

MONMOUTH MERCURY

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All photographs taken by CPOET(WE) Roberts



The 'Black Duke' exercises with a US Warship near Somalia

MONMOUTH RAISES THE TEMPERATURE

Picture the scene...the faintest zephyr of breeze drags itself across the flight deck, the Arabian sun beats down, scalding the deck and making any thought of sunbathing unbearable. Sixty sweating sailors stand sizzling like sun-scorched snorkers, liberally basted in 'Pusser's issued' sun cream...intent on one thing only: a Flight Deck BBQ.

Whilst MONMOUTH has maintained a high operational tempo and accomplished a great deal in support of coalition operations in the Arabian Gulf, Red Sea, and the Horn of Africa; there has been time for some well deserved rest and relaxation. This issue of the *Monmouth Mercury* will aim to elucidate for you, the lucky reader, a mere portion of what your Matelot has been up to since last you heard from the 'Black Duke'.

SLt Isaac, OOW 4

Captain's Corner

*Cdr Ian Feasey RN,
Commanding Officer*

Dear Family and friends. Since the last issue of the Mercury things have been heating up, in more ways than one, for all on board the Black Duke. Having transited the Suez canal on 4 Apr we got our first taste of the heat with sweltering temperatures in the Red Sea making operations a little uncomfortable. The operational heat came from the need to transit the Bab el Mandeb strait at the bottom of the Red Sea. Because of the threat the Ship was at Action Stations for 8 hours in the heat, yet the camaraderie and team work ensured we were able to cope with the adverse conditions and the transit passed without incident; all that training at FOST in January paid dividends.

We have since been working with our American colleagues and other partner nations both to hone our ability to operate in this part of the world and also to help in the ongoing fight against piracy in the Gulf of Aden. There has been an increase in attacks on merchant ships in recent weeks and the Black Duke can anticipate spending more time in this region to protect global trade and ensure that ships end up safely in UK ports with their goods.

Since sailing from Montenegro some 47 days ago the Black Duke has spent 41 of those at sea on patrol; the remainder being alongside in Bahrain. This is a high ratio compared with other ships and as a result there has been a need to balance time focussed on operations with an afternoon a week where my team can relax, reflect and take stock. Each of us use this time differently, some choose to sleep, some reflect and others exercise, but we always aim to organise a team event to ensure that we can maintain the fighting spirit of the ship in which everyone plays their part. I therefore make no apology for the light hearted nature of this issue; I think it speaks to the finest traditions of Royal Navy sailors looking after one another whilst away from home.

I have had the privilege of conducting a 'CO's Inspection' of the Upper Deck and Engine spaces during the past month. These periodic inspections create a lot of competition on board as to which teams can produce the best standard. This inspection in particular brought home to me the mindblowing amount of work that everyone onboard is doing each day to maintain our weapon system and our home in extreme temperatures at all hours. These are amazing people, doing amazing things, but most importantly they are your friends and relatives; you should be proud.

In the next issue of the Mercury I hope to report more operational success and a port visit to East Africa....

Departmental Statistics:

Marine Engineering: *'Absolutely steaming'* During April Monmouth has spent 586 hours underway. This equates to watching 1528 back-to-back episodes of Friends.

Weapon Engineering: *'E-T(WE) phone home'* Each email home will travel approximately 44, 472 miles, or alternatively 1.78 times around the Earth.

Logistics: *'Nothing to yolk about'* Monmouth's hungry matelots have consumed 31, 680 eggs so far on the deployment; the attendance of Twickenham for the Army v Navy game.

Warfare: *'Fuel my ambition'* Monmouth has received 1, 350, 000 litres of fuel. This could fill just under 25, 000 cars in the UK.

Executive: *'Number Crunching'* During April, the Ship's Company completed a total of 75, 600 sit-ups.

Embarked Flight: *'Don't mean to flight-en you but'* During April and the initial part of May, the pilot and observer spent a combined total of 200 hours sunbathing.



Above: Monmouth engages in a RAS

Replenishment At Sea (RAS)

AB(SEA) 'Crash' Evans

Monmouth has successfully completed several Replenishments at sea (RAS) with both British and American Tankers. When out at sea for long periods of time it is a requirement for ships to refuel and re-store whilst on the move. HMS Monmouth completed her first RAS with USNS Kanawha taking on fuel and stores.

This was not only a chance to see some different faces but also to get some very vital stores onboard i.e toilet roll, fresh food and beer. Monmouth has also completed a RAS with British tanker RFA Fort Victoria again taking fuel and stores. The 'Black Duke' will have many more replenishments at sea whilst on deployment out in the Gulf in order to take on fuel, stores and, best thing of all, letters and packages from home.



Above: The winning team receive the Bucketball trophy from the CO (From left to right: LS Hajigeorgiou, AB Benning, AB Martin, AB Elliott, Cdr Feasey, LS Ramsey and AB Bevan)

Right: The team relishes their victory

Charity Totals Raised April-May

£82 CPO's Mess BBQ
 £178 Row the Suez
 £640 CPO's Horse Racing Night with BBQ
 £30 PO's Mess Army/Navy Rugby

Total Raised: £930.00 for the Ship's Charities!

Bucketball

AB WS(UW) 'Big Bad' Bevan
 AB WS(UW) 'Taff' Elliott

The day started off with mixed emotions for The Black Duke Dragons (BDD), as they knew they were up against it. But team captain AB WS(UW) 'Taff' Elliott called a team meeting and spoke about the emotional and physical rollercoaster that they would experience. At 2pm The BDD, mustered at midships ready for their last chance to bring it together. They made their way down to the flight deck in single file with chests bursting out with pride and then IT BEGAN.

The first game was against 'THE OFFICERS' which didn't bring enough challenge for The BDD. The game started off with a long ball from 'Scotty not Hottie' (Ramsey) to 'Pea head Benny (Benning)' And scored the opening goal. The game finished 5 - 2.

Then came the second game against Logistics - this proved to be more of a challenge. There was tension between the vice captain 'Big Bad Bev' and sun tan loving 'Stu Barlett' as they both fought for victory. Then came the Iron fist of Manchester-born 'Pincher Martin' and this put him to bed. The game finished 6 - 3.

The third game was against The PO's 'Weight lifting Club'. The BDDs were behind the whole game but the Dragons rose like a phoenix from the ashes of potential defeat to bring home the win. With 30 seconds left to play, the skipper 'Taff Elliott', picks himself up after an unlawful big hit by 'Joey No Leg Day Halliday'. Taff then passes the winning bucket to the waiting arms of 'Scotty Not Hotty'.

The final Game was against 'The Chiefs' going in as the underdogs. Here occurred a memorable instant that set the tone of the match. The Greek God 'Haji' rolled a bloodthirsty chief, with all his might, up into the air. There was an intake of breath from the spectators that will never be forgotten. The Dragons stepped up to the plate once again to come away with an historic victory.

The tournament ended with the rightful winners taking their place on the podium to collect the prestigious Black Duke Bucket Ball Trophy!



OP. SAMURAI BLADE

Mne Malbon

After entering into the Gulf of Aden, The Royal Marines Boarding Team (RMBT) had the opportunity to conduct their first boarding exercise serials, utilising U.S. and South Korean vessels.

First up was the boarding of the unfortunately named U.S.S Ponce (we were later informed it was pronounced Pon Say). After a swift boarding the RMBT were free to do what they are best at. They made their way to the bridge controlling and detaining numerous non-compliant occupants on the way. After securing the vessel to the best of their ability (after taking down the World's smallest 'pro' wrestler) and conducting an initial search, the Royal Navy Boarding Team arrived to conduct a more intrusive search for 'drugs', knowing that the vessel was now secure.

After trading some flashes and a quick photo the teams disembarked and were eager for their next boarding on a South Korean ship a few days later.

The RMBT used this second boarding as an opportunity to rehearse how they would carry out a boarding if it so happened that one of the sea boats (used to insert us onto the target vessel) was to break. With the cross decking from the 'broken' (for exercise purposes of course) sea boat to the healthy seaboard being complete, the insertion carried on as normal.

Right: Royal prepares to search a South Korean warship.

(cont...) I now know what it is like to be a famous person being hassled by paparazzi. Upon boarding the vessel, the RMBT became inundated with a hail of flash photography.

After fighting their way to the Bridge, overcoming various martial arts flying kicks, they stormed the Bridge and were met by the three most compliant crew members known to man.

Once they had determined who was who amongst the crowds of onlookers on the Bridge they swept the rest of the ship to find what intel had suggested was onboard. The Blue Team then arrived to come and do their part, finding a large cache of cereal boxes helpfully marked 'Heroin'. With the boarding serial over, it was time to exchange 'gizzets' before extracting back to HMS MONMOUTH for tea and medals.



Horse Racing

POET(ME) Fishwick

After a very long stint at sea the CPO's mess hosted the long awaited and infamous RN horse racing evening. The Ship's Company flocked to the Flight Deck armed with team names and banyan ready for a wind down and a good laugh with a couple of beers and the chance to win some beer tokens for the next stop.

The M.C. got the racing underway and Honest Bill's Bookmaker's took the monies for the first off. With the Warfare Boys winning the first race the other messes smelt a challenge, The PO's brought out a secret weapon for the events to follow with PO Stockley in the saddle and PO Fishwick as the lead trainer. Under the watchful eyes of the Ship's Company, the dices rolled and a close fought competition ensued. However, the PO's Mess romped home the win and the flourish to follow taking the 3rd race by a nose and completely dominating the 4th with little challenge yet they sat out the final race not due to the fact of a tired horse but couldn't count all the money they won. Lots of money was raised for charity throughout the evening and brilliant turnout by all involved events like this really do boost moral and within the ship and are a great wind down after periods at sea.



Above: Members of the CPO's Mess form 'Honest Bill's Bookmakers' for the racing night.

Tug 'o' War

Mne Tennison

On the 15th April Monmouth held a tug of war competition on the all-purpose 5G pitch (flight deck). Due to the physical stature and all round hoofing reputation of the Royal Marines their team were the outright favourites right from the very start...At 1400 all the teams mustered on the flight deck as the PTI established the rules and regulations at length. While all the other teams prepared by stretching and having numerous team talks on strategy, the Royal Marines were seen to be topping up on tanning oil and yawning, clearly not fazed by any of their competition.

The first match was the Stokers' A team vs the 28 man mess, the Stokers won this round 2-0. The second match was the Stokers' B team vs the Royal Marines, the Royals used this match as a bit of a warm up (for left arms only) and won the round 2-0. In the next round they came up against the Stokers' A team. The Royal Marines used their endurance and strength of granite, to hold their opponents at bay until they tired out, before quickly ending the first round. It was soon apparent that the Stokers had nothing left to stoke. The Royals quickly won the second round and progressed on to the final. The final was between the Wardroom and the RMs.

In the 3rd round everyone knew what was inevitably in store for the Officers so they took to a little bit of cheating (I'm sure Integrity is one of the principle values taught at Dartmouth?) adding 3 extra members to their team. Quickly they soon realised that was still not enough to win and added 2 more. The rules became more fluid and this allowed a win for the Wardroom.

In the 4th round, after running out of Wardroom members, the Officers decided to tie their side of rope to part of the ship.

Some say the Royals managed to stop the ship for a few seconds with the sheer force exerted through the hull. The victory was eventually taken by the Royals and they were presented the trophy by the XO to add to their rapidly expanding trophy cabinet in the Operations Room Annex.



Above: Physical prowess embodied

