



# NAVY NEWS

FEBRUARY 2024

## DIAMOND DELIVERS

THE flash of a Sea Viper missile lights up the bridge of HMS Diamond as the Type 45 destroyer repels Houthi drones in the Red Sea.

See pages 2-3

Picture: LPhoto Chris Sellars

Inside: ■ Royal Marines return to Arctic ■ HMS Protector in Antarctica

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# At the sharp end



THERE are few places quieter or darker than the bridge of a Royal Navy warship at night.

A pitch-black, near-silent world unscarred by the cacophony of modern life and the light pollution of major conurbations.

Perhaps the officer of the watch instructs the helmsmen to make a sporadic change of course, or takes a navigational fix.

He or she may alert the commanding officer to nearby maritime traffic.

There's the occasional beeping of the WECDIS electronic charts system alerting the team to a potential navigational hazard.

And then. **CRASH STOP VENTILATION IN ZONE ONE; STANDBY FOR VIPER TO LAUNCH.**

There's a brief, violent judder which seizes 8,500-tonnes of warship as if a child were shaking a bath toy.

And then a tremendous roar and flash of fire which turns night into day for no more than a second or two.

Despite standing nearly five metres (16ft) tall and weighing one third of a tonne, the flames and the astonishing speed with which the missile burst from its silo ensured no-one on the bridge physically saw it 'lift off'.

But they may yet be able to tell whether it hit its target, scanning the darkness with their binoculars in the hope of spotting a brief explosion somewhere on the horizon.

Target destroyed. Now repeat several times. In a matter of minutes.

While many Britons were stuck in the nightly commute, or perhaps sitting down to dinner with loved ones, 9.15pm in the Middle East – 1815 Zulu – on Tuesday January 9 2024, HMS Diamond was coming under the most sustained aerial bombardment any Royal Navy vessel has been subjected to since the Falklands.

But let's rewind a bit. The ship departed Portsmouth at the end of November as the UK's could no longer allow terror attacks to threaten shipping in the Red Sea.

Those attacks increased fivefold in the closing months of 2023 as Houthi rebels in Yemen hurled drones and missiles at shipping traversing the southern Red Sea.

And that cannot be allowed to happen. Morally, it's wrong. And financially it's a potential seismic shock the global economy can do without. Close the Red Sea and you add 6,000 miles (and at least a fortnight) to the journey of shipping between Europe and the Indo-Asia-Pacific region. The cost: perhaps £280m every hour, a cost picked up by you and me on fuel, food, cars, white goods.

The decision to commit Diamond proved to be none-too-soon.

Barely had the destroyer arrived in the danger zone than she found herself in harm's way. In the small hours of December 16 the words 'Standby for Viper to launch' were heard for the first time

in anger – and a Royal Navy missile took out an incoming aerial threat, something it last did in the first Gulf War of 1990-91.

A few days later, the international community formally stood up a dedicated operation – Prosperity Guardian – of nations committed to protecting shipping in the Red Sea, either by sending ships to fend off attacks, or provide personnel, intelligence, logistical support and the like.

Providing an invisible umbrella to shield against air attack is what the Type 45 is designed for. A single destroyer can scan in the region of 200,000 square miles of sky – which is about the size of France – looking for threats. It can eliminate them at distances of up to 75 miles away.

Which brings us to the night of January 9 and a potent Anglo-US naval force (four destroyers and carrier USS Dwight D Eisenhower) patrolling a 100-mile stretch of the southern Red Sea between the Yemeni ports of Al-Hudaydah and Mocha.

At 9.15pm, air warfare specialists monitoring the aerial picture courtesy of multi-colour flatscreens in Combat Information Centers (US vessels) and Diamond's ops room began to spot a flurry of new contacts on the right of their screens, moving inexorably left – west, from land towards the sea.

Twenty-one contacts in all: 18 one-way attack drones, a couple of anti-ship cruise and a solitary anti-ship ballistic missile all fired at the contacts the Houthi rebels own radar had picked up offshore.

It has been described variously as the largest or most sustained aerial threat Royal Navy sailors have faced since the Falklands.

Then, men hunched over green or orange screens of Type 42 destroyers and Type 22 frigates watched intermittent or continuous blips draw ever-closer to the centre of the screen.

Take it with Sea Dart. Or: Take it with Sea Wolf.

Four decades later and it's just as tense, though the technology and procedure has changed somewhat.

**BIRDS AFFIRM TRACK GY405.** The Sea Viper Controller – known simply as 'Viper' – informs the Air Warfare Officer that PAAMS has a 'kill solution', namely that it can and will destroy the target should the ship decide to engage.

**BIRD TARGET TRACK GY405.** Diamond's Air Warfare Officer decides the threat is real and the moment has come to act. The ship's main broadcast springs to life and the Officer of the Watch warns shipmates:

**CRASH STOP VENTILATION IN ZONE ONE; STANDBY FOR VIPER TO LAUNCH.**

You're about to fire a missile weighing a third of a tonne, accelerating from 0-Mach 4 in seconds. The ship judders, especially forward, there's a tremendous roar then...

**BIRDS AWAY TRACK GY405.** Viper tells the air warfare officer the missile has successfully fired. The report is shared over the radio network with other ships to inform them that Diamond has acted.

As the smoke and exhaust fumes – noxious, hence the need to turn off the ventilation to stop them spread around the ship – clears, Sea Viper has cleared the ship's superstructure and is now manoeuvring for the kill.

The missile can either strike its foe directly – the kinetic force of the impact alone should be enough to destroy the target – or it can explode in close proximity, shredding the target with shrapnel and ending its journey.

Whichever method of kill is chosen, Sea Viper is now manoeuvring at speeds and forces difficult to imagine. Travelling in excess of four times the speed of sound, Mach 4, or over 3,000mph, it is steered on to its target by



a series of tiny rockets which adjust the flight of Sea Viper at forces up to 50 times the strength of gravity... and far beyond what any human could survive.

**VIPER ASSESS KILL TRACK GY405.**

Viper informs the air warfare officer that the target has been destroyed and the threat has been eliminated; electronic confirmation is supported by a visual report from the bridge if they saw the impact or not.

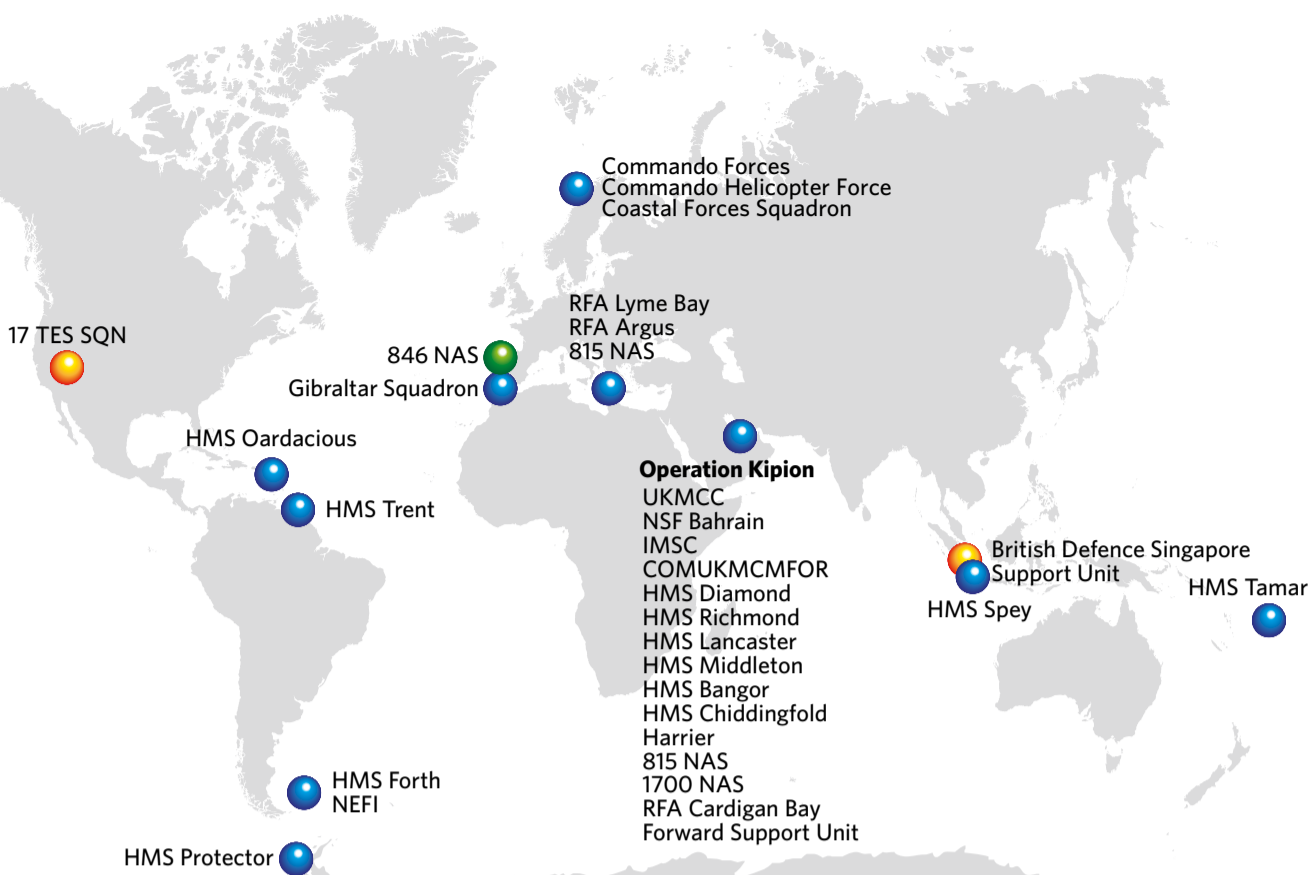
Of the 18 drones taken out in the engagement of January 9, Diamond dispatched seven, some with Sea Viper, others with her 30mm gun.

As of today (January 20), the 200 souls aboard the Type 45 destroyer have not been called upon to fire in anger again but she – and, when unavailable, HMS Richmond or Lancaster (see page 5) – will continue to patrol the beat to keep the Red Sea open and deter aggression and terror attacks.



### Training or on patrol around the UK

HMS Hurworth 815 NAS  
 HMS Northumberland 824 NAS  
 HMS Iron Duke 825 NAS  
 HMS Severn 845 NAS  
 HMS Mersey 846 NAS  
 HMS Tyne 847 NAS  
 HMS Scott RFA Tiderace  
 Coastal Forces Squadron RFA Stirling Castle  
 XV Patrick Blackett RFA Proteus  
 Project Wilton DTXG  
 814 NAS



On patrol somewhere beneath the Seven Seas is one Vanguard-class submarine and an undisclosed Trafalgar or Astute-class boat



## GLOBAL | MODERN | READY

WAR – and peace – dominate this edition, from the white heat of modern naval warfare to humanity after battle and the sheer tranquility of some of the most remote locations on the planet.

We begin in the near and Middle East, so often the touchpoint for conflict.

Sea Viper has proven itself as a world-leading air defence system for the first time in the line of fire, bringing down Houthi drones in the southern Red Sea as **HMS Diamond** engaged incoming targets on at least two occasions while protecting shipping (see pages 2-3).

Such is the importance of the mission – disruption to Red Sea maritime traffic will send shockwaves through the global economy – that **HMS Richmond** has been dispatched to support both the Type 45 and her sister Type 23 **Lancaster**... which has come through the busiest month in her 32-year-career as a result of the tense situation in the wider Middle East region (see page 5).

And after spending much of the autumn of 2023 positioned in the eastern Med in case the situation in the Israeli/Gazan conflict worsened, one half of Littoral Response Group (South), **RFA Lyme Bay**, put into Port Said to deliver shelter kits and blankets for those who lives have been tossed upside down by the war (see right).

Poised to respond all autumn long on both Lyme Bay and **RFA Argus** were the Royal Marines of **42 Commando**, who give us an insight into how they've passed their time to date before the next phase of their deployment begins (see page 11).

As we're in the depths of winter, we're in the heart of preparations for Arctic exercises (this year it's Nordic Response leading into NATO's Steadfast Defender). The exercises begin in earnest later this month (running into March), but preparations are under way by the **Commando Forces** and **Commando Helicopter Force**: acclimatisation, winter survival skills, (re-) learning the basics of manoeuvring in a world blanketed by snow (see page 6).

At the peak of this year's Arctic workout, there will be 20,000 UK personnel committed across the region... 20 of them courtesy of the **Coastal Forces Squadron** which deploys four P2000 boats to the High North, going deeper into the Arctic for longer than ever before (see opposite).

Staying in the cold but switching hemispheres... **HMS Forth** has returned to her regular beat in the South Atlantic. Among her first tasks was to visit South Georgia to help scientists study the impact of bird flu (see page 9) as indeed did **HMS Protector** on her first work period of the season as part of her broad scientific mission which has also seen her help with the count of the Antarctic penguin populace (see the centre pages). Navigating the RN's icebreaker/survey/science ship around the frozen continent has been assisted by one of the ship's company on exchange with **Sir David Attenborough** (aka Boaty McBoatface) gaining vital experience (see pages 16-17).

Warming up a little, patrol ship **HMS Trent** was asked to – and made – a short-notice visit to Guyana on the northern shores of South America to help dampen regional tensions (see page 13).

Enjoying warm skies were the fliers of **846 NAS** who hopped over to Portugal for their second stint of training on the Iberian Peninsula (see pages 22-23).

There's a welcome return for **809 Naval Air Squadron** after a 40-year hiatus as the RN's dedicated front-line F-35 Squadron, formally stood up at RAF Marham (which, like 617 Sqn will be a joint RN/RAF affair from tip to toe – see pages 14-15).

After a lengthy hiatus a fresh bid is being made for lottery cash to lay the foundations for a new Royal Marines Museum in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard (see page 31).

And finally, many congratulations to the five submariners of **HMS Oardacious** who rowed the Atlantic faster than any of the 37 teams which departed the Canaries in mid-December to win 'the world's toughest row' (see page 35).



# RFA LYME BAY DELIVERS AID FOR GAZANS

Pictures: Corporal Anil Gurung;



THE Royal Navy delivered more than 80 tonnes of humanitarian aid for Gaza on behalf of the UK.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship RFA Lyme Bay delivered more than 300 pallets of UK aid as well as medical supplies on behalf of the Republic of Cyprus into Port Said, Egypt.

The aid consisted of nearly 5,000 shelter kits and nearly 11,000 blankets.

Task group commander, Commander Sam Stephens, said: "The UK's Armed Forces have a proud history of providing humanitarian assistance right across the globe, and the Littoral Response Group (South) was rightly re-tasked to the eastern Mediterranean to provide the UK government with the capability to deliver aid to Gaza."

He added: "We've worked tirelessly to provide a full range of options to ministers as to how we

can best help, and I'm proud that we have now delivered on behalf of the United Kingdom."

The Cypriot aid of ten pallets contained more than 1,500 kilograms of essential medical supplies and medication.

This latest delivery follows more than 70 tonnes of UK aid for Gaza already delivered via Egypt by the Royal Air Force since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas conflict.

RFA Lyme Bay's Commanding Officer Captain Chris Clarke said: "The work to help facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza has been an emotionally subliminal occasion for the ship's company of RFA Lyme Bay."

"In a truly a joint and international endeavour, from the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office and Ministry of Defence to their Cypriot counterparts, our people, whether Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Army and civilian

RFA staff, have combined to embark, transport and now offload aid into the hands of non-government organisations ashore.

"We remain hopeful that our endeavour, no matter how small in the greater context of the conflict, will bring some hope and comfort to those in this time of great need."

The aid was received by the Egyptian Red Crescent for onward transportation and distribution in Gaza by aid organisations including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

RFA Lyme Bay is deployed to the Mediterranean alongside RFA Argus as part of Littoral Response Group (South). Both ships have been deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean ready to support UK and international efforts to ease the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza.



**HMS Puncher (nearest the camera) with a sister P2000 and a Skjold-class Norwegian Navy corvette in a snowy Harstad on last year's maiden foray into the Arctic**

# Four go deep into the Arctic

The RN's smallest ships head off on their longest deployment in their 35-year history – and deeper into the Arctic than ever before.

Four coastal forces craft leave Portsmouth early in February for a four-month mission – mostly in the fjords of Norway.

While away the fast patrol boats, each crewed by just five sailors, will go further north than any of their class – above the 70th Parallel – as they work with the Norwegian Navy and Norwegian Coastal Ranger Commandos and support key international exercises.

In the past few years, the Coastal Forces Squadron has evolved from a unit of 14 boats which was mostly used to give university students a sample of life in the Royal Navy to a force returning to its WW1/WW2 roots, specialising in small, fast boat operations, supporting front-line RN and NATO training and missions around the UK and northwest Europe.

Last year the boats spent several months in Norway. Commander Richard Skelton, the Coastal Forces' Squadron's Commanding Officer, said his team would build on those experiences for the return to Scandinavia.

"This deployment marks the next step of the Coastal Forces Squadron journey, moving away from a purely training role into an operational one," he explained.

"Gone are the days of solely supporting university training. There's a clear intent to return to our roots and once again become experts in small boat warfare. The squadron has a new way of working, operating together out of select locations, focussed on small task groups, conducting coastal warfare.

"Norway is a key ally, they're also experts at operating small craft in the harshest of environments, so it's brilliant to be able to go and share our knowledge and test our tactics."

HMS Biter, Blazer, Exploit and Trumpeter will leave Portsmouth in early February, making their way around 1,750 miles via the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, eventually reaching their destination north of Tromsø in time for the large-scale international winter exercises Joint Viking and Nordic Response.

In April the boats will join the Norwegian Navy and five Royal Navy Wildcat helicopters in the waters around Bergen as the two allies develop small boat tactics – and to allow helicopter crews hone their skills in taking out such threats on Exercise Tamber Shield.

All four boats are small (just 54 tonnes, 68ft long), fast and nimble (20 knots plus) but not designed for open waters and their open bridges are completely exposed to the elements. The average temperature is expected to be -6 Celsius, but even in March it can drop to around -30 in the High North.

"It's no small feat to take a 20-metre long plastic patrol boat, with an open bridge 1,500 miles north into the Arctic Circle and not only survive there but operate," said Commander Skelton.

"The ships' companies have worked hard to prepare and will be challenged by not only the environment but also the tasking. Ultimately it's the sort of adventure you join the Royal Navy for."

Petty Officer Timothy Scott, HMS Biter's marine engineer officer, added: "Deploying to over 70 degrees North where the average temperature will be below zero presents an exciting new challenge for the squadron," he said.

"Building on last years' experience we will rise to a new challenge in the harsh Arctic environment of Norway and continue the journey of returning to our roots of small boat coastal warfare."

## Laser-armed warships step closer to reality

A LASER weapon which could be fitted to future generations of Royal Navy warships has successfully destroyed aerial drones for the first time.

A burst of a high-intensity beam from Dragonfire costs no more than £10 – yet can bring down incoming drones, missiles and aircraft.

After nearly a decade in development and in investment of around £100m, it's been successfully tested by government scientists on the Ministry of Defence's ranges in the Hebrides.

Developed by UK industries working with the Government's defence laboratories, Dstl, Dragonfire is a 'laser-directed energy weapon'.

It can engage any visible target (the range is classified) in theory even one travelling at light speed.

To be effective, it must concentrate its high-power beam typically for around ten seconds – on the same spot (the tracking system requires precision equivalent to hitting a pound coin from a kilometre away apparently) causing the target to break up or, if the laser focuses on, say, a missile warhead, to cause it to detonate.

It cannot be fitted to existing Royal Navy ships... but it could be installed on those currently under construction such as Type 26 or 31 frigates, while the Army is looking at fitting it to some of its armour to take out enemy aerial threats.

Developers say even a concentrated burst of ten seconds of high energy costs no more than using an electric heater intensively for an hour.

# Sister Action

THE 'butterfly effect' of regional alliances, differences and positioning for political and strategic leverage in the Middle East have impacted on two Royal Navy frigates, one finding herself heavily in demand... and another unexpectedly in demand.

The surprise was for HMS Richmond, which was activated in response to the persistent missile/drone attacks in the southern Red Sea and should be arriving in theatre by the time you read this.

Which is welcome news to both HMS Diamond and Lancaster, as Richmond will be providing cover – the military term is 'added resilience' – when either of the former is unavailable for operations, such as maintenance, resupply or giving crew a rest after an intense period.

Because right now, they're all intense periods. Lancaster (pictured cutting an impressive dash through the Arabian Sea), for example, has completed the busiest and most challenging month in her 32-year career.

The frigate clocked up record mileage, spending just four days in port, as she maintained a near constant presence at sea, assisting merchant ships during a period of increased tension and attacks on vessels, conducting security sweeps, supporting allies and helping to take out £8.5m of illegal narcotics.

The Red Rose has been deployed to the Middle East since late 2022 as part of the long-term programme to maintain a major warship permanently in the Gulf region.

Having exchanged crews for the final time in 2023 (the 200 men and women of Starboard Crew taking over from the Port comrades) in the opening days of December, Lancaster then embarked on a sustained period of patrols.

The ship has mostly been assigned to an international task group – CTF 150 – charged with ensuring smugglers (weapons and drugs) do not use these waters to traffic.

In all Lancaster spent 27 of the next 31 days at sea (including Christmas and New Year's Days).

Her crew spent more than eight whole days at immediate readiness to respond to incidents and 21 hours at action stations, during which they assisted an oil tanker which had come under attack from Houthi rebels; the frigate subsequently received a personal letter of thanks from the tanker's owners.

"Despite working over the festive season the tasking was critical to the safety and security of shipping in the Red Sea," said Lieutenant Commander Jonny Forer, Principal War Officer (Air) responsible for monitoring – and, when necessary, dealing with aerial threats.

"A professionally rewarding task that demonstrated the fighting spirit and adaptability of the ship's company in a challenging operational environment."

And while they were denied the physical thrill of boarding and seizing a suspect craft and uncovering a drugs haul, there was the warm glow of satisfaction knowing that the intelligence the ship gathered and shared with US Coast Guard Cutter Emlen Tunnell while working for French-led CTF

150, led to the interception of \$11m (£8.5m) of illegal narcotics.

In total HMS Lancaster sailed 8,764 miles – the most in a calendar month and the equivalent to three crossings of the Atlantic from Portsmouth to New York, placing demands on all on board.

"The ship's company should be extremely proud of their efforts," said Commanding Officer Commander Chris Chew.

"Remaining at sea over Christmas and New Year, the ship has continued patrols and safely assisted shipping through the Red Sea, while also reassuring other merchant shipping in the area.

"All of this would not have been possible without HMS Lancaster's sailors and Royal Marines who have remained fully motivated and committed to getting the job done."

Among them is IT and communications specialist Engineering Technician Corey Dohan: "Although it's my first time at sea in the Royal Navy, it's been great to be able to put my training to the test in real world operations in support of keeping the world supply routes open, providing security to civilian ships through such a dangerous area."

For Richmond barely had crew started to take down Xmas trees and decorations than they were told to prepare their ship for sudden deployment.

She will principally serve as 'understudy' to Diamond on Operation Prosperity Guardian which, potentially, means the first use of Sea Ceptor in anger should Richmond be called upon to take defensive action to protect herself or merchant vessels.

She heads for the Middle East having only returned to Devonport shortly before Christmas on another short-notice mission, helping to protect undersea infrastructure in the Baltic in support of regional allies.

"It's a real challenge to quickly shift from the freezing temperatures of the Baltic to the warm waters of the Gulf. However, our ship and crew are well prepared for any eventuality; it's a very dynamic, quickly-changing situation in the Red Sea at the moment but we are ready and looking forward to doing our bit," said Lieutenant Jack Tarr, Richmond's senior Officer of the Watch.

"By maintaining a visible and persistent presence in the region, the Royal Navy demonstrates our commitment to our friends and allies, and to protecting and maintaining the maritime security which is crucial to our national interests."

One of the most junior sailors onboard, 18-year-old comms and IT specialist Engineering Technician Jamie Symons, added: "This is my first Gulf deployment and I'm hugely looking forward to it. Everyone onboard is keen to get out there and make a difference. We've all seen what's going on in the news and know that what we are going to do is important.

"This is why I joined the Navy and what I've been trained for, so it will be great to put everything I've learned so far into practice."

The frigate paid a whistle-stop visit to Gibraltar to take on stores and fuel, whilst allowing her ship's company time to undertake the famous run to the top of the Rock (completed before sunrise...).

Picture: LPhoto Bill Spurr





# BACK TO THE ARCTIC

BRITAIN'S Commandos are heading to northern Norway ahead of NATO's biggest Arctic exercise in a generation, as the UK underscores its commitment to security in the High North.

Elements of the UK Commando Force, including Royal Marines, Army Commandos and the Commando Helicopter Force are bound for the alliance's northern flank.

Three months of rigorous preparations have led to this point as more than a thousand Commandos begin operating in one of the world's most inhospitable environments, where temperatures are known to plummet to -50c and where polar nights mean the sun doesn't 'rise' until the end of January.

Royal Marines established an encampment in Skjold (40 miles south of Tromsø) – known as Camp Viking – which is to be their operations hub for the next ten years as they continue to be at the tip of the Arctic spear.

The Royal Marines have a long tradition of cold weather and mountain warfare dating back to the 1940s, and continue to build on the strong bond between Norway and the UK.

The Commandos will be sharpening their ability to survive, move and fight across the tough Arctic terrain as they build up to an exercise which will test Allies' collective ability, for the first time, to defend the Nordic regions – including Norway, Sweden and Finland – from invasion.

"The opening of Arctic trade routes and the constant threats, requires the UK to support NATO and our Scandinavian allies more than ever," said Major Ric Cole, from the Commando Force.

"Since World War 2 and the first use of Commandos, we have trained and operated from the fjords and inlets, pushing deep into the frozen interior.

"The UK Commando Force remains the partner of choice for our Norwegian counterparts, and increasingly to new NATO member Finland along with Sweden, whose Special Operations Forces and Coastal Rangers will be working with the Royal

Marines.

"Together, and with US and Dutch involvement, we seek to develop a potent force capable of Defending NATO's Arctic flank."

More than 20,000 NATO troops, 50 warships, submarines and other vessels and more than 110 fighter jets, helicopters and other aircraft will take part in the exercise, with the Norwegian hosts expecting participants from 14 nations.

Usually Norway hosts the bi-annual exercise. However, since Finland joined and Sweden's expected membership to NATO, the exercise – previously called Cold Response – now encompasses the wider region and has been renamed Nordic Response.

Exercise Nordic Response will give allies the opportunity to learn how to operate across this vast and complicated environment, test new equipment and tactics, and ultimately preparing them to work and fight seamlessly alongside each other.

Before the main punch of the exercise in March, Commandos and their support units will undertake cold weather training throughout January and February – honing their survival skills, before moving onto live firing drills, integrating artillery and air strikes, before deploying over 200km inside the Arctic Circle to put it all in to practice.

Preparations for the deployment began in October when Commando Logistic Regiment arrived to 'set up' the winter deployment.

Camp Viking is not a permanent base, meaning vehicles and equipment are shipped in each year from the port at Sorreisa, some 40 miles away, to set up, stores, accommodation for 1,000 people, medical centre (including pharmacy, dental and rehab facilities), a canteen with 23 chefs and 19 mechanics in the workshops keeping troops and equipment going through the long deployment.



# MISSING HIKERS

ROYAL Marines assisted Norwegian authorities in finding two missing hikers lost at night deep inside the Arctic Circle as temperatures plummeted below -20C.

Specialists from Plymouth-based 30 Commando's Surveillance and Reconnaissance Squadron are usually found at the tip of the commando spear, covertly gathering crucial information on the battlefield and on 'enemy' positions to help commanders might make the right moves in combat.

But they turned their particular talents as the eyes and ears of the UK's Commando Force, to a rescue mission as Norwegian Police and search-and-rescue experts searched for two missing hikers in the remote mountainous Helligskogen region, near the border with Finland and Sweden.

The squadron's Operations Room – inside Helligskogen military camp in Norway's far north – became the coordination hub and a staging post for rescue services to gather before deploying into the wilderness.

Four Royal Marines Commandos on snowmobiles were offered to authorities to aid their search efforts, while avalanche equipment and maps were provided to aid efforts.

"Thankfully, we were stood down when the first Norwegian team to deploy found the hikers in a mountain shelter," said Mountain Leader, Warrant Officer 2 Dave Strickson.

"Following the incident, all involved came back to Helligskogen to conduct an after-action review and to thank us for our support and hospitality.

"From a squadron perspective and all parties involved, this was an excellent example of partnering and everyone is looking forward to training together in the future."



Emergency services in the Operations Room at Helligskogen military camp



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# ONE FLU OVER THE SKUAS' NEST

THIS is paradise.

A cold paradise – barely above freezing by day, even at the height of the austral summer.

Every inlet and bay offers jaw-dropping vistas, the snouts of glaciers meeting the cold waters of the South Atlantic, walls of ice, snow-capped peaks and rich wildlife, especially birds.

But although South Georgia may look as unspoiled by the hand of human intervention (if you ignore the abandoned whaling stations), there's trouble in paradise.

On her first foray to the island chain in 12 months, HMS Forth supported groundbreaking scientific research by transporting Dr Marco Falchieri to and around the island chain.

Last autumn, ornithologists reported the unexpected deaths of brown sea skuas on neighbouring Bird Island (which takes its name from the rich avian life).

They feared bird flu – the official term is High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza or HPAI – had reached the islands, but needed confirmation.

Enter Dr Falchieri of the Animal and Plant Health Agency's Influenza and Avian Virology team.

Thanks to samples he and the patrol ship's crew took from dead wildlife – elephant seals and birds – now analysed at labs back in the UK, experts have been able to confirm the first cases of disease in the sub-Antarctic, probably carried to the archipelago by migratory bird.

It's not prevalent yet, and it doesn't seem to have infected or had an impact on the penguin populace, but elephant seals, fur seals, brown skuas, kelp gulls and Antarctic terns have all been hit and experts are taking steps to keep the

disease in check.

Let's hope they succeed, because no-one who visits South Georgia fails to be struck by its beauty.

"South Georgia was absolutely stunning, I have never been anywhere like it in my life," said seaman specialist Able Seaman Dan Crewdson.

"The scenery and wildlife were just incredible and I feel so lucky that I got the chance to see it."

For Forth's Commanding Officer Commander Chris Easterbrook, it's been good for the ship to return to her regular 'beat'.

The River-class vessel spent nine months away from her normal stomping ground, leaving the Falklands in February and heading for the Rock as the first in her class to undergo 'deep maintenance': work on her hull, engines, shafts, a fresh coat of paint as well as upgrades to weapons and communication systems.

Improvements to mess decks and living quarters were also completed, improving the lived experience of the ship's company.

Down time allowed crew to visit the Rock's regular sights: St Michael's Cave and the siege tunnels, there were regular sports afternoons and barbecues in the sun, adventurous training opportunities such as paddle boarding, and professional insights into 'behind the scenes' in Gibraltar, such as a tour of the ammo depot. And sailors had the chance to take part in The King's Coronation Parade.

"While we all worked very hard during the maintenance period, it was great to have some downtime to explore Gibraltar," said Engineering Technician

Joseph Williams.

This is what I joined the Royal Navy for and now I am very happy to be at sea on operations".

The ship returned to the Falklands via the western coast of Africa, allowing visits to Cape Verde, Ghana and Namibia where Forth used the rare opportunity to showcase the RN, UK and capabilities of the River class by hosting events for VIPs, while the football team's year-long unbeaten run came to an end at the hands of a local side who triumphed 2-0.

Now back on-task after a full 'MOT', her place in the yard in Gibraltar has been taken by HMS Medway, which stood in for Forth for most of last year.

Having reacquainted herself with the Falklands – where the average temperature in December (the equivalent of June in the Northern Hemisphere) is 12-15 Celsius... which is colder than Gib – Forth conducted her first reassurance patrol of South Georgia.

"We are now very excited to be back in the South Atlantic to renew our bonds with the Falkland Islands and work together with our colleagues from the British Army and Royal Air Force," said Commander Easterbrook.

"HMS Forth has worked extremely hard over the past 12 months, upgrading and refurbishing our systems so that we can remain fighting-fit for another five years.

"In particular, I'm immensely proud of the ship's engineers, who worked hand-in-glove with industrial partners from Gibraltar and the UK to make this highly complex engineering project a success."



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Royal Marines of 42 Commando carry out boarding training ahead of an Eastern Med deployment

Image by POPhot Barry Wheeler

## READY TO RESPOND

**ROYAL Marines of 42 Commando have been deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean in the early phases of 2024 – on standby to carry out evacuation operations.**

The Plymouth-based commandos rehearsed rescue missions in Cyprus alongside RAF Chinooks from 7 Squadron, meaning they were ready to carry out evacuations of British nationals in Lebanon if needed as the unrest in the region continued – centred on the Israel-Hamas conflict.

K Company – who are held at high readiness to deploy worldwide at speed on maritime operations – and L Company worked with 7 Squadron to be able to work seamlessly together, culminating in a training mission to search, secure and recover personnel back to the main task group, the Littoral Response Group (South) (LRG(S)) centred on RFA Lyme Bay and RFA Argus (**more on page 4**).

This included maritime snipers, the Fleet Contingency Squadron from K Coy (trained in specialist boarding operations), Joint Terminal Attack Controllers (who call in close air support) from 29 Commando and 1st Military Working Dogs Regiment all working together.

The training near RAF Akrotiri ultimately

prepared the group for operations if required.

L Company meanwhile trained closely with Merlin helicopters from Yeovilton-based 845 Naval Air Squadron from Commando Helicopter Force.

Again, this was focused on bringing personnel to safety – giving the commanders of LRG(S) options with the situation in the region constantly developing.

This tasking in the Med came off the back of a busy 2023, which included 42 Commando being involved in efforts to evacuate British nationals from Sudan and sharing commando skills and knowledge with Ukrainian Marines during training in the UK.

In between a busy operational programme, there was also the opportunity carry out vital boarding training in the UK – keeping commandos sharp for ops chasing down drugs runners, pirates and terrorists around the world.

K Company worked on the development of tactics of what is known as Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIOPS) – which is military parlance for stopping and boarding vessels, ultimately disrupting illegal activity.

This work, pictured above, was cut short with the marines tasked to the Eastern Mediterranean in the wake of attacks in Israel on the 7 October.

# ROADSIDE RESCUERS

ROYAL Navy medics have worked with Devon and Somerset Fire Service on skills needed to rescue casualties from damaged vehicles.

Between 2018 and 2022 road collisions were recorded as the fourth biggest reason of death in the Armed Forces, posing a serious risk when personnel are deployed overseas on training or operations.

That is why medical staff from Plymouth-based 42 Commando have received high quality training in skills needed to respond to roadside incidents as first responders.

The medics experienced first-hand of being in the damaged vehicles, with protective sheets and the 'jaws of life' hydraulic rescue tools cutting away door frames and glass being shattered.

Personnel also got their on the tools using a donated vehicle.

PO Medical Assistant Laura Thurlow, from 42 Commando's Medical Training Wing, Logistics Company, said: "As the first responder, it allowed medics to have greater respect and understanding of the amount of time and effort that must go into extraction of a casualty.

"Equally, the training allowed the Fire Service to demonstrate the skills required to minimise risk when approaching a collision and also share their invaluable experiences, gained throughout their careers.

"The training was deemed a success by both parties whose paths rarely meet in real life situations, resulting in the medics of 42 Commando obtaining high-quality training in an area not commonly discussed or demonstrated within the medical branch, but with high relevance in the UK and for Commando Force operations."

She added: "The 42 Commando Medical Wing have successfully supported many deployments last year - in a particularly high tempo period, but still recognise that maintaining capabilities and learning new skills must remain a priority to enable the Commando Force into the future."

## AN EPIC JOURNEY

TWO former Royal Marines, Alan Chambers and Dave Thomas, reached the 1,000km mark in their quest to ski unassisted to the South Pole.

They are raising funds for the Royal Marines Charity under the project name Mission Spiritus Antarctica.

In a submission written from the ice, they said: "The team would love use the 1000km milestone to thank dear friends and sponsors.

"The team have one more degree to deliver the mission to the South Pole.

"Still no easy feat but the Commando Spirit is strong."

The pair are on an unassisted journey from Hercules Inlet to the geographic South Pole and as of mid-January had 'just' 130 gruelling kilometres left to go on their expedition.

They will have been on the ice for close to two months when, weather permitting, they reach their destination, having dragged heavily laden sleds with all their food, fuel and stores for the 54+ day trek.

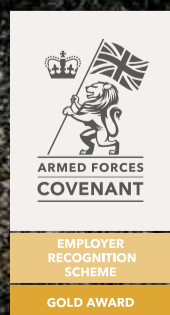
Welshman Dave from Port Talbot – at the age of 68 years and one month – will set a new Guinness World Record by becoming the oldest person to reach the South Pole unassisted, beating the previous record by an impressive four years.



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# LEVEL PEAKS



# SUPPORTING GUYANA

## HMS TRENT RE-TASKED AS BORDER CLAIMS RENEWED

**ROYAL Navy patrol ship HMS Trent deployed to Guyana as part of the UK's unequivocal backing to the Commonwealth nation as the Venezuelan regime renewed its border claim on the Essequibo region.**

HMS Trent is deployed to the Caribbean to hunt drugs smugglers, but was diverted from Barbados to Guyana to reaffirm support to the South American nation and back its territorial integrity.

Trent anchored off Georgetown and welcomed aboard Guyana's Chief of Defence Staff, Brigadier Omar Khan, the British High Commissioner to Guyana, Mrs Jane Miller and a number of other dignitaries.

This was an opportunity for Guyanans to be shown the ship's main capabilities and the operations it undertakes, while underlining the UK's work in the region.

First Lieutenant Robin Poyser led a team from Trent ashore to visit a newly-built hydroponics facility – one example of how Guyana is looking to prosper.

Lt Poyser said: "It was fantastic to spend time ashore in Guyana with our friends and allies. It was an experience I'll always cherish."

Forty members of the Guyanan Coastguard and Defence Force toured HMS Trent, before training and combined manoeuvres concluded the visit.

The ship usually operates in the Mediterranean and off Africa's west coast as part of a long-term security mission, but replaced destroyer HMS Dauntless in the Caribbean in December after

negotiating some tough seas during her winter crossing of the Atlantic Ocean.

For many of the sailors it was their first experience of a long ocean transit and the sense of remoteness when 1,500 nautical miles from the nearest land.

The reward at the other end was some downtime once in Bridgetown, Barbados – including the ship's first ever 'hands to bathe' (the opportunity to swim in the ocean from the ship) and a Christmas BBQ on the flight deck.

The respite was short-lived, however, when the ship was tasked to sail to Guyana.

HMS Trent returned to Bridgetown after this urgent tasking was complete for a crew rotation before heading to Puerto Rico to embark a United States Coast Guard team, who the ship will work closely with to hunt smugglers.

SLt Alex Kemp said: "Working with our United States Coast Guard colleagues is tremendously exciting and I cannot wait for our drug interdiction operations to begin."

Trent is now on patrol, meaning the ship has delivered on operations across four continents and visited 14 nations in the last year.

Fellow River-class Batch 2 HMS Medway usually patrols the Caribbean but has been in the South Atlantic – operating around the Falkland Islands – while sister ship HMS Forth underwent maintenance.

With Forth back in her regular stomping ground, it freed Medway up to get some much-needed maintenance, paving the way for Trent to head to the Caribbean.





## Female Wildcat pilot makes history at pass-out parade

A UNITED States Coast Guard officer will be the first female to fly the Royal Navy's maritime Wildcat helicopter on front-line operations.

Lieutenant Commander Rachel Rychtanek graduated just before Christmas alongside fellow pilot Lieutenant Elliott Wylie (on the left of LPhot Dan Rosenbaum's picture, above) and observer Lieutenant Kieran Lovett at a ceremony at RNAS Yeovilton.

The trio completed their training to fly the Wildcat HMA2 – the maritime version of the helicopter, which 825 and 815 Naval Air Squadrons operate as the Wildcat Maritime Force.

Lt Cdr Rychtanek, 32, who is an exchange pilot from the United States Coast Guard, said: "The highlight of my training was getting back out onto the shipboard environment and watching the other students perform their first solo deck landings.

"I'm very excited for the opportunity to deploy to operational theatres that I otherwise may not have seen in my United States Coast Guard career."

At the end of 78 intensive weeks of studying, exams and practical assessments, each graduate was presented with their wings ahead of front-line operations with 815 Naval Air Squadron.

"Training was a challenge, the most exciting and demanding part of the training was the final exercise at Prestwick, a week long exercise involving several aircraft from 825 NAS operating in the mountains and lochs of Scotland, something that really prepares you to go onto a frontline squadron," said Lt Lovett.

"It has been a long process and it is a relief to finish all my training.

"I am looking forward

to going on the frontline squadron, it will be great to see more parts of the world I've not been to before, especially from a bird's eye view."

The ceremony highlights the achievements of the newly-qualified aviators and gives families and loved ones an opportunity to celebrate their success, and learn about their role in the Fleet Air Arm.

The ceremony ended with a show from the Black Cats display team demonstrating the capability of the Wildcat HMA2 helicopter. Lt Wylie is fresh off the conveyer at the end of an intensive six-and-a-half-year journey, but it didn't appear to be his destiny to be a Wildcat pilot initially.

The 29-year-old from Lancashire joined up to be a submariner but after a visit on a boat decided that a life underwater wasn't for him and he forged a career in engineering, working on Sea Kings and Merlins, and later becoming an officer.

"The course takes a lot of mental resilience, I would say to get through it, just because there are a lot of assessments throughout," he said.

"It's been hardwork and a very difficult thing to do. You've got to appreciate how long it takes and the pressure over that period of time is difficult to deal with.

"But when you're on a good course with good course mates who help each other through it makes a difference. That camaraderie."

Lt Wylie points to his support system - his wife Faye and daughter Annabelle.

"My wife has been a massive help. I've come home stressed and worked up, she calms me down and brings me back to reality," he said.

"She reminds me of what's important and you return to work refreshed."



# PHOENIX RISING

RESPLENDENT in its spotless hangar, with its iconic bird emblem on its tail (sadly a decal, applied solely for the occasion), this is the first F-35B Lightning in 809 Naval Air Squadron.

From the ashes of the Naval Strike Wing and its venerable Harriers, the torch passed between generations of pilots, and the first front-line Fleet Air Arm fast jet formation in a dozen years established.

And in standing up one of the most famous units in naval aviation, Britain gained its second front-line stealth fighter formation, joining the RAF's 617 'Dambusters'.

Nearly 41 years to the day that 809 – known as the Phoenix Squadron, its pilots nicknamed The Immortals – passed

into history at RNAS Yeovilton, it was brought back to life in front of scores of friends, family and VIPs at RAF Marham.

The last naval officer to hold the title of 809 Commanding Officer, Commander Tim Gedge, symbolically presented the unit crest – a phoenix rising from the flames – to the pilot in charge of its re-birth, Commander Nick Smith, the emotional high point of an hour-long ceremony and service which concluded with an F-35 flypast over the Norfolk air base.

"It is an honour and privilege to be afforded the opportunity to command 809 NAS and lead the workup to full operational Capabilit," Commander Smith said.

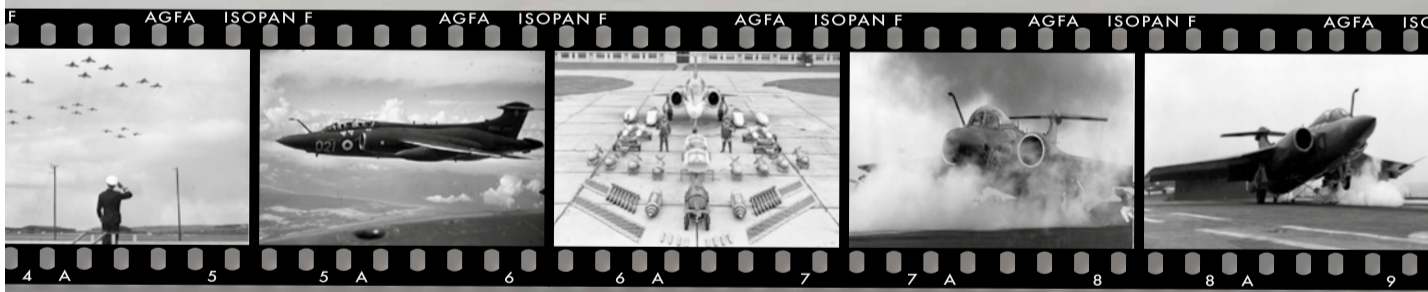
"The squadron has a rich history of Royal Navy and Royal Air Force

integration from the days of operating the Blackburn Buccaneer at RAF Lossiemouth in the 1960s and 1970s, to the Falklands Conflict in 1982 and this is set to endure well into the future.

"The latest re-incarnation of 'Phoenix Squadron' will see this joint service approach deliver a world-leading fifth-generation combat air capability, deployable from both land and sea."

The Lightning is two generations ahead of the Sea Harrier Commander Gedge and his colleagues flew in the Falklands in 809's most recent iteration – although both aircraft are equally at home operating on land or from the decks of Royal Navy aircraft carriers.

And though a naval air squadron, 809 – like 617 Sqn before it – is a national asset, its personnel drawn from both



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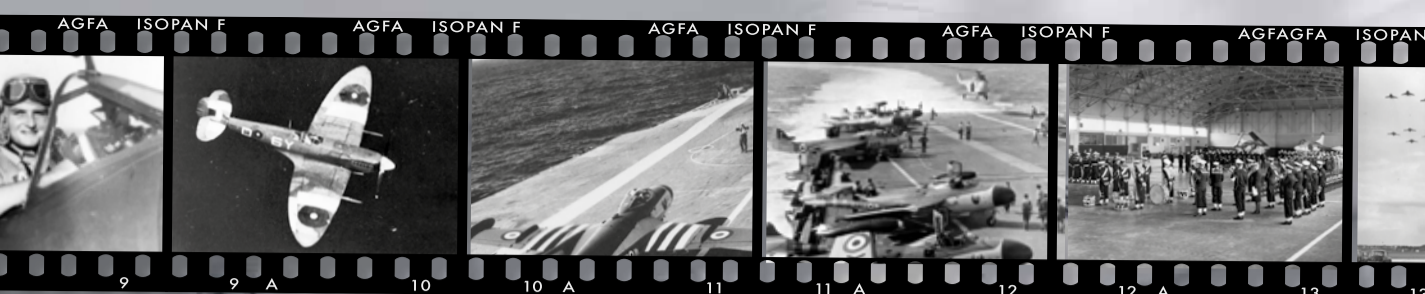
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the RAF and Royal Navy, its commanding officer alternating between the two Services.

The mixed 809 ranks were inspected by the two guests of honour, Second Sea Lord Vice Admiral Martin Connell and Air Marshal Harv Smyth, Air and Space Commander, who also addressed the hundreds of personnel, friends and family gathered in the Marham hangar.

"You only have to look at the battle honours of 809 to know the rich history of those who have gone before you. I hope it will be a huge inspiration," Vice Admiral Connell reminded his audience.

"809 has a proud heritage and it is therefore entirely fitting that our nation's most capable F-35 combat air force now

has a second RN/RAF front line squadron which carries the 'Immortals' name into this modern era as we continue to expand our global carrier strike capability."

Air Marshal Smyth added: "On behalf of the RAF and our Combat Air Force, it is simply superb to see 809 Squadron stand-up, continuing our endeavours to grow the Lightning Force.

"I know from my time on Joint Force Harrier and multiple tours in the Lightning enterprise, that when the RAF and RN operate together, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

"And when equipped with Lightning, it makes for an unbeatable combination for the Combat Air Force, capable of delivering next-generation air power from land and sea."

Of the more than 100 historic Fleet Air Arm units whose numbers are currently dormant, 809 was selected more than a decade ago as a F-35 Lightning formation, largely due to its illustrious history as a strike and attack squadron having received battle honours from operations in the Arctic, Mediterranean, Burma, Suez and South Atlantic over a 41-year period.

The recommissioning sees the number of UK squadrons operating the Lightning expand to four, two front-line, plus 207 Sqn (Operational Conversion Unit) and 17 Test and Evaluation Sqn.

All are joint RAF and RN ventures, with the commanding officer and senior pilot alternating between the two Services.

Pictures: RAF Marham  
Historic images: Fleet Air Arm Museum



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# SNOW PATROL

**A Royal Navy officer prepared for an imminent Antarctic deployment on ice breaker HMS Protector by sharpening vital skills on British research ship RRS Sir David Attenborough.**

**Lieutenant Commander Philip Boak embarked on the vessel as it headed south to Antarctica, gaining 'ice experience' that will prove invaluable when he heads there again but now with knowledge of navigating and operating a ship in polar waters.**

**The time on board also gave him a chance to learn about the vital work of the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) and the operation of their state-of-the-art polar research ship.**

**Lt Cdr Boak, who has spent time on survey ships HMS Enterprise and HMS Scott as well as other ships, told *Navy News* about the incredible work experience:**

I flew from the UK to the Falklands, before joining the ship in Mare Harbour, East Falkland. Here the ship made final preparations for sailing and embarked the remaining members of the crew and scientists.

On sailing, the ship proceeded south across Drake Passage, before heading down the Antarctic peninsula towards the Rothera Research Station. The views on this stage of the journey were absolutely stunning.

At Rothera, the ship resupplied the base with provisions and fuel,

with the whole of the ship and the base contributing to the effort. BAS staff gave tours of the base, including the various laboratories, the old husky kennels and the airfield.

On sailing from Rothera the RRS Sir David Attenborough (SDA) headed north, back around the Antarctic Peninsula towards Signy, part of the South Orkney Islands. On route, the ship completed a drive-by of A23a, the world's largest iceberg.

In the waters immediately adjacent to the monstrous iceberg a pod of killer whales was spotted. The exciting encounter made the news.

Once at the tiny research station at Signy, resupply work commenced again. Being too shallow for the SDA to proceed alongside, the small tender Terror was used to shuttle supplies back and forth (the tender is named after HMS Terror, one of the doomed ships from Captain Sir John Franklin's Arctic expedition of 1845. The motor launch of the SDA is named after the other ship, HMS Erebus).

The SDA maintained a constant position using her advanced Dynamic Positioning technology. While assisting with the unloading of supplies, there was the opportunity to explore the base, including the remains of a Norwegian whaling station, and learn about the important scientific research taking place on terrestrial ecosystems.

On departure from Signy, the SDA headed south into the

Weddell Sea for a ten-day dedicated scientific expedition, the first of its kind for the ship.

The ice-breaking capability of the ship was put to good use negotiating the sea-ice, heading deep into the Weddell Sea. The expedition was in support of the objectives of BIPOLE, an interdisciplinary NERC programme examining biogeochemical processes and ecosystem function in polar ecosystems.

Daily, the ship would deploy its sophisticated equipment including:

- Bongo net - A net device so called because of its shape, and designed to be lowered to 200m depth to catch planktonic organisms. It was great being able to examine these creatures up close and capture some imagery with my phone camera.

- Mammoth net. A much larger net, designed to be lowered to 1,000m to catch planktonic organisms. The series of nets can be opened and closed at various depth ranges, allowing the vertical distribution of organisms to be studied.

- Conductivity Temperature Depth (CTD) carousel. The CTD carousel can be lowered several thousand meters into the water column, recording the salinity and temperature of the water with depth.

The bottles arranged on the outside of the carousel can take samples of water at different depths, allowing the chemical properties of the water to be analysed in the lab, including the





(Main image) Lt Cdr Philip Boak on the sea ice in the Weddell Sea; (right, clockwise) RRS Sir David Attenborough in South Georgia; scientists take sea ice core samples; Lt Cdr on the sea ice; the Antarctic Peninsula; refuelling at Bird Island; scientists deploy a Met Office float.



rafting, the whole of the ship's company was able to disembark onto the ice, a unique experience.

After the Weddell Sea, the SDA proceeded back north towards South Georgia, coming alongside the Research Station at King Edward Point.

Alongside for just the day, resupply work again took place, with numerous containers and cargo being off-loaded.

King Edward Point is primarily a marine and fisheries research station, owned by the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and operated by British Antarctic Survey. With the bulk of the resupply completed, the SDA set sail that evening and headed west towards Bird Island.

The RRS Sir David Attenborough then spent three days resupplying the Research Station on Bird Island, located to the far west of South Georgia. As with Signy, the tender Terror had to be used to shuttle supplies back and forth, including fuel in a large ten-tonne bladder.

With relatively poor weather and choppy seas, it was a real testament to the dedication and professionalism of the crew of the SDA that the resupply work took place so safely and smoothly. Bird Island itself was aptly named, with large penguin and albatross colonies clearly visible.

Precautions due to bird-flu meant that movement restrictions were in place, but there was still plenty of opportunity to glimpse wildlife with scenes reminiscent of those in the *Blue Planet* or *Planet Earth*. The island was also home to a very large colony of fur seals, with the beaches crowded with small pups.

After Bird Island, SDA proceeded back to King Edward Point, this time remaining alongside for just over two days. Once the resupply work was completed, there was the chance to visit the excellent museum, shop and post office at adjacent Grytviken, site of an old whaling station.

Highlights included a carol service in the 110-year-old whalers church, and playing a football game on one of the most scenic football pitches in the world (with seven king penguins spectating from the side-lines!).

After South Georgia, the SDA proceeded back to the Falkland Islands. The passage back included Christmas Day, which was celebrated with an excellent lunch, Secret Santa and live music.

The whole experience was fantastic, both professionally and personally. Being onboard the RRS Sir David Attenborough provided a real eye-opener to the work carried out by BAS, and the importance of the scientific research carried out in the polar regions.

#### HIGHLIGHTS

During my time in the Royal Navy so far, I have quite literally seen the world. Antarctica was the final continent to 'tick-off', and I was visiting the Falkland Islands and South Georgia for the first time as well.

With Rothera located just south of the Antarctic Circle, I managed to get a certificate to commemorate this event (going with my 'crossing-the-line' and Arctic Circle certificates).

There was a huge abundance of wildlife to be seen in the Antarctic

waters. Among other animals I managed to spot six penguin species, (Magellanic, Gentoo, King, Chinstrap, Emperor, Macaroni) and five seal species (Weddell, Crab Eater, Leopard, Elephant, Fur).

During the scientific expedition to the Weddell Sea, it was fascinating to observe the various planktonic species which were caught at depth, including copepods, krill, polychaete worms and jelly fish.

The whole area is steeped in history, and I was keen to learn more about the exploration of Antarctica.

This was very apt, as I have just departed from HMS Scott, named after Captain Robert Falcon Scott of Antarctic fame. South Georgia gave the opportunity to visit the grave of Sir Ernest Shackleton, who was at one time a rather bitter rival of Captain Scott.

During the trip I read up on the history of the BAS, including Operation Tabarin, the secret British expedition to the Antarctic 1943-46.

Other historical avenues to explore were the Battle of the Falklands 8 December 1914, when a powerful British force under Vice Admiral Sturdee tracked down and destroyed the German East Asia Squadron under Admiral Graf Spee.

This avenged the earlier defeat at the Battle of Coronel 1 November 1914, when Admiral Graf Spee defeated a British Force under the command of Rear Admiral Sir Christopher Craddock.

Running a Parkrun in the Falklands and completing a marathon-length training run at Rothera Antarctica on one of the coldest, windiest, yet most scenic routes ever (03:04:00).



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# NORTHUMBERLAND REFLECTS ON SUCCESSFUL, AND BUSY, 12 MONTHS



One of the Royal Navy's busiest frigates of the past 12 months has continued her efforts of being ready to protect UK interests and deploy at short notice.

Frigate HMS Northumberland has started this year where she left off in 2023, being ready to sail in UK waters or further afield as the navy's high readiness ship.

After a well-deserved Christmas with loved ones (but held at short notice in case they were needed), the ship's company were back on board in the new year, immediately preparing the ship for sea, conducting maintenance and general husbandry.

During this time the ship's company welcomed Rear Admiral Steven McCarthy (Defence Equipment and Support Ships Director Operations and Chief Naval Engineering Officer) to present a number of awards from the RENOWN team at DE&S and the Surface Flotilla.

The Senior Leadership Team of the Northumberland's Marine Engineering Department was presented with a RENOWN Availability Award from DE&S in recognition of their outstanding efforts in consistently delivering the ship ready for operations against significant challenges.

Marine Engineer Officer Lieutenant Commander Rich Brennan said: "I couldn't be more proud of my team and the way they have performed throughout 2023."

"It was a tough year and they responded to every challenge with a huge sense of determination and professionalism which ultimately enabled the ship to respond to an unprecedented amount of Russia-facing activity in the North Atlantic.

"I must also mention the assistance we have received from across our support enterprise throughout the year. The pan-enterprise approach adopted by my team has facilitated the best possible support which has been crucial to our success."

Rear Admiral McCarthy also presented three SURFLOT Excellence Awards for Engineering, Communications and Underwater Warfare, praising the crew for their efforts over a demanding year of high tempo operations.

These awards were a tangible recognition of the remarkable success Northumberland has achieved as a ship's company throughout the past 12 months, both in delivering on operations and in ensuring exceptional availability against incredibly taut regeneration periods.

These include working alongside a number of allies and fellow Royal Navy warships in the North Atlantic, Arctic Circle and waters in surrounding regions.

Despite 2023 being a busy year for the ship, her Commanding Officer Commander Will Edwards-Bannon said his crew took it in their stride.

"I have once again been humbled by the cheerfulness and selfless commitment that this ship's company has demonstrated time and again in 2023," he said.

"As we look forward to the challenges ahead of us, all of us in Northumberland can reflect on the past year with pride in what we achieved for the Nation and gratitude for the shipmates we have served alongside."

HMS Northumberland was on operations throughout

2023, protecting the UK's interests in the North Atlantic and Arctic Circle.

Her skills in anti-submarine warfare saw her working with allies to hunt and monitor submarines and protect critical underwater infrastructure such as pipelines and cables.

Countering threats below the waves successfully and with professionalism directly contributed to her winning the Surface Flotilla's Underwater Warfare Trophy for 2023.

Not only charged with defending the North Atlantic against sub-surface threats, the frigate was also tasked with countering potentially hostile nations' warships across NATO's Northern Flank.

In April, she conducted a co-ordinated fleet escort operation alongside Type 45 destroyer HMS Defender, fellow frigate HMS Kent and patrol ship HMS Severn to shadow two Russian destroyers as they sailed near UK waters.

Shortly afterwards, Northumberland led a contingent of Royal Navy ships into the Arctic Circle, experiencing 24 hours of daylight.

Northumberland, Defender and Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker RFA Tideforce, alongside their Norwegian hosts, integrated into the USS Gerald R Ford Carrier Strike Group for the carrier's maiden deployment to the region.

She then led a multi-national task group on operations in the High North for the second year in a row, being joined by Norwegian frigate HNoMS Otto Sverdrup and US destroyer USS Thomas Hudner.

During this mission, the UK and Norwegian ships enjoyed

the opportunity to exchange personnel with each other to gain experience in how each respective navy operates on a day-to-day basis and to forge close relationships with important allies.

The theme of exchange was further reinforced with Thomas Hudner's Sea Hawk helicopter operating from the flight decks of both Northumberland and Tideforce.

But it wasn't just at sea the ship carried out important relationship work with key allies.

She visited a number of nations including Denmark, Iceland and Norway – the last of which she played her part in celebrating the coronation of King Charles III in Reykjavik.

Her ship's company supported the British Embassy's coronation events and also held its own 'street party' on board, welcoming representatives from eleven different NATO nations.

But the ship also worked hard to improve the lived experience on board with Northumberland's resilient crew consistently rising to meet every challenge of 2023.

Some of the ship's most junior sailors have organised whole-ship celebrations for International Women's Day and an LGBTQ+ Pride event while deployed, while others have organised raffles, flight deck sports and a unique 'submarine racing' night to ensure our sailors enjoyed their down-time between missions.

Sustaining Northumberland through this year of high-tempo missions in the unforgiving operating environments of the North Atlantic and Arctic Circle has required an exceptional effort from all on board.





LET(ME) Hammersby bringing timber to Detaille Island for UK Antarctic Heritage Trust work there

Adelie penguins on Pourquoi Pas Island

Oceanites scientists launch a drone as part of their penguin-monitoring work

Fay Couceiro, Professor of University of Portsmouth, Antarctic

# SOUTHBOUND

## ICE BREAKER BEGINS POLAR MISSION

Images by LPhot Gareth Smith



SAILORS from HMS Protector are taking meticulous steps to avoid spreading dangerous bird flu to remote penguin colonies as the ice breaker carries out scientific and conservation work in Antarctica.

Researchers have warned of 'one of the largest ecological disasters of modern times' if the virus reaches remote penguin populations in the peninsula.

As HMS Protector carries out her annual patrol of the White Continent, strains of avian influenza have been detected in the sub-Antarctic – HMS Forth worked with the Animal and Plant Health Agency to take samples for analysis which proved the disease had reached South Georgia ([read more on page 9](#)).

Protector's researchers and scientist are carrying out a range of vital work across the Antarctic during her deployment, including studying the human impact on the continent, monitoring penguin populations and helping the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust maintain historic buildings/bases.

The ship are taking measures to ensure the flu is not introduced to vulnerable wildlife – thoroughly cleaning and scrubbing clothing and kit to remove anything which could be a contaminant.

"Penguins are highly social birds. They gather in large colonies, often numbering in the thousands, to build nests and raise their chicks," explains Lieutenant Commander James Winsor, Protector's First Lieutenant.

"One of the biggest threats to Antarctica's unique wildlife since 2002 has been avian flu.

"HMS Protector has been taking steps to ensure that we don't introduce or spread avian flu amongst the wildlife.

"We will check our kit, we will clean any seams and Velcro, for small seeds or debris, Hoover out any pockets to remove any soil and anything which could contaminate the shore.

"We will check out boots, clean them and then put them in a biocide bath – similar to those used during the foot and mouth pandemics.

"Avian flu is such an issue in Antarctica because most species of seabird down here are very sociable. They are in large colonies and tightly knit for support.

"If the flu is introduced to those colonies it would have a devastating effect. The Royal Navy have a responsibility to protect the environment where it can."

Before heading to the ice, these procedures were put into practise during research trips to the Gentoo penguin colony at Bertha's Beach in the Falkland Islands.

University of Portsmouth scientists, representatives from Oceanites penguin-monitoring programme and seven members of the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust – with their materials and stores for the season ahead – joined Protector as she headed from the Falklands on a mission with several stops which would eventually take the ship to Rothera Research Station, the British Antarctic Survey base on Adelaide Island.

### LOCKROY AND LOADED

On their voyage south, the ship delivered 1.5 tonnes of timber, steel and conservation supplies to Port Lockroy to help the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust (UKAHT) members complete structural works on the roof of the historic building there, protecting it from the elements for years to come.

"I was really looking forward to going ashore for my first time in Antarctica and seeing some of the wildlife," said Writer Emma Whittingham.

"Whilst walking around Port Lockroy, I noticed some penguins with eggs and was delighted when one of them began to hatch right in front of me. What an experience."

It wasn't all work and no play in Port Lockroy as the ship's company became

the first Royal Navy vessel to paddleboard in Antarctica.

Sailors explored the stunning natural icy waters of the harbour, the shoreline of which is home to a living museum, shop and the most southerly operational Post Office in the world (not sure if it has the Horizon system...).

Curious penguins investigated the paddle boarders, swimming right up to the group to say hello.

"Unique experiences such as this should be a constant feature of life in the Royal Navy," said Leading Physical Trainer Andrew Houghton, who led the paddle-boarding experience.

"Not only does it accommodate all of the moral components essential to the RN but it is also about creating experiences and learning that will undoubtedly stay with you for life".

### THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILLE

Onward Protector went to Detaille Island, where the UKAHT members would stay for several weeks to carry out conservation work on Base W, a former research station of the British Antarctic Survey that was quickly vacated in 1959 after unstable ice around the island cut scientists off from their supply ships.

Three tonnes of stores and supplies were ferried by Protector's Zodiac boats over 48 hours in arduous conditions. Protector will return to Detaille Island in the second phase of her deployment, before returning the UKAHT team back to the Falkland Islands.

"It was a huge privilege to have the opportunity to collaborate with members of the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust and support their mission in delivering essential building materials and supplies for the conservation of historic buildings around the Antarctic Peninsula. An experience I will never forget," said Lieutenant Commander Lindsey Gascoigne, Protector's Logistics Officer.



Environmental Pollution at the studies samples taken in the



Pengiuins from a Gentoo colony swimming in the icy waters



Members of the ship's company taking part in stand-up paddle boarding at Port Lockroy



A Gentoo penguin at Port Lockroy



### THE PENGUIN COUNTERS

For the first time HMS Protector is working with penguin counters from Oceanites, the world's only publicly supported non-profit Antarctic research programme based in Washington DC.

They primarily collect and collate penguin colony data from across the Antarctic, work which aims to increase international awareness of the impact of climate change.

Their penguin counters usually collaborate with expedition/tourist ships visiting the Antarctic Peninsula, in order to access penguin colonies.

However, these ships visit a limited number of colonies during the breeding season, so Protector is facilitating two Oceanites penguin counters – Alastair Wilson and Ros Green – to access colonies that are rarely visited, and collect data for sites that haven't been monitored for a decade or more.

One site hasn't been counted since 1983.

The count data will be invaluable for updating Oceanites penguin population trends, and will enable them to assess which penguin species are doing well, or not so well, given the increasing effects of climate change.

"HMS Protector's crew have welcomed us into their on board family, and helped us collect data that will protect penguins for decades to come. We've had an amazing time," Ros said.

### DR ROCKS AND PROFESSOR POLLUTION

Two University of Portsmouth scientists, Professor of Environmental Pollution Fay Couceiro and Dr Clare Boston (nicknamed Professor Pollution and Dr Rocks respectively by Protector's sailors), are studying the impact of tourism and climate change on the Antarctic while with the ship.

"What an incredible experience," said Fay. "Breath-taking scenery, spectacular wildlife, an amazingly friendly and helpful crew, and great food.

"I can't thank the Royal Navy enough for this opportunity and everyone on HMS Protector for an experience I will never forget."

Fay has collected water samples at each of Protector's stops. These will be tested for concentrations of microplastics, metals and nutrients – providing insight into the different types of impact humans may be having on the continent.

Clare, meanwhile, is collecting rock samples with the help of the Royal Marines. The samples taken on Pourquoi Pas Island will look at the timings of glacier advances during the last 5,000 years.

Geomorphological mapping – documenting shapes within the landscape – and rock shape analysis were also carried out there to investigate glacial processes of sediment transport.

In collaboration with the hydrographic section, Clare has also collected some survey data in Marguerite Bay to examine glacial landforms produced by the Antarctic Peninsula ice sheet around 20,000 years ago.

"I've had an amazing experience joining HMS Protector, seeing the Antarctic wildlife and collecting data. The crew have worked hard to get me ashore and help me find some rocks," added Clare.

### UNCHARTED SEAS

Protector's has recorded more than 1,000 square miles – an area the size of Dorset – of seabed data in areas that were either uncharted or poorly charted during her deployment.

This work will increase the safety of seafarers sailing through this region at a time when maritime traffic is significantly increasing – between 2011 and 2020 the number of voyages to Antarctica almost doubled from 234 to 408.

The data collected will all be given to the UK Hydrographic Office for inclusion in chart and navigation publications.

### AND ONTO ROTHERA

The research station at Rothera is the British Antarctic Survey's (BAS) logistics centre and a delivery of aviation fuel by Protector is essential to keeping the two aircraft, which shuttle scientists to remote field study sites and provide support to satellite bases in the region, running throughout the season from the station's 900m runway.

The BAS team were very welcoming to the RN sailors, opening a shop for them to buy souvenirs unique to Rothera and invited personnel to their new recreation building for a social evening.

There was also a friendly football match against the BAS team, which finished 3-3.

That concluded the opening phase of Protector's deployment south.

"The team in Protector have willingly worked extremely hard, often in extreme environmental conditions in terms of freezing temperatures, near gale force winds and of course ice," said Commander Mark Vartan, Protector's Executive Officer.

"All have put in many long days whether that be feeding hungry mouths, avoiding ice bergs, launching and driving boats or keeping the machinery running without fail, to achieve the mission.

"The satisfaction that we all feel is reflected in the memories and photographs and friendships that have been built through the teamwork with the knowledge that we have achieved what we have been asked to deliver, efficiently and safely.

"Although coming towards the end of the first 2023/24 Work Package, many of us are looking forward to the next work package that will take the ship to South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands."

# BUILDING BRIDGES



ROYAL Navy and Portuguese helicopters swooped on a vessel seized by armed assailants during an intensive training scenario off the coast of Portugal.

The fliers of 846 Naval Air Squadron and the Portuguese 751 Squadron put into action weeks of work on tactics and procedures as they took back a Portuguese patrol ship from armed stowaways.

The Merlin helicopters carried out an assault, as troops fast roped onto the deck, rescued hostages and took back control of the ship in training designed to enhance the ability of the two NATO allies to carry out of these vital operations.

"It was great training in a new environment that really showed what is possible when specialists work together to achieve joint operations," said Lieutenant Commander David Houghton-Barnes, from M-Flight, the boarding operations – known as Maritime Interdiction – experts of 846 Naval Air Squadron.

The boarding in the Atlantic Ocean was part of significant joint training alongside the Portuguese 751 Squadron, who also fly the Merlin helicopter – which the Royal Navy deploys widely across the globe.

846 and 845 Naval Air Squadron of Yeovilton-based Commando

Helicopter Force use the Commando Merlin variant of the aircraft to carry Royal Marines into operations wherever they're needed, in all extremes of environment.

The three-week deployment of 120 members of 846 to Montijo Airbase, across the Tagus River from capital Lisbon, also saw student aircrew and pilots challenged across Portugal's skies, the crowning moment of five years of toil to qualify and 'earn their wings' ahead of going on front-line duties.

The journey itself to Portugal, more than 1,300 miles through Spain and France, was a test of critical planning for student aircrew and engineers to ensure they had correctly calculated the fuel needed to carry all personnel and equipment for the long flights between airfields.

Once at Montijo Airbase, the Merlins flew a range of missions – from dropping troops into action, carrying underslung loads and simulating hostile engagements. A notable step up in intensity work in the UK.

Captain Jon Sutton RM said: "It has been a challenging culmination of many years of rotary training and a big step up from training sorties at Yeovilton.

"A personal highlight has been working with Portuguese Forces to

conduct aviation assaults.

"Carrying troops has really sharpened everyone's focus and it's great to fly around fellow Commandos."

Engineer, Petty Officer Paul Rendle, added: "Our time in Portugal is incredibly beneficial for us engineers.

"It really helps enhance our problem-solving skills, operating in a foreign environment much different to Yeovilton.

"As well as building a relationship with the Portuguese Air force it enhances crucial team building skills for the whole squadron."

This deployment builds on work in the summer together and further built the ability of the UK and Portuguese squadrons to operate together.

Commanding Officer of 846 NAS, Commander James Coleman, said: "Our partnership with 751 Squadron is a testament to the shared commitment to excellence and the pursuit of the highest standards in naval aviation training.

"This experience is invaluable for our students, engineers and supporting elements; broadening our ability to deploy whilst enhancing the interoperability of our respective forces; and sharpening our ability to fight and win."





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# Get moving and help the RNRMC

DID you make a promise to yourself that this year would be the year you got fitter, stronger or just moved your body that little bit more? We're here to make that promise a reality!

Why not sign up for one of the many challenge events Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) offers and not only feel the physical post-event endorphin high but also that warm, fuzzy feeling you get from knowing you've raised money for a good cause.

Whether it's a 5km, a marathon or even an ultra, we have a huge variety of running events to choose from.

If running isn't your sport, no problem, why not face an altogether different fear and

take on the dizzying heights of our Spinnaker Tower abseil instead?

Walking, cycling, rowing, there's really no limit to the form your fundraising efforts can take but rest-assured, no matter what challenge you set yourself, our friendly Fundraising team will be supporting you every step of the way.

In 2023, a team from a University Royal Naval Unit in Devon embarked on a remarkable journey along the Southwest Coastal Path from Land's End to Plymouth, covering over 160 miles in support of RNRMC and Defence Medical Welfare Services.

One of the eight-strong team, Freja, described the reason why they decided to

raise money for us:

"We chose RNRMC because many of the officer cadets in the unit aspire to join the navy in some capacity after graduation and we know that RNRMC is the principal charity of the navy. RNRMC has given so much support, both to us as a unit and across the entire naval service and so we took it upon ourselves to give back to them and raise some money for the amazing work they do."

The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity is YOUR charity. We exist to support sailors, marines and their families, for life. If you'd like to join us on the journey to achieving this mission, email [fundraising@nrmc.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@nrmc.org.uk) to get involved.



## Let's hear it for our great supporters

RNRMC is fortunate to have a whole host of incredible supporters and fundraisers championing our cause.

Whether you host a bake sale, run a marathon or play a round of golf whilst raising money for RNRMC, we want you to know that your efforts are hugely appreciated! We can't achieve our mission to support sailors, marines and their families without your help.

Here are just some of the activities our fundraisers have been up to over the past few months.

Nick Hargreaves, pictured, based at HMS Eaglet, started his fundraising journey for us by completing an epic challenge in the form of the Leeds to Liverpool 130-mile ultra-marathon back in August 2023. The race saw him run, shuffle and crawl his way to the finish line in 37hrs 50 minutes. Not content to leave it there, he has since completed the North Yorks Ultra, the Warrington Way 40-mile Trail Ultra and the Tour of Pendle with 4900 feet of elevation gain, amongst many other runs.

Terry Dixon nominated RNRMC as his chosen charity for the month of November. Donations were made by participants from Terry's guided walking tours of his hometown of Reading, where he was born and bred. He set up Terry's Reading Walkabouts as a non-profit with the aim of increasing his fitness in a proactive way and to pass on his love of the local history, culture, architecture and so much more, in a fun way!

Naomi Pearmine donned her trainers and ran the Southampton Mo'Run, smashing both the run and her fundraising target, whilst on the golf course, the RN Engineers Open was sponsored by Lightfoot Defence Ltd and Hythe Marine Services raising an impressive £2,200 for the charity.

If you've fundraised for RNRMC in the past year, or at any point in our 17-year history, no matter what you've chosen to do or how much money you raised, we want all of our supporters to know that your endeavours are recognised and we are forever grateful!

## WRNS BT now under umbrella of RNRMC

THE Women's Royal Naval Service Benevolent Trust (WRNS BT), which has been providing advice and financial relief to former members of the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) since 1942, is now officially a subsidiary charity of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC).

This is a major step to protect support for women who served in the WRNS. It strengthens the already strong partnership between WRNS BT and RNRMC; closely intertwined through their shared values and collaborative working.

The move is part of WRNS BT's strategy to reduce running costs to ensure support can be delivered to the last remaining eligible beneficiaries – the youngest of whom are expected to live for another 40 to 50 years.

Although a subsidiary charity, the name WRNS BT will be retained, as will the Trust's Royal Charter and website. A Board of Trustees will continue to comprise of former members of the WRNS and will include a representative from the RNRMC.

If you need to contact the WRNS BT for financial assistance or wish to send a donation, then please note the following new contact details.

The WRNS BT Office  
C/O The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity  
Building 37  
HMS Excellent  
Whale Island  
Portsmouth  
PO2 8ER

For financial assistance and advice: Email: [grantsadmin@wrnsbt.org.uk](mailto:grantsadmin@wrnsbt.org.uk); Tel: 023 9387 1522

For general enquiries and donations: Email: [theteam@nrmc.org.uk](mailto:theteam@nrmc.org.uk); Tel: 023 9387 1520



# Roaring times ahead

THE RNRMC is delighted to announce that the Senior Command Warrant Officer (SCWO) Reward, Recognition and Respite (RRR) Scheme will be continuing in 2024.

The charity's fantastic collaboration with Parkdean Resorts, Victory Services Club, Union Jack Club, China Fleet Country Club and Royal Maritime Club, provides much needed breaks in the UK for naval families.

Last year saw many serving personnel and their dependents enjoy a joyous and relaxing break.

One recipient reported back to RNRMC about his time in Scotland with his family:

"I'm extremely grateful to the RNRMC for allowing me to have this break during my treatment. The fresh Scottish air made a huge difference.

"Being able to explore the Clyde of Firth Islands such as Bute and Cumbrae and enjoy the evening entertainment as a family was my personal highlight."

A holiday away, and the emotional respite it offers, is vital to the family unit and would not be possible without the financial support provided through the scheme.

The opportunity to apply for the award is open to all ranks and rates, regular, reservist personnel and families, within the Royal Navy.

Its aim is to recognise not only the Service Person but also their families for the extraordinary sacrifices and support they provide whilst their spouses/partners and loved ones are deployed around the globe.

In addition, under this award it aims to recognise families that may have gone or are

going through difficult times and where time away may help.

Families awarded a break, may, if it is felt appropriate enjoy the break with or without the recipient, if deployment means they cannot go, and perhaps invite another family member (i.e. Grandparents) or friend to join them.

The Divisional Officer / Troop Commander / Naval Families Federation (NFF) or Royal Navy Family & People Support (RN FPS) representatives should email [mygrant@nrmc.org.uk](mailto:mygrant@nrmc.org.uk) requesting the online link to complete the application form and submit.

Selection Boards will sit monthly between Jan-Dec. Further details of how to apply can be found in the [Royal Navy Temporary Memorandum \(RNTM\) 09-031/23](#).

## Strengthening Neurodiversity Support for RN community

KIDS is a leading charity for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Every young person should have an equal opportunity to play, learn, grow and thrive.

The Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust (AFCFT) and the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) have partnered with Kids to offer the opportunity for RN parents and carers in families or households where there is neurodiversity, to take back some time for themselves.

'Nurturing Anchors' is an online course facilitated by other parents and people with lived experience.

It's about meeting others and taking care of

yourself so you can stay anchored in the ever-changing seas around neurodiversity.

"Before starting this course I felt very alone. I didn't feel like I had anyone to turn to, and that I had no one who understood me.

"But this course has given me something I can relate to and something that uplifts me," said a participant from previous cohort.

Commitment: Every Thursday for 12 weeks, 7pm - 9pm

Delivery: Online, Group-based workshops.

Next Start Date: February 8.  
To sign up, find out more or to register your interest for a later date, scan the QR code.



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Coronation choreographers and tech trailblazers are among those honoured by His Majesty for

# Exemplary service

**SAILORS and Royal Marines who organised the King's Coronation and revolutionised the way the Service uses tech have been singled out in the New Year's Honours.**

Twenty-three full-time and Reservist personnel face a trip to the Palace for investitures from knighthood to the King's Volunteer Reserve Medal.

Described as the "principal driving force" behind the Royal Navy's contribution to last May's Coronation of His Majesty The King, Commander Trefor Fox – based at HMS Excellent in Portsmouth – is made an OBE.

Some 900 personnel from across the Naval Service were mustered either to take part directly in ceremonial events or support the huge security effort shielding the largest State Ceremonial Event since 1953.

Cdr Fox, who is based at the Navy's headquarters in Portsmouth, was "at the epicentre of every aspect of planning" of the Navy's involvement from arranging transport plans and training to supporting rehearsals – balancing the requirements to support the Coronation with the need to maintain training and front-line operations.

"The spectacular success of the Royal Navy in this historical event was in no small part through his tireless endeavours," says his citation.

Two officers at the forefront of the Navy's growing use of autonomous systems both receive the MBE: Commander Martin Howard commanded the Navy's sole aerial drone unit, 700X Naval Air Squadron, based at Culdrose in Cornwall, while Lieutenant Commander Ross Balfour is paving the way for the Service's switch from traditional forms of minehunting to crewless systems.

Based at Faslane in Scotland, Lt Cdr Balfour is described as the "trailblazer of autonomous Mine Countermeasures systems", taking something which was being trialled and turning it into a brand-new capability which is revolutionising the way the threat of mines is dealt with – both in home waters and around the world.

Similarly, Cdr Howard's small unit provides drone flights for ships deployed around the world, trains hundreds of pilots from across the Forces; trials cutting-edge technology, modifying commercial drones for military use; and the team have even developed their own

The Military Division of the Most Honorable Order of the Bath

As Knight Commander

Lieutenant General Robert Andrew Magowan RM

As Companions

Rear Admiral Andrew Betton  
Rear Admiral James David Morley

The Military Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire

As Commander

Commodore Stephen David Roberts

As Officers

Commander Trefor Morgan Fox  
Commander Christopher Robert Hollingworth  
Colonel Andrew Glenn David Lock RM  
Commander Lucy Jane Ottley  
Commander Ian Hayden Richardson  
Commander Jamie Duncan Wells  
Captain Allan Thomas Youp

As Members

Commander Steven Andrews  
Lieutenant Commander Ross Donald Balfour  
Leading Seaman (Diver) Rory Edward Cartwright-Taylor  
Warrant Officer 1 James Adrian Cuthbert  
Warrant Officer 1 Engineering Technician (Communication and Information Systems) Steven Gilbertson  
Commander Martin John Howard  
Lieutenant Commander Alexander Rowan Marsh  
Commander Paul O'Dooley, Royal Naval Reserve  
Chief Petty Officer Engineering Technician (Marine Engineering) Michael John Stephens  
Lieutenant Sam David Thompson  
Commander Roger Simon Wyness

The King's Volunteer Reserves Medal

Warrant Officer 2 Michael Rudall, Royal Marines Reserve

■ See page 39 for commendations

drone.

Also awarded the MBE is Leading Diver Rory Cartwright-Taylor from the Diving and Threat Exploitation Group, which deploys worldwide to support Royal Navy operations – from dealing with mines and underwater explosives to carrying out challenging engineering tasks on submarines. The Faslane-based diver's personal contribution have directly impacted on front-line operations.

The impact of veteran marine engineer Chief Petty Officer Michael Stephens was also directly impacted the front-line Fleet.

The senior rating from Merseyside, who retired from the Navy in October, played a key role in the installation, integration and testing of new engines in destroyer HMS Dauntless – the first ship in the Type 45 class to undergo the vital Power Improvement Programme (PIP). His contributions were decisive in the success of PIP (Dauntless returned home just before Christmas after her first deployment with the new engines) as well as inspiring junior engineers to continue their naval careers. He's made an MBE for his efforts.



Warrant Officer 2 Mike Rudall, from Cardiff, has been awarded The King's Volunteer Reserves Medal for being "an outstanding role model" to fellow commandos during his 35 years and for being "an exemplary representative" of the Reserve Forces.

Mike – pictured above with his brother Chris (right) on the ramp of a Chinook in Afghanistan in 2011 – found out about the award courtesy of a phone call from his Colonel while completing his weekly shop.

"It's been a wonderful surprise," said the 54-year-old.

"My wife, Deb, passed away four years ago and I know how proud she would be of this achievement.

"It's lovely to have my commitment and hard work recognised. It's so nice to feel appreciated after three decades of service."

He added that the honour was not just for him though and the hard work of his unit is the reason he's been able to be so committed to the role.

"I would really like the unit to be recognised. This isn't just about me – it's about my Reserve unit and how supportive it's been to me, to enable me to achieve everything I've wanted to do across defence," Mike said.

As Sergeant Major of the Cardiff detachment of Royal Marines Reserve Bristol, Mike is regarded as the "cornerstone" of the unit, known for his efforts to maintain the highest standards among comrades as well as looking to raise the unit's profile and numbers.

He's served on the front line in Iraq, Afghanistan and East Africa, was called upon to support the security effort ensuring the 2012 Olympics in London ran safely and smoothly, and has skills and experience which are frequently in demand.

Reflecting on his military service, Mike said: "Being a reservist has without a doubt helped me in my civilian job in the police."

"The Royal Marine Reserves has given me opportunities that wouldn't be possible in any other job. You can surpass yourself physically, test yourself mentally and the camaraderie is second to none. We are all one big family."

"It can be a challenge and without the commitment and support of my family I wouldn't have been able to achieve any of this. Without my daughter, Elizabeth, and partner, Katrina, being strong enough to let me go away on six-month operations or working two demanding jobs I wouldn't be where I am now."

Alongside being a devoted reservist Mike had an equally-demanding job with South Wales Police, retiring just a few months ago having reached the rank of inspector. He has no immediate plans to bring the curtain down on his military career.



## Mum recalls flight to save her baby son

A MOTHER has thanked the Royal Navy for saving the life of her son 18 years ago.

In 2005, Kate Gardner, pictured right, was living on the Isles of Scilly when she rushed to hospital just 28 weeks into her pregnancy.

She was airlifted by an RNAS Culdrose helicopter to Royal Cornwall Hospital where her son was born the following day.

Ms Gardner said the swift intervention of the navy undoubtedly saved the life of Jack, who recently celebrated his 18th birthday.

"His birthday just brought it all home to me," she said. "Jack is now a healthy six-foot-one amazing young man so I just wanted to thank you for getting me to the hospital so he could be cared for properly when he was born."

Ms Gardner, who now lives near Exeter, said her bump wasn't even noticeably showing when, one wintry night 18 years ago, she felt pain and realised her contractions had begun. Once at St Mary's Hospital, medical staff decided it was safer to have her airlifted directly to the mainland and the coastguard alerted RNAS Culdrose to send a helicopter.

"I can remember I was laying on a mat on the floor of the helicopter," she added. "The midwife came with us. They crew were really lovely and kind."

She said Jack was born the following day at just 2 lb 12 oz, and was incubated for a week.

Ms Gardner added: "The navy also flew us off St Mary's again a few months later when Jack developed breathing problems overnight. Once again you got us safely to Treliske Hospital before he was transferred to Bristol for surgery to reconstruct his trachea."

"Without your help, I very much doubt my son would be alive today. 'Thank you' just doesn't seem enough."

A spokesman for RNAS Culdrose said: "We were delighted when Ms Gardner got in touch with us to share her memories of that fateful night – and delighted too to wish Jack a happy 18th birthday."

"Although the Royal Navy's 771 Naval Air Squadron was disbanded in 2016 and our focus is now fully on defending the UK, we remain rightly proud of the squadron's achievements which touched so many lives. Many of the personnel from the squadron remain working here at Culdrose. Some are now civilians while others remain in the navy and serve on frontline operations with the Merlin Helicopter Force."



## Brothers sign up just weeks apart



POMPEY brothers join Navy.

Not exactly unusual. Scores of brothers from Pompey. Except these brothers ARE Pompey, not from it: Oshane and Kurtney Pompey.

Hailing from St Vincent and the Grenadines, they've joined the Royal Navy just weeks apart... such that Kurtney (in his fourth week of conversion from civilian to sailor) joined his brother on the parade ground of HMS Raleigh for Oshane's passing-out parade.

AB Oshane, a former attendee at the St Vincent and The Grenadines Community College, joined the Royal Navy in mid-October 2023 looking for a career that would allow him to gain professional qualifications while working with people who set the highest of standards.

"It's a brilliant and joyful feeling to complete training and be part of the Royal Navy," the 26-year-old

said of the ten-week experience at the Torpoint establishment.

"The training was what I expected – intense, disciplined and physically demanding. It gave me routine and working in a team to get tasks done allowed me to develop my own skills, as well as feel valued when adding my own contributions."

After Christmas leave, Oshane swaps Torpoint for Gosport, beginning his professional training as a marine engineer, while his brother resumes his basic training at Raleigh – all being well he'll pass out at the end of February, then move to HMS Collingwood in Fareham to learn how to serve as a mine warfare specialist.

Kurtney embarks on the rest of his civvy-to-sailor conversion with a spot of advice from his brother: "Just keep pushing yourself to achieve your best – then any obstacle can be overcome."

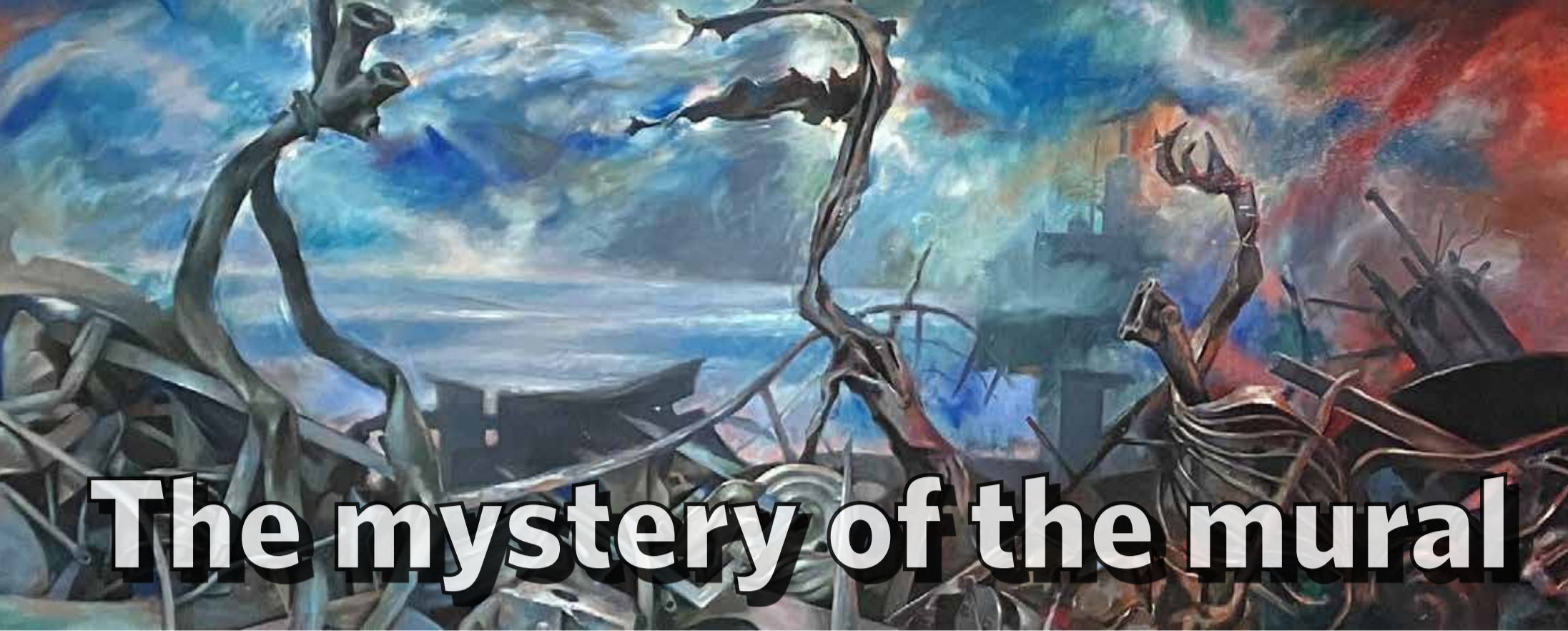
Registered charity number: Royal Navy & Royal Marines Children's Fund 180182

### Naval Children's Charity

Supporting children whose parents serve or have served in the Naval Service.

Naval Children's Charity  
311 Twyford Avenue, Stamshaw,  
Portsmouth, PO2 8RN

www.navalchildrenscharity.org.uk  
023 9263 9534  
caseworkers@navalchildrenscharity.org.uk



# The mystery of the mural

It looks like the darkest scene from a graphic fantasy novel but it actually depicts one of the bleakest moments in recent naval history.

These are the death throes of RFA Sir Galahad, the amphibious support ship turned into a blazing hulk – alongside her sister ship Sir Tristram

– in the Falklands in 1982 after an Argentine air attack.

And now the huge painting – 20 feet long, six tall – adorns the trainees' bar/mess at HMS Raleigh... after more than 14 years out of sight.

It was 'rediscovered' during work on a disused classroom not used since the late 2000s in Fieldhouse Block.

The team from the Defence

Infrastructure Organisation, which is responsible for the defence estate, are keen to know the story behind the artwork – no plaque or information panel was found with it.

The tragedy it graphically depicts is well known: 56 men were killed, 48 of them from Sir Galahad – the greatest single loss of British lives in the conflict – when the landing ships

were surprised by Argentine bombers at Fitzroy on June 8 1982.

But as to who painted it and why – was it someone who was there or a talented artist who served at HMS Raleigh some time between 1982 and 2010 – everyone is in the dark.

"I walked into what was a classroom and, on the wall, I noticed a very unusual piece of artwork,"

said Jon Rickman-Dawson, Raleigh's facilities manager, who rediscovered the painting during an inspection of Fieldhouse Block while demolition work was carried out nearby.

"I took photos of it and started to ask questions to people who have worked on the site for a long time as to what they knew about it and what it is of."

## Restorative measures for LGBT ban victims

IFYOU – or someone you know – served during the ban on LGBT personnel in the Forces between 1967 and 2000, and were impacted by it, you or they may be eligible for restorative measures.

Some measures such as allowing those affected to wear the Armed Forces Veterans' badge, medals which were withheld or withdrawn, hold a veterans' card and access the 'disregard and pardon' scheme, striking a conviction from your record have already been implemented in response to the LGBT Veterans Independent Review.

Others have just been added, including:

- applying for a replacement beret/cap badge;
- officers can have their service details published in The Gazette;
- applying for a Service Leavers' Certificate;
- a written reproduction of the Prime Minister's apology;
- connecting with each other at Service events, conferences, community functions and LGBT Networks.

You can choose to receive any restorative measures you are eligible for in a Service ceremony or event.

There is also the opportunity to provide testimony for the official historic record of the Ban and its impact, which will be added to that already given during the Review and held by The National Archive.

Planned restorative measures due to be brought in this year include:

- registering an interest restoring your rank and/or commission in service records held by Defence if you were demoted as a result of a discharge/dismissal due to the ban.
- registering interest in an LGBT Service Ribbon as an alternative to a special Veterans' badge for those who served at the time of the ban;
- and register an interest to have an administrative discharge, which was based solely on sexuality, or perceived sexuality, qualified. Successful applicants' records will be amended or annotated to record the discharge reason as being "pursuant to a policy subsequently held by the European Court of Human Rights to be unlawful".

Either those directly affected by the ban while serving in the Armed Forces between 1967 and 2000 can apply or, if the veteran is deceased, 'a person of sufficient interest' – someone who had a long-standing, close personal relationship, such as a relative, spouse, civil partner, long-term partner, or child(ren) – can apply on their behalf.

Details and forms can be found on the LGBT veterans 'support and next steps' website: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/lgbt-veterans-support-and-next-steps](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/lgbt-veterans-support-and-next-steps).

## Sign up for Tor of duty

VOLUNTEERS are needed to help run the annual Ten Tors event on Dartmoor in May.

The long-running event – also known as Exercise Wyvern Tor – is one of the largest outdoor challenges for young people as they navigate their way around ten tors or check points over two days.

Around 400 six-strong teams are due to take on the moor, attempting one of three courses (35, 45 or 55 miles).

Although they are unsupported, there's military assistance for participants, including the RN and RAF running larger 'safety check points' with medics and support teams, and more austere, remote check points comprising a handful of tents, with basic facilities, ration packs for sustenance.

Although the event itself begins at 7am on Saturday May 11, volunteers begin mustering on Wednesday May 8, will be in the field from Friday May 10 and off the moor by 5pm on Sunday May 12.

Details are available in RNTM 03-002/24 or from [SWHQ-TenTors-RNLO-Mailbox@mod.gov.uk](mailto:SWHQ-TenTors-RNLO-Mailbox@mod.gov.uk).



## CXX education for aviators in Glasgow

THE RAF's subhunters of today met the Royal Navy's subhunters of tomorrow when they spent a day with the Type 26 frigate community on the Clyde.

Aircrew from CXX Squadron – who conduct long-range maritime surveillance missions monitoring activity on and beneath the waves courtesy of nine Poseidon P-8 patrol aircraft – spent a day with sailors from HMS Glasgow, the first Type 26, and experts from BAE Systems who are building the entire class of warships to replace the aging Type 23s.

Poseidon is one of the teeth of the anti-submarine 'trident' protecting the UK from hostile threats beneath the waves, alongside a Merlin Mk2 helicopter and a Type 23/26 frigate.

In service with the RAF since 2020 and based on a Boeing 737-800 airliner, it replaces seats for passengers with an array of sensors and suite of computers to crunch data – including from sonobuoy listening devices (dropped in the path of a suspected submarine to help locate and track it) and high-resolution area mapping to pinpoint contacts of interest on and below the waves.

HMS Glasgow forged an alliance with the squadron almost from the moment the first sailors joined the ship and crew headed up to Moray for a glimpse inside a Poseidon back in the spring.

That hospitality was reciprocated when a team of pilots, weapon system officers and weapons system operators made the 180-mile trip down to the Clyde to see the Type 26s under construction at BAE's Scotstoun and Govan yard.

The former has been home to HMS Glasgow for the past 12 months as she undergoes fitting

out/trials/completion.

Her ship's company, led by Senior Naval Officer Commander Phil Burgess, provided the fliers with an update on the progress with the new frigate programme – and what we can expect from them when they enter service later this decade.

And in turn the RAF guests gave everyone at Scotstoun an insight into the role of the nine Poseidon – not just anti-submarine warfare, but also search and rescue, humanitarian aid and evacuation and, in future, potentially anti-surface warfare.

The brief finished by covering the importance of the cooperation between the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force and how the work by BAE Systems plays a key role in the joint endeavour.

"When in service we will be working closely with our RAF colleagues; it's great to be able to be able to build these relationships and develop a greater understanding of the future capabilities at this early stage," said Commander Burgess.

The crux of the visit was a tour of HMS Glasgow, with the RAF visitors particularly impressed by the size and scale of the frigate, even in her current state of build.

The tour focused on key areas such as the ops room, accommodation, quarter deck where the towed array sonar system will be installed and Sea Ceptor and Mk41 missile silos.

The visit concluded with a look around HMS Cardiff – from the hardstanding at BAE's Govan yard across the Clyde.

The RAF visitors returned to Lossiemouth with a framed image of the ship and HMS Glasgow cap tally as a token of friendship between the two services and units.



## Warfighter turns writer to take top essay prize

CONGRATULATIONS to Royal Navy Strategic Studies Centre Richmond Fellow Midshipman Joe Reilly military winner of the 2023 Royal United Services Institute Trench-Gascoigne Essay Prize.

Since 1874, the think tank has encouraged civilians and military personnel to put pen to paper (and, more recently, finger to keyboard) for the best free-thinking debate in the realms of defence and security.

Casting their eyes over this year's essays were Air Vice Marshal Peter Dye, former Director General, Royal Air Force Museum; Professor Beatrice Heuser, Senior Associate Fellow, RUSI, and Professor of International Relations (Politics), University of Glasgow; and Lieutenant General Sir David Capewell, Distinguished Fellow, RUSI, and former Chief of Joint Operations, Ministry of Defence.

They singled out Joe's work – 'Perfidious Albion? British Foreign Policy in an Age of Strategic Choice' – as the best submission from a member of the Armed Forces.

The prize was awarded by the Chief of the Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, following his annual lecture and discussion around the contemporary security and defence challenges facing the UK.

It was the third success of the year for the junior officer. He took second place in the First Sea Lord's 2023 Essay Competition in May, then first place in the Australian Chief of Navy's 2023 equivalent contest in November.



"My hope is that someone will see the picture and it will make them remember something. It would be great to credit someone with having put something into this site that has been adopted as part of it. Other sites have so much history, they might have great gold-framed oil canvases. We haven't got that, but what we have got is this."

It's now seen by several thousand men and women undergoing the transition from civilian to sailor every year, but it's particularly stirred the memories of Falklands veterans such as Mark Eve who as a chief petty officer in HMS Hecla, used as an ambulance ship helping those injured in the attacks.

"I'll be honest, the first time I

saw the painting, it got me very emotional," he said.

"There are things in the painting that I can see, but nobody else can, but then when other veterans have looked at it, they see what I see. That's the marvellous effect it has on you. It's a little bit abstract in some respects but it encapsulates everything about the Falklands

conflict.

"Not only does this painting make me emotional, but it also makes me immensely proud of what I did during that time. It was my duty, but I am still proud of what we all achieved."

Raleigh's Commander, Commander Sean Brady, said the base was keen to trace the artist and put the story behind the painting into context:

"What we want is to find who the artist is, where they are now and what they were trying to show with this painting.

"I personally thought the artist was trying to show the reality of what happens in conflict and this picture shows it really well."

If you can help, email [dio-corporatecomms@mod.gov.uk](mailto:dio-corporatecomms@mod.gov.uk).

## FOST fosters closer ties with Danes

THERE will be closer ties between the Royal Navies of Britain and Denmark after two signed an agreement.

Commodore Andrew Ingham, Commodore Fleet Operational Standards and Training, and Kontreadmiral (Rear Admiral) Henrik Ryberg, head of the Danish Navy, put their signatures to a Memorandum of Understanding before joining HDMS Iver Huitfeldt for her 'final inspection' off Plymouth – the climax of six weeks of intensive training.

The agreement builds on an already very strong relationship between two NATO allies and Joint Expeditionary Force partners who work side-by-side frequently, not least in the North Sea.

And the Danes – like many overseas navies – also frequently take advantage of the training the Royal Navy offers in its Plymouth exercise area courtesy of Operational Sea Training delivered by the team at FOST, who prepare Royal Navy and allied warships for front-line duties courtesy of an extensive assessment.

Crew of frigate Iver Huitfeldt were tested in their abilities to deal with fires, floods, breakdowns, attacks above, on and below the waves, response to humanitarian crises and natural disasters and complex international scenarios which demand naval intervention.

The memorandum embodies a commitment to shared objectives, with the focus on enhancing the two navies' operational capabilities, increased joint training initiatives, and stepping up the exchange of expertise between the Royal Navy and the Royal Danish Navy.

"This memorandum of understanding solidifies our partnership, bolstering the already well-developed interoperability between our two navies," said Commodore Ingham.

"This renewed alliance between FOST and the Royal Danish Navy signifies a new era of mutual growth and strengthened capabilities."

# Royal reward for hot-shot Royal

**NO-ONE is a better shot in the Senior Service than Royal Marine Sergeant Tom Hughes, whose marksmanship has been honoured by His Majesty The King.**

The 34-year-old green beret from Swindon headed to Windsor Castle to receive the King's Medal from the monarch himself in recognition of repeatedly hitting the bullseye.

Tom, who serves with 42 Commando Royal Marines, based at Bickleigh, near Plymouth, earned the medal as Champion Shot of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines.

The winner of the medal – which have been presented to the armed forces by the Monarch since the reign of Queen Victoria – proves him or herself in a series of operational shooting competitions, sponsored by the Fleet Commander.

It may be called a competition, but this is not a sport, rather a test of martial ability using the same small arms sailors and Royal Marines carry in action, with each element based on developing specific combat skills.

The competitions are advanced marksmanship training events open to serving personnel of all ranks, rates and branches. Competition is used to drive each participant to their highest levels of personal performance, and the best of the best this year was Tom.

He was carried off the range as victor by his fellow competitors in an open Sedan chair (pictured) in a long-standing military tradition, ahead of the more formal presentation from His Majesty.

Tom was accompanied at the ceremony by his partner Daniella and his father John, a Royal Navy veteran and contemporary of His Majesty in the Senior Service as both served in the mid-1970s.

In a private ceremony, His Majesty presented the first marksmanship medals of his



reign to Tom alongside Lance Corporal Thapa (1 Battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles), winner of the Army contest, and the RAF's top shot Corporal Mitchel (No 1 AIDU).

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience and the group had 15 minutes with The King, who took the time to talk individually with everyone," said Tom.

"He was very knowledgeable on what we had done and also made clear he intended to maintain a direct link with the award in future years."

Commander Jon Sutcliffe, the Royal Navy's lead for delivering Operational Shooting Competitions and the King's

Medal process, said he was "immensely proud of Sgt Hughes and all the other personnel who participated in the competitions back in June.

"The level of skill increase we see across all trainees is fantastic and the medal gives a unique grand prize that motivates all to strive to win and be the best they can be."

Details of the 2024 competition programme will be released by RNTM. Enquiries about the King's Medal and the OSC programme should be made via [NAVY-RNRMRMailbox@mod.gov.uk](mailto:NAVY-RNRMRMailbox@mod.gov.uk).

Picture: HM The King and British Ceremonial Arts Ltd



## Passing the BRNC baton

THE spiritual home of the Royal Navy officer corps has welcomed its 57th commanding officer.

At 39 Captain Andrew Bray is the youngest person in a quarter of a century to oversee the training of several hundred Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary officers every year, plus scores of cadets from the UK's international partners and allies.

He takes over as Captain of Britannia Royal Naval College from Captain Sarah Oakley, who leaves the imposing red-brick college rising over Dartmouth for the corridors of power, working at the MOD's headquarters in Whitehall.

She took charge of the 118-year-old establishment in May 2022 and said her 18 months at the helm had been a privilege she would always remember.

"The opportunity to inspire and train the next generation of naval officers is one I have relished," she said. "I am reassured by the commitment and dedication of the individuals who have chosen to make a career in the Royal Navy. I would like to thank all the staff, officers and local community for their support during my tenure."

Her successor is the first logistics officer to head the establishment, holding a post held by names such as VC winner Martin Dunbar-Nasmith, former First Sea Lord Sir Julian Oswald and Admiral Sir Nicholas Hunt, father of the current Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt.

Captain Bray began his Royal Navy career as a cadet in September 2002. He returns 21 years later as its commanding officer having served extensive around the globe in survey ship HMS Scott, destroyer Dragon and, most recently, in the UK's largest warship, aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales.

"I am delighted to be taking command of the college today. I would like to thank Captain Oakley for all she has done for the college, cadets, staff and our community," he added. "At a time when the importance of the Navy could not be more apparent to our way of life and national security, I look forward to joining the team and the local community as we work together to lead, mentor, and train our future leaders."

# Malay monument to Force Z tragedy



## Heads, you win...

HISTORIC ship figureheads at iconic naval sites in Portsmouth are to be restored – and others put on display for museum visitors – thanks to £250k of lottery cash.

The figureheads were once the symbols of HMS Seaflower, Martin, Queen Charlotte, Madagascar and Asia – each unique carving on the ship's prow acting as both an identifier in an age when many sailors could not read, and also a source of pride and identity akin to present-day crests and badges.

The figureheads of HMS Seaflower (pictured) and Martin have adorned HMS Nelson's wardroom since the impressive building in Portsmouth's Queen Street opened 120 years ago, while that of HMS Queen Charlotte greets anyone working on or visiting HMS Excellent on Whale Island.

And those from HMS Madagascar and Asia are held by the National Museum of the Royal Navy, which has been awarded the cash by National Lottery Heritage Fund, plus £15,000 from The Pilgrim Trust, to restore the three figureheads exposed to the elements – and tell the story behind all five.

The symbols of HMS Seaflower and Martin – both late Victorian training brigs – have suffered especially; water has rapidly deteriorated the internal timber surfaces and metal fixings such they were in danger of reaching a state beyond repair.

The money will not just allow conservators to get to work, but also tell the story of the individual figureheads and the objects in general, their cultural and artistic significance and the role of the Royal Navy in creating and sustaining Britain's colonial empire. New museum staff will work with communities and the Royal Navy to develop activities which will explore the figureheads' history and unpick historic perceptions they represent.

And courtesy of technology it will allow people who wouldn't normally see the figureheads of HM Ships Seaflower, Martin and Queen Charlotte due to their locations on secure naval sites to experience and learn about them virtually.

Louisa Blight, Head of Collections and Research at the National Museum, said people were both intrigued and somewhat bemused by figureheads.

"Every figurehead has a story to tell, but many of these stories are both partial and one-sided," she said.

"We will undertake 3D scanning and tomography of the figureheads identified as in a perilous state, as well as two others which fall within the project's areas of focus.

"The funding enables us to respond to our visitors' call for a reinterpretation of the figureheads and work closely with communities to ensure that they can see themselves in the stories we tell and the collections we hold."

AN ANCHOR recovered from those who desecrated one of the Navy's most hallowed sites was unveiled at the heart of a new memorial.

The King of Malaysia led tributes as a monument to HMS Prince of Wales and Repulse was dedicated in Kuantan, the state capital of the province of Pahang – and the city closest to their wrecks.

The battleship and battle-cruiser were sunk by Japanese bombers on December 10 1941 some 61 nautical miles east of Kuantan.

Some 840 souls were lost – 513 from battle-cruiser HMS Repulse, 327 from HMS Prince of Wales – while the tragedy ushered in a series of defeats for Commonwealth forces at hands of Tokyo, culminating in the fall of Singapore.

Eight decades after the tragedy the Agong (King) of Malaysia, Yang Di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah, commissioned a memorial to the sailors and marines who tried to prevent the invasion of their land.

Paid for by private donations and installed at Teluk Cempedak beach, it features a kedje (secondary) anchor from Repulse, which was seized by Malaysian authorities following illegal salvage from the wrecks.

Aside from the Malay King and Queen, the dedication service – 82 years to the day of the disaster – was attended by British and Malay civilian and military VIPs, including Rear Admiral Andrew Betton, Director Joint Warfare, who



The King and Queen of Malaysia are shown Repulse's kedje anchor, centrepiece of the new memorial

represented the First Sea Lord, and Henrietta Wood, whose grandfather Captain John Leach was one of those lost and whose father, Admiral Sir Henry Leach, who was First Sea Lord during the Falklands conflict.

Mrs Wood told guests of the impact of the tragedy on her father, aged just 18 in December 1941; serving in Singapore at the time, he had been itching to "have a crack" at the enemy, while his father feared the naval force was probably doomed.

A few days later Capt Leach was proved correct; his distraught son searched desperately for him among the survivors returned to Singapore until one of HMS Prince of Wales' gently told him that his father had been lost.

"The memorial is, I hope,

not just a grateful remembrance of the 840 men whose grave is the deep waters of the South China Sea but also a reminder to us to learn the lessons of history and look to a future of trust, understanding and respect between nations. The current terrible conflicts just cry out for humanity," Mrs Wood said.

"This memorial is a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made in war but also it's a symbol of the bond between our countries and, I hope, will serve as an encouragement to others to accept their differences and work peacefully together.

Ailsa Terry, the British High Commissioner to Malaysia, recited an extract from *For the Fallen* by Laurence Binyon.

"This memorial will provide an opportunity for visitors to reflect on the enormity of the loss and the cost of war," she said.

"It is a fitting tribute to the personnel who perished along with the ships, and also serves as a reminder that important naval heritage like this must be protected as well as of the strength of the UK-Malaysia relationship."

Seven sailors from HMS Spey provided a small Guard of Honour for proceedings, less than a month after the patrol ship held a service of remembrance over the wrecks. The Portsmouth-based vessel has been in Singapore undergoing maintenance through December into 2024.

# Kiwis join Neptune service

SENIOR figures from New Zealand gathered with personnel and civilians from Faslane to remember the darkest hour in their country's naval history.

There has been no greater loss of New Zealand life at sea – 150 souls – than the sinking of cruiser HMS Neptune in the Mediterranean in December 1941.

Of 765 men aboard the Neptune, 764 died, killed when the ship struck a series of mines off Tripoli while leading a task group attempting to intercept an enemy convoy.

In fact, around 30 crew survived the sinking, but died of wounds or exposure as they awaited rescue – which only came five days later.

By then only 20-year-old Able Seaman Norman Walton – he'd managed to clamber down the ship's anchor and find a raft – was still alive. He was eventually picked up by an Italian ship and spent the next 15 months as a prisoner of war.

When told that no-one else had survived Norman refused to believe it. It wasn't until

he was repatriated in 1943 and the Royal Navy confirmed the story that the reality hit home; even then it was a reality that was "hard to take in".

Fifty years later he visited New Zealand to unveil a memorial in Nelson to honour his fallen shipmates. He died aged 84 in 2005.

The name Neptune was resurrected by the Royal Navy in the 1960s, proudly borne by the new establishment of HM Naval Base Clyde, where an imposing memorial can be found in honour of the men of 1941.

To mark the 82nd anniversary of the tragedy, Scott Williamson, Honorary Consul for New Zealand in Scotland, accompanied by Commander Wayne Andrew and Commander Jennie Hoadley of the Royal New Zealand Navy attended the annual service of thanksgiving.

"It was a privilege and an honour on behalf of the Government and People of New Zealand to be able to remember all those who lost their lives in the sinking of HMS Neptune on December 19 1941," Mr

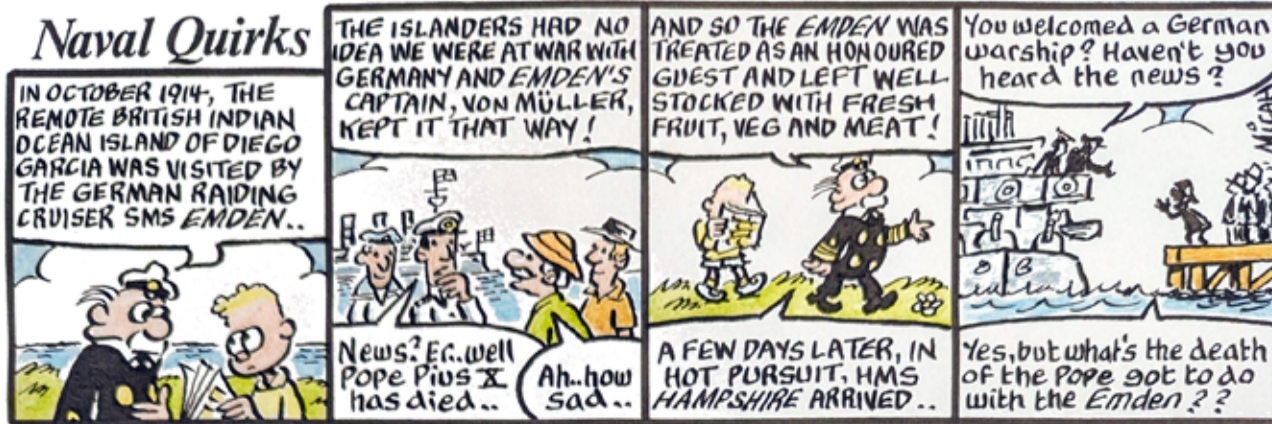
Williamson said.

"Although we gathered at Faslane on a wet, windy morning in December our passing discomfort really counts for nothing as we recall the horror of all of those on board – particularly the sole survivor. It is at times like this that we appreciate the sacrifice that all these sailors made."

Commander Peter Noblett, the Base Executive Officer, organised the service and invited the New Zealand representatives.

"It is only since becoming part of HMS Neptune that I have learned the full story of the disaster and that it was one of the biggest losses to befall the Royal Navy in World War 2," he explained.

"I also learned that Neptune was still an important part of New Zealand history, as with 150 men lost in the disaster, it is the worst maritime loss in the history of the Royal New Zealand Navy and is widely commemorated throughout that country, especially in their Reserve units from which the 150 volunteers had come."



## New home for museum collection

IF YOU'RE in East Anglia and wish to see this fine replica of WW2/post-war sloop/frigate HMS Crane, you'll no longer find it in Norfolk... but neighbouring Suffolk.

It's one of several exhibits and items from the impressive collection at the Marshland Maritime Museum near Kings Lynn which has been transferred to other guardians of the nation's naval heritage.

Mike Smith and his wife Jo, who own the Clenchwarton museum, are making space in their archive of nautical objects and ephemera, which stretches back to the Victorian Navy.

Offering a new home to HMS Crane (including bell and peribouy) are the team from the Museum of the Royal Naval Patrol Service, 70 miles away in Lowestoft. (Picture, left to right are, Leo Whisstock, RNPS Association Secretary, Peter Down of the Ton-class Association and Marshland's Jo Smith.)

In both World Wars, RNPS personnel manned armed trawlers and motor minesweepers – nicknamed Mickey Mouse sweepers for the buoyant magnetic sweep they trailed behind them.

RNPS vessels specialised in either anti-submarine or minesweeping operations, serving in every theatre of WW2; the motor minesweepers are perhaps best known for their valiant work in clearing ports and estuaries after liberation, while their anti-submarine cousins often acted as close escorts to Atlantic and Russian convoys – hence the link to Crane and the transfer of some items of minesweeping equipment to the RNPS museum.

HMS Crane was the last Black Swan-class sloop to serve in the RN, seeing action in the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Far East (Sicily, Atlantic, Normandy, Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay) continuing in service into the '60s.

You can see the replica in its new RNPS Museum home on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings, or by contacting [hq@rnpsa.co.uk](mailto:hq@rnpsa.co.uk).

## BEM for Godfrey

FOUNDING member and stalwart of Bude branch of the Royal Naval Association Godfrey Harrison was awarded the British Empire Medal in the New Year's honours.

Known as Georgie, Godfrey served extensively in the post-war RN from joining HMS Ganges in 1953 and training as a gunnery specialist, serving at HMS Excellent and Cambridge and aboard HMS Charity, Concord, Saintes and Tiger, before ending his career as a Leading Seaman QRI seaman gunner in HMS Corunna.

He co-founded Bude RNA in 1989 with an inaugural membership of 36... which now stands at 105... and until recently also served as chairman of the local RBL branch.

He's held several positions in the RNA branch over the past 35 years, including honorary secretary, press officer and chairman.



## Poles honour Jack... for honouring Poles

FRESHLY decorated with the Polish Army Medal in Bronze, Able Seaman Jack Booth stands proudly in the Embassy in London with his relative Karl and Colonels Robert Pawlicki (left) and Tomasz Ferfecki.

Jack, serving at HMS Collingwood, is one of six members of the Booth family involved in the ambitious Łaguna Spitfire Legacy which hopes to build a full-size replica one of the legendary WW2 fighters as a tribute to Polish aviators – more than 80 years after it plunged into a field in Coquelles on the Pas de Calais, not far from the present-day Channel tunnel terminus.

The huge task was sparked when Jack's uncle Scott Booth bought a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine which he planned to turn into a coffee table at his home in Gloucestershire.

With the serial numbers on the engine still legible, Scott decided to look into the engine's history – leading him to the actual aircraft, Spitfire P8331 RF-M, and the men who flew it.

The last man to climb into her cockpit was Major/Wing Commander Piotr Łaguna (pictured inset), a 35-year-old Pole who had flown in defence of his homeland in September 1939, then fled it when it was overrun by the Nazis, fought in France and when it too fell to the jackboot, he came to the UK and fought alongside fellow Poles in the Battle of Britain.

On June 27 1941, serving with the legendary 303 Squadron – which has subsequently been immortalised in print and on the big screen – Łaguna (pronounced 'Wagoona') led a formation of Spitfires on a sweep over the Pas de Calais.

In attacking the German airfield at Coquelles, Major Łaguna ran into ferocious flak, caught fire and crashed.

Having researched his story,

## Christchurch champ Squibb

LAST month we brought you news of a legendary sporting figure (footballer/manager/commentator/pundit Chris Kamara) signing up to the Royal Naval Association.

This month we bring you news of a world champion on the books of the Christchurch branch.

Shipmate Lynn Squibb represented Team England Super Seniors' Ladies' team at the 2023 World Ten-Pin Bowling



Scott – and many of the Booth clan, including Jack – created the Łaguna Spitfire Legacy with the aim of telling not just the tragic story of the pilot himself, but the 18,000 Polish air and ground crew who contributed to the Allied victory in World War 2 by recreating Łaguna's fighter and telling the Polish story to as many people as possible.

Running for several years now, news of the project reached the ear of the Polish Government, who deemed the team worthy of the Polish Army Medal (*Medal Wojska Polskiego*).

Awarded in gold, silver and bronze classes (project leader Scott received gold, Jack bronze), the medal is presented to non-Poles either for their contribution to the country's defence and security – typically senior officers such as US Generals James Mattis and David Petraeus – or to anyone who promotes the history and traditions of the Polish armed forces around the world.

The Spitfire team were invited to the Polish Embassy in London to receive their decorations – "a proud experience and a very interesting day," said Jack.

He continued: "We are definitely going to carry on the Łaguna Spitfire Legacy. It has not only brought awareness to the legacy but also brought my family closer together.

"We plan to carry on looking for parts and to restore it for Poland."

Championships in Cali, Colombia in December.

They took gold in the team event and Lynn also won a Bronze medal in the Ladies' double event – reward for a sport she took up as a leisure pastime while serving in the WRNS in Portsmouth 30 years ago.

The England team bought home 15 medals in total – only one short of the USA team who bagged 16 medals.

# FRESH IMPETUS TO MARINES MUSEUM



## MUSEUM chiefs this month make a fresh bid for lottery to kick-start stalled plans for a new £13m Royal Marines Museum.

The museum closed its doors to visitors in the spring of 2017, with the goal of re-opening in Boathouse No.6 in Portsmouth Historic Dockyard in 2020 with a much more modern, interactive exhibition than its former home could support.

The project relies on nearly £5m of National Lottery funding. If it is granted, it 'unlocks' access to other cash – fund-raising by the museum and pledges from individuals and organisations – to finish the new museum.

The first bid was rejected, then came Covid, but now bosses at the National Museum of the Royal Navy are ready to make a new application for lottery support having used the lengthy hiatus to both tweak the bid and the design of features in the exhibition spaces.

If successful – a decision could come in June – the new marines museum would open in 2026, taking over space currently occupied by the Action Stations exhibit.

"For a big story, you need a big canvas, a big space – the boathouse is a perfect location," explained Matthew Sheldon, acting director general of the National Museum of the Royal Navy.

"The plans have been re-drawn since the initial bid was made with the emphasis now very much on the story of the Royal Marines Commandos from World War 2 through to the present day, and how they fit in with the work of the wider Royal Navy.

"Yes, it will tell the 360-year proud history of the Corps, it's a wonderful story which deserves to be acknowledged, but what we really want to convey is the excitement of what the commandos do, creating a museum which is physically interactive, challenging visitors, especially younger ones.

Breathing fresh life into the new Royal Marines Museum – "seven years without one is painfully long" – is Mr Sheldon's "number one task".

He steps into the shoes of Professor Dominic Tweddle, who transformed, then expanded, what was once the Royal Naval Museum, by bringing four separate RN museums under a single banner (marines, submarines, Fleet Air Arm and Navy), then adding to both the collection and scope of the museum.

So the Explosion firepower museum in Gosport, 19th Century frigate HMS Trincomalee is now the centrepiece of the northern arm of the national museum in Hartlepool, WW1 cruiser celebrates the Great War RN and Jutland in Belfast, and historic vessels such as monitor M33 and D-Day veteran LCT70704 have been added to the collection and restored.

The result is one of the UK's largest museums – 400 staff, 500+ volunteers who help bring exhibits to life ("without that human connection with the ships and aircraft the story is much less rich," Mr Sheldon says) – with an annual turnover of around £16m.

The marines museum aside, don't expect too many additions to the NMRN 'family' in the immediate future.

Consolidation rather than expansion – making the most of what exists at present is key, particularly as the tourist industry/museums/hospitality sector are still recovering from the impact of Covid (support and funding from the RN was crucial to sustaining the museums through the pandemic).

That means that plans for an official Royal Naval Museum in Plymouth are on hold indefinitely in favour of focusing on improving the visitor experience across the existing sites, such as bringing the Royal Navy story up to 2024 to highlight its ongoing relevance and importance.

"People want a unique great day out. Can you see things in our museums which you cannot see anywhere else?" Mr Sheldon said.

"I think we've got that, not just with our attractions and museums, but also the setting. If you visit Portsmouth or Yeovilton, you're visiting working bases, you'll see HMS

Queen Elizabeth, Prince of Wales, as well as wonderful collections with an enthralling story behind them."

The advent of the Queen Elizabeth-class carriers, berthed very visibly opposite HMS Victory, prove major visitor draws both to Portsmouth and the dockyard (the latter is welcoming half a million people on site annually – 90 per cent of them with no direct connection with the Navy, a good number of them from overseas).

Despite being dismantled, surrounded by tarpaulin and scaffolding, Nelson's flagship remains the jewel in the crown. There is an anticipated seven more years' work to complete before the most comprehensive restoration/renovation in her history, by the end of which the

"The story is brilliantly told as it is – by audio guides or guided tours," Mr Sheldon said. "But Victory's restoration is revealing new stories, stories which we're sharing with people for the first time, which is truly exciting.

"There is nothing Victory anywhere in the world. She represents the navy's key role in our history, Britain is what it is today thanks to Victory and the navy of that era – and the ship herself is the pinnacle of that story."

The northern England arm of the museum, NMRN Hartlepool, will begin delving into the history of its 'big ticket' exhibit, HMS Trincomalee.

The oldest warship afloat in Europe and the last ship built by the East India Company in then Bombay (today Mumbai), Trincomalee embodies the frigates of her era, although her story is not widely known.

Now the museum can start to tell that story better and to a wider audience courtesy of a grant of nearly £100k from the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund, run by the Museums Association.

The cash has been used to employ curator Muskaan Gandhi and fill this gap by working with community groups in and around Hartlepool to co-produce research supporting new narratives, interpretation and displays.



## Sign of life marks branch's birthday

A ROAD sign on a wall at HMS Sultan now points the way to a small, highly-dedicated branch crucial to the safety of all who fly at sea.

To mark the 80th anniversary of the RN Safety Equipment and Survival Branch, veterans joined today's Safety Equipment Technicians at HMS Sultan to celebrate eight decades of lifesaving.

It is a trade which came into its own in World War 2 with rapid advances in sea survival as the conflict progressed.

Equipment was maintained initially at sea by trained seaman specialists – and ashore by Wrens, trained by RAF personnel.

But as kit became increasingly complex, it became clear that fully-qualified personnel were required, and in November 1943 the Royal Navy Survival

Equipment Branch was formed.

It's enjoyed several homes – HMS Raven at Eastleigh, HMS Siskin in Gosport, RNAS Daedalus in Lee-on-the-Solent and, since 1996, the RN's home of marine/aerial engineering, HMS Sultan.

By far the longest period of the branch's 80-year existence – some 35 years – were spent at Seafeld Park in Hill Head, near Lee-on-the-Solent.

From 1956 until 1991 when the site was sold, the old country house/school served as a unique training environment for personnel assigned to the small but vital branch – and remains its most fondly remembered location, hence the unveiling of



the old road sign as a memorial.

Lieutenant Commander John Scivier, president of the Royal Naval Safety and Survival Equipment Association, underlines the importance of the work past and present with three simple words: *We save lives.*

"I spent nine years in the Safety Equipment Branch. Seafeld Park was the home of training for most people in the association, it was the training environment which we would all know," he said.

"It was a unique place which took you away from the Royal Navy into a country home environment, we all have very fond memories of it.

"A lot has changed since, with

personnel recognised now as Safety Equipment Technicians, meaning their technical skills are being recognised. We hope the sign, donated by association member John Vitti, will offer some inspiration to those now coming through training."

Among the thousands of naval aviators past and present grateful for the technicians' work is the head of the Royal Navy, First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Ben Key, who served as an Observer in Lynx helicopters in the 80s and 90s.

He told members of the association: "Please pass on my best wishes, not least because I once had to use their equipment 'in anger' and neither it, nor the training provided in how to use it, let me down. So I am forever grateful to them for the vital role they play in ensuring we save life at sea when things go wrong."

# Junior cadet's gifts of love to children

A KIND-HEARTED junior cadet from Huyton with Roby Unit has played her part to help disadvantaged children in Liverpool over the festive period.

Libbie, aged ten, collected 305 selection boxes to spread some Christmas cheer over the festive period.

She was able to buy the selection boxes for local foodbanks by using her own pocket money as well as through raising donations.

Donations have been forthcoming from within Sea Cadets too.

"Libbie mentioned what she was doing at a Sea Cadets meeting and they wanted to get involved and they donated money for Libbie to buy more selection boxes," her mum, Kelley said.

Libbie was heartbroken to discover that not every child gets a visit from Santa Claus on Christmas Day.

"It was about two years ago at Halloween we were dropping off sweets to a local foodbank when the staff explained to Libby that

not every child gets sweets if they can't afford a costume, which led Libbie to ask me about Christmas and I explained Santa can't visit every family," Libbie's mum added.

Libbie was determined that she had to do something to help. Using her own £5 weekly pocket money, she bought selection boxes for the food bank.

"Libbie has always been such a sensitive child and has a heart of gold. In 2022 she saved up her pocket money and donated 48 selection boxes to different food banks," Kelley said.

"Christmas just gone she used her own money but I also put a post on Facebook asking people to donate selection boxes and it's gone like wildfire. We're donating them in bundles of 50 and through word of mouth we find foodbanks who would like them."

Libbie said: "Every kid should have at least something nice to open on Christmas Day, I know it's only chocolate but when you get a present it makes you feel loved and happy and that someone was thinking of you."

Lieutenant Commander (SCC) Paul Rycroft RNR said: "Libbie has only been a junior sea cadet since June of last year, but took to being a cadet like a duck to water.

"She has enjoyed the boating during the summer and has thrown herself into learning as much as she can within the sea cadets. She is also looking forward to attending junior cadets courses and camps in 2024.

"She is one of the most thoughtful cadets we have, and extremely likeable, when she told us that she would like to better the total number of selection boxes she collected previously which was 40, we were delighted to help."

Hillside Neighbourhood Centre were among those handing out Libbie's boxes just before Christmas, with a Santa riding around a sleigh in Huyton to hand out presents to children in need.

St Michael's Church in Huyton also distributed some of Libbie's selection boxes to disadvantaged girls and boys living in the area.



## Recognition at Ruislip

RUISLIP Sea Cadets are celebrating awards made recently to one of their cadets and to one of their staff.

Royal Marines Cadet Corporal Joe of Ruislip has won the Stationers Cup for 2023, the award being for the outstanding RMC in Lima Company.

The result was announced by London Area Officer, Cdr James Nisbet, RN at the London Volunteer Conference.

In the citation – which was read out – it was noted among other things that Joe had attended a Combined Cadet Force "Acquaint" week at the Royal Marines Commando base at Lympstone in Devon in both 2022 and 2023 and that he had been voted "cadet of the week" by his peers on both occasions.

Joe was subsequently awarded his certificate at Evening Colours at Ruislip by his Oic, Sgt (SCC) Darell Letton. He will be formally presented with the Cup later in 2024.

And just before Christmas PO Kim Finnis, Ruislip's Training Officer, was awarded a certificate of appreciation and named Volunteer of the Year for London Western District, the presentation being made at Ruislip by the Assistant District Officer, Slt (SCC) Maxine Lincoln.

## Weighty issues for adult volunteers

AN EXCELLENT morning's work took place with adult volunteers from across East Kent District.

Blue, Green and UMT all discussed matters that matter to them, such as:

- new regulations on ten-week periodic checks on unit-owned vehicles.
- Issues on local training for adults and cadets.
- Use of district boating hubs, using NSCAC to escalate concerns and ideas for the district moving forward and much more.

Special thanks to Canterbury unit for hosting the annual conference providing refreshments and making sure the heating was on.

District Officer Lt Cdr Kevin Martin said: "The AV conference is a great initiative which allows a broader voice for volunteers to air their concerns as well as celebrate their achievements and successes. We have another challenging year ahead; which we will meet as always, together in a spirit of positivity and optimism."

# Over the moon

## Former cadet aiming high in NASA moon programme

A FORMER sea cadet could be one of the first people to walk on the Moon in over 50 years.

NASA has announced that an international astronaut will be joining an American mission to the moon by the end of the decade. This decision would make the chosen crew member the first non-American to ever set foot on the Moon.

If a British astronaut is selected, the most likely contenders would be British astronaut Tim Peake – who spent six months on the International Space Station (ISS) almost a decade ago – or one of the three Brits selected for the European Space Agency's 2023 astronaut programme.

One of them is former sea cadet Rosemary Coogan (32), an astrophysicist originally from Belfast in Northern Ireland.

Rosemary attended school in Brighton and gained two master's degrees from the University of Durham. One of these focused on physics, mathematics, computer programming and astronomy, and the other on gamma-ray emission from black holes.

Rosemary moved to the University of Sussex as a doctoral researcher, studying galaxy evolution and the activity of active galactic nuclei. From a young age, Rosemary spent several weeks a year away from home onboard military training vessels and land bases as a Cadet Petty Officer with Brighton Sea Cadets Unit from 2002 to 2009.

"I've been interested in space for as long as I can remember – I was drawn by how vast and seemingly mysterious it is," Rosemary told the Sea Cadet magazine team last year.

"But it was after doing my degree that I decided I wanted to have a career focused on what we can learn from space."

Rosemary is currently undertaking 12 months of basic training at ESA's European Astronaut Centre. "Our training is really varied, to give us the skills needed for any mission," said Rosemary.

"So far, we've been studying human anatomy and how the body is affected by space flight, radiation physics, human behaviour and even photography, so we can share our view from space. We'll also be trained in outdoor survival skills, and spending a significant amount of time diving around an underwater mock-



up of the International Space Station to simulate the microgravity environment. When we are assigned to a specific flight opportunity, we'll have two years of specific training."

How did being a sea cadet help Rosemary prepare for her chosen field?

"Sea Cadets gave me the opportunity to become more independent at a young age and spend time away from home, learning skills and doing activities I didn't do at school," Rosemary explained.

"It encouraged my sense of adventure and helped build my confidence to try new things. The teamwork and leadership skills that are part of Sea Cadets are essential as an astronaut – and for any career."

In November 2022, Rosemary Coogan, John McFall and Meganne Christian were named in a class of 17 men and women chosen from 22,523 applicants. These three Britons are among the European Space Agency's first new cohort of astronauts in almost 15 years.

All 12 people to walk on the Moon previously

have been American men. If Rosemary were chosen, she would be the first non-American, the first British person and the first woman to ever set foot on the Moon. The Artemis II mission will see four fortunate crew members take a 10-day journey around the moon in NASA's deep space Orion capsule, gathering vital knowledge on the lunar surface.

US Vice President Kamala Harris made the announcement of this agreement at a recent meeting of the National Space Council. "In recognition of the essential role that our allies and partners play in the Artemis programme, I'm proud to announce that, alongside American astronauts, we intend to land an international astronaut on the surface of the moon by the end of the decade," Ms Harris said.

In a statement, NASA said that it will "make specific crew assignments closer to each mission as the mission parameters and crew criteria are defined." The first mission to land on the moon is expected no earlier than 2027.



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# Sea of opportunities



HANDLING lines, helming the ship, plotting positions and outrunning storms – all in a day's work the Sea Cadets' Offshore Fleet, says the outgoing Commanding Officer of the TS Jack Petchey, Lieutenant Commander (SCC) Michael Royle RN.

2023 was a busy year for the five Sea Cadets vessels based in Gosport. Sailing, motoring, gliding and sometimes smashing through the seas around the UK, the Fleet has roamed as far north as the Caledonian Canal in Scotland, as far south as St. Malo in France, as far east as Amsterdam in The Netherlands, and as far west as Ballycastle in Northern Ireland.

Highlights span the entire sailing season, which operates between mid-March and late November. The Sea Cadets flagship brig, the TS Royalist, visited Hartlepool for the Tall Ships Race in July, joining sail training ships from countries like Indonesia, The Netherlands and Poland to celebrate the magnificence of sail power. The brig celebrated ties with a number of ships, conducting tours and enjoying the camaraderie of simply being fellow sailors.

For the D-Day commemorations, TS John Jerwood visited Ouistreham, in the Normandy region of northwestern France. Her cadets marched over the

Pegasus Bridge, which was the site of daring glider landings during the opening minutes of the Allied invasion of Normandy. Participating in several events in the local area, the voyage was extended to a fortnight so that both commemorations and the usual training could be covered. The event was such a success that the Sea Cadets are planning a return to Normandy with the whole fleet for D-Day 80 this year.

Nearby, TS Jack Petchey took part in the Liberation Day parade in St. Peter Port, Guernsey, along with veterans and serving members of the Armed Forces. Guernsey's Lieutenant Governor took a particular interest in the cadets, expressing admiration for their high standard of marching.

This was a case of "prior preparation prevents poor performance," as they'd practiced their drill earlier that week by marching through the marina in Jersey.

Yachts TS City of London and TS Sir Stelios were front and centre in Falmouth for Armed Forces Day, with HMS Richmond in attendance. Cadets from across the southwest area flooded to the town, with many participating in the parade, playing in the band, and chatting to visitors at the Sea Cadets marquee. In October, the yachts also took part in the Annual Small Ships Race in the Solent, finishing a respectable

sixth and seventh in their class.

Early in the year, the whole fleet sailed in formation in the Solent while long-running children's television programme Blue Peter, filmed on board the TS Royalist. Stunning aerial photography captured by drone shows the Fleet in perfect arrowhead formation, under blue skies and fluffy white clouds.

Good weather hasn't always been guaranteed, and inevitably entertainment has had to be found ashore while the seas and wind prevented sailing. Sea cadets have enjoyed visiting many attractions, including the D-Day Centre and WW2 Museum in Portland, the National Maritime Museum in Falmouth and the Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. The Heli Ops team in Portland were particularly accommodating. Comprised mostly of ex-Navy aviators, the company delivers aviation training in decommissioned Sea King helicopters.

While on board, the cadets (who are aged between 12-18), are instructed in a wide variety of topics. They are taught the ropes and how to secure them (so the ship doesn't float away at night!), the basics of chartwork and engineering, how to helm the vessel, buoys and their characteristics, among a plethora of other topics.

Cadets are also encouraged to climb

aloft into the vastness of open space to handle sails in TS Royalist and handle sails in the yachts. They also experience what it is like to live with others in close confines, something which Jack Tar has been doing for hundreds of years. They soon discover, as every matelot will know, that it's not always easy sharing a small space with so many others.

Not only is the Sea Cadets syllabus covered throughout the year, but the organisation offers the opportunity to strive towards the Expedition section of a Duke of Edinburgh Award. The two yachts, TS Sir Stelios and TS City of London, hosted cadets for a fortnight's voyage late in the year.

Reflecting on my time as Commanding Officer of TS Jack Petchey, one of the most unique Commands in the Royal Navy, I can say – what a gig! I learnt early in this role that the most important thing is to make sure the cadets are having fun, and if we as a crew can enjoy ourselves as well, then that's a bonus.

We've done some incredible things in 2023. The ship's been through the inland waterways in Holland; we've done hands to bathe in Lulworth Cove; we've sailed through the stunning scenery of southwest Scotland; and we've even seen a little of the east coast of Ireland.

My time is up in April 2024 and it's been the privilege of my career so far to

be in Command of this ship. I'll be very sad to go.

Cdr (SCC) Ben Swain RNR, Offshore Commander, took up his role in late summer 2023. "Though operating a Fleet like ours is challenging, the difference we can make to the lives of our young people can be life-changing and the experience we provide can highlight the opportunities that life at sea can offer," he said.

"Our cadet satisfaction surveys are returning excellent results, with an average score of 8.7 out of 10. The sea cadets' favourite aspects of their voyage often include the practical aspects like helming and chartwork.

"Their least favourite elements includes washing up after meals, but I'm afraid that's a necessary part of the week, if we ever want plates to put the food on, so we'll take the hit on that one!"

At the close of the season, the Sea Cadets Offshore fleet has returned to its home in Gosport for essential seasonal maintenance, including being lifted out of the water, and will return to the seas for cadet voyages in mid-March 2024.

For more information, visit the Sea Cadets Offshore Facebook page at group <https://www.facebook.com/seacadetsoffshore>



## Indian Navy host First Sea Lord Cadets

FIRST Sea Lord's Cadets Petty Officer Cadets Maisie (Fishguard Unit) and Joseph (Camberley Unit) represented Sea Cadets at a prestigious event hosted by the Indian Navy in New Delhi.

Maisie and Joseph joined student delegates from the G20 (the world's largest 20 economies) and nine guests from around the world – including Australia, Bangladesh, Nigeria and the UAE – to compete in the ThinQ international quiz.

The G20 ThinQ aims to offer bright young minds and tomorrow's future leaders a chance to experience the Indian Navy for themselves.

The Sea Cadets duo did the charity proud, performing brilliantly in several rounds covering current affairs, world history and geography as well as maritime explorations, insights and innovation, narrowly missing out on a place in the final.

In between quiz rounds and study sessions, Maisie and Joseph were able to meet young people from the National Cadet Corps of India and immerse themselves

in the culture and heritage of New Delhi – including a visit to the iconic Taj Mahal.

Joseph said: "Visiting India was incredibly fascinating. I really enjoyed seeing the cultural sights, the Taj Mahal and the ancient ruins of Qutb Minar. Most of all I had fun meeting new people.

"One moment which stuck out the most to me was meeting the Vice President of India at the New Indian Parliament Building. It was a privilege to speak to him as well as have a tour of the vast building. It was an honour representing the UK's Naval Cadets at this international event and a brilliant memory as I come to the end of my time as a cadet."

Maisie said: "Outside of our quizzing commitments, we accompanied our assigned Royal Navy Liaison Officer on a visit to the Indian National Cadet Corps, which provided us with an invaluable insight into their approaches to training provision, and we were also able to meet with the cadets themselves. We were also afforded the opportunity to attend a mess dinner held

at the Indian Naval Officer Mess. The Guest of Honour was Admiral Kumar, Chief of the Indian Naval Staff."

"For me, India represents a fascinating mix of race, creed, culture, and history," Maisie added. "I am very grateful to the Indian Navy for being such fantastic hosts throughout our stay."

The two sea cadets were accompanied by two adult volunteers, Sub Lieutenant (SCC) Kim Pybus RNR of Newham Cornwall VC Unit and Sergeant (SCC) Mark Watkinson of Sefton Unit on their trip to India.

"It was a privilege and an honour to be a representative of the UK as chaperone for our First Sea Lord Cadets and it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience to see all the different places in India and experience their culture," said Sergeant (SCC) Mark Watkinson.

"Being selected to support and chaperone the UK FSLCs Maisie and Joe was such a wonderful experience," said Sub Lieutenant (SCC) Kim Pybus. "I am so proud of them for the way they conducted themselves the whole time we were there."

## BINGO SUCCESS AT EAST OF SCOTLAND DRILL NIGHT



OFFICER cadets marked their final drill night of 2023 with a difference – raising money for charity with a bingo night.

Organised solely by students at URNU East of Scotland, the event raised hundreds of pounds for homeless people in and around the community.

Hailed a great success, the Officer Cadets were praised for their efforts and supporters were thanked for their generosity.

The cadets from the URNU's two headquarters in Edinburgh and Dundee converged at Hepburn House (Edinburgh's base) for the Drill Night.

Wanting to raise money for a worthy cause, they decided to conduct it in a different format to other Drill Nights.

Planned and lead solely by the OCdts, they arranged a charity bingo night, the proceeds of which went to Fresh Start, one

of the chosen charities of URNU East of Scotland.

Fresh Start is an Edinburgh-based charity helping people who have been homeless get established in their new homes. It has been supported by the URNU since 2022.

The proceeds from the OCdts' bingo night raised £585 for the charity. The cadets also spent time gathering Christmas food banks for Fresh Start and South Leith Church.

As Charities Rep in Edinburgh, A/OC Mirran Weir, a second year student at Edinburgh Napier University, was pivotal in the success of the event.

She said: 'This was a really enjoyable collective effort from the Cadets and it was great to be part of such a successful event.'

'The kindness and generosity of a lot of friends to the URNU in East Scotland meant that we also had some nice prizes to give out on the night.'

The Commanding Officer of the unit, Lieutenant Commander Nick Bates, added: 'It was rather special to observe the Officer Cadets successfully executing the event.'

'We extended the invitation to members of the Edinburgh MEC and it was pleasing to welcome so many to the Unit to witness their students supporting an excellent cause.'

## Bristol cadets become actors for BRNC examinations

CADETS from Bristol URNU got to be actors in the practical examination recruits at Britannia Royal Naval College have to complete to pass out.

Maritime Assessed Leadership Task is one of the exams Officer Cadets at the Dartmouth college must complete to finish their training and start their navy careers.

URNU Bristol were lucky enough to have the opportunity to take part in both the practice period before and during the exam, as actors for each PLT.

The cadets had one objective – to interfere and cause chaos; the result was a fantastic opportunity for the candidates to showcase their leadership, adaptability and people skills.

Throughout the week they slowly increased the intensity of each exercise, acting in many different roles from concerned local farmers to displaced migrants and from hostage takers and protestors to terrorists.

It was a good opportunity for the university students to test Dartmouth's Officer Cadet's ability to handle challenging situations and put them through their paces.

One scenario which was a highlight for the URNU squad was playing migrants that didn't understand

English and didn't understand know they were holding a ticking bomb.

The exam came to an end with a final show off between the Officer Cadets supported by local police and ambulance services with 30 students taking part.

They played violent protestors, trying to break through a wall of police officers and OC's, then being injured or passing out, forcing them continuously adapt to the changing situation.

One URNU OC was arrested three times, with different scenarios and situations being played out each time.

'Being tackled to the ground, handcuffed, and searched, only to 'reset' and repeat was a truly unique opportunity,' they said.

And to make the examination as realistic as possible, a special effects makeup artist worked her magic, creating realistic bullet wounds, bruises, shellshock and more.

Outside of the fun the URNU Bristol students had during the exercise, it was a wonderful experience exploring the Britannia Royal Naval College grounds - the rich history and atmosphere was awe-inspiring.

URNU Bristol would like to thank Lt Price RN and his team at RNLA for this fantastic opportunity.

## Birmingham unit battle off against Army corps rivals in weekend playing the enemy

STUDENTS at URNU Birmingham played the enemy in a weekend away to test their Army rivals.

Having already been on an annual exercise to play enemy at Gareloch Battle Camp, the unit was invited by the Army Birmingham University Officer Training Corp to another weekend away to pick up some rifles and play enemy for them once again.

The weekend was freezing cold with temperatures as low as -1C, which was made none the better by the accommodation being a remote barn in the countryside of Leek training area, North Staffordshire.

Layers of warm clothing was piled on and the four

Officer Cadets (OCdts) made their way outside on a crisp frosty Saturday morning, having all been given their field kit the night before.

After being given their first location, the OCdts navigated their way with map and compass to where they would sit and wait for the first wave of "attacks".

Previous experience told them they were in for a long wait, so in good naval tradition they got busy getting some hot wets and scran going.

Over the day the small naval contingent were hit with two aggressive platoon attacks from the UOTC, but excellent use of the terrain and good area knowledge saw

a spirited defence take place.

The modern-day Naval Division stood well considering they have only had limited SA80 weapons training and limited field craft knowledge.

Being tired and cold certainly didn't stop the OCdts from giving the attacks everything they had, before they headed back to their barn to rest just as snow started to fall.

However because of the snow and cold, the Directing Staff decided to call off Sunday's platoon attacks, planning instead to TAB (the Army's versions of a Royal Marines YOMP) to a nearby location for coach pickup.

Disappointed, but not deterred, one OTC Cadets still

led a briefing for the attack in preparation for their time at Sandhurst.

A fair TAB awaited them the next day to the pickup location, where they cleaned their rifles and got on a long-awaited and much-appreciated heated coach back to URNU Birmingham.

One cadet said: "Yes, it was cold, yes, it was wet, but a weekend with the OTC is a valuable experience for any Cadet looking to spend some time outdoors getting their hands dirty."

URNU Birmingham said they were grateful to the BUOTC for inviting them on another of their evolutions.

## Pupils see Type 26 frigates in visit to BAE shipyard

A VISIT to one of the world's most advanced warship's makes the school day glow quicker...

A dozen youngsters (plus two teachers) from a London school – all correctly dressed in protective kit – pose in front of HMS Cardiff having won a competition to see Britain's next-generation submarine hunters under construction.

Students from St John's, a Merchant Taylors Schools' for boys aged three to 13 in Northwood, wrote essays to earn their place on the day trip to BAE Systems' Govan yard, where three Type 26 frigates are currently under construction.

The boys – all aged 12 and 13 – were hosted by crew from HMS Glasgow, the first 26 which is undergoing completion at BAE's other Clyde facility in Scotstoun.

They received a welcome brief and presentation covering the history of shipbuilding at the Govan yard (famous names built on the site include WW1 battle-cruiser HMS Renown and WW2 battleship HMS Howe) and the progression of warship construction on the Clyde down the years.

They also received a ship's challenge coin and a detailed painting of HMS Glasgow from Commander Phil Burgess, the new frigate's Senior Naval Officer.

"It was fantastic to have a keen and enthusiastic audience from the school, seeing the children showing real interest in both the project and the engineering fields available to them," Cdr Burgess said.

Employees from BAE Systems contributed to the story and explained the complex processes, skills and machinery required to build a leading-edge warship, giving the students a wider understanding of potential engineering opportunities and career fields which may be open to them.

The visitors were also shown the state-of-the-art Visualisation Suite which contains a digital 3D model of the Type 26. The computer based programme allows the viewer to virtually walk around a completed frigate, looking at every detail down to the last nut and bolt.

Virtual turned to reality in the fabrication shed, where the schoolboys were shown the production line and how sheets of flat steel are manufactured into composite parts of a ship's structure before eventually becoming a part of the ship itself.

Finally, the youngsters were led on a tour of HMS Cardiff, the second Type 26 under construction, visiting various compartments including the bridge, ops room, accommodation quarters, dining halls and the 5in main gun. Both students and teachers were in awe of the sheer size of the vessel and the complexity of design.

Cdr Burgess hopes similar visits will follow in the future. He added: "We'll continue to work with our affiliated organisations and give these opportunities to visit the work that is going on here."



# OARSOME!

A TEAM of Royal Navy submariners arrived in Antigua having won the world's toughest rowing race: 3,000 miles across the Atlantic.

After 35 days four hours and 30 minutes in their tiny boat Captain Jim, the five men, known collectively as HMS Oardacious, were greeted by hundreds of people in Nelson's Dockyard, English Harbour – the first land they had seen since December 13 when they left the Canaries.

Shortly before 1pm – 9am in Antigua – the rowers entered English Harbour, stood up in their boat and raised red flares in triumph – the traditional celebration of winners of the gruelling race, while boats in harbour tooted their horns in appreciation.

Stepping ashore minutes later to receive the winners' silver trophy – the Royal Navy men beat 36 teams to the finish line – they were embraced by their families for an emotional reunion on the waterfront.

Bearded, tanned, and both ecstatic and exhausted, Captain Jim's skipper Commander Matt Main said the race had been "tough, really, really tough".

"It's a really long way - and I don't recommend rowing it - try flying it... or perhaps cruising," he joked to the crowds of the experience.

"We had some beautiful times – in the moonlight, racing through the night on big waves, great fun. But there were also lows, some awful crosswinds when you felt you were making no progress – sometimes it felt like it would never end.

"But overall, it's been a brilliant experience. It's demanded a lot of love – and tolerance at times – but these four men are amazing. We made a real bond."

Alongside him in Captain Jim was fellow marine engineer officer Commander Dan Seager, 38, 37-year-old Lieutenant Rob Clarke, a medical services officer, marine engineer Petty Officer Ian Allen, 39, and 40-year-old Commander Mike Forrester have flown out to Antigua to welcome the rowers after more than one month apart.

Their boat Captain Jim – named in memory of a former colleague – left La Gomera in the Canaries on December 13. Since then, the submariners have rowed in shifts of 2½ hours on the oars, followed by 90 minutes' rest in the tiny cabins at each end of the boat.

They've burned through around 5,000 calories every day (the figure for the average adult is around 2,000 calories), all are suffering salt sores, blisters and sea sickness, jumped into the ocean to scrape barnacles from the hull – marine growth can slow the boat down by as much as half a knot, a massive drag when the men have been propelling Captain Jim through the Atlantic at speeds of around 3½ knots – and have been battered by 20ft waves which on occasions threatened to capsize the craft.

To maintain morale, the rowers have phone/internet links with both their families and the wider world, posting images, videos and – a surprise hit among followers – poetry to capture their feelings, prompted by involvement with the charity Never Such Innocence which

encourages young people, particularly those from military families, to express themselves through the arts.



And the team's poet, Commander Seager, turned to verse to sum up his feelings now the race is over:

*Farewell Atlantic Ocean  
It's true I cannot lie  
If I was offered to row again  
I'd definitely fly.*

This is the third time a team of submariners has taken on the World's Toughest Row under the banner of HMS Oardacious.

It has become a major fundraising initiative for the submarine community (Captain Jim's team have raised £15K alone since leaving the Canaries, and around £70,000 for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity).

Though they didn't beat the world record, the quintet posted the fastest time by any military crew – and they are also the first five-man team to lift the title (the race is typically won by teams of four due to the weight advantage).

The rowers had the backing of HRH The Prince of Wales, the honorary head of the Submarine Service – HMS Oardacious raises funds for mental health, wellbeing and resilience projects in the submarine community – and legendary yachtsman Sir Robin Knox-Johnston.

## ROWERS STEAL THE SHOW IN BIRMINGHAM

THE Royal Navy's Indoor Rowing team won nine medals and took a UK Armed Forces 2K crown at the British Rowing Indoor Championships at the NEC in Birmingham.

Twelve RN competitors competed in 15 races and nearly all of them set seasonal or personal bests along the way.

Serial high achiever WO1 Mark Branson (SULTAN) won gold in the Men's Lwt 60-64 2k in a time of 7 mins 20.4 secs, with a storming finish to clinch the title and add another medal to his World, European and National collection.

CPO Collin Leiba aka 'Mr Plymouth 1992' (FOST-SMQ) also won gold in the Men's 60-64 500m, leading all the way in a world class time of 1 min 25.2 secs.

POMT George Hall (JHGS) was making his debut in 'live' racing and rowed an outstanding race to finish 2nd in the Men's Lwt 'Open' 2k in 6 mins 41.1 secs, again rowing a controlled race with a storming finish to move up from 4th to 2nd in the final 250m, plus also taking the UKAF Senior (<40) Lwt 'Fastest 2k' trophy, thus breaking the Army stronghold.

Hall's emergence owes much to Surg Capt Dan Connor's (JHGS) mentoring and he was also a medallist with bronze in the Men's Lwt 54-55 500m in 1 min 33.1 secs.

Early races on the day saw Team Manager Paul Winton (MCTA) take 3rd place in the Men's 65-69 2k, shortly followed by Lt Cdr Stu Moss (SULTAN) adding to his substantial medal haul with third place in the Men's 50-54 2k in 6 mins 25.9 secs, effectively controlling his medal position all the way in a competitive race.

CSgt James Wade (3CdoX/30Cdo) has been the fastest RN 2K rower since 2020, including gold and silver medals in World Championship age groups. BRIC 2023 saw him in another epic battle for gold, vying for the lead the whole way in the Men's 40-49 2k, but just beaten to the line as he rowed a world class 6 mins 06.2 secs within the biggest age group entry (74) of the day.

CPOPT Rich Charrett (Nelson) also took a bronze on his return to racing after injury, with a time of 7 mins 09.2 secs in the Men's Lwt 30-39 2K.

The medal collection was completed by former WO2 Adrian Walker (SDA/RNRA) with a silver in the Men's Lwt 60-64 500m in 1 min 38.3 secs. Interesting to note that of the 12 who raced with RN affiliation, that four were submariners and five were Lwts, accepting the disappointment in not having any women's team members this time around due to military constraints.

Royal Navy Indoor Rowers are planning to compete at the World Rowing Indoor Championships (WRICH24) in Prague (February 23 and 24).

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# THE SULTANS OF SWING PUT ON A GREAT SHOW

## BOXERS GO TOE-TO-TOE AT HMS SULTAN EVENT

A SPECTACULAR display of amateur boxing was enjoyed by all as the Royal Navy went toe-to-toe with the Army at the HMS Sultan Boxing Dinner Show.

A combined Royal Navy team, from His Majesty's Ships Sultan, Collingwood, Nelson, and Dauntless, took on personnel from the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME), MOD Lyneham and guest fighters from Brighton ABC.

The competition was played out in a highly electric atmosphere, with the show including a display by a Corps of Drums from the Gosport Division Royal Marine Volunteer Cadet Corps and a parade of the fighters.

The Boxing Dinner provides the perfect platform for novice boxers to take those first steps into a competitive boxing ring. In total, twelve action packed bouts were on the card with two all-female fights, in addition to the eight Army vs Navy bouts, all consisting of three, three-minute rounds.

Fight of the night was the heavyweight bout between AB Fraser Scott (HMS Sultan) and Trooper Alfie Rolandsen (King's Royal Hussars), with the soldier claiming the victory in front of the excited crowd.

Presentations were made to winning fighters by VIPs including the Commanding Officer, HMS Sultan, Captain Jo Deakin OBE, Commanding Officer, HMS Collingwood, Captain Tim Davey and by local dignitaries and Defence industry representatives, including the Mayors of Gosport and Fareham, councillors Martin Pepper and Fred Birkett.

As the evening drew to a close, the Commanding Officer of HMS Sultan, Captain Jo Deakin OBE presented the winning team from REME with the trophy.

The event director, Leading Physical Training Instructor Caddy said: "The HMS Sultan Boxing Dinner Show is always a fantastic advert for both Royal Navy boxing and this year certainly didn't disappoint.

"For several of our fighters, it was the first time they'd appeared the ring competitively, but it was great to see the way they stepped up to the challenge, especially the girls out there who really went for it. Hopefully this will be the platform for many of them to pursue the sport further, with the long-term goal of representing the full Royal Navy Boxing Squad."

### Bout results (winners in **BOLD**)

62KG: AB Henry Goodall (SUL) VS **AB Charlie Webb (CWD)**

70KG: Female bout – AB Niahm Tur (NELSON) VS **Lauren Brown (Brighton ABC)**

75KG **Prince Charlton (Brighton ABC)** VS Cfn Adam Robb (REME)

71KG: AB Shaun Kennedy (SUL) VS **LH Bradley Rushton (DAUNTLESS)**

86KG: Spr Bailey Bates (Royal Engineers Boxing) VS **LCpl Brandon Hall (REME)**

58KG: Female bout – Louise Downing (CWD) VS **Cfn Emma Hutton (REME)**

60KG: **AB Alex Burbury (NELSON)** VS Cpl Craig Wolfendale (REME)

63.5KG: **AB Pete Jarvie (NELSON)** VS Cfn Luke Griffiths (REME)

73KG: AB Cameron Geraldas (NELSON) VS **Cfn Ronnie Leonard (REME)**

73KG: **Mne Dan Humphries (CWD)** VS Spr Alex Smith (ROYAL ENG)

86KG: LH Adam Crane (CWD) VS **Spr Henry Taylor (ROYAL ENG)**

90KG: AB Fraser Scott (SUL) VS **Tpr Alfie Rolandsen (KRH)**



Prince Charlton, right, (Brighton ABC) VS Cfn Adam Robb (REME)



AB Niahm Tur, left, (NELSON) VS Lauren Brown (Brighton ABC)



Cameron Geraldas, left, (NELSON) VS Cfn Ronnie Leonard (REME)



Mne Dan Humphries, right, (CWD) VS Spr Alex Smith (ROYAL ENG)



The boxing dinner show

Images by: PO Photographer Pepe Hogan and AB Ryan Steer

# SAILING IN CHILE

A GROUP of sailors represented Britannia Royal Naval College in the Off Valparaiso Sailing Regatta in Chile, finishing as runners up.

At the invitation of the Chilean "Arturo Prat" Naval Academy, the sailors competed in J24s against from the officer training schools of Chile, USA, Italy, Canada, Ecuador, and Spain as well as Chilean civilian teams.

Over the course of the first few days, they spent time familiarising themselves with the yacht (which none of them had sailed on before), initially with crews of mixed nations, whilst interacting with hosts and international colleagues.

Upon our arrival the sailors observed the cadets completing divisions, after which they toured the naval college witnessing and learning about the Chilean cadets' journey to become officers.

Conversing with their hosts and other countries' representatives, they discussed the differences between training, with the majority on a four-year course in contrast to our seven-month duration.

The college also hosted an excellent evening reception during the race weekend where the competitors mingled with local dignitaries and defence attaches.

All participants went on a guided tour of the nearby Museo Maritimo Nacional, housed in the former naval college building overlooking the port.



This was an opportunity to discover more about the history of the Armada de Chile, along with their shared history with the Royal Navy through fascinating stories and historical artefacts.

A key pillar in the shared history is Lord Cochrane, a former officer in the Royal Navy, who had been hired by Chile to organise and command their Navy.

The RN contingent also learned about Chilean Naval hero Arturo Prat whose name is commemorated on numerous plazas, streets and buildings throughout the country including the academy itself.

They also explored the streets of Valparaiso, experiencing a ride in one of the Ascensores (funiculars), that the city is known for, to see views of the town. They took advantage of a slack wind to stroll from the sailing club past Pelicans towards a gathering of Sea Lions both in the sea and congregating by the fish market hoping for scraps.

The visit culminated in an excellent three days of racing.

The first day was of solely military college teams. Wind conditions allowed for only one race and this was won decisively by the Royal Navy.

The next two days of racing combined the military teams with civilian racers, making twelve teams in total.

Competition was fierce with a variety of exciting and eventful starts with several close finishes. There were some weather holds due to low wind but overall seven races were completed.

This was a successful week for our team with new friendships formed, experience gained and an enjoyable time racing.

Ultimately the Royal Navy team achieved an impressive second out of the military teams together with second overall.

This forms an excellent foundation for a team to build upon in next year's regatta.

# COMEBACK KINGS CLAIM VICTORY...



A DOMINANT second half performance saw RN Rugby League overcome a six-point half-time deficit against the RAF taking the game 28-22.

The fixture, at RAF Cranwell was in the first round of the Betfred Challenge Cup with the service sides having the honour of opening this year's first-round matches.

Described by the BBC as the 'stand out tie of the round' the clash was broadcast live on the BBC i-player giving AF Rugby League a huge amount of exposure highlighting the quality of the game in the services.

This was the first outing for both teams since last years Inter Services series and was played under several new and amended rules brought in for the 2024 season.

The Rugby Football Leagues senior female referee Tara Jones officiated the match and with the help of her touch judges kept the game flowing whilst penalising any infringements by either side.

The first half saw the sides exchange scores, the RAF taking an early 4-0 lead after five minutes with an unconverted try.

Soon after the RN replied, a neat grubber by Scrum half MNE Rhys Joel hit the base of the posts and bounced into the arms of LPT James Teixeira who touched down under the posts.

A straight forward conversion by PO Ben Chambers gave the RN a 4-6 advantage.

A more regulation try, again scored by Teixeira, moved the Brothers further ahead.

Hooker LET James Tilley sparked the move from dummy half giving Teixeira the scoring opportunity, another conversion by Chambers had the Brothers ahead by 8 points after the first quarter. A couple of injuries requiring off field treatment disrupted the RN shape allowing the RAF a way back into the game which they capitalised on enjoying their best phase of the match. So from being 8 points down the home side turned the game on its head with two try's and a conversion taking a 18:12 lead into the half time break.

RN Head coach CPO Darren Bamford's half time talk certainly had its effect on his side as RNRL totally dominated the second half both territorially and score wise. A re-energised RN



side pressed for an early second-half score but resolute RAF defence kept the Brothers at bay until the 50th minute.

The returning AET Jack Ray finally broke the RAF line forcing himself over the line for the try, Chambers conversion was good bringing the scores level at 18-18.

With play almost exclusively in the RAF half another RN score seemed inevitable and after another great move from midfield left centre AET Jack Bartlett used his strength to get over the line and put his side ahead once more.

With only a narrow four-point lead another score was needed to secure the game for the RN.

The killer blow was struck by stand-off, AET

Charlie Mattison touching down to the right of the uprights, Chambers making no mistake with two pointer to put his side out to a ten-point lead at 18-28.

The RAF did not give up though and in a frantic last five minutes they scored a try of their own however with the missed conversion that was to be the last action of a thrilling encounter between the two great rivals.

Final score 22-28, a thoroughly well-deserved win for RNRL masterminded off the field by Coach Bamford and on the field by CIS Brodie-Lee Butler on his debut as skipper backed up by vice-captain Mne Dave Brown. Skipper Butlers efforts were rewarded by him receiving the Man Of The Match award at the

post match reception being awarded the Man of the Match trophy.

A great contest very much enjoyed by those at the game as well as those watching the BBC live stream judging by the social media comments at full time.

The match is still available on the BBC i-player with commentary by one of the greats of the game former player and Great Britain coach Brian Noble.

Next up for the Brothers is a 2nd round tie against Mersey side team Thatto Heath Crusaders with the match to be played at USSG Burnaby Road in Portsmouth.

For more information go to [royalnavyrugbyleague.com](http://royalnavyrugbyleague.com).

TOP LEFT: The triumphant Royal Navy team

TOP RIGHT: Charlie Mattison in action

LEFT: Jack Broxton in possession for the Royal Navy

Images by [sbsphotos.co.uk](http://sbsphotos.co.uk)

# SURF'S UP AT RN CHAMPIONSHIPS

THERE was a thrilling display on the waves at the Royal Navy Surfing Championships at Tolcarne Beach, Newquay.

The annual competition is open to surfers of all abilities from across the Navy and Royal Marines and had been postponed from its usual window in October due to unusually flat conditions.

The conditions on the day were anything but flat however, with waves generally in the shoulder-to head-high range but with frequent larger sets that were well overhead – challenging for the less experienced competitors but certainly "contestable".

The competition included the usual disciplines of Bodyboard, Longboard, Women's Open and Shortboard Open, and stand-in Competition Secretary Lt Ryan Woodridge did an excellent job of corralling the surfers between running and back and forth to the beach to surf his own multiple heats in both Bodyboard and Shortboard.

Clearly possessing superhuman energy and enthusiasm despite the grey, rainy weather and difficult surf

Ryan took the Bodyboard win for the second year in a row, and placed 4th in the Shortboard.

The Women's Open looked a sure thing for defending champion and favourite AB Leni Milne, however the decision to sit 'out the back' and try to pick off the larger waves proved the wrong one.

While AB Milne and fellow shortboarder AB Chloe Thorne struggled to find a rideable wave among the big 'close outs', relative beginner Lt Patricia Longthorp stayed busy on the inside in the whitewater, with her far higher wave-count ultimately leading to victory.

The Longboard final also proved dramatic—the field reduced to just two who managed to battle through and get into position, with AB Levi Jack showing exceptional dedication to the sport after losing his board, swimming back in to collect it and then paddling back out to rejoin the final.

In the end, Cpl Ryan Joslin took the win with some impressive rides (and equally impressive wipeouts!)

As per previous years, the highlight of the event was the Shortboard Open final, where the large waves gave the RN & RM's best surfers the chance

to show off their skills. AB Jake Sage once again took the win in a closely fought final.

Lt Cdr Ollie Judd claimed Wave of the Day with one of the competition's longest rides that culminated in the 'running over' of a fellow surfer who had unwisely paddled right underneath him.

Competition complete, the competitors retired to the Wax bar and restaurant in Watergate Bay to relive the highs and lows of the day and receive their trophies and prizes. The RN Surfing Association would like to thank their sponsor, the management consultancy firm Squaracle, for generously donating this year's prize fund.

The aim of the RN Surfing Association is to provide quality training opportunities throughout the year for all its members. The annual Championships are just one of many events and trips that RNSA members can take part in, with Beginner Weekends, Intermediate training sessions, and surf camps/tours taking place regularly both in the UK and abroad. To find out more and to become a member visit [surfnavy.com](http://surfnavy.com) or search for the Surf Navy group on Facebook.





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*The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of the MOD*

We are no longer running the Mystery Ship competition. December's winner was: John Copley, from Plymouth.

**THE following personnel were awarded Merit Service Medals in the New Year's Honours list:**

POLOG(CS) W Champs, NATO ACO Maritime Command HQ  
 WO1 S Clark, 30 Commando IX Group  
 WO1 B Coker, 47 Cdo RG RM  
 WO1ET(ME) R Crozier, HMS Tamar  
 WO1(MW) D Dean, MWS, HMS Collingwood  
 WO2(D) M J Doherty MBE, COMSURFLOT  
 CPOET(MESM), I Hamblin, HMS Triumph  
 WO1WS(TSM), N Harvey RN SM School  
 CPOET(WE) A J Hunt, c/o Naval Secretary  
 WO2LOG(CS), D Knibbs HMS Queen Elizabeth  
 WO1WS(AWT) D Lennon, Permanent Joint Headquarters  
 CPOACMN A Mayes, 824 Naval Air Squadron  
 WO1 RSM B Meldrum Commando Training Centre RM  
 WO1 J I Melhuish, 42 Commando RM  
 WO2 S Muir, 45 Commando RM  
 WO1 H B Robb, 43 Commando FPGRM  
 CPOMA M Rodway, Commando Logistics Regiment  
 WO1MA D Rowley, FOST  
 WO1 S Stroud, Commando Training Centre RM  
 ACPOWS(AWT) B W V Thompson, RN Warfighting Centre  
 WO1ET(ME) M Watkins, FOST  
 WO1AET S Wilson, Wildcat Maritime Force HQ, Yeovilton

**The following Commendations have been awarded:**

**First Sea Lord's Commendations**

Captain I Barnes Royal Marines  
 Petty Officer (Physical Training Instructor) J Best  
 Leading Hand (Diver) D Box  
 Commander M Bray Royal Navy  
 Colour Sergeant M Burley

**Deaths**

**Butler, David, Chief SM Stoker.** Served from 1954 to 1972 in HMS Arethusa an Londonderry, among others. Member of Arethusa and Londonderry associations and member of Warwick Branch of RNA. Former RNA Area 8 president. Died January 6, aged 88.  
**Caryer, Doug Wilfred.** Served December 1945 to February 1958 in HMS Pembroke, Neptune, Narvik. Proudly received his Nuclear Test Medal before passing away on December 30 2023.  
**Fisher, Andrew, Fleet Chief (Marine Engineering Artificer (Propulsion)).** Served September 1958-September 1985. Died La Linea, December 17 2023.  
**Campbell, Richard Captain (Hon) OBE.** Joined BRNC Dartmouth age 13 in 1946 and served in submarines (HMS Acheron) before qualifying as a Hydrographic Surveyor. Served in many survey ships including Dalrymple, Dampier and Endurance before commanding HMS Woodlark, Beagle and twice HMS Hydra, including the ship's deployment as a

Lieutenant R Cheyne Royal Navy  
 Lieutenant Commander N Dale Royal Navy  
 Lieutenant Commander T Leonard Royal Navy  
 Chief Petty Officer Engineering Technician (Weapon Engineering) I Masterson  
 Colour Sergeant B Richards  
 Lieutenant B Sloan Royal Navy  
 Ms S Spickernell  
 Lieutenant Commander S Taylor Royal Navy  
 Warrant Officer 2 S White (Royal Engineers)  
**Royal Navy Commendations**  
 Colour Sergeant T Austen  
 Warrant Officer 1 R Bays  
 Colour Sergeant G Bennett  
 Warrant Officer 2 S Cannadine  
 Leading Logistician (Catering Services) N Collins  
 Sergeant G Court  
 Lieutenant A Davidson Royal Navy  
 Commander S Edwards Royal Navy  
 Corporal A Fleming (Royal Logistics Corps)  
 Lieutenant Commander N Gammon Royal Australian Navy  
 Mr Peter Hawley, Naval Families Federation  
 Leading Hand (Seaman) O Manning  
 Chief Petty Officer (Medical Assistant) D McLea  
 Chief Petty Officer Engineering Technician (Marine Engineering) G Newbon  
 Surgeon Lieutenant S Owen-Smith Royal Navy  
 Lieutenant Commander J Smith Royal Navy  
 Staff Sergeant S Tamang (Royal Logistics Corps)  
 Air Engineering Technician K Tipton  
 Lieutenant Commander S Westlake Royal Navy

**Royal Navy Team Commendations**

N2 Department, Commander United Kingdom Strike Force  
 Commando Logistics Regiment Medical Team  
 Fleet Operational Standards & Training (Ships) Faslane Division  
 HMS Audacious – Marine Engineering Forward L Department  
 Sonar Department  
 HMS Audacious – Sonar Department  
 Marworks Team

**Commander Joint Helicopter Command Commendations**

Lieutenant Commander B C Brazenall Royal Navy  
 Lieutenant S P Bloomer Royal Navy  
 Lieutenant J G Wallace Royal Navy  
 Warrant Officer 1 (Air Engineering Technician) I Toms  
 Warrant Officer 1 (Air Engineering Technician) C Harvey  
 Chief Petty Officer (Air Engineering Technician) R L Willis  
 Sergeant E Mason  
 Petty Officer (Air Engineering Technician) D R Sanderson

**Commander Joint Helicopter Command Team Commendations:**

845 Naval Air Squadron Engineering Support Team  
 Merlin Mk4 Synthetic Training Equipment Facility (MSTEF)

**Deputy Chief of the General Staff Commendation**

Lieutenant B J Rogers Royal Navy

**Vice Chief of Defence Staff Commendation**

Lieutenant Commander M A Graham Royal Navy

**AOC 22 Group Commendation**

Lieutenant Commander K D Dallimore Royal Navy

**Gowling, Andy 'Growler' CMEM(M).** Served from 1985 to 2009 in HMS Sultan, Scylla, Catti-stock, Newcastle, Manchester, and Nottingham. Awarded LSGC. Member of Type 43 Association. Died January 7, aged 54.  
**HMS Bulwark, Albion & Centaur Association Len Dyer. AB.** HMS Albion 62/66. Died 14/02/22.  
**Georgina Smith.** Wife of Ken Smith. Died 27/07/23.  
**Cherry Francis.** Wife of Peter Francis. Died 10/04/23  
**Billy Bowman. CK.** HMS Centaur 54/56. Died 23/11/22. Age 88.  
**Bob Hawkins. CDR.** HMS Bulwark 79/80. Died 07/10/23. Age 63.  
**John Ogston BEM. LSA(S).** HMS Centaur 54/56. Died 04/06/21. Age 88.  
**Les Kirkden. LREM.** HMS Centaur 54/56, HMS Albion 62/64. Died 01/06/23.  
**Mick Dunnington. MECH1.** HMS Bulwark 60/61 & 79. Died 26/12/23. Age 90.

hospital ship/ambulance ship during the Falklands War 1982. He commanded the RN Hydrographic School and was Assistant Hydrographer of the Navy (in the rank of Acting Captain). Died November 29 2023, aged 90.  
**Heap, Phillip Raymond, Warrant Officer (Weapon Engineering Mechanic)(Ordnance).** Served HMS Collingwood, Palliser, Cavalier, Devonshire, Murray, Phoebe, HM Submarines Walrus, Narwal, Osprey, Cachalot. Member of RNA HQ Roll Gp. Died October 27, aged 82.  
**Stuart Steven Parrott, Lt. Cdr (Rtd).** Known to most and all within the Branch as "Polly". Joined the Bude Branch of RNA as a S/Lt and was Social Sec. Died November 2023, aged 41.  
**Peterson, Danny, ETME.** Joined 2016 and served in HMS Sultan, Iron Duke, St Albans, Trent, Excellent and Forward Support Unit (B). Awarded Diamond Jubilee and Coronation medals. Died December 21, aged 30.

rescued survivors.

I am in contact with the daughter of the Commander and the son of one of the crew of USCG 56 and we want to share information with any of the survivors' families about their rescue. We have the names of the seven crew members who were lost but not the survivors. If anyone has information, please email [sggipson@msn.com](mailto:sggipson@msn.com).

Gary Gipson

club treasurer at [roc91014@gmail.com](mailto:roc91014@gmail.com) or 07812 789 233. Just name the crest you'd like.  
**HMS Lord Austin:** I am seeking family or friends of sailors who served on the trawler which was sunk in the Seine Bay on June 24 1944. Seven crew were lost and the remainder were rescued by US Coast Guard Rescue Flotilla One cutter USCG 56. My cousin Jess Alton Gipson was a crew member of USCG 56 which

**Ask Jack**

**Exeter White Ensign Club** will be closing in early 2024 after more than 40 years in the former Holy Trinity Church in South Street.  
 Over its lifespan the club, which serves as a hub for several veterans' groups in the city, including the WRNS, Royal Marines and Submariners' Associations, has collected more than 270 plaques/mounted crests of ships and units. All are being sold for £40 each (including postage and packing), available from the

**Reunions**

**HMS Mohawk Association:** A reunion will be held at the Queen's Hotel, Blackpool, from March 22 to 25. For details call IOW Tours on 01983 405116 or email [rob.proud@mypoistoffice.co.uk](mailto:rob.proud@mypoistoffice.co.uk)  
**HMS Bulwark, Albion & Centaur Association and HMS Tenby Association:** The 2024 reunion takes place at the Beaches Hotel, Prestatyn, North Wales, from May 10 to 13. Contact Denis Askham at 07773651213 or email [askhamd3@gmail.com](mailto:askhamd3@gmail.com). For HMS Tenby contact David Macalister on [dmac121dm@gmail.com](mailto:dmac121dm@gmail.com)  
**HMS Troubridge (Final Commission) Association 1966-69.** The 2024 reunion will be at The Queens Hotel, Osborne Road, Southsea, Portsmouth P05 3LJ October 7-11. Contact Bryan Pace at [Romft1@GMail.com](mailto:Romft1@GMail.com)  
**HMS Undaunted, Eagle and Yarmouth**

**Association:** The FINAL reunion will take place from Friday 25 October to Monday 28 October 2024 at the Derby Mickleover Hotel, Etwall Road, Derby DE3 0XX. Sadly this will be the final reunion due to dwindling numbers. Cost for 3 nights is £420 for a double room or £140 per night. Further details available from Alan (Whiskey) Walker by email [whiskey666@outlook.com](mailto:whiskey666@outlook.com) Tel: 01268 548041. Come and join us for the final bash.  
**HMS Medway Queen.** Are you connected with the Medway Queen – one of the last large ships involved with the Dunkirk evacuation still with us? The team lovingly restoring the paddle steamer want to celebrate her 100th birthday this year by involving every one who has played a part in bringing her back to life.  
 As well as carrying hundreds of thousands of

tourists from the Medway to Southend, Heme Bay and Clacton on pleasure cruisers, she was pressed into service as a minesweeper in WW2.  
 In May 1940 she was sent across the Channel and brought back around 7,000 troops from Dunkirk, securing her place in naval history.  
 100th birthday plans include a memorial service at Rochester Cathedral on Sunday April 21 2024.  
 Former crew, staff, anyone involved in the long restoration of the ship or has a story to tell about the ship and their experiences aboard, especially families of Dunkirk veterans saved by the ship should contact Pam Bathurst of the preservation society ([pambathurst@sky.com](mailto:pambathurst@sky.com) or Medway Queen Preservation Society, Gillingham Pier, Pier Approach Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 1RX).

**NOTICEBOARD ENTRIES**

■ Notices for this page should be brief, clearly written or typed and addressed to - The Editor, Navy News, Navy Command, Leach Building, HMS Excellent, Portsmouth PO2 8BY, or email: [news@royalnavymail.mod.uk](mailto:news@royalnavymail.mod.uk) or [editor@royalnavymail.mod.uk](mailto:editor@royalnavymail.mod.uk)  
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 ■ Reunions appear in date order, and requests to place an entry in a particular edition cannot be guaranteed.  
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**Talking Navy News**

Navy News is available free of charge as a digital file on memory stick or email from Portsmouth Area Talking News for th ose with difficulty reading normal type. Contact 07770 088388 and leave a message, or email [studio@patn.org.uk](mailto:studio@patn.org.uk) A speaker that will take a USB plug is required but this can be obtained from the Talking News, or the file can be played back through a computer.

**Submissions for the Deaths, Reunions and Ask Jack columns in next month's Noticeboard must be received by February 12 2024**

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