Dear Family and Friends,

Another 2 weeks gone! I hope you were all able to enjoy the festive season where possible and as we move forward into 2015 I wish you all a very happy New Year; hopefully it will be a little more predictable and less challenging than 2014.

As I’m sure you’ve heard, we did manage to get most of the promised stand-down and definitely made the very best of what we could, enjoying just a short opportunity for some relaxation and reflection. The combined flight deck meal, carol service and reindeer racing on Christmas Eve was undoubtedly the highlight. I can’t begin to describe the fun that was generated by this event, but hopefully the photo helps you to see what it was all about.

Just as importantly, it was a huge fund-raising opportunity for EducAid. Alongside all the fun, the ship managed to raise almost £1000 just from this one event; a huge achievement by everyone who contributed and particularly those who put so much effort into organising and running such an incredibly successful event. Many of the team had the privilege of paying a special Christmas visit (flown in with Santa, presents and elf onboard the aircraft!) to the EducAid school and orphanage in Port Loko on 23 Dec. The opportunity to distribute some of the food/clothes/toys that have been donated and just to spend time with these incredible children and staff members was truly humbling. An experience that I’m sure will remain with many people for a very long time. We have definitely seen first-hand what an incredible charity EducAid is. Not only are they literally saving these children’s lives, but also providing essential life-skills and an education that should enable them to enjoy a safer and more secure adult life. The sponsored rowing challenge was also completed on New Year’s Eve; the current total for all money raised now stands at £6,350 - an absolutely fantastic effort so far; thank you to all those who have contributed.
Christmas Day did allow a bit of a lie-in for those that wanted it, followed by an excellent lunch; the small alcohol allowance inevitably helped the festive celebrations a little bit along the way. As ever, the highlights of the day involved our phone calls/e-mails with you all back home and the opportunity to open the plethora of Christmas presents that you’d sent to us alongside many of the charity boxes that had been despatched by a number of charitable groups.

As we all think about taking down the Christmas decorations and focusing on the New Year, the Squadron’s programme inevitably remains at the forefront of our minds. Hopefully you are all now aware that after much planning and wrangling, the Squadron has been formally attributed a period of Rest & Recuperation (R&R). A rolling 14 day leave programme, which starts on 6 Jan, has been devised to enable almost everyone to travel back to the UK and enjoy a short period of exceptionally well deserved leave. Anyone who is unable to do so will definitely have that period added to their annual leave balance to ensure they don’t miss out. Extremely mindful of the Easter School holiday dates, I am also trying to identify an opportunity to dispatch an Advanced Party home from the ship once we are released from GRITROCK (although still awaiting confirmation). Every effort is being made to try and get everyone back for Easter; as soon as there is any more news you will be the first to hear.

I’ll finish now as I started with a genuine wish for a happy New Year to everyone.

You remain in our thoughts and prayers as always,

Ross Spooner