DEFENDER JOINS NATO CARRIER STRIKE GROUP

As part of the Government’s commitment to the fight against global terror, HMS DEFENDER has become part of the French Carrier Strike Group. She will command and control the airspace around the French carrier, Charles de Gaulle, protect the Task Group and direct jets deep into Iraq and Syria to strike at the heart of Daesh.

The Ship has already conducted training missions with French Air Force Mirage aircraft and has been honing Air Command and Control skills while conducting counter-arms and weapons smuggling operations in the Gulf of Aden.

She will be escorting the Charles de Gaulle into the Arabian Gulf through the Straits of Hormuz, as part of an international NATO Task Group involving French, German, Belgian, and Japanese ships.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CAPTAIN – Cdr Stephen Higham

December has been an poignant month for DEFENDER. Joining the French Carrier Strike Group allows us to fulfil our primary role as an Air Defence Destroyer, and demonstrate the T45’s world beating capability but it also reminds us of our role to project power against our enemies.

It is also a difficult time of year for us, and our loved ones at home as we approach the Christmas season. We will all be missing our families, particularly at this time of year.

However, every Sailor and Royal Marine serving in DEFENDER knows that what this Ship does directly contributes to the National Security of the UK. Whether it is interdicting illegal arms shipments to terrorist groups or delivering world-class Air Command capability from the sea and directing and controlling aircraft conducting strikes against Daesh overland, we are resolved to do all we can to keep our Country safe and protect our Nation’s interests.

I hope you are proud of the vital work your loved ones are doing. We will have you all in our thoughts and prayers this Christmas.

I wish you all, on behalf of the ship’s company of HMS DEFENDER, a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Peaceful New Year.
DEFENDER recorded a Christmas Message whilst on Operations with the Carrier Strike Group in the Gulf of Aden.

The ship’s company not on watch mustered on the Flight Deck to wish their friends and family at home a Merry Christmas. The weather might not seem very festive, but the ship’s company embraced the Christmas spirit with hats, tinsel and homemade banners to show their loved ones they are thinking of them.

DEFENDER is lucky to be spending Christmas alongside in Dubai, which will give the ship’s company a well-earned break after a very busy period at sea. Before she gets alongside, however, there will be a traditional RN Christmas on board.

The festivities will include roast turkey with all the trimmings – carved by the captain and served by the officers. There will also be a charity Reindeer Racing event and, of course, each mess will hold a Secret Santa.

Whilst the ship’s company will all be missing friends and family back home, the day will hopefully go some way to bringing a bit of Christmas cheer to us all.

If you would like to see what we, and the rest of the RN are up to this Christmas then take a look at the Royal Navy Facebook page or search online for #YuletheWaves for all the RN’s Christmas messages.

---

**PADRE’S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE**

A traditional Christmas decoration is the Advent Wreath or Crown. It is made of a variety of things which all have different meanings to remind us of the meaning of Christmas. First are the evergreens, symbols of immortality. Then there are laurels which signify victory over persecution and suffering. Cedar denotes strength and healing and the prickly leaves with red berries of the Holly reminds us of the crown of thorns at Easter which is the fulfilment of Christmas. The circle of the wreath, with no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God and on top of the wreath are five candles. Four to represent the weeks of Advent;

Hope, the hope for all God’s People.
Peace, the Prince of peace the Prophets came to foretell.
Love, the love of family for child and the love of God for creation.
Joy, the joy of Mary on carrying the Christ child.

The progressive lighting of the candles symbolizes the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord’s first coming into the world and the anticipation of the completion of God’s Kingdom. The last Candle is the Light of the world which represents Christ and is lit on Christmas Eve.

There are no trees at sea so HMS DEFENDERS’ wreath is slightly different! We still have the candles and the circle, but the base is made from a 4.5” shell. The use of a piece of our ammunition reminds us of the hope of peace, when swords will be beaten into plough shares and spears into pruning hooks and nation will not take up arms against nations and there will be war no more.

Advent calendars, advent wreaths, Christmas trees, giving and receiving presents all are there to remind us of the Christmas story. The story of the gift of a loving God to all people, in coming to live with us, be one with us, share all things with us, but most importantly to allow us to have a loving relationship with God, and the continued hope for peace between all. I wish you all a very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

---

**CHARITY FUNDRAISING**

Thanks to all those at home who are getting involved, keep in touch via the email address below and let us know how you are getting on. If you have any photos of your charity fundraising events then send them in and we will include them in the Newsletter.

Upcoming events:
Reindeer Racing – A traditional RN ‘Horse Racing’ night with a Christmas twist.
Christmas Cake Sale – volunteers will show off their baking skills in the galley and produce some tasty treats to sell during the Christmas festivities.

**TOTAL = £429.68**

If you would like to get involved in our fundraising at home please contact our Charities rep RPO Murphy:

HMSDFND-Exec-RNPoliceSectHd@mod.uk