

ASSAULT STATIONS!

The Newsletter for HMS BULWARK

Issue 2 March – April 2016



Bulwark delivers the Griffin's Strike

Since we returned from Easter Leave, as the Fleet Amphibious Flagship HMS BULWARK has been taking part in an important UK-French exercise, called *Griffin Strike*, around the southern coasts of England and Wales.

Joining other Royal Navy vessels, including HMS OCEAN and HMS SUTHERLAND, along with warships from the French Navy led by the assault helicopter-carrier FS DIXMUDE, *Griffin Strike* was designed to further build the capability of the two countries to operate together. The exercise has proved that UK and French maritime, land and air forces can be deployed together at short-notice for a wide range of bilateral operations and, if called upon, work alongside one another as part of a NATO, EU or UN operation.

The exercise lasted two weeks, with the maritime element taking place in the Solent and west coast of England before culminating off south Wales in the Bristol Channel. It involved Royal Marines conducting beach assaults by sea and air (see above), working with helicopters and aircraft of all three of the Armed Services, and linking up with a considerable number of UK and French land forces ashore.

FROM THE CAPTAIN

Dear families and friends,

I am writing these introductory remarks from the Bristol Channel, as we work alongside our French colleagues in Exercise *Griffin Strike*.

During this exercise, my superb sailors and marines proved again that we are still the best ship in the Navy, as we have been tested to our limits with hundreds of soldiers and marines landed on Welsh beaches by our landing craft and helicopters, while we even had time to wish Her Majesty the Queen a happy 90th birthday. A busy time for everyone!

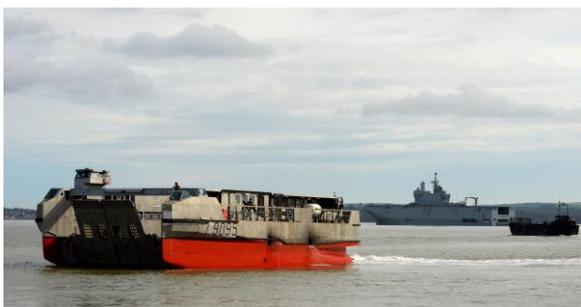
I hope you all had a wonderful Easter and that you enjoyed some relaxing time with your loved ones. Although we will be at sea for much of the next few months, our families and friends are never far from our thoughts, and I hope to meet many of you on Families' Day later in the year.

Yours aye,

James Parkin
Captain
HMS BULWARK



TRAIN AS WE MEAN TO FIGHT



By land and by sea', the motto of the Royal Marines, perfectly encapsulates HMS BULWARK's primary purpose and her focus throughout spring 2016.

One of the four 'pillars' of the UK's defence strategy is its amphibious capability. This gives the government the option of landing troops anywhere in the world, either in support of humanitarian, peace-keeping or combat operations. With the focus for the last decade and more having been on Afghanistan, it is a specialist skill-set which the Naval Service had not practised for some time. Exercises *South-West Sword* and *Griffin Strike*, either side of Easter, were opportunities to return to core business and prepare for the future.

In preparation for the exercises, the Bridge and Operations Room teams attended a number of training sessions at the Maritime Composite Training School in Devonport to refine their war-fighting skills in anti-air, anti-surface, and anti-submarine environments. This training ensured that kinks were ironed-out and new additions to the department were brought up-to-speed in short order. The most recent addition to the Bridge Team, Officer of the Watch 3, Lt Dan Sykes-Gelder RN said: "*South-West Sword* and *Griffin Strike* were great opportunities to practice conducting amphibious moves and flying-serials at the same time. Your skills are certainly put to the test, as we can have up to 8 landing craft and 2 helicopters deployed simultaneously. There are a lot of moving parts but it is a very rewarding job".

Lt Rignall RN

Chinooks, Merlins, Sea Kings and Wildcat helicopters conducted a staggering 250 deck landings during *South-West Sword*, giving a HMS BULWARK's Air Department a really useful run-out.

Perhaps the highlight of all the flying activity was the last ever "Junglie" Sea King landing on a Royal Navy warship, prior to the aircraft being decommissioned from service. Given that the first ever "Junglie" had landed aboard the previous HMS BULWARK, it seemed only fitting to conduct the last ever landing aboard the current BULWARK. This historic moment took place on 18th March just off the Plymouth breakwater when the last Sea King, code-named Avenger 1, landed on board (see below).



Following several photo opportunities they formed up with Avenger 2 and flew off past the ship towards Plymouth and then home to Yeovilton for "tea and stickies".

Lt McInnes RN

Top Award For Bulwark Chef

Leading Chef Pryer has been awarded a Fleet Commander's Commendation for his services during Operation *Weald* in the summer of 2015.

Whilst maintaining the highest standards of catering for the Ship's Company, it was no mean feat to create menus and prepare food to sustain up to 1,150 survivors for up to 48 hours. Through innovation, determination and with traditional good humour, the team worked tirelessly to deliver over 17,000 additional meals and 7,000 bottles of water to the survivors.

'It wasn't because we were told to do the job' stated Leading Chef Pryer 'it was because we had to. People needed our help and we wanted to do it. It challenged us beyond any previous training we had undertaken for Humanitarian Relief Operations. We saw people who had gone 3 or 4 days without food and who were desperate. It wasn't until after that we reflected on what we had witnessed, it made us thankful for everything we have and it is an amazing honour to receive the Fleet Commander's Commendation.'

Mid Gunning RN



SHIP-SHAPE AND BRISTOL FASHION IN THE GALLEY!

BULWARK's catering team now have the swagger to match their skills with a new set of chefs' whites and aprons!

It is no mean feat planning and preparing hundreds of nutritious hot meals every single day, week in week out. During *Griffin Strike*, the team were cooking for up to 700 people, including the Ship's Company and Embarked Military Forces. Undaunted, they worked tirelessly to create tasty, varied meals which were enjoyed by all on board.

The team have just received delivery of bespoke chef whites and aprons, which was made possible by a Royal Navy and Royal Marine Charity grant. Over the next 6 months the ship will be conducting high profile visits such as London, the Sunderland Air Show and the Battle of Jutland commemorations, during which many VIPs will be hosted. The team's new uniforms will certainly add that touch of panache!

PO Mold



Keep up with the all the news from HMS Bulwark on Twitter @HMS_BULWARK



Working hard, digging deep and getting results!

Amid the high-profile successes of HMS BULWARK over the last year it is sometimes easy to overlook the spirit and determination shown by individual members of the Ship's Company in a whole variety of ways. At the start of 2015, with the ship's programme looking fairly quiet, Steward Denham (see left) decided to improve her skill-set by studying for a GCSE in English. If she had known how the year would actually develop she might have questioned her own sanity! Operation *Weald* was so high-tempo that finding time for study was a huge challenge and the *Cougar 15* deployment in the autumn offered no let up either, particularly for the Logistics Department. Undeterred, and with the support of AB Kelly, one of the ship's part-time instructors – who in their spare time volunteer to help teach their colleagues – she dug deep, refused to throw in the towel and achieved a highly commendable Grade C.

SC Kelly



Happy Birthday, Your Majesty!

HMS BULWARK took time out from *Griffin Strike* to mark the 90th birthday of Her Majesty the Queen earlier this week, while at sea in the Bristol Channel. Sailors and Royal Marines spelled the number 90 on the flight-deck and the chefs even baked a special cake, photos of which appeared on the BBC, ITV and Forces TV.



You can now follow the adventures of HMS BULWARK's mascot, William the Bear, via Twitter @WilliamTBear



All those in favour, say 'aye

HMS BULWARK's Young Officers (YOs) have embraced the longstanding naval tradition of "the Gunroom".

Originally, as the name suggests, the Gunroom was a space used by the gunner and his mates. It came to be the usual accommodation for Officers below the rank of Lieutenant and was often a rowdy place compared to the well-mannered Wardroom! Although in the modern day YOs are members of the Wardroom, BULWARK's male YOs now have their accommodation together in one compartment, complete with elegant sign on the door, plaques on the bulkhead and a picture of an elephant (which must never be mentioned!). While the female YOs are accommodated separately, they are firmly part of this community and ethos. Bringing together YOs from different branches, backgrounds and stages of training, the Gunroom provides opportunities to learn from one another's successes (and mistakes), support each other and work as a team.

A recent example of this was the series of YO-led debates held during *South-West Sword* before Easter. Covering issues as diverse as the situation in Syria, the use of social media on board and the upcoming EU membership referendum, the Gunroom split into two teams for each debate in order to argue for and against the proposed motion. Rather than following a pure debating format, BULWARK's Gunroom injected a touch of the BBC's *Question Time* to the debates, with "Lt Cdr Dimpleby" presiding over the teams and inviting questions from the audience. A wide cross-section of the Ship's Company attended, keen to hear the arguments put forward by each team before testing them with probing questions. Captain Parkin rounded off proceedings by summarising the key points, declaring the winning team and offering all present some further thoughts to consider.

S/Lt Humphries RN

