

# COMUKMCMFOR Newsletter



Issue 05 | November 2015

## MESSAGE FROM COMUKMCMFOR

We are now officially in the last month of the deployment and I can confirm that our reliefs are scheduled to arrive in Bahrain on Monday 23 November! After handover, the RAF should get us to Brize Norton, Oxfordshire on the evening of Friday 27 November.

While this is obviously very exciting news, we remain focused on our final task. This involves commanding a major US and UK MCM exercise, in which we will have our full mine hunting force at sea. It will be an exceptionally busy period for the staff as we will be disembarking from our home on RFA Cardigan Bay to command from ashore, whilst also preparing for the handover to Mine Warfare Battle Staff 2. Our final month in Bahrain also gives us the opportunity to reflect on and enjoy the last few weeks of our very successful deployment, celebrating Trafalgar Night and Halloween in various different styles.



**Commander Paul Ottewell**

Lt Paul Malcolm has prepared this newsletter and I hope it will give you a feel of what our six months away has involved. I am incredibly proud of this team; not just for how well they have worked but also for the camaraderie displayed every day. It has been a privilege to lead the First Mine Warfare Battle Staff this year; what these 17 men and women have achieved together is truly special.

There will be one more newsletter before our return in which I will set out our finalised travel arrangements. Once again, thank you for your ongoing support to your family members. We could not do this without you.



UK Mine Counter Measures Force

# Winter is coming!

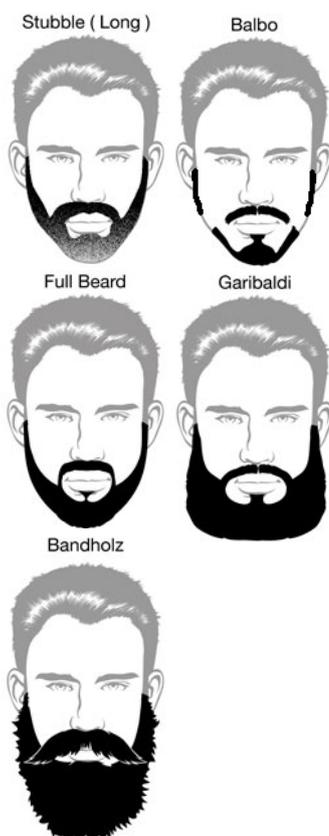
Almost six months ago the 17 members of MWBS1 arrived at Djibouti after a long journey via Istanbul. As we mustered outside the terminal in the 39°C heat, the cool and damp memories of the UK were left far behind us. Despite being safely cocooned in the air conditioned bliss of RFA Cardigan Bay much of the time, there was still 'climate shock'.

This summer we have experienced all sorts of extremes. The lowest point was in Africa at Lac Assal where it was at least 50°C and our weatherman was heard only to mutter "Hot! Damn hot!" We had seas that were only just shy of four meters (12 feet) in the Somali Basin off the Horn of Africa in July and then mist and drizzle off the coast of Oman in August. The UV index has never been lower than 'Extreme' until this month and sunburn remains a self-inflicted injury!



The temperatures have dropped over the last month and we are almost considering a light jumper or other top overnight. Maybe in another month or two? Not for us. We have another 'climate shock' waiting for us. Instead of the hot, dry and dusty environs we have become accustomed to, the cold, wet and windy UK awaits.

It's said that the British always talk about the weather and in our case it is increasingly true. Winter is coming and we are all looking forward to it.



## BEARDS ARE IN

That is to say, beards have always been in the Royal Navy. Unlike the Army and the Royal Air Force, only the RN is allowed to wear beards. The 'full set' has long been a sailor's privilege with the other services confined to mere moustaches.

The Rugby World Cup has been a fine showcase for the beard recently and here at 1MWBS, we have our fair share. We deployed earlier this year fresh faced (almost) after being ordered to "shave off" for our gas mask testing. Since then, such is the appeal of the beard, our three original bearded ones have been joined by another two.

*"Beards and moustaches shall be kept neatly trimmed especially ... at the lower neck and cheekbones."* BR3 – Naval Personnel Management

One individual has wholly committed to the 'deployment beard' and has flatly refused to trim the length of his beard while another has been 'growing out' recently. Both have been on the receiving end of complimentary and not-so-complimentary name calling. Another has elected to trim down a little, perhaps after familial pressure.

Our opinions are divided with regards to the beards. Often there is derision and envy but more frequently there is a feeling that every bloke should grow a beard at some point in his life. When put to the question as to why; there does not seem to be one definitive answer.

The 5 different beards of 1MWBS

# LIFT THE SHIP CHALLENGE

Starting on Wednesday 14 October, 1MWBS started our 'lift the ship' challenge. We aimed to collectively bench press 615 tonnes - the same as a Hunt Class Mine Counter Measures Vessel (HMS CHIDDINGFOLD at the right). Over the course of the following week we met and surpassed our aim, managing to lift a total of 669.7 tonnes.



For those that don't know, or can't remember, a bench press involves lying on your back with a bar and weights held above you, lowered to just above your chest and then raised until your arms are fully extended again.

We completed the challenge ahead of schedule. Everyone is feeling a little tired and perhaps a little sore but we prepared for it and then we smashed our expectations. Not everyone lifted the same weight and there were some significant personal bests (Al Magill lifted 20 tonnes in one day!) as well as some over-achieving (Brian Cashman). A big well done to AB 'Bobby' Ball for organising the entire event.

Thank you all so much for your generosity. The total money raised at the time of writing was an amazing £1140. When GiftAid is added you can see that we, both us out here and you the home team, have raised a total of £1411 which is no small feat.

Our just giving page can be found at <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/COMUKMCMFOR14>



## AIN'T NO MOUNTAIN HIGH ENOUGH

The sky is blue and clouds are scarce. The stark mountains are dark brown, sandstone yellow in places, and rise quickly out of the dusty plains surrounding them. In the valley below, there are patches of green in the cultivated orchards that fringe the villages. From the lowest point in Africa to the mountain peaks of Oman. At least that is how it should have been, had I been able to get there. Jealousy is never attractive.

Earlier in our deployment we spent sixty days conducting Operation Neptune Rihala 2 deployed 'around the corner' in the Gulf of Aden. On the return leg to Bahrain we stopped at Muscat, Oman, to allow us and the rest of the Task Group a chance to unwind a little.

We seized the opportunity to break out into the Omani interior and a pair of RN Adventurous Training Instructors came out from the UK to lend a hand. Three one-day trips were conducted up into the stark beauty of the Omani mountains. Attendance varied across the task group with four from 1MWBS, 14 from HMS BANGOR, six from the RM Force Protection Team, six from the embarked Royal Logistics Corps contingent as well as four from USS GLADIATOR.

Members of the team enjoyed some enthusiastic 4x4 action to get to the jump off position some 1500m above sea level (that's about 4500ft in old money). The hike was in the Jebel Shams locale and provided amazing views from the ridges and summit at 2300m (7600ft) not to mention the chance to stretch legs after confinement onboard for a lengthy period. Temperatures reached over 40°C (105°F) and although the air was thinner, the sky was bluer and everyone agreed it was well worth the effort. Even the bag meals weren't too bad.

Adventurous Training is an important activity for military personnel. It allows us to physically and mentally challenge ourselves in an environment with a controlled exposure to risk. We are all encouraged to participate as often as possible. A day out in the Omani mountains certainly blew the cobwebs away.



## A LITTLE BIT OF WHAT YOU FANCY

It's month five. It goes without saying that we are all aware this is our last month before returning home to our loved ones, friends and not to forget our family pets. We all think of our loved ones and we are lucky to have email access and welfare minutes on the Paradigm satellite phone network to ease the separation.

Sometimes it is hard to keep your mind from wandering home and contemplating the things we miss the most. The things we miss while deployed from home often change as we spend more time away and the little things become bigger with distance and time.

So the question we asked last month was: What are you looking forward to most?

To avoid any embarrassment or inappropriate replies we are going to assume *everyone* responded with Spouse/Partner/Family/Pets in the first instance.

What else do we really look forward to when we get back?

**Can you guess which one is the thing your matelot is looking forward to most?**

1. Going for a nice walk somewhere green in the great outdoors.
2. Seeing green scenery.
3. Sitting on my own settee and watching TV.
4. Sleeping in my own bed.
5. Stocking my own fridge.
6. Preparing and cooking my own food.
7. Watching Formula 1 with the father-in-law.
8. A square sausage sandwich.
9. Playing football.
10. Getting my fingers green in the garden again and seeing the wildlife.
11. Sitting in my own home in my new armchair.
12. Re-establishing my normal seat at the Wine Vaults.
13. Having breakfast at the Southsea Beach Café.
14. Enjoying awesome fresh Italian food at home.
15. The sound of wind and rain outside on the window and a cuppa in my hand.
16. Online gaming with my sons.
17. Walking on a beach with rock pools

## LOSING WEIGHT AND FIGHTING FIT THIS DEPLOYMENT

A lot has been said about the work we have done during the deployment, however, what you may not realise is that members of the team have taken the opportunity to improve their 'lifestyles' in an effort to be 'fit' for home.

Back in the early days the Doc, Surg Lt Sarah Lownes, initiated her Healthy Lifestyle Clinic and we all dutifully turned up at sickbay to be weighed, measured and found wanting. Almost everyone came away with a flea in their ear and the motivation to change shape. Losing weight was NOT the goal; it was to improve fitness and reduce body fat (muscle is denser than fat apparently).

The gym on board is well equipped with cardiovascular (CV) and weight training kit and it is used and abused by 1MWBS members daily. Some have preferred a good bit of CV to knock the edges off their day while others have smashed the weights in. We will NOT discuss the vagaries of musical taste in the gym, however, the German industrial scene is becoming strangely popular!

The staff naturally fell into small groups of likeminded individuals looking to achieve the same kind of results. The true OPERATION-MASSIVE is led by CPO Ashby with PO Newlove, LCIS Tighe and AB Ball all taking the time during their days to get into the gym to improve their fitness, or perhaps just their strength.

Most days, you will find the Command Team (The Boss, Chief of Staff and Operations Officer) out on the upper deck, during the earliest morning hours, conducting some kind of cross-fit lunacy. The two clearance divers, Jason (COS) and Al (Ops) continue to egg each other on with the Boss looking on in despair. After

lunch the lieutenants, led by Ben Crouch (the Logs Officer), who like AI, takes some perverse pleasure from it, visit the gym.

Each month we have fallen under Sarah's scrutiny and we have collectively achieved a lot, although we have lost more waist than weight! The verdict is that the Chief of Staff Lt Cdr Jason White is officially the Staff's Biggest Loser! A special mention is also deserved for the Cox'n CPO Dean Ashby who has shrunk his waist the most.

### KEY STATS

- 1. Total Waist Lost**  
29.8" or 74.5cm
- 2. Total Weight Lost**  
66.4lbs or 29.5Kg
- 3. Average Waist Lost**  
1.75" or 4.5cm
- 4. Average Weight Lost**  
3.9lbs or 1.75Kg

### BIGGEST LOSER

**COS - Jason White (9kg)**

It has always been the understanding that every unit that comes under COMUKMCMFOR command should leave it in a better state than when it arrived. It seems this applies to our personal health and fitness as well!

## SOURCES OF SUPPORT AND ADVICE

**The Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC).** If there is a requirement for a sailor serving overseas to return to the UK for compassionate reasons, for example if a close relative becomes very seriously ill (normally life threatening) or dies, then it is the role of the JCCC to investigate the circumstances and make a recommendation as to whether compassionate travel should be granted. This telephone line is manned 24 hours a day. Communicating bad news directly to servicemen is not recommended. **+44 (0) 1452 519951.**

You can now download the JCCC App:

### JCCC - MOD ICE app

The new JCCC app is called 'MOD ICE' and provides a very simplistic 'Click and Call' facility that will direct the user to the most appropriate organisation if they are faced with a family emergency. The app can be downloaded as follows:

1. Visit [www.defencegateway.mod.uk](http://www.defencegateway.mod.uk) using the phone or device you want to download the app onto.
2. Enter your Defence Gateway User Name and Password. If you don't have a Defence Gateway account, click 'Register' to set one up.
3. On the Defence Gateway home page, click on 'App Store'.
4. Read the instructions and click on either 'Android' or 'Apple' to suit your device.
5. Select 'JCCC MOD ICE' from the selection of apps and follow the download procedure. In some cases you may need to 'trust' the defence gateway site on your device if prompted.
6. You can download the app onto as many devices as you wish.
7. To download the app onto phones or devices belonging to family members, we recommend the device is given to the Service Person, who can then access the Defence Gateway using their own log-in and complete the download. Passwords and log-in details should not be shared.
8. Note the JCCC MOD ICE app is not currently available via public app stores and can only be accessed via the Defence Gateway.

**Royal Navy & Royal Marines Welfare (RNRMW).** RNRMW provides a comprehensive social work service to all Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel and their families. Its purpose is to provide support in peacetime and in times of crisis, to prevent or reduce the effects of personal difficulties, especially those that arise as a result of Forces life. RNRMW offers counselling, practical and emotional support, and

advocacy services. Examples of the type of work undertaken include support for deployed personnel and their families with bereavement, relationship problems, debt, mental health, special needs and next of kin. **+44 (0)23 9272 8777** or **@RNRMWelfare**

**Naval Service Welfare Website.** This website provides accessible support services that strengthen and enhance the resilience of Naval Service personnel, their families and communities. Check out the family support forums.

<http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/welfare/find-help>

**Families & Friends of Deployed Units.** There is a national programme of events for families and friends of deployed loved ones.

<http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/welfare/welfare-teams/fafdu>

**The Naval Families Federation.** This exists to give naval families an independent voice in government. I commend their website and services to you. <http://www.nff.org.uk>

**Confidential Support Line.** This is a confidential, impartial telephone listening/advice service offered by trained civilian advisers who will discuss any issue that may be causing concern or personal distress.

Advisers will endeavour to identify possible sources of support or resolution where necessary but no direct action will be taken by the support line. Callers may remain anonymous. The line operates seven days a week from 1030 to 2230. Call **0800 731 4880** or from overseas call UK **+44 1980 630854**.

**If you are concerned by something unexpected you have learned from the media about the Royal Navy or the Royal Fleet Auxiliary in the Middle East, you may obtain further information by calling the Confidential Support Line.**