

ASSAULT STATIONS!

The Newsletter for HMS BULWARK

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HMS BULWARK TRIES OUT DELIGHTFUL DUQM

In our first port visit after we entered the Middle East, BULWARK pulled into the brand new port of Duqm, in Oman, for two short "logistics stops" to load food and stores items onto the ship - firstly to prepare for our tasking on Exercise OMANI COUGAR, and the second one (after we finished) to embark a Royal Marine "Special Purpose Task Group" from 42 Commando.

This is the first time any RN "big ship" has visited Duqm, which lies some 200 miles away from the capital, Muscat, and we were joined alongside by HMS OCEAN and MV EDDYSTONE on both visits. The Government of Oman plans that Duqm will be the "Dubai of the Arabian Sea", and although currently a building site, many billions of pounds are being spent to turn the port, and the city, into a modern, gleaming city for the region.

Without bars, or restaurants, to visit, the visit liaison team instead organised access to a unique 'Container Village', situated on the jetty. Facilities within this self-contained leisure complex were fairly basic but included several retail and food outlets including a Pizza Hut, a bar, a basketball court, and a souvenir shop. The rare treat of Wifi was available, and (although it was a little slow with 600 people logging on at once) most of the Ship's Company managed to contact their loved ones at home. A barber shop was even available for those who needed a much needed haircut.

With the two largest ships in the Royal Navy berthed alongside together, this provided the perfect platform to stage an OCEAN vs BULWARK sports tournament, including football, volleyball and tug of war. Despite their larger Ship's Company, the mighty BULWARK comprehensively triumphed over OCEAN, a fact which the DLO relished in reminding the Captain of OCEAN as he received the trophy from him at the prizegiving.

Being the only port visit East of Suez, the ship also took the opportunity to hold traditional events such as a combined Trafalgar, Taranto and Royal Marine anniversary dinner, a "Pickle Night" for the WOs, CPOs and POs messes, and a ceremony to mark the flag shift of Commander Amphibious Task Group as he and his staff left BULWARK to move to OCEAN.

Both ships sailed on the same day to continue onto the next phase of the Joint Expeditionary Force (Maritime) deployment, but they did so separately, as OCEAN headed NE, and BULWARK sailed SW. It seemed appropriate, then, that as the two ships parted company for the last time, we played the song "Driving home for Christmas" over our loudhailer at them!

FROM THE CAPTAIN



Dear families and friends,

BULWARK has been busy since you last received a newsletter from us. We have participated in a major amphibious exercise off Oman, conducted training with the Somaliland Coastguard, and transited back through Suez Canal into the Mediterranean Sea. We have swum in the ocean, watched films under the stars, and have recently paid a fascinating visit to Israel where many of us had the chance to visit sites such as Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. Finally, we are just about to arrive in Barcelona, for our last foreign port visit before we make our way back through the Straits of Gibraltar.

To say that a lot has been crammed in to this relatively short deployment of three months would be an understatement - but what a way for BULWARK to spend her last trip before she goes into extended readiness next year. We are all very much looking forward to coming home to see you all, and with only two weeks left to go you won't have too long to wait.

Thank you to all of you for your support of the ship, and of the superb people who serve in her, while we have been deployed. I hope to meet many of you on the jetty on the day we get back alongside.

Yours aye

James Parkin
Captain HMS BULWARK

INAUGURAL TRIATHLON FOR HMS BULWARK

The Fleet Amphibious Flagship held the very first HMS BULWARK triathlon, both in and around the ship whilst pausing on passage through the Gulf of Aden

In the searing heat of the Arabian Sea, over 60 personnel from the Ship's Company and Embarked Military Force from J Company 42 Cdo took on the challenging endurance competition as the ship took a rare opportunity during a busy 3 month deployment for an afternoon of sport and recreation.

The triathlon, organised by the ships Physical Training Instructor (or "Clubswinger", in naval parlance) Petty Officer Michael 'Red' Setterfield, commenced with a 200 metre swim in 28 degree open water. However this was no ordinary swim - to start, the ship had to "dock down", lowering the stern in the water, and flooding the well dock with thousands of tonnes of seawater. Then, competitors had to enter the sea through the stern gate, which was lowered into the azure waters of the ocean to act as a ramp. Throughout the evolution, keen marksmen stood guard from the Flight Deck keeping a watchful eye for possible unwanted visitors, especially 'Nobbies' (or sharks, as most people call them), and trained lifeguards stood by in case of any difficulties.

On completion of the swim, the triathletes then climbed back into the ship via the stern and made their way to the flight deck for a gruelling 6.5 km cycle ride on the ship's spinning bikes, after which they each ran 14 laps of the ship's upper deck, covering approximately 2.8 miles. The sportsmen were competing for the 2016 award of the coveted "Stuart Rule Trophy", awarded every year to the sailor or marine who has completed the greatest individual sporting endeavour on board the ship, and named after Captain Stuart Rule Royal Marines, who tragically died in a diving accident in the previous amphibious assault ship, HMS FEARLESS, in 2001.

The triathlon was won in 30 minutes 24 seconds by Marine Henry Barrett from Suffolk and serving in J Company, 42 Commando, Royal Marines. He said "It was great fun to be able to conduct a triathlon from a warship in the middle of the ocean, and it was made even better by the fact I won."

'Hands to bathe' was indeed ordered on completion of the triathlon, so that some of the 500 sailors and marines who were not competing could experience the rare event of swimming in the open ocean, hundreds of miles from shore. As a naval custom which dates back centuries, the order "Hands to Bathe" was originally designed to save on fresh water supplies, when men of sailing ships were ordered to get clean in a calm (and preferably warm) open sea, rather than use up precious drinking water. Nowadays, however, it is more of a recreational activity, and used to reward the Ship's Company for a job done well, when time, location, sea state, temperature (and Nobbies), allow.

One of the ship's Young Officers, Sub Lieutenant "TJ" Walter, said afterwards "Hands to Bathe was not only a brilliant opportunity to relax, but after battling the triathlon out in 35 degree heat, allowed us all to cool down. It was hoofing!"



Mne Henry Barrett receiving the Stuart Rule trophy from the Captain - as 'Clubz' photobombs from the side



Ship's Company enter the water for the swimming discipline of the triathlon



Brave swimmers take on the deep blue...



Hot work running 14 laps of BULWARK's upper deck

REMEMBRANCE SERVICE

HMS BULWARK held a special Remembrance Sunday Service at sea off the coast of Somalia on the 13 November to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Forming up on the Flight Deck at 0800 before the heat of the day set in, the Remembrance Sunday service was led by the ship's chaplain, Father Charles Bruzon RN, and over 500 sailors, marines, soldiers, and civilians took an hour out from a very busy operational schedule to gather, reflect and perpetuate the memory, courage and comradeship of those who have served their country.

After the Naval Service Roll of Honour for 2016 was read by the ship's Executive Warrant Officer, Warrant Officer John Dewhirst RM, the ship's saluting gun marked the start of the 2 minutes silence and three wreaths, representing the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and British Army were subsequently laid at the foot of the ensign staff.

For the ship, the annual Remembrance Day service is an important opportunity for all of us to show our gratitude and remember all those who fought for our nation, not only during the First World War, but in all other conflicts since. Being able to do so on the day in question, in an area of the world with many challenges, was particularly poignant.

Newly-joined Able Seaman Chef Stan Leach, 17, from Cambridge said, "As the youngest member of the Ship's Company, it was an honour to be part of such a special service and to be able to read the bidding prayers. I have attended services in the past, but this is my first time taking part when deployed on operations."

Captain Theo Hogg Royal Marines, the Officer Commanding Landing Craft for 4 Assault Squadron Royal Marines (4ASRM), part of the Ship's Company of HMS BULWARK, said "Today's service has been particularly poignant for 4 ASRM as it is almost 10 years to the day since Marine Jason Hylton, previously of 4 ASRM in BULWARK was tragically killed in Iraq, when his raiding craft hit an improvised explosive device on the Shatt al-Arab waterway." In his memory, one of the two Royal Marines messdecks in BULWARK is known as 'Hylton Barracks'.



PULL!!!

HMS BULWARK took an opportunity to give its very first clay pigeon shooting club a run out. The club, organised by the ship's Amphibious Operations Officer (AOO) Lt Col Fuller, utilised a generous grant given by the Grass Roots sport fund, which allowed the club to purchase the trap, clays and ammunition needed. PO(AC) Edd Johnston and PO(CS) Chris Faulkner, keen participants of clay pigeon shooting themselves, ably assisted Lt Col Fuller in the set up and running of the club and the Ship's Company were given the opportunity during some rare downtime whilst at sea to try out the sport from the ship's flight deck.

Over 90 sailors and marines from the ship took part in the shoot and got an instructed session in shooting the clay pigeons from the aft end of the ship's flight deck. As the club was funded by the Grass Roots sports fund it allowed all personnel on board the chance to try out the sport, which for many of them was completely new.



THE COUGAR STRIKES - OMANI COUGAR 16

HMS BULWARK together with HMS OCEAN, 42 Commando Royal Marines and Omani Forces have joined together off the coast of Oman for a resounding culmination of amphibious training for the Joint Expeditionary Force (Maritime) deployment this year.

Demonstrating the UK's ability to deploy highly effective maritime forces anywhere in the world, OMANI COUGAR saw UK and Omani forces work seamlessly together to command the exercise from HMS BULWARK, culminating in a night time over the horizon raid by J Company 42 Commando and Omani troops from HMS BULWARK, HMS OCEAN and a tank landing ship of the Royal Navy of Oman. Royal Marines stormed ashore from landing craft in their Viking tracked vehicles and moved quickly inland to take their objectives.

With Commodore Burns disembarked for other tasking, the Captain acted as the Commander Amphibious Task Force for the exercise, and said afterwards, "OMANI COUGAR was the culmination of many months of planning and cooperating with the Omanis. Set in a fabulous training area, to finish amphibious training on a real high this deployment with a night time raid staged by ships concealed below the horizon and landing J Company over the beach in their armoured Vikings was a real achievement. The exercise has really helped to reinforce the UK's relationships with Oman and to ensure the task group is ready to respond if called upon."

In preparation for the amphibious raid, Omani staff were embarked in HMS BULWARK and worked closely with their UK counterparts to command the operations. HMS BULWARK conducted a challenging week of air defence exercises with the Omani Air Force, carried out landing craft training drills and hosted the Royal Navy of Oman Director General of Operations and Plans for a short visit.

Lieutenant Colonel Jim Fuller, the ship's Amphibious Ops Officer said, "As 4 Assault Squadron RM prepares to transfer to HMS ALBION next year, seeing all 8 of BULWARK's craft work the beach and deliver in their primary role in challenging conditions set the standard for our amphibious operations in the future."

Sixty years on from Suez, the pioneering tactical use of combined helicopter and landing craft assaults remain a cornerstone of the Royal Navy's amphibious capability and underpins how the JEF(M) provides forward deployed military capability, giving options to allow the UK to respond rapidly, when faced with an overseas crisis.



Members of the Ship's Company enjoying a BBQ on the ship's Flight Deck

KEEPING UP WITH HMS BULWARK

Family and friends who have access to Facebook can click on a link and ask to join the ship's closed Facebook Group. Simply go to:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/HMSBulwarkCommunity/>

Also, anyone can follow HMS BULWARK on Twitter at:

[@HMSBulwark](https://twitter.com/HMSBulwark)

For the younger ones amongst us, William the Bear also shares his adventures on Twitter at:

[@williamtbear](https://twitter.com/williamtbear)

Finally, the ship also has pages and a forum to join on the Royal Navy website at:

www.royal-navy.mod.uk/bulwark

Please come and join us on any or all of these sites!