DEFENDER’s GOT TALENT

Whilst you were all watching your favourite Friday night TV entertainment, HMS DEFENDER was making theirs! On Fri 21 Nov, DEFENDER’s Got Talent came to the hangar, complete with everyone’s favourite comedy duo, a team of four star studded judges, and some incredible acts, all vying to win the coveted title of DGT Champion! Sadly, Ant and Dec were busy, so the equally hilarious double act of Cluzb and Guns stepped up, and were joined on stage by our four celeb judges: Bunny Hassletroff, Simon Trowel, LS Drabble and Teresa the Geeza.

After their opening introductions, and with audience anticipation levels sky high, it was time to bring on the first act of the evening. LS Payne and the Defender body building team came out to show what the perfect combination of oats and weightlifting can achieve, with their display of incredible body building poses. Their carefully choreographed routine impressed the audience but received unexpectedly harsh criticism from the Judges.

The second act came courtesy of the Royal Marine Boarding Team. As their last huzzah before they leave the ship, they held a competition to decide who had managed to grow the best ‘tashe’ during their time on board. The XO stepped up and chose his winner, and, more importantly, his loser, who was faced with the unenviable challenge of eating a specially prepared omelette, complete with a Royal Marine ‘facefluff’ dressing. The audience were kept somewhere between fascination and disgust, and the judges were (almost) lost for words. The third act came courtesy of AB Stocker and his team of actors whose well rehearsed account of life on DEFENDER, including all of the key characters and events, had the audience in stitches. AB Stocker looked completely at ease on the stage in his little black dress and heels, and his team of actors drew the praise of all four judges.

The final act of the evening saw a recently formed band called Romeo’s Disciples take to the stage. They kicked off with a crowd pleasing favourite and within seconds the whole Ship’s Company was singing along with frontmen PO Romeo and ET Bain. They even received a standing ovation from the judges.

Whilst the judges went off to decide on a winner, the Ship’s Charity Auction was held. There were a number of highly sought after items to bid for including the opportunity to be personal steward for the day and many more. Portside Portsmouth, a flight in the ship’s helicopter, a tour of the ship with a CO for a day, the first off the gangway in Muscat, Oman – including all of the key characters and events, making theirs! On Fri 21 Nov, DEFENDER’s Got Talent came to the hangar, complete with everyone’s favourite comedy duo, a team of four star studded judges, and some incredible acts, all vying to win the coveted title of DGT Champion! Sadly, Ant and Dec were busy, so the equally hilarious double act of Cluzb and Guns stepped up, and were joined on stage by our four celeb judges: Bunny Hassletroff, Simon Trowel, LS Drabble and Teresa the Geeza.

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Back to DGT, and our judges had returned to deliver their verdict. After they had cast their votes we were left with deadlock and the CO was left to cast the deciding vote. Whilst he recognised the clear talent of Romeo’s Disciples, he was drawn to the comedy genius of AB Stocker and his actors.

Gracious in defeat, Romeo’s Disciples finished the night off with another few classics that had the audience swaying and singing along. When the curtain dropped at the end of the night, everyone went away happy in the knowledge that DEFENDER does have (some) talent!

END OF DEPLOYMENT

Looking back over the course of this maiden deployment there is much to think about and a real sense of achievement that I hope we, the DEFENDER family, are able to take a moment to be thoroughly proud of. We are returning back from live operations in the Middle East and have nearly completed the mission assigned. Our successes have been founded on hard work, commitment, sacrifice and more than anything, the strength of the team. Now, as this phase of DEFENDER’s life draws to a close, the next chapter opens – a time to focus on life returning to some semblance of normality, of being with those we love most. Once again, thank you for the support you have given us – we couldn’t have done it without you.

COMMANDER P D NASH
I have been nominated for the task of writing about my favourite moment from deployment. I would imagine that like most of the ship’s company, that moment has not happened yet as that moment will be seeing spinnaker tower on the horizon as we sail into Portsmouth to be greeted by all our friends, family and loved ones. For this article I will describe my favourite professional and personal moment of the deployment so far. Professionally my favourite moment was when I completed my AB1’s board as it was the reward for all the training and hard work I have undertaken in the last 18 months. On a personal level my favourite moment would be sharing a luxury apartment in Dubai for a week with some of my best friends onboard, creating some memories that I will never forget.

ET(WE) J Chapman

Without a doubt I would have to say that the best/funniest part of the deployment was the ‘Larne Target Coxswain’ prank that was played on the whole of the Ship’s Company. It started off on daily orders asking for volunteers and explained in detail what they would be doing. As I was reading this, it said you would be driving a speed boat with a target on the back whilst people were shooting at it, there was also a cash incentive of £50 and it was a recognised qualification on JPA. I instantly thought this has to be a wind up! I was sat in the mess with a few of the lads and a few individuals came in and the conversation went as follows:

‘Well that’s me £50 up’

Everyone was in tears laughing and said ‘why are you going to be £50 up?’ Knowing fine well what they where going on about.

‘Have you not read daily orders? I am going to be a Larne Target Coxswain; there are limited spaces so I would hurry up if I was you.’ At this point no one could hold it in any longer and burst out laughing, this would have to be the biggest give away at this point.

A few days went by and a pipe came across on the main broadcast asking for all Larne Target Coxswains to muster on the flight deck. About 10 minutes after this another pipe came across saying anyone wishing to watch the training to come to the flight deck. There must have been about 90% of the Ship’s Company that came to watch. The Buffer and the Sea Specs had everyone in life jackets and rigged fire fighting hoses. They all stood in a line and started doing what looked like the YMCA with the RAS torches and then got soaked with the hoses for about 5 minutes to simulate the type of environment they may be exposed to in the boat.

After this the Buffer told everyone that it was a big practical joke and the CO presented everyone with a certificate for taking part.

The whole of the Ship’s Company have been working very hard and sometimes you need to play the odd practical joke to raise moral.

LAET M Wilson

My best moment of the deployment was the well deserved down time in Dubai after a very intense 3 and half months at sea. I flew my wife out and saw her for the first time since being deployed. The week was a new experience for the both of us seeing new cultures and sites like the Burj Khalifa (tallest building in the world) which we could not do at home or would not go on holiday to.

ET(ME) A Yemm

Out of the many interesting things that I have done on the deployment so far the best experience by far has to be the Go-Karting day that we had in Bahrain. The Go-Karting took place on an international outdoor purpose built Go-Karting track. It was set up in to be a mini grand prix and consisted of a qualifier and two races neither of which I did very well in. I also enjoyed the day in the Yas water world in Abu Dhabi which was a good break in between the two longest stints at sea. It also has a water slide that loops; the first one in the Middle East.

Mme J Whitworth

The most enjoyable part of the deployment for me was the four week period where we were working off ship, being used as enemy forces for an exercise for 40 Commando and the American forces on a small island off the coast of Kuwait. I also really enjoyed being part of a short term training team for the Bahraini SWAT Teams, the Coastguard and the Counter Terrorism teams at the MOI Police Training Camp. The reason I enjoyed this four weeks the most is that I felt that we were doing something worth while, productive, rewarding and enjoyable. It was a good break off ship to be put on land to play enemy for the exercise, running round doing what we do and making it hard work for the attacking forces. Once we finished we went to the MOI Police Training Camp where we were training one of the Bahraini SWAT teams. This was good for all us as you could see the progression that they were making over the relativity short period of time we had with them and by the end they had all vastly improved their skills and combat marksmanship. The second week was spent working with the Coastguard teaching some of the young recruits boarding drills, occupancy control and searching. For the more senior members of the Coastguard who were divers it was more of an enhancement on what they already knew. The third week was spent back at the MOI working with the Counter Terrorism team which was pretty much the same as the first week and just as enjoyable and rewarding as they also progressed very well in the small amount of time we had with them.

Overall the four weeks spent working with the 40 Commando and teaching the Bahraini forces was the highlight of the deployment for me, as I felt like we, as a team, were undertaking something productive and worth while.
The Flanders Poppy was first described as the "Flower of Remembrance" by Colonel John McCrae who, before the First World War, was a well known Professor of Medicine at McGill University in Montreal. He had previously served as a gunner in the South African War, and at the outbreak of the First World War decided to join the fighting ranks. However, the powers-that-be decided that his abilities could be used to better advantage, and so he landed in France as a Medical Officer with the first Canadian Army contingent. At the second battle of Ypres in 1915, when in charge of a small first-aid post and during a lull in the action, he wrote, in pencil, on a page torn from his despatch book, the following verses:

In Flanders' fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place: and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders' fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe;
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high,
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders' Fields.

The verses were sent anonymously to "Punch" magazine and published under the title "In Flanders' Fields". In May 1918 Colonel McCrae was brought as a stretcher case to one of the big hospitals on the channel coast of France. On the third evening he was wheeled to the balcony of his room to look over the sea towards the cliffs of Dover. The verses were obviously in his mind, for he told the doctor who was in charge of his case:

"Tell them this, If ye break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep".

The same night Colonel McCrae died. He was interred in a beautiful cemetery on rising ground above Wimereux, from where the cliffs of Dover are easily visible on sunny days.

An American lady, Miss Moira Michael, had read the poem and was greatly impressed, particularly by the last verse. The wearing of a poppy appeared to her to be the way to keep faith, and she wrote the reply:

"THE VICTORY EMBLEM"

Oh! You who sleep in Flanders' fields,
Sleep sweet - to arise anew;
We caught the torch you threw,
And holding high we kept
The faith with those who died.
We cherish too, the Poppy red
That grows on fields where valour led,
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies,
But lends a lustre to the red
Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders' fields.
And now the torch and poppy red
Wear in honour of our dead.
Fear not that ye have died for naught:
We've learned the lesson that ye taught
In Flanders' fields.

On November 9th 1918, only two days before the Armistice was signed, Miss Michael was presented with a small gift of money by some of the overseas War Secretaries of the YMCA for whom she worked, and whose Conference was being held at her house. She told them about the two poems, and announced that she was going to buy 25 red poppies with the money. This she did; she wore one herself, and each Secretary there bought one from her. It is claimed, probably rightly, that this was the first group selling of poppies.

Fighting can never be a good thing, the threat of combat can never be good, but it can be right if it is to further the aims of Freedom, Justice and Truth. The Poppy is a symbol of that goal and of not breaking faith as Lt Col McCrea begged and Moira Michael promised, with those who have done just that.

For Jesus said:
12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.
13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Wearing our poppies is not a symbol of winning or losing- but of honouring that gift to us.
I approach the end of my tenure as XO HMS DEFENDER with a mix of emotions – happiness and excitement at going home to see my family, tinged with sadness that I am leaving 3 weeks before the end of deployment. It is hugely beneficial for the ship for the new Second in Command to get some sea time, before going into a large maintenance period, where a lot of senior management, including the Commanding Officer, change around. Reflecting on the last 18 months, we have been through some good times and bad times; I don’t think my wife or I will ever forget having our anniversary lunch (plus bottle of wine!) being interrupted by a recall to the ship just before Christmas last year…and this year has been just as busy, with the hugely successful last 6 months contributing to global maritime security. It is cliché, but the strength of a ship is in the people – you should all be hugely proud of your loved ones onboard, they have done a fantastic job and are a brilliant team. I will be genuinely sad to leave the ship, but look forward to handing the baton to my very capable successor, Lt Cdr Jason Eacock. Jason understands the pressures on the Fleet, having recently come from a job managing the programme of all the ships around the world. He has joined with enthusiasm and drive and will take the ship through the next chapter of her life into 2015 and beyond. Good luck to the Ship’s Company of HMS DEFENDER, and thanks to the families and loved ones for your unstinting support – we cannot do it without you. Enjoy the homecoming – see you there!

FIRST WORD FROM THE NEW XO

I join HMS DEFENDER towards the end of a hugely successful period on Operations and feel very proud to serve as their Second in Command. Ben has done a fantastic job over the past 18 months guiding the Ship through their early generation and maiden Operational Deployment. I now pick up the mantle and look forward to the challenges that lie ahead. First and foremost is returning to the UK and our loved ones, enjoying a period of rest and recuperation over the festive period; rebalancing of lives becomes the number one priority. Thereafter, we begin the journey again to support Operations around the UK – I know that the professionalism and cohesion onboard, coupled with the strong support from you all, will ensure further success as we continue to write DEFENDER’s history.

THE ROYAL MARINES TURN 350!

We were all lucky enough to celebrate the Corps 350th birthday while aboard in Bahrain staying in the Foreign Commonwealth Office accommodation. We also had the privilege of been invited to the Defence Attaché’s home to celebrate this memorable birthday, along with the hierarchy of Bravo Company 40 Commando, staff from UKMCC, a few ex-royals and the DA’s family. It was a very good evening and good to see other Royal Marines and former Royals overseas celebrating the birthday with us. We had a few drinks and a meal; a few photographs taken with all those who attended with the DA. There were a few short speeches in remembrance of all those who have fallen, all with a glass of port raised. Once we left we went back to our compound in Juffair and went ashore; we all had a hoofing night and a wazz time celebrating our corps 350th birthday.

LAST WORD FROM THE XO

PACAS

Parents and Children are embarking HMS DEFENDER on the eve of our homecoming to experience a day and night at sea with their loved ones. PACAS aims to provide families with an understanding of the role in which their families have played at sea over the last 6 months whilst deployed in the Gulf. Included in the PACAS programme is a fly past by the Ship’s embarked flight, a deployment presentation and a Christmas carol service. Further information about PACAS has now been pushed out to Ship’s Company, if you are attending PACAS and do not have any information about the day please ask your family member serving onboard HMS DEFENDER.

HOME COMING!

On the 12th December 2014 HMS DEFENDER will be returning to Portsmouth after completing her maiden deployment to the Arabian Gulf. To mark this momentous occasion DEFENDER would like to invite family and friends to welcome her arrival in a traditional Homecoming Ceremony. Portsmouth Dockyard will be open to guests from 0800 who are to make their way to Victory Jetty to wave their loved ones alongside at 1030. Hot drinks, Hog Roast and children’s treats will be available on the Jetty free of charge for all those attending the ceremony. There will be several marquees provided for shelter but it is advised that warm clothing should be worn. Entertainment will be provided for the children and Her Majesty’s Royal Marine Band will also be performing prior to HMS DEFENDER opening the ship to visitors. If guests would like to step onboard to experience how the Ship’s Company have been living during the six month deployment, then please be advised to wear appropriate flat footwear.

Further information regarding the important details about gate entry can be found in the enclosed leaflet.