

845 NAS

Newsletter

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A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDING OFFICER

Cdr Matt Punch MBE RN

Uniquely I am able to take this opportunity to welcome you all, Squadron members, family and friends, to 845 Naval Air Squadron. It is a huge honour to command a squadron with such a remarkable history and I am proud to call myself a Junglie. We are now all playing a part in another significant milestone in the history of 845 NAS. I had hoped to be able to produce this newsletter earlier in the year but the tempo since that wonderful stand up parade back in July has been relentless.

I am astounded by the volume of activity undertaken by Squadron personnel over the last few months and the stories below will give you an interesting and entertaining insight into some of the goings on. Exercise Black Alligator in the USA occupied many of us over the summer; it was fantastic to train alongside our colleagues from the Royal Marines as well as test the Merlin in the most challenging conditions.

Those who didn't deploy had an equally successful period, occupying themselves with UK tasking and taking opportunities for Adventurous Training.

I appreciate that the transition from a hugely successful and proud RAF Squadron to a Naval Air Squadron may have been unsettling for some of you and the natural concerns caused by significant change will be exacerbated as we approach the Squadron move to Yeovilton, Somerset, in June 2016. I will ensure an update of the details of this move will be covered in the next newsletter and in conjunction with this I will be delivering information briefs to service personnel and families as the date draws nearer, which should answer any questions you inevitably have.

I ask that you pay particular attention to the list of those Squadron members awarded Commanding Officer's prizes. This is a termly event where I have the privilege to reward some outstanding individual performances over the preceding months. 845 Squadron have achieved a huge amount in a very short time and has only been able to do so with the dedication and professionalism of many people; picking out just a few to reward is a hugely difficult job so the winners thoroughly deserve recognition.

Finally, I wish you all a relaxing Christmas and a very happy and prosperous New Year.

Yours Aye

Matt Punch



THE JUNGLIES – A BRIEF HISTORY

845 Naval Air Squadron is one of three frontline Commando Aviation squadrons in the Fleet Air Arm. As such, the Squadron provides expert aviation support to ground forces, principally 3 Commando Brigade (the UK's elite amphibious formation).

This role, which the Squadron pioneered and expanded in the mid-twentieth century, has found itself at the forefront of British military helicopter operations in every major operation since the invasion of the Suez in 1956. Along with the other squadrons that constitute the Commando Helicopter Force (846, 847 and 848 Naval Air Squadrons), the *Junglies* enjoy a formidable and unique prestige within British military aviation. This status has been hard won, but well-proven through generations of competence, courage and ingenuity.



Whirlwind of 845 NAS during the Suez Crisis

Primarily amphibious aviation specialists, the breadth of distinct environments and roles the Squadron has operated in is truly remarkable. From 2000 – 2007 alone, 845 NAS undertook operational duties in the jungles of Sierra Leone, the mountains of the Balkans, the deserts of Iraq, the precipitous tracts of Afghanistan and the frozen wastes of the Arctic, all whilst fundamentally remaining dedicated maritime aviators.

Moreover, the history of 845 NAS reflects several seminal moments in the development of naval aviation: initially a *maritime strike* unit flying with state-of-the-art torpedo bombers, the Squadron served during the raging Pacific theatre of WWII, which witnessed the advent of aviation as the most important strategic element of modern naval warfare. The Squadron was resurrected just as the *helicopter* revolutionised naval aviation in the mid-1950s. It was here, during the Suez crisis, the unit executed a major insertion of amphibious troops to devastating tactical effect – thereby effectively 'inventing' Commando (Cdo) aviation.

In the 60 years since the Suez, 845 NAS has maintained this role with Jungle exuberance and has had the privilege of operating some famous and important maritime helicopters in the *Avenger*, *Whirlwind*, *Wessex*, *Sea King* and most recently the *Merlin Mk3/3a*

The Future

As we move forward, 845 NAS will continue to operate the Merlin Mk3/3a which has brought a step change in capability, including much improved speed, endurance, stability, inter-operability and (most importantly) lift capacity. This is shortly about to start a comprehensive upgrade package that will result in the much improved and *marinised* Merlin Mk4. This will enable Cdo aviation to remain as the Country's most flexible and operationally relevant support helicopter for the next generation.



ADVENTUROUS TRAINING LAET (AV) Bennett

Organised through the Naval Outdoor Centre Germany (NOCG), 2 RN and 2 RAF Junior Rates from the Squadron took advantage of an opportunity to undertake a weeks Adventurous Training (AT) in Germany.

Having set off from RAF Benson early on the Saturday morning it was straight to Dover to catch the ferry and once in Calais we set off on the 10 hour bus ride to our destination. Having arrived at 1030, we moved into our accommodation and the remainder of the day was our own to explore the local town. The following morning it was up early for the initial briefings that outlined the specific activities we were to be undertaking and the various challenges we would encounter throughout the week. However, because we were such a small party we were attached to another group and afforded an opportunity to undertake a K2 Kayaking course.

With the basics grasped on local lakes over the first 2 days, the remainder of the week was spent on challenging rivers, white water and culminated in a final test of navigating our way down a grade 3 river including a weir and numerous obstacles. Having all successfully completed the weeks Kayaking course we were awarded our 'K2F Joint Service Kayak Foundation Course' certificates.

Although we all chose the Kayaking option NOCG is not all about the water. Other opportunities available throughout the week included Mountain Walking, Mountain Biking, Rock Climbing and what the locals call Klettersteig (a mixture of Climbing, hiking, mountaineering).

Meals at the Outdoor Centre comprised of pan-English breakfasts and self made packed lunches for when out on activities. Evening meals were of an especially high standard, consisting of high quality meats, well cooked vegetables and desserts. This was an outstanding week and a great opportunity to challenge ourselves with activities none of us had previously conducted.

Full details about NOCG, including family opportunities, can be found at:

<http://www.nocg.co.uk/index.html>



Marines, 3 x Merlin Mk3As deployed with engineering support to what would become home for 9 weeks; US Marine Corps Training Centre at Camp Wilson, California.

Having transported the aircraft by shipping to North Carolina the plan was to fly from the east coast to Camp Wilson, a journey that would take in ten state boundaries and was anticipated to be completed in 4 days. Of course as with most plans things did change slightly. After diverting off the planned route due to weather, there were further challenges for the Engineering team due to numerous unserviceabilities, including an unexpected engine change in Mississippi.

With the transit completed it was straight into the desert Environmental Qualification (EQ) phase for the Squadron. This was to ensure the basics of operating in such a harsh environment were fully grasped and included the aircrew carrying out dust landings, load lifting training, and formation flying both during the day and by night. Once completed crews then consolidated their skills and also conducted tasking in the form of troop drills with UK and foreign troops.

However, it was not all about operating from the desert and halfway through the deployment part of the Squadron moved to Nellis Air Force Base near Las Vegas, in support of Joint Personnel Recovery (JPR) training and the recovery of isolated individuals from hostile situations. Under the expert tutelage of the 66th (Jolly Green) Rescue Squadron of the United States Air Force who are the world leaders in conducting JPR, the 2 week package was a resounding success. Not only did this period facilitate invaluable training but it also allowed downtime for individuals within the Las Vegas area.



Ex Black Alligator Continued

With the Exercise at Nellis complete, it was back to Camp Wilson in preparation for the final exercise. During this phase all the ground and flying training that had been practised was fully tested, with the Sqn supporting multiple company lifts into major targets areas, along with Artillery and Mortar Company inserts. The training value and environment was proving to be second to none, as described by Cpl Jay Whitehouse a Royal Marine Aircrewman serving with 845 NAS:

“Having been on several tours flying in Afghanistan, and undertaking the training before we deployed, it’s amazing how well Camp Wilson and the Twentynine Palms area would prepare somebody for overseas training operations. Not only is the area far larger than anything we have in the UK, the environment is perfect to. It is a great location and ideal for both those who have operated in the desert before, and also for those who were experiencing this extremely challenging environment for the first time”.

Overall this was the busiest few months of flying the squadron had witnessed, with lots of old and some new lessons being learnt whilst operating in the harsh desert environment. Notwithstanding this being the first overseas deployment for many individuals, the efforts of the engineering and support staff to keep the aircraft running was second to none. Despite a range of faults from fixing broken oleos, cracked windscreens, or the constant repairs to the blades following the dust landings, the engineering team kept the aircraft operating and ensured that this vital training for the Squadron could be completed.



HONOURS AND AWARDS

AOC 2 Gp Commendation

C/Tech Young. For his outstanding contribution to Operational Capability during the Afghanistan campaign, coupled with his dedication to the Scouting movement when not deployed and back in the UK. Where, in his spare time (over 27 years), he has grown the organisation from some 15 to 70 individuals in at the local group.

Operational Service Medal (Afghanistan)

Cpl Keegan RAF

Long Service and Good Conduct Medals.

Sgt Lane RM
PO Glover

CO's Prizes

CO 845 Termly Awards are given to personnel who have shown a marked contribution to Squadron productivity and Operational Capability throughout the Term. Autumn 2015 CO 845 Termly awards go to:

PO Devrill. For exemplary work in the establishment and sustainment of safe and effective combined RN and RAF tool control.

LA Muliss. For the introduction of a squadron information dissemination tool and for his notable efforts during VIP visits to RAF Benson.

LAET Whitmore. For his outstanding contribution towards Flight Safety by the introduction of a new Aircrew publication management system.

Sgt Carter. Exemplary service during a secondment to the RAF Benson Merlin On Site Support Team to undertake essential support activity and the provision of technical advice.

Flt Lt Turl. For his outstanding contribution to Squadron and Station morale in managing and organising the 28(AC) Sqn standing down and 845 NAS standing up social event. An event that directly benefitted over 400 personnel.

Emergency Contact

Joint Casualty & Compassionate Centre (JCCC)
Tel: 01452 519951- Manned 24Hrs a day
Royal Navy Royal Marines Welfare Portal
<http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/welfare/find-help>
Tel: 023 9272 8777

Update on Domestic Links at Yeovilton

Royal Navy Royal Marines Welfare (formally NPFS) at Yeovilton
Tel: 01935 455277
Tall Trees Community Centre
Tel: 01935 840333