This newsletter has taken a little longer than planned to come together. Mostly because every Department onboard has been able to send people away from the ship for leave, personal development and career courses. You will read about skiing and sailing here, but there has been much more going on to expand, in some way, the minds and bodies of all in OCEAN.

Time in base port is also when we tackle that more challenging piece of maintenance or when a much needed upgrade can take place. Once again, the dockyard as well as many local companies swell the numbers onboard and help us with the workload of keeping the ship safe to operate, but also equipped to fulfil the latest task or mission that is expected of us. And that need to be ready for operations remains as important now as it was 100 years ago when a previous HMS OCEAN took part in the Gallipoli Campaign.

As you receive this letter Her Majesty the Queen will be visiting your ship and acknowledging our return to operational service with a rededication service. That will also be the day that many of us go on Easter Leave – another chance to “recharge the batteries” before OCEAN picks up her programme and returns to sea in the new term.

Thank you again for your continued support at work and at home, without which much of this would not be possible.

Tim Henry
It’s not all work, work, work!

One of the remaining benefits offered to all personnel, and probably unique from any other employer is the chance to take part in Competitive Sport, and Alpine Skiing & Snowboarding is no exception. From a complete beginner, to a budding enthusiast, or even someone who fancies their chances at the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea the RN Ski Championships has something for everyone. Hosted in Tignes, France the resort offers suitable conditions for all. Comprehensive lesson packages are offered by the RN Ski Instructors, from a week’s beginner course, to lessons to polish your skills, or racing technique for those who want to get the edge in the races that are held throughout the week.

Everyone who attends must take part in one of the races as a minimum, which for some will be their first attempt at racing. However, those who do well are invited to continue to the Inter Services Championships in the following weeks. The weeks are well organised by the RN Winter Sports Association, and the Event Travel Company, who arrange everything, your departure and return to the UK, your accommodation, ski hire, lesson and race entry - meaning that apart from turning up, and paying the bill there is very little for you to worry about.

As official AT & Competitive sport the RN will pay towards your travel to and from the event, and towards your food while in resort. While in the grand scheme of an expensive sport, this goes some way to making it more affordable for some. Of course as with all events there is plenty of time in the evenings to catch up with friends you have not seen for years. I thoroughly recommend the week for everyone, and if you have never been skiing, but want to give it a try - then I can only recommend the RN Ski Champs, as the place to start.

Lt Ian Woodward

EXERCISE CANARY GOLD

The time alongside over the past few months has also allowed the crew of HMS OCEAN to take part in some adventurous training activities. Eight lucky members of the Ship’s Company participated in Leg 5 of Exercise Canary Gold, an annual Joint Services Adventurous Sail Training Centre expedition which bases one of their Nicholson 55 yachts in the Canary Islands for the winter and enables crews to undertake 2 week legs around the island chain.

Dasher, the Royal Navy Nic 55 was the yacht of choice this year and was based in Puerto Calero in Lanzarote. Cdr Shane Doran, PO Gemma Wollaston, AH Caroline Penrose, AB Faye Mason, ET Alex Black, ET Loui Fecchi, ET Daniel Hanney and Wtr Jason Bell, along with 3 Army personnel made up the skipper and crew for a 2 week trip in February.

Despite being a very inexperienced team the trip was a great success with everyone having a great time and learning a lot. Every job on board has to be shared out with everyone taking turns not only sailing the yacht but cooking, cleaning, and undertake the seemingly constant stream of repairs that have to be done on a 38 year old yacht – a bit like being at sea in OCEAN! An impressive 450 NM was clocked up visiting 5 of the islands and 7 different ports – each being different and ranging from the ultra modern marina to those that can only be described as ‘currently under development’.
Ports visited were Puerto Calero - Lanzarote; Las Palmas - Gran Canaria; San Miguel - Tenerife, San Sebastian - La Gomera; Puerto de Mogan – Las Palmas; Gran Tarajal - Fuerteventura and Rubicon – Lanzarote. It is hoped to participate in further sailing expeditions – as professional mariners, time spent on the water in any craft is never wasted.

Shona’s Story…

The Air Department has not seen many aircraft since Christmas, but here has still been lots of work to do. Essential maintenance of the systems and support facilities for embarked aircraft require constant upkeep, and the Air and Air Engineering flight deck and hanger teams have been working tirelessly to ensure that everything is ready to recommence flying operations when the Ship returns to sea.

Leading Airman Shona Barnes is HMS OCEAN’ s Survival Equipment Leading Hand, and she helps run a busy section servicing, issuing and maintaining aircrew and flying survival equipment. Previously drafted to RNAS YEOVILTON, Shona joined Ocean in December 2014 excited at the opportunity to gain experience on board Ship and at sea. 3 months into her draft she has found the time onboard challenging and very different to life at an air station but a challenge that she is thoroughly enjoying. A keen sportswoman, she has made the most of the period of time alongside and satisfied her interest in skiing, when she took part in the RN ski championships in Tignes. She undertook 3 days of training which was hard word but ultimately paid off when she earned herself second place racing in the novice event.

Commenting on the Ski Champs LA Barnes said, “I would highly recommend it to anyone wanting to learn to ski or snowboard, or just wanting to improve on existing skills. Its fun as there is a good mix of people you wouldn’t normally associate with.”

ROYAL RETREAT!

During the rejuvenation of HMS Ocean, 9 ASRM hasn’t stopped on land or sea, from adventure training in the Alps to exercises down the Tamar and up into Dartmoor. It’s been a fully packed few months that has seen the majority of the squadron relax and also enhance there skills.

In early January, Eleven members of the squadron got away to compete in the Royal Navy Ski championships, this number was very nearly cut down to Ten due to an individuals kit awareness, miss placing a valuable document. While in the Alps, success came through Mne Coetzee in 1st place and Mne Wyeth in 3rd in the beginner’s race. However the most memorable moment was when the Marvell characters took to the slopes bearing all in sub zero conditions.

Aside from the Championships there has also been chance for the squadron to ski in Bavaria and Norway, completing a foundation mountain leader course and caving qualifications. Concluding with a multi activities week rock climbing, canoeing, kayaking and white water rafting, which at this time of year was extremely refreshing.

This has been a valued few months for the squadron, allowing the members to enjoy some well deserved
adventure training whilst keeping up to date with a busy program.

Cpl Joe Long

MEANWHILE BACK AT THE RANCH...

The past few months has given us the opportunity to work hard and more importantly play equally as hard, and as a result morale is high. Having spent the latter half of 2014 at sea racking up impressive lists of defects, the Weapon Engineers have had the opportunity to get stuck in and fix them, without the dreaded constant cry of ‘ETBOL, ETBOL, ETBOL (Estimated Time Back On Line)’ from the operators!

During the FTSP (Fleet Time Support Period) we’ve done what we love doing best – take things apart, ‘tinker’ with them and obviously fix them! Every system from telephones to radars has been checked and tested, repaired and upgraded, not always to plan but always successfully in the end. The most significant upgrade has been to our suite of computers and we are now fitted throughout the ship with a very versatile Command and Control system.

This will soon allow an Admiral and his staff to embark in HMS OCEAN from where they will be able to command a Maritime Task Force or Amphibious Task Group. As the ship gets ready to sail again and her versatility increases ever further, the only question on everyone’s lips is…‘When will all the toilets be working again…!!!’

CPO Neil D’Arcy

Talking of which..!

The Marine Engineering Department has continued the trend of an extremely busy operational tempo with a complex fleet time support period and a number of defects to keep our teams working hard. The routine checks that have been drilled into us over the last year helped us catch a defect on one of our Main Engines before it became too serious.

WHERE TO FIND HELP AND SUPPORT...

For general welfare support call the RN/RM Welfare Portal - 02392 728777
Need your loved on 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!