**From the Captain**

**Operational Sea Training** is the process by which OCEAN is trained and validated to conduct all the myriad of activities that could be expected of us. It places pressure on every element of the ship; from the equipment and tactics to the people and doctrine. The programme is carefully designed to build the ship up slowly and challenge us with ever more complex "problems" to solve. It follows an adage that has served the Royal Navy well for hundreds of years, namely to train hard and "fight" easy. You can rest assured that all of this is done in a very controlled and deliberate way (even if, for many, it seems somewhat overwhelming at first). What is most pleasing (to me) is that every member of the ship’s company has responded to the very significant challenge that they had been set.

Some of the stories here sound pretty ghastly and you will have heard from your loved ones as to the challenges that they have faced over this period – yes, it’s tough, but you would expect nothing less as this training is what will take us, should it be required, into harms way and deliver us home safely on completion. I am immensely proud of what everyone has achieved and I am most grateful to you for your ongoing support which allows us to continue. There is certainly light at the end of the sea training tunnel and, beyond that, an equally exciting programme; but more of that next time.

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**OPERATIONAL SEA TRAINING**

Imagine a training exercise dreaded by many, designed to test the very best the Royal Navy has to offer. A psychological torture that can mentally break even the most experienced of matelots. Such an experience can be described in three simple words: Operational Sea Training. Stress levels can reach an all-time high and tensions will be tangible as you tackle each exercise, whether it be a corroded cable on HF Comms repaired by CPO D’Arcy’s Weapon Repair Team, or a ‘fire’ in the Aft Radar Office extinguished by CPO Lancaster and her team; all of which will be introduced by the reverberation of impending doom (otherwise known as the General Alarm)!

Many will experience sleepless nights, dreading the long and arduous road ahead of them the next day. But, there is a light at the end of this dark, gruelling tunnel. For when all the smoke is clear, every soul on-board will emerge far greater than when he entered. When the dust settles (don’t be daft, there’s no dust on-board!), every soul on-board can say they walked through Hell barefoot…and survived! OST is designed to assess you, and your ship, to test the entire department, from the Lieutenant in charge of the Weapon Repair Organisation, to the ET Proctor tackling a flood in the Forward Gyro Room. Yes, it may be just a ‘game’. But play it, and win it, and after multiple weeks of blood, sweat and tears: game over. But most importantly, ready for anything!

*ET (WE) ‘Yorkie’ Holdroyd*
A right ‘Royal’ Affair

It’s not often the Royal Marines of 9 ASRM get the chance to don their finest rig and attend a Regimental Dinner. However, the celebration of the Royal Marines 350th birthday seemed to be the perfect excuse, albeit a little belated. The evening was enjoyed by all who attended, including all members of 9 ASRM, members from Ocean’s ME and WE assault organisations and other ‘green lidded RN’. The dinner proved to be the perfect opportunity for green to mix with ‘blue’ and further build a good working relationship sharing some of the Corps valued traditions.

The chefs put on an excellent three course meal to be enjoyed with good wine and even better company. The service was impeccable and the efforts of all the catering team did not go un-noticed and for that we thank them. A special mention should also be made to Mne Mackenzie who made a great effort in reciting the Corps convening order. The Corps memorable dates and battle honours were read out by other members of the Squadron and when the time came for the toasts Mne Wyeth managed to steal the thunder of the Colonel by prematurely making a toast to the lads of 9 ASRM. Further toasts to the Queen, the Commandant General and to absent friends were made to round off what was simply a wonderful evening. Thanks go out to all involved in organising the event which will not soon be forgotten.

LCpl Chris Scoles.

A VERY BUSY ‘VILLAGE’ INDEED...

Having joined HMS Ocean earlier this year fresh out of the box from the Leading Airman Qualifying Course, I’ve had a very busy period leading up to Operational Sea Training (OST). I was given various jobs in addition to my core role as a Leading Airman, including duties as a HQ1 watch keeper, manning the Ship’s centre for incident control. Following a short time back alongside in Plymouth after our time in the Mediterranean with the COUGAR 14 Task Group, we had to get the ship ready to meet the cleanliness and safety standards for the start of OST.

Throughout the OST period we have hosted an array of Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force aircraft including Lynx, Merlin, Seaking, Apache and Chinook.
The Ship is now operating day and night giving me the opportunity to work with various aircraft types expanding my professional knowledge and confidence massively.

We currently now have 4 Royal Navy Lynx Mk 8 aircraft embarked until Christmas with 100 squadron personnel in addition to aircraft that will be flying to and from the Ship every day. This means the Air Department has a very busy schedule conducting aviation training to support various squadrons in deck qualifications, and gives me more opportunities to keep improving on my leading airman skills whilst also helping and leading junior Naval Airmen on the deck and in action and emergency stations. I am looking forward to completing OST and having some down time in Amsterdam then on to Christmas leave and a well deserved break.

LA(AH) Katie Village

As ever, everyone has continued to put in 100% effort and when we haven’t been participating in the training serials we have had to continue with maintenance and sort out the ever present defects. The routine day to day jobs have also had to keep on being done with the photos below capturing some of the team at their places of work.

ETME Hynd, above left, is doing a great job sorting out and processing the enormous quantities of rubbish that OCEAN generates every day; a rather suave pose in front of one of the Garbage Processing Machines in the bowels of the ship.

Some of the Assault Section have been tracked down and are shown, above, taking a few seconds out from maintaining one of the two aircraft lifts. Capable of lifting helicopters, troops and equipment over 30 feet from the hangar to the flight deck these pumps and lifts are massive.

The Marine Engineers also play a key role in the fire fighting teams, an unlikely looking group photographed in the middle of one of the many exercises (above right). Unfortunately we haven’t been able to identify them - if anyone can recognise their loved one then please forward all answers on a post card to: Chief Stoker, HMS OCEAN, BFPO 350!

Lt Ollie Fairbairn RN

OST? And the rest...

November has been an extremely busy month for the ME Department as we have continued with the delights of Operational Sea Training in order to help us develop as a team to operate, maintain, fight and repair HMS OCEAN in times of peace and ultimately, if called upon, times of unrest.
Lead, learn, laugh... It’s no joke!

‘Lead, Learn, Laugh.’ This is the mantra that the Captain appropriated for this OST period.

Harbour week, the first week of OST proper, consisted of honing our war fighting skills in MCTS (the closest we can get to an ops room experience ashore). At the same time we spent the week ‘under attack’ from enemy forces firing at the ship from the jetty at all hours (though usually the unsociable ones) and we had one quite inconsiderate intruder which forced the whole ship’s company out of the bed for hours at a time when you’d really want to catch up on some much needed sleep. Sleep, or lack thereof, would be a bit of a theme for OST.

When we got to sea the first major operation was the disaster relief exercise, based on Illustrious’ time in the Philippines, that utilised a large amount of the ship’s crew who were sent ashore by the Marines’ Landing Craft (LCVP) and everything from the ship’s amphibious capability to how the crew dealt with casualties, fire fighting and even rebuilding a school was tested. This was knackering but for bits of it actually quite fun.

Throughout OST we have had numerous testing, simulated situations thrown at us at all times of the day and night. Amongst them we’ve had major fires, helicopter crashes on deck, floods, chemical attacks, air defence exercises and full on wars that test everything at the same time. No one on board had an easy time of it and very few people had much sleep. Training to deal with all these threats to the ship whilst, at times, deprived of any rest has proved that we’ll be able to deal with almost anything, whenever it might happen. Throughout the period we, as a ship, have improved dramatically and are now, hopefully, ready in all respects to go to war if necessary.

As my first OST it’s been an eye-opener and seriously useful, but I’m certainly not that disappointed it’s over. My suggestion to change the Captain’s mantra to Lead, Clean, Learn, Don’t Sleep, Laugh, Clean, was turned down for not being catchy enough!

AB (WS) Titmus

TO OST AND BEYOND

Throughout Operational Sea Training (OST), the Logistics Department have been in the thick of the action; in particular, individuals have been fire-fighting and flood-stopping with the Forward Repair Party Posts (FRPPs) as the Ship sustained simulated damage. Departmental personnel have also provided life-saving first-aid to simulated casualties throughout the scenarios. The Catering Services team have been working to a tight schedule to feed the entire Ship’s Company during Action Messing, cooking, serving 550 personnel and clearing up again within a 75 minute “lull” in the action. Alongside the war-fighting efforts onboard, the Department have been involved in Operation Dryout, where a troop of Royal Marines arrived on board mid-way through a field exercise and were given food, had their clothes laundered, and given a bed for the night to allow them to refresh before returning ashore to complete their activities.

Logistics personnel were also heavily involved in the OST disaster relief exercise, on board and on the ground in a number of sites around Freeport (aka Plymouth), providing support to villages devastated by a recent hurricane. The exercise was based on HMS “ILLUSTRIUS” experience providing humanitarian assistance in the Philippines in 2013. The last phase of the exercise involved a large-scale evacuation of civilians from the ‘devastated’ country; Logistics personnel were involved in registering, feeding, medical screening and accommodating the evacuees on board. The Logistics Department continue to work towards the Ship’s goal to become the UK’s operationally ready LPH, before a well earned Christmas break.

SLt Coomer. RN

WHERE TO FIND HELP AND SUPPORT…

For general welfare support call the RN/RM Welfare Portal - 02392 728777
Need your loved one back in an emergency? Call the Joint Casualty & Compassionate Cell - 01452 519951
Or email HMS OCEAN’s Chaplain - The Rev’d Stu Hallam on HMSOCEA-EXEC-CHAPLAIN@mod.uk

Comments and suggests about the newsletter are always welcome, please email the Chaplain above!