From the Captain…

While news of our re-tasking to the Far East came as a surprise, it gives me great pride to lead the men and women of HMS ALBION to the forefront of UK operations. Our mission is to forge new partnerships and reaffirm long standing ties in a part of the world that is growing in importance.

While this means we will be away from home for longer, I would like to thank you for your continued understanding. As a husband and father, I fully appreciate the pressures of naval life, and will do my utmost to support your loved ones in their personal endeavours as much as their professional ones.

Many of you will have seen the excellent videos and pictures that we have shared online in recent weeks. I am pleased we have an active and growing Facebook group, and thank you for respecting the sensitivities of our programme.

I hope you enjoy reading about our recent travels. In a few short weeks ALBION has established her place here in the Far East in style. High profile visits to Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei and Japan provided a great opportunity to demonstrate the Royal Navy’s global reach, while the Royal Marines have proved their mettle in the heat and humidity of the jungle.

In all these endeavours, your loved ones have been the very best ambassadors the UK could wish for, and we should be proud of their skill and commitment. Thank you for your continued support.

Tim

Captain Tim Neild
Commanding Officer
HMS ALBION

ALBION VISITS THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

Many of your loved ones joined the Royal Navy and Royal Marines to see the world, and this deployment is enabling us to do just that.

Last month, HMS ALBION became the first Royal Navy ship to visit Brunei in seven years. While the Royal Marines were training in the jungle, the Ship’s Company were busy hosting local VIPs and exercising with the Royal Brunei Navy. When not on duty, there was time to explore the water village of Kampong Ayer – described as the ‘Venice of the East’ – while others headed to the mangroves in search of monkeys and crocodiles.

Meanwhile, for the vast majority of us, ALBION’S recent port visit to Sasebo marked our first time in Japan. Many chose to visit the nearby city of Nagasaki, famous for being a target of the nuclear bomb in 1945 which brought the Second World War to an end.

ALBION has now departed Sasebo and is back at sea to support maritime security in the Asia-Pacific region.
At 0200 on April 18th, HMS ALBION crossed the Equator and entered the Southern Hemisphere. In true seafaring tradition, King Neptune and his Royal Court came on board to celebrate with those who hadn't dared ‘cross the line’ before. In temperatures exceeding 32 degrees, Neptune emerged from the sea mist to deliver his remarks, in which he praised the Ship’s Company for their passage so far and warned them of what was to come. One-by-one, we were called forward, faces covered in shaving foam, for Neptune’s barber (the brother of Sweeney Todd) to ensure we looked presentable before the dreaded Doctor gave us our medicine. The Bears were the last port of call. These salty Sea Dogs made sure that every one of the 320 newly initiated members paid the correct respects.

LIONS SHINE IN SINGAPORE

In April, HMS ALBION became the first Royal Navy warship to visit Singapore since 2013. The visit, which followed 24 days at sea, afforded some much needed down time for the crew. It also provided an opportunity to demonstrate ALBION’S unique capabilities to an important Commonwealth partner.

ALBION’S sporting teams again put up a stellar performance, with ALBION FC beating their counterparts 8-4. Although the score line might not suggest it, this was one of the tougher matches the team have played so far, mainly down to the stifling Singapore heat.

ALBION RFC put in an equally heroic performance against Singapore National Select Rugby Club (a semi-professional side) who had just returned from the Rugby 7’s in Japan. Although it was a hard fought contest, the Singapore Select side came out on top with a 31-12 victory. Aside from sport, Singapore was able to offer water parks, zoos, shopping and hotels for those who wanted a bit of pampering.

17 YEARS YOUNG!

On a cold clear March morning in 2001, Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal launched HMS ALBION at Barrow-in-Furness.

Now, 17 years later and in slightly warmer temperatures, the day was celebrated with a wonderful cake made by our Logistics Department. Each of the 9 letters was raffled off, with all proceeds going to our affiliated charity, Claire House.
RENDEZVOUS IN THE JAVA SEA

In April, ALBION rendezvoused with a French Task Group off the coast of Indonesia, demonstrating the global reach of UK-French naval cooperation.

The link-up offered the impressive sight of two large assault ships sailing in close formation. It also provided the opportunity for personnel exchanges. The French sailors who visited ALBION reported that they were pleasantly surprised by the quality of British cuisine!

RM SPECIAL PURPOSE TASK GROUP (SPTG)

We asked the Officer in Charge, Major Mick Trafford, about the Task Group.

**What's your primary role?** We are a Company size of approximately 150 Royal Marines drawn predominantly from 45 Cdo, providing a very high readiness, versatile, force to conduct virtually anything, anywhere, at any time, day or night; be that personnel evacuation, disaster relief or combat.

**What does a typical day at sea look like?**

ALBION provides flexibility for my Commandos to maintain their physical fitness, conduct live firing drills and close quarter battle training, and to prepare for the numerous exercises. In addition, my Commandos will complete personal development activities, such as educational qualification and language training.

**Can you tell us about the recent jungle training in Brunei?**

This is the first time a Special Purpose Task Group has been sent to the Far East which is why we wanted to exploit whatever training we could in this part of the world. Brunei offered 80% of my guys their first opportunity to work in the jungle.

The jungle is probably the best possible environment for honing Commando skills. In the Arctic the elements will always be your biggest enemy, whereas in the jungle once you learn how to manage the heat and humidity you can actually focus on pure soldiering.
The LION SLEEPS TONIGHT

HMS Albion’s Chaplain, Eddie Wills, shares his memories of accompanying the Royal Marines into the Brunei jungle.

At first light on Saturday 28 April, the stern gate of HMS ALBION opened to allow two landing craft crammed with 150 or so Royal Marines and 8 Royal Naval personnel to head ashore and into the jungles of Brunei for Exercise Hutan Commando.

Once landed, we made our way through the sweltering heat to our ‘harbour’ site. Here we set up hammocks between the trees, covered by a mosquito net and poncho to keep off the worst of the rain. After a tasty ration pack meal we settled down for our first night.

One of the first things that strikes you about the jungle after the heat is the noise. There is a constant background buzz of insects, mostly cicadas and crickets, including one we named ‘the car alarm beetle’ - its noise was so loud that when we attempted to get near it actually hurt our ears! There are many other sounds - birds, monkeys and so on - but disappointingly we didn’t see very many of them. Thankfully we didn’t see many snakes or large spiders either. Nobody was very disappointed about that!

On our second day we set out on an orienteering exercise, far from easy when you quite literally cannot see the wood for the trees. The jungle is a difficult environment to survive in for the uninitiated. A substantial part of our field training revolved around basic survival skills, including tracking, shelter building, trap making and making use of the local flora and fauna as food. Some fruit tasted better than others and the giant ants (about the size of a wasp) weren’t too bad, but I drew the line at eating a still squirming Mango Grub. Apparently they taste like chicken when roasted…

Wednesday provided a change of scene when we were relocated to a river for river crossing drills. This had to be accomplished in both directions, firstly as a group of four, then with a return trip as an individual. To make matters even more interesting, crocodiles were known to infest the river, so it was reassuring that there was a Zodiac boat to keep them at bay! With both trips successfully completed small groups conducted contact drills along the banks before spending the night in the relative luxury of Sittang Camp.

Returning to the jungle for our final day, we were left with minimum equipment and tasked with building a shelter to sleep in for the night. Timber was in great supply, but finding sufficient numbers of large leaves to create a roof proved more problematic. However, by lunchtime four structures of widely varying designs had been constructed and all that remained was to collect fire wood for the night. Throughout the night we took it in turns to keep the fire burning - that is until the heavens opened and the fire was extinguished in moments. Little sleep was had as we huddled within the shelter. The rain stopped at first light, almost exactly as we broke camp.

I suppose the acid test of this experience is would I be prepared to do it again, to which the answer is most certainly yes - just not right away!
FLIGHT DECK VISITS

Since we deployed, HMS ALBION's has worked five different types of helicopter, including Chinook and Griffin from the RAF, Fleet Air Arm Wildcats, a French Alouette and this Black Hawk helicopter from the Royal Brunei Navy.

KEEP UP TO DATE!

Follow HMS ALBION on Twitter @hms_albion and Facebook ‘Royal Navy’

Charities to help service personnel and their families with support and advice on a wide range of issues:

INDONESIAN INSIGHT

HMS ALBION'S warmest welcome so far has come from the people of Indonesia. As the ship arrived in the capital city of Jakarta, we were greeted by traditional dancers and dozens of schoolchildren waving British and Indonesian flags. The Captain was even given a garland of flowers to wear around his neck!

Consisting of more than 17,000 islands, Indonesia is one of the world’s most populous democracies, with a rapidly growing economy. The excitement reflected the fact that ALBION was the first Royal Navy ship to visit in seven years.

While we were there, a group of sailors and Royal Marines led by the ship’s Chaplain was invited to visit a local Orphanage to experience a traditional Indonesian meal, which is served on banana leaves.

The children were very excited to meet the Ship’s Company and were queuing up to take selfies. After the visit, a collection was held for our left over Indonesian currency which raised the equivalent of more than £400 for the orphanage, who are over the moon with the donation.

LOOK WHO CAME ABOARD!

During our visit to Brunei, we were pleased to welcome former Liverpool footballer John Barnes onboard. He’s a big supporter of the Armed Forces and was keen to talk to the ship’s company about the importance of teamwork and camaraderie.