

Monmouth Mercury

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Ready, Set, GOA!

As the Black Duke sails majestically into the final two months of her Gulf Deployment, the operational tempo remains high. Operating within the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman, the Ship and her Company have taken part in a wide variety of exercises and conducted several diplomatic events.

With the return journey through the Mediterranean in the forefront of everyone's minds, Monmouth's sailors continue to do their part in protecting shipping and contributing to general maritime security.



Above – A gunner at work during a 30mm shoot

All Photographs Courtesy of LPhot Rosenbaum

Captain's Corner

Cdr Ian Feasey RN

Dear Family and friends,

As I write, The Black Duke has just transited the Bab El Mandeb Strait at Action Stations and we have commenced our passage north towards the Suez Canal. This is a sure indication that the deployment is in its final phase and we will soon be back home in Devonport.

The Ship has been extremely busy during September and October, whether hosting Indian Naval Staff whilst alongside in Goa, maintaining our fighting capability through training exercises, or escorting vulnerable shipping through the Strait of Hormuz; the team have worked tirelessly to ensure that the ship continues to deliver for the UK despite having spent more than 7 months away from UK.

I can imagine that the final countdown has also begun at home; I know my daughter has a jar of sweets to count the days; one for each day until Daddy gets home. With the end also in sight on board the ship, we are counting the days but trying to take our minds off things with a balance of work and the odd social event to allow the team to relax.

I very much hope that as many of you as possible can join us for homecoming and be there on the jetty as we arrive into Devonport. It promises to be a very exciting, if somewhat emotional day!

Ship's Visit to Goa

SLt George Heathcote, BFT YO

Below – The Captain greets an Indian Naval Officer at the Gangway



Having spent the preceding weeks supporting international coalitions in efforts to intercept narcotics and weapon smugglers Monmouth crossed the Indian Ocean to visit India allowing the Ship's company to relax and recuperate after a busy few weeks at sea but also to conduct a number of defence engagements with the Indian Navy in order to maintain the positive relationship the UK has with their Indian partners.

The first day saw Commander I Feasey Royal Navy conduct calls on Flag Officer Goa, Rear Admiral Puneet K Bahl, with the two officers enjoying positive discussions with regards to both of their growing navies and how, with the reintroduction of carrier strike capabilities into the RN, the UK and Indians are looking forward to taking part in multilateral carrier operations in future.

As a gesture of good will gifts were exchanged as is customary when visiting partner nations.

Further engagement with the Indian Navy saw Monmouth flight crew along with a number of YOs visit the Indian Naval Air Station HANSA, the HQ of the Indian Navy's Fleet Air Arm. This visit allowed aviators from both navies to share experiences with one another and look at how each other operate with regards to naval aviation.

The Officers were fortunate enough to be hosted by the Wardroom of INS HANSA during an evening reception. The evening allowed officers from both navies to interact on a more relaxed level, strengthening the relationship between the two nations. Monmouth's officers were able to sample the excellent local cuisine, albeit considerably adapted to ensure it didn't prove too spicy for the UK officers.

After the defence engagements were over the Ship's company were able to explore and enjoy the delights that Goa has to offer, with many heading north to experience the glorious beaches and local delicacies on offer.

Having thoroughly enjoyed their time in Goa, Monmouth Ship's company were quickly back in the saddle returning to sea to conduct further tasking in order to protect the UK's national interests.

Right – INS Gomati and Monmouth take part in OOW manoeuvres



Crash on Deck Exercise

The Ship's Company of HMS Monmouth were put to the test mentally and physically in the form of a Crash On Deck Exercise (CODEX).

A CODEX simulates a helicopter, which is landing on or taking off, crashing on the flight deck.

It utilises all personnel on board the 'Black Duke' in challenging and diverse roles, from managing manpower throughout the ship to deploying first aid parties and organising specialist fire fighters and cutting crews onto the scene.

Volunteers came in thick and fast, as most were more than happy to act as casualties on the flight deck knowing full well they would very soon be cooled down by the water monitors and fire hoses in the 38 degree heat!

As the exercise unfolded, so did the extra challenges, where surprise casualties were thrown in along with numerous fires breaking out where the deck (surfaces) and bulkheads (walls) had been breached through the simulated crash on deck.



Above – Firefighting Effort

ET(ME) 1 Joel Rogers, who was one of the fire fighters on the simulated scene, said

“An exercise as large as this is extremely challenging not to mention the extremes of the heat we have here in the Indian Ocean. Plus on top of that, wearing all the fire-fighting gear to remain protected makes it that much more difficult and realistic.”

With the exercise complete and all equipment stowed, it was time for 205 Flight, embarked in HMS Monmouth, to prepare Wildcat ZZ533 for a routine flying sortie up into the cooler skies of the Indian Ocean.

Strait Back into it

SLt Isaac

Due to the political tensions and tactical implications of the Strait of Hormuz, the Black Duke was tasked with escorting two mine hunters, HMS Ledbury and Blyth through the contested waters. The Bridge Team, always happy to see another British warship, exchanged IDs using flashing light (as is routine on RN vessels) and fell into station on the port side of the mine hunters. Due to the limitations imposed by the propulsion systems of the mine hunters (built for manoeuvrability and stability, not speed) Monmouth made a sedate 8 knot transit (a third of her usual speed) in order to provide escort to the two smaller ships.

After successfully completing the transit without incident, the ships took part in winching drills using Monmouth's Wildcat helicopter and also conducted a boarding exercise.

Serials completed, Monmouth gave the MCMVs permission to carry on and they continued to Muscat in order to allow their Ship's Company to get ashore and take part in some well-deserved Adventure Training.



Above – Monmouth escorts the MCMVs

Commando Challenge



Above – Ship's Company carry a 80kg dummy

This made the cargo net considerably more difficult to negotiate. Once all four team members had crawled their way out of the net, a reward of 50 burpees greeted them. This only added to the muscle burn and finally the team made their way back down to the flight deck through the hanging obstacles to deliver the ammo and pick up the simulated casualty 'Dead Fred', the ship's man-overboard dummy.

Once more through the sheep dip with Fred and the final lap of the course began. Fred, weighing some 80kg when saturated, was carried by the team around each obstacle and returned to the flight deck for a period of hypothetical first aid.

The winning team completed the course in under 16 minutes, now being enlightened to what it is like to be a Bootneck, received a bottle of Black Duke ale each to celebrate. Well done to all the teams that entered.

Saturday 30th September saw the Royal Marines of HMS Monmouth host the Ship's Company for the inaugural Ship's Commando Challenge. The Marines, part of the ship's boarding capability, created a do-it-yourself version of the 'bottom field' assault course from Commando Training Centre Royal Marines including a makeshift sheep dip from the infamous Woodbury Common endurance course. Created from pallets and tarpaulin, the sheep dip took pride of place on the flight deck and was the start and finish point for all the participating teams.

The course began with sprints of the flight deck to sap the oxygen from the lungs before the teams of four made their way through the sheep dip to gather weighted ammo liners and start the first of several physical challenges around the ship's upper deck, all whilst wearing combat body armour and webbing. The teams progressed to the under-over obstacle made from a combination of bivouac shelters and buoys. Working as a team to successfully clear the obstacles with the heavy ammo liners, they moved to the midships cross passage to conduct a staple exercise in the RM's physical routine; the humble press-up. 100 reps between the team meant they progressed to the fo'c'sle where a Marine manned a fire hose and waited to drench them head on.



Above – The winning team with prizes (LStd Milton-Gorvie, Wtr Bartlett, Wtr Greenaway and SC Thomas)

BOARDEX

DURING HMS Monmouth's patrols of the Indian Ocean, the Royal Navy and embarked Royal Marines Boarding teams conducted a spot of boarding training.

The training involved various embarkation drills ranging from standard ladder drills to fast roping.

With both of the Black Duke's seaboats being used for the first part of the evolution, the Royal Marines Boarding Team (RMBT) donned all their equipment required for conducting boarding operations, and made their way onto the boats before peeling away from the Ship to get in position for the first run.

After the RMBT conducted a few runs embarking and disembarking on the pilot ladder it was time for them to practice the 3m hook-on ladder.

During this run, a dummy was used to act as a man overboard (MOB), essentially a member of the boarding team who had slipped and fallen into the water from the ladder. This is so the team are strong in the knowledge of what to do when recovering a MOB, which may become a reality during a boarding operation.

Marine Connor Aldrich RM said, "These drills are crucial to our operational effectiveness, however as simple as climbing a ladder is, it's made significantly more difficult when the vessel is moving at speed coupled with a choppy sea-state. It's good to get all our drills practised and fully squared-away so when the operational boardings are required, the whole team are on the same page, ensuring a smooth and safe procedure."

With the RMBT content with their runs, it was the turn of the Royal Navy Boarding team to practice their embarkation techniques.



Above – A member of the Boarding Team scales the side of the Ship



Above – Fast-roping onto the Fo'c'sle

Unlike the RMBT who are used to initially secure the vessel, the Royal Navy boarding team will conduct all the searching of compartments on a vessel in order to find any illegal cargo that may be on board.

Marine Staite said,

"The fast roping serial was a good opportunity to refresh the drills acquired on the Royal Marine Boarding Course. The first serial was fast roping onto the flight deck of HMS Monmouth wearing minimal kit. This was to refresh the drills and techniques in a controlled environment; it's also used to re-establish confidence in the procedures. The second time was in full boarding kit combined with the safety stores, which adds some serious weight. You can feel the increase of speed on the way down the rope. The third time was onto the fo'c'sle of the ship, whilst it was underway at approximately 10 knots to simulate the confined space and speeds which we may face operationally."

With both teams forging a strong partnership over the seven months whilst on board, it was time for HMS Monmouth to continue her patrols of the Indian Ocean in support of Combined Task Force 150 whilst on OP KIPION.

Flight Deck Sports

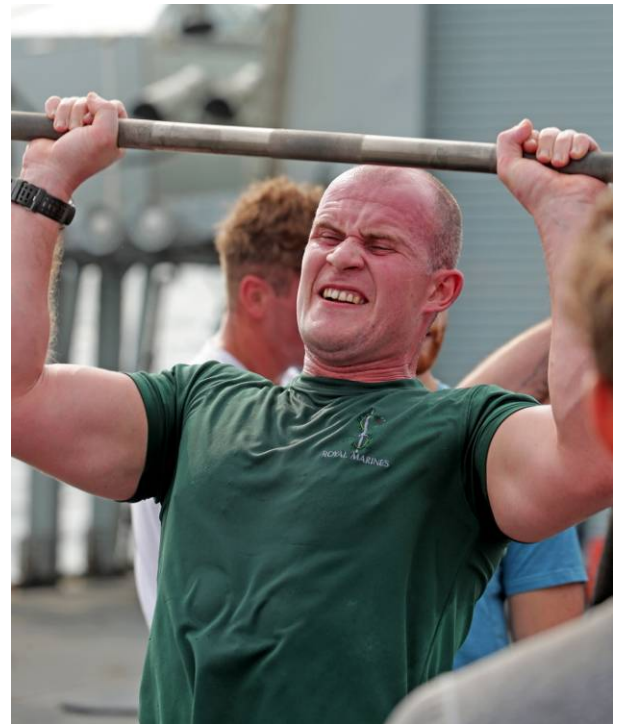
LPhoto Rosenbaum

On a hot muggy afternoon in the middle of the Indian Ocean, the crew of HMS Monmouth gathered on the flight deck ready for a brutal afternoon testing their strength and stamina.

The afternoon sport session, which was organised by LPT Aaron Squance, was aptly named the Crossfit Games, and involved six disciplines designed to test every muscle group in the body to its limits.

With over 40 participants taking part, the competition was staggered over a three hour period, with two teams battling it out at the same time every 30 minutes.

The event started off with each team of 4 personnel rowing 2 kilometres, straight into 200 sit ups, 200 push ups, 200 goblet squats holding an 18kg kettlebell, 200 military presses using a 20kg Olympic bar, and finishing with a 1.2 kilometre run around the Upperdeck carrying two drums of foam, each weighing in at 20kg, and all against the clock.



Above – Mne Lindsay endures the pain
Left – The XO carries two drums of fire-fighting foam



In case that wasn't challenging enough, each team throughout the whole event had to keep a 28kg kettlebell off the floor with harsh time penalties imposed if it touched the deck.

With every mess deck on board putting forward at least one team, the competition proved to be extremely fierce, especially when the fourth team to go, comprising of the XO, WEO, LO and Flt Cdr, set a blistering pace despite their combined ages of 156 years. Each team had to relentlessly tag each other to spread the extreme work load on the aching muscles.

After three gruelling hours, the competition came to an epic close, with the Ship's Rugby team (Carr, Owen-Hughes, Bartlett, Thomas) just pipping the Royal Marines to the finish line by a minute.

Monmouth's Fundraising Mission

The Ship is attempting to complete a fund raising challenge for the Royal British Legion (RBL) in memory of the Battle of Coronel, where one of the 'Black Duke's' predecessors was lost in action. Monmouth's Ship's Company are attempting to complete 738 miles in one day, in memory of the 738 souls that were lost on board her forebear in the Battle of Coronel in 1914. It requires each person on-board to complete approximately 4 miles each. Monmouth is completing this event to raise money for the Royal British Legion as a thank you to all the work they do and continue to do for Service Personnel. If you wish to donate money towards your loved one completing this event please follow the link below to go to the just giving page:

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/hms-monmouth2017>

Ship's Log(s)

Chef Harrower

My first trip away has seen me spend the first 3 months as the AB Caterer, ensuring that the daily requirements for ingredients are provided for the galley and ensuring that all food stores are accounted for. At Action Stations I am responsible for ensuring that all stations are adequately stocked with fluids and action snacks to ensure the Ship's Company don't fall down during the long periods of time spent at State 1, which has been 6 times and counting. Post-caterer, I moved into the Galley where I soon found myself in charge of a watch as part of the Command, Leadership and Management (CLM) incentive for the AB Chefs intent on moving up the promotion ladder. A stalwart of the Ship's football team, I am always keen to get stuck in alongside against what has been a variety of opponents, climates and even pitches!

It's always good to give the Chefs some time off at sea. By far the best way of doing this is through a Flight Deck BBQ. Making other departments dig out in the Galley prepping all the food and condiments (under the close scrutiny of a trained chef) gives a majority of the chef department some much needed downtime and the other departments an experience of what it is like to work in the intense heat of the galley. By far and away my favourite BBQ experience was watching the Wardroom struggle in the galley environment and having them serve you afterwards. It is also a good excuse to get some 'BanYan' rig on and chill out in the sun for some much needed relaxation for the Ships' Company.

BBQs are often combined with some evening entertainment in the form of a whole ship's quizzes; these are often competitive with many inter-mess rivalries becoming apparent. Each mess takes a turn in hosting the event. This leads nicely into RASing, in order to have a successful BBQ you need to have food, this is has been provided by a Replenishment at Sea (RAS), which involves many members of the Logistics Department. The POWtr is on bats, the Std takes notes with the Captain and Chefs, Writers and Supply Chain guys handle various lines.

This is a valuable way of getting a variety of stores onboard without having to go alongside and being able to remain operational for longer. It is not just food that gets provided in a RAS but also ammo, fuel and other pivotal stores, with my personal favourite being the RAS of beer to restock the NAAFI. One notable RAS for the ship was when LSC Gilbert having been checking stores onboard decided to send his mobile phone back to RFA Fort Victoria on one of the pallets. After much negotiation and a good will gesture from the Captain they were able to RAS the mobile back to the Black Duke.

So, a trip of firsts; first boarding stations, first drugs bust, first RAS of three commodities at the same time, first Hands to Bathe, first crossing the line, first flight deck BBQ, first rugby match against foreign opposition and ultimately a first 9 month deployment.

Just a small sample of what has been an eventful deployment so far. Who knows what sort of firsts lay in wait for the Logistics Department in the final months with the home-stretch yet to come!

Below – The Logistics Department

