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The HMS ST. ALBANS Newsletter

Issue 02 | January 2016



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Welcome to our second newsletter and the first of 2016. It's good to be able to say "we'll be home this year!" You will have probably heard and seen pictures of our Christmas and New Year celebrations, but for those who haven't a selection are included here. We all tucked in to a delicious Christmas lunch and even had a surprise visit from 'Santa'!

A MESSAGE FROM THE CAPTAIN

Dear families and friends,

Since last writing, we have arrived in the Gulf via the Suez Canal, after proving the Ship was ready for operations during our stop in Crete. I know you are likely to have seen photos of Christmas and may even have heard of our take on the Nativity, some truly spontaneous performances. Unfortunately(?) it was not recorded, but I hope children at home may have remembered at least a line of *their* part! I very much hope that you have all enjoyed the festive period and that we have treated you suitably well from afar. Our day at sea passed well, and we continued east towards our first Gulf port visit for New Year. Although video calls from Muscat were not always easy to hook up, many (hopefully all!) welcomed the opportunity to message home.

Back on the waves, we are doing our first bit of dedicated security tasking out here, working to identify and disrupt criminal activity at sea. As ever, the first weeks of any deployment are often a challenge as we all settle into our routines, us onboard and you at home. However, HMS ST ALBANS continues to perform strongly, and has been praised widely by our current Commander for the quality of our support to his mission. There have already been tests, particularly materially as the Ship is put through her paces in an increasingly hot climate, but I have been delighted with the way in which our people have maintained her and repaired the inevitable equipment issues.

Thank you once more for the gifts and messages of support that you have been posting. It's always a delight as a parcel arrives in a maildrop or another email drops into the inbox. We will write again soon but please let us know if there is anything else we could/should be doing to keep in contact or help you out. Finally, whilst not counting down, you should now know when your loved one is getting their mid-period leave – as promised, I have pushed to lock in dates for everyone in good time.

Yours faithfully,

Rich Hutchings

Commander R P H Hutchings
Royal Navy, Commanding Officer
HMS ST ALBANS



For New Year we were alongside Muscat, many of us took advantage of hotel leave to stay in some of the luxurious local accommodation. On the 2 January, all those not on watch visited the Wadi Shab with its stunning scenery and deep natural pools to swim in. Then in the evening we were treated to a wonderful buffet meal and entertainment at the Shangri-La Resort Hotel.



GIBRALTAR 'TWIN PEAKS' CHALLENGE

0600 on a chilly December morning in Gibraltar, the sky still dark, the mighty silhouette of The Rock loomed ahead.

40 of St Albans prepared to take on this time honoured challenge. After a very clear and comprehensive brief from the local PTI (the importance of this will become clear later). There was an explosion of speed at the starting whistle. A blistering pace was set over the first 500m of the dockyard; then, the pack turned the corner to face their first steep gradient and the speed reduced... drastically!

The gaps between runners started to lengthen as the gradient steepened. Leading the way, storming up the inclines and cruising along the flatter sections our Royal Marine Lieutenant Warren Rowe was at the front with a few sailors and the rest of his marines falling behind.

A team of marshals had kindly volunteered to guide us on our way and did a sterling job of keeping us on the right track. As I limped past the final marshal, the end within sight I gave a final push, expecting to see Warren waiting at the finish line with a smug grin. As I crossed the line however, I was met by: "Well done, first man back!". Yes, it's true, our brave 'booty' may have set the pace but he stumbled at the final hurdle. He missed the only turn on the whole run and finished on top of the wrong mountain! Lt Matt Snazell came in second and PO Chris Brailsford made it an all Royal Navy podium.

Warren wasn't alone in doing the Gibraltar "Two Peaks Challenge" and there was plenty of teasing for those who took the 'scenic route'. After posing for a group photo everyone headed back down for a well earned breakfast! Better luck next time Warren...



MASCOT OF THE MONTH

In a new feature for younger readers each Newsletter will highlight one of the deployed toys accompanying your loved ones...

Introducing Super Monkey! (Seen here at Wadi Shab) Super monkey belongs to Orin and Aurora Walker and he is busy deployed with ST ALBANS on an endless quest for treasure. His favourite food is bananas and chocolate and he has a habit of getting up to mischief at every possibility. He can regularly be found around the Ship and getting ashore on adventures while not at sea. He is looking forward to coming home and giving Orin and Aurora all the shiny things he has acquired while being deployed.

IN THE DARK

Very shortly after we sailed we had to limit our communication channels for operational reasons which meant we couldn't be in touch with the outside world. Because it came on at such short notice we know it took quite a few people by surprise and that e-mails weren't answered or expected phone calls weren't received. Hopefully we now have the means to alert you if this happens again. If you receive this newsletter electronically then we have your current details. If however you currently only receive it by post, please ask your loved one on board to pass on your e-mail address if you have one, so we can be in touch with you faster.

FACEBOOK

The limited communications also coincided with the launch of the Facebook group, so it took longer than we would've liked to approve people to join. When we get lists through of new joiners it takes a while to find their contact onboard if they don't share the same name, but please be patient, we will approve new joiners as quickly as we can.