Operation GRITROCK
Deployment Support and Families Newsletter ~ No2

Newsletter Overview

Within this newsletter we seek to update the families and loved ones of those deployed on Op GRITROCK, the UK response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa, and inform those families and service personnel who may deploy on Op GRITROCK about pertinent welfare support and key deployment issues. Please be aware that it is not intended to be read in isolation but complement the advice and guidance provided by relevant Governmental Agencies and Local Health Authorities tasked with supporting this emergency both at home and abroad.

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1 - OP GRITROCK OVERVIEW

The Big Picture

- **UK PM statement to Parliament following the European Council Meeting 24 Oct 14:**

  "In Ebola we are facing one of the worst public health emergencies in a generation, and I have been absolutely determined that Britain, with other countries, will lead the way in dealing with this.

  There is a massive crisis in West Africa, and we should feel some moral obligation as a wealthy country to help. But also, we are dealing with it because it directly threatens our national interest and our people in the United Kingdom, and that is why we have taken such a leading role."

- This Government’s first priority is the safety of the British people and playing our part in halting the rise of Ebola in West Africa is by far the most effective way of preventing Ebola infecting people in the UK. The UK has some of the best public health protection systems in the world and the risk to the UK remains low. The NHS has robust and well tested systems in place to deal with the threat of Ebola

- Amongst the three most affected countries, the UK is leading the response in Sierra Leone, with the US leading on Liberia and France focusing on Guinea.

- The Ministry of Defence is assisting the Department for International Development in providing a key component in the UK’s response. The UK military has extensive experience in providing care to large numbers of personnel during a humanitarian crisis, as well as a degree of clinical knowledge regarding infectious disease control and containment measures. RFA ARGUS is providing a vital logistical lift capability with her embarked Merlin helicopters, and the RAF provides air-transport and an aeromedevac capability should it be required.
As we all know, Ebola is a ghastly disease and if unchecked has no respect for individuals, families or indeed international borders. The effects and consequences of the disease have presented our Commonwealth partner Sierra Leone with a significant challenge to stem the tide of this epidemic, and we must continue to make every effort to support them in this battle. Together we can beat this terrible disease and genuinely save lives.

In my capacity as Chief of Naval Personnel and Training and Second Sea Lord the welfare of our sailors, marines and auxiliary personnel is my absolute priority. I have emphasised the importance of keeping you informed as much as possible throughout this important operation, and have asked that any questions you may have are, in the first instance, to be addressed to and answered by those in direct command of those deployed.

I am in no doubt that your foremost question is when your loves ones can be expected to return home. Some will already have returned home as part of the normal manning cycle, and others can be expected to do so between now and April 2015, when it is anticipated that RFA ARGUS will return to the United Kingdom. In any event, if there are any changes to the roulement cycle, returning individuals or groups of people early or slightly later than you might have expected, you will informed at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Naval Service prides itself on being on duty around the globe twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, at sea, on land and in the air. In direct response to this global emergency your loved ones continue to deliver a much needed service in Western Africa and we must all be justly proud of what they are doing right now. I wish, personally, to express my heartfelt thanks for your incredible support so far, not only on behalf of a grateful nation but also that of the wider International Community as we continue to stand up to this global crisis.
Dear families,

As we approach the festive period I look at what 1 AGRM is doing to support the battle against Ebola in Sierra Leone and am filled with immense pride at what we have achieved so far. We are working tirelessly to battle this epidemic together with 42 Commando Royal Marines, RNAS Culdrose and RFA ARGUS as our men and women continue to deliver much needed aid and medical supplies to those people in need.

Rest assured, the welfare of your loved ones remains my ultimate priority and I receive regular returns from the Chain of Command in RFA ARGUS with the assurance that they are being looked after at all times. Our team continues to do a fantastic job in the region and you are right to be as proud of them as I am.

Please let me take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year from all of us here at 1 AGRM. Needless to say, you would have wanted to have had your loved ones with you during this festive time but they will return in the New Year and I know you will continue to provide them with the moral support they so richly deserve.

If you need any further support from 1 AGRM our Welfare Team remains ready and able to assist you in any way possible to ensure you are looked after and kept informed at all times.

A very Merry Christmas to you all and a Happy New Year.
Dear 42 Commando Families,

I am really proud of the contribution that our people are making in Sierra Leone, alongside their colleagues from 1 Assault Group, RNAS Culdrose and RFA Argus. Our men have been supporting the movement of people and materiel in landing craft and helicopters, as we expected, but a small group have also made a valuable contribution ashore.

The Senior British officer in Sierra Leone noted that the regional Ebola response coordination centre in Makeni was not running effectively, and he tasked six of our men to go and assist. They added huge value, improving the centre’s infrastructure and setting up an ‘operations room’. In this way, over the course of a couple of weeks, they lent their command and control expertise to support the civilian led coordination of Ebola support. This team has now returned to Argus and should be proud of what they have achieved in improving the coordination of response in and around Makeni.

As you would expect, I am keeping a very close eye on how our men are being employed and also whether there is enough work for them to do to make their continued deployment worthwhile. I hope to visit the team shortly to see for myself and I will provide you more feedback after that visit.

In the meantime, please let me wish you all the very best for the preparations towards Christmas – I know that the absence of loved ones can make this a difficult time. Please don’t hesitate to contact us if you need support or advice. We are here for our hard-working families.

Sincerely,

Rich Cantrill
Dear Families,

Since leaving Falmouth on the 17 Oct 14 it has been a whirlwind ride for the Marines of 539 and 42 Cdo. Initial health and safety briefs, operational briefs and general understanding of how Sierra Leone managed to get the Ebola Virus, coupled with bad weather in the Bay of Biscay meant that the first few weeks have flown by. We are now entering our fourth week in Sierra Leone. So far the Marines have completed several beach and river reports that have outlined how accessible the Sierra Leone River is for the transport of stores and personnel, and this is likely to be our primary role during this Operation. 42 Cdo have been managing all Force Protection activity for the Ship which includes hours of what may appear monotonous walking around the various decks of RFA ARGUS – sun cream always at the ready! Talking about the weather we experience searing heat during the day of around 37° and awesome thunderstorms in the evening. They are doing a great job and have managed to maintain high morale throughout. In addition, 6 members of 42 have moved inland to Makeni to assist with the stabilisation of that district. Working from a secure compound they are providing leadership and management to the local district teams (UK military and DfID officials) that coordinate the Ebola response force. These Marines have really got into the weeds with what they have been asked to do and are doing a fantastic job and making a real difference. Notable periods on the trip so far have been the 350 celebration of the Royal Marines. On the 28th Oct we celebrated our birthday with a cake (onion flavour) and a note from the Brigade Commander, Pudsey Bear shout out to all those supporting Save the Children fundraising and the Laundry Troll! I’ll let the marines explain the tale.

Just to reassure the families back home, when the Marines go ashore in Sierra Leone there is a no touch policy and exposure to the local population is minimal despite the media photos seeming to suggest otherwise. With Malaria being the biggest threat, anti-malarias are taken daily and all the Marines are paying heed to this advice. When they return back onboard RFA ARGUS there are stringent medical checks; temperature monitoring twice daily to identify any possible fever/infection quickly. So, we are being looked after by the doctors onboard and are truly in good hands.

To finish, can I thank all of you who are left behind at home. The support that you are giving to our young men is essential and I see it on a daily basis with the Marines in high spirits, willing to react at short notice to resolve all sorts of problems. Without your support my job as the Officer Commanding Royal Marines would be considerably harder. So on that note, I wish everyone a Merry Christmas, we will be thinking of you all, and a Happy New Year.
3 - DEPLOYED WELFARE

Reminder - Compassionate Action

If circumstances should arise whilst your relative is deployed that make it necessary for you to apply for his/her return on compassionate grounds (such as a death in the family, serious illness or serious family crisis), you will need to contact the Joint Casualty Compassionate Centre (JCCC). Their telephone number is:

**Joint Casualty Compassionate Centre (JCCC): 01452 519951**

When you call JCCC you will be asked the following information:

- **Serving Person’s Service Number, Rank, Name, Unit and current location.**
- **Full details of the relative concerned and is known their location.**
- **The name of any other organisation involved, i.e. Doctor, Hospital.**

Please be aware that any information will be verified with the appropriate organisation before Compassionate Leave and Travel can be authorised.

Reminder - Royal Navy Royal Marines Welfare (RNRMW)

As part of a comprehensive review of the Navy’s specialist welfare services, primary access to the RNRMW organisation is now through the RNRMW Portal Team.

Contact details are:

- **RNRMW Portal Team:** Mon to Thus 0800 –1630. Fri 0800 to 1600.
  
  📞 02392 728777  ⚡ navypers-welfare@mod.uk

**Emergency Situations:** For situations that occur Out-of-Hours, the Guardroom at RM Stonehouse, Plymouth provides emergency welfare cover 24 hours a day. In **Out of Hours Emergency Situations**, please ring them on the number below and they will contact the Duty Royal Marines Welfare Officer who will ring you back.

- **Stonehouse Guardroom:**
  
  📞 01752 836395

Reminder - RNRMW HIVE Information Service

RNRM HIVE Information Service is an integral welfare support asset, providing a bespoke information service to the Service community. The range of information is extensive focusing on the local unit, area, deployment, housing etc.

Local regular updates are provided within the Royal Navy website forums, notifications can be set to send updates direct to your email address.
• Plymouth HIVE Information Service

☎ 01752 286138/727157  ⚡ navypers-pfcshivemailbox@mod.uk

Reminder - Royal Navy Website:  www.royalnavy.mod.uk/welfare

Within this website sits a vast range of information and support for you and your family members.

There is an events calendar which holds both National and Local events including those offered by RNRMW.

The Family Forums require you to create an account. Each Service person can have up to 5 family/friends registered on their service number. A detailed guide on setting up an account is provided within the pack.

Within the Members Area, each unit has its own page, all information published by the unit, including this letter, plus info from theatre and a discussion forum can be found on the site. Please register and try it out as we will be using this site as the primary means of communicating with you. It is a very good way of allowing the Unit to pass information to you quickly, plus it works well as a means of effective communication between yourselves.

Local events and key dates for the future

At the time of writing there are no plans to conduct any specific Op GRITROCK family events or briefings. Please continue to monitor the RN Community website for any pertinent updates.

Please find attached a local, Plymouth, Family and Friends of Deployed Units (FAFDU) flyer detailing a support event planned for Sunday 7 December 2014.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the Governments outline plan for monitoring service personnel returning from Sierra Leone?

Individuals returning from Sierra Leone will be monitored in line with current Government advice as mandated by Public Health England (PHE) and World Health Organisation (WHO). The exact nature of this monitoring will depend on the circumstances of the individual concerned. On return to the UK, service personnel will be screened at RAF Brize Norton and/or other point of entry in line with UK Border screen requirements. These requirements are regularly reviewed.

Will service personnel who are infected with EVD be evacuated?

Any service person who becomes an EVD patient will have their circumstances considered on an individual basis driven by clinical need. The safety of the service persons and health practitioners will be of paramount importance – and if it is determined that the best outcome will be delivered through medical evacuation then medical evacuation will take place.

[For the latest up to date advice on Ebola, please continue to consult the Public Health England WebPages]

Is there screening at RAF Brize Norton and/or other UK ports of entry?

Screening has been introduced and all returning service personnel will be screened at RAF Brize Norton and/or other principal ports of entry in line with UK Border screening requirements and their Public Health England defined Category. This is just one part of a much wider force protection process to keep our people, and the UK, safe.

What happens if my partner/family member gets infected - will they be treated in Sierra Leone or the UK?

Multiple factors require consideration: If a case occurs, the decision to treat in country or return to the UK will be determined case-by-case basis and driven by clinical need and the requirement for patient and practitioner safety (determined by consultation between MOD, Department of Health/Public Health England and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office [FCO]).

Will returning Military Personnel be put into the UK population at risk database?

Public Health England (PHE)’s assessment of the risk to the UK from Ebola has not changed, and remains low. There are high quality, robust, well-tested infection prevention and control measures to contain any imported case(s) of such disease. We have made sure that clinicians are aware of the symptoms to consider in any returning travellers and have a rigorous monitoring regime in place. Testing can be rapidly undertaken to confirm/exclude the diagnosis. We will continue to closely monitor and review our plans.
Have service personnel deployed to Sierra Leone been given the correct equipment to undertake their respective duties?

Yes. Specific Ebola Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has been designed and issued to all service personnel deployed in support of this emergency. All appropriate training on the use of PPE has been provided and endorsed by the Department of Health (DH) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

What are the PHE Categories referred to in the media and other briefing notees: CAT 1, 2 or 3?

PHE has defined three Ebola Risk Categories for personnel returning from West Africa:

- **Category 1.** This person visited an Ebola affected area, but had no direct contact with an Ebola case (or body fluids) while they were there; this includes people who have had casual (eg visited a home of an Ebola patient), without direct contact with the Ebola patient or body fluids of the patient.

- **Category 2.** This person had direct (close) contact with Ebola cases (or body fluids) while they were in the affected area, but wore appropriate protective equipment/clothing (PPE), and had no known breaches in PPE.

- **Category 3.** This person had direct (close) contact with Ebola cases (or body fluids) while they were in the affected area, wore appropriate protective equipment/clothing (PPE), but are concerned that they may have had a breach in these protective measures or have had direct contact with an Ebola patient’s blood, urine or secretions without being protected.

What is the impact on personnel of being placed in either PHE Category?

In line with PHE policy the following Monitoring and Employment Restrictions are applicable for each risk category:

- **Category 1.** There are no restrictions on the activities of a person in this category – they can return to usual activities. There is no monitoring or reporting requirement. In addition, personnel who deploy on Op GRITROCK for a period less than 7 days who have not come into contact with a case of Ebola and are asymptomatic will not be subject to travel restrictions. All other personnel are not to undertake international travel for occupational reasons for 21 days following their return to the UK. This is to ensure that they are able to access appropriate healthcare should the need arise. Individuals who wish to travel overseas on leave are to seek specific medical advice.

- **Category 2.** Personnel in Category 2 can return to live in their own home with ordinary family and social contact, return to work (having received a PHE clearance certificate), travel by public transport and carry out other daily activities. They are required to check their temperature twice daily for 21 days after return, and to report any raised temperature (over 38°C) or other suspicious symptoms to a named monitoring team at PHE. In addition, all personnel in Category 2 are not to undertake international travel for occupational reasons for 21 days following their return to the UK. This is to
ensure that they are able to access appropriate healthcare should the need arise.

- **Category 3.** Personnel in Category 3 can return to live in their own home with ordinary family and social contact, attend office-based work only (DMS healthcare workers do not return to work until they have received a PHE clearance certificate), and can take agreed UK transport (as discussed with their monitoring team at PHE). They are required to check their temperature twice daily for 21 days after return, and to report daily by phone to a named monitoring team at PHE, even if they do not have a raised temperature (over 38°C) or other suspicious symptoms.

**Will returning UK military personnel be able to go abroad on holiday?**

The exact details will vary between individuals. However, provided they are cleared by the appropriate monitoring regime for the individual there will be no travel restrictions placed on service personnel returning from Sierra Leone. This is in line with PHE guidance, and will be kept constantly under review.

**What about if a service person is required to return home for compassionate reasons?**

Compassionate cases will be managed on a case-by-case basis in consultation between PHE and MOD. JCCC will continue coordinate all MOD compassionate movement and are well appraised on the specific protocols linked to this Operation.
HIVE FRIDAY 5 ONLINE

- The ‘Top Five National Threads of Interest’ are provided through the Royal Navy website. Add to favourites on your internet browser.

- If you are not already a member you will need to register online.

- Once registered click HIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS, you can access individual area updates, including the Plymouth HIVE Friday 5.

- You can subscribe to get instant notifications by using the ‘subscribe to this thread’ tab; this will push all updates straight to you by email.