

The Albion Chronicle

HMS Albion's newsletter for families and friends

Issue 2 | July 2019



ALBION Deploys

The Ship's Company and the embarked Joint Staff of the Commander of the Amphibious Task Group (COMATG) and Commander 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines (Bde Comd) lined the Ship's side for one last chance to wave goodbye to the many friends and family on the shore as ALBION sailed for the Baltic to lead the multi-national Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) task group in support of European security on 20 May. COMATG and Bde Comd have commanded the deployment – codenamed **Baltic Protector** – from ALBION. It is the first ever JEF deployment. At its peak, a total of 3,850 sailors, marines, soldiers, and airmen have taken part, along with more than 19 naval vessels from the nine JEF nations: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and UK.



D'YOU HEAR THERE?

If you have been struggling a bit to get in touch with your loved ones while we have been away, this is because there is a real world threat our communications may be interfered with. As a consequence there have been times when we have to remove our sim cards from our phones or turn them off altogether. Most of the time we still have Ship's email and Paradigm phones, although the queues can be quite long as they were on Fathers' Day! Normal service is resumed whenever we can, but thank you for your patience when getting in touch has been tricky.

From the Captain...

I hope you enjoy this bumper edition of the newsletter, which tells the tale of ALBION's short but highly significant Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) Baltic Protector deployment, from start to finish.

It seems a long time since I wrote to you all to inform you I had assumed command. In that time, your ship and your loved ones have achieved a great deal, and you should be very proud of them! After a lengthy maintenance period, the ship has regenerated and retrained itself (with some external help) to take the helm of the multi-national JEF task group.

I am sending you this as we sail from Helsinki, after three phases of operations in the Baltic which have seen us operate with all of our JEF partner nations. It has also seen us host Secretary of State for Defence and Chief of Defence Staff, along with their 8 counterparts from the other JEF nations, as they publically recommitted to the JEF concept and expressed how impressed they were at our achievements.

So what have we achieved? We have taken part in the largest American-led Exercise BALTOPS in nearly 40 years; we have re-asserted Britain's commitment to European security in a crucial region; and, we have worked closely with the Army and RAF and partner nation force elements deployed to this region. It's been a remarkably busy couple of months. But we've also had some fun, and this edition will also tell you about some of the good times we have had onboard, in places such as Copenhagen, Kiel and Helsinki.

As Captain I would like to say a huge 'Thank You' to each and every one of you for supporting your loved ones during a busy and demanding deployment: you know we couldn't do it without you! We are all looking forward to seeing you next week at our homecoming.

Peter
Captain Laughton MBE
Commanding Officer
HMS ALBION



TASK GROUP ASSEMBLE

Phase 1 of the Baltic Protector Deployment was all about amphibiousity (it's a real word, honest). This saw us meeting up with HMNLS Johan De Witt (the Dutch version of ALBION) and getting troops on the beaches. As can happen in these situations, the weather hampered efforts on a few days but thanks to the skill of the COMATG planners the objective was met. The final assault saw troops (and one dog) being dropped by Landing craft and helicopter onto beaches before "yomping" in and completing the objective.

Phase 1 complete, ALBION entered the Baltic Sea through the narrow Kattegat strait between Denmark and Sweden.



BALTOPS 19

And on to Phase 2 of the deployment – Ex BALTOPS 19; two weeks of large-scale fleet manoeuvres, amphibious assaults, stealthy commando raids and helicopter attacks, concentrated in Lithuania and Sweden.

Eighteen nations committed personnel and equipment – more than 50 ships and submarines, three dozen helicopters and aircraft and over 8,500 military personnel – to the US-led war game. This made it the largest BALTOPS in nearly 40 years.

Over the 14 days of the exercise – which has been running annually for 47 years – almost every aspect of naval warfare was tested. As UK flagship HMS Albion oversaw the amphibious assault spearheaded by 3 Commando Brigade, before BALTOPS reached its climax with 'free play': an unscripted war at sea between the two 'sides' drawn up for the exercise.



SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE VISITS ALBION



In a visit that underlined the UK's commitment to European security, Secretary of State for Defence, the Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, travelled to Klaipėda, Lithuania to visit HMS ALBION for a Conference to mark the first anniversary of the formation of the JEF along with her counterparts from all the JEF nations and their Chiefs of Defence. It is fitting that this anniversary should come during this first JEF deployment.

Secretary of State (shown here with Cdre James Parkin, COMATG) spoke alongside her Lithuanian counterpart, Raimundas Karoblis to emphasise the progress we have all made together in this first year.



ALBION REMEMBERS



Two anniversaries fall in the calendar of HMS ALBION. This year especially so, the 75th anniversary of D-Day and HMS ALBION was no exception. Although the Ship was many miles from the beaches of Normandy, the events of 6 June 1944 were commemorated on the Flight Deck, firstly by assembling the Ship's Company to form the number '75' and then by an Act of Remembrance. Cdre Parkin opened the service by reading the order given by General Eisenhower to each and every service man and woman involved in the Allied invasion. Chaplain

Wills read from a moving account of D-Day by a Royal Navy Chaplain, Mike Crooks. Chaplain Crooks had served onboard an American Tank Landing Ship on the day, an equivalent vessel to ALBION, which made it all the more poignant.

The other event is in some ways more personal to ALBION and our integral 4 Assault Squadron Royal Marines (4 ASRM) in particular. 4 ASRM are responsible for ALBION's fleet of Landing Craft. One of the Landing Craft is always designated 'FJ' – Foxtrot Juliet – and is named in honour of the coxswain of LCU F4, Colour Sergeant Brian Johnston from HMS FEARLESS, ALBION's predecessor as an LPD, for gallantry during the Falklands Conflict.



During Operation CORPORATE in 1982, the mission to re-take the Falkland Islands, LCU F4 was working in the vicinity of HMS ANTELOPE when an unexploded bomb detonated. The explosion immediately caused a fire resulting in ANTELOPE's crew being ordered to abandon ship. CSgt Johnston laid his craft alongside the ANTELOPE and began to fight the fire and take off survivors. At approximately 2200 hrs he was ordered to stay clear of the ship because of the severity of the fire and the presence of another unexploded bomb. CSgt Johnston nonetheless remained alongside until his load was complete, rescuing one hundred survivors.

A few days later on 8 June 1982, LCU F4 was bombed by enemy aircraft. CSgt Johnston and five of his crew were killed. For his gallant and distinguished service in the face of extreme danger CSgt Johnston was posthumously awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal. On return to the UK F4 was replaced by a new LCU and renamed "FJ" in honour of CSgt Johnston. Every year since, 4 ASRM holds a remembrance service to commemorate the actions of CSgt Johnston and his crew. This year, the ceremony was attended by COMATG and Bde Staff in addition to members of HMS Albion's Ship's Company.





Time to relax!

It is not all work! Occasionally the Ship's programme allows for a little down time at sea. The catering staff supported by members of the Wardroom hosted a Flight Deck BBQ, not quite the perfect weather in the North Sea for outdoor eating but the food tasted great all the same! These quieter periods also allowed for Flight Deck sports. Inter-mess bucket ball was the chosen sport for the day!



ASSUALT STATIONS



As you've read, during this deployment we have demonstrated ALBION's capability not just with other UK forces but our partner nations on the continent. The operational and training activity of our large and multinational task group are planned and delivered by COMATG and Bde Comd, both from afloat in HMS ALBION. It has been a huge honour to host Cdre James Parkin and Brig Matt Jackson and their staffs.



Wonderful, Wonderful, Copenhagen!

Our first Baltic run ashore was in Copenhagen. Despite possibly the highest lager prices in the world, everyone made the best of what the city and its environs had to offer. One revelation was the public transport system, which was extensive and convenient with a railway station close to our berth, allowing quick access to the city centre. The real surprise, however, was the electric scooters that were available to hire all over the city. All that was required was to download an app onto a smart phone that could be used to activate the scooter, and a way you went! The best part was that when you reached your destination you could abandon the scooter and then find another for your return when ready. Needless to say there was quite a collection of them at the foot of the gangway.



The period alongside also allowed the Ship's Company to partake in some sport and adventurous training. There was rock climbing, a 50km Copenhagen city tour on bikes and an opportunity to go for a visit to the old Viking stronghold of Roskilde and the impressive Viking Ship Museum.

The first round of the Ship's golf tournament took place at Kobenhavns Golf Klub and 23 of the Ship's Company competed. The ship's rugby team played in a friendly against Fredrickberg Rugby Club, who were the Danish Champions of 2018. The result sadly ended the Albion Lions' winning streak from last year, albeit with a respectable loss of 19-15. The Fredrickberg side commented that it was the toughest game they had played in some time.

After three and a half days of relaxed routines, the Ship sailed to take part in BALTOPS 19 (see page 2, above).



KIELER WOCHER

Fresh from participation in BALTOPS, ALBION headed to Germany for Kiel Week, an annual celebration of sea and seafaring which has been held for over 125 years. Albion fired a 21-gun salute as she arrived in Kieler Bucht, paying her respects as we passed the imposing German Naval Memorial at Laboe on the eastern shore of the bay, dedicated to sailors lost at sea of all nationalities.

The nine-day celebration of ships and the sea is one of the world's largest maritime festivals and the largest public event in northern Europe this summer, pulling in 3½ million visitors. Some 1,600 of those filed around ALBION for her 'open ship' event. Other collaborative events for participating navies including an international gathering of sailors, five-a-side football and rugby 7s tournaments, shooting, archery and golf competitions providing the chance for Brits to test themselves against counterparts from Germany, Denmark, Poland, US and Turkey.

Having taken part in the first 4 days of the festival, the task group sailed to prepare for the third and final phase of the Baltic Protector deployment, with a packed schedule of training across Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.



THE FINAL PHASE

After our visit to Kiel, the JEF Task Group moved into the third and final phase of the deployment, with a packed schedule of training across Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Royal Marine Commandos worked with Lithuanian Armed Forces to train in urban surveillance and ambush tactics.

Armed Forces Day – 29 June – saw Sailors, Royal Marines, Soldiers and Airmen of the Baltic Protector Task Group conducting amphibious raids and urban training in Lithuania and Latvia alongside their JEF colleagues from the Baltic States. Later, on 4 July, elements of the Estonian Defence Forces and Royal Marine Commandos were supported by ships, boats, helicopters and fast jets from the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force during a stunning display of littoral strike capability. The event was designed to demonstrate how the JEF can be used to reinforce partner nations from the ‘maritime flank’ during a crisis in Northern Europe.

It’s not every day you see a 62.5 tonne Challenger 2 Tank drive onto the UK’s Fleet Flagship. But operating in Estonia offered a rare opportunity to demonstrate how British Army tanks can be moved and projected ashore using Royal Navy and Royal Marines amphibious platforms.

The final exercise of Baltic Protector ended in a free play scenario on Saaremaa Island in Estonia. The defensive action against an amphibious assault was played out in the early hours of the morning between local Estonian Volunteer Defence League (EDL) soldiers and Royal Marines from 45 Commando.



HELSINKI HIGHLIGHTS

Our Final stop in the Baltic has been in the Finnish capitol Helsinki. As well as the usual round of defence engagement and Ship Open To Visitors, there has been time to get ashore and explore both the city and surrounding islands and some of Finland’s interior too. Two expeditions have been for walks in Pajanne National Park while the Golf Society enjoyed playing on the course at Espoo.



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