

RED ROSE

Newsletter for HMS LANCASTER

Issue 04 | October – December 2015



MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDING OFFICER



Writing the foreword to this bumper Red Rose newsletter is a poignant reminder to me of everything we have achieved over the last nine months while deployed on Atlantic Patrol Task (South). It has been a hugely successful period on operations that has seen us sail over 35,000 nautical miles and visit over 18 foreign countries. That may sound enormous fun – which it was – but there was also a serious business to our deployment with LANCASTER ultimately protecting our Nation's interests by supporting a cross Government programme of engagement and influence activities as well as conducting numerous maritime security patrols. In fact, even a cursory scan of this newsletter drives home the sheer magnitude and importance of the tasks undertaken by my supremely professional and proud Ship's Company. You will be delighted to know that they have consistently delivered in splendid style and I could not be more proud of their achievements - I hope you feel the same.

When I took command back in November 2013, I said that team LANCASTER included all our families and affiliates, and I still stand by that. Without your encouragement and stoic support, our task would be insurmountable so I owe you my sincere thanks for always standing by us, especially during the last nine months. I do hope that you can join us for our homecoming ceremony on 17 December when we will proudly fly the Duchy of Lancaster Pennant as we enter Portsmouth Dockyard. I am told Santa and the Royal Marines Band will be there as well so it promises to be a truly fitting and memorable family event.

As this year draws to conclusion so does my time in Command and I will be moving on from the 9th February when our current XO (Lt Cdr Jim Thomson) takes over as the Senior Naval Officer. He will be at the helm until LANCASTER is placed into reduced readiness from April 2016 prior to an extensive Refit starting in 2017 which will enhance her with new and cutting edge capabilities.

Well, I have now used up my allocated space so it just leaves me to thank you again for your unstinting support and to wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.



ANGOLA

LANCASTER visited Lobito, Angola from the 4th to the 8th October having sailed from Cape Town at the end of September. The visit was another busy stop for the Ship's Company, which saw numerous events hosted onboard including an evening reception and an official VIP lunch attended by Her Majesty's Ambassador and the Angolan Regional Commander. Additionally over 180 Angolan Military cadets were given the chance to tour the Ship and interact with LANCASTER's crew.



However, it wasn't all hard work as each evening transport took the Ship's Company to the local Restinga region of Lobito where a number of beach bars and restaurants provided a well earned break.

Prior to the Ship sailing, the Angolan Navy extended their hospitality by hosting 60 members of the Ship's Company for an evening reception. This was a fantastic evening with live music and dancers performing a traditional welcome prior to a feast which was very much enjoyed by all!

TRAINING



Lobito was the first visit where LANCASTER's Royal Marine Boarding Team joined forces with a US Marine Corps team to deliver high quality training to foreign militaries.

In Angola, this involved a three day training programme which was delivered to teams from the Angolan Fusiliers and the Angolan Special Operations Squadron. The package included hands-on practical lessons ranging from boarding tactics, close quarter battle techniques, patrolling and medical training.

The US Marine Corps team embarked in LANCASTER continued to work side-by-side with the Royal Marine Boarding Team as LANCASTER continued her deployment up the west coast of Africa.

ENGINEERING CHARITY

The Marine Engineering Department seized the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the local community in Lobito by volunteering to help a local school. They put their engineering expertise to good use as fifteen members of the department descended on the school to fix the dangerous and inadequate electrics and generators.

After a long and extremely hot day, the generators were successfully serviced and lighting had been made safe with additional light switches added to the system. In order to complete the task, six of the team returned to the school the following day to put the finishing touches to a job well done.



ST HELENA

LANCASTER visited St Helena for the bicentenary Napoleonic Celebrations, commemorating the day that Napoleon arrived on the island for his exile 200 years ago. Throughout the visit the Ship's Company took part in events of remembrance and celebration. These included a parade at Napoleon's Tomb as well as proceedings at Longwood House (where Napoleon was under house arrest during his exile). Over 40 people took part in tours of the island visiting the Governor's residence at Plantation House which is the home to Jonathan the 183 year old tortoise, the island's brewery, Napoleon's Tomb and other historic Napoleonic sites. With clear views of the famous Jacob's Ladder steps from LANCASTER's anchorage position, there was no doubt that many would attempt the challenge and climb the steps. The popular local method of sliding down the railings however, was not attempted by even the most ambitious of Ship's Company.



WILDCAT IN ST HELENA

The visit to St Helena was another exceptionally busy stop for the Wildcat Helicopter (callsign "VOODOO") which saw her and the aircrew capture a number of stunning aerial photographs of the island in support of the local community. They also had the privilege of being the first ever rotary-wing aircraft to land at the island's brand new airport, and only the second ever aircraft to land there after the initial test flight. Currently the only way of reaching St Helena is by sea, a journey which takes 5 days. The new airport, due to open in early 2016, will provide the island with a long awaited link to the outside world.



GHANA

On 21st October LANCASTER arrived for her official visit to the port of Tema in Ghana. The aim of this visit was to conduct defence engagement with the Ghanaian Government and continue to improve relations between our armed forces. In order to achieve this, LANCASTER hosted several high profile events onboard, including a Capability Reception and an Official Lunch attended by the Ghanaian Chief of Defence. Additionally, bespoke training sessions were delivered to members of their Navy including damage control, fire fighting and first aid.

Despite the hectic programme, the Ship's Company found time to unwind by playing football, rugby and basketball matches with the Ghanaian Navy, as well as taking a round of golf with the British High Commission Staff.



GHANA CHARITY PROJECT

Republic Road School in Tema, Ghana, is where over 700 children aged between 3 and 16 years old receive their much-coveted education. However, the bright and energetic nature of the staff and children was not reflected in the walls of the school; drab and dull, they were not an inviting call to education. Determined to change that, twenty members of LANCASTER's Ship's Company arrived in coveralls and were greeted by a throng of smiling, excited school children, and a whole lot of handshaking.

In the 30 degree heat old paint was stripped off, and tin upon tin of bright yellow paint was opened ready to give the school a new lease of life. Luckily the Ship's Company received some help. It wasn't long before tiny hands started grabbing sandpaper and paint brushes, gleefully doing their bit for the school. Five hours later, sweating and covered in dust and paint, the job was finished. The walls had been transformed into something more fitting for this amazing school in the heart of one of the poorest places in the world.



BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS



Finding a good excuse for a party, the embarked Royal Marines in LANCASTER held a dinner on board to mark the 351st Birthday of the Corps.

The Captain was invited as the guest of honour along with members of the RM boarding team, the US Marine Corps boarding team, and any members of the Ship's Company who have served with the Royal Marines or have a green beret. The night was a great success worthy of the occasion.

NIGERIA

In the midst of a whistle stop tour of Western Africa, LANCASTER paid a visit to the bustling port city of Lagos in Nigeria, home to some 17 million people. It soon became very clear that almost everything involving any sort of transport was entirely at the mercy of the city's infamous traffic 'system' (or lack thereof). The Ship soon found a way around this; in true Navy fashion, boats proved the only means of successfully getting from A to B!

Throughout a very busy four days the Ship played host and delivered training to a number of Nigerian Navy officers and sailors. This training encompassed a variety of areas ranging from aircraft management and maintenance of diesel generators, to firefighting, repair of the Ship's rigid-hulled inflatable boats, and media training. There was even the opportunity for some of our own sailors to visit the Nigerian Naval Ship (NNS) PROSPERITY to consult on the Nigerian Navy's current operating procedures.

As always, "Royal" was in on the action as they provided yet another excellent package of boarding, searching and close quarters combat training to a group of Nigerian Marines which was once again well received. Finally, the ship conducted a "PASSEX" (Passing Exercise) with NNS PROSPERITY involving a series of synchronised manoeuvres, and even an exercise to practise the boarding and searching of a suspicious vessel.



TOGO

Continuing LANCASTER's West African odyssey, at the beginning of November she made a four day visit to Lome, the capital and only port in Togo.

Over 20 members of the Ship's Company volunteered to take part in another highly successful outreach project, this time at a local orphanage. The team helped with basic maintenance and did some painting and decorating to improve the quality of life for the residents. Additionally a small group travelled across Togo to Wahalla Cemetery to conduct a poignant remembrance service. The cemetery is the location of the only Commonwealth grave in Togo, and the final resting place of the first British officer killed in action during the Great War.

Togo sadly saw us say goodbye to our USMC contingent having worked side-by-side with the Royal Marines over a very productive and successful six week period.



FAREWELL TO RFA GOLD ROVER

LANCASTER and RFA GOLD ROVER parted ways on Sunday 8th November following a final Replenishment at Sea (RAS) and steam past. Prior to this, the two ships had spent the previous five months together after first meeting in the Falkland Islands during the unforgiving South Atlantic winter. Since then, the two ships have sailed to warmer climes, totalling an impressive 16,500 nautical miles. Throughout, RFA GOLD ROVER has provided LANCASTER with valuable stores and fuel and has conducted nine RAS serials equating to a total transfer of half of LANCASTER's own weight in fuel.



SIERRA LEONE



LANCASTER demonstrated its commitment to Sierra Leone with a four-day visit, arriving just days after the West African nation was declared free from Ebola. The visit began with the Captain hosting a dinner on board attended by the President of Sierra Leone, Dr Ernest Bai Koroma, as well as key ministers of the Sierra Leonean Government and British diplomatic staff.



At the United Christian Church School in Freetown, members of LANCASTER's Ship's Company were given an extraordinary welcome by 600 singing pupils expressing their heartfelt gratitude for the help Britain had given combating Ebola earlier this year, and for the work the crew was about to carry out at the school. Over the course of just two days, the Ship's Company worked hard to renovate a new wing of the school which will house orphans of the deadly disease. With the effort of 40 sailors and marines, the concrete walls were transformed into bright and colourful rooms ready to furnish for the children.



Finally, the ship's company marked Remembrance day with a moving ceremony alongside Sierra Leonean veterans from the Burma campaign. The crew from LANCASTER was able to express their respect for those that had given their lives, and for the veterans aged 95 - 110 in the King Tom Military Cemetery. This was a poignant end to a visit which was enjoyed by all who took part, grateful for the opportunity to pay their respects to the fallen and support Sierra Leone in its recovery from the effects of Ebola.

CHARITY WORK

November marked the eight month point for LANCASTER's deployment and gave the Ship's Company further opportunity to raise money for to charity. A 'Pirate Racing Night' on the Flight Deck organised by the WO and CPO's Mess added another £315 to the £1,500 already raised over the deployment for the Ship's charity 'Unique Kidz'. The Morecombe based charity provides a safe and interactive environment for disabled children.

Throughout the month, a number of the Ship's Company have been flaunting the naval rule of 'no moustaches' by taking part in Movember. This has raised £397 for the Prostate Cancer and Lance Armstrong Foundations. Additionally a remembrance poppy collection raised £334.50 for the Royal British Legion. The crowning achievement was the Ship's Auction organised by PO Baz Hearn which raised £3,820 for Unique Kidz and Orchid the male cancer charity. In total, the Ship's Company has raised over £10,000 for charitable causes in the last year.



THE WARFIGHTING EDGE

COUNTER NARCOTICS OPERATIONS

Over an eight day period LANCASTER embarked a Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) from Cape Verde in order to conduct Counter Narcotics (CN) operations in their territorial waters. The LEDET was formed from three different organisations: the Judicial Police, the Maritime Police and the Coast Guard. While on board, LANCASTER's own boarding team conducted training serials with the LEDET.

The pattern-of-life collection and training provided to the LEDET was extremely valuable and well received by all organisations involved. This integration is key to securing Cape Verde's maritime approaches and preventing illicit narcotic trafficking.



WORKING WITH THE FRENCH



The French Falcon-50 Maritime Patrol Aircraft based out of Dakar supported LANCASTER during the last few days of the CN operation in the vicinity of Cape Verde. The jet committed to two sorties of three hours, each covering a huge area that would have taken a full day for LANCASTER and Wildcat to complete alone.



GUNNERY

Despite the busy visit programme over the last few months, LANCASTER still found time to conduct Gunnery training with comprehensive 4.5inch, 30mm and small arms' shoots conducted throughout.

Testing LANCASTER's weapon systems proves accuracy and ensures that we remain ever ready to respond to a call for fire.