To Our Families

It has been three months since I last wrote and HMS IRON DUKE has now passed the half way mark of her six month deployment. In the time since my last letter we have successfully integrated with our NATO allies into the Task Group, conducted training off Norway (including a visit to the Arctic Circle) and spent our first period in the operational area of the Baltic. We have also visited many exciting cities including Amsterdam, Bergen, Trondheim, Oslo and Riga. With much more to come in the final three months this has become a truly enjoyable yet challenging deployment.

I hope that you have all had plenty of opportunities to talk to your loved ones while we have been away. WiFi has been a great enabler in maintaining links to home and I understand the intention is to fit every vessel in the RN with the same capability in due course; IRON DUKE has led from the front and I trust you have all felt the benefit of being able to stay in touch. My sense from talking to the Ship’s Company is that morale remains high and everyone is looking forward to seeing more of the Baltic in May and June. Your support continues to feed that morale, and I thank you for it.

There are challenges ahead for us, too; a Ship and Flight at sea for six months will begin to feel as tired as its crew. That means my engineers will be working harder to maintain her engines, machinery and weapon systems far away from the convenience of the UK; the operational tempo will increase as you have no doubt seen in the newspapers, and my warfare teams will be pivotal in maintaining our readiness as we establish ourselves in the Baltic; and of course nothing can happen without the support from those members of the Ship’s Company who keep IRON DUKE going 24 hours a day, including chefs, stores and communicators. There is much work to be done!

My job is to make sure I balance our operational tasking and responsibilities with sufficient time for the Ship’s Company to rest and recuperate. There are some excellent training opportunities ahead and I am sure we will be kept busy by events unfolding in the Baltic, but there will be time for some fun too. Everyone will make the most of these opportunities and you will no doubt hear great tales of adventure ashore, but the real effect we will have remains at sea and that is where I will focus my effort. Should it be necessary to restrict communications home for any operational reason, please do not worry – we will keep you informed as much and as often as possible.

Finally, as I did in January, please let me remind you of the sterling work of the RN/RM Welfare organisation (previously NPFS) which can be contacted on 02392 728777. For urgent cases the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC) is available 24/7 on 01452 519951.

With warm wishes from a rather cold deployment so far,

B W Aldous
Commander Royal Navy
Commanding Officer