A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDING OFFICER
Lt Col Derek Stafford MBE RM

Where on earth does the time go? It seems like only minutes ago that I was penning some introductory words on the Christmas Link Letter. That said, a huge amount has happened in the intervening period – the Squadron has deployed to the Arctic to conduct environmental training, we have moved back to our home at RNAS Yeovilton, rounded off that move with a Homecoming Parade, and we have subsequently deployed D Flight into the field – I think the articles that follow paint a much better picture of these activities than I can, so I’ll leave it to the various authors to update you. What I will say in advance, is that the Squadron has been on a remarkable journey since it stood up in September 2014 and the programme we have worked through has been widely recognised as a remarkable feat, testament yet again to the unique qualities and ethos of 846 NAS personnel; if ever further proof were needed! The country has recently been to the polls and elected not to change the Prime Minister, but notwithstanding the latter and the impending Security and Defence Review, the Fleet Air Arm and indeed the Joint Helicopter Command continue to work through a period of unprecedented change - we are replacing every front line aircraft we fly and will soon be operating the two largest aircraft carriers the Royal Navy has ever seen. 846 NAS remains just one piece of the wider defence ‘change’ jigsaw. As far as the Commando Helicopter Force is concerned, other pieces of this jigsaw are also coming together. I’m pleased to report that 847 NAS has now finished its conversion from Lynx to the Wildcat helicopter and 845 NAS will stand up at RAF Benson with the Merlin in mid Jul 15. Whether you are a member of the squadron, or a friend or family member that supports the squadron or wider Force, collectively we are all part of this on-going journey. The challenges have been considerable thus far and I very strongly commend all those involved. So what of the next 6 months? Our central purpose has always been, and continues to be, the safe and effective support of Royal Marines Commandos from the sea to the shore – with the impending deck clearances for the Merlin MK3 the squadron will soon be concentrating on gaining individual deck qualifications and re-invigorating our maritime expertise. Additionally, M Flight continues to prepare for its high readiness maritime interdiction rôle, D Flight will participate in the Royal Navy’s COUGAR 15 deployment as well as Exercise ARCADE FUSION in NW Europe, and we will be welcoming the Operational Conversion Flight to the 846 team in Jul 15 when they relocate. The summer and autumn period promises much.

For now, I wish you all the best for a great summer, and finally, I hope to see and meet many of you at the CHF Families Day on Friday 24 Jul 15 here at Yeovilton.

Yours Aye
Del Stafford
LAET Starkey – M Flight

For the first time since the handover of Merlin from the RAF to the Royal Navy, 846 NAS had the lead of the Merlin MK3s on Exercise CLOCKWORK 15. This in itself is a steep learning curve for all involved and a very satisfying privilege.

From the get go, engineers were fighting a losing battle against the weather and two unserviceable aircraft upon landing in Bardufoss (200 miles inside the Arctic Circle!). With winds up to 73mph and hangars not large enough to store the aircraft, it quickly became clear the challenges which would be apparent throughout the whole trip. Equipment used previously for Sea Kings was unsuitable for the Merlin, not to mention the procedures, which are standard in normal climates but had to be quickly adapted to make practices safe, yet workable, in the harsh environment.

The workload built rapidly in just a few days, mainly thanks to the weather. The cupboards in the aircraft which house all of the avionic wizardry had concealed snowmen inside them after a night of particularly heavy snowfall and strong winds, luckily found by a conscientious AET before the aircraft had been started. We then had to change an engine which had been damaged from ice ingress. This was conducted in the same treacherous weather conditions, but we also had a communication existing with a Norwegian crane driver!

Lessons were being learnt every day from which everybody took on board and adapted their routine to incorporate these changes. Once the bad weather passed, and with the lessons learnt during it, everybody knew what was expected of them and procedures flowed much more easily. From the Junior AETs who worked hard from the moment they got in, to the Seniors who managed the workload well prioritising the jobs accordingly - this teamwork and flexibility allowed us to produce the aircraft for the pilots to qualify in the snowy conditions, resulting in achieving what we had set out to.

Overall the trip was an experience for all concerned - learning the glitches of the aircraft and overcoming them to reach our goal in the old ‘Junglie’ fashion.

GUERNSEY LIBERATION CEREMONY
(May 15)

Lt Teece – D Flight

This year marks the 70th anniversary of Victory in Europe. For the people of Guernsey this was the anniversary of their liberation from Nazi occupation and an excuse for a party fitting of such a milestone. The Liberation Day celebrations have been attended by many CHF personnel over the years, however this year was to be the first appearance of the Merlin and the final appearance for the Sea King.

A small contingent of 12 personnel (3 aircrew and 9 engineers), deployed late on Friday 8th May and met up with our Sea King counterparts who were already on the island.

The celebrations last all weekend with the main event on the Saturday. The citizens of Guernsey line St Peter Port’s main street to witness a cavalcade of hundreds of vehicles dating back to the Second World War, escorted by a number of flying displays. On the day, despite the glorious sunshine, the gusty wind conditions precluded the parachute display and the BBMF from making an appearance. In true Junglie fashion, the Sea King and Merlin agreed to stay on station longer than originally requested. We took off at lunchtime with the event already in full swing down in St Peter Port and formed up out to sea. Once we were given the green light we
conducted a number of low speed passes of the cavalcade with the door open giving our crewman, LACMN Best, an opportunity to practise his waving. Below, the street was packed with people and we could see the true extent of the cavalcade which produced a steady flow of traffic the entire time we were on station. Once ‘Besty’ was exhausted from all the waving in the back, we made one more high speed pass before departing back to the airfield.

The evening’s entertainment was a 1940’s themed hangar party, heavily subscribed with tickets being sold out months in advance. We were provided with enough tickets for all to attend. The evening consisted of a sit down dinner and entertainment in keeping with the period. The next morning showed how good an evening it was with many a sore head around the breakfast table.

The weekend cemented 846’s already strong relations with the Island and we look forward to returning to help with any further festivities.

SUPERCAR SIEGE – LEEDS CASTLE  
(May 15)

POAET (M) Whitmore  
846 NAS was invited to take part in the Supercar Siege event held at Leeds castle in Kent. The purpose of this was to raise money for children’s charities including the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Children’s Charity. For this event the squadron provided one Merlin helicopter plus support ground crew and aircrew to be a static display for the public. Also at the event were a number of high performance cars including the Ginetta racing team, Ferrari, TVR, Koenigsegg Agera and a number of classic cars.

On the morning of the event cars started to arrive and take their place within the grounds. The Jaguar owners club settled in front of the aircraft with a number of classic cars to the rear. The weather proved to be spectacular as were the amount of people in attendance. The day started fairly quiet with a few families taking the opportunity to have a tour around the aircraft however by mid-morning this had grown to a cue of forty plus people which remained around the average for the whole day. The estimated number of people we gave a tour to throughout the day was 3500-4000. The children loved the chance to wear the helmets with the visors down giving them the ‘Top Gun’ experience with a fair amount of parents also getting involved with pictures for their family albums. Most could not believe the aircraft was real and thought it was for display purpose and delivered via road and when they were told it was a fully working aircraft that added to the excitement. Amazed by the size of the aircraft and the performance capabilities, the last stop was the cockpit. When leaving the aircraft there was big smiles all around with excited children looking forward to telling their friends at school that they had been on a helicopter.

HONOURS AND AWARDS

OSM(A)

Lt Rowan was awarded the Operational Service Medal (Afghanistan) for his service during an operational tour of duty last summer.

CO’s Prizes

The CO 846 Termly Award is given to the person who has shown a marked contribution to Sqn productivity and Operational Capability throughout the Term. The Autumn 2014 CO 846 Termly award goes to PO Slack.

A number of personnel were awarded a CO’s Commendation for particularly noteworthy performances, conducting their duties above and beyond the requirements of their terms of reference and exhibiting high professional standards.

Lt Moore. For his thorough review of the Safety Equipment transition.

Sgt Insley. For his essential contribution to the instructional cadre whilst deployed in Norway, resulting in all aircrew achieving an Environmental Qualification.

Sgt Lodge. For his essential role in relocation and operationalization of flight planning and tireless efforts throughout Easter Leave.
PO Dodd. For his steadfast dedication to the thankless task of painting the hangar floor, leading by example and continually motivating his manpower.

PO McCutcheon. For his instrumental role in the Relocation Committee and establishing the new building and hangars ready for operations.

PO Smith. For her huge contribution in the establishment of Naval Air Stores procedures on CHF Merlin and transitioning the 846 Merlin stores system.

PO Wood. For exemplary work developing the role equipment section for the force and being a key enabler in relocating the Sqn to Yeovilton.

The award of a Good Show

A Good Show is awarded for an individual exhibiting actions above that expected within their normal duties. It is to recognize a particular action which may have prevented a potentially dangerous situation developing further.

Lt’s Albon and Trowman

Whilst deployed in Norway on Ex CLOCKWORK, Lt Josh Albon and Lt Ollie Trowman were tasked to conduct an engaged Ground Run on ZJ129 following maintenance work. During start-up they noticed a resistive force through the yaw pedals. Further diagnosis revealed a jolt through the tail rotor blades in the same particular configuration. These two junior aviators identified a previously unrecognised characteristic of the new articulated tail rotor design, and work is still on-going between manufacturer and Test Pilots to explain this phenomenon. Such dogged attention to detail is entirely worthy of the award of the Royal Navy Flight Safety Centres Good Show.

AET Charles. Whilst deployed in Norway on Exercise CLOCKWORK, AET Charles was conducting a Before Flight Service after a particularly heavy snowfall. His thorough inspection discovered snow ingress into a high voltage compartment which upon starting, could have caught fire or worse had he not spotted it. Further inspections revealed that another two aircraft had similar levels of snow ingress in the same compartment. His diligence prevented damage to 3 aircraft and also identified a fault which can now be rectified and by doing so, deliver higher Operational Capability to the front line.

The Aircraft Certificate of Competence.

CPO David Wilson. The Aircraft Certificate of Competence is awarded to Chief Petty Officers who have successfully completed their professional training and passed rigorous examinations, testing them on engineering policy, Flight management, planning and engineering knowledge of both Mechanical and Avionic trades. Most importantly, ensuring that they are sufficiently competent and understand airworthiness principles to make appropriate, safe engineering decisions to enable the Air Engineer Officer to authorise them to take charge of detached and deployed aircraft on their own.

Update on Domestic Links at Yeovilton

As Lt Col Stafford mentioned in his opening address, the OCF are moving from RAF Benson to Yeovilton in July. Some useful links are below.

Royal Navy Royal Marines Welfare (formally NPFS) at Yeovilton
Tel: 01935 455277

Tall Trees Community Centre
Tel: 01935 840333

Emergency Contact
Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC)
Tel: 01452 519951
Manned 24Hrs a day

Royal Navy Royal Marines Welfare Portal
Te: 023 9272 8777

We’re on the web! Visit us at www.royalnavy.mod.uk
Click on ‘Our Organisation’-‘Fleet Air Arm’-‘Helicopter Squadrons’-‘846’