building.

X-Ray and their supporting heavy weapons made their way down a narrow stretch of terrain with trees on either side, taking out the first enemy position and clearing building by building to the far side of the village near its 14th Century church. The village is made up of concrete houses. There's a curved main road through the middle, but there's a row of houses and alleyways with high walls on one side and a complex of buildings in front of hedges on the other. The main road leads to a more open area with the church's grounds just on the other side.

The whole village provides a good challenge to the assaulting forces. This was a great chance to polish skills before heading off to the desert, jungle and eventually, early next year, the Arctic.

Major Sam Hughes, Officer Commanding of X-Ray Company, was pleased to put his commandos through their paces.

He said: "Sitting on the range is one thing. Doing that in the wind and rain we've experienced this week in a tactical scenario, working with those vehicles, is huge. Hence why it's really important to come together.

"The exercise has gone really well. It's about recording what we've learnt. We're about to go in to more traditional mountain training which is more on foot. Probably less of the heavy weapons and vehicles but that's different skills.

"So we will combine the training we've done here and the mountain training when we go to Norway in January for a three-month deployment doing Arctic training when we will have the Vikings, we will have the heavy weapons. It's about taking forward the skills we've got."

Once Imber was taken, the Vikings rumbled in, picking the commandos up ahead of taking bridges further up the road.



Dad hands promotion to his son

LIEUTENANT Commander Colin Manson has been given the rare honour of promoting his son, the now Lt Cdr Robert Manson just days after he and his wife Jess Manson, a deck officer in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, made him a grandfather for the first time.

Colin Manson, 60, joined the Royal Navy in 1988 and has served in a plethora of vessels including HMS Coventry, Sheffield, Ocean, Invincible and Roebuck and holds the NATO medal for Kosovo and Yugoslavia, General Service Medal for Operation Bolton and the Operation Telic medal.

Colin said: "It is a great privilege for me to confirm my son in his new rank. He no longer needs to call me sir!"

"I am proud of his achievements to date and hope that this is just another step on his way in what I believe will be a hugely successful Naval career."

"To my mind though, my granddaughter is a far greater achievement than any simple rank could hope to match. Thank you both for making this such a joyous occasion."

Colin left the regular Royal Navy in 2011, going on to join government committees on climate change and the Arctic before joining the Royal Navy reserves and serving in HMS Collingwood and now Naval



● Lt Cdr Robert Manson receives his insignia from his dad Lt Cdr Colin Manson aboard HMS Medway

Command Head Quarters Whale Island, where he works on future warfare concepts development.

Colin's son Robert, 30, was born the same year as his father joined the Navy.

He decided at age six on a families day on HMS Sheffield that he wanted to join the Royal Navy as an engineer.

At age 15, Robert passed his Admiralty Interview Board and was accepted to study at Welbeck college.

Going on to join the Defence

Technical Undergraduate Scheme, he graduated from Southampton University with a degree in ship science and joined Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth in 2010.

Robert has served on HMS Diamond and HMS Sutherland and is now the Marine Engineering Officer on the recently commissioned Offshore Patrol vessel, HMS Medway.

He lives in West Sussex with Jess, 29, and their newborn daughter Poppy Olivia.

Innovation first for HMNB Clyde

HM NAVAL Base Clyde hosted an innovation and technology market stall event, the first of its kind at the military site.

More than 20 firms linked to Aberdeen's oil and gas technology and innovation sector visited the home of the UK Submarine Service, meeting some of the men and women responsible for maintaining the country's nuclear-powered submarines.

The event, which was arranged by the Naval Base's Superintendent Fleet Maintenance (SFM) organisation, aimed to explore new technology which could be used to combat challenges associated with submarine engineering.

"This event has strengthened our relationship with Aberdeen's O&G sector," said Capt Andrew Lewis, the base's SFM.

"Their enthusiasm to help us has boosted my optimism that we can and will improve our delivery

of submarine engineering at HMNB Clyde."

Every single hour of every day for the last 50 years at least one Royal Navy ballistic submarine has been at sea providing the UK's nuclear deterrent. During that entire time the vessels have been maintained and supported by the engineering expertise at HM Naval Base Clyde.

During the technology and innovation event firms were invited to create "market stalls" within the Warrant Officers and Senior Rates Mess. Those involved in the submarine enterprise could then visit the individual stalls to learn about new technologies and developments in the sector.

The visitors were also taken to the site's Shiplift facility – capable of lifting a 16,000-ton Vanguard submarine completely out of the water – to gain a sense of the engineering challenge.



● Above, Chris Warner, top, Sam Seeley, right, Michael Bell



Remembrance living on the skin of our service people

SAILORS and other personnel serving in the Royal Navy and Fleet Air Arm have shared the stories behind their tattoos as part of a project run by the Royal British Legion. Tribute Ink showcases how the armed forces community commemorate comrades and remember their time in the service through their tattoos.

From anchors and swallows to ships and compasses, the naval-themed ink represents what their time in the naval service means to them.

The tattoos and the reasons for them are currently being showcased in an exhibition at the National Memorial Arboretum, in Staffordshire, and will tour the country over the next few months.

One of those to feature is Leading Hand

Danielle Cummings, pictured, who is currently serving on HMS St Albans. She got her first tattoo after deploying to Afghanistan.

"So I went out to Afghanistan and drew my anchor and my swallows, which I then got tattooed on the middle of my back when I returned to the UK," she said.

"The swallows would always take me home but the anchor would keep me still so that people could find me – that was my interpretation of it."

"I was out in Bahrain and that was a tough time to be away for and when I came back I wanted something to remember that even though it was tough, I could still get through it, get through anything."

"For that I got 'A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor'."

Other naval service personnel to feature included Air Engineering Technician Chris Warner, based at Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose.

His tattoos include a lighthouse, vessels and a quote from Admiral Lord Nelson. He said getting tattooed has often been a therapeutic experience.

Fellow Air Engineering Technician Kye Beasley was inspired by Greek mythology for his ink, which also features a sailing ship.

Meanwhile former Royal Marine and now Leading Photographer Sam Seeley has a ship to mark his first deployment as a sailor after transferring to the Royal Navy Photographic Branch.

Royal Navy Diver Michael Bell has two sleeves and his chest tattooed. Across his knuckles is the phrase "bomb frog" – a nickname for divers.

The striking images in the exhibition were taken by renowned photographer Charlie Cliff who was given

unprecedented access to armed forces sites. He said: "Diving into the lives of the many forces members and veterans I photographed was an honour. Their stories are important, and I was eager to do everything I could to help them."

Alex Owen, head of armed forces engagement at the Royal British Legion, and former Household Cavalry officer, added: "The sacrifices made in the armed forces, big and small, are ones that come to define you."

"The Royal British Legion's Tribute Ink exhibition aims to uncover some of the inspiring modern stories of Remembrance living on the skin, and in the hearts, of our servicemen and women today."



The Royal Navy & Royal Marines Children's Fund

The only charity dedicated to supporting children whose parents serve, or have served, in the Naval Service.

Originally set up as an orphanage, we now assist children with a wide range of needs and at times of family crisis. Applications can be made at any time and those seeking assistance can contact the office directly for an application form, or download it from our website.

311 Twyford Avenue, Portsmouth PO2 8RN • t 023 9263 9534 • caseworkers@rnmchildrensfund.org.uk
www.rnmchildrensfund.org.uk

RNRMCFC Registered charity number: 1160182 • Patron: HRH The Duke of York, KG, GCVO, CD



No limits for fast-jet Joe

Flier relates 'incredible' experience in USA

ROYAL Navy fast jet pilot Lieutenant Joe Mason is on exchange with VFA-106 – 106th Strike Fighter Squadron, better known as the Gladiators, in the USA.

The squadron feeds the US Navy's Atlantic carrier fleet with trained fast jet pilots and weapon systems operators (the US Navy's equivalent of observers in the Fleet Air Arm).

Every six weeks, upwards of a dozen pilots/WSOs arrive at the Gladiators' home of Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach.

And over the next nine months aviators like Lieutenant (pronounced 'loo-tenant' on the other side of the Atlantic) Mason helps to turn them into fully-qualified airmen and women nine months later, qualified to operate from 100,000-tonne US flattops by day and night.

The Brit is an F/A 18 Super Hornet pilot and instructor with the Gladiators – and on his second tour of duty in the States flying the mainstay of US Navy carrier operations.

Joe, who has the US Navy call sign Virginia Slim, takes up the story.

My wife and I arrived in Washington with another RN pilot and his family, Lt Steve Harry, in August 2014 and after a short aero medicine course at NAS Pensacola in Florida, we moved to NAS Meridian in Mississippi to train on the T45C Goshawk, the USN's version of the Hawk.

Having already completed Hawk T2 training at RAF Valley I only had to complete a relatively short course compared to the USN students going through.

It was a great introduction to flying in the US however, the main purpose was to Carrier Qualify (CQ) and after a quick four months of flying I CQ'd on board the USS George HW Bush in April 2015 after ten arrested landings.

After NAS Meridian, I moved to NAS Lemoore in California and joined VFA-122 (the Flying Eagles), the west coast FA18 Fleet Replacement Squadron.

The course was a little over a year and covered all disciplines of strike fighter aviation, again culminating in CQ except this time both day and night.

The USN is, quite rightly, entirely focused on air power from the carrier and it is for this reason that pilots join their fleet squadrons able to operate from the carrier both day and night from day one.

I joined my fleet squadron, VFA-146 (the Blue Diamonds) in June 2016.

The Squadron had just started the work-up cycle for an upcoming deployment so the timing couldn't have been better.

A year later, during which we spent two months on board the USS Nimitz and two months on detachment to NAS Fallon in Nevada, we deployed as part of CSG-11 in the Nimitz, visiting the Pacific, Indian Ocean and Gulf.

We returned to the Pacific region where we operated alongside the USS Ronald

Reagan and USS Theodore Roosevelt for an extremely rare tri-carrier exercise.

During cruise I also qualified as a Landing Signal Officer having spent every fourth day "waving". This entailed hours and days of 'on-the-job' training, learning the correct sight picture and sound of recovering aircraft so that I was eventually able to act as an LSO on the radio.

Having achieved my Navigational Watch Certificate prior to moving to the US I also took the opportunity to get some time in on the bridge of the Nimitz and qualified as a Command Duty Officer (Underway).

The USN say "very well" in place of "very good" and "left and right" rather than "port and starboard" but apart from that surprisingly difficult language barrier the procedures are much the same.

Finally, after six months deployed, we returned to the US just in time for Christmas with our families.

The last year with VFA-146 was spent with the squadron in maintenance phase, a planned period post-deployment where the aircraft are readied for the next deployment work-up cycle.

It was during this period that I completed my section (UK "pairs") and Division (UK "fours") lead qualifications and finally, after two-and-a-half years with the squadron, I left to become an

instructor. Now at VFA-106, the east coast Fleet Replacement Squadron based at NAS Oceana in Virginia, I help to train new aircrew, both pilots and back seat Weapon System Officers how to fly and operate the FA18.

We train USN, RAAF, RCAF and of course, RN students here and it is a great place to be.

As an LSO I am also fortunate enough to be able to keep my hand in with carrier operations when we embark in order to CQ our students.

This experience has been incredible. It has encompassed extensive amounts of time, including frontline operations, embarked on board big deck aircraft carriers flying a true multi-role strike fighter, plus LSO and bridge time.

With this background and experience, those of us lucky enough to be part of this program really will be able to bring back to the RN the knowledge and expertise the Fleet Air Arm needs to ensure we are able to truly deliver UK Carrier Strike.



● Main image, Lt Mason takes a selfie; Clockwise from top left, flying a Goshawk; Behind the catapult in the Goshawk; Taking on fuel over the Med; Lt Mason, front, with Lt Andy 'Handy' Werhan, USN, following their appearance at the F-18 Air Power Demonstration in Virginia





● PO Nicole Gardner with Juniper and CPO Craig Bartlett with Buddy

Making friends with the animals

TWO sailors deployed to the United Kingdom Maritime Component Command in Bahrain, spend their free mornings at the Bahrain Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BSPCA).

PO Nicole Gardner and CPO Craig Bartlett, both dog owners back in the UK, recognise the need for rescue and abandoned dogs to have some care and attention on a regular basis.

With the intense heat and humidity of life during the summer months in the Gulf, both Nicole and Craig willingly give their time for a couple of hours of exercising, pampering and providing the occasional chew treats for the dogs.

Craig said: "It is such a lively atmosphere at the centre. The dogs come from a variety of backgrounds, some are very timid and nervous, others just want to run around and play."

"I own a Brittany Spaniel, called Woody, who is currently being looked after by my mother and I find the few hours spent with the dogs gives them some respite from their kennels and allows me some relaxation away from the demands of my work in the HQ."

Nicole added: "I really enjoy seeing local families arrive with their excited children and leave with a family pet a couple of hours later."

"Each time I take a dog for a couple of hours, it gives me huge personal pleasure and I hope whichever dog I have for a short time also enjoys time away from their kennel."

The BSPCA was established in 1979 by a small group of committed and passionate animal lovers.

Blooming marvellous

HMS Collingwood is celebrating winning two Gold medals at this year's prestigious Fareham in Bloom Awards.

In a glittering ceremony at Fareham's Ferneham Hall, the UK's largest naval training base scooped two out of the three Gold Awards on offer, delighting the team led by Mark "Cozy" Powell, Environment & Energy Manager and Martin Bowyer, the Safety, Health, Environment & Fire Manager.

HMS Collingwood triumphed in the categories of Best Business Parks and Commercial Landscapes and also Best Feature Garden. The latter was created outside the Motor Transport offices by drivers Les Carstairs and Lyn Harding to brighten up a derelict re-fuelling area.

Extreme running



● CPO Colin Reynolds at the top of Grand Col Ferret

ROYAL Navy Chief Petty Officer Colin Reynolds, of 1710 NAS in HMNB Portsmouth, set out on an ultra marathon to raise funds for Cancer Research UK.

The route of the 101KM (66.7 miles) UTMB-CCC followed the Trail du Mont Blanc, starting at Courmayeur in Italy, passing through Champex-Lac in Switzerland and finishing in Chamonix, France.

CPO Reynolds takes up the story.

At 05.00 my alarm goes off. I'm already awake but I lie in bed until my phone confirms to me that it's time to get up. I pull on my running gear and pin my race number to my shorts. I flick the switch on the kettle and turn on the stove to heat my disproportionately large pan of porridge; this is going to be a long day. The morning skies are clear and it feels cold as I walk through Chamonix to board the bus that will take me to the start line in Italy.

Arriving in Courmayeur I feel the usual pre-race nervous anticipation.

A 15-minute walk takes me to the start line in the village centre, already buzzing with noise, nervous chatter and a heady aroma of analgesic muscle rub.

Loud speakers warble in several different languages, announcing runners from all nationalities; music drifts up and down the lines of waiting runners, complemented by a drum-troop hidden somewhere in the melee; helicopters rumble overhead. This feels electric.

Before I know it, a countdown has started... *Dieci! Nove! Otto!*... we're fully embracing the Italian locale... *Sette! Sei!*... a helicopter hovers above... *Cinque! Quattro!*... we're all clapping in time... *Tre! Due!*... someone sets off a smoke grenade, I can't see a thing... *Uno! Andiamo!*... a reservoir of runners floods across the start line, carrying me into the streets of Courmayeur.

For the next kilometre, we parade ourselves past the thousands of people who are lining the narrow Italian streets.

Then, as the party slowly starts to recede, the tarmac road turns into gravel track, then into forest path; the gradient increases; the chatter subsides; the climbing begins.

The first climb – Tête de la Tronche – reaches an altitude of 2,500m and takes me nearly two-and-a-half hours. Any thoughts I'd had about "jogging these hills" are quickly dispelled.

These hills are mountains, they are steep, and it is hot. By the time I reach the first checkpoint both of my water bottles have been squeezed dry and my face is caked in salt; I've only covered 10km.

I manage to muscle my way through to an overwhelmed-looking volunteer at a table of bottles (the 2,000-strong field of runners all seem to have arrived at the same time). I quickly down a cup of cola, recharge my water bottles and re-join the trail.



● Colin at the start of the marathon; Runners climb the Grand Col Ferret

I'm feeling good; in fact, I'm on top of the world. The trail is rolling gently, my legs are feeling strong and the views in all directions are breath-taking. The summit of Mont Blanc glistens against a backdrop of uninterrupted blue sky; glaciers flow from above the snowline, cascades of ice, frozen in time, reaching into the Italian foothills. The field of runners has started to spread out and I feel like I'm running a race in the Alps.

Suddenly I'm climbing again. The heat of the day is really kicking in. The trail is loose and dusty. This climb is different from the first; the field of runners has thinned further and there is more room to pass.

It's relentless; a climb that just keeps going; steeper; hotter. It finally comes to an end at the Grand Col Ferret – a pass from Italy into Switzerland at 2,537m.

The altitude is having an impact on my recovery, so I stop for a few minutes. It's worth it. As I take in my surroundings I am reminded again of what inspired me to enter this race in the first place.

I'm not a contender in this arena, but in this respect I am the same as most of these runners. We all have different reasons for being here; we all have our own pace, and our own individual goals; but at these distances, there is an intimate level of mutual encouragement that pervades all.

There is a unique bond that exists between those in the ultra-running community. Everyone wants to do well; everyone wants to prove their ability; but ultimately, everyone wants everyone to succeed. Words of encouragement are traded between all competitors; language is no barrier – everyone gets the gist.

The descent into Switzerland brings things back into focus. This is worse than the climb; a quad-burning 12-mile drop to the valley floor.

The afternoon sun is in full force and I'm craving something sweet; the aid station at La Fouly obliges me with some watermelon – it's the best thing I ever tasted. I'm also craving some flat terrain, but I don't get it; the drop continues.



Eventually, for a few blissful minutes, the trail flattens... and then starts climbing again. I'm starting to notice a pattern.

I arrive at Champex-Lac just as it's getting dark. This is a significant milestone – I'm 33 miles in, which puts me over half way.

The aid station is a large marquee; it's warm and humid inside. There's hot food on offer. There are a lot of people sitting; massaging legs; heads on tables; some are sleeping. This is the danger zone. I'm starting to feel comfortable, it's dark outside and I feel no desire to start climbing any more mountains.

These are alarm bells. I pull on my head-torch, extract myself from the warm, comfortable marquee and plunge into the night.

I'm on my own now. Every so often I spot the light of another head-torch, bobbing in the distance, but mostly I'm relying on the trail markers to guide me.

The darkness brings a whole new set of experiences. The trails are technical and I'm stumbling more frequently. I need to concentrate hard and I lose all concept of time.

Cow-bells ring intermittently from the night, their bearers hidden by the darkness. I come across three more head-torches, filling their water-bottles from a mountain spring. In an assortment of accents, they assure me that it's good to drink; we help each other with our water bottles and continue into the night.

I pass through an isolated cow-shed at the edge of a field; the cows have vacated, but their fragrance has not.

There's a string of electric light-bulbs and someone checks my number. More water, more encouragement and I'm on my way again.

Some time elapses and I come across a man at the corner of a field who also checks my number. Adjusting my head-torch, I confirm to myself that he's holding a glass of wine; I clock a half-full bottle on the grass. It's the middle of the night, in the middle of nowhere. I say "santé", he replies with "cheers", then I'm on my way

again.

I arrive at the checkpoint of Triente knowing I still have 20 miles and two major climbs to negotiate.

It must be the early hours of Saturday morning; there's music playing in the aid station, it seems to be attached to a bar.

There are people with bottles of beer, casually observing the pot-mess of exhausted ultra-runners.

I'm not sure that my scrambled mind is interpreting this the right way, so I focus on eating some cheese. I fill my water bottles and emerge back into the comforting normality of the night.

I climb again. I descend again. Now I'm seriously tired. I'm back in France. I have reached Vallorcine, the final major aid station, and I sit down. I can feel my body slump.

I methodically change the batteries in my head-torch; fill my water bottles (no food this time – it's lost all appeal) and slowly exit the tent. I'm feeling cold but I resist the urge to pull on more layers – I know what's coming.

More climbing. I know this is the last one, but I'm moving slow; my energy is all spent.

I pick out a figure in the darkness moving slowly ahead of me, hobbling his way up using a branch as a walking stick; he's grunting with every step.

As I pass him, I ask him if he's okay. He doesn't understand my words, but he gets the gist and flashes me a big smile and a thumbs-up. I continue up, the sounds of his hobbling and grunting slowly receding behind me.

I reach the top of Tête aux Vents knowing that all the climbing is done – it's downhill all the way from here.

There is light in the morning sky and from somewhere, energy is returning to my legs. The final aid station, La Flégère, comes and goes. I barely notice it. A sign tells me I have 9km left to run. I'm still running.

I get a glimpse of Mont Blanc, its summit the only thing yet touched by the sun.

I'm cruising down a forest trail, switchback after switchback, each one bringing me closer to Chamonix. Finally, I break out of the forest and see a road. I cross it via a scaffold bridge... I limp up and over it like an old man... then I'm back in my stride, on the outskirts of Chamonix.

It's only 07.30 but there are already people along the route, willing me on to the finish, I turn a corner and see the huge UTMB arch that marks the finish line. It's buzzing with people.

Cow-bells ringing; clapping; shouting; cheering. The noise is unreal. The atmosphere is amazing. I slow down to savour every moment. I cross the line.

It has taken me 22 hours and 31 minutes. I am finished.

You can read more about my motivation for taking on this challenge at: fundraise.cancerresearchuk.org/page/colins-ccc-giving-page

Supporting veterans

THE Royal Navy & Royal Marines Charity has awarded a grant of £85,000 to The Poppy Factory to help Royal Navy and Royal Marines veterans with physical and mental health conditions find their way back into employment over the coming year.

This is the latest grant in the RNRMC's long standing partnership with the Poppy Factory.

The funding will go towards The Poppy Factory's Getting You Back to Work service, which supports around 300 veterans back into work each year.

Since 1922, The Poppy Factory has been employing wounded, injured and sick veterans to produce the poppies, wreaths and Remembrance symbols for The Royal British Legion's annual Poppy Appeal and the Royal Family.

In 2010, The Poppy Factory's employment support expanded, and their Getting You Back to Work service helps veterans find jobs within their own communities that harness the skills they developed in the services.

Deirdre Mills, Chief Executive of The Poppy Factory, said: "We are very grateful to The Royal Navy & Royal Marines Charity and its supporters for this important funding, which will help more veterans with health conditions back into employment and enable them to gain a new sense of purpose."



Welcome funding boost for those struggling with mental health



VETERAN mental health support has recently been boosted via the latest RNRMC grant to Combat Stress.

£90,000 will help fund the core treatment that Combat Stress provides to Royal Navy and Royal Marines veterans who are struggling with their mental health.

In 2018, this treatment helped Dave, a former submariner, who had battled panic attacks, nightmares and flashbacks for many years following a serious incident while deployed on HMS Sceptre. This eventually forced him to leave the Navy.

"After leaving I felt angry and frustrated, because in my mind I'd failed. I also felt incomplete – leaving the Navy was like losing a family, a part of myself."

However, Dave's mental health struggles did not end there.

"I spent four months lying on the couch, not able to do anything. I was caught in a cycle of guilt and shame, telling myself I had no right to feel the way I did because I hadn't seen action or lost a limb."

Dave eventually visited his GP, who diagnosed him with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and referred him to Combat Stress.

"It wasn't until I spoke to the clinical staff at Combat Stress that I realised how broken I was. Talking about what I'd been through for the first time felt like a giant weight had been lifted. I realised that what I'd been feeling wasn't my fault."

If you would like to find out more about Combat Stress or how to access their support, please visit their website, or call their 24-hour helpline on 0800 138 1619.



Peter knows we really care

£50,000 from the RNRMC and its funding partner, Greenwich Hospital, has been awarded to Care for Veterans to help its residents.

The grant will help the charity deliver tailored rehabilitation programmes to disabled Navy and Marines veterans like Peter Hines, a Navy veteran, pictured above.

Peter first came to Care for Veterans in November, 2017, for a two-week respite stay.

Following multiple falls at home, he and his wife decided that living in the family home was no longer possible and he became a permanent resident in early 2018.

With the support of the physiotherapy

team at the charity, Peter is as active as possible and spends lots of time outside, chatting and tending plants with other gardeners.

He said: "They're very good here; the staff are lovely, they're compassionate."

Rehab services funded by the RNRMC grant include occupational therapy, speech therapy, social and recreational activities, neuropsychology, chaplaincy and mini-ambulance service.

Trust and foundations officer Kim Bowen-Wood said: "We are extremely grateful to RNRMC for their very generous donation."

"It is a wonderful example of their commitment to supporting Naval veterans and their families for life."

Challenging work out

A MIXED team of Royal Navy sailors, Royal Marines and civilian support workers completed a 25-hour CrossFit challenge for three charities.

The challenge started at HM Naval Base Clyde's Sportsdrome at midday. Consisting of a mix of aerobic, body-weight and weightlifting exercises, the team completed 25 of the workouts non-stop over the 25-hours.

Benefiting from the arduous challenge were The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity, Cancer Research UK, and St Luke's Cheshire Hospice.

"The toughest part had to be when my hands started to hurt from pull-ups," said Leading Physical Trainer Elise Broughton, 30, one of the event organisers.

"The highlight was watching everyone keep smiling and laughing even though we were all so tired."

The team fought through the fatigue and muscle cramps, being cheered along at the end by HM Naval Base Clyde staff. Each one of the team members who began the challenge made it successfully to the finish.

The youngest member of the team, Able Rating Supply Chain Ellie Evans, 18, said: "It's been really hard, we have been completing a workout every hour for last 25 hours. It wasn't so much the workouts that were difficult, it was how tired I was especially in the early hours of the morning."

Cash bonanza from tattoo

THE 2019 Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo has donated £775,000 to nine UK military charities.

The money is being awarded to ABF The Soldiers' Charity, the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity, RAF Benevolent Fund, Army in Scotland Trust, Army Piping Committee, 51 Infantry Brigade Welfare Fund, Edinburgh Garrison Welfare Fund, Scottish National War Memorial and the Scottish Amenities Fund.

The tattoo is also donating £225,000 to four Scottish arts and youth organisations, taking its total support for good causes to £1 million. These donations are made from the tattoo's financial surplus each year.

Rooted in Scottish tradition, the Tattoo is the premier military Tattoo in the world, has been sold out consistently over the past 21 years, is watched live by over 220,000 people annually and is televised to over 100 million people each year. The 100-minute showcase of military pageantry, music, dance, technical wizardry and special effects takes place against the backdrop of Edinburgh Castle.

Spot of French leave honours those who fell on D-Day



THIRTY-SEVEN cyclists set off on their London to Paris cycle challenge as part of the Royal Navy & Royal Marines charity and BAE System's inaugural Heroes Challenge 2019 in honour of the 75th Anniversary of D-Day.

The challenge set off from London and concluded four days later in the iconic city of Paris.

Passing through picturesque English countryside, the cycle crossed the Channel at Portsmouth and continued through the small villages and medieval market towns of Northern France, while stopping to take in some of the Normandy landing beaches.

Other highlights included visits to D-Day landing points Juno Beach and the Gold Beach, plus a trip to the historic Pegasus Bridge where the first house to be liberated from the Nazis in 1944 still stands.

The challenge raised over £72,000 which will go towards funding projects for Naval veterans.





'ONCE NAVY, ALWAYS NAVY'



Our hearts w

AS 835 red carnations gently drifted on the surface, the hollow clang of eight bells echoed across Scapa Flow.

End of watch. It had not sounded at this spot since it was rung by a seaman at midnight on October 13/14 1939.

It would never ring again aboard HMS Royal Oak. Within 90 minutes, this 31,000-tonne leviathan, survivor of an encounter with the German Fleet at Jutland, bristling with 15in guns capable of striking targets 19 miles away, would be at the bottom of Scapa Flow.

The sinking of the battleship was not the first major blow to Britain or her navy in World War 2; carrier HMS Courageous was torpedoed before the end of September with the loss of 519 souls.

But the Royal Oak tragedy has reverberated through the generations. The double shock of a capital ship being sunk in the apparent safety of the navy's principal home base and more than 100 boys – aged under 18 – going down with the Royal Oak provoked both an outcry and much soul searching.

In the eight decades since, while the anniversary of the losses of other great ships largely pass unnoticed, the Royal Oak disaster has been remembered religiously in the

ship's native Portsmouth and in Orkney.

The 80th anniversary prompted several days of events, beginning in St Ann's Church in Portsmouth Naval Base, where a memorial stone was unveiled by the Princess Royal and her husband Vice Admiral Sir Tim Laurence.

Dedicating the tablet, RNR chaplain Rev Adam Gay told those gathered in the historic church that the new memorial was "a reminder to us of those who have died, but it also compels us to look forward; to honour those who died by seeking to build a better future – to ensure that the courage and sacrifice of others will never have been in vain."

The Royal couple then joined relatives to talk about the impact the battleship's sinking had on their families.

They were also shown underwater imagery captured by divers over the past 12 months as part of the Royal Oak 80 initiative to produce a comprehensive 21st Century survey of the wreck and met the Royal Navy divers who plunge into Scapa Flow each year to inspect the wreck and replace the White Ensign which 'flies' on the upturned hull.

That mission of honour was once again performed by Northern Diving Group who plunged into the chilly Scapa

Waters to head down to the upturned wreck.

She lies there torn and crumpled, but otherwise surprisingly intact, because of the skill of U-boat commander Günther Prien, who evaded the blockships and defences at Scapa to reach the Fleet's anchorage.

Prien took aim at the first major target he sighted.

After being hit by one torpedo which caused relatively little damage but did wake the crew, Royal Oak was then struck by three more simultaneously as Prien made a second attack.

The results were horrific. Three messes – stokers' boys' and Royal Marines' – were killed in an instant. Jets of flame roared through the battleship's passageways. And the list caused by the holes blasted in the hull rapidly worsened as water poured through portholes, open on a relatively warm night with Royal Oak 'safe' in her home.

Royal Oak sank in 13 minutes.

No man who survived that ordeal is still with us; the last survivor of the tragedy died in December 2016, but the ship's memory is kept alive vigilantly by the HMS Royal Oak Association, Orkney islanders and several generations of Royal Navy divers.

Orcadians arranged two days of events, beginning with



Images: LPhoto Unaisi Luke, Marjo Tynkkynen, Kieran Hatton, Bob Anderson, Professor Chris Rowland and Kari Hyttinen



Living links with WW2 broken

BRITAIN has lost two of its last living links with classic naval victories of World War 2.

Stanley James 'Jim' London toiled in the bowels of HMS Exeter as the cruiser locked horns with German pocket battleship Graf Spee in December 1939 – the Battle of the River Plate.

Half a world away, Ralph Briggshaw was a signalman on the flag bridge of HMS Hardy, leading the charge against a superior force of German destroyers at Narvik.

Both have passed away – Jim just weeks shy of his 100th birthday; Ralph only three days after he was rewarded by Norway for fighting for the country's freedom in 1940.

Jim London was one of the numerous junior stokers keeping his heavy cruiser in the battle. She suffered

the heaviest damage – and losses – of the three RN vessels involved in the relatively-short action; Jim helped bury more than 60 shipmates in the South Atlantic after the battle.

But collectively, HMS Ajax, Achilles and Exeter inflicted sufficient damage on Graf Spee to force her to seek repair in Montevideo and then, three days later, scuttle herself in the Plate estuary – delivering the first significant naval victory of WW2 to the RN.

The youngest of eight children, Jim was born in Herefordshire on October 2 1919. After a brief spell delivering fuel to homes, businesses and farms on the eastern outskirts of London, he joined the Royal Navy. Exeter was his first ship – and earned the everlasting gratitude of Chileans for the help provided after a terrible earthquake struck

Concepción in 1938.

The Chileans rewarded all the Britons involved in the relief effort with commemorative medals.

Canadians named a town after HMS Ajax in recognition of the River Plate victory, with the streets bearing the names of sailors on the three British ships. In 2016, London Lane was dedicated – and a then 97-year-old Jim was presented with a replica roadsign by Rear Admiral Paul Bennett.

The veteran was somewhat nonplussed by the 'fuss' surrounding the battle and men who fought in it. He thought the River Plate action was a "minor incident" in six bitter years of war and the victory used to gloss over some of the naval tragedies in the opening months of the conflict such as the loss of carrier HMS Courageous and battleship Royal Oak.

He left Exeter while she was repaired in Devonport and later took part in the raid on Norway's Lofoten Islands in 1941, served on Malta convoys, captured an Italian submarine when drafted to minesweeper HMS Seaham and ended the war in the Far East aboard carrier HMS Implacable.

Jim worked as an electrician for

more than 30 years, before becoming a professional gardener in his 60s, working until the age of 80.

Ralph Briggshaw (pictured, right, as a boy seaman at HMS St Vincent in Gosport pre-war) spent several minutes in the icy waters of Ofotfjord in April 1940 when HMS Hardy was sunk.

The ship had led a bold dash by inferior British forces to surprise ten German destroyers which had captured the port of Narvik.

In the ensuing fighting, Hardy capsized – Ralph was struck by shrapnel in the back and arm and swam 200 yards with his usable arm to reach land where he collapsed.

He was eventually evacuated to a hospital in the Lofoten islands, where he spent six weeks recuperating before being repatriated.

He spent another two-and-a-half years being treated for his injuries, then returned to active duties with sloops HMS Cygnet and Black Swan, was loaned to a Polish destroyer in the run-up to

D-Day and served aboard an Algerine-class minesweeper.

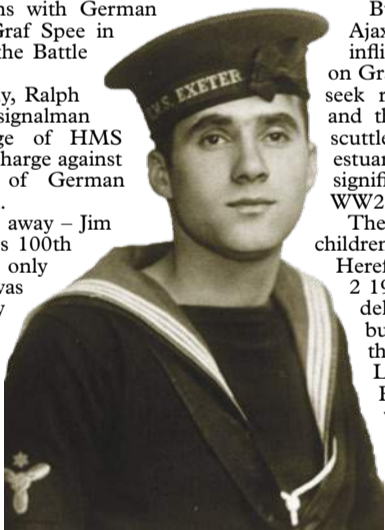
He left the RN in 1950 as Yeoman of Signals and became a radio and radar engineer at Gatwick airport in civvy street.

His naval escapades prompted his brother Leonard to join the post-war RN, he was an avid reader of *Navy News* up to his death, and, 79 years after Narvik, he was the last surviving crewman from the Hardy.

"The family are devastated by Ralph's passing but we understand that he had a long good life and loved his country and the Royal Navy," said his great nephew Luke.

"Ralph was my hero growing up and, along with grandad, fuelled my love for the Royal Navy and its history – he was the subject of many family stories."

You can hear Ralph describe the fighting at Narvik in an interview he recorded aged 94: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkaugQZhTak>



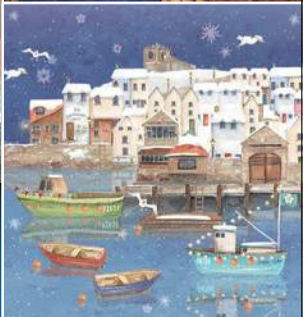
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with Oak

a community 'poppy plant', placing 1,259 wooden flowers in the Royal Oak memorial garden at Scapa.

That was followed by a presentation from expert divers/wreck surveyors on the Royal Oak 80 project.

Over the past 12 months a team of volunteer divers have been granted a licence to inspect the wreck by the Secretary of State for Defence; the site is normally off limits except to navy divers.

The images were gathered using the latest techniques to create 3D virtual reality models of the wreck – updating similar scans produced over a decade ago. The aim is help relatives of those lost – and the wider public – to picture the ship's final resting place; they were even given the chance to 'swim' around some parts of the wreck by donning virtual reality glasses (Royal Oak is an official war grave, off limits to all but permitted divers).

"Unlike battlefields, such as the D-Day landing beaches of Normandy, naval war graves are less accessible to most people and are more easily forgotten," said Lieutenant Jen Smith, who's worked with the survey team all year.

"Lying beneath the waves, it is difficult for current generations to imagine the

significance of these sites and the scale of such a loss."

The service of remembrance at the memorial garden was rather more of a traditional affair, attended by around 150 relatives, plus the ship's company of HMS Bangor, Northern Diving Group team and Naval Regional Command.

A wreath was laid to the victims – the toll is now 835 after recent research uncovered details of a crew member who died in hospital from burns two weeks after the tragedy. His name has now been added to the Book of Remembrance in Kirkwall Cathedral, where there is a memorial corner dedicated to the ship.

And it was from there that the ship's bell – recovered in 1982 – was temporarily transferred to the lighthouse vessel Pharos for the final act of commemoration over the Royal Oak's last resting place.

A flurry of craft moved into place and the 150 relatives and guests at the memorial service cast poppies into the water, and a wreath of oak leaves and carnations was placed on the becalmed surface of the Flow by Naval Regional Commander Captain Chris Smith, Lord Lieutenant of Orkney Bill Spence and Royal Oak Association chairman Gareth Derbyshire from HMS Bangor.

Marine's Intrepid honour

SAILORS killed in a bitter – and largely forgotten – Mediterranean battle were honoured by islanders... and one former Royal Marine, 76 years after the fighting.

The battle for the island of Leros – just off Turkey's Bodrum peninsula – in the autumn of 1943 was a rare German success set against defeats in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Russia and the Atlantic.

Under Axis occupation, the island became a base for the Italian Navy in the eastern Mediterranean.

But when Rome switched sides in September 1943, Leros fell into Allied hands. Britain sent 3,000 troops to bolster the Italian garrison, supported by naval power including Royal Navy destroyer HMS Intrepid and the Hellenic Vasilissa Olga.

The Germans unleashed a six-week air campaign against the defenders, followed up with an invasion by air and sea in mid-November, leading to the island's capture and the Allies' defeat four days later.

Some 600 Britons were killed alongside over 250 Italians with over 8,500 men taken prisoner in fighting for an island roughly three times the size of Portsmouth.



Killed on the very first day of the battle – September 26 – were 15 Royal Navy sailors, lost when HMS Intrepid was sunk in Lakki Bay during a ferocious dive-bomber raid which also accounted for the Greek destroyer (72 men killed) and knocked out most of the harbour facilities.

Nearly 80 years later it was the sight of the White Ensign flying over Leros which piqued the interest of retired Royal Marines Captain David Butcher,

who was sailing around the Greek islands with his wife Julia.

That prompted some exploration of Leros by the green beret and led him to the memorial to Intrepid.

Having sailed in her successor – the long-serving Cold War/Falklands veteran assault ship – the former marine felt a connection with the wartime destroyer and was determined to take part in commemorations.

Each year on September 26 the entire island's populace gather to

mark the sacrifices made in 1943. With the help of the Royal British Legion's Bordeaux and South West France branches, Capt Butcher secured a wreath and joined locals in placing them on the memorial.

"I feel privileged to have been there this year to witness the sharing of grief and the remembering our lost ones with members of the HMS Intrepid Association and others whose relatives had served on Leros," said Capt Butcher.

RN women display in Yeovilton

IF YOU missed the exhibition celebrating the role of female sailors when it was hosted by the National Museum in Portsmouth...you can now catch it at the Fleet Air Arm Museum in Yeovilton.

Pioneers to Professionals: Women and the Royal Navy tells the story from the 17th Century through the WRNS to the present day.

Entry to the exhibition is included in the standard price.



Drumming up old Eaglets

THE Royal Marine Cadet Corps of Drums (Portsmouth) line up in Southsea's Royal Beach Hotel after a hugely successful and impressive evening supporting veterans of one of the Navy's post-war greats: HMS Eagle.

It was here, in 1972, that the carrier's crew held their decommissioning 'do'. And 47 years later, it was here that 70 former Eaglets gathered for a weekend of dits, dinners, drumming and sightseeing tours of the city.

After the reception on the Saturday evening, guests were asked to take their places for the gala dinner which started with the entry and resounding performance of the traditional 'Mess Beating' by the cadets – much to the surprise and wild applause of the seated guests.

After the meal, the cadets – many of whom had travelled up from Plymouth – resumed the entertainment with a drill display ahead of a draw/auction, which pumped £465 into the youngsters' coffers.

"All the ex-Eaglets and guests were overwhelmed with the hospitality they received again in Portsmouth," said principal organiser Danny du Feu.

"HMS Eskimo also had their reunion at the same time and many sea stories were being exchanged into the wee hours."

Plans are already in hand for the 2020 get-together in Weymouth; details from Danny on 07711 083465/ddf.photography@gmail.com or association secretary Joan Wright on 07710 540621/trevjoan8@ntlworld.com.

Kenyans call it a day

EIGHT HMS Kenya veterans met for the final time in Derby's Stuart Hotel to celebrate the cruiser's 18-year career through war and peace.

One wartime Kenyan AB Raymond 'Ginger' Board and seven post-war members of the ship's company attended a dinner.

The ship served extensively in WW2 – in the Arctic, Atlantic and Med, including the Pedestal convoy to Malta – as well as post-war in Korea, and supported the tour by the then Princess Elizabeth and Duke of Edinburgh to the Far East in 1952... a tour cut short by the death of George VI while the Royal couple were visiting the country of Kenya.

The ship's ties with Derby go back to Warship Week in WW2 when the East Midland's city adopted her. All the city's past mayors were invited to join the veterans at the last get-together.

Naval Quirks



Cadets to the rescue – twice



Whitehaven at front for RBL ceremony

WHITEHAVEN Sea Cadets turned out in force to celebrate the anniversary of one of their local Royal British Legion Branches and for the dedication of a new Standard.

The cadets were invited to attend the 75th anniversary celebrations at Egremont, near Whitehaven, and to lead the parade to and from the dedication of a new branch standard at St Mary and St Michael's church.

Commanding Officer, Petty Officer (SCC) Stuart McCourt said that the unit had been delighted to receive the invitation.

"It was a pleasure for us to be able to support the Legion on this notable day for them. It was also a great honour to have been invited to lead the parade, and for two of our cadets to escort the new standard back to the branch."



Gareth Edwards, the Legion's standard bearer thanked the cadets for attending and said that it was an excellent turnout from the cadets, who were a credit to themselves and their unit.



Roaring successes are celebrated

TS TIGER'S ship's company swelled to more than 120 for the unit's annual awards night.

Cadets received certificates, badges and awards in recognition of their efforts of the boating season and since the opening of the Artemis and Rancee junior divisions.

Three new entries recited the Sea Cadet promise and were officially welcomed into the corps by their district officer.

Five trophies were also awarded to cadets who had gone the extra mile during the year.

Staff at the Leicester unit are now planning an exciting winter training programme for the cadets, with the chance to earn specialisation badges and complete modules towards their next rank.

SEA Cadets on two different yachts were called into action twice in one day, after mariners got into difficulty in the English Channel.

TS City of London and TS Sir Stelios with cadets from Fraserburgh, Dartford, Portsmouth, Guisborough, Harrogate and Taunton on board managed to assist off Portland Bill.

TS City of London, captained by Colin Ridley, were called to help the Solus Maru, which encountered engine trouble off Portland Bill.

TS City of London towed the Whitby-based yacht for a mile, leading the way into Weymouth Harbour after originally beginning her voyage in Brixham in south Devon.

Within a mile of the scene, TS Sir Stelios, pictured right, and its captain Gary Stokel responded in the hour of need to help the 42 ft steel-hulled yacht, Milu, in testing conditions, off the entrance to Portland Harbour.

Suffering engine failure – and with a language barrier – the French couple in charge of Milu had planned to make for Portland but after a heavy tow, Sir Stelios got them safely alongside in Weymouth.

With thanks to the Weymouth Harbour Master and staff who took lines and ensured both yachts were safe without further incident, credit goes to the sea cadets on board who took charge of the situation.

Philip Russell RN, Captain of Sea Cadets said: "Both sets of cadets deserve



every credit especially considering that for many of them, it was their first day on board.

"It's often the case that they are called on to assist but it's still rare for that to happen twice within a mile of each other.

"The Sea Cadets' values of loyalty, courage, commitment, respect, and self-discipline are often tested and we are so proud that our yachts were able to help."

Both TS City of London and TS Sir Stelios are cutter-rigged Rustler 42 yachts and were built in Falmouth, to make it easier for cadets to manage.

With berths for six crew and two adults, the yachts – along with the rest of the Sea Cadets fleet – provide young people with one-of-a-kind experiences to boost confidence and increase skills for their future lives.

Josie races to top title

TEENAGER Josie Ruffles has capped a great year by being named sailor of the year by the East Anglian Offshore Racing Association.

Josie, 17, who attends Royal Hospital School, has this year undertaken around 2,000 miles of tough yacht racing, including winning the Wallis Cup.

She also completed the Royal Ocean Racing Club's Fastnet Race this year, following in the footsteps of her brother Toby, who completed the race two years ago.

Josie was receiving her trophy this month at Medway Yacht Club. She had been due to receive it in Ostend, Belgium, following the final race of the season, the Buckley Goblets.

She was racing across the North Sea with her father for the sixth time this year but faced tough conditions of Force 6-7 winds and waves of four metres. The duo completed the race in nine hours but found the return journey even tougher.

Winds over 40 knots damaged the pair's mainsail and Genoa sails but they still managed to get home in 13 hours.





Future sailors look to past

DURING the second week back at Welbeck Defence 6th Form College the Royal Navy Year 13 students departed for our first Royal Navy visit to Whale Island in Portsmouth, writes **Charlie Johnson-Greening**.

It was a flying visit, lasting just 24 hours, but it was a very educational day.

We left Welbeck at 4pm after lessons and made the three-hour journey down to HMS Bristol, our accommodation for the night.

HMS Bristol was initially designed to defend a class of aircraft carriers which were never built and it is the only Type 82 destroyer ever built for the Royal Navy.

One by one we made the short walk up the gangway and saluted Her Majesty as we boarded for what for many of us, was our first step on board a commissioned Royal Navy ship, the first of many.

We formed up in three ranks and after a quick brief, we were taken to our mess. Bunks three tiers high, creaky and cramped.

After we were all settled in we were given the opportunity to explore the decks of HMS Bristol, and take advantage of the games room. Before we knew it, it was 10.30pm and time for lights out.

Wednesday morning we were up bright and early to form up and were marched up to the canteen for a tasty fulfilling breakfast.

After breakfast we made our way next door to the fire-fighting training unit. Every Royal Navy sailor experiences fire-fighting training at a state-of-the-art purpose-built fire school on Whale Island and now it was our turn to get an insight into what we have ahead of us.

A presentation was given on the different types of fires and how to combat each one, then a quick try on of the old and new equipment that

is used by the Royal Navy's fire-fighting force.

Next we were booted and suited into the firefighting training gear and taken to the simulation rooms.

A demonstration was given on how to handle fires with the purpose built equipment and then we all got to put out a fire of our own using the corresponding extinguishers for the fire.

Afterwards we were all able to use the hoses (which are on board every surface vessel in the Royal Navy) and even the Chief and Ma'am Neep – our marketing manager – got involved, but they were quickly drenched.

To finish the firefighting section off we were given a tour of the mock ships compartments that are used to mirror a true fire on board of a ship.

We returned to the rest room for lunch where we were given the disappointing news that for health and safety reasons we would not be able to do our training on the Damage Repair Instructional Unit (DRIU).

Instead we were taken around the complex on a dry walk through and although we were all disappointed that we were not actually going to get wet, we were shown how to bung holes that were produced by missiles and how to fix broken pipe work.

Because our DRIU training had been cancelled we were able to make an unexpected visit to the oldest commissioned ship in the Royal Navy, HMS Victory.

We had a private tour, led by Royal Marine Sergeant Watson, who was very inspirational and gave us an excellent understanding into the past of the Royal Navy, and the tales of Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar.

Although the trip was not as scripted, it truly was an exciting insight into the Royal Navy and what we will meet in our upcoming military careers.



● From left to right: Marine Samuel Edge, Marine Blake Dempster, Warrant Officer First Class Richard Cartman, Marine Harry Dowley and Marine Jack Dare

FOUR Royal Marines recruits from Shrewsbury marched the last ten miles of their gruelling final 30-mile commando test alongside the man who gave them the opportunity to earn their coveted green beret.

Warrant Officer First Class Richard Cartman, careers advisor at the Armed Forces Career Office in Shrewsbury, took seven hopefuls on to the legendary Royal Marines Commando training programme at the Commando Training Centre at Lympstone in Devon.

The recruits were all in 275 Troop and four remained heading into the final week of the 32-week course, which tests hopefuls rigorously – both physically and mentally – before they can collect their green beret and qualify as an elite commando.

Throughout the recruitment process, WO1 Cartman kept in close contact with his candidates and planned to mark their success at their pass out parade.

However, deployment overseas meant WO1 Cartman couldn't make the pass out but he was adamant he wanted to see his youngsters in their finest hour.

That was when WO1 Cartman decided to head out on to Dartmoor as the recruits navigated through their final 30-mile speed march test, which they have eight hours to complete and carry 40lbs of equipment and a rifle throughout.

He joined them for the final ten miles of the speed march and was with them – Marines Harry Dowley, Blake Dempster, Sam Edge and Jack Dare – as they were presented with their coveted green berets and became elite Royal Marines Commandos.

"It was a huge honour for me," said WO1 Cartman. "It gives me incredible pride when you see the young people achieve their dreams like this."

"It is a great success for four originals to be successful from one Armed Forces Careers Office and I wanted to show my support. Being presented with their coveted green berets is a monumental moment in anyone's life."

"I've struck a strong relationship with all my candidates and in most cases you become the most important adult in their lives minus their parents."

Mne Dowley was delighted to complete the tough training alongside comrades from Shrewsbury.

"The recruitment process was smooth and having someone so enthusiastic as WO1 Cartman was extremely helpful," he said.

"Training was hard but having mates from start to finish helped us a lot, the bond you make with the lads is something you can only discover here."

"To finally finish the commando tests with your mates you started with from home was the proudest feeling we've all felt in our lives and to have our careers advisor with us was a huge bonus."

WO1 Cartman – who has been in the Naval Service for 26 years – followed his recruits' journeys as they progressed to training at Lympstone and seeing them qualify brings great joy.

"The Naval Careers Service is an incredible privileged position I find myself in and giving people the opportunity and being such a huge influence on young people's lives gives me an immense sense of pride," he said.



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Callum honoured in Astute officer's name

ROOKIE Callum Jackson received an award in memory of murdered submariner Ian Molyneux as he completed his transition from civilian to sailor.

The weapon engineer was singled out as the best trainee on one of the world's most technically-challenging military training courses, the Submarine Qualifying Course.

The course demands that a trainee learn how to operate more than 30 complex engineering systems on board – so that they can react in an instant in an emergency alongside their shipmates, whether on a hunter-killer T or A-boat or serving in a V-boat carrying the nation's nuclear deterrent.

After weeks of training, his positivity and "eagerness to understand" all he was taught by instructors led to him standing out from the 39 other would-be 'deeps' eager to join the Silent Service – and earned him the Molyneux Prize.

It is named in honour of Lieutenant Commander Ian Molyneux – a fellow weapons engineer who was posthumously awarded the George Medal for sacrificing his life attempting to stop an armed shipmate running amok aboard HMS Astute in 2011.

The prize was presented to the junior submariner by Midshipman Jamie Molyneux RNR – Lt Cdr Molyneux's son.

"It is an honour for me as a junior rating in the weapons engineering branch to receive this award in memory of Lieutenant Commander Molyneux – and humbling that his son was able to come and present it to me today," said Callum.



"The Submarine Qualifying Course was challenging but enjoyable. It has been a great foundation for the rest of my submarine training, and I am very proud to have finally completed this important phase of my career."

His instructor, Warrant Officer Jeff Crawford, said not only had Callum excelled on the course, but also spurred on his 39 colleagues.

"He took charge of the class ensuring everyone knew where to be and ensured study groups took place. His continued drive for knowledge continued throughout the course culminating in a course average of 97.9 per cent," WO Crawford added.

"Considering he had only been in the Royal Navy for ten weeks,

LET Jackson joined with a very positive approach to learning and eagerness to understand all course content.

"These attributes helped him demonstrate to the training staff that he had a complete grasp of all onboard systems, which was well above the standard required at this stage of his training."

Originally from Plymouth, Callum joined the Royal Navy under its Undergraduate Apprenticeship Scheme – an accelerated initiative to become a nuclear or weapon engineer. Participants are paid to study for a BEng (Hons) degree, gaining practical skills, and spending time in active service on boats either as a marine engineer or weapon engineer.

Picture: LPhoto Robert Oates, FRPU North

A base in

Don't you forget

BAHRAIN.

One of the world's principal oil and financial centres, home to 1.2m people – half of them foreign nationals – squeezed into an area twice the size of the Isle of Wight.

Destination of the first commercial Concorde flight in 1976 (yours for £356, or £2,500 today).

And, since 2018, home to the first new Royal Navy establishment overseas since the withdrawal from Suez half a century ago.

The complex – officially the UK Naval Support Facility – is not a naval base per se – it doesn't have the full range of amenities)

Nor is it especially large – half a dozen cream-coloured three-storey accommodation and admin blocks covering an area perhaps half the size of HMS Nelson, based around a central welfare hub, five minutes' walk from the waterfront, plus a sprawling warehouse a stone's throw from the water which is home to the logistical and engineering support for RN ships operating in the region.

It's home to around 200 personnel typically – but can accommodate around 500 for short periods, such as crew rotations – from the staff of the UK headquarters in the region, the Maritime Component Command, to those assigned to the various international task forces based in Bahrain, as well as RAF personnel running the airhub and soldiers who provide force

APART from the UK headquarters themselves, established in the aftermath of the 9/11 atrocities in 2001, no RN presence in the Gulf has been more sustained than that of its minehunters.

We're now into the 13th year of what started out as Operation Aintree, permanently basing two, then four mine warfare vessels (two Hunts – Brocklesby and Ledbury – two Sandowns – Blyth and Shoreham) in Bahrain.

They'll spend up to one third of their three-year stint in the Gulf alongside undergoing maintenance to sustain operations in the unforgiving Middle Eastern conditions, while their crews trade places with their counterparts in Portsmouth and Faslane every six to seven months.

"The big ships get a fanfare when they sail, a fanfare when they return. We get none of that," says Lieutenant Commander Adam Riddett, Brocklesby's Commanding Officer.

"We're operational from the day we step off the plane to the day we get back on it to return home."

The Gulf is officially mine free... so why do we still need ships permanently based here

to find something that Recent history has seen mined during the various conflicts of the past 30 substantial knock-on effects

Beyond the military/the Gulf is an ever-changing. The nature of the water temperature, salinity and five or six times a day.

And the nature of the changing, as anyone who Abu Dhabi or Bahrain decades will know: the back and land reclaimed appearing, new ports being carved out of rock which alters the seabed the minehunter the past dozen years.

The hunters have also for example, is 37 years. Inside, she's 2019: new updates and other tech

"We keep bringing in but even with older equipment still unlocking its potential

protection (currently the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment).

They enjoy twin and single-berth air conditioned cabins, many of them en suite, all with free WiFi and a good half dozen free UK TV channels courtesy of BFBS.

The all-ranks canteen serves three free meals a day in the welfare block where there's also a coffee shop-cum-bar, the 'green room' (it's painted green...) to chill out with a book, coffee, play uckers or ping pong, a small chapel (with stained glass window) and bish, a small convenience store and a 24-hour gym, with off-site adventurous training such as paddleboarding, also provided regularly.

None of which existed 18 months ago. Personnel were scattered across Bahrain in flats and hotels, receiving living allowances for food, petrol and the like. Apart from a couple of support sheds and HQ building, there was nothing.

The new complex is a gift and thank-you from Bahrain's ruler for the RN's long-standing support and contribution to his small

nation's security and stability. It is Bahraini soil – one reason, out of respect, the name Jufair was not resurrected.

Otherwise, it's a naval base in all-but name. The Ensign is raised at Sunrise, lowered at Sunset in front of the administration centre. Living in the UK NSF is much more like being in a base back in the UK. With the heating turned up to the max...

"But it's not Nelson in the sun," stresses WO1 Lou Lewis from the engineering Forward Support Unit. "It's actually something rather unique, adapted to suit the way we live and operate in the Gulf. And it really works."

His team have been given a shiny new hangar to provide pretty much all the engineering support the minehunters need short of refit or dry dock. They have the ability to replace a Hunt-class ship's engine (and did so... taking out one of Brocklesby's power plants in "brutal 45C heat").

The FSU, who rotate through Bahrain every four months, were based in a shed about half a mile away – a good stretch from the ships themselves and via a US checkpoint; it meant a trip in a truck and the vehicles were searched each time. Now, you step out of a new shed directly on to the jetty.

For the 30 or so engineers based here this is, says Chief Petty Officer Carl Wilkes, "a very rewarding job. Taking things apart, finding what went wrong, fixing it, putting it back together. It's hands-on, non-stop work here."

The old FSU shed couldn't accommodate all the 20ft ISO

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Commander Riddett adds. "Even after all this time, we're still finding new ways of using Seafox, for example."

In pairs, or in groups, the hunters head out on a regular basis, usually with 'mother' which houses the mine warfare battle staff and fuel, food and spare parts to sustain the small ships for extended periods at sea, often with US hunters, also based in Bahrain. Beyond the deliberately-laid practice mines, most mine warfare sorties will uncover 40 to 50 fishing nets and associated equipment, the odd lost anchor, perhaps a block of concrete.

All are dutifully mapped so that someone else doesn't have to spend time identifying them later on.

And on return to Bahrain, they make use of the new facilities to continue their three-year missions.

"The new facility means we can look after our sailors a lot better, especially when there's heavy work going on," Lieutenant Commander Riddett adds. "One of the great things is the ability to move people ashore when we need to. It's a big step forward for us."

containers which serve as workshops and stores; they sat outside, exposed to the elements and needed considerable TLC. Now they're inside a cool shed with the rest of the unit's engineering kit, offices and work areas. And, like their counterparts in the UK, they are ready to up sticks at short notice to support the minehunters wherever they are needed.

On the other side of the shed is the RN's east of Suez logistics hub, another cool, cavernous warehouse, with 'lanes' set aside for supplies for the ships for stores (no food), anything from replacement fire extinguishers to fresh mattresses.

Perhaps 20 pallet loads of kit pass out of the warehouse weekly to the ships, with 15 going the other way, destination UK, mostly overseen by two junior rates.

After a lengthy spell on HMS Albion, including last year's Far East deployment, this is Liverpoolian Leading Logistician Steph Morgan's first experience of Bahrain.

The job is "a lot busier than expected, particularly when all the ships are in" and she rather misses the mess deck life aboard the flagship.

"Everything here is brand, spanking new, this is the best food I've had in a unit and I cannot complain about the accommodation – I have a single berth cabin," she says.

"If you just go back to your cabin after work and close the door, then it can become lonely here. You have to make the effort to mix."

For the

would like to see a few tweaks. "A lot of the site is quite spartan," he says. And certainly many of the blocks are rather sterile – although there is a little greenery with lawns and palm trees around the site, a few mementos, photos and the bell from the old HMS Jufair (the base closed in 1971) and blocks named after old Ton-class vessels which once operated there (Beachampton, Appleton, Chewton...).

The on-site shop lacks the comprehensive range of goods over on the US base... but then it caters for 15,000 personnel not just over 200.

The biggest inconvenience is money. The site is cash only. US dollars. You can't use cards in the shop, coffee shop or bar. The nearest cash point? In the US base.

These are relatively minor quibbles. The base's First Lieutenant, Major Tony Topping RLC, has spent 38 years in the military and reckons it's the best front-line base he's seen.

"When you look at bases in other operational theatres, they're not a patch on this," he adds. "In Afghanistan, you had a tented city. You'd get up in a morning to nothing but desert. Here there's a patch of green, a little oasis and a reminder of home."

Perhaps pushing it a little, but if you remember the now-demolished HMS Rooke in Gibraltar or some of the run-down post-colonial facilities in Cyprus, or served in the rather drab 'Death Star' in the Falklands, the Naval Support Facility Bahrain is a massive step forward.

Picture:
LPhoto Rory
Arnold

minehunter crews especially, the advent of the support facility is a godsend. It allows them to escape their ships while major maintenance (longer than four days) is carried out, living in the air-conditioned accommodation blocks, making use of the welfare and sports facilities, carrying out some personal admin.

HMS Brocklesby's Able Seaman Sean 'Nosey' Parker is on his third Gulf deployment. The facilities in Bahrain are "100 per cent better" than what used to be here.

"Before there was nothing, nothing apart from the US base," he adds. It's a good 15-minute walk from the jetty to 'America' as Brits dub the sprawling naval complex.

"We've been there a lot less. The food is good here, the accommodation decent. TV showing the football is a big winner. But in the 50-degree heat, sometimes it's just nice to come over here, play pool, use the WiFi and chill out," the 29-year-old junior rating adds.

His shipmate diver Stefan Guy agrees, but



• Lt Cdr Marie-Claire Berkett talks to Leading Naval Nurse Hayley Mills Jamieson and her children in Excellent's new maternity hub

Picture: LPhoto Joe Cater

Excellent start for maternity suite

LEADING the way keeping expectant and new mothers fit is HMS Excellent where what is believed to be the first maternity suite in the Forces has been set up.

Whale Island's sports pavilion is now a combined pavilion/maternity centre, the latter filled with CV equipment, weights, kettle bells, baby pens, baby changers, a rest area and much more to provide the upmost support – allowing users to work out in privacy, but still close to their children.

The suite is the brainchild of PTI Petty Officer Luke Steele. He helped his wife, a writer, back to the appropriate RN fitness level after the birth of the couple's first son, Jacob.

Thanks to his training and vocation, Luke was able to offer the nutritional and workout guidance so she could pass her fitness test and return to work.

"This highlighted the fact that not all females in the RN had the privilege of this support when returning to work – and I realised that the RN wasn't currently equipped to support maternity," said Luke.

"The maternity suite allows them to effectively re-gain their fitness levels with the added support of physical trainers who are now qualified in post-natal fitness."

There are around 60 women serving on Whale Island who are pregnant or have given birth fairly recently; the latter face the added pressure of passing their fitness test within 18 months of returning to work.

Dedication rewarded

TWO Royal Navy officers have been recognised for their exemplary efforts in ensuring submarines and ships have skilled engineers to keep them at sea.

Commander Adrian Coulthard and Lieutenant Commander Kim Mehta are recipients of the highest award the Royal Navy can bestow, short of official honours: the First Sea Lord's Greenwich Hospital Prize, presented by Britain's senior sailor – currently Admiral Tony Radakin – aboard his flagship, HMS Victory.

The prize celebrates the hard work of those who have made an outstanding and unparalleled contribution to the service.

Commander Coulthard has played a key role in providing the Royal Navy with new engineers via HMS Sultan, especially in his role as training commander at the Gosport establishment where he was described as the "driving force in the training revolution of competent and confident marine engineers, without whom the Fleet cannot go to sea."

Lieutenant Commander Mehta's performance while also serving at Sultan (she's now serving at Navy Command in HMS Excellent) is viewed as outstanding. Having nurtured thousands of Royal Navy engineers in her 23 years as a training officer, and trumpeted the cause of female engineers, her contribution to the service "should not be underestimated. A tireless champion for her branch, the cause of marine engineering in the Naval Service is immeasurably better for her tireless efforts."

The award is sponsored by the Royal Navy's oldest affiliated charity the Greenwich Hospital which works with the First Sea Lord to recognise extraordinary accomplishments and dedication.

"Today's recipients embody our values and standards of courage, commitment, discipline, respect, integrity and loyalty," Admiral Radakin said. "Their achievements are in the finest traditions of the service."

Alex's prose prowess

WORDSMITHS from across the Navy have been putting pen to paper (or finger to keyboard) to demonstrate their skill in prose.

At stake: a top prize of £300 and the honour of winning one of the Navy's longest-standing academic competitions, the Lieutenant Commander Hooper prize essay.

Running since 1957, the annual competition encourages junior ratings/other ranks in the Navy or Royal Marines to produce a 2,000-word academic essay on one subject from a choice of several.

ET (WE) Alex 'Phil' Schofield from HMS Westminster tackled the politically-charged (and

highly-topical) subject: "Has the first-past-the-post voting system had its day?"

He made excellent use of facts and references from a range of credible sources, and was named the winner by a panel of judges from across the Education and Training sphere.

That earned him £300 and a winner's certificate, presented in front of shipmates by Rear Admiral Jim Higham (ACNS (Ships) and Chief Naval Engineering Officer).

Runner-up was LS(CT) Robert Patterson of HMS Defender who pocketed £150 while Sultan's LET Christopher Hewson was third, earning £100.



40-year Church service

ROYAL Navy Reservist Lt Cdr Liz Church is marking 40 years in the service.

The Submarine Operations Reservist is currently deployed in HMS Queen Elizabeth for the Westlant 19 deployment to the Eastern Seaboard of the USA.

"To be able to travel overseas with HMS Queen Elizabeth is a real privilege and not one I expected when I joined as a non sea-going Wren 40 years ago," said Lt Cdr Church.

"The role I am doing on the aircraft carrier is something which, during my career, I have done on many different ships, and with many different Navies around the world.

"It is fantastic to be able to help in some small way towards the Westlant 19 deployment. The continued opportunities and personal challenges offered by the Reserves are what have made my naval career something I have really enjoyed."

Cdr Ben Horner, Head of Reserves Submarine Operations said: "Lt Cdr Church is an absolutely first-class example of an experienced and committed Reservist, drawing upon the wealth of her specialist expertise to help deliver carrier strike and to keep both HMS Queen Elizabeth, and her supporting submarines, safe and working seamlessly together.

"There could be no more fitting way for Liz to celebrate this incredible milestone than at sea, aboard the nation's flagship, doing the job she loves."

Comms Shack

THE Project Mountbatten (PjM) team have completed the GAP Analysis for ET, LET and POET courses, which will allow training design to begin this month, writes WO1 Daniel Castle (Daniel.castle304@mod.gov.uk / 93832 8811).

We've also had support from front-line units and they have loaned your team SMEs to support the training redesign, which should demonstrate to you all how important Project Mountbatten is and the Command support we have.

We have put in place interim accreditation for both our ET and LET courses (See the newsletter on Defence Connect) and we plan to award our ETs 'Unified Communications Technician Apprenticeship' Level 3 from Apr 2020, with more information to follow for our LET and POETs.

Moving away from PjM, I've received good news from a unit which relies heavily on CIS SQEP: our team working on the ALIS network.

This RN-RAF unit is critical to the operational capability of the F-35 and has been working extremely hard and to that end. The MPE team in ALIS, headed by POET(CIS) Gemma Hodder, has been awarded a 2* commendation for its dedication getting the MPE element of ALIS online and ready for the Westlant 19 deployment and future operations.

Deaths

Jim Oliver, Wtr. Served from February 1941. Served in Royal Arthur, Victory, HMS Stag (Port Said), HMS Grebe, RAF Hugarda, HMS Bull (Massawa). Pilot training in 1944, completed in Canada RCAF. Joined 769 Squadron, HMS Mergansa, RNAS Rattray. Founder member of Market Harborough RNA. Died July, aged 96.

Clifford Self. Associate member of Norwich Branch of the RNA, joining in 1989 and serving as branch padre. Died September 20, aged 77.

John Alan Newby, LS. Joined as boy sailor at Chatham in 1948. Served in HMS St Vincent, Pembroke, Kenya, St Kitts, Solebay, Mounts Bay and Belfast (during Korean War). Died September 17.

Gerald Douglas 'Cousie' Bertram. Served from 1942 in HMS Stalker in USA, Salerno, Tunisia, Southern France, Alexandria, Trincomalee, various operations on the Burma coast, covering the invasion and retaking of Rangoon. Then Malacca Straits, witnessed the surrender ceremony with Lord Mountbatten. Remained in Ceylon until discharge to UK in February 1946. In Reserves for Korean War for five years. Died September 27, aged 94.

George Charles Simpson. Served in HMS Ramillies during WW2 and then HMS Peacock. Died October 12.

Joe Cussen, AB. HMS Cheviot. Died October 9.

Surg Capt Donald E Mackay. FONAC, HMS Blake, Osprey, Ark Royal, Condor, President. INM Alverstoke, NH Haslar, RN Med Staff Sch. Died September 21, aged 91.

Cdre Peter J Williams OBE. FOCAS, FONAC, DNAV. Naval Attache Athens. RCDS. 846 NAS, HMS Worcester, Eagle, Albion, Bulwark. Died September 18.

Capt Michael S Shallow. HMS Dampier, President, Terror, Aurora, Ark Royal, St Angelo, Warrior, Seahawk, Bulwark, Pembroke, Drake. C-in-C Nav Home Cd. Died September 10, aged 82.

Lt Cdr RNR Edward M Atkinson. HMS Sussex, Mercia. Died September 16, aged 71.

Lt Cdr Sir John M Drinkwater QC. Flag Lt to 1SL. HMS Syrtis, Trident, Cumberland. Died August 13, aged 94.

Stan Cheetham. Signalman. Served 1943-1946 on Fleet Minesweepers. Member of Algerines Association. Died September 19, aged 94.

Len 'Tony' Jones. Died at the Royal Bournemouth Hospital, on October 14, aged 75. Sadly missed by his family, friends and shipmates.

Les Pumphrey, TL. Served from 1954-6 in HMS Marvel and HMS Ocean. Member of RNA Limavady. Died October 14.

Submariners' Association

Ray Gritt CPO M(E). Served 1958

to 1978 in HM Submarines Astute, Thermopylae, Tactician, Teredo, Ambush, Artemis, Truncheon, Alcide, Renown, and Churchill. Member of Gosport Branch. Died September 3, aged 84.

Geoff Grove L/SeaA.GL. Served August 1950 to June 1956 in HM Submarines Teredo, Sturdy, Truncheon, and Tapir. Member of North Staffs Branch. Died September 11, aged 90.

Anthony Bragg AB UW3. Served Aug 1963 to July 1967 in HM Submarines Ocelot. Member of Colchester Branch. Died September 13, aged 79.

Tim Evins CPO WEA. Served September 1981 to February 1996 in HM Submarines Repulse. Member of Dorset Branch. Died September 19, aged 63.

David A Cook RO2. Served December 1954 to January 1961 in HM Submarines Untirin, Upstart, Springer, Scorchier, Taciturn, and Porpoise. Member of Dolphin Branch. Died September 25, aged 83.

Association of Royal Navy Officers and RNO

Cdr Gavin A Richardson. HMS Seahawk. 706, 820, 771, 810, 824, 829 NAS. Naval Command HQ. Died September 22, aged 52.

Lt Cdr David A Tink. HMS Seahawk, Albion, Bulwark, Heron. Died October 1, aged 81.

Lt Cdr Michael O Hawkes. HMS

Hermes, Ark Royal, Raleigh, Blake, Kent, Drake, Avenger, Defiance. MOD Bath. NGTE Pyestock. Died September 21, aged 76.

Lt Edward D O Van Lennep. HMS Reaper, Farndale, Birmingham. Died September 4.

Lt Gilbert Whitesman. HMS Fife, Yarrnton, Barrosa, Scorpion, Dryad, Drake. Died September 23.

Capt RM Derek A Oakley MBE. RM Eastney, RM Deal, HQ 3 Cdo, 42 Cdo, Cdo School RM, HMS Terror, HQ Training Group RM. Died September 22, aged 92.

Sir Donald Gosling. A Service of Thanksgiving for the life and work of Sir Donald Gosling KCVO will be held in Westminster Abbey at noon on Wednesday December 11 2019. To apply for tickets, email Mrs Nicky Lee on nicky.lee855@mod.gov.uk who will then organise tickets and seating with the Abbey events team. Tickets will be despatched by early December. When applying for tickets please include details on whether you are serving or retired and what rank/rate you hold/held. Applications should also include address to which the tickets are to be sent. For questions about the Service, please contact Cdr Al Murray on al.murray928@mod.gov.uk or by phone on either 07985 732763 or 02392 573076.

Reunions

HMS Mohawk Association: Reunion takes place at the Kegworth Hotel, Packington Hill, Kegworth, from November 1 to 4. For details call IOW Tours on 01983 405116 or email Bob Proud rob.proud@mypostoffice.co.uk

HMS Relentless Association: The 2019 reunion takes place over the weekend of November 22-25 at the Hotel Royale, Bournemouth. All ex-'Rusty R' members 1942-1968 welcome. Contact Secretary@hmsrelentless.co.uk (Tel: 02392 599640), or to book direct with SF EVENTS email hmsrelentlessreunion@

sarahfletcherrevents.co.uk (Tel: 01452 813173)

HMS Cheviot: Reunion in Torquay for three nights, starting March 5 2020. For details contact Victor Denham at vic742008@hotmail.co.uk or phone 0794995503.

Loch Class Frigates Association: Our annual reunion takes place at the Cardiff North Hotel, Cardiff, on April 17-20 2020. Membership is open to all who served on any of the Loch-class ships or their variants (Bay class, Admirals yachts, survey ships and repair ships. For more details contact

honorary secretary Andrew Nunn at Andrew.nunn@blueyonder.co.uk or call 0117 9505835

HMS Ganges Association: Our annual reunion will be held April 17-20 2020 at the Warners Gunton Hall Holiday Village near Lowestoft. Open to all those who served at HMS Ganges, wives & partners also welcome. For booking details contact tony.wilders@btinternet.com tel:07787106202 Or Isle of Wight Tours on (01983) 405116.

HMS Cadiz, Saintes and Wizard: A shared reunion takes place from

Friday May 8 to Monday May 11 2020 at the Novotel Hotel in Nottingham. All three ships' associations will hold their own annual meetings and share all other activities. For details contact Isle of Wight Tours Ltd at 3 New Road, Lake, Sandown, Isle of Wight PO36 9IN. Tel 01252 405116, fax 01983 405504, email enquiries@iowtours.com or contact HMS Saintes Secretary Fred. Terry1@ntlworld.com, call 01252 625974.

HMS Broadsword Association: Biannual reunion and AGM takes place at the Best Western Royal Beach Hotel, Southsea, on Saturday May 23, 2020. The reunion is open to anyone who has served on Broadsword. For details visit hmsbroadswordassociation.co.uk or contact Bill Skilliter wistheplumber@yahoo.co.uk

1710 Naval Air Squadron 10th Anniversary Dinner: For all serving/ex serving squadron members takes place at the WO, SRs & SNCOs mess in HMS Sultan on Friday June 5 2020. For information please contact Elaine Rogers at Elaine.Rogers683@mod.gov.uk or phone on 02392 722758.

HMS Isis, D-87 'That which Remains' 1936 to 1944. My father was an Army Officer attached to HMS Isis as BLO and was a survivor of her sinking on July 20 1944. I am seeking contact with former crew, survivors, families and or descendants. My hope is to join for acts of remembrance in coming years. Please contact: Angus Beaton 07966166981 or angusbeaton@me.com

BRNC Entry Sept 1980 40th anniversary reunion dinner, BRNC Dartmouth, Saturday October 31 2020. Details from Cdr N J 'Nobby' Hall, neil.hall324@mod.gov.uk.

Ask Jack

CPO John Terrett. We are trying to trace my sister's brother-in-law. He served in HMS Ark Royal in either the 1970s, 80s or 90s. He was born in Middlesbrough and had a brother, Norman, and mother Milly.

Alison and Nigel Bryden Invermill@talk21.com

Michael Frampton. My brother-in-law boxed extensively for the navy during his service in the 60s and was awarded his colours. He would love to get a Imperial Services/Combined Services cloth badge to sew on to his sweatshirt. He is now 75 and I would love to obtain one for him.

Joe Joryeff joryeffj@gmail.com

CPSA Jim Asher. I am trying to contact a former shipmate with whom I served in HMS Cardiff during the Falklands conflict. I served as a CHMEM at the time.

Terry Edson Sallyann.edson@tiscali.co.uk

£50 PRIZE PUZZLE



THE mystery boat in the September edition of *Navy News* (right) was HMS Sceptre, who travelled to the Falkland Islands for her final deployment.

Mr FP Peplow, of Preston, wins £50 for sending us the correct answers.

This month's mystery ship is a Landing Ship Tank originally just numbered, which served in the 1940s. She was then renamed after a famous WW2 battle.

1) What was her name? and 2) which country was she scrapped in?

Complete the coupon and send it to Mystery Picture, Navy News, Navy Command, Leach Building, HMS Excellent, Portsmouth PO2 8BY. Coupons giving the correct answers will go into a prize draw to establish a winner.



Entries must be received by December 5. More than one entry can be submitted but photocopies cannot be accepted. Do not include anything else in your envelope: no correspondence can be entered into and no entry returned.

The winner will be announced in our January edition.

The competition is not open to Navy News employees or their families.

MYSTERY PICTURE 297

Name

Address

My answers: (1)

(2)

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- Please send in reunions at least two months (preferably three) before the month of the event. There may be a delay before items appear, due to the volume of requests.

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Submissions for the Deaths, Reunions and Swap Draft columns in December's Noticeboard must be received by

NOVEMBER 14, 2019



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Stone me, this fast-track lark is really tough going

MIDSHIPMAN Thomas Brock from HMS Eaglet takes part in the assault course at Commando Training Centre as part of the Royal Naval Reserve's Accelerated Officer Programme.

He was one of 11 who have joined the Fleet as Midshipmen after the latest course in which 12-18-months of training is condensed into eight weeks.

The course consists of militarisation – a basic introduction into military life including fitness, field-craft, map-reading and survival techniques to training in leadership, weapons, ceremonial

and first-aid. Militarisation culminates in a three-day basic skills package and navigation exercise on Dartmoor, followed by a three-day assessed practical leadership exercise at BRNC.

Four weeks of marination follows, allowing the OCs to apply what they had learned during militarisation to the maritime environment.

This year, the OCs joined HMS Forth for their two-week initial sea acquaint, during which the students learned about ship routines and procedures, watch-keeping, weapons handling, firefighting and assisting in the galley.

Returning to land, the students went to the Defence College of Policing and Guarding, Southwick Park near Portsmouth, for academic study and a medical exercise on HMS Bristol.

The final week of AOP saw the OCs visit Commando Training Centre Royal Marines for a two-day acquaint, completing both the Bottom Field Assault Course and Endurance Course.

The successful group passed out at BRNC in front of their families and friends, with Commander Maritime Reserves, Cdre Martin Quinn, taking the salute.

RNBT to build new home for veterans

RNBT, the largest naval benevolence charity, is in advanced discussions with the aim of building a new 66-bed care and nursing home in Portsmouth.

The trust already runs a Care Home in Gillingham, Kent, but has concluded that the needs of naval veterans and spouses in the Portsmouth area mean that a naval care home should be built here.

The new home will include facilities to support those living with dementia.

Following an extensive review of available sites, the trustees have decided to enter into a partnership with a national developer who has already bought a site in Portsmouth.

The detailed proposal has now been presented as a formal planning application to Portsmouth City Council.

The chosen site is a plot of land which forms part of the St James' Hospital site in Milton, Portsmouth, which is earmarked for development.

The new home will be a purpose-built three-storey building to a proven design, featuring a lounge and dining room on each floor, a coffee shop, hair salon, library, garden room and cinema, surrounded by landscaped gardens.

A fundraising target of £5m has been set, and a number of military charities and organisations have been approached.

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BOOK

SONS of Tubal-Cain A History of Artificers in the Royal Navy 1868-2010 by John North.

Available from Troubador Publishing
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Army duo join RN

THEY have more than 25 years engineering experience between them but for two former soldiers, joining a Royal Navy ship has been a "baptism of fire".

Ex-Army electronics engineers Ryan Bramley and Ben Fawcett swapped working on tanks to working on a Type 23 frigate.

With the change of service has come some challenges from learning Jackspeak (Royal Navy slang) and the Royal Navy salute, to finding their way around a ship.

The pair wanted more stability for their families and so, after seeing a recruitment campaign to fill a shortage of navy engineers, they transferred from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers to become Petty Officers on board HMS Lancaster.

PO Bramley spent 15 years in the Army but was excited for a new challenge.

He said: "Transferring into the Royal Navy was like transferring into the unknown, like going into a new job, it's been exciting."

"But the main reason to move was stability for my family. All my posts in the Army have been less than two years and I have to keep pulling my kids in and out of different schools and moving house."

PO Bramley made the transfer in 2016 and after he completed his professional courses, he attained an engineering degree and the rank of Petty Officer; the icing on the cake was winning



● PO Ben Fawcett and PO Ryan Bramley are ex-Army engineers now serving on HMS Lancaster

Picture: LPhot Barry Wheeler

the award for achieving the top student. It was presented to him by HRH The Princess Royal.

His job on board HMS Lancaster, known as the Queen's frigate as Her Majesty the Queen is the sponsor, is maintaining the ship's sonar.

He added: "The main challenge of moving services has been getting to grips with naval knowledge."

"I've come across with 15 years of experience in the Army so I've got the leadership, management

and engineering experience.

"All the principles are the same and I've got plenty of experience, but its learning a new platform. It has been a steep learning curve for us."

"I don't even know if I will be sea sick yet as I've never been to sea."

"The language,

Jackspeak, has been quite difficult to get around – we've had to learn it quick and it's been hard to get used to. There have been a few funny instances with the language."

PO Fawcett served 11 years in the Army and admitted it had been a massive learning curve, describing on board HMS Lancaster as a "completely different life". His job on board is the satellite communications maintainer.

"You are living and working on the ship. We've had a baptism of fire, literally by learning about fire-fighting and flood procedures on board," he said.

"It's been a great experience transferring into the Royal Navy, I've got qualifications now too I can move on and progress up the career ladder."

HMS Lancaster has been undergoing an extensive upkeep period and is scheduled to sail back to her home port of Portsmouth at the end of the year.

The ship's company successfully moved back on board in August and the focus now is to get her ready to sail from Devonport and complete a period of trials prior to re-joining the fleet next year.

PO Fawcett said he was looking forward to going to sea for the first time.

He added: "I'm 100 per cent looking forward to my first deployment, I will make the most of it. I love being on board, everything is within 20 metres, the lads here on board are highly motivated and morale is high."

"I was quite naive about the navy. There are so many different things to learn about."

"For example, the navy has Divisions every Friday morning – and the salute is different. I accidentally threw up an Army salute – I had a hard time living that one down."

During her upkeep, HMS Lancaster has received upgrades to her main surveillance radar, receiving the new-generation Sea Ceptor missile system.

The structural integrity of the hull has been strengthened with the installation of 200 new steel inserts.



Transferring into the Royal Navy was like transferring into the unknown, like going into a new job, it's been exciting.

Attention to detail

Slim volumes pack a punch

THE GROVE REVIEW

NORMAN Friedman has a unique reputation as a historian of warships, both of his own United States Navy and of the Royal Navy.

Uniquely he combines intensive archival research with technical understanding to trace the way ship design and delivery reflected policy decisions and technological dynamics, writes Prof Eric Grove.

Now he has turned his attention to British submarines with a two-volume study the first of which, *British Submarines In Two World Wars* (ISBN 978-15267-3816-5) has recently been published by Seaforth of Barnsley.

The approach is typical Friedman with detailed discussion of policy meetings; one finds out which official wanted what and when. The detail can sometimes be overwhelming but it does mean that it is now easier than it used to be to come to an informed conclusion on British submarine policy in this period, given the almost verbatim recording of documents.

The book begins with an overview of "The Royal Navy and the Submarine, 1901-1945".

He demonstrates that far from being against submarines, was by 1914 the Royal Navy was "the world's leading submarine operator. It was extremely innovative".

He goes on to explain how submarines were made to work and the nature of the first RN submarine classes of small coastal boats growing to the larger

diesel-powered "D" class that led to later successful design of "larger overseas" submarine.

The author then covers the wrangling over contracts when the Admiralty set out to break Vickers' monopoly of submarine design and development. He might have mentioned the interplay of this controversy with the fate of the first RN rigid airship, abandoned after initial problems to prevent a new Vickers monopoly.

The next chapter covers the development of the "E" class the classic overseas submarine of World War 1.

This is followed by another on the rather unsuccessful submarines built using the much vaunted foreign designs.

The next chapter on "The Ocean Submarine" is particularly important as it analyses the much-maligned "K" class steam submarines.

Interestingly, the paper trail on these boats is rather thin but it is clear that, at the request of the Grand Fleet, a steam-powered submarine was developed, fitted with an auxiliary diesel electric system to give greater flexibility on surfacing and diving and greater endurance.

Friedman, rightly, defends these much-maligned boats. He explains that the infamous "Battle of May Island" in which two boats were lost in collision was caused by the very innovative nature of the new fleet assets: "It was not that the idea of direct support by submarines was disproven but rather that a great deal had to be done to make it work."

The boats were indeed challenging to operate given their great length and the "potential for mischief in all the engine room openings".

Nevertheless the "Ks" fulfilled an



● The World War One submarine HMS H5

important fleet function in preventing an unopposed withdrawal by the High Sea Fleet. The post-war Admiralty Technical History of submarines praised the design, which was able to overtake capital ships hove to in a North Sea gale.

Indeed the boats were "undoubtedly better than their designers expected". They generally performed well on exercises. The study concluded that "the Ks demonstrated that we could confidently produce a successful boat of any size and specification asked for".

Beatty asked for more in 1918 as the boats' advantages "could not be oversimulated".

Six more were ordered of an incrementally improved design; so much for the idea of abject failure.

The author could have supported his account further with a in article in the 1919 *Naval Review* extolling the virtues of the class.

Its author argued that the fundamental reason for the unpopularity of the class was the need for submariners to smarten themselves up for operations with the Grand Fleet.

Another controversial class covered are the three monitor submarines of the "M" class armed with old 12-in guns.

Although they were very different it seems they were indeed originally referred to as "Special K" class with the designations K18-21 altered to M1-4 in April 1918.

Perhaps more could have been made of the fundamental rationale of these boats to use shells rather than slower torpedoes, to solve fire-control issues (Max Horton was an enthusiast for this), although land attack does seem to have been more of a role than I had previously thought.

The book continues with a very comprehensive account of inter-war and World War Two submarine design, development and performance.

Attention is paid to such details as periscopes. The level of illustration in its 432 large format pages is quite remarkable with photographs, and diagrams both in black and white and colour.

No-one can understand British submarine design and development in the period without reading this landmark book. It is excellent value at the RRP of £50, but significant savings can be made on the internet. One cannot wait for the promised volume two bringing the story up to date.

OSPREY have carved a niche in the military history market for beautifully-illustrated slim guides on battles, actions, units and machines of war through the ages, compiled by experts for a general reader.

The 344th entry in their Campaign series *Java Sea 1942* (£14.99 ISBN 978-1-4728-3161-3) by retired US naval commander Mark Stille covers the first major naval encounter of the Pacific War.

In the UK, the Java Sea is largely viewed through the prism of the loss of cruiser HMS Exeter. She was, in fact, one of 32 vessels involved in the battle, or rather series of battles, in the namesake sea.

Neither side covered itself in glory, but the Allies came away with the bloodiest nose, dogged by inaccurate gunnery, unreliable torpedoes, difficult comms and poor leadership.

The Japanese had their shortcomings, too, but triumphed due to superior numbers, better ships and crews used to winning. A

Angus Konstam focuses on the Silent Service's legendary X-craft raids on Hitler's flagship in 1943 in *Tirpitz in Norway* (£13.99, ISBN 978-1-4728-3585-7).

Konstam is particularly impressed by the raid - Operation Source, immortalised on celluloid as *Above Us The Waves* - for what it achieved (knocking the Tirpitz out of action through the winter of 1943-44) through the skill and bravery of the X-craft crews operating machines plagued by problems; had they been better, the damage to the German ship would have been far greater.

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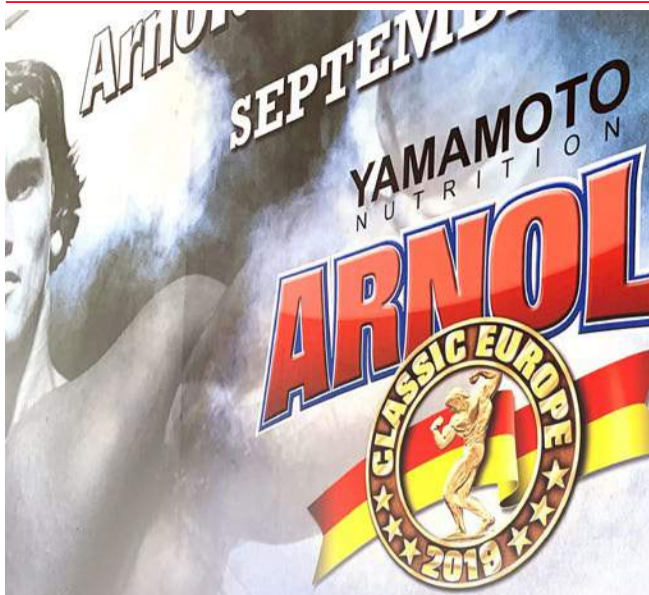
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This official calendar makes the ideal Christmas gift, order now to beat the Christmas rush whilst stocks last.



LEADING Chef (SM) Wesley McGuinness competed at the Arnold Classic Europe Bench Press Championships in Barcelona.

He was invited to compete after his podium finish at the British Powerlifting National Bench Press Championships back in February.

"I felt extremely proud to be the first person throughout the Armed Forces to be selected for this event and to represent the Royal Navy and Silent Service at the highest level of Powerlifting in the UK."

CPO (SM) Paul Foran, pictured, has mentored and supported Wesley throughout his training since he began powerlifting six years ago.

"There is a tremendous amount of preparation that goes on behind the curtains."

Wesley opened up with a first attempt of 162.5kg, then second attempt was 170kg. His final attempt was a successful lift of 175kg with a 7.5kg personal best.



RN off to flyer in historic game

THE inaugural wheelchair rugby league Inter-Service contest was held at the start of this year's championships.

Five matches were played at HMS Nelson, HMS Temeraire and United Services Ground in Burnaby Road, Portsmouth.

All three services provided wheelchair teams to compete in a highly-charged, exciting and sometimes ferocious sport which is rapidly gaining popularity across all levels of the sport.

With a vastly more experienced side the Army took the competition with wins over the RN and RAF, however, the RN secured their first win in the sport, beating RAF 16-4.

A huge amount of work went into providing the venue and qualified officials for this new venture which was co-ordinated by CPO(PT) Steve Lockton with support and sponsorship from the Royal British Legion, Soldiers League and i-Pro Sports Hydration.

Next up was the veterans' fixture and in the first fixture since 2009 the latest RN Veterans' side took the game with a late converted try by 22-16.

Unfortunately, that was to be as good as it got results wise as the Army took the three later matches to put them in a series winning position.

The RN women, the Wrenegades once again put up a huge performance against an Army side which contained several professional players at both League and Union but could not break the Army defence to register a score.

The Academy fixture was by no means all one sided but once again the soldiers took the game.

Despite shipping 26 points in the first half the inexperienced Academy side fought their corner against a huge Army side and only conceded 14 points in the second half but could not get more points on the board themselves.

The final game of the day was the seniors' fixture which proved to be a classic, despite the score being tied 2-2 at half-time.

A speculative kick into the Army red zone was picked up by winger Matamosi, who somehow beat the RN defence to race the length of the field.

This spurred the Army on and, despite a well-taken try by ET(SM) Danny Johnson converted by RM Lennox Green, the soldiers ran out 8-24 winners.

The third round of the series saw the action move to Featherstone in West Yorkshire when the RAF hosted the RN.

The Academy were up first and a close first half saw the RAF go in 6-18 ahead in a fairly even contest.

The RN's second-half performance was hampered by three game-ending injuries to experienced players which as well as stripping the bench of replacements disrupted the team on the pitch.

A further two converted tries kept the RN in sight of the RAF but the final quarter saw the flyers ease out to an 18-36 victory avenging last year's loss to the RN.

Probably the most exciting match of the day was the women's fixture, with both teams having suffered heavy defeats to the Army there was a lot of pride at stake on the day.

CPO Matt Bown's side looked a lot sharper and more cohesive after the Army game and matched the RAF in all areas of the game.

The RAF did take the lead early on with an unconverted try but the RN were up for the fight and although not getting a score themselves it



remained only 0-4 at half time.

After the break the Wrenegades came out fighting and took the game to the RAF with the pressure finally telling, AB Sian McLaughlin forcing a way through the RAF defence under the posts giving PO Sam Alderson a straightforward conversion to make it 6-4.

The RAF did respond with a converted try of their own to ease ahead 6-10.

This set up a fantastic finale and once again the RN were on the hunt for points, the crucial score came from veteran PO Sarah Jenkins who took on and beat the defence to tie the scores at 10-10. The match remained tied at full time and we were into golden point, however, despite a massive effort on both sides the game could not be settled and after a nasty collision leading to more medical treatment the game was brought to a halt.

The senior's game was preceded by a minute's applause in memory of RAF player Scott Stevenson, who tragically passed away following a head injury the previous week.

The RAF started much the stronger and were ahead after barely two minutes, SAC Sam Breeze

opening the scoring for his side.

RN skipper PO Ben Taylor marshalled his sided and had them back on the front foot for much of the half and with the RAF down to 12 men the RN took their chances.

AB Robbie Maclean scored on his full RN Seniors debut. It remained 4-6 at the break with the game in the balance.

The RAF went further ahead ten minutes into the second half but the RN were still in contention. However, the next RAF score was the killer punch.

A kick through was missed by everybody but the RN were adjudged to have held the RAF back so a penalty try was awarded taking the score out to 4-18.

Another RAF try made it 4-22 with 20 minutes to go. Not impossible but perhaps the memory of Scott Stevenson gave the RAF that bit extra in the final 20 and the RN were unable to get back on terms so it was 4-22 to the RAF.

Report: Keith Humpleby
Pictures: Richard Beattie, SBS Photography

Spartans take to the streets of the homeland

THAT'S one way of preparing for Navy life.

Chris Smalley is this month attending the Spartan World Championships in Sparta, Greece.

He is aiming to raise funds for Combat Stress.

The ex-Army man is currently undergoing his Petty Officer Engineering Course in preparation for university next year and then Dartmouth in 2021 for his commission.

A Spartan Trifecta is earned by completing three different Spartan obstacle courses – either three miles or eight miles, plus a 13-miler or a 30-mile ultra race – in one year.

Only those 2,000 Spartans who have earned the right to compete in Greece will race before the statue of King Leonidas, past the tomb of Menelaus, through the waters of Eurotas and find glory in the ancient homeland of the Spartans.

"I'll be smiling like a Cheshire cat when I land in Athens," said Chris. "I am proud to have achieved what I have done so far this year but to get to Sparta is just amazing."

We'll have a report on how Chris got on in next month's *Navy News*.



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Toughest of tests

Action-packed three-day experience strengthens skills



FIFTY Royal Navy Reservists from ten RNR units across the UK participated in a National RNR Sailing Exercise in the Solent. They sailed ten yachts from the Joint Services Adventurous Sail Training Centre – JSASTC – in Gosport.

The aim of the SAILEX was to strengthen marinisation training within the RNR, particularly for junior officers and junior rates.

This has become particularly relevant as the RNR will be playing an increasingly significant role in crewing OPVs in UK waters.

An action-packed programme included: navigational training, boat handling, man overboard drills, sailing skills, sea awareness, team building, rule of the road, VHF communications, unit cohesion and the development challenge that sailing on the sea offers.

The weather conditions were varied with up to Force 5, providing stretch to the participants.

AB Karl Stephenson, from HMS Ceres in Leeds, said: "Ahead of the SAILEX I was hoping to gain extra seamanship skills and sea sense which is especially relevant for me being in the WarSea reservist branch.

"And in going on this three-day exercise I got bucket loads of this!

"Being part of the crew taking a 34ft yacht over to the Isle of Wight gave me a great experience living in confined spaces with a crew, basic seamanship and the rules of sailing."

Both junior officers and ratings were exposed to many seamanship challenges for the first time.

OC Jack Cooper, who has been a member of HMS President for just under a year, said: "I had a fantastic few days out on the SAILEX.

"It was a great opportunity to get together with the wider RNR and get taken out of my comfort zone.

"As someone who has never crewed a yacht, the opportunity to work as a team, in a situation where your success and safety rely on good communication and pulling together to achieve a task – it was very rewarding. With my upcoming confirmation course at BRNC only a few weeks away, being able to test my leadership in a stressful but controlled new environment was invaluable."

Captain Mel Robinson, DACOS (Reserves), came to JSASTC to witness preparations for sea at the start of the exercise. She addressed the participants, emphasising the importance of maritime skills, making training fun and of leadership.

Lt Cdr Simon Cook RNR, from HMS Wildfire, who initiated and led the exercise was pleased with the result:

"79% of people gave a five out of five when asked if they would recommend it to a colleague.

"It was excellent to witness so many reservists at sea, all stretching themselves in maritime skills.

"It has been a team effort to make this happen and I am grateful for Captain Robinson's support for the exercise, to JSASTC for providing such excellent training platforms and staff and to my assistant Sub Lt Jessie Tucker RNR for all of her hard work."

Report: Sub Lt Sarah Houghton, HMS President





• Sir Jock Slater with the Illustrious bell at the Oval

New lease of life for Lusty's bell

THE distinctive 'clang' of the bell of one of Britain's greatest warships will sound again – now at one of Britain's greatest sporting venues.

Ring the bell from carrier HMS Illustrious will signal the imminent start of play at 10.55 on each day of a test at The Oval – home of Surrey County Cricket Club and typically the venue for the final match in a series.

Lusty retired in 2014 after 32 years' service around the globe and the ship was sent to the breaker's yard two years later.

Historically-important artefacts – as well as useful/secret military technology – were removed from the Harrier carrier before she was towed to Turkey for breaking up, including her two bells.

One is held by the National Museum of the Royal Navy so that it is always available for display if required; the second went to the Royal Navy's trophy store in HMS Nelson.

And there it may have stayed, but for former Second Sea Lord Jonathan Woodcock who suggested a ship's bell might be used to sound the 'five-

minute warning', heralding the imminent start of play at the Kennington ground – mirroring a similar tradition at Lord's introduced a dozen years ago.

The trophy store possesses a fine collection of bells from decommissioned ships, but eyes fell on Illustrious given her status as a former flagship and her affiliations with London (not just the city, but also the City of London Corporation, Met Police, Worshipful Company of Shipwrights and the like).

So the carrier's bell has been loaned to ground, whose staff have decided that a former officer from the ship should ring it on the first day of each test for years to come.

The first former officer invited to sound it was Admiral Sir Jock Slater, Illustrious' first Commanding Officer, who rang the clapper ahead of the start of the fifth Ashes test last month to inaugurate the new 'curtain-raiser' to Oval tests.

Originally used for timekeeping, especially on watch, in recent times the bell has assumed much more of a ceremonial role on modern warships.



Runners tame the Tarka

A SELECTION of the RN's top endurance athletes took on the Barnstaple full and half marathons.

The conditions on the day certainly made for interesting racing with light rain showers and high winds with both races following the Tarka Trail and the marathon distance running around RMB Chivenor as well.

A few runners from RMB Chivenor, which included their Commanding Officer Lt Col Aldey Alderson, ran with full webbing and rifle.

The first marine across the line in the marathon was Mne Ben Clough in three hours five minutes.

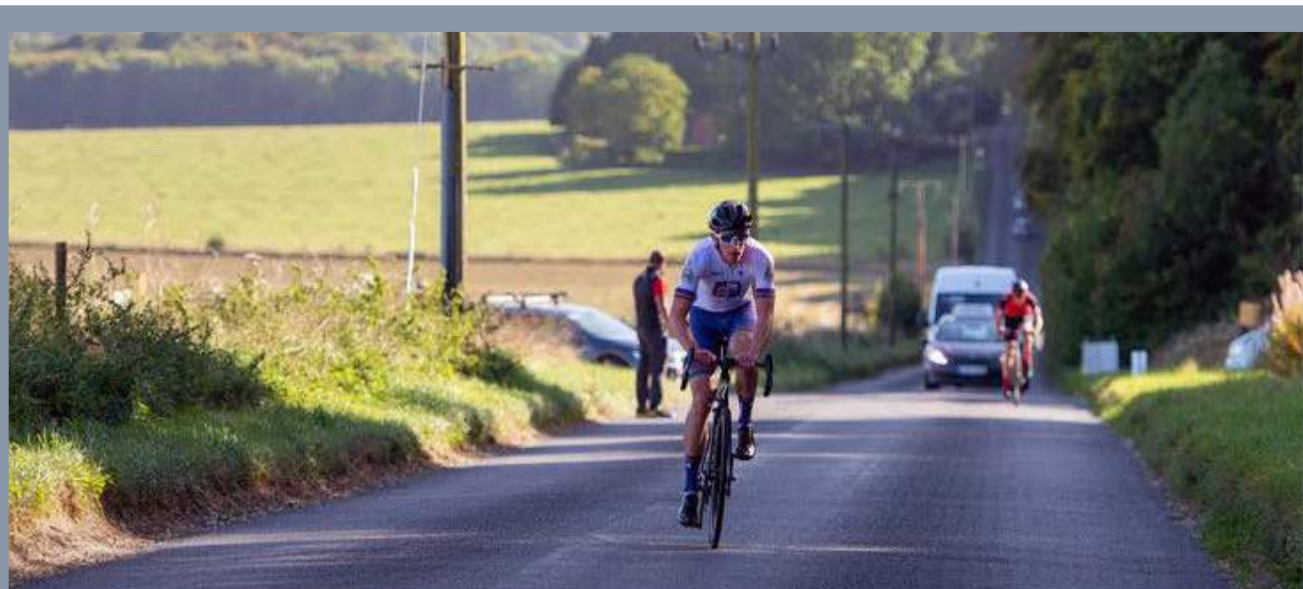
The rest of the contingent competed over the half marathon with great success.

Cpl Adam Stokes won the race in 1:12:11, POAET Bryn Phillips also made the podium in third in 1:15:09, Lt Cdr Scott Jamieson claimed 1st Male Vet Over 40 and the team's only female, Lt Fleur Peoples, also claimed a podium position as third overall female.

The RN Athletics Association are constantly looking for new members regardless of ability.

We would like to hear from anyone who would like to compete for us, we cover all disciplines from cross country to road and 5k to ultra-marathons.

If you would like more information then contact PO Bryn Phillips RN Athletics Association Communications Officer, bryn.phillips485@mod.gov.uk.



Tooley takes road honours

ROYAL Marines Corporal Adam Toole powered his way to victory over his nearest Army rival in the Inter-Service Road Race Championship.

The RNRMR team were pinning their hopes on Cpl Toole or fellow Cpl Aled Jones securing a win at Upavon in Wiltshire.

"After suffering a 'mechanical' in the ISRR Criterium Championship, I was more determined than ever to get a decent result in the ISRR Road Race Championships," said Cpl Toole.

"The weather for the race was good and the wind had significantly dropped from the recce we did the day before.

"As we rolled out for my third ISRR I had good legs and form leading up to the race, so was confident in my ability to take the race on from the front.

"The RAF led it up the first climb setting a decent tempo. I attacked over the top taking two Army and one RAF rider with me.

"We worked well together and established a gap of 1min 20 seconds on the peloton.

"Co-operation soon started to break down with the RAF and one of the Army riders refusing to take their pull on the front; this led to me attacking up the hill with 20 miles remaining and dropping the RAF rider and the Army rider.

"Me and Cpl Webb (Army RR champion) then came to an agreement to have any chance of staying away we needed to work together and that is what we did, until with four miles to go I made my move and attacked on a short steep hill and managed to create a small gap.

"With Webb unable to get back into my slipstream I kept the power down and got as aero as possible, fighting against the headwind.

"As I turned left and into the final

kilometre, I knew I had enough of a gap to enjoy the final 500m.

"I crossed the line 20 plus seconds ahead of the chasing Army rider. All in all, it was a brilliant race on a challenging course and I was delighted to take the win.

"The win was made even more sweeter by the lads working hard in the rear and bringing home the team prize.

"Massive thanks to the RNRMCA for their continued investment and support to the race team, as without all the hard work from those behind the scenes this win wouldn't have been possible."

Sgt Rob Lewis RM, the RNRMCA road race secretary, said: "In the peloton behind our job was to mark all attempts to chase down the breakaway and then frustrate their pursuit.

"Every man contributed to this which was a cracking piece of teamwork; this involved a lot of yelled communication, whilst hovering between threshold and anaerobic effort and having eyes on stalks to sense every move; a bit like chess on wheels, but all whilst anaerobic.

"Lt Stephen Swindley's keen eye for race-craft was decisive for managing which

The victorious team

- Cpl Adam Toole RM
- Cpl Aled Jones RM
- Sgt Rob Lewis RM
- Lt Stephen Swindley RN
- Cdr Gavin MacDougall RN
- C/Sgt Alistair Stubbs RM
- C/Sgt Will Page RM
- Cpl Chris Howarth RM
- Lt John Sawers RN
- Cpl Dan Lyness RM
- CPO Tam Fraser RN
- CPO Ben Dixon RN

counter moves to mark.

"Our main effort was to ride for the individual win, but to also come away with the Team Trophy is mind blowing, and is testament to the fact that all the guys battled for every position right to the line.

"The current trophy dates back ten years, and until now, every years' inscription is 'Army'.

"In fact there hasn't been an RNRM win in serving memory. The fact that we did this on the Army's doorstep (near Salisbury) is pretty sweet.

"Next year we will organise the Inter Services; it would be pretty class if we could hatch together a team strong enough to retain the trophy.

"Any aspiring road racers (or ex pro ringers who we know are out there) who want to start racing or get back competing, the first step is to join the club and get in touch."

Fellow rider Lt Swindley added: "The 2019 ISRR course was well selected; hard enough to require strength in depth, but fast enough to be tactical.

"Aggression is the key to success on such a course and every move had an RN jersey involved.

"Once a break had established including Tooley, one of our principal riders, teamwork in the bunch was the key to the break staying away and dissuading any Army or RAF efforts to put more riders up the road.

"Although not physically on form, eight years of road racing meant I knew how to control a bunch and frustrate the opposing teams; chasing down certain riders, letting the wheel go on others.

"In this respect the whole team worked seamlessly and were rewarded, taking the individual and team championships."

Report: Sgt Rob Lewis RM





We won't carp on but we won again

● Lt Cdr Lee Rigby and PO Callum Watkins are joined by Tibetan Terrier Caesar as they show off their catch



NAVY anglers retained the Inter-Service Carp Championship title.

The Royal Navy Royal Marines Angling Association were hosts at this year's event held at an 11-acre lake at Orchard Place Farm in Kent.

The farm has previously hosted the civilian UK Carp Fishing Championships.

The evening before the competition commenced comprised of team tactics and all competitors coming together for a pre-match barbecue, ably prepared by PO Adam Ariss.

The following morning as the sun rose over a misty body of water the pressure to retain the trophy for the Royal Navy was palpable.

The three teams were up early eagerly anticipating the competition ahead, the tri-service rivalries were as fierce as ever, albeit well natured.

The competition would be fished over 48 hours with each service having an eight-man team broken down into four pairs, each pair would fish in one of four separate sections.

The all-important draw was made by the team captains; The RAF came out first (to nobody's surprise!) and selected their preferred section.

The Royal Navy captain Lt Cdr Lee Rigby selected next and the Army were left with the remaining section.

The competition started well for the RNRMAA team with good leads established in two of the four sections, our third section had their noses in front, but it was a close-run thing.

Our fourth section were struggling in the toughest area of the lake to bag a fish, their primary goal was to land a fish however small to

avoid a 'did not weigh penalty'.

By the end of the first 24 hours the competition was in RN hands but the RAF and Army were now getting amongst some good fish.

The Army were opening up a commanding lead in the fourth section and our lead in one and two sections were being pegged back.

The third section remained on a knife edge and looked like it would prove crucial come the end.

The team as a whole breathed a sigh of relief when news came through that four section had netted a small but very welcome carp, therefore avoiding the 'did not weigh penalty' that could have cost the team dearly.

The competition finished with two section wins, a second place and a third leaving the RNRMAA team as 2019 Inter-Services Champions for the second year running.

The team also registered the overall winning pair – WO1 Lee Horner and PO Phil Jakes.

The pair also registered the biggest fish meaning another clean sweep of trophies for the RNRMAA in this year's Inter Services.

The eight-strong team also featured PO Callum Watkins, LH Nick Flynn, AB Jason Hill and WO2 Martin Ash. They were supported by Sgt Oli Taylor and AB Ben Patterson.

For information on angling in the RN and how you can be involved please visit RNRMAA.com.

Report: WO2 Martin Ash RM

● Pictured top from left, WO1 Lee Horner with PO Phil Jakes; The RNRMAA team; PO Jakes during the night session

Surf, wildlife and recycling all on agenda in South Africa for

Wave rulers

LANCE Corporal Rhys Morris, of Commando Logistic Regiment, swapped the wilds of Barnstable in Devon for the wild seas off South Africa.

He was one of a dozen lucky members of the Royal Navy Royal Marines Surfing Association chosen to enhance their surfing skills at the world-renowned location of Jeffreys Bay – J Bay as its known -

After almost 48 hours of travelling, including a stop-over in Cape Town, the waves that awaited the team, suited all members of the group and it provided an outstanding opportunity for the surfers to prepare for the subsequent Royal Navy/Royal Marines Surfing Championship in Cornwall and then the Inter-Service Championships early next year.

The group was formed from a mixture of RN/RM surfers, male and females, short boarders and long boarders with a wide range of abilities and styles.

Daily activity included dawn patrols where the team checked the waves prior to first light in order to make the most of the conditions.

These early starts were frequently followed by at least another one (or two) additional surfs during the day when the swell was particularly pumping.

The conditions ranged considerably during the surf tour, and at their best were assessed as being in excess of double-overhead; demanding conditions for the best of surfers.

For those who were still building confidence in the water and improving technique, a local beach break known as Kitchen Windows provided an ideal opportunity to hone their skills. Taking away the fear of the rocky, shallow reef conditions it provided a far safer environment and ensured that none of the

team looked like too much of a kook (novice/learner surfer) in front of the J Bay locals.

Professional instructors were sourced and enabled team members to improve at an impressive rate given the constant supply of useable waves. Whether surfing the double overhead, super-fast, shallow and scary waves of supertubes or the more mellow waves at Kitchen Windows, the trip certainly offered something for everyone.

When the waves weren't coming through there were opportunities to explore the fantastic surroundings.

We explored the local area, visiting different beaches including St Francis Bay, Albatross and Paradise Beach.

The team also took the opportunity to visit the amazing game reserve at Addo Elephant Park, experience the thrills of a zip line quarry and explore the extensive surfing retail outlets across the town.

Integrating with the local community, on land and in the water, was an important part of the itinerary and the team dedicated a day to supporting a local charity, the J Bay Recycling Project.

Run by a local group of dedicated volunteers within the local township, the project encourages schoolchildren to gather recyclable materials such as plastic, tin, glass and cardboard. It's then weighed and separated into the correct areas at the local community centre and the children receive tokens according to the volume of waste collected.

It was genuinely humbling to see children as young as three or four years old, dragging huge bags of plastic waste behind them to spend or save their tokens in the local shop.

This enabled them to purchase daily necessities such as toiletries, tinned and fresh food or games, clothing, toys, books and stationery.

It was a joy to see the look on their faces when they left the centre – all of them having also been provided with a sandwich, a piece of fruit and a slice of cake.

All the income generated by the sale of the collected recyclables is then ploughed back into the charity, making a real difference to some of the poorest members of the community.

The charity operates every Monday and since its concept in 2011, the J Bay Recycling Project has attracted an average of 320 children per week, recycling approximately 2.8 tonnes of waste material from the streets of J Bay – a truly remarkable achievement.

With surf conditions deteriorating towards the end of the trip, an early departure for Cape Town enabled the team to experience the bright lights of the big city and undertake some sight-seeing, including viewing the iconic Table Mountain, Robben Island, Signal Hill and a trip to see the penguins at Boulders Bay.

Anybody interested in taking part in the 2021 RNRMSA tour – yet to be organised – will need to be a paid-up member of the association and a member of the RNRMC. Membership Secretary, Commander Rich Carthew, can provide more details.

Report: ET(WE) CIS Jess King

