

ASSAULT STATIONS!

The Newsletter for HMS BULWARK

Issue 01 | January – February 2016



Launching into 2016

Fleet Amphibious Flagship HMS BULWARK launched into 2016 with a new Commanding Officer, Captain James Parkin, together with some prestigious additions to her trophy collection.

HMS BULWARK's performance during 2015 has been recognized once again with the Royal Navy's Capital Ship Fleet Effectiveness Trophy. The award recognized unwavering performance through 2015 including migrant search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, the poignant 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli Campaign and the Cougar 15 deployment to the Mediterranean, which included providing security for Her Majesty the Queen in Malta.

2015 was a landmark year for other awards, including *The Sun* "Millies" Best Unit Award (see article on page 3). HMS BULWARK was also extremely proud to be the winner of the Desmond Wettern Trophy for 2015, awarded to the Ship considered to have done most to project a positive image of the Royal Navy. The Ship was also a finalist for the Plymouth Herald's 'Pride of Plymouth' awards, while her sports teams won a Fleet Sports trophy to boot.

Captain Parkin said, "I am hugely honoured to assume Command of HMS BULWARK. The ship has a demanding future programme to meet and a faultless reputation for sustained excellence in high profile situations. I am certain that the sailors and marines under my Command will continue to deliver operational success in the future, whatever 2016 holds."

FROM THE CAPTAIN

Dear Families and Friends,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the first issue of "Assault Stations!" – the new newsletter for the families and friends of HMS BULWARK. I have always been a passionate advocate of ensuring the role of families in supporting their loved ones is fully appreciated, and given the tempo, programme, and history of HMS BULWARK in the past year, it is clear that my team could not have preformed as they did, or won the awards they won, without your support. Thank you for all you did, and all you continue to do, and do let us know if you feel there is more that I can do to keep you informed.

I hope to meet as many of you as possible over the next year.

Best wishes,

James Parkin
Commanding Officer



COUGAR 15

With Commander Amphibious Task Group and 3 Commando Brigade embarked, BULWARK formed an integral part of the UK's contribution to a series of strategic exercises, aimed at sending a strong message to NATO's allies and rivals alike.

A short stop in Gibraltar marked the end of the initial phase, aimed at checking the readiness of all participating units. This gave the Ship's Company time to enjoy perhaps the best-loved "run-ashore" in the Royal Navy, including the lung-busting "Rock Race", a pre-dawn race to the top of the Rock of Gibraltar.

From there it was straight into Corsican Lion – an opportunity for UK and French amphibious forces to practise working together, doing beach reconnaissance, day/night landings and aviation operations. These culminated in a joint Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation, during which naval personnel played the role of civilians needing to be evacuated from a potentially hostile environment, something the UK has achieved in recent years from Beirut and Benghazi, and the French from Yemen.

Toulon, home to France's main naval base, was the setting for Bulwark's next task, to host high-level discussions on the future of UK-French naval co-operation. A visit from the Fleet Commander formed part of this key tasking. Meanwhile, the Ship's Company explored the French Riviera and re-stored in preparation for the main effort, Exercise Trident Juncture



Trident Juncture was the largest and arguably the most important naval exercise NATO has undertaken in the last 20 years. From the eastern Atlantic to the western Med, over 36,000 personnel from 30 nations were involved, along with 140 aircraft and 60 ships. Rear Admiral Radakin, flying his flag in HMS OCEAN, took overall command. BULWARK, as always, was in the thick of the action, taking part in a range of anti-submarine, anti-surface, amphibious and aviation operations. Key among these was a demonstration, to a cross-section of influential NATO VIPs, of her capability to deliver Royal Marines ashore (see above).

Finally, to mark the successful conclusion of this landmark exercise, a selection of the naval units involved came together for a spectacular photo-call (see below).

POAC Hume



OP ALVIN

From exercising to operations: The key element of COUGAR 15 was Operation Alvin, for which Bulwark was tasked to act as a "command platform" to provide security for both the EU conference on migration and the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. The Prime Minister and Her Majesty the Queen were among a host of world leaders who travelled to Malta for these back-to-back conferences. Utilising its own landing craft, two Merlin helicopters from 814 NAS, the frigate HMS SOMERSET and personnel from the RAF and the Met Police, BULWARK provided a vital, all-round surveillance picture, ensuring that both events went off without incident.

Roll out the red carpet!



On 22nd January a group from HMS BULWARK headed up to London to represent the ship at The Sun's prestigious annual "Millies" award-ceremony.

The eighth "Millies" ceremony was a way of recognising the nation's Service men and women for their efforts and achievements during 2015, which has been a momentous year for BULWARK. Lance Corporal John Pritchard Royal Marines was on the short-list for the most outstanding sailor/marine, while the ship itself was nominated in the category of Best Unit.

The day started with a trip to 10 Downing Street, where the BULWARK team joined the other nominees at a reception hosted by Samantha Cameron and the Defence Secretary. The Rt Hon Michael Fallon MP paid glowing tribute to the achievements of the UK's Armed Forces during the year, highlighted BULWARK's contribution in saving thousands of lives in the Mediterranean, as well as the Ship's important role in COUGAR 15.

A star-studded event at London's Guildhall followed and the celebrities turned out in force. Famous faces such as explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes, singer Rod Stewart (see below), Superman actor Henry Cavill, former Top Gear presenter Jeremy Clarkson, entrepreneur Baroness Karren Brady and London Mayor Boris Johnson all got to take selfies with the BULWARKs!

Unfortunately, L/Cpl Pritchard did not win but his selfless dedication was recognised nonetheless. Particular mention was made of the fact that while he was caring for pregnant women and children who were in perilous danger, his wife was at home giving birth to their second son.

BULWARK, meanwhile, faced stiff competition from the Army and the RAF for the main category of Best Unit. In the end, the judges were overwhelmingly impressed by the sheer amount of diverse work undertaken by the ship during 2015 and the trophy was presented to HMS BULWARK.

In winning the "Millie" Award for Best Unit 2015, the citation underlined how the entire Ship's Company set a benchmark for professionalism, hard work and compassion:

For the fifth year running, HMS BULWARK remained at 5-days' notice to deploy anywhere in the world. In April 2015 she stood off Gallipoli in Turkey to honour those that fell during World War I. During those commemorations, Prince Charles and Prince Harry used the ship as a base. Only a few days later, BULWARK would be hosting very different visitors.

As the loss of life in the Mediterranean unfolded, the Prime Minister took the decision to deploy the Ship at very short-notice as the UK's response to the unfolding migrant / refugee crisis. Over an intense period of operations, 4747 lives were saved in just 6 weeks. On one particular day, 1300 people were rescued from the sea in 7 separate incidents.

Sing-along with Rod!

Much to the delight of the Ship's Company, back-stage Rod Stewart sang 'We are sailing' with the team. For some of the older members this was a dream come true, especially when one considers the number of times that song has been sung in mess-decks throughout the Fleet!

Lt Cdr Jones



An R&R stop in Palermo was the venue for a 24-hour charity race, with a twist!

Conceived and organised by L/Cpl Brooker of Bulwark's Assault Squadron, this fantastic, bone-jarring event involved teams of 6 people running round-the-clock relays around the upper-deck. Many of those who took part completed at least the equivalent of a marathon, with one or two doing double that and "crazy" Sgt Al Hunter completing 351 laps (over 58 miles)! As if a marathon were not enough of a challenge, in true Royal Marines style, the idea was hatched whereby, for extra sponsorship, runners could be required to wear or carry various random items, from gas masks to fire-fighting suits, from a (loaded) stretcher to a 50kg shock-strop from a landing craft! This hoofin' idea added comedy value and helped swell the coffers.

L/Cpl Kennedy



BULWARK FC in 10 goal thriller

The ship's football team began their 2016 campaign with a feisty match against HMS Sutherland.

Despite both teams missing players through work commitments, the game did not disappoint. Sutherland took an early lead when LET Dawes gave away a blatant penalty and POPT Johnson, making his first ever appearance as a goalkeeper, allowed the ball to creep through his legs from the resulting spot-kick. Bulwark were back level less than five minutes later when a speculative, long-range volley from LET Bilton found into the top corner. Sutherland went 2-1 up only for Bilton to again equalise, tapping in from a great cross from LET Craig to leave the match all-square at half time.

Bulwark came out all guns blazing in the second half, roaring into a 4-2 lead with goals from LET Craig and POAWT Thistlethwaite. This allowed the Manager to give a number of players their debuts from the bench. This back-fired, however, as Sutherland capitalised on poor defending to go 5-4 up and leave Bulwark facing defeat.

Bulwark's own "Tinkerman" made further changes to strengthen the team going into the final few minutes. These inspired substitutions did the trick and man-of-the-match LET Craig equalised with a superb free kick with just 5 minutes left on the clock. Despite late pressure, Bulwark could not find the winner and the match ended 5-5.

LWtr Marson

ME Rugby

Important bragging rights were at stake on Wednesday 3rd February when the Marine Engineering (ME) Department held its eagerly-anticipated Junior Rates (JRs) versus Senior Rates (SRs) rugby match, the tenth time this fixture has been contested.

An energetic first-half at Rectory Field saw the JRs take a commanding lead of 22-0, leaving the "old men" facing humiliation and a large bar-bill! It was to prove, however, a classic "game of two halves", as the SRs dominated the second period, scoring 26 points without reply. With the JRs unable to discover their early form, the match ended with a 26-22 victory for the SRs. Man of the Match awards went to ET Ford for the JRs and PO Roberts for the SRs.

The game was played in a competitive but good-natured spirit, the only injury of note being to the recently-arrived AMEO, Sub-Lieutenant Brand, who received a cut to the head requiring four stitches, a small price to pay for the afternoon's entertainment. At the final whistle both teams retired to the club-house for some much-needed refreshment, before embarking on a Departmental social evening, with no further casualties reported!

S/Lt Humphries

