



# MONMOUTH MERCURY



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Left :Families wave the Black Duke off as she departs Plymouth  
Right: Lt Cdr Ed Munns waves goodbye to family and friends



## Farewell Plymouth!

We deployed 6<sup>th</sup> March, waving a tearful farewell to the UK, Plymouth and our families & friends. Following hot on the heels of a great Families Day onboard, it was wonderful to see so many of our loved ones waving as we passed Drake's Island. See you in 9 months!

## Captain's Corner Cdr Ian Feasey RN



Welcome to the inaugural issue of the MONMOUTH Mercury!. I am sure you would all agree that our damp and windy departure from Devonport on 6 Mar already feels like an age ago. When I reflect on what your loved ones have achieved in the Black Duke since then I have to say that I have been hugely impressed. Whilst the content of this newsletter focuses on some of the more social aspects; the Ship's Company have put in a monumental effort across the Mediterranean to ensure that we are at the higher state of readiness to proceed East of Suez. For the Engineers this has meant a heavy drumbeat of trials; for the Logisticians ensuring all our food and stores have reached us and for the Warfare and Flight rehearsing all our drills and procedures for operations. As you will be aware our time away needs to be treated as a 'marathon' rather than a 'sprint' and ensuring we achieve a balance of work and rest is at the forefront of my mind. Our next stores delivery will include the mail, which hopefully should contain some Easter goodies. I trust that the onboard wifi system is allowing you all to keep in touch with your loved ones and you may also wish to follow the Black Duke's twitter page @HMS\_MONMOUTH. The next issue of the Mercury will have more details about our first period East of Suez. Happy Easter from the Black Duke.



The Black Duke enters Gibraltar

## MONMOUTH in the Med

After a surprisingly calm crossing of the Bay of Biscay, it was time for some final trials, a few port visits and a move to an operational footing as we headed towards the Suez Canal.

That's a reasonable amount to fit in during a "simple Med transit," including flying our brand new ScanEagle UAV, firing Heavy Machine Guns (a first for a T23) and then putting the Black Duke through the Navy's equivalent of an MOT in Souda Bay to prove the weapons and sensors. Clear of those trials, we had some exercises to run to make sure we're ready to respond to fires or floods, to threats from the sea and air, and to focus the mind ahead of the operational tasks ahead.

# Home from Home – “The Rock”

The first stop of the tour, Gibraltar, was an eventful stop for us all. We fronted up in the football and rugby, however struggled to cope with strong opposition provided by the locals in the first couple matches of our deployment. We all made the most of the rock, from exploring the extensive cave network to walking up it whilst trying to avoid the infamous monkeys, and of course spending an afternoon or two on the beach. The local nightlife and shopping provided entertainment enough for all of us, although the headaches in the morning were an unwelcome side effect experienced by many. Of course the ultimate cure for a good night out is the rock run, Sailors and Royal Marines racing each other up to the top, with Royal Marine Capt Will Stevens the winner by a country mile, for a unrivalled view of the morning prior to sailing later that day.

A chance to catch up with loved ones over the numerous WiFi hotspots, Gib was a great place for us to start what is becoming a very busy deployment for all.



Top left: MONMOUTH Rugby team before the game in Gib. Bottom Left: Ship's Company complete the rock run with stunning views over the harbour. Right: MONMOUTH enters port with Gibraltar rock in the back ground.

## Souda Bay



A chance for us to relax for the weekend before a very busy week at sea, Souda did not disappoint. Most of us headed into the nearby city of Chania to enjoy the local Taverns and historic harbour as we made the most of the sunshine with a beer (or two) on the seafront. It was not all play though, there were some serious matters to finalise before we sailed on Monday morning.



The Black Dukes' fastest man race (take 2) was still very much to be decided. With the winner LSC Jase Gilbert, beating PO ME Joey Halliday to our inaugural Black Duke fastest man award. Never ones to be beaten and having to go one faster, the ME Department spent a day at the local GoKarting track. The MEO Lt Cdr Mark Gibbs spending most of his time in the tyre barriers due to an interesting take on the rules by some of his department. As described by POME “Nobby” Clarke “More like dodgems than a grand prix”. MONMOUTH the bear also made his first appearance of our trip, keep an eye out for more.

Top – Storing ship alongside in Souda, with MONMOUTH the Bear  
Bottom – LSC Gilbert winning BLACK DUKE's fastest man  
Right – Our Marine Department Racing at the local GoKarting Track



Black Jack Flight Vertrep in the Med

## Black Jack - Flight

We said our goodbyes on the 6th of March, starting our journey south for the first stop in Gibraltar. Greeted by fantastic weather we took the opportunity to explore this "Britain in the sun." A part of the core task book for every matelot, amongst many other places we experienced the Donkeys Flip Flop (The Horseshoe – an infamous pub that lies between the dockyard and the town and sees a lot of Naval personnel).

Making the most of the good conditions, we achieved a lot of flying as we headed east in the Mediterranean, passing between mainland Italy and Sicily we arrived in Souda. For most of the flight it is somewhere we are quite familiar with. We disembarked and stayed at the NAMFI (a Greek military base) for 6 days.

Like a flash Souda was over and we re-embarked; back to reality we got on our way acquiring our new SMR and guest pilot on the way.

While heading back on our tracks towards Montenegro for one last 'Western' stop before heading through the Suez Canal we cracked some aviation serials, bedded in the new SMR, and had a day of Flight Deck sports and a Flight Deck BBQ.

Our first full ship crash on deck exercise was a manic and sweaty experience for the fire-fighters, but not so much for the boot-necks who "volunteered" to act as aircrew and therefore were soaked by the fully charged hoses!

That was March and here we are now alongside in Montenegro, a new stop for all and should be another adventure until we head through the Suez and get properly stuck in. Stay tuned for more next month.

## Heading East, Getting Hotter!!

As we head further East and the Suez Canal we embark on the next step of our 9 month deployment. With lots to look forward to and a busy programme there will be many 'dits' for us all to take home on our mid-deployment stand down. The Med has prepared the Black Duke for the many trials we will face East of Suez. Conducting port visits to build foreign relations and trials to ensure the Ship is materially ready it has been a busy time for us all. Leaving the Mediterranean behind and moving into the Red Sea, we are ready for the next step.

## Every Matelot feels at home in Bar

The Black Duke had the warmest of welcomes in Bar, our third stop on our current deployment. After some work with our newest partners in NATO, the Montenegrin Navy, it was time to enjoy a few days off exploring the local countryside of stunning vistas and ancient ruins. Both our Rugby and Football teams got a run out with our Rugby team venturing all the way into the capital Podgorica to play one of the very few teams in Montenegro, tough opposition proving too much for us in the end. In addition some of our own including WO1 Dave Sibson, ET Luke Machon, Lt Cdr Si Shaw, Lt Cdr Ed Munns, Chief Claude Hoareau and Chief "Nobby" Noble made the effort to climb one of the local mountains. No easy feat, a 15km walk to an altitude of 2500ft offered what they described as "stunning views" and "well worth the effort" as well as offering them the chance to cool off from the heat of the coast. Good food, culture and mega friendly people all helped to make this stop a great farewell to the Med for us.



Top: The Black Duke amateur mountaineers on their inaugural climb  
Middle: MONM fires Chaff rounds  
Bottom: AB "Robo" Robson firing MONMOUTH's brand new 50 cal.

