



# NAVY NEWS

JANUARY 2024



RFA Mounts Bay operates in the Baltic Sea as Finland hosts its first major exercise as a NATO member. Royal Marines and Finnish landing craft operated from the ship as commandos landed ashore.

See pages 2-3

Picture: Finnish Defence Forces

## BALTIC BUSINESS

Inside: ■ Wildcat in focus ■ First Sea Lord interview ■ Pacific Partnership



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# SMOKE ON

# THE WATER

*View from the dock of RFA Mounts Bay as a Royal Marines landing craft operates in the Gulf of Finland*

## PROTECTING UNDERSEA CABLES.

TWO key missions. Two unyielding alliances. One strategically vital region. Your peace and warmth across Christmas and the New Year.

RFA Mounts Bay, pictured right, and Royal Marines sailed deep into the Baltic Sea to the Gulf of Finland as NATO's newest member, Finland, hosted its first major military drills.

Crucially, for Finland's new allies it was the opportunity to learn and understand the complex geography of the region, gaining a better understanding of what it takes to operate in the rugged island-strewn coastline with its narrow channels.

Amphibious ship Mounts Bay was the UK's centrepiece to the exercise – codenamed Freezing Winds – alongside specialist commandos.

Freezing Winds provided a unique experience and a foundation of knowledge of operating on Finnish turf, helping allies understand what it takes to defend Finland.

As Freezing Winds was winding up, Mounts Bay, HMS Richmond, HMS Somerset, HMS Tyne, HMS Severn, HMS Cattistock and HMS Penzance were activated to protect underwater cables and pipelines from the Baltic to the English Channel.

This tasking came under the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) – a group of ten like-minded nations dedicated to prosperity and security – to ensure stability and deter threats to critical undersea infrastructure.

Supported by RAF P8 Poseidon patrol aircraft, this task force of frigates, mine hunters and patrol ships act as a deterrent in areas of interest.

Richmond's Commanding Officer Commander Chris L'Amie said: "We all rely on critical underwater infrastructure, for our internet, power and fuel supplies. Supporting the resilience

of these systems while working together for mutual regional security is essential.

"The ship's company and I are proud to have the opportunity to strengthen our bonds with fellow JEF nations."

On her way to the Baltic, HMS Richmond stopped in the Swedish port city of Gothenburg and was greeted into the city by Swedish Armed Forces small boats.

The Devonport-based ship, pictured second right, took the chance to boost UK relationships with JEF partners by hosting delegates on board to discuss ideas on regional security.

JEF is made up of the UK, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Sweden.

Together, they react to events in northern Europe's waters, ready to respond to crises and world events.

After Gothenburg, Richmond sailed to work closely with Latvian and Estonian ships as part of a JEF Response Option – the coming together of ships and aircraft across the region to protect critical undersea infrastructure.

This was the first time the response option has been activated following its creation last year to defend the region from threats.

While on patrol, HMS Richmond used her advanced sensors to gather crucial information and experienced several interactions with Russian vessels and aircraft.

The intelligence gathered was then shared with fellow JEF nations.

Lieutenant Commander Mike De La Rue, the ship's operations officer, said: "I am proud to have been involved with furthering the growth of our relationships and the opportunity to operate closely together in a challenging environment.





# MAKING FRIENDS WITH FINNS.



"I've also personally enjoyed working within the JEF to help refine best practices. We all do things slightly differently; understanding these nuances will ultimately enable us all to be more effective as a team."

Before this activation, commandos carried out waterborne operations with specialist troops from the Uusimaa Brigade and US Marine Corps along Finland's jagged and complex coastline.

Mounts Bay operated off the Uusimaa coast – with capital Helsinki contained along it – surrounded by sea fog in freezing temperatures ready to land forces ashore on commando raids/covert missions as part of the exercise.

Specialists from across the UK Commando Force were taken ashore by 4 Assault Squadron, who are expert landing craft pilots – used to navigating difficult waterways to get commandos inland to hit an adversary where they least expect.

Among the teams to be landed ashore were 148 Battery of 29 Commando Royal Artillery, who are responsible for calling in naval gunfire from nearby warships and air strikes in their specialist role but are also experts in covert patrols behind enemy lines, concealment, encrypted communications and battle damage assessment.

All of this was part of Littoral Response Group (North) (LRG) operations. The Royal Navy has two LRGs – North and South – which are designed to deploy rapidly to strategically important locations in response to world events.

Captain James Allen, Mounts Bay's Commanding Officer, said: "The archipelago of Finland itself is very difficult to operate within, especially finding channels to go in and out of ports. Going into Turku for example is too tight for us to go

through, so it is a challenge.

"The archipelago is beautiful and stunning but from a navigational perspective but you have to have your wits about you."

Marine Chaivivat Muankeaw, of 4 Assault Squadron, added: "Exercise Freezing Winds provided me a unique experience as coxswain operating Inflatable Rigid Craft Mk4 (IRC) in a cold weather environment.

"When I was driving the IRC the wind chill was around -20C and I had to think about different factors such as the speed the IRC was travelling, as the faster it went the colder my passengers would be.

"The type of environment I was operating in required different kit and clothing but I was well prepared given the rigorous training I received before being deployed to Finland.

"This exercise gave me experience of working alongside different elements of UK forces such as 148 Battery, and international forces such as 2nd Recon US Marine Corps.

"These forces have different operating procedures, and the challenge was to standardise those procedures during the WADER training, before we started the tactical exercise. I found this training to be demanding and challenging given the cold temperatures and the sea fog.

"I met with the Finnish Navy during this exercise and they showed us the craft they operate and the type of training they receive.

"I received a presentation on how their boat groups operate and the size and scale of their forces.

"This is very helpful as they are a new NATO member and it allowed me to understand how their craft work and how we can integrate with them in any future operations."

# A SURE PRESENCE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD



EACH December the *Oxford English Dictionary* selects a word of the year.

'Goblin mode' (acting in a hedonistic manner with thought for the consequences) for 2022.

And for 2023? Rizz. The ability to flirt/chat up successfully, apparently.

So what word would they pick for the Royal Navy on the cusp of 2024?

How about 'balance'?

Probably doesn't spring immediately to mind. But it's a word the First Sea Lord uses frequently (alongside 'busy' and 'successful') to describe the thinking and considerations which run through the minds of the Senior Service's leaders.

Balancing demands with capacity, with the budget, with the impact on personnel and family lives, balancing the needs of today, with the needs of tomorrow and beyond.

And then there's the balance sheet at the end of the year.

We've 'lost' several ships: the Echo class are gone. So too most of the Sandowns. The frigate fleet is down to 11 with the retirement of HMS Montrose. Recruiting figures were disappointing. Some of our accommodation is not what our people deserve.

And the biggest minus of all: in addition to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the global geo-political situation has grown more unstable courtesy of Hamas' actions and the conflict in Gaza which sees ships and several hundred sailors and Royal Marines deployed in the eastern Mediterranean/Red Sea as a precaution as 2024 opens.

But there's a lot to add to the 'plus' column.

Two new RFAs (Proteus and Stirling Castle) and orders placed for three more. Five new frigates under construction. HMS Anson delivered. The capacity of Ukraine's Navy continues to grow thanks to training from our sailors and Royal Marines. The two Littoral Response Groups, central to future Commando Force operations, have been deployed to the Baltic and eastern Mediterranean. The engine enhancements to the Type



45s are progressing well and, more importantly, work. HMS Prince of Wales returned to the fleet and completed aviation trials, her sister HMS Queen Elizabeth provided NATO with the potential of fifth-generation carrier striking power for the first time.

And that's on top of the 'routine stuff'. The nuclear deterrent, the submarines and ships safeguarding home waters, work in the Gulf, the winter training in Norway, the patrol ships "holding watch" all over the world.

"I anticipate 2024 to be just as busy," says Admiral Sir Ben Key (pictured chatting with sailors from HMS Tamar in Sydney last autumn).

"In terms of the range of likely challenges we face through the year I believe we're very well set.

"It's good to be busy – it's good to be wanted. Wherever I travel around the world, what sailors and Royal Marines offer – their talents, skills, observations – is in great demand.

"The Royal Navy is seen as making a contribution wherever it goes, whether that's in a leadership role, which it tends to be in the Euro-Atlantic, or in a contributory role, building capacity and preparing for future challenges, as it tends to more be around Africa or the Indo-Pacific."

As 2024 opens, the Navy finds itself conducting two missions not on its books 12 months ago: on stand-by in the eastern Mediterranean for possible evacuation/humanitarian aid duties in view of the Israeli-Palestine conflict; and at the end of November HMS Diamond was dispatched to the Middle East to bolster the UK's security presence in the region.

In both cases it led to short-notice deployments or extensions to existing missions.

"We try to balance it so that people are only asked to do things that are genuinely worthwhile and meaningful," the First Sea Lord explains. "We're also working hard to make sure that things are explained to families and that strong, effective support mechanisms are in place for them."

Requirements to support potential new tasks are firmly on the Naval Staff's radar as they look to a future with growing challenges – from traditional state actors to broader, global issues: climate change, possible food and water shortages across swathes of Africa prompting crime/piracy, mass migration, illegal fishing and the like.

These are possible futures which we can plan for. There are also

certain futures to prepare for, notably what Admiral Key calls the "recapitalisation of the Fleet, the biggest in decades".

The first new frigates in nearly a quarter of a century are now within touching distance: 2024 will see the first Type 26 HMS Glasgow named by Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales, while the first Type 31 frigate, HMS Venturer, will enter the water for fitting out, allowing assembly of ship number three, HMS Formidable, to begin the hall Venturer has just vacated. Both classes promise to be "fabulous replacements".

The fifth Astute-class submarine, HMS Anson, is conducting trials, boat six, Agamemnon "is not far behind", crew are already assigned to HMS Dreadnought, the first of the next-generation nuclear deterrent submarines, the RFA has Proteus and Stirling Castle, new support ships are on order.

This transition to the mid-21st Century Navy poses numerous challenges, not least operating older classes of ship while their replacements are ready to take their place demands more sailors, different supply and support chains (the last Type 23 frigate is not due to retire until around 2035).

As well as rising to these personnel and logistical challenges, there's a "generational leap forward" in technology to both grasp and master.

"The 23s have been magnificent workhorses of the fleet, they have truly done us proud, but let's be honest, it's a design laid down in the 1980s, built through the 80s and 90s – they're old.

"The Type 26 is a leap forward into a world-leading 21st-Century anti-submarine frigate with some truly great cutting-edge capabilities, the 'acoustic quieting' of the hulls', but also some capacity and digital architecture built in which sets

them through for the next 20 or 30 years."

Some "really innovative thinking" has also gone into the design and construction of the general purpose Type 31s, again looking ahead a quarter of a century so that future technologies can be added – and added quickly, that's the key.

Because military tech is moving at an incredible pace. The new Mine Hunting Capability being assessed in Scotland and the Gulf and is proving to be more effective than its crewed predecessor. Small aerial drones are expanding the capability of patrol ships and frigates, while the work HMS Prince of Wales has carried out in the autumn in the USA has shown that it's a question of when, not if, larger crewless aircraft will be operating from Royal Navy aircraft carriers.

"Staying at the cutting edge of all of the opportunities we have is something we should be really proud of in the Service because it's within our DNA, but we're not going to remove human beings from the maritime battlefield," the First Sea Lord stresses.

He wants autonomous systems to perform "dull, dirty and dangerous" tasks. "If you can get a machine to do that, then let the technology crack on."

War in Ukraine has shown technology on the modern battlefield has its limits. It is only effective in the hands of a skilled, resourceful, courageous operator.

So while the RN is investing in crewless systems above, on and below the waves, anyone picturing a future of a sailorless Navy, of robots battling it out at sea well, says Admiral Key, "they're envisaging some sort of science fiction novel".



The embodiment of carrier strike, F-35Bs arranged on the deck of HMS Queen Elizabeth during her autumn deployment  
Picture: LPhoto Chris Sellars

“The future sailor or Royal Marine may be a completely different sort of person to his or her counterpart of today, but we will still need them,” the First Sea Lord underlined. “Look at the Royal Marines – some of those classic commando characteristics are going to be required for many, many years to come.”

Admiral Key – like all of today’s leaders in the Senior Service – embraces technology and the need to move with the times and changes.

He also acknowledges all are children of the 70s and 80s. Mobile phones were the size and weight of a brick. The internet did not exist. Computers were desktops and hadn’t progressed too much since Pong.

They are proficient with tech, but not as much the leaders of tomorrow’s Navy, born in the 90s and 00s, who have grown up in a globally-connected world the older generation could only dream of.

It’s the task of today’s generation of senior officers, says Admiral Key, to allow innovative skill- and mindsets to flourish, to allow young leaders and experts “who are best placed to understand and embrace new and exciting technologies” to experiment, test, trial – and, if successful, adopt them.

“That is what is going to drive this new Navy. I will not be part of it – that new Navy will be run by people who are at sea today, in the early stages of their career, or ten to 15 years in.”

Running parallel are huge cultural

shifts.

When the admiral joined the Royal Navy women did not go to sea, homosexuality meant instant dismissal, barracks and large messes were the order of the day, not single, twin or six-berth cabins, and a whole host of what today we’d label ‘unacceptable behaviours’ were part and parcel of Service life.

Four decades later, there is no job or role in today’s Navy not open to women; diversity and inclusion are not merely embraced but central tenets of the RN’s core values, and considerable effort has been invested in eradicating unwanted and unacceptable actions and behaviours, while a dedicated team under Commodore Catherine Jordan is looking at the culture of the RN to ensure, says the First Sea Lord, “the best environment possible is created for everyone, an environment where everyone wants to bring the best of their work regardless of their backgrounds and talents, feel acknowledged and contributed and feel safe”.

That also means changing the workforce model to meet the needs and expectations of people in society today and into the next 10 or 20 years, and much more flexible careers: senior officers envisage “zig-zag careers” in the near future, where sailors and marines perhaps spend a few years in the reserves, working in other industries to gain

outside knowledge, in addition to regular service, striking a balance between private and professional lives.

Some infrastructure across the Naval estate from the Clyde to Collingwood is not up to the standard a sailor of 2024 expects.

“Everyone should have an absolute expectation that hot water will come out of the shower, that the heating will work, that the quality of the food they receive is good, fresh and nutritious, that they get time to participate in sport, keep themselves fit, time to enjoy with family and friends when they’re not away and deployed,” Admiral Key stresses.

While there’s no bottomless pit of money to fix some of these problems, “local solutions” and innovative thinking should see improvements in the coming months.

Another field in which changes should reap rewards is recruitment – recent figures pointed to a six-year low over a three-month period.

It isn’t, Admiral Key believes, the result of a career in the Royal Navy appearing less attractive to young people, rather a difficult recruiting

environment and a hangover from the pandemic – when the process was mostly digitised.

“Recruiting isn’t just a digital process – it’s a human contact activity. We’ve done a lot in the last few months to change it, to speed it up and that is now beginning to accrue real dividends.

“We’re seeing expressions of interest go up considerably, applications translated into people turning up at Raleigh, Dartmouth and Lympstone in greater numbers.”

It is nearly 40 years since Admiral Key walked through the gates of Britannia Royal Naval College for the first time.

What advice would he offer to that young man – or woman – now arriving at Raleigh, or Lympstone or Dartmouth?

“Live for the moment and enjoy every day, even the not-so-good ones.”

That might sound glib. Things won’t go your way every single day.

“But somewhere there is some good in it,” Admiral Key says.

“People who enjoy their work tend to do it better, and people who are doing their work better tend to catch the eye of others around them, people will want to be part of their teams. Their superiors will want to give them greater opportunities and so it becomes more fulfilling.”

He joined because the Navy would sponsor him through university; he did not fancy the career his parents wished him to pursue, becoming a doctor, but then nor did he plan on a naval career beyond perhaps the age of 30.

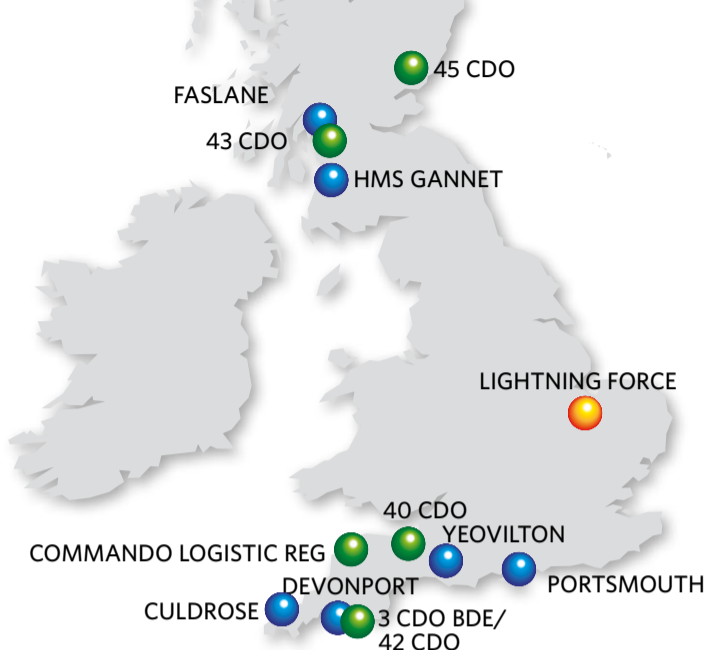
As for heading the world’s most respected naval service, not a thought of it.

So another piece of advice: “Strap yourself in because you’re probably going to be in the Navy longer than you currently think.”

Interview by Richard Hargreaves.

## Training or on patrol around the UK

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



17 TES SQN

Gibraltar Squadron  
 HMS Trent

HMS Richmond  
 HMS Somerset  
 RFA Mounts Bay

HMS Duncan  
 RFA Lyme Bay  
 RFA Argus  
 815 NAS

### Operation Kipion

UKMCC  
 NSF Bahrain  
 IMSC  
 COMUKMCMFOR  
 HMS Diamond  
 HMS Lancaster  
 HMS Middleton  
 HMS Bangor  
 HMS Chiddingfold  
 Harrier  
 815 NAS  
 1700 NAS  
 RFA Cardigan Bay  
 Forward Support Unit

British Defence Singapore  
 Support Unit

HMS Spey

HMS Tamar

Pacific Partnership

HMS Protector  
 HMS Forth  
 NEFI

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



## GLOBAL | MODERN | READY

WELCOME to 2024, a year which opens with the world offering an even more uncertain future and even greater global challenges than 2023.

To the war in Ukraine was added renewed conflict in the Middle East and increased regional instability.

That prompted some short-notice/changes to deployments (HMS Diamond to the Middle East, HMS Richmond and other vessels to the Baltic, RFAs Argus and Lyme Bay in the eastern Mediterranean in response to the situation in the Middle East) as the old year drew to a close.

The head of the Royal Navy, First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Ben Key, offers his 'big picture' view of these – and other challenges – which occupy the discussions, thinking and, ultimately, actions of the leaders of the Senior Service (see pages 4-5).

HMS Richmond is one of seven ships activated/committed to support our Joint Expeditionary Forces allies in the Baltic/North Sea region, monitoring activity, safeguarding maritime infrastructure and undersea cables. HMS Somerset, Tyne, Severn, Cattistock and Penzance have also been committed, while RFA Mounts Bay was already in the region to take part in Exercise Freezing Winds, the first hosted by Finland as a member of NATO (see pages 2-3).

Ships, units and teams who especially stood out during the past 12 months – be it on the front line or in harnessing new tech, such as the mine warfare specialists of Project Wilton – have been singled out in the Surface Fleet Excellence Awards (see page 22).

Destroyer HMS Dauntless is home in Portsmouth after completing her successful Caribbean patrol, while her younger sister HMS Duncan has handed over NATO task group responsibilities in the Med to Italy after five months at the helm (see page 7).

Funnelling that white heat of technology are the RN's sole drone unit, 700X NAS, whose growing experience with the small Puma surveillance aircraft is reaping rewards with the patrol ship flotilla. It's now been joined by the Banshee, a small jet which will be used to test sensors and develop tactics (see page 11).

HMS Lancaster – which has been joined by HMS Diamond to bolster the UK security presence east of Suez – completed her third and final RIP (roulement in place) of the year shortly before Christmas to allowed sustained patrols over the festive period (see pages 14-15).

In the Indo-Pacific, HMS Spey made her first venture into the Indian Ocean and India itself with a visit to the Andaman Islands, before a whistlestop visit to Port Klang in Malaysia (see page 13), while also paying her respects to WW2 capital ships HMS Prince of Wales and Repulse with a poppy drop over the wrecks in the South China Sea (see page 31).

Royal Navy personnel have again joined the largest humanitarian mission in the region, the US-led Pacific Partnership, with Captain Joe Dransfield serving as its deputy commander (see pages 16-17).

HMS Protector is making her annual trip to Antarctica region with the first work period dedicated to studying the impact of tourists on the unique environment and a warming climate on glacial erosion by embarking scientists from the University of Portsmouth (see right).

It's not only Protector which demonstrates the RN's commitment to the environment. Twenty units at home and aboard rose to the one-tonne challenge set by the First Sea Lord... and actually rid waterfronts of two and a half tonnes of rubbish which had dumped by the oceans (see page 23).

Astute-class submarine No.6 HMS Agamemnon isn't quite complete yet, but her crew are forging an identity... literally courtesy of a Sheffield steel works ... and metaphorically by hosting friends and her sponsor (see page 9).

The Wildcat has now been in service with the Fleet Air Arm for ten years (yes, really). We take a look at its achievements to date and, more importantly, what the future holds (see pages 19-21).

Royal Marines Musicians now train side-by-side with their Army counterparts courtesy of a new combined Schools of Music, a much enhanced version of their long-standing alma mater in Portsmouth Naval Base. The Alford School was formally opened by the Princess Royal (see page 22).

A healthy mind is as important as a healthy body – a mantra embraced by the UK's flagship HMS Queen Elizabeth which embarked on the most comprehensive programme of fitness and wellbeing during her autumn deployment (see page 28).

And finally... may we wish all members of the Naval family – serving personnel, families, veterans, advocates and supporters – a Happy New Year.

# Protecting the polar region



THE Royal Navy will help scientists study the impact of tourism and climate change on the Antarctic as icebreaker HMS Protector begins her annual polar mission.

Scientists from the University of Portsmouth will work with HMS Protector until the end of this month as the survey and research ship deploys with a double-pronged mission dedicated to better understanding the frozen continent and its waters.

The Antarctic received a record number of tourists during the 2022-23 season – 105,331 visitors with 50 ships a day operating around the frozen continent at the peak, with both figures only expected to rise.

Much of the work of the Royal Navy over the past few decades has been to facilitate that trade by surveying Antarctic waters using the latest tech allowing seafaring charts to be updated to the highest standards.

But scientists are concerned the increased tourist activity could be having an effect on the region's delicate ecological balance.

Professor Fay Couceiro (on the left of the picture) has joined Plymouth-based Protector to study the impact of cruise ships on marine pollution on the west coast of the Antarctic Peninsula.

She'll collect samples of water and sea bed sediment from bays visited by cruise vessels, comparing them with samples from sites undisturbed by tourism.

"There has been a steady increase in cruise ship tourism and certain bays on the Antarctic Peninsula are now regularly visited," she said.

"We need to understand more about how this trend is affecting this beautiful but fragile ecosystem."

In particular, she's looking for concentrations of heavy metals, microplastics and

antimicrobial resistance genes, while fellow scientist Dr Clare Boston will carry out bathymetric surveys of the sea floor using HMS Protector's multibeam sonars in bays not previously documented to map glacial landforms.

Dr Boston is also hoping to sample some glacially-deposited rocks on land for surface exposure dating – a technique which can be used to date when the rock was deposited, which will give an indication of when the land was last covered by glacier ice.

"The effects of climate change are a major concern in the region," Dr Boston explains. "The Antarctic Peninsula has witnessed some of the most rapid warming on earth in the past 70 years. Better understanding of both recent glacier change and longer-term dynamics of ice sheet recession is important for improving predictions of how glaciers on the Antarctic Peninsula will respond to future climate change."

H M S  
 Protector is  
 equipped  
 with



everything needed to assist the scientists with their research projects: a full sonar suite, small survey boat equipped with a multi-beam echo sounding system that can survey the sea floor at shallow depths, close to calving glacier margins.

"We are delighted to be able to welcome the Portsmouth University scientists onboard to assist with their research into climate change and the effect of tourism on the fragile ecosystems in Antarctica," said Captain Milly Ingham, the ice ship's commanding officer.

"Their research, alongside the work of the ship, collecting data for the UK Hydrographic Office and the British Antarctic Survey, demonstrate the Royal Navy's longstanding involvement in the region, which started with Captain Cook in the 18th Century."

As well as supporting the University of Portsmouth team, Protector will continue her work updating charts, delivering supplies for BAS teams and conducting general scientific observations.

Protector's sailors will also tackle the impact of climate change when they return to Metchnikoff Point for the second time in a decade.

The headland, on the northwestern tip of Brabant Island, was the site of a British Joint Services Expedition back in the mid-80s.

They were forced to abandon the site in a hurry due to an expedition member suffering a badly broken leg and – as was custom at the time – buried equipment and waste under snow, convinced it would always stay covered.

Global warming proved otherwise. Protector's crew cleaned up much of the site in 2017, but not all of it.

Recent reports suggest that some of the waste may now be visible and on the surface, the ship will return at the end of summer to see what can be done to clear up Metchnikoff Point for good.

# DUNCAN COMPLETES NATO MED MISSION...

**THE Royal Navy has handed command of NATO's premier task group in the Mediterranean Sea to the Italian Navy after more than five intensive months on front-line duties.**

HMS Duncan has been flagship of Standing NATO Maritime Group Two, leading a multinational force primarily working in the eastern reaches of the Mediterranean on security operations.

The Type 45 destroyer and her task group – led by the Royal Navy's Commodore Paul Stroude – have, as NATO states, maintained "ceaseless vigilance, presence and readiness to reassure regional allies, deter adversaries and, if necessary, defend NATO territorial integrity".

In all, 19 different ships from nine NATO nations operated under Cdre Stroude and HMS Duncan as the task group focused on its role as part of the alliance's very high readiness joint task force, which was activated in response to Russia's ongoing unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine.

As the RN handed over command to the Italian Navy's Rear Admiral Pasquale Esposito and his flagship ITS Bergamini at a ceremony in Taranto, the commodore said: "Commanding this multinational task group has been the most extraordinary privilege and experience.

"Every ship and every nation that I have had the pleasure to work with has contributed its own individual skills and capabilities.

"Yet it is remarkable how through being united by a common purpose and a common set of values, and with a common set of operating procedures and equipment, these ships could come together and work seamlessly such that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts.

"This is the true strength of the NATO alliance. Our success from start to finish was also underpinned by the power of friendships, and the incredible support that was altruistically provided to the task group by the network of NATO Mediterranean nations. This was extremely humbling."

RAdm Esposito added: "I inherit an important legacy of all that my predecessor, Commodore Stroude, achieved, and as a task group we are ready to do whatever it takes to accomplish our mission.



**Chief of Staff of NATO Maritime Command, Rear Admiral Jose Enrique Delgado, makes a speech during the handover ceremony on HMS Duncan**  
Image by PO Phot Lee Blease

"Under my command the task group will continue to demonstrate how well NATO allies operate together. Our continuous presence in the Mediterranean strengthens the deterrence and defense of the alliance."

Cdre Stroude took command in June from the USA and during that time a total of 19 different ships contributed directly to the task group from nine different NATO nations: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the

United Kingdom.

The task group worked with dozens more allied ships and submarines, which operated in associated support to the mission, as well as with numerous allied aircraft. His multinational staff was drawn from seven contributing nations: Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Romania, Spain, Turkey, and the UK.

SNMG2 is one of four Standing Naval Forces which operate under NATO Allied Maritime Command, based in Northwood.

# BACK AFTER THE BUSTS

HMS Dauntless returned to Portsmouth after seizing more than £200m of drugs during a hurricane season deployment to the Caribbean.

The Type 45 destroyer intercepted smugglers on four occasions, helping seize more than 2,000kg of cocaine during a 27,000 nautical mile mission.

Dauntless also sailed to British Overseas Territories to reduce the risk of storm damage and provide reassurance to islanders during the region's hurricane season, which runs from June to November.

Sailors grabbed national headlines in August after helping clear dangerous waste plastic from a turtle nesting site on the Caribbean island of Curaçao and return home after a highly fruitful deployment.

"I am immensely proud of what HMS Dauntless has achieved during this deployment," said Commanding Officer, Commander Ben Dorrington. "The first destroyer to complete this task since Dauntless was last in the Caribbean in 2012."

"Our team have worked tirelessly over the last 195 days away across a range of tasks."

Notably the deployment proved the success of the Type 45's major engine upgrades, with Dauntless the first of her class to have undergone the significant Power Improvement Programme (PIP).

Three highly-efficient, modern engines were fitted to increase reliability but also give 'headroom' for further upgrades in the future thanks to a notable increase in electrical capacity.

The ship now produces enough electricity to power 2,000 homes, which means the on board sensors capable of tracking targets in excess of 200 miles away are more quickly available for use.

Throughout her Caribbean deployment, Dauntless has been available and reliable – serving as evidence the two-year endeavour of PIP has borne fruit as it is rolled out across the Type 45 class.

Deputy Weapon Engineering Officer, Lieutenant Harry Jukes, said: "The additional resilience provided by the third diesel generator gives us increased redundancy in the ship's electricity supply, meaning more availability of sensors to command capable of tracking contacts in excess of 200 miles."

Petty Officer Engineering Technician Ryan Waters added: "The PIP has given much greater resilience to the propulsion plant of a Type 45 destroyer, improving availability to the Type 45 fleet which provides essential air and missile defence capability to protect the UK's aircraft carriers deployed on operations around the world."

In a nutshell, the Atlantic Patrol (North) has been a successful front-line proving ground for PIP and Dauntless is now available to be at the forefront of any deployment and more notably able to attach to either of the Royal Navy's aircraft carriers, providing world-class air defence.



A MOST REWARDING SECOND CAREER

# WE'RE RECRUITING THE RECRUITERS

Your career in the Royal Navy was not like your school mates'.

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# Forging new links

## Bond of friendship for latest nuclear submarine

THERE'S a formal bond between Britain's newest nuclear submarine and the steel city of Sheffield.

HMS Agamemnon – No.6 of seven Astute-class hunter-killer boats built for the Royal Navy Submarine Service – has shaken hands with Sheffield Forgemasters, which traces its history back to before Nelson, signing a Bond of Friendship.

The South Yorkshire firm, which was nationalised two years ago, is a heavy engineering specialist, designing and manufacturing high-integrity forgings and castings for the world's most complex engineering challenges... including Astute-class submarines (which have been compared with the Space Shuttle in terms of complexity).

The skills and high-quality workmanship of Sheffield Forgemasters' workforce are vital to the safety and integrity of our submarines and Agamemnon's crew took the opportunity of the bond signing to explain to employees the role they play and what life aboard the world's most advanced submarine is like.

In return, the Forgemasters showed the submariners around their works which, among other products, provides critical nuclear components for both military and civilian use (including the Sizewell B power station).

They were particularly impressed to see the forgers casting parts which are likely to be installed in the fourth of the next-generation SSN-Aukus submarines which are due to begin replacing the Astutes from the late 2030s... and will be in service well into the 2070s.

If you're wondering what a 'bond of friendship' is compared with, say, an affiliation... well, it's an association, typically reviewed (and renewed) annually and generally falls outside the four main categories of affiliation (city or borough, livery company, youth organisation (e.g. Sea Cadets) and military unit).

"It was a privilege to tour the Sheffield Forgemasters site and to see at first hand the incredible work that the company delivers on behalf of the UK's defence programme," said Agamemnon's Commanding Officer Commander David 'Bing' Crosby... who is a Sheffielder himself and supports Wednesday, whom his daughter plays for at U16 level.

"We are totally reliant on the impeccable safety requirements that our suppliers must meet to ensure that our vessels can head out to sea, often for considerable periods of time, and as we work to provide support to the country's Continual At Sea Nuclear Deterrent, a

submarine delivered National endeavour.

"The Bond of Friendship means that we will always be linked with this great Sheffield company and we will share news of each other's progress and collaborate on various events when we are back in dock."

Richard Bell, Sales and Business Development Director at Sheffield Forgemasters, added: "It is a great honour to have signed The Bond of Friendship with HMS Agamemnon and its crew and we look forward to learning much more about the team and their lives at the forefront of our defence strategy."

It's the latest tie with the White Rose county for the new boat which is affiliated with the city of Wakefield – crew have already supported some mayoral events – and Yorkshire University Royal Navy Unit, based in Leeds.

Back in Barrow, for the first time crew welcomed the boat's sponsor, Lady Sarah-Jane Sedwill, among several friends and VIPs who were shown around the hunter-killer as she nears completion in the huge Devonshire Dock Hall at BAE's works.

Lady Sarah-Jane joined the Honourable Mary Montagu-Scott, director of Buckler's Hard Maritime museum, which has also signed a bond of friendship with 'Aggie' and will provide the battle honours board with oak from the same forest as the first Agamemnon (Nelson's favourite ship) back in 1781.

In company with John Moorby, Astute



Left to right, John Moorby, Cdr Crosby, Mary Montagu-Scott, Lady Sarah-Jane Sedwill, Lt Hugo Morgan, and Freeman Shades

Programme Director, and Cdr Crosby, they toured the complex, workshops, main assembly hall, and the Submarines Academy for Skills and Knowledge and chatted with BAE employees and Agamemnon's crew about bringing the boat to life.

"What an absolute pleasure it was to see everyone working together and having such pride in their critical part that they play in this national endeavour," said Lady Sedwill.

"It was very apparent that everyone involved in her creation not only works together as a team but are also immensely proud of what they do.

"It was fantastic to visit the Devonshire Dock Hall and see HMS Agamemnon midway through build which has helped me visualise her completion and how awesome she will be.

"I am very excited to be planning another visit to see her progress, and have more opportunities to meet up

with crew members and the BAE team, learning more about life on a nuclear submarine and how, as Sponsor, I can fulfil my role to the best of my ability throughout HMS Agamemnon's life into the Submarine Service."

She is due to return later this year for the boat's naming ceremony, after which the submarine – named for the legendary leader of Greek forces in the Trojan Wars and the sixth Royal Navy vessel to carry the name – will enter the water to begin trials (including a practice dive) so she can depart the yard and join her operational sisters in Faslane.

"This first visit of our sponsor is another key step as we push Aggie towards naming and then launch," said Commander Crosby.

"The visit enabled Lady Sedwill to learn and see first-hand the progress of the submarine and the sheer volume of endeavour across the yard to meet the Royal Navy's demands."

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“

**WE ARE PUSHING AHEAD  
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”

With a roar from its twin jet exhausts, the Banshee drone races forward on its launcher and shoots into the icy blue sky on the coast of Cornwall.

Within seconds the jet has disappeared from view, heading for the segregated-airspace exercise area, to the south-east of the Lizard peninsula.

This was the first flight by the Royal Navy of the Banshee Jet 80+, the latest addition to its uncrewed air systems, taking place on a sunny if cold afternoon.

It follows a period of extensive training this year including trails in Scotland with defence company QinetiQ.

The team at 700X Naval Air Squadron have been learning to fly this formidable drone, delivered by a programme codenamed Project Vampire.

They are flying from Predannack Airfield,

which is already used for drone research and training, being safely away from the main helicopter base at Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose.

After passing through its assigned waypoints out to sea, the sleek, grey drone returned to Predannack 30 minutes later, deploying a parachute to gently land back on the airfield.

Captain Stuart Irwin, the commanding of RNAS Culdrose, said: "I am delighted to announce the successful and uneventful first flight of the Banshee by the Royal Navy.

"I'd like to thank everyone involved in what has been a huge team effort.

"We've had amazing support from the air station and our industrial partners in getting Project Vampire off the ground.

"Banshee is a significant step forward in terms of range and speed and we are

pushing ahead in this next exciting phase of development in the use of remotely-piloted air systems."

The Banshee drones are 10 by 8 feet in size and can fly in excess of 400 mph with a range of more than 60 miles.

They are propelled into the air using a large 60-foot pneumatic launcher. Using a ground station, the controller can operate the aircraft in various modes and potentially access onboard cameras or other sensors.

The drones will not be weaponised but will instead be used to develop the skills and regulations required to fly jet-powered drones.

The Banshee trials come after a series of demonstration flights on HMS Prince of Wales in 2021. It looked at how the drone and associated support equipment can be integrated within a busy ship and flight deck.

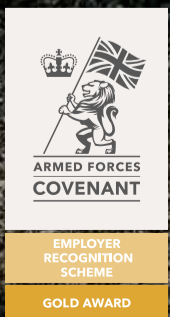
# Jetting off



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# LEVEL PEAKS



YOU wait 16 years for the Royal Navy to visit your island chain... and then two ships call inside ten months.

2023 began with HMS Tamar calling on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands – about 600 miles east of the mainland.

And the year nears its end with HMS Spey following in the footsteps of her sister, sailing into the archipelago's capital, Port Blair.

It's Spey's first visit to India – indeed her maiden foray this far west on her five-year Indo-Asia-Pacific mission in conjunction with Tamar, reinvigorating Britain's involvement in the security and prosperity of the vast region.

Berthed at Naval Component Command (NAVCC) Headquarters on the outskirts of Port Blair, Spey welcomed Indian Military officials were welcomed onboard Spey for planning with their Royal Navy counterparts.

And a discussion on maritime security challenges and priorities across the Bay of Bengal as part of the wider UK's commitment to regional security and the strengthening of ties was hosted by the British High Commission and UK's Defence Advisor to India, Brigadier Nick Sawyer, with senior Indian Navy officers led by Rear Admiral Sandeep Sandhu, Chief of Staff Andaman and Nicobar Command, and Commodore Sugreev.

"We deeply value our relationship with India in a

shared endeavor to confront those who challenge the rules-based system and ensure peace and prosperity on and from the sea," Brig Sawyer said.

"The visit of a sixth Royal Navy ship to India within a year is the clearest demonstration of that as well as the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt in action."

In addition, the River-class patrol ship HMS Spey hosted a number of Indian Navy personnel during a link-up with an Indian Naval patrol vessel off the islands to build on the close ties between the two navies – and enhance co-operation at a ship-to-ship level.

Once in port, Spey's 50 crew took the opportunity to explore the islands' rich culture and diversity, sampling the incredible flora and fauna in the national park and swimming alongside rich marine life at many of the idyllic beaches and coves.

Lieutenant Commander Bridget Macnae, HMS Spey's Executive Officer, said both navies benefited from the link-ups at sea and ashore.

"Frequent port visits and multilateral exercises between the Indian Navy and Royal Navy continue to support our ever-expanding relationship and operational interaction and cooperation," she added.

"The UK and India firmly believe in – and promote –

the rules-based international system; we share an interest in upholding international maritime law and supporting a free and open Indo-Pacific."

Before Spey and Tamar, you have to go back to frigate HMS Montrose in 2007 for a Royal Navy warship visiting the Andaman and Nicobar Islands... and the early 1990s before that.

Spey's crew then enjoyed a front-row seat to one of the wonders of nature – from a safe distance.

The patrol ship was sailing from Port Klang, the port of Kuala Lumpur, following her inaugural visit to Malaysia, making the short (275 mile) night passage to Singapore.

In doing so she transited the Malacca Strait – second only to Dover when it comes to the world's busiest shipping lanes.

And while she did, the narrow waters were lit up by a spectacular electric storm – captured here on camera by Lt Cdr Shaun Roster.

"The environment never ceases to provide us with a combination of both beauty and drama, often in the same day," he said.

"From epic sunrises to dramatic storms, it's easy to forget just how privileged we are to witness planet earth in all its glory."

Pictures: Lt Cdr Shaun Roster



# Spey's magical moments



# NEW YEAR NEW CREW

## GULF PATROLS CONTINUE FOR HMS LANCASTER



**T**HE crew of HMS Lancaster have completed patrolling Middle East waters to hand over duties in the region to... the crew of HMS Lancaster.

One entire team of 200 men and women (sailors, aircrew and Royal Marines) known as Port Crew have traded places like-for-like with counterparts in Starboard Crew, who've flown out from the UK to take charge of the frigate into 2024.

Crews spend four months at a time on Operation Kipion, the UK's security mission in the Gulf/Red Sea/Indian Ocean.

By using bases and ports across the Middle East and through the regular rotation of crew, HMS Lancaster herself is available for operations in a part of the world key to UK – and global – prosperity and peace more often than returning her home and dispatching a replacement.

Much of the time is dedicated to counter-smuggling patrols – one resulted in a £3m drugs haul being seized – interspersed with safeguarding merchant shipping as and when required, and frequent exercises with allies and partners operating in the region.

Such as Qatar, just a day's sailing from Bahrain. Making use of their brand-new naval base at Umm Al Houf, the hosts invited the Royal and US Navies to join them for some combined training, Ferocious Falcon, an exercise full of action, flying and high-speed manoeuvres in close proximity – just 300 yards apart at times – to other warships.

Royal Marines of 42 Commando demonstrated their board and search techniques (behind the drugs bust earlier in the deployment) with the Qatari vessel Al Khor offering their expertise to assist partner nations.

After some flying exercises which also involved American littoral combat ship USS Indianapolis, participants assumed 'falcon formation' for a photograph before breaking and resuming regular duties.

Other duties have included escorting British (the minehunting forces based in Bahrain) and US warships (led by assault ships USS Bataan and Carter Hall) in and out of the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz choke-point, as well as merchant shipping during a period of heightened tensions in the region.

Central to all the ship does operationally has been her Wildcat helicopter, callsign Pyro, from Inferno Flight, 815 Naval Air Squadron back in Yeovilton.

It covered nearly as many miles as its mother ship – flying more than 7,000 nautical miles (roughly London to the Falklands) – conducted 180 deck landings, including one on the USS Dwight D Eisenhower, safely delivered the medical officer to an allied warship to treat a casualty, and conducted 25 hours of sorties with its 'weapon wing' (for Martlet missiles) attached.

As for the frigate herself, she spent 1,408 hours (over eight whole weeks) on patrol as she sailed more than 11,500 miles – nearly half-way around the globe, while Port Crew have seen off 7 tonnes of spuds, more than 38,000 eggs and over 1,200 tins of baked beans (among other culinary treats).

The homecoming crew have steered Lancaster through the hottest part of the year in the region – temperatures up to 45° Celsius on occasions. Their successors take over in the much more bearable mid-20s... and may even have to put their jackets on at night when it drops to the mid-teens.

Still, the Gulf waters are plenty warm enough (circa 28°C). One afternoon's relaxation from the high-tempo of operations allowed for a flight deck barbecue after shipmates had worked up an appetite courtesy of hands to bathe, with hotdogs taking the place of helicopters as crew feasted on an array of grilled dishes and meats. To round off the day, Lancaster's trainee officers compiled a 'Best of British' quiz... which was promptly won by the wardroom.

"I finally managed to do a hands to bathe – another Royal Navy bucket list item ticked off. It's not every day you get to go swimming in 3,000 metres of water," enthused Officer of the Watch Lieutenant Jack Mason.

"It has been an awesome four months delivering effect in region. No two days have been the same, whether that be conducting counter narcotic operations or escorting merchant vessels through the Straits of Hormuz. The team really does work when everyone comes together to meet the command aim."

Logistician Leni Milne particularly enjoyed the "familiarisation flights" the Wildcat team laid on for shipmates to give shipmates an idea of what it's like to operate a cutting-edge naval helicopter.

"Abu Dhabi was definitely a great port visit, adventurous training was provided, as well as sampling the culture, the waterparks and Ferrari World were a great way to unwind!" she added.

"Karachi in Pakistan was a great defence engagement opportunity. Having numerous visitors onboard as well as a local school visit, it was exciting representing the Royal Navy."

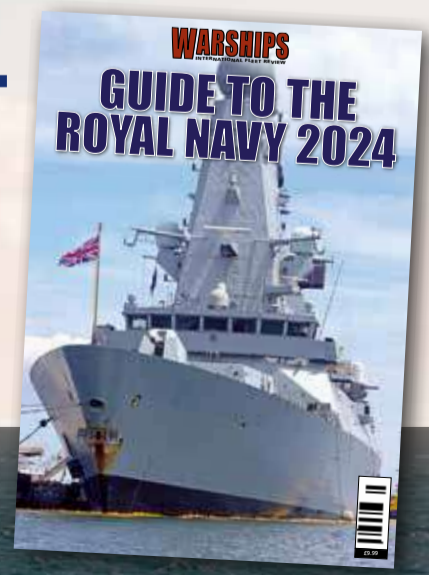


## GUIDE TO THE ROYAL NAVY 2024

A mixture of warship profiles, commentary and analysis, including:

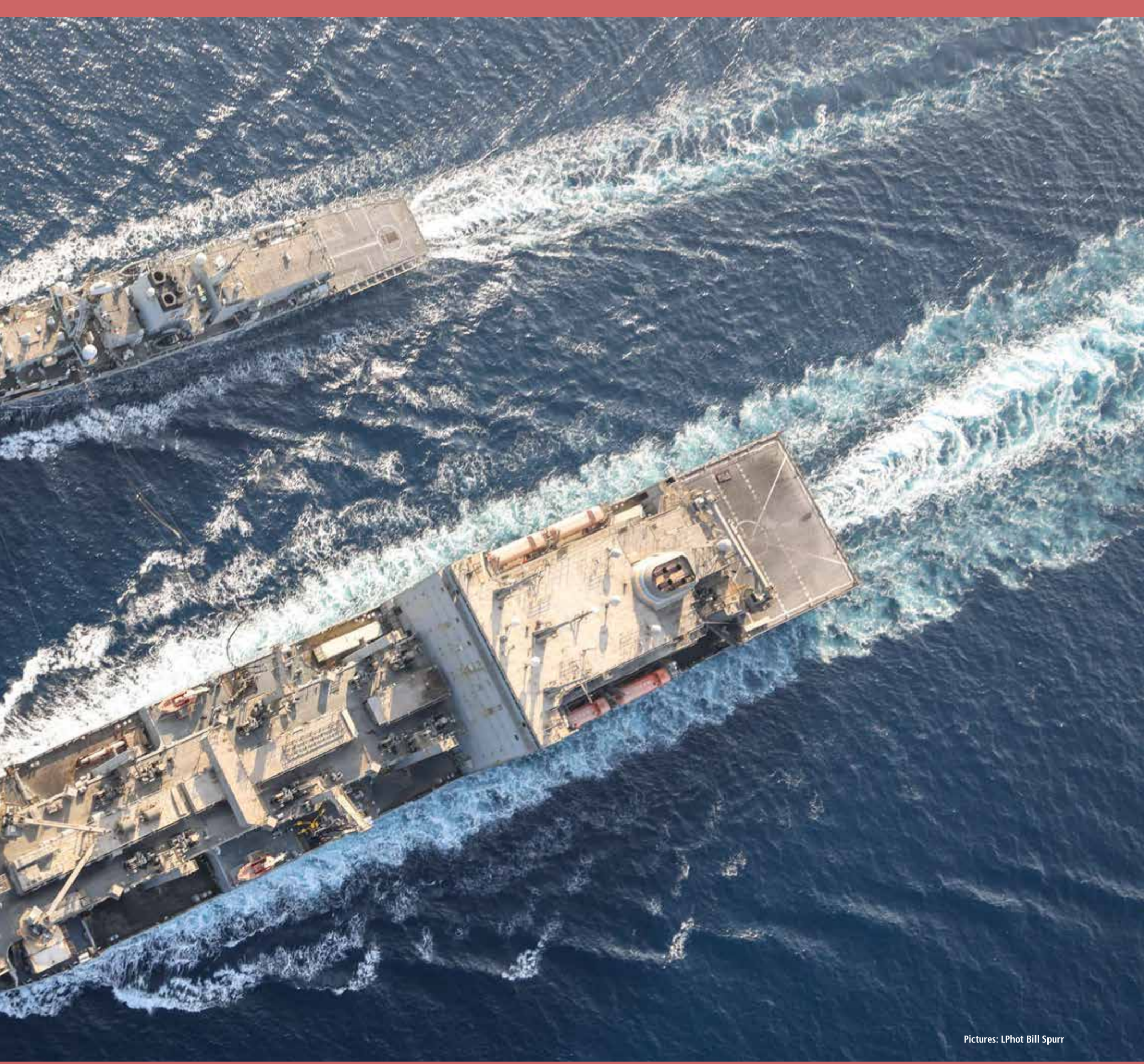
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Pictures: LPhot Bill Spurr

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# Royal Navy personnel take part in the world's largest humanitarian aid mission



Captain Joe Dransfield uses his phone to try to distract a child awaiting a tooth extraction at a clinic in Fiji; A dog is treated during a neutering clinic in Fiji



Trees were planted at the La Union Botanical Gardens in La Union, Philippines as part of Pacific Partnership 2023



Above: British Army Colour Sergeant James Muir plays the pipes to his captive audience in Tonga  
Below: Flight Lt Stephen Crawford, left, of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, and Colour Sgt James Muir, act out the Loneliest Whaleshark, during a woodwind ensemble performance for children in Tonga



Above: Capt Dransfield receives a traditional welcome in Papua New Guinea;  
Below: The USS Pearl Harbor arrives in Pearl Harbor



Divers from US Coast Guard, Royal Navy, Royal Malaysian Navy, Malaysian Coast Guard, Fire and Rescue Department of Malaysia and Republic of Korea pose for a photo after a training session during Pacific Partnership 2023

## Pacific Partnership 2023

- Medics treated around 15,000 people, including 1,700 dental patients, eye tests for 1,400 people (and more than 800 pairs of glasses handed out).
- Surgeons performed 30 hip and knee replacements and 20 hernia repairs.
- A veterinary team conducted numerous food safety visits and helped with stray neutering programmes, again training national professionals.
- The disaster-relief team ran workshops and exercises in each country offering practical advice for dealing with wild fires, earthquakes and tsunamis, including search and rescue, diving and command and control of disasters.
- Engineers completed 12 projects, including building new classrooms in Vietnam and Philippines and contributed to renovations that included water, waste and school facilities across the other nations.
- And on the cultural level, the embarked band performed more than 70 concerts to more than 30,000 people, alongside chaplaincy, science events, sporting activities and engagement events focusing on women.



# Humanitarian mission - Pacific Partnership - where they Made a real difference



**“ This is a mission that is all about humanity and diplomacy. ”**  
Captain Joe Dransfield

Royal Navy dental nurse AB Jessica Gibbins conducts an oral health demonstration for children in the Solomon Islands

BRITISH sailors, marines and soldiers joined the world's largest humanitarian and goodwill mission.

They joined the US Navy-led Pacific Partnership – a six month deployment across swathes of the Pacific – delivering assistance, guidance, training, education and culture to thousands of people in more than half a dozen nations.

The Royal Navy provided the deployment's deputy commander, plus divers, a medical planner, infectious diseases specialist and a Royal Marines communications instructor, while the Army supplied a combat engineer, a security force assistance liaison officer (working alongside the disaster-relief team) and a piper.

Born out of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, Pacific Partnership is a unique goodwill mission centred on humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief readiness (hence the motto *'Prepare in Calm to Respond In Crisis'* – but embracing medical assistance and aid, throwing in some construction projects and even cultural events.

This is the 19th year the deployment has been run, directed from the amphibious ship USS Pearl Harbor – similar to the Royal Navy's HMS Albion and Bulwark – and supported at times by the littoral combat ship USS Jackson, Japan's JS Shimokita and South Korea's ROKS Chan Ja Bong.

Pacific Partnership is vast in scope – countries visited include Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Tonga – and length: USS Pearl Harbor left San Diego in June and returned in time for Christmas.

At the core of the deployment have been 1,500 personnel, mostly from the US, but bolstered by experts from Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

In recent years, a Royal Navy officer has acted as the mission's deputy commander. This year the honour befell Lynx/Wildcat aviator Captain Joe Dransfield, who's seconded to the US Navy for the duration of Pacific Partnership.

He's been responsible for leading the planning and execution of a complex, frequently-changing mission, and acting as a diplomat/ambassador for both the UK and US.

“This is an incredibly rich and diverse mission,” Captain Dransfield said.

“The mixture of accents, languages, cultures and uniforms, united in common goals, has been

unbelievably rewarding to be part of.

“From calling on ministers to reassuring kids about to receive treatment. From giving blood to playing rugby. From search-and-rescue training to taking part in fascinating cultural ceremonies. This is a mission that is all about humanity and diplomacy. We have built bridges and made a genuine difference. A real once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

Dental Nurse Jessica Gibbins – normally based in Gibraltar – joined a team at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara in the Solomon Islands sharing their knowledge and experience with local health care experts.

“I think this is a great opportunity for me and the dentists to provide care for people who maybe don't have dental care which is accessible. Hopefully we can leave a mark on the dental centre by sharing our experience and give patients a better experience dental-wise.”

In Fiji Surgeon Commander Matt O'Shea – a consultant in infectious diseases and clinical microbiology at the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine and associate clinical professor in the University of Birmingham's Institute of Immunology – and his US Navy counterparts shared their knowledge to assist local military and civilian doctors, took part in a discussion about Covid with more than 1,000 people and encouraged the country's clinical, research and education institutions to work more closely together.

“It was fascinating to get an insight into the Fijian ways of working and then to see where we could work together to build their skills and resilience,” Matt said. “It has been a really rewarding experience and I have made some professional linkages that I hope we can build upon in the future.”

Fellow RN medic Lieutenant Michelle Carter from the Defence School of Healthcare Education – was also heavily engaged in Fiji, as well as Nuku'alofa, Tonga.

She contributed to a number of medical engagements, including community health fairs, advanced lifesaving training focusing on 'stopping the bleed', and encouraged women that there's a fulfilling career open to them at sea (a 'women in maritime' seminar in Fiji), or in science, technology, engineering and maths (a STEM symposium in Tonga).

“The STEM events at the high schools gave us opportunities to talk to many kids offering advice

and answer all kinds of questions about the Navy,” she said.

“The kids were very engaging and I personally loved the display of song and dance that followed as an offer of thanks.”

In Malaysia, Lieutenant Matt Bowden and Petty Officer Stuart Ricketts shared their insights and expertise to show how clearance divers – who normally deal with mines and unexploded ordnance – could prove extremely useful in the aftermath of a disaster, such as using their handheld sonar.

The final member of the Royal Navy contingent – and sole Royal Marine on Pacific Partnership – was communications specialist Corporal Joe Omlo, assigned specially to help Tongans should a major disaster strike their islands.

In January 2022 Tonga was hit simultaneously by a volcanic explosion and an undersea landslide, triggering a tsunami. All undersea connections to the kingdom were cut, leaving Tonga with no communications with the outside world.

They were given high-frequency long-range maritime communications in the wake of the disaster – but not the training to use them... which is where Joe stepped in.

He spent four days training Tongan Armed Forces and their civilian counterparts so they can make the most of their long-range radios in the event of future disasters.

Joe said with the last disaster so close in people's minds they were incredibly grateful for the assistance.

“To hear people talk about the devastation of the volcanic eruption and tsunami that battered the island in 2022 was unreal,” he added. “If we can make even a little bit of difference to their ability to bounce back quickly in the future then we will have done our job.”

The Army contingent on Pacific Partnership was headed by Major Johnny Walker, Regimental Quartermaster with 33 Engineer Regiment Royal Engineers, in his final deployment after almost 40 years joined the legendary Naval Construction Battalion (better known as the Sea-Bees).

He played a key role in mentoring his US counterparts including on some particularly challenging projects, and worked alongside his Fijian and Tongan counterparts on building, refurbishment and diving projects.

“It was a privilege and humbling experience to

meet the people of Fiji, especially the ribbon cutting ceremony for a school, where the whole school laid on a ceremony which included amazing dancing and an insight to their traditions,” he said.

“As I head back to the UK I can reflect on the good we have done to prepare and assist these islands for what the future has in store.”

Lieutenant Andrew Duff of The Black Watch, 3rd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland, provided humanitarian aid/disaster relief guidance and explored potential future security assurance opportunities for the British Army in Fiji and Tonga.

He worked with the heads of the respective national armed forces training teams, learning how they fit into their national disaster-response plans, identifying any training opportunities and shortfalls.

“We were made incredibly welcome by the armed forces in both Fiji and Tonga,” he said “The way their national cultures play into the way they operate was fascinating to see. I loved the opportunity and I hope we can continue to work closely together.”

And finally Colour Sergeant James Muir added culture to the deployed. Pipe Major with the Black Watch, he joined fellow musicians from Australia, Canada, Fiji and New Zealand in bolstering the US Navy Fleet band.

They performed seven times in the Fijian capital Suva and surrounding area, hosted by the band of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces who treated their guests to South Pacific hospitality and fresh coconuts.

The senior NCO was on deck to pipe the Pearl Harbor into Nuku'alofa, Tonga – right in front the king's palace.

The combined band subsequently appeared on national TV, visited schools and laid on public performances.

“At each school I gave the children and some teachers a chance to get a sound from the Great Highland Bagpipe,” said James.

“From all eight attempts only one very strong-lunged student managed to get a sound – met by great applause when successful and a big round of clapping and laughter when not.

“For my part in Pacific Partnership, I am immensely grateful that I was ever given the opportunity to be a part of such a wonderful team and mission. It's a special part of the world with some the friendliest and caring people I have ever come across.”



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**T**HE golden age of the Wildcat helicopter is almost upon us. The true identity of this small, highly manoeuvrable helicopter is really only starting to reveal itself to the world as it ascends to its rightful place as a snarling maritime attack helicopter bristling with weaponry.

The Apache of the sea is what this helicopter is designed to be, but in its early phases of life it didn't really reflect that, seldom did it carry anything that could sink or incapacitate an adversary's ship or submarine.

You'd be forgiven for thinking the Wildcat was a bit of a cuddly kitten of the sky, lacking any punch – but far from it.

The Wildcat has now grown its 'teeth and claws' with its weapon wings bristling with Martlet missiles for taking out boat swarms or small ships, Sting Ray torpedoes for hitting submarines and, soon, Sea Venom missiles able to take out larger surface targets – corvettes or frigates.

Not to mention the Wildcat can wield a .50 calibre machine gun on its door and play host to Royal Marines sniper teams capable of knocking out a drug smuggling speed boat from range.

It means Wildcat aviators are getting back to one of their main purposes... war fighting.

"Ultimately our job is to search for and sink enemy ships if needs be," said Lieutenant Scott Sunderland, instructor pilot with 825 Naval Air Squadron and part of the Black Cats display team who thrill audiences at air shows with their dynamic flying displays in Wildcats.

"I've spent most of my time with Wildcat in a period where we haven't had any hard kill capability, but our bread and butter as a force is anti-surface warfare.

"We've been in this period where we haven't had any real missiles. We were doing humanitarian aid, hurricane disaster relief, anti-drugs smuggling, counter piracy, all that sort of stuff out in the Gulf.

"We weren't able to fulfil our primary role but now we've got these missiles coming online. The challenge now is readjusting our mind-set as aviators back to proper warfare.

"It absolutely is a really exciting time with these missiles. It's going to be an absolute game changer."

The Yeovilton-based Wildcat Maritime Force (WMF), some 400 people and 28 Wildcats under its two squadrons, are those pushing the maritime variant of the helicopter – the HMA2 – into the future.

815 Naval Air Squadron takes care of front-line operational work on Royal Navy ships around the world, while its sister 825 Naval Air Squadron's business is training and generation.

Commander Alasdair Lang sits above the two as the WMF

commander, balancing operational commitments, training, maintenance, future capability or the logistics behind it and ultimately the direction the force is going in.

The former Lynx observer – the Lynx is the Wildcat's predecessor – allows the commanding officers of each squadron to focus on their own role while overseeing the bigger picture, ensuring what the squadrons offer keeps them at the pinnacle of UK defence.

The HMA2 variant of the helicopter has more than 40,000 flying hours under its belt since it first came into service in 2015, becoming a well-known and respected commodity on the Royal Navy's global deployments.

The same can be said for the AH-1 variant flown by Commando Helicopter Force's 847 Naval Air Squadron, which supports Royal Marines operations in its battlefield reconnaissance role and accumulated more than 9,000 flying hours along the way since 2014, including in the Arctic Circle where it has worked in tandem with Apache helicopters to search for and destroy ground targets.

The Wildcat has evolved and developed in its own right, but its heritage from the various generations of Lynx since the 1960s means there's a huge amount of depth to the design and features.

"We are the end of the beginning," explains Cdr Lang about where we're at with the Wildcat. "The initial step was to bring in the helicopter. Now we're bringing the weapons systems online.

"We're pretty much at the end of that process. We know as much as we're probably going to know about the helicopter, and its current configuration and how best to use it.

"The weapons are now really coming up to speed and so I'd look at the next few years as being almost probably the best bit for the force. A sweet spot."

## WILDCAT AND THE DRONES

The weaponry the Wildcat is gaining is one thing, but there are many different strands to the developments, including plans for aircrews to control drones from their helicopters.

That partly relates to work going on to the install the Link 16 system – a messaging network used by NATO to share information between aircraft, ships, vehicles and ground forces.

This will allow Wildcat helicopters to be well-informed on the tactical situation as they establish more of a war fighting role, but it also means that they can control uncrewed systems.

"You'll be able to sit in the aircraft and send and receive digital messages," explains Cdr Lang.

"Which means, for instance, if we're in a role where we're doing maritime strike, rather than our crews having to talk to someone about the situation, they can effectively just send all of

that information digitally.

"The way that we're developing the kind of human-machine interface for that capability means that you'll be able to have a sort of series of set messages in it.

"The real advantage of that is if you're controlling an uncrewed system, so a drone, for instance, you could have, say, 50 preset messages that you've loaded in at the start of that mission.

"It opens a whole host of activity across NATO that Wildcat can contribute to which it hasn't been to date."

## ANALOGUE TO DIGITAL

All of this is a far cry from the Lynx of yesteryear, as you'd expect, but it's reassuring to hear it from the man with a 26-year engineering career under his belt working first with Lynx and then bringing Wildcat to the front line.

Air Engineering Technician, Chief Petty Officer Pete Rogers, joined the navy in 1997 and worked on various models of Lynx initially, before the Lynx MK9 Alpha, which essentially was a hybrid of Lynx and Wildcat, and now Wildcat itself today.

He's seen Wildcat through its infancy, deployed around the world – the Gulf, the Caribbean, the United States to name a few – as the Senior Maintenance Rating (SMR), engineers who burden huge responsibility as the main person responsible for keeping the aircraft primed for intensive operations throughout a deployment.

It's people like CPO Rogers who are the backbone of the success of Wildcat.

Cdr Lang stresses Wildcat is a highly modern and capable system, but it's pointless without "really capable and qualified crew and maintainers to operate it".

"It's a job of enormous responsibility – you're effectively on your own," CPO Rogers explains, when asked about his role as a SMR. "You're a senior rate not an officer and being at the top of the engineering food chain is quite a lonely job.

"You're maintaining the airworthiness of the aircraft but you're also trying to deliver operational capability.

"Occasionally when I was away, I had moments where the gravity of what I was doing hit home.

"I remember one time we were doing dawn and dusk flights, looking for drug runners. We've been launching our aircraft at 4am for weeks.

"I'm stood out on the bay watching the aircraft go. You couldn't see very much and the aircraft disappears off and within a quarter of a mile he was lights off down-low off looking for targets.

"We're doing this everyday and I suddenly think 'I'm signing for



# YOU AIN'T SEEN N

that and been doing it for weeks'. The aircrew are your friends and I'm putting them over the sea every single day. That's my engineering signature that signs that off.

"You need to be afraid. You need to be scared all the time. You cannot get complacent."

He adds: "We lost a lot of Lynx in the noughties. It has a massive effect on the force and the people when you lose aircraft and people. I never want to be on the back of that again, I never want to see other flights go through what they went through."

Certainly, the modern Wildcat is night and day from the Lynx. "If you think of Lynx as clockwork, Wildcat is digital. The Lynx were literally clockwork. Run by cogs and dials, air and bellows, like old Rover cars," explains CPO Rogers.

"The Wildcat is a completely digital system. Whereas before our engines would have been controlled by mechanical, feeling the head slow down and spooling the engines up to compensate. This is all done electronically by four computers.

"The avionics suite is Star Wars compared to what the Lynx could do. The camera and the radar as a combination are pretty amazing."

"Does it look like a Lynx? It would be stupid to deny it doesn't but it is not a Lynx," adds Cdr Lang.

"This is a much more modern, much more capable helicopter, but one that benefits from the fact that the Royal Navy was operating the Lynx helicopter and Leonardo was making it and supporting it for 40 odd years.

"All of the benefit of generations of experience – aircrew, maintainers or manufacturer – the Navy has a distilled all of that and basically brought Wildcat into service off the back of all that information and knowledge. Now, we are putting together an exceptional product that is effectively world-beating and has a world-beating anti-surface capability."

## THE FLU

Given how hardworking the Wildcat helicopters are, there's constant work going on by the engineers to keep them fighting fit for the front-line.

Time at sea means constant work to protect the aircraft from corrosion, but you get a lot of bang for your buck – the HMA2 Wildcat has completed 52,431 landings on ships. The 825 NAS engineers look to squeeze around 1,400 flying hours per year out of their aircraft, but face constant battles with workforce availability and intensive maintenance.

The way the aircraft was brought in ten years ago, rolling them out as an entire fleet in one sitting, has caused issues.

"It was brought in in a bit of a strange way," explains CPO Rogers. "Usually when you build an aircraft you build it in batches of six or ten and you establish them as fleet leaders – you find out what the problems are from that, and then you retrospectively build the next ten knowing the problems you're facing.

"By the time you get to the last 50 or 60 you've an aircraft that has grown all the problems and been rectified.

"Currently when a Wildcat catches a cold, the fleet goes down with flu – because they're all getting older at the same rate.

"It was an odd way to bring in an aircraft and think it was financially driven. We've got more aircraft for it and aviation is expensive."

There are daily challenges with workforce and the supply of stores for repairs, but generally speaking the WMF look to always have 24 of their 28 aircraft available for action.

The Wildcat is in constant demand too.

"The last 12 months have been exceptionally hectic," explains Cdr Lang. "As ever, defence has quite a lot of demands placed on it and the Wildcat being an exceptionally capable aircraft means it's in demand worldwide, when it comes to operating.

"Whether it's in the Caribbean on hurricane or disaster relief or counter-narcotics or illicit trafficking, or equally we have a permanent presence in the Gulf with the forward deployed frigate. We've also looked at a whole host of other activities – whether it's generating force elements to go away with the carrier, or looking forward now to Carrier Strike Group 25."

That demand is a reflection of the Wildcat's importance to the Royal Navy.

"If you look at the navy at the moment, there's no other offensive missile capability," adds Cdr Lang. "If you want a maritime task group to go out and have some claws, we are it. There's no other maritime strike capability in the navy.

"That makes us, I would argue, indispensable."

## THE PILOT'S REVIEW

So what's this nimble beastie like to fly?

"Well, I think the best way to describe the Wildcat helicopter is if you put it alongside the Merlin, for example, I would say the Wildcat is like the Ferrari of the skies and Merlin is like the Ford Transit van of the sky," says Lt Sunderland with a wry smile.

"It's more manoeuvrable. It's more dynamic. One of my secondary roles here is as the Black Cats display pilot and displaying the Wildcat really gives me an even different view on the aircraft and just how capable it is.

"I never flew the Lynx but if you spoke to some of the guys

who flew them, they will tell you that we've got bags and bags of power available in the Wildcat.

"We never really have to worry about running out of power. It's a worry in other helicopter types that you're not going to have enough power available to do whatever you want to do.

"You very rarely have to worry about that really in the Wildcat, even when we're in hot conditions and really heavy."

## A HOPEFUL SUBMARINER

All of this excitement might be whetting your appetite, but if you want to get behind the controls of a Wildcat a lot of patience and hardwork is required – it can take all in seven years to earn your wings, such is the pace of the aircrew pipeline.

Lieutenant Elliott Wylie is fresh off the conveyer belt at 825 Naval Air Squadron, having just qualified 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.

Now he's reached his goal of becoming a Wildcat pilot, alongside one other finishing up their qualifications at Yeovilton in late 2023.

"We started with six, now we're down to two. That's sometimes the progression," Lt Wylie says.

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

"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."

By Peter Howard



# NOTHIN' YET

# Annual awards put Fleet's finest in the spotlight

ONE of the smallest formations in the Royal Navy – and operating some of its smallest vessels – has proved to be the most useful in paving the way for future operations.

Indeed, many people even within the Service may well not have heard of Mission System Team 3.

But senior officers at the RN's Surface Flotilla have. And they're mightily impressed – so much so they've awarded the team the Naval Capability Trophy.

Perhaps better known under the banner of Project Wilton – replacing existing minehunters with a combination for crewed, remotely-operated and autonomous systems – MST3 have been in the vanguard of future mine warfare, demonstrating “unwavering dedication, innovative spirit, and outstanding motivation” to not merely enhance operational capability but have also reshaped the Royal Navy's approach to their specialist branch of naval warfare.

Above all the team have demonstrated not only that they can perform missions carried out by Sandown and Hunt-class mine countermeasures ships, but they can outperform their traditional counterparts.

MST3 is one of more than 20 ships, units, teams and individuals singled out in the Surfplot Excellence Awards (in the past also known as the Fleet Efficiency Awards) for their contributions to naval operations, security and effectiveness above the waves.

In addition to bragging rights with other ships and units, the title grants the winners permission to fly a blue and white pennant featuring the hippocampi, mythical seahorses and the symbol of the Surface Fleet.

As the Fleet's “hardest working” (nine months at sea out of the previous 12) big ship, HMS Albion took the ‘best capital ship’ title – a fitting end to six years of intensive operations – ahead of both aircraft carriers.

HMS Duncan, also away from her home base (Portsmouth) for nine months this year, is hailed as the best destroyer for her work with allies in the Mediterranean especially (she's led a NATO task group since July), her achievements all the more impressive as nearly half her ship's company are on their first deployment.

And the top frigate is HMS Portland, heavily in demand, maintaining an exceptionally high rate of availability for operations in the exacting North Atlantic and home waters, often for weeks at a time.

HMS Mersey, has been worked equally hard from Bootle to the Baltic, shares the Jersey Trophy as the best Batch 1 patrol ship, HMS Tamar named the best Batch 2 vessel; the latter has “excelled” at her Indo-Asia-Pacific mission in “setting a benchmark” for how navies operating in the region (not just the RN) uses similar patrol ships.

“The Surfplot Excellence Awards are a fantastic opportunity to recognise the hard work and achievements of our people throughout the year,” said



RN Motor Boat Harrier undergoing trials with MST3

Commodore Paul Pitcher, Commander Surface Flotilla.

“2023 has been a demanding period requiring dedication and professionalism, and the Surface Flotilla has delivered across the board – BZ to all winners and runners-up!”

The full list of winners:

■ **Naval Capability Trophy:** MST 3; Runner-up: HMS Prince of Wales Air and WE Depts.

■ **Capital Ship Trophy:** HMS Albion; Runners-up: HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales

■ **Destroyer Trophy:** HMS Duncan; Runner-up: HMS Dauntless

■ **Frigate Trophy:** HMS Portland; Runner-up: HMS Lancaster

■ **Offshore Patrol Vessel Trophy (The Jersey Cup):** Batch 1: HMS Mersey; Runner-up: HMS Severn; Batch 2: HMS Tamar; Runner-up: HMS Medway

■ **Mine Countermeasures Trophy (The Jim Action Trophy):** Winner: MTXG Crew 1; Runner-up: MCM2 Crew 6

■ **Hydrographic and Meteorological Trophy:** FHMU (Fleet Survey Team); Runner-up: HMS Protector

■ **Inshore Patrol Vessel Trophy:** HMS Raider; Runner-up: HMS Blazer

■ **Above Water Warfare Trophy (Grytviken Cup):** Dauntless; Runner-up: HMS Somerset;

■ **Under Water Warfare Trophy:** HMS Northumberland; Runner-up: HMS Portland

■ **Communications Trophy:** HMS Northumberland; Runner-up: HMS Albion;

■ **Electronic Warfare Trophy:** HMS Kent; Runner-up: HMS Lancaster (both watches)

■ **Fleet Diving Unit Trophy:** Alpha Squadron; Runner-up: MCM2 Crew 5

■ **Seamanship Trophy:** HMS Queen Elizabeth; Runner-up: HMS Prince of Wales

■ **Engineering Trophy:** HMS Northumberland; Runner-up: MCM2 Crew 6

■ **Rulers of the Road Pennant:** HMS Trent (98.1 per cent); Runner-up: HMS Tyne (96.4 per cent).



# HARMONIOUS MILESTONE

## Princess Royal opens combined school of music

MILITARY musicians from both the Royal Marines and Army will now learn their trade in a new combined school of music opened by the Princess Royal.

The Alford Schools of Military Music in Portsmouth Naval Base combines training and rehearsal space for both the Royal Marines Band and the Corps of Army Music.

Up to 100 students – three in five of them Royal Marines – can be trained at one time across the combined new school, which takes its name after the ‘king’ of British marches, Kenneth Alford, who served with distinction in both the Royal Marines and Army.

The school is spread over several buildings, but it's the former ‘detention quarters’ or DQs, dating back to 1843, and used by RM musicians for more than 30 years, which is the centrepiece.

The prison cell blocks are now used as individual and small ensemble practice rooms, each fitted with acoustic panelling sound proofing to create an ideal space for the musicians.

Her Royal Highness spent a morning at the new school, welcomed by a performance from the RM Band, senior officers and VIPs and musicians from both Services.

After a tour of the site – coupled with further performances – throughout the morning, the Princess Royal spoke with students about the new facility and their training.

“I was very nervous at first, but she's very supportive of military music and it was an honour to play for her – and very interesting to chat to her about my experience in training with the Band Service so far,” said Musician Alex Wallace, a Royal Marines clarinettist and pianist.

Fellow clarinettist – but in the Army – Imogen Naegli told the guest of honour she believed both bands would benefit



tremendously from training side-by-side.

“I'm really excited to be training with the Royal Marines, I think this will allow us to work closer together,” she said.

“Currently we can't work at the same time and have to practice separately, whereas being able to practice together in one facility will allow us to support and rely on each other.

“Everyone's open and friendly to each other here, everybody just wants you to pass out and do your best.”

Lieutenant Colonel Huw Williams RM, Principal Director of Music (Royal Marines), said a great deal of work had been put into the site to accommodate the two corps of musicians – with outstanding results.

“It's got lots of character and makes for a fantastic school of music,” he said.

“The work that's been done over the last 18 months has really re-made it – it's like a new facility inside the school of music but, of course, with all the heritage and character of the old detention quarters, so we're very pleased.

“Having the individual training rooms is incredibly beneficial for the musicians. If you were to go to a music conservatoire or music college, you're very unlikely to be



allocated your own practice room for the duration of your training.”

During the refurbishment a stash of contraband was found concealed behind the window of one cell, including cigarettes, books and metal polish. Graffiti dating back to 1864 was also uncovered, along with the name of a sailor from HMS Warrior scratched into the brickwork.

These discoveries will be exhibited behind a clear screen to protect and preserve the heritage.

Following the official opening, trainee musicians will begin their instruction in earnest this month.

Pictures: LPhoto Gareth Smith

# Glimpse of future as Dreadnought roadshow visits Clyde

THE Defence Nuclear Organisation and the Submarine Delivery Agency brought the first Dreadnought Roadshow to staff at HMNB Clyde.

Rear Admiral (RADM) Donald Doull, the Senior Responsible Officer for the programme, made the opening address to a packed audience, setting the scene for the two-day event.

RADM Doull described Dreadnought as the next generation of submarine warfare and highlighted how vitally important it is for our national and global security.

Next to speak was Naval Base Commander, Commodore Sharon Malkin, who explained how teams at Clyde were working together to plan and prepare for the arrival of Dreadnought.

The first boat is due to arrive at Faslane in five years and Cdre Malkin described the challenges it will bring, but also highlighted some of the opportunities, such as recruitment, with 230 new

people needed to support the programme.

To encourage participation, the roadshow offered a balance between presentations and interactive sessions so, not only was there a varied set of briefings on both days, attendees were also given the opportunity to get involved.

On display in a breakout room were visualisation posters of the submarine, which included layout schematics of the new state of the art vessels.

If you fancied a more immersive experience, you could have a go of the Virtual Reality headsets and take a virtual walk through the submarine.

There was also a chance to chat to the Dreadnought Alliance team during Q&A sessions with Equipment System Owners, the Transition-into-service team and members of the Ships Staff who were happy to answer any questions about

the programme, transition, or the submarine itself.

A great deal of thought and effort has gone into improving the lived experience for the 130-strong crew on the Dreadnought-class submarines and this will be the first Royal Navy submarine built with separate female crew quarters, toilets and washing facilities.

Another first, is innovative new lighting which will allow day and night to be simulated onboard.

In the Vanguard-class submarines, gym equipment is squeezed into any available space however on the new submarines there is a dedicated gym facility, kitted out with weights, exercise bikes, cross-trainers, rowers and running machines.

The roadshow comes as the government announced another £121m investment in the

next-generation nuclear deterrent.

Defence firm, Babcock, has been awarded contracts worth £66m and £55m – the former for developing the support needed to maintain the new submarines, the latter will cover providing the weapon handling and launch system and submerged signal ejector equipment for boats No.2 through 4 (King George VI).

The agreements follow the recent signing of a five-year contract with the MOD to support the detailed design for the new SSN AUKUS submarines, which will replace the Astute Class hunter-killer fleet from the late 2030s – reinforcing the importance of Babcock's expertise and experience in supporting the UK's current and future submarine fleet to enable improved in-service availability.

Minister for Defence Procurement, James Cartledge said: “The Dreadnought Class will

be central to keeping our country safe and will further enhance our world-renowned submarine fleet.”

When the Dreadnought Class enter service in the early 2030s, they will be the largest submarines ever operated by the Royal Navy with each submarine measuring 153.6 metres long – the approximate length of three Olympic swimming pools.

In total, four submarines will be built at Barrow – HMS Dreadnought, HMS Valiant, HMS Warspite and HMS King George VI. Together they will replace the current Vanguard-class flotilla which have been in service since the 1990s and will begin retiring in the early 2030s.

The third generation of deterrent boats will continue a mission – Operation Relentless – the Royal Navy has conducted around the clock since 1969.



# WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH

## ...two-and-a-half tonnes of it cleared up by Royal Navy

BOTTLES, boxes, cartons, packets, plastics, tins, wrappers, foil.

All dumped on shorelines from Cardiff to Curaçao, Diego Garcia to Devon.

Set a target of collecting one tonne of trash from beaches to mark World Ocean Day back in June, sailors and marines gave up their spare time to rise to the challenge set by the head of the Royal Navy... and surpassed the target by 250 per cent.

The seed of the challenge was sown by 11-year-old Cheshire schoolboy Thomas Morgan back in March.

Thomas wrote to the office of First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Ben Key – copying in HM The King for good measure – challenging the Royal Navy to prove its environmental credentials by collecting one tonne of litter from oceans and coastlines.

Admiral Key embraced the idea – supporting research into and tackling climate change is a key tenet of the Royal Navy's environmental challenge.

Two seemingly idyllic locations yielded a tonne of rubbish between them: Diego Garcia, a tiny UK dependency in the British Indian Ocean Territories, yielded 780 kilogrammes of trash

when personnel based there combed the sands; and crew of destroyer HMS Dauntless collected 300kg of rubbish – thus assisting the local turtle population – in Curaçao in the Caribbean.

The clean-up wasn't limited to the sea shore. Royal Marines Reservists from Merseyside picked up 200kg of junk from canals and towpaths in the Birmingham area; Naval Reservists from HMS Sherwood in Nottingham collected a similar amount from the banks of the Trent.

And when HMS Eaglet's reservists tackled the Liverpool shoreline, the instigator of the challenge joined them.

"I feel really privileged to have taken part in the clean-up exercise in Liverpool," Thomas said.

"While the goal of the day was to collect as much plastic/rubbish as possible to prevent it from reaching the ocean, taking part showed me that the day was much more than a simple litter-picking exercise.

"It was amazing to see a sense of community and the formation of lasting relationships around the One Tonne Challenge that I helped create."

Beyond the clean-up, the challenge proved an

excellent opportunity for connecting with local communities around Naval Bases and beyond.

All five crew of patrol boat HMS Express carried out a beach sweep on an iconic pop culture landmark, Barry Island, in Wales, as featured in the BBC TV show Gavin and Stacy.

"Lots of people approached us and were very pleased with what we were doing. Most people in our vicinity even helped pick up nearby rubbish," said Express' Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Ryan Prize.

"It was a great afternoon for the ship's company, and it won't be our last."

And the Mayor of Felixstowe, Councillor Seamus Bennett, recognised HMS Blazer's crew as they conducted their litter pick on the site of the former HMS Beehive (today part of the Kent town's commercial port).

All of which has delighted Imogen Napper, a marine scientist by profession and Royal Naval Reservist in her spare time, who oversaw the challenge and collated the results from all 20 units/ships participating, all of whom made a difference, whether they bagged seven kilogrammes of detritus... or 780.

"This is the first time in my Royal Navy Reserve career that I have been able to

combine elements of my civilian job. It has been a unique task but a really rewarding one," said Lieutenant Napper.

"Connecting with people across the Royal Navy and seeing the positive environmental results and the discussion that has formed has been really encouraging. Together, we are stepping in the right direction for environmentalism."

She's particularly impressed that the challenge has prompted sailors to think not just about the environment but how the waste they generate in their lives can contribute to the problems blighting oceans and coastlines.

"One of the volunteers told me: 'Who wouldn't want to take a couple of hours away from a computer and help clear up some of our mess?'"

Above all she praised the support throughout the RN for the clean-up.

"The success of the One Tonne Challenge is testament to the impact that can result from a good idea, supported by senior leaders and with a plan to deliver," Imogen added.

"The Royal Navy exceeded the challenge set, and our people should be rightly proud of their achievements."



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# OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES HELP MARINE OPEN UP

WITH a wide range of situations to deal with, from life-changing physical injuries to complex mental health struggles, the Royal Navy's recovery program for Personnel on Recovery Duty (PRD) requires a sophisticated support approach.

Thanks to RNRMC grant funding, a wide variety of activities are on offer to aid the rehabilitation of PRD sailors and marines.

In this article, we share the uplifting story of Warrant Officer Tom Miller, a Royal Marine who discovered a new found sense of strength through a unique Chainsaw Maintenance and Crosscutting course, funded by both RNRMC and RMA-TRMC.

Tom's journey is a testament to the remarkable growth that can occur when individuals open up and connect with their peers.

A seasoned Royal Marine, Tom faced challenges not uncommon to the profession, balancing his home life with the demands of the job.

He said: "About three-and-a-half years ago, I took full custody of my daughter. I found being a full-time, single parent was simply not conducive to the intensity of the job."

"It was obviously a very stressful time, trying to show up and be present in my work life and support my daughter, who was facing some challenging circumstances. I didn't see a way that I could do both."

"And that is when I decided to speak with my Commanding Officer. He listened to me and found me a role I could do while supporting my daughter, which meant a lot."

"It was in this new role that I met CPO Angie Cheal, who runs the funded courses."

The chainsaw course, designed with the well-being of Royal Navy personnel in mind, went beyond the traditional approaches to mental wellness.

It provided a hands-on, collaborative environment where

sailors and marines could learn a new skill while also fostering an atmosphere of openness and mutual support.

Tom fondly recalled the experience: "It's a situation where you are put into a completely alien setting, away from the military, with no rank."

"Everyone is equal and is given the space to have a break and just enjoy themselves. Ant, the instructor, was exceptional, drawing on his experience to help some of the guys there who've had addiction problems and various mental health problems."

Beyond the technical skills acquired, the course facilitated an atmosphere where sailors and marines could share experiences and challenges openly.

"It gave me, and the others, the reassurance that it's okay to not be okay," Tom added.

"It gave us the chance to have a little break from work and to gain a small qualification. I think the main facet to it was learning that we all need to open up a little bit and that this is not going to be a detriment to your career in any way."

With a newfound sense of resilience, Tom encourages his fellow Royal Navy colleagues to embrace similar experiences.

"Don't hesitate to dive into opportunities like the Chainsaw Maintenance and Crosscutting course. It's more than just a skill-building exercise; it's a chance to connect with your peers in a way that strengthens not just your professional abilities, but your mental well-being too."

"If chainsaws aren't your thing, there is a range of activities on offer from surfing to arts and crafts."

In expressing gratitude, Tom extended his thanks to our charity for making courses like these possible.

He said: "The support received from RNRMC goes beyond funding; it's an investment in the well-being of Royal Navy personnel. The chainsaw course was a unique and valuable experience, one that changed my life for the better."

To hear more about RNRMC, visit [rnrmc.org.uk](http://rnrmc.org.uk).



## All-ranks celebrations on HMS Victory

THE decks of HMS Victory were once again alive with chatter and laughter as the ship hosted an All-Ranks Trafalgar Night Dinner.

It saw deserving personnel across the Royal Navy who had been nominated by their Commanding Officers come together for the annual celebration.

Funding from the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) and Greenwich Hospital contributed to the dinner and an engraved gift for all those in attendance.

The All-Ranks Trafalgar Night Dinner was a unique experience that immersed participants in the ship's storied past.

The dinner took place on the Lower Gun deck, complete with polished wooden tables and

period-appropriate decor.

But the Trafalgar Night Dinner was not just a culinary event; it was a celebration of the deserving Royal Navy personnel in attendance.

The evening brought together Royal Navy personnel of all ranks, fostering a sense of community and shared pride in their achievements.

Hosts included Hon Capt Keith Knowles, Director People & Training Rear Admiral Jude Terry, Command Warrant Officers, representatives from First and Second Sea Lords' offices and staff from RNRMC staff and Greenwich Hospital.

Lieutenant Toni Harding said: "It was fantastic to see the revival of the All-Ranks Trafalgar Night dinner, supported by RNRMC and Greenwich Hospital this year."

"More than 70 sailors and marines from across the five fighting arms were selected to attend the dinner having been nominated by their Commanding Officers for their excellent performance throughout the year."

"We very much look forward to re-establishing this event annually as a way of recognising the fantastic work of our personnel across the fleet."

The event was a truly poignant and memorable occasion, blending history, tradition, and camaraderie in a setting that resonates with the echoes of the past.

As the participants raised their glasses to the heroes of Trafalgar, they not only paid homage to the enduring legacy of the Royal Navy but also celebrated their achievements.

## Charity thanks supporters

THE Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) welcomed supporters and friends of the charity to an annual evening reception to thank them for their efforts over the past year.

Guests were invited to the event at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, with sponsors which included L3Harris and navy leaders.

The reception followed the traditional Christmas lessons and carols of the Admiralty Carol Service, attended by First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Ben Key, and members of the Navy Board.

There were musical performances from the Royal Marines Band and the choir of the Royal Hospital School, Suffolk, and readings by Andrew Jameson, RNRMC chief executive, and Bernard Edwards, a supporter of RNRMC.

Held in the Crypt, the reception and its preceding Admiralty Carol Service provided an opportunity for the Royal Navy to thank those in attendance for their continued commitment to the RNRMC's mission to support sailors, marines and their families for life.

Sponsorship of this reception by L3Harris Technologies and Navy Leaders marked the start of both organisations' Bridge Partnerships with RNRMC.

The RNRMC Bridge Partnership scheme provides companies with an official alliance to the RNRMC, offering the opportunity to work closely with the charity and pledge support to their vision.

## New partner in law firm

CONSUMER law firm, Slater and Gordon, has become an official partner of The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC), becoming the first law firm to partner with the charity.

The law firm, which has a dedicated military practice area, will provide its legal services to charity users as part of its wider commitment to supporting the military. The firm is already a signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant.

The RNRMC is the principal charity of the Royal Navy and exists to support sailors, marines and their families, for life.

Slater and Gordon is providing free 45-minute family law consultations, reduced fixed fee divorce costs and a free online will service to those that utilise the charity's services.

The law firm also has specialist military injury lawyers who provide expert advice on a No Win No Fee basis, meaning there is no financial risk to those affected.

Natasha Orr, of Slater and Gordon's military team said: "Slater and Gordon has been committed to supporting the armed forces for many years through charity initiatives which is something I am extremely passionate about."

"Our partnership with The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity will allow us to take this a step further and truly make supporting the armed forces part of everyday life at Slater and Gordon. At Slater and Gordon, we take pride in our commitment to supporting those in the armed forces."

## GRANT FOR SCOTTISH SOCIAL ENTERPRISE SUPPORTING VETERANS



A COMPANY that supports veterans with employment and volunteer opportunities has received a grant.

SBMC (Scotland's Bravest Manufacturing Company) has been given £20,000 from The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity and Greenwich Hospital.

The grant is to

contribute towards the salary of an existing Royal Navy veteran who is employed at the social enterprise in Renfrewshire.

The funding will also enable SBMC to continue to provide personalised welfare and development support to the Royal Navy and Royal Marine veterans

they employ and to reach more veterans.

A social enterprise, SBMC is a division of the veterans' charity RBLL.

SBMC's ethos is to provide employment, volunteering and development opportunities for Armed Forces veterans and people with disabilities in Scotland who may need support adjusting to civilian life.

Staff manufacture signs for a range of industries that include highways, transport, and the commercial sector.

They also complete bespoke engineering projects. Last year SBMC was one of the first organisations to win the coveted King's Award for Enterprise.

Carl Baller is a Royal Navy veteran who works in SBMC's Signs department as a Manufacturing

Operative, and whose salary will be partially covered by the grant.

He said: "I would like to thank The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity and Greenwich Hospital for contributing towards my salary as working at SBMC has greatly improved my life."

"It's like being back in the forces as we can relate to each other."

"Since working at SBMC I can provide for my family so it's not all down to my wife."

"Our family life is better because I am better. I have a routine and structure to my day and am part of a team."

The £20,000 will further support volunteering costs, and overhead costs of employing veterans as the cost of living crisis has seen these increase drastically, limiting the number of new beneficiaries that SBMC can

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# Let's hear it for the Err-News

URNU Training Officers are part time volunteers who give up their free time to oversee the training and well-being of the Officer Cadets in the University Royal Naval Units or URNUs (Err-News) as they are known.

There are 16 physical URNUs across the four nations of the United Kingdom plus a Virtual URNU with a total of around 850 Officer cadets from as far afield as Gibraltar. Currently there are 127 members of the Training Cadre which includes both Training Officers and a small but growing number of former Senior Ratings.

The Training Officers Confirmation Course is the latest step towards the professionalisation of the URNU Training Cadre.

The first of these week-long courses was delivered over two sites, HMS RALEIGH and Britannia Royal Naval College (BRNC), and is a follow-on course from the Initial Training Officers Course (ITOC).

Though the courses are run by the URNU Headquarters at BRNC, much of the training is delivered using facilities and staff from the two new-entry training establishments.

The course is offered to those personnel within the organisation who have a minimum of three years seniority as a Sub Lt (URNU) or hold a Senior Training Officer position within the unit. This initial course was attended by 19 training officers taken from 12 units across the UK.

The syllabus is broad ranging from a session in the Damage Repair Instructional Unit to discussions on mental health, from Ceremonial Training to presentation skills, and sport and physical training.

The course aims to give the officers attending all the tools they need to deliver training to the highest possible standard, encompassing training for both internal and external activities the URNU units undertake.

HMS Raleigh offered the Training Officers the use of the CBRNDC Squadron (Triumph) allowing them vital hands-on experience of how things work on a Royal Navy warship.

The snapshot of Initial Officer Training gained at BRNC, allowed the Training Officers a more in depth understanding of the training the URNU Officer Cadets complete. The skills gained over the week are then taken back to the units and used to develop the more junior Training Officers as well as to enhance the training for the Officer Cadets.

Lt (URNU) Alana McNulty, the Senior Training Officer of URNU Manchester said: "I had an absolutely fantastic week at the Training Officers' Confirmation Course ... The week provided a chance for us to generate ideas, discuss how we can make our URNUs better and create more opportunities for Officer Cadets, as well as putting us through our paces and testing our mettle as Training Officers."



# HERITAGE LESSONS FOR BIRMINGHAM

URNU Birmingham took part in a heritage trip to Norfolk, to learn about Lord Nelson, practise teamwork and leadership, and help with the local beach clean.

Accommodated in self-catered accommodation, each cadet had a duty shift where they were responsible for cooking, cleaning, and timings of the rest of the group. Inclement weather meant the planned paddleboarding could not go ahead, and was substituted with several hours on an orienteering task.

This allowed all members of the unit to practice their land navigation and map reading skills while learning some of the local history of the area.

Later that day, the group visited the Church of All Saints, where they learned about Lord Nelson's early life through presentations prepared and delivered by the officer cadets themselves.

They were also able to observe some of the artifacts kept in the church, including ensigns from both HMS Nelson and HMS Indomitable, the font where Nelson was baptised, and his personal medicine cabinet.

The cadets then visited a recently commissioned wooden carving of Nelson, Map Room and the Lord Nelson Brewery, where further presentations on Nelson's military career and the Battle of Trafalgar were delivered.

That evening, the OCs were divided into groups to participate in a range of practical leadership tasks.

A group favourite involved navigation of an obstacle course with half of the team blindfolded and nobody able to communicate in English, which forced them to

adapt and find new ways to work together.

These tasks provided an excellent introduction to PLTs for new cadets, while allowing more senior members to practice their leadership.

The final day of the trip saw the cadets depart for Sheringham, where they spent time working alongside the local community by engaging in the monthly beach clean as part of the One Tonne Challenge.

This opportunity allowed the unit to demonstrate the commitment of both the URNU and the Royal Navy to giving back to local communities by contributing to the maintenance of the local environment, even managing to meet the local MP Duncan Baker.

After returning the equipment, the cadets visited the Sheringham museum, where they learned about the history of the local area, including its close ties to the RNLI and modern green energy initiatives.

After an excellent introduction and tour by the museum staff, including former RNLI members, they had time to look around the museum and receive the last of the OC-led presentations.

The weekend represented an excellent opportunity for all involved to learn about one of the Royal Navy's most important historical figures, while also practising the important leadership and team skills that are vital for all members of the URNU.

URNU Birmingham would like extend their thanks to everyone that made this trip possible, with a special thanks to the staff at the Church of All Saints and the Sheringham museum.



# Having a blast on Penzance

FIVE Officer Cadets embark on the Sandown-class minehunter HMS Penzance.

A unique opportunity for the URNU, we split the embarkation down into two legs to maximise training opportunities for the officer cadets.

The ship sailed from the Scottish West Coast, where she had been supporting a significant Remembrance Event, and out into the choppy waters of the Irish Sea, before returning to home port.

The OCdts were exposed to a variety of training serials and seamanship drills, working alongside the ships' company and gaining a valuable insight into life at sea. This amazing embarkation also included an unforgettable first overseas 'run ashore' for the OCdts.

OCdt Little, a third year history student at University of Edinburgh, commented: 'HMS Penzance was a great experience.

"Much of our time on board was spent shadowing the crew and their activities which offered a unique insight to life at sea. We also got taught how to use firefighting equipment and how the ship's company

responds to emergencies culminating in a large fire exercise which we got involved in. Watches on the

Bridge was my personal favourite since it was so beautiful to see the sea before us and lands of Ireland in the distance."

OCdt Jones, a second year Business Studies student at Edinburgh Heriot-Watt University, said: 'I particularly appreciated learning about the different branches of the Royal Navy and how they work together onboard.

"The ship's company were very accommodating, treated us well, and it was good fun learning about the customs onboard such as rolling dice to decide who washes the dishes.

"It was great to get the opportunity to participate in exercise

emergencies, learning about compartment re-entry and first aid.

"It was a good experience getting involved with tasks during our embarkation and it gave us a nice insight of life at sea if we were to join the Navy."



Registered charity number: Royal Navy & Royal Marines Children's Fund 11601



## 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

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**023 9263 9534**  
[caseworkers@navalchildrenscharity.org.uk](mailto:caseworkers@navalchildrenscharity.org.uk)



# Martin's marvellous merchant medal

WITH an astonishing 52 years' service under his belt, there was Royal recognition for the outstanding contribution Chief Petty Officer Martin Etwell has made to the RFA.

The medal, introduced in 2015, is presented to between a dozen and 20 merchant seafarers – and that includes the 1,700 men and women in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary – for their outstanding contribution to the maritime industry and seafaring.

To date only four other – two serving, two retired – RFA personnel have received the MNM for their work with the service and its association. Martin, who's from Newbury in Berkshire, joined the RFA in 1971 as a galley boy. Half a century later, as a chief petty officer, he's one of the most respected chefs in the UK Armed Forces, passing on his knowledge to new cadres of Royal Navy and RFA caterers, and acting as a mentor to RFA trainees at the Defence College of Logistics, Policing and Administration at Worthy Down, near Winchester.

Before stepping ashore to teach, Martin served on every class of RFA vessel in service up to the new Tide-class tankers which support UK carrier operations. He was in the galley of RFA Fort Austin during the Falklands conflict, accompanying assault ship HMS Fearless into San Carlos Water when the landings to liberate the islands began. Fort The ship spent four days in 'Bomb Alley', surviving several near misses and subsequently took survivors from destroyer HMS Coventry aboard.

In 2020 he was serving aboard RFA Cardigan Bay, command ship for Royal Navy minehunters in the Gulf, conducting patrols during a period of heightened regional tensions. When the frigates of the minehunters failed, it was his skill, expertise and calmness based on his years of experience which kept the task force fed, provided with fresh water and stores – and, most importantly, on its mission, rather than being forced to return to port for repairs.

Martin frequently helps shape both his branch and the future of the RFA by advising senior officers with an appreciation of logistics and catering unrivalled by anyone in his branch. He also somehow finds time to assist and coach new recruits who benefit enormously from his expert tuition and mentors those on his course who need extra support. Those trainees have often gone on to take the 'top student' title at Worthy Down and serve award-winning military catering teams.

Martin's efforts have already been recognised as Chef of the Year in 2011 and 2019 by the Worshipful Company of Cooks. Approved by the Queen in 2015, the Merchant Navy Medal for Meritorious Service is presented to those who have served at sea in any capacity in the Merchant Navy or fishing fleets for at least 20 years during which they have made an important contribution.

"It is a great honour to receive this prestigious award and I am very grateful to the RFA for my nomination," Martin said. This year's recipients were decorated by the Princess Royal at Trinity House in London in the presence of the Secretary of State for Transport, Mark Harper.



BRITAIN'S flagship pioneered a wide-ranging health and wellbeing initiative while operating in northern European waters with NATO allies and partners this autumn.

Everyone aboard HMS Queen Elizabeth was involved in the 'Flagship Performance' programme, probably the most comprehensive fitness/mental health and general wellbeing initiative ever devised on a Royal Navy warship.

All 1,000-plus members of the ship's company received a hardback book compiled by the carrier's Deputy Principal Medical Officer, Surgeon Lieutenant Commander Nathaniel Roocroft, outlining how to remain fit and healthy while aboard – supported both by a hectic programme of activities and events and, courtesy of the galley, plant-based high-protein options at every meal.

Flagship Performance initiative is founded on six 'pillars': sleep, daylight (namely, get some), nutrition (eat well), movement (fitness), mindset and connection (mental health and general well-being).

To that end, more than 40 events, activities and drop-in sessions were organised on board weekly during the autumn deployment by 'ambassadors' – drawn not just from the carrier's medical team and physical training instructors, but also the training management team and regular members of the ship's company.

Keen weightlifter Able Seaman Francis Raptis, a member of Queen Elizabeth's meteorological department, stepped forward to be an ambassador as "a big believer in the power of exercise".

"No problem has been too formidable for me as long as the luxury of the gym is available," he says. "No excuse has been too great so as to overpower my love and enthusiasm for stepping into the gym and pushing to be a better version of myself, not only physically though also in a psychological sense – as long as the mind is strong, the body is ready to cooperate and this perspective has been

strengthened through exercise."

Francis continued: "It can be difficult for a lot of people at sea, particularly when the deployment is lengthy and when there is the consideration of family affairs at home.

"Being a flagship performance ambassador gives me the opportunity to enable people on board who may feel lost and confused to realise the great power of exercise in boosting resilience and building a strong and determined outlook."

Writer Andrew Pellatt said that "physical and mental health wellbeing should be a right for anyone, of any background," said He worked with people with special needs before joining the RN and has used that experience and knowledge to help shipmates "who may not necessarily know who and where to go to".

He's convinced that by bringing shipmates – including embarked forces such as the carrier's air group personnel – it made the collective ship's company "physically and mentally robust for the challenges ahead".

And Able Seaman Adam Gater was keen to help his shipmates' mental wellbeing, organising training classes to educate them on how to look after each other's mental health.

He continued: "It is sometimes easier to talk to a close friend down the mess before going to sickbay. Therefore having better distributed training among the fleet could benefit anyone regardless of rank."

Sporting/fitness activities offered included staples of RN keep fit, including circuits in the hangar, indoor rowing and spinning, through to judo and muay Thai (Thai boxing). In addition, to enhance inclusivity, dedicated female weightlifting sessions from beginners up to clean-and-jerk standard were introduced.

Well-being workshops to manage stress, develop practical skills such as mindfulness, understand unhelpful thinking habits and set wellbeing goals were held, Wim Hof breathing classes arranged to help with both sleep and relaxation, and healthy lifestyle drop-in sessions focusing on improving sleep, diet

## NSF's First Fit Festival

THE head of the UK's Armed Forces saw 200 personnel from four navies channel their energy into a weekend of international sport in Bahrain.

Hosted by the Royal Navy's regional headquarters, the UK Maritime Component Command, the first International NavyFit Festival challenged sailors from the Royal, US, Canadian and Kuwaiti navies to participate in a variety of sports including rugby, cycling, golf, football and climbing.

The contest sought to promote positive health and wellbeing, introduce service personnel to new activities and pave the way into grass roots sports. At the same time there was the opportunity for a bit of international bonding.

Professional coaches from the RN's Grass Roots Sports Team, based in the UK, came out to organise proceedings, showcasing recognised sporting activities in the Senior Service whilst supporting individual self-development and teamwork.

The festival opened with a welcome from Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, Chief of the Defence Staff, who was visiting the Kingdom of Bahrain for an update on the latest UK activities in the region.

Bahrain serves as the hub for the Royal Navy east of Suez, supported by the RAF and Army, using the Naval Support Facility at Mina Salman port as their base.

On completion of the main sporting activities and following an 'It's a Knockout' session in the pool, participants were treated to a barbecue, quiz night and carnival evening.

"My vision of organising a NavyFit Festival in Bahrain was to host the first ever overseas festival involving allied nations participating in a variety of individual and team sports, building on international relationships in an operational theatre," said Petty Officer Gareth Reid, UKMCC and Naval Support Facility Physical Training Instructor, who organised the event.

"The whole event was a great success with nearly 200 personnel attending and taking part."

Chief Petty Officer Theo Cain, who manages the 'soft facilities' at the NSF, added: "I found this to be a fantastic way to explore new sporting activities and I gained a great sense of accomplishment throughout the day.

"The support from the PT staff and spectators was outstanding and we were incredibly grateful to the Gosling Foundation for supporting the event."

and mental health arranged.

A number of events were held to encourage social connection in a digital age, whilst allowing people to develop new skills or hone old ones.

Lessons were held in four different languages, sailors enjoyed chess clubs, debates, discussions of modern warfare theory, and had access to an extensive library.

Performance coaching was made available to the entire crew, and Chartered Management Institute accredited coaching courses were held for 60 people.

In all, some 300 sessions/activities were organised across the board – at no extra cost to the RN and all fitting around the carrier's operational programme.

"We launched Flagship Performance using the mantra of 'healthy body, healthy mind' to encourage ownership of physical and mental health, drive engagement with communal activity, and push an agenda of personal and professional development," said Lieutenant Commander Oliver Hounslow, Training Management Officer.

Picture: LPhoto Belinda Alker

## Danes look to RN's Reserve Forces for future growth and cooperation

LEADERS of the reserves in the Danish Navy visited Portsmouth to see how the UK Reserve Forces operate – and how the two allies can learn from one another.

Captain Steen Gravers and his team spent time both at Naval Headquarters on Whale Island and at the area's Royal Naval Reserve HQ, HMS King Alfred, based in the naval base.

Like the RN, the full time Royal Danish Navy – Søværnet – is supported by a force of reserves who are vital to the Service's successful functioning.

Unlike the Royal Navy however, the Danes only established their naval reserve in the past decade, whereas the reserve arm of the Senior Service goes back in various forms more than a century.

The visit provided an opportunity to share the best practices of both maritime reserve forces from the viewpoints of strategy, structure, training and motivation of personnel.

Captain Gravers met his British counterpart, Commodore Jo Adey, Commander Maritime Reserves, and the Royal Navy's People and Training

Director, Rear Admiral Jude Terry.

"Having worked intensely for a number of years building the Royal Danish Navy Reserve, it was time for us to be inspired by and to create better relations with a close ally and benchmark Navy Reserve," said Captain Gravers.

"Expectations were high and were more than fulfilled. We returned to Denmark with a catalogue of ideas and areas where we could collaborate further."

This was the first time the staffs of the two naval

reserves had conferred on such a scale – but it won't be the last.

"As NATO allies, the Royal Navies of Denmark and the United Kingdom work closely together around the globe every day, particularly in areas such as Maritime Trade Operations," said Commodore Adey.

"Each of our respective Reserve Forces are different in many ways, but there are many ideas and experiences we can share to find way to do our business better."



## Marines' 2024 promises to be 'no less exciting'

IN HIS end of year message to the Corps, Commandant General Royal Marines General Gwyn Jenkins RM (pictured chatting with commandos during their annual winter training in Norway) thanked members of the General Service, the Special Boat Service or the Band Service for their achievements throughout "another incredible year", hoping all found time "to pause, recharge, and reflect on what has been an incredible performance" with their families whose support has been vital to that success.

2023 again highlighted the unpredictable nature of global events. In a world already overshadowed by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, we have seen instability in Sudan, the Middle East and ongoing security concerns across the maritime environment.

Throughout all of this, Royal Marines have been front and centre, responding to these crises, delivering under the most extreme circumstances and demonstrating the highest standards of excellence.

Last year also afforded us the opportunity to celebrate: the Coronation of His Majesty the King – Our Captain General; the 50th anniversary of UKNLS0, reaffirming our longstanding relationship with the Netherlands Marine Corps, and continued close interoperability with the USMC.

Whether at sea or on land, in training or on operations, the Royal Marines have truly embodied the Defence purpose of protect the nation and help it prosper – and I am immensely proud of all you have achieved.

Behind every Marine is a network of support and strength, and I'd like to share my heartfelt gratitude for the sacrifices made by those who stand by our side and allow us to focus and succeed on operations.

To them, I send my deepest gratitude and admiration for the part they play in protecting our Nation.

As we look ahead to our 360th year, 2024 promises to be no less exciting.

While it's impossible to predict exactly where the Royal Marines will find themselves, rest assured, the warfighting Commando Force and expertise of the Royal Marines will be in high demand!

## 'We need more AT...'

CREW of HMS Iron Duke asked for help from the Deployable Regional Unit (DRU) on a visit to Stavanger to make the most of AT opportunities during a break from sea trials.

The challenging Norwegian environment allowed the DRU team to draw upon their wealth of AT experience, plan and lead various activities including summer mountaineering at Preikestolen (Pulpit Rock), Stand Up Paddleboarding (SUP) in Frafjord, plus indoor climbing. The range of activities, and the enviable Scandinavian landscape, allowed the participants to experience everything that AT can offer within a timeframe which delivered without impacting on the ship's programme.

For many younger members of the ship's company this was their first exposure to AT and provided an invaluable opportunity for them to develop not only physical but also leadership skills, while also providing a welcome respite to their daily routines on board.

The level of uptake saw more than one third of the ship's company participating and the provision of activities was well received – as evidenced by the comments of LH Hunter who said the Norwegian AT was "an exhilarating experience, challenging and an absolute must. The best time I have had

yet in the Navy!"

Ascending Pulpit Rock stood out as a highlight for many participants, rewarded with breathtaking views across Lysefjorden and stunning surroundings.

Moreover, the team enthusiastically embraced Frafjord's picturesque lakes during the SUP activities. Paddleboarding allowed the team to explore these serene waters, immersing themselves in the natural beauty of the area.

Additionally, the team delved into the world of indoor climbing, testing physical and mental abilities as they scaled walls, reinforcing camaraderie and mutual support. With its elements of strategy and strength, it provided an enriching experience which complemented the outdoor adventures.

WO Jamie McNeil Iron Duke's Executive Warrant Officer said the ship was delighted it had sought the DRU's input.

"For me it was the shared hardship and enjoyment that the team had at the same time, the bonding, encouragement and determination is what the service is about. Instilling the core values and challenging ourselves while building memories to look back on in years to come, will hopefully strengthen the retention of our sailors. We need more of this!"

# '...All part of a winning team...'

A BESPOKE forum set up by HMS Northumberland has scooped the Devonport-based warship a Women in Defence award... and improved life aboard for all 190 souls.

The Change Working Group, which comprises able and leading rates, senior ratings and lieutenants – and with a disproportionately high number of female members relative to the composition of the crew – was set up on board the frigate with a big ask: to help improve the lives of all aboard.

Twelve months after the group's inception the ship's forward thinking earned Northumberland the 'inclusive teamwork' title at the awards.

The ship has been heavily engaged on duties in home waters and the North Atlantic especially in 2022 and 2023.

As well as being deployed for eight months of both years, when not conducting anti-submarine and maritime security patrols, the ship has been a hive of activity undergoing ongoing maintenance, training and preparations for renewed activities – all of which puts a strain on her men and women.

The Change Working Group was set up in the autumn of 2022 to improve the 'lived experience' of shipmates (a happy workforce = more effective workforce).

The group was created specifically to give an equal voice to all ranks and ratings aboard, regardless of background, race or sex and all members are volunteers – often bringing experience from being part of other groups/networks such as the Naval Servicewomen's Network and Compass. In addition any member of the ship's company can attend one of the bi-monthly meetings.

Weapons Engineering Technician Charlotte 'Charlie' Vincent, who works in Northumberland's comms centre, followed her dad into the Royal Navy – although when he joined "it was a very male-dominated service".

She's delighted by the strides taken by the Service – and her ship since then.

"The role of women in the Royal Navy has only grown and no doubt will continue to do so, we have women working in all branches of the Royal Navy, on surface ships, submarines and aircraft, occupying positions from admirals to captains and warrant officers," Charlotte added.

"It's always good to see anyone join the Royal Navy – it truly gives you a life and experiences that you cannot get anywhere else. But it is amazing to see the amount of women who are joining up now compared to years ago."

The group has suggested ideas and changes which could be quickly and easily introduced by the command team on board such as

- creating an anonymous Diversity and Inclusion suggestion box – directly contributing to the inclusive nature of the ship as a whole;
- implementing a core working week which personnel can opt into on a weekly basis – significantly improving the work-life balance of the ship's company while in base port (of huge importance given the extended periods Northumberland has spent deployed);
- extending 'make and mends' for watchkeepers



Northumberland's Change Working Group collect their award on stage and (below) the RN attendees at the ceremony



(alongside and at sea) to reduce fatigue;

- adapting duty rosters to ensure parity;
- changing the working day during regeneration periods to improve the work-life balance for those who live ashore;
- improving information flow on board by creating regular updates for the ship's company while deployed to enhance the understanding of all on board of the ship's critical operations.

The improvements implemented via the Change Working Group have contributed significantly to the morale, resilience and, fundamentally, to the operational capability of the ship – and as a ship deployed on the front line of Royal Navy operations, the significance of that cannot be overstated.

The frigate was one of several RN units/individuals nominated for ten awards across the Armed Forces and supporting industry and civil service sectors – but the only one to come away from the prize evening in London, hosted by TV presenter Julia Bradbury.

"It's truly great to be a part of HMS Northumberland and to have our hard work and efforts recognised," said Electronic Warfare specialist Able Seaman Holly Toms.

"The ship has won a number of awards this month showing high competency in engineering and communications, but to win an award that stretches across the whole of the Defence community is a true honour.

"In Northumberland we are all

treated as equals working towards the same goals in the interests of our Nation's defence.

"Here we are all part of a winning team and it's great to see our efforts and hard work acknowledged."

Chef Samantha McDonald added: "It was a huge honour to be invited and to liaise with other women in Defence from so many other backgrounds. It was great to speak with other services and share our experiences."

The title was an honour which, says Northumberland's Commanding Officer, Commander Will Edwards-Bannon, is richly deserved.

"The original idea behind forming HMS Northumberland's Change Working Group was to create a novel means of empowering all ranks on board to make a difference to their ship, capitalising on the energy of those already involved in the ship's Naval Servicewomen Network as well as those who had not yet found their route to getting involved but were interested in doing so," he added.

"Since then, thanks to the creativity and effort of all those involved, the Change Working Group has not only initiated a series of practical improvements to life on board but it has also served as a shining example of the power of inclusivity, teamwork and engagement.

"I am incredibly proud that this team's achievements have been recognised on such a prestigious stage as the Women in Defence awards and am hugely grateful for the support of everyone who has made this possible."



## Paddle in Pacific for recovery

MEN and women in recovery from illnesses and injuries spent time in Hawaii to compete in an annual canoe race.

Sailors and Royal Marines from the Royal Navy Recovery Centre Hasler flew to Waikiki beach for the Na Koa Canoe Regatta as part of their rehabilitation.

The centre, based in Plymouth, supports individuals who are battling against serious illnesses and injuries and the visit to Hawaii gave them the chance to come together and work as a team in the race.

The group left the UK and flew to the Pacific destination via Los Angeles and 20 hours of flying, landing at Waikiki Beach and spending their first full day snorkelling and 'turtle spotting'. In the evening, they were hosted by their sponsors, Ed and Juliet Jesson, who provided funding for many of the event's participants. Ed is a former helicopter pilot in Vietnam and was interested in the group's stories of how they had overcome their obstacles.

As part of their visit, they visited Pearl Harbor where they were hosted by Retired Army Chaplain Commander Steven Jensen (Chaps) and also got a tour of the USS Missouri.

The final part of the day incorporated lunch at the aviation museum, kindly provided by Chaps, and an opportunity to gain first-hand experience of being a WW2 pilot caught in an aviation 'dog fight', courtesy of a computer-generated flight simulator.

With the sightseeing finished, it was time for RNRC Hasler to start training for the Na Koa Canoe Regatta. They entered two teams – a Royal Navy team and a Royal Marines team. The marines team found themselves in the water during the training after being flung from the boat on the return run of their practice race.

Although wet, they were not hurt and were able to rest before the first race the following day.

Despite having only a few days of practice, the teams did themselves proud and put up competitive times against some seasoned canoeists.

Unfortunately, this was not enough to qualify to the knockout rounds, where some teams posted unbelievably quick times.

The final day allowed time for reflection and an opportunity to unwind before flying back. Some of the participants had bought members of their family out to enjoy the experience. This also allowed them to feel part of the 'RNRC Hasler family'.

The Hasler family is unique as it incorporates a collection of individuals who are involved in their own personal battles against serious illnesses and injuries. However, in consequence of this, they all share a kindred spirit and the way in which each person overcomes their personal obstacles inspires the others in turn.



Unbelievable, Jack...

WE DON'T normally trumpet a new member joining the Royal Naval Association.

Serving personnel, veterans, families, associate members join the 18,500-plus members in almost 250 branches in the UK and beyond every month.

But it's highly unlikely any have played top-flight football. Or played at Wembley. Or managed Football League side. Or appeared on live TV for more than 20 years as one of the nation's best-loved football pundits like Chris Kamara.

What you may not know is that the RN gave Chris a springboard to that career.

The 65-year-old, who's just published his latest memoir *Kammy - he's pictured above signing a copy for RNA Engagement officer Dave MacAskill in a Portsmouth bookshop* - was spotted by scouts as a young midfielder playing for the RN back in 1974.

Pompey offered the Navy £200 - about £2,500 in today's money - to buy the teenager out of his contract with the Senior Service.

Chris' RN career was brief. He joined at 16 under pressure from his dad, an ex-seafarer, completed basic training at HMS Raleigh before moving on to HMS Vernon, the then home of mine warfare in Portsmouth.

Already an adept footballer playing for Middlesbrough Boys before he signed up, he quickly found his way into the RN side. And the rest is history.

Chris was on the books of Pompey before his 17th birthday... and playing first-team football at Fratton Park before he was 18.

Nearly half a century later, he remains grateful for the opportunity the Navy gave him.

"Once a matelot always a matelot - it doesn't go away," he says. "I've got a lot to thank Pompey for."

And now, as the member of the Royal Naval Association, he's got access to a life-long community of like-minded and supportive individuals, supporting serving and ex-personnel through life's highs and lows. And enjoying a good smattering of laughs and dits along the way.

"We are very excited to have Chris 'onboard' he is a truly inspirational sportsman," said RNA Chief Executive Bill Olyphant.

"Our membership spans all ages, all interests and is based all over the world and are delighted that Chris has come back to his Naval roots."

If you fancy following in Kammy's footsteps and joining the RNA, visit <https://royal-naval-association.co.uk/join-us/>



# 'Terry would have been delighted...'

YOU probably won't recognize the address - 103 Maison Dieu Road, Dover.

But thanks to historians, you will know one of the Navy's greatest 20th Century leaders was born there.

Better known today by locals as the presbytery of the neighbouring St Paul's Roman Catholic Church, in 1920, as Moray House, it was birthplace of Terence Thornton Lewin, now marked with a Blue Plaque courtesy of the Dover Society.

Six decades later, as Admiral of the Fleet Sir Terence - known by friends as Terry or TTL - Lewin steered the nation's armed forces through the Falklands War, the most senior of a remarkable triumvirate of outstanding naval officers in key positions during the 1982 conflict (First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Henry Leach and Commander-in-Chief Fleet Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse).

Sir Henry famous told Mrs Thatcher that Britain could - and should - act to liberate the islands, words echoed by the Chief of Defence Staff was half a world away in New Zealand at the time of the Argentine invasion.

On his return to the UK, Sir Terry was equally resolute to the War Cabinet: "We must be prepared to take losses. But we are not going to lose. The only thing which will make us lose is if you lose your nerve."

On June 14 1982, both admirals were proven right after the short, but bitter battle to liberate the Falklands.

Victory alone would earn Sir Terry a place in history, but it barely scratches the surface of his naval career.

He joined the Royal Navy a year before World War 2 was declared in September 1939, served in HMS Belfast's (very brief) first commission then struck up a lifelong friendship with Prince Philip of Greece (the future Duke of Edinburgh) aboard battleship HMS Valiant.



His wartime service took him to the hottest (and coldest) hotspots including the Arctic (he took part in 12 Russian convoys) and the relief of the Malta (Operation Pedestal) in August 1942.

After the war he commanded the destroyer Corunna, the Royal Yacht Britannia, the Dartmouth Frigate Squadron and the carrier HMS Hermes.

When the Falklands were invaded he was the nation's senior military figure, sitting in the cabinet of then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

He retired from the military the following year, after victory had been delivered and spent his retirement championing naval history and heritage (he was especially interested in Captain Cook). He died in 1999 aged 78.

103 years to the day of his birth, members of the Dover Society, civic dignitaries, clergy and Dover Sea Cadets (pictured) gathered at the admiral's birthplace to see the memorial plaque unveiled.

His son Tim was especially moved by the occasion.

"The Sea Cadets provided a side party to pipe the unveiling, a gesture Terry would have been delighted with.

"When he was sent home after being diagnosed with terminal cancer my niece, who had been a Sea Cadet, piped him back into his house."



# A fine century under two flags

THERE can be no finer way for a sailor to celebrate a birthday than surrounded by comrades, enjoying a tot, cake and the odd naval anecdote.

And at 100 years old, Captain Rolfe Monteith probably has more than a few from service under two flags.

In a distinguished career spanning nearly 30 years, the officer served in both British and Canadian warships through the hardest days of WW2 through to the challenges of the Cold War.

Originally from Ontario, he arrived in the UK in 1941 to begin his officer training - alongside 30 fellow Canadians - at Britannia Royal Naval College.

Dartmouth acted as the alma mater not merely for officers joining the Royal Navy and those of the Dominions including New Zealand, South Africa and India, but also volunteers from occupied Norway, Denmark, Belgium and France.

In late 1943 Capt Monteith (pictured inset) was assigned to new destroyer HMS Hardy at Scapa Flow to complete his training through practical experience on an operational warship.

In mid-October, Hardy sailed with Canadian ships HMCS Haida and HMCS Iroquois and the destroyers HMS Janus and HMS Vigilant, as escort to the battleship HMS Anson, carrying a relief garrison to the remote Norwegian island of Spitsbergen - more than 500 miles north of the North Cape.

"These Arctic Convoy trips were dangerous affairs, on route to Murmansk and Archangel we fell under almost constant surveillance by the Germans," Capt Monteith recalled.

"Being in the engineering branch, I naturally came to the attention of the squadron engineer, who insisted I operate all the machinery in the ship, even if a compartment were blacked out.

"It was an invaluable lesson in damage control, especially on the convoys from Scapa Flow to Russia where we could expect attacks by German U-boats and Luftwaffe aircraft at any time."

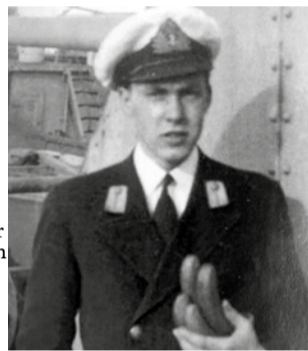
His draft to Hardy ended in the final days of 1943. Barely a month later, the destroyer was hit by a German torpedo. HMS Venus took off survivors before sinking the hulk, but 35 of the Canadian's former shipmates were lost.

From a relatively small force of barely 1,800 officers and men crewing just 11 fighting vessels at the outbreak of World War 2, by the war's end the Royal Canadian Navy was the fifth largest fleet. Canadians sank more than 30 U-boats, and seized or destroyed over 40 surface ships at a cost of 33 vessels and 1,797 souls.

After the war, he continued in service and retrained as an air engineer in the Royal Canadian Navy, going on to serve as air engineer officer on aircraft carrier HMCS Magnificent, then as project manager for the Canadian hydrofoil project and as Director of Fleet Maintenance.

He left the RCN in 1970, emigrated to the UK, eventually settling in Devonport, and worked with Babcock until 1983, and thereafter as a private consultant, travelling the world on behalf of British industry.

Capt Monteith was surprised on his milestone birthday by Devonport Naval Base Commander Brigadier Mike Tanner and Captain of the Base Captain David Preece (pictured above), who presented the centenarian with a cake and a specially-labelled bottle of Rum, produced by one of the staff at the Naval Base.



# Tragic Grimsby trawler honoured

THE 12 crew of a trawler blown up with all hands have been honoured in the boat's spiritual home thanks to the efforts of a Royal Navy sailor.

Petty Officer Richard Jones has made it his mission to research and highlight tragedies up and down the land - notably train crashes and disasters at sea - by producing a slew of books or erecting/restoring monuments.

The bitter fate of His Majesty's Trawler Othello - which spent most of its life catching fish, operating out of Grimsby - caught the eye of the senior rating, by day a weapons engineer based in the Portsmouth area, last year.

Richard, who hails from Bridlington, succeeded in installing a memorial to the Yorkshire Belle in his hometown last summer.

The Yorkshire Belle was a pre-war pleasure cruiser which, like the trawler, was converted into a patrol vessel to meet the demands of wartime.

The two vessels were carrying out a patrol of the Humber Estuary in April 1941 when they struck mines and were destroyed.

No man on either vessel survived - 21 men in all, though four bodies from the Belle were recovered.

Othello's crew, drawn from across the Royal Navy, are remembered on the three Naval Memorials, especially the one in Chatham, while the boat herself is listed on the Royal Naval Patrol Service Memorial in Grimsby docks.

Next to it there's now a blue plaque mounted on stone, funded by UK Operational Support Services Ltd, as a dedicated monument to Othello.

Richard's just published his 20th book, *Lost at Sea in Mysterious Circumstances*, which focuses on individuals, ships and aircraft - some famous such as aviatrix Amelia Earhart, band leader Glenn Miller, the Mary Celeste and airliner MH370, others less so, like three Hull trawlers lost at sea in January and February 1968.

He's hoping to write a book on the Othello-Yorkshire Belle tragedy, though tracing relatives of the men lost after more than 80 years to give the human story of the loss has proved difficult.

Any connected with the two vessels of the Royal Naval personnel on board either vessel can contact him at [shipwreckdata@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:shipwreckdata@yahoo.co.uk).

# Raleigh good turn-out

EIGHTEEN former ratings and guests witnessed the newest recruits pass into the Navy - as they themselves had done decades earlier - at the latest 'veterans' return' to HMS Raleigh.

Ex-matelots who joined up between 1949 to 1985 took advantage of the new initiative which allows them to take a trip down memory lane - and cheer on a new generation of sailors as they complete their basic training.

Space is limited. Contact [christopher.ceary680@mod.gov.uk](mailto:christopher.ceary680@mod.gov.uk) for details.



MANOEUVRING at speed, her funnels belching white puffs of smoke which drift lazily through the sky over the South China Sea, Britain's newest battleship is captured on camera by high-altitude German bombers.

She has no more than two hours to live.

In December 1941, the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales and the battle-cruiser Repulse, lost in the same action of Malaya, stunned a British people still shocked by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

More than 80 years later, the loss of two capital ships on the same day – and with them 840 souls – still resonates in today's Senior Service.

Which is why HMS Spey paused to pay her respects – the first RN vessel to pass over the wrecks since the Pandemic.

Eighty-four poppies – one for every ten men killed – were cast into the water.

Dispatched in a bid to halt the Japanese invasion of the Malay peninsula, the two ships – which formed the kernel of the Royal Navy's Force Z task group – were overwhelmed by enemy aircraft around 80 miles east of Kuantan.

HMS Prince of Wales sits 233ft (70m) and HMS Repulse 183ft

(55m) below the surface, both are internationally-recognised war graves.

Lieutenant Commander Bridget Macnae, Spey's Executive Officer, said it was an "absolute honour" for the patrol ship's 50 crew to honour the fallen, a ceremony which bookended the UK's traditional period of remembrance.

"As we remember them, we also pause to remember those that perished and give thought to those who survived the tragedy and lived on with the difficult memories of the loss of their friends throughout their lives.

The Royal Navy will honour their memory for evermore."

Engineering Technician James 'Pat' Patterson cast 84 poppy leaves into the sea from a hand-woven rope basket made onboard, while Spey's First Lieutenant Lieutenant Commander Rebecca Deakin RN committed two paper-crafted flowers – handmade from maritime

charts, each bearing a crest of the lost ships.

"Being deployed on patrol across the Indo-Asia Pacific, we are all very conscious onboard Spey that we have the opportunity to pay our respects to the sacrifices made by our fellow serviceman so far from home," said Leading Hand Andrew 'Drew' MacClean, who researched the history of the tragedy and outlined the course of the battle for his shipmates during the memorial service.

"With Remembrance Day having just passed, it is such a privilege to pause and give thought to those sailors and marines at rest in these waters."

# POPPIES FOR THE MEN OF FORCE Z



Present-day images: Lt Cdr Shaun Roster, HMS Spey

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# Cadets remember the fallen



THOUSANDS of Sea Cadets joined their communities to remember those who gave their life for their country, taking part in parades, poppy appeals and ceremonies at war memorials, cenotaphs and churches across the country.

Whitehaven Sea Cadets teamed up with cadets from 1030 Whitehaven Squadron Air Training Corps and the Whitehaven and Cleator Moor Army Cadet Force detachments to sell poppies in Whitehaven town centre and raise funds for the Royal British Legion Poppy appeal.

"The support shown by the community to the Poppy Appeal was incredible," said CPO (SCC) Stuart McCourt, Commanding Officer of Whitehaven Sea Cadets.

"We had many former servicemen and women come over to engage with the cadets and thank them."

Whitehaven Unit also took part in Remembrance services in their home town as well as the neighbouring town of Cleator Moor.

"Our cadets were honoured to be involved in significant positions, including a sentry for the Whitehaven Cenotaph, wreath layers at both events and one of our cadets was standard bearer for our local Royal British Legion branch as well as bearing our own standard."

Junior Cadet Kaleb, 11, said: "I'm really thankful to be able to take part in the event and be able to pay our respects."

OC Yasemin, 15, added: "Laying the wreath at Whitehaven was a privilege for me. I always feel that Remembrance Day is a big one for me, not only for our Sea Cadets Unit, but to be able to march alongside other cadets from different forces and veterans."

Scarborough's Acts of Remembrance were well supported across the town.

A morning service took place at Oliver's Mount, followed by wreaths being laid at the foot of the monument. The Laying of Poppies on the Sea Remembrance Service also took place at the church, which was attended by young and old, veterans and serving personnel.

Scarborough Unit's marching band led the parade that followed before the concluding service at the lifeboat house and the scattering of poppies on the sea. Large numbers of people congregated to join in the service, which was delivered from the lifeboat slipway.

"Scarborough Unit paraded and did the unit and the wider Sea Cadets proud," said Bob Smith, Chair of the Unit.

"I received many positive comments from the public and various veterans who were in

attendance."

AC Charlotte, 15, who played the trumpet at the parade, said: "I know that this day has great meaning to a lot of people, so we work hard as a unit to get it right, it's one of our major parades of the year."

"I saw a few people that I knew amongst the general public, and it feels nice that they come out to support Remembrance Day and show their respect."

Sheffield Sea Cadets put on a spectacular Remembrance Day parade through Sheffield City Centre.

"I'm really proud of our cadets and staff and we received fantastic feedback from members of the public and local veterans," said SLt (SCC) Chris Camps, Officer in Charge of Sheffield Unit.

"Our sea cadets, Royal Marines cadets and junior cadets attended multiple events across the Remembrance weekend to pay respects to past and present members of the Armed Forces."

"When I laid the reef, I felt a sense of honour and pride," said Sam, 13 from Sheffield Unit.

Heavy rain did not put off a large crowd attending the annual parade in Evesham. Evesham Sea Cadets took part in the parade which began on the High Street, made its way down Bridge Street and concluded in front of the War Memorial in Abbey Park.

Senior Cadet Tom, 14, said: "I thought the wreath laying at Evesham War Memorial was poignant and respectful and it was nice to see so many people all come together to commemorate our fallen."

The Leamington Sea Cadets Band led the Bengworth Parade, which saw organisations from across Warwickshire get involved.

"Leamington & Warwick Unit have been leading the parade with our unit band for several years now and our cadets are very proud of this," said CPO (SCC) Paul Freeman, Officer in Charge of Leamington & Warwick Unit.

"This year, we have the great honour of laying a reef on behalf of veterans who were too ill or infirm to take part as well as our own reef."

Cadet Megan (11) said: "It was great to see lots of different youth groups at the Remembrance Parade."

London Area cadets attended the Royal British Legion's Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall while Eton Sea Cadets attended the Windsor Remembrance Service.

Romsey held one of its biggest ever Remembrance Sunday parades this year, in which Romsey Unit played a prominent role.



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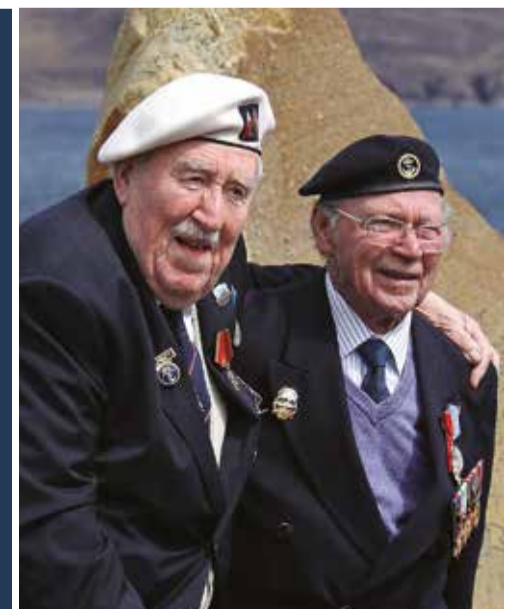
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## King's award for volunteer work

MARYPORT & Solway Sea Cadets Unit has been awarded the King's Award for Voluntary Service – the highest award possible for a local voluntary group.

The hard-working and committed group of Sea Cadets volunteers based in Maryport's King Street, will receive the award crystal from the Lord-

Lieutenant of Cumbria Alexander Scott in summer. Two of their lucky volunteers will also get to attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace in May and June 2024.

Mark Dawson, Maryport and Solway unit's chairman, said: "I am excited and honoured that our work has been recognised.

"This prestigious award is also thanks to the fantastic support of the entire community for their local Sea Cadets unit over many years.

"I would like to give a huge thanks to our wonderful volunteers for all their passion, enthusiasm and the many hours they put into creating a fun and safe environment for our young people to learn, develop skills and thrive in."

The Commanding Officer of Maryport & Solway Sea Cadets, Lieutenant Claire Bostel, said: "I am especially pleased to receive this award for all our current and former cadets.

"They should feel rightly proud of their contribution to the unit and to the community which has now been recognised by the King himself."

Parent Janine praised the unit for the support they have given to her child.

"The Sea Cadets volunteers supported my daughter through her rehabilitation process after her mobility issues prevented her from her first career choice with the Royal Navy," she said.

"They encouraged and challenged

her to become a cadet paddlesports instructor, which she achieved.

"It's also thanks to them that she was successful in securing a marine engineering apprenticeship.

"She is now a volunteer at the unit, providing the same support to the young people as she received herself"

Based in King Street, Maryport, Cumbria, the unit was originally established in 1967 in the Solway Firth, before moving to the town of Maryport in 1981 under the name of Maryport & Solway Sea Cadets Unit.

Maryport & Solway Unit is one of 262 local charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups to receive the prestigious award this year.

Equivalent to an MBE, The King's Award for Voluntary Service aims to recognise outstanding

work by local volunteer groups to benefit their communities.

The award was created in 2002 to celebrate Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee.



## Cadets create stunning poppy display for RBL

PETERBOROUGH Sea Cadets paid tribute to the servicemen and women who made the ultimate sacrifice during the Great War through the creation of a large poppy display.

More than 500 hand-made poppies have been used to create the stunning artwork inspired by the former Tower of London display.

The staff and cadets put in many hours of hard work to make the display, which was seen flying high from the unit building's mast, draping all the way down to the ground.

The eye-catching cascade of hundreds of red poppies was displayed at their unit premises on Old Customs House at Town Bridge, one of Peterborough's busiest roads.

The effect proved particularly striking at night, when the poppy display was all lit up, causing curious passers-by to stop and take a look and drivers to slow down to admire it.

The display, which took months of effort to create in order to be ready for Remembrance Day, aimed to raise funds for the Royal British Legion's annual Poppy Appeal.

PO (SCC) Matt Millington, the Commanding Officer of Peterborough Sea Cadets, explained that this initiative means a lot to the adults and cadets at the unit.

"We have around 500 poppies in the display," he said.

"They have all been made by members of the group out of the bottom of plastic bottles. We have done a lot of work with the Royal British Legion in the past, and we had a cascade coming out of the window last year.

"I wanted to do something even more spectacular this year, and we came up with the idea of putting the cascade on the mast. It has taken about six months to do, and everyone has been involved.

What inspired the idea to make the poppy display? "The original idea last year came from the cascade that was at the Tower of London," said PO (SCC) Millington.

"I am now looking at what we can do next year – possibly wrapping the whole building in poppies."

Peterborough Unit cadets also attended the launch of



the Poppy Appeal in Peterborough to show their support.

At the time of publishing, the unit had raised £377 towards their £600 goal in favour of the RBL Peterborough branch.

"Any donation is a help towards a great

cause and will go to support veterans in the local area," it states on their fundraising page.

If you would like to contribute to this appeal visit [gofundme.com/f/remembrance-for-the-royal-british-legion-2023](https://www.gofundme.com/f/remembrance-for-the-royal-british-legion-2023)

## Westminster visit to see local MP

DOZENS of cadets from TS Brilliant Tunbridge Wells Sea Cadets visited their local MP Greg Clark at the Palace of Westminster.

The group included members of the unit management team, staff and cadets.

On arrival the cadets were met by Mr Clark who thanked them for their community service over many years and congratulated them on their turn out over Remembrance weekend.

He then gave a tour of the House of Commons and explained its working.

The cadets asked questions and then Mr Clark presented badges and awards in Westminster Hall.

The unit said: "We are grateful to Mr Clark and his team for making us so welcome, also to South East Trains and Crowborough Royal British Legion for sponsoring the travel to and from Parliament."



# WHERE EAGLES DARE

TO MARK the 50th anniversary of one of the most iconic of offshore sailing races in the world, the Rolex Fastnet Race, the Royal Navy Offshore sailing team entered two yachts to join the record 430 boats attempting to tackle the infamous endurance event.

These boats were YOYO, the newly acquired Sunfast 3600 owned by the Royal Naval Sailing Association with a crew of seven sailors who had trained together and raced together for much of the season, and Eagle of Hornet a Comfortina 42 Sail Training Craft owned by the Joint Service Adventure Sailing Training Centre and sailed by a crew who dedicated a week to training immediately prior to the race in order to develop the skills and teamwork required to be safe and competitive.

Both teams consisted of a wide range of ranks, rates and specialisations; from a Lt Cdr WEO to an AB2 Sea Spec and a wide range of racing experience; from a seasoned skipper completing his tenth to multiple people who had never completed the race before.

Race day dawned and it was a blustery day with very strong gusts and sustained wind speeds on the start line of 20kts.

The Solent was an awe-inspiring sight with boats of all shapes and sizes, from the most modern multihulls who expected to complete the 695 nautical mile event in under three days to the large single hull boats specifically designed for ocean racing and much smaller boats which were expecting to spend up to a week battling the elements.

Storm sails and reefs were the order of the day with palatable tension and excitement as thousands of spectators gathered on Cowes seafront for the start on the historic Royal Yacht Squadron line.

With both boats 'clear' on the line, the 2023 Fastnet race began and the crews strapped in (quite literally) for a bumpy start to proceedings.

All competitors knew they were in for an intense 24 hours that would make or break their race.

As the race proceeded towards the Hurst Narrows (the Eastern entrance to the Solent), a 30kt head wind met a Solent in full ebb and a vicious 'wind over tide' sea state developed.

Leaving the relative shelter provided by land, the race progressed into the channel where winds of 40-45kts (a F9 or Severe Gale) and five to six metre waves combined with heavy rain.

Overnight the fleet was badly hit, within 24 hours over 100 yachts had retired with one sinking, four losing their masts (including unfortunately YOYO which was brought to a safe haven with an excellent display of seamanship and no injuries) and multiple suffering from other forms of damage.

HM Coastguard responded to some 28 incidents in the first stages of the race. Not knowing the fate of their team mates, Eagle battled on through what was described by Skipper Lt Cdr Dave Cummings as "the worst weather" he has ever seen on a Fastnet race, and this was his 10th.

Displaying a sound level of seamanship, the decision was taken to find shelter and navigator SLt Reece McCarthy was charged with finding a safe haven while waves battered the boat, the crew sheltered in the cockpit for protection and the helm struggled to hold a course or indeed their feet.

Portland, a historic Naval sanctuary was the ideal place and the boat proceeded in ensuring the crew could catch its breath, take stock and hopefully allow for the weather to abate.

Day two dawned and although the weather was calmer,

the scars from the previous night were visible across the marina and Team Eagle contemplated a return to the race.

With over 600 nautical miles still to go, committing to returning to face the elements wasn't easy.

Displaying great courage and determination and having been firmly bitten by the indescribable bug that makes this competition great, Eagle slipped the marina and returned to the fleet.

With a large number of boats still visible it was clear a lot of boats had decided that discretion was definitely the better form of valour and had also sought shelter through the storm.

As Eagle passed Portland Bill the team started to hear the news of YOYO and the others, being the only Navy team left standing only strengthened Eagle's resolve. Onwards to The Rock.

Passing the Scillies, it was now a dash to the famous Fastnet Rock and the literal turning point of the race.

Entering the Irish Sea, more misfortune (and highly ironically)...no wind! Utterly becalmed, Eagle spent a tortuous 50 nautical miles doing little more than floating in approximately the right direction ultimately costing some 12 hours onto the finish time.

Thankfully the wind filled and good progress was made.

Passing Fastnet Rock in daylight with an iconic (and obligatory) Rock Phat, the team were heartened to know the hardest part of the race was done and they were on the homeward stretch.

Unbelievably the weather rapidly deteriorated again and once again it was time for storm sailing and a crew braced for some more challenging sailing.

The weather was like most of the crew had never experienced before but such is what makes Offshore Sailing so interesting and addictive. Through pure grit, determination and courage Team Eagle battled hard, once again passing the Scillies and on to Cherbourg.

Just before midnight on 28 July, after 6 days, 8 hours, 33 minutes and 5 seconds, Eagle of Hornet crossed the finishing line. Having sailed over 700 nautical miles, they had achieved what proved insurmountable for so many.

The second UK Armed Forces boat into Cherbourg and one of only three to actually complete the race, the delights of Cherbourg awaited with the crew making it just in time for the legendary Rolex Fastnet finishing party.

The Royal Navy Offshore Sailing Team competes in an exciting array of events every year. 2022 saw a team taking part in the Caribbean 600 race, numerous Royal Ocean Racing Club Offshore Sailing races around the British Isles and Northern Europe and high profile regattas such as Cowes Week and the Royal Dartmouth Regatta. Future plans include Cork Week, a sports tour to New Zealand and much more besides.

If you are interested in representing the Royal Navy at Offshore sailing or want more information, we are always looking for new sailors of all ranks and rates. Visit [www.RNSA.org.uk](http://www.RNSA.org.uk) or email [rcoffshore@rnsa.net](mailto:rcoffshore@rnsa.net). The Royal Naval Sailing Association is a charity dedicated to encouraging serving sailors to the sport of Offshore sailing.

HMSTC Eagle of Hornet: Skipper – Lt Cdr Dave Cummings RN, Mate – WO1 Jason West, Navigator – SLt Reece McCarthy. Crew – Lt Gemma Winterton RN, SLt Quinn Squires, OC David Calder, LH Alex Bixby and AB Kalem Cutts.

SV YOYO: Skipper – Lt Vincent Pieterz RN, Mate – SLt Henry Wilson, Crew – LNN Kat Jay, Lt Cdr Maddy Win RNZN, SLt David Jackson, SLt Doug Calder.



The crew of the Eagle of Hornet

# ROWERS FROM ALL OVER THE GLOBE

THE Royal Navy Indoor Rowing Championships 2023 were conducted as a hybrid event, with live racing hosted at HMS Temeraire and those deployed and unable to attend submitting remote performances prior to the live event.

Consequently 50 'ergers' competed in 82 race slots: 45x 2000m, 37x 500m of which 29 raced 'live'.

Almost the entire contingent of 'medics' deployed in the Middle East competed.

Whilst there were some world-class age group performances, there were also significant achievements by others new to this demanding sport, with many setting seasonal and personal bests.

Race categories and medal opportunities incorporated Men/Women, Hwt/Lwt within 10-year age group ranges.

Trophies were awarded to fastest Men & Women, Hwt & Lwt, Masters (>40) & Seniors (<40).

Fastest RN Woman over 2k was Rachel Aldridge (RNRA) with 7 mins 07.1 secs, in the W Hwt 30-39 to take the Senior 2k trophy.

Fastest Master Woman was CPO Claire Drew (JHGS) in 7 mins 45.3 secs (40-49). Musn Nicola Perry (CTC RM Band) was the fastest Women Lwt over 2k with a time of 8 mins 24.7 secs (20-29) taking the Women's Senior 2K trophy.

Seasoned Men's Lwt performers Surg Capt Dan Connor (JHGS) in 50-59 and WO1 Mark Branson (Sultan) in 60+,

both rowed world class 2k times of 6 mins 54.3 secs and 7 mins 17.3 secs respectively), with the former taking the Masters 2k Lwt Trophy. Emerging talent POMT George Hall (JHGS) was a welcome addition to the men's Lwt category where he rowed an excellent time of 6 mins 53.4 secs (20-29) as the fastest senior 2k racer, having made significant 'deployed' gains under the mentoring of Surg Capt Connor.

Some stunning performances were set in the men's Hwt 2k, with CSgts James Wade (30 Cdo) and Gareth Evans (JFC Naples) rowing 6 mins 07.1 secs and 6 mins 22.5 secs respectively (40-49). This was not unexpected from Wade a former age group World Champion and regular medallist at all events. Evans was making his erg race debut and has significant improvement potential to win medals at national and international levels. Lt Cdr Stu Moss (Sultan) was another former age group world championships multi medallist, winning the 50-59 age group in a time of 6 mins 26.2 secs. Lt Sam Cass (820 Sqn) was the fastest men's Hwt senior, racing in the 30-39 age group, he rowed an excellent lifetime best of 6 mins 10.2 secs, sending a message to Wade that the preserve of the fastest RN 2k might come under challenge in the near future.

500m erg sprints present a slightly different physiological challenge as time appears to extend exponentially, beyond the realm of possibility, over the last 150m. High level

performances (mins:secs) were set by men's Hwts: Wade (1.21.5 secs), Lt Josh Berg (RNR, 1.23.4, 30-39, Moss (1.25.9), but surpassed in 'normalised equivalence' by Mr Plymouth 1992 CPO Collin Leiba (FOST SMQ) who rowed a time of 1 min 25.9 secs in his 60+ age group. For Lwts: Hall rowed 1.33.2, Branson 1.35.7, Connor 1.33.1 (!) to win their age groups, with LMT Lee McPherson (RCDM) winning the 30-39 in 1.35.7.

The Women's 500m Hwt categories saw wins for Lt Mia Richardson (Drake) 1.44.7, Musn Hayley Holgate (CTCRM Band) 2.15.7 and PO Emily Fray (RFA Lyme Bay) 1.46.9, with the only contested Lwt win taken by Perry 1.55.7 in the 20-29 category.

Special plaudits are due to the eight racers deployed on Exercise Omani Wolfe who won 13 medals/trophies.

CSgt James Wade was the deserved recipient of the annual Doug Wylie Memorial Award for 'Courage and Commitment', in recognition of his outstanding race and time trial performances, winning World Championship medals and the Global Indoor Rowers League (IRL) overall title in 2022/23. Consistently rowing sub 6 mins 05 secs 2k times, his long-term structured training is focused on a sub 6 mins 2k.

RN Indoor Rowing POC: [paul.winton177@mod.gov.uk](mailto:paul.winton177@mod.gov.uk)



# CELEBRATING ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE

## WITH THE CHURCHILL MEDAL AWARD 2023

THE annual Churchill Medal Award (CMA) ceremony was held on Thursday 2 November 2023 at IET London: Savoy Place.

The Churchill Medal Award is an emblem of excellence in engineering and technical advancement, awarded annually for engineering and innovation in the Armed Forces and MOD on behalf of the Joint Professional Engineering Institutions (PEIs).

The award was first given in 1952 by the Society of Engineers as their most prestigious accolade. This distinguished award pays honour to those who have made outstanding contributions to the realm of engineering and technology, particularly in support of military operations and readiness. This year, there were a remarkable array of nominations, leading to the selection of five exceptionally deserving finalists.

The mission of the Joint PEIs is to inspire the broader public to join the engineering and technology industry, thereby advancing the global engineering community. Our finalists have not only left an indelible mark in their respective domains but have also enriched the entire engineering world.

This year's Churchill Medal was won by HMS AUDACIOUS & C-Squadron DTXG Main Vent Repair Team, Submarine Service and Diving and Threat Exploitation Group, The Royal Navy.

HMS AUDACIOUS' unprecedented 11-month Mediterranean Deployment was in direct response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. They were tasked to repair the recurrent failures faced by the main vent operating mechanisms inside partially flooded main ballast tanks as these defects significantly impacted AUDACIOUS' ability to safely conduct covert operations.

In addition to the environmental constraints, AUDACIOUS had to remain within a fixed readiness profile throughout, which meant the team had to be able to fully revert the system or complete the repair within a limited timeframe to enable sailing. This tremendous technical challenge required significant adaptations to existing processes and the generation of bespoke procedures. Similar repairs had only ever previously been attempted in a UK dry dock, with full access into the main ballast tanks for specialist technicians to work on the mechanisms. From arrival to completion of testing, the entire process was completed in 19 days. In successfully conducting these highly complex operations underwater, the team ensured that AUDACIOUS



### ADVERTORIAL

remained in theatre delivering vital National Tasking for a further six months.

This year's exceptional finalists were:

- Staff Sergeant Charlie Pengilly, Corps of Royal Engineers, The British Army
- High Risk Operations Cell, The Royal Air Force
- 1710 NAS Data Exploitation Team - comprising a team of three from The Royal Navy, and one Ministry of Defence Civil Servant within 1710 Naval Air Squadron

- Lieutenant Commander Anthony Gilroy, The Royal Navy

We congratulate all the finalists and the winning team and would like to thank all who attended this year's ceremony and contributed to the evening being a huge success.

To see more about the Churchill Medal Award or if you'd like to find out about IET membership for the Armed Forces, please visit [theiet.org/armed-forces](http://theiet.org/armed-forces).

The Churchill Medal is awarded jointly by the Institution of Engineering and Technology, Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST), the Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS), the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE), the Institution of Royal Engineers (InstRE), the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE), the Society of Operations Engineers (SOE) and the British Computer Society (BCS).

The Institution of Engineering and Technology is registered as a Charity in England and Wales (No. 211014) and Scotland (No. SC038698). Futures Place, Kings Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG1 2UA, United Kingdom.

# HISTORIC CAMPAIGN FOR TURBOCHARGED KARTERS

THE Royal Navy Royal Marines Karting Team won an historic 41 trophies during a stellar 2023 campaign as they laid down the gauntlet for next term.

In 2022 the team, under new manager PO Liam Waterhouse, performed superbly, with two drivers finishing in 2nd place in the Armed Forces Karting Championship and the team as a whole narrowly missing out by one point on the constructors' title.

Galvanised by those efforts, the team based at RNAS Yeovilton wanted to surpass 2022's achievements and solidify their reputation as the team to beat in the AFKC. That is exactly what they have done in spectacular fashion, winning five of six titles: The AFKC Endurance Championship, Premier Class Championship, Station and Unit Trophy, AFKC Hard Charge Trophy and the Inter-Services Cup.

In the Premier Class, LH Sam Cresswell of 815 Naval Air Squadron clinched the title, a first for the RNRM team.

In the Endurance Championship, PO Waterhouse and veteran Craig Beesley finished first while LH Cresswell and LH Matthew Chambers made it an RNRM one-two, claiming second overall. The latter pairing were awarded the Hard Charge Trophy, after impressively gaining 90 positions over the course of the campaign.

LH Andrew Grant, LCpl George Garrett (CTCRM), Mne Alex Simmonds (43 Cdo) and LH Tom Shelton (815 NAS) also finished in the top 10, with karts #48, #49 and #89 all making significant contributions, securing trophies in numerous races. This collective effort resulted in the team's first ever victory in the Station and Unit Trophy by a dominant margin of 53 points to the next team.

The final round saw the RNRM's top four karts pitted against the top four from the Royal Air Force (RAF) and Army teams for the Inter-Services Trophy.

Despite the RAF and Army having a combined pool of 17 teams to select their drivers from as opposed to one, the RNRM team pulled through to score the most points on the day.

One of the only trophies/awards not won by the RNRM team was the Super Category Trophy.

However, Kart #47 driven in the 85KG+ class by LH Andrew Grant, LCpl George Garrett and LH Ollie Suatt (815 NAS) was leading the SC championship halfway through the season until unfortunately the drivers deployed and were unable to race.



Had it not been for deployments the team would have no doubt clenched the SC Trophy as they have in previous years.

The AFKC has become the largest endurance karting series in the country, featuring 55 karts with a team of two drivers competing across seven rounds held at locations dotted around the UK - Dorset, North-East Scotland, London, Lincolnshire, South Wales, Cumbria and

Oxfordshire.

Although logistically demanding, team cohesion was evident throughout the season, as they managed to average an impressive six kart entries per round, solidifying their position as the largest contingent for a single team in the paddock.

This year also saw an impressive 31 different drivers from varying RNRM bases throughout

the year which has resulted in highest number of participants in a given season to date, showcasing the team's improving depth and diversity.

The team would like to thank the continuous support from the Royal Navy Royal Marines Motorsports Association (RNRMMSA), RNRMC and RN & RM Sports Lottery that allow the team to continue to compete successfully against RAF & Army counterparts.



## NAVY FIGHT IN DEBUT



THE Royal Navy American Football team showed they have a bright future ahead as they battled hard in a loss to the RAF in their maiden Inter Services fixture.

Held at HMS Excellent, it was a tough introduction to the sport with a handful never playing in a competitive game before.

But with regular grassroots and training camps prior to the fixture and more planned in the future, the coaching team are feeling optimistic about their progress.

It was the Royal Navy who took the lead in the first half after opening drives from both teams ended in punts.

The defence took advantage of a fumble from the RAF offence in their own endzone to score their first touchdown with PLET Chris Mackay-Reid jumping on the ball.

The extra point was missed to give them a 6-0 lead.

But as the rain came down, both teams'

offences struggled to make big plays with strong tackles and good coverage limiting first downs.

As the game went on, the RAF drew level after intercepting the ball and scoring a touchdown. They pulled ahead 7-6 after converting the extra point.

Their defence stepped up again with an interception, giving the RAF offence the ball within 10 yards - which they scored.

Two more touchdowns in the fourth quarter gave the RAF a 24-6 win.

The main drive for the association over the last three years has been to increase participation.

WO1 Dave Smith, one of the coaches, said: "For me, grassroots is so key for this sport to be able to grow and get some more active participation. American football is for all level of athleticism with the added bonus of playing while representing the navy."

# RUNNING INTO THE NEW YEAR



*Winner of the Seniors event AET Duffett*



*Runners in action at the HMS Sultan Competition*



*The CO, HMS Sultan, Capt Deakin presents the Engineers' Trophy*



*Sub Lt Forrest-Jones approaches the finishing line as the fastest*

TOP runners from across the Eastern Region competed with personnel from across HMS Sultan in the HMS Sultan Cross-Country Competition.

Runners from HMS Sultan, HMNB Portsmouth, HMS Collingwood, HMS Excellent, Thunderer Squadron and Royal Marines School of Music competed for a place in the top ten finishers in their category, to be part of the team who will compete in the Royal Navy Cross-Country Competition in HMS Raleigh. In addition, the top ten runners scores from both Sultan's own Marine and Air Engineers were tallied towards the base's own Engineers' Trophy, with this the last of multiple sports throughout the year which trainees compete in.

The course took competitors around the technical side of the site before heading back along a similar route including around the Fort once more before a final sprint for the finish line.

With the results in, the fastest males both came from Sultan, Sub Lt Carson and AET Duffett winning the U23 and seniors, respectively. In the women's competition, winners were Bug

Gibb from RM School of Music first in U23s and Sub Lt Forrest-Jones HMS Collingwood claiming victory in the seniors.

Perhaps more importantly for the Marine and Air Engineering trainees, in a change from recent years, the Marine Engineers did enough on the track to take the Engineers' Trophy for 2023, with the Commanding Officer, HMS Sultan, Capt Deakin presenting the award to Commander Marine Engineering, Cdr King.

## Cross Country Winners Ladies

**Sub Lt Forrest-Jones HMS Collingwood 29:41**

## Ladies U23

**Bug Gibb RM School of Music**

## Male U23s

**Sub Lt Carson HMS Sultan 25:32**

## Male Seniors

**AET Duffett HMS Sultan time 23:23**

*Images by PO Photographer Pepe Hogan*



# THE RIVALRY GOES ON

TICKETS are now on sale for the 2024 Army vs Navy rugby match.

The Royal Navy won the Senior Men's crown for the first time since 2016 last year with a dramatic 39-22 win over the British Army at Twickenham Stadium, and will be looking to do the same this year on Saturday, May 4th. They will begin their quest for a first back-to-back title success in 50 years when they take on the Royal Air Force in Plymouth on Saturday, April 20th.

Meanwhile the British Army's Senior Women are seeking a three-peat of titles since regaining their crown in 2022, and their campaign kicks off against the Royal Navy also at Twickenham Stadium on Saturday, May 4th.

The schedule also means that the Royal Air Force will have the all-important fallow week in the middle round of the three. The RAF Senior Men have won two of the last seven Inter Service Championships (2015 and 2018), while the Senior Women are

the only team to have broken the Army's run of titles and have pushed the red shirts all the way in the last two years.

The 2024 Inter Service Championship retains the double-headers with the Senior Men and Senior Women both sharing the big stages of Brickfields Stadium in Plymouth, Gloucester's Kingsholm Stadium, and the home of England Rugby, Twickenham Stadium.

Each weekend also includes the relevant Masters level fixture. The Royal Navy Mariners and the Royal Air Force Vultures get things underway at Devonport Services RFC on Friday, April 19th, with the Mariners then taking on the British Army Masters at Richmond Athletic Ground on Friday, May 3rd, and the series rounds off between the RAF Vultures and Army Masters at Kingsholm Stadium, Gloucester, on Friday, May 10th.

For more details, visit: [armynavymatch.org.uk/9/23/tickets](https://armynavymatch.org.uk/9/23/tickets)



ARMED FORCES DAY,  
FALMOUTH



HMS COLLINGWOOD  
OPEN DAY



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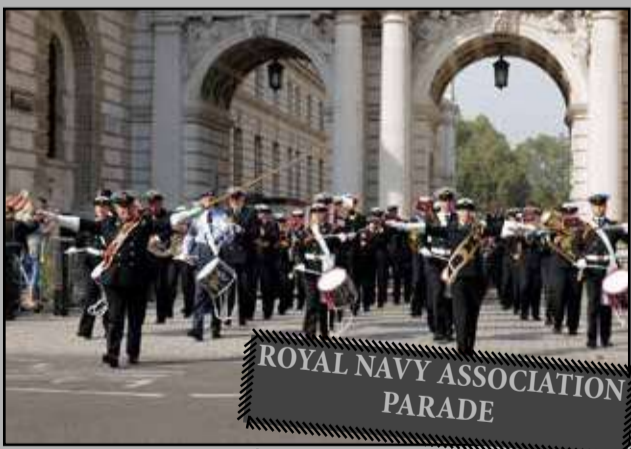


WEMBLEY  
STADIUM



MAYOR'S  
CONCERT

# Moments to remember as bands look ahead to new year



ROYAL NAVY ASSOCIATION  
PARADE



WORKSHOP AT  
RNAS YEOVILTON

THE Royal Navy Volunteer Band Association are gearing up for another busy year ahead, building on their many successful events of 2023.

The ten bands, from all over the country, received high praise for their efforts over the past 12 months from Rear Admiral Antony Rimmington, the Royal Navy's Director of Strategy and Policy.

And the positive feedback gave the musicians a boost as they look to get going for 2024.

Their busy 2023 started in the spring with the chance to meet up and make music at HMS Heron, at RNAS Yeovilton, for a workshop.

Under the musical direction of the single remaining uniformed Volunteer Band Instructor Bd CSgt Page, 77 volunteer musicians met to work through challenging pieces of music. The day ended with an online premiere of the new RNVA Drum Static written by Cpl B Paine and a live-streamed performance of the concert band pieces.

Despite the spring being some of the quieter ones in the calendar, the bands remained busy.

HMS Heron supported the Baltonsborough Royal British Legion 100 dinner and delivered a concert for the mayor. Northwood HQ, alongside the RMBS Corps of Drums, played a mess dinner hosted by Commander NATO Allied Maritime Command.

Meanwhile, HMS Collingwood's band performed at Southwick Park to celebrate the amalgamation of the RAF Air Traffic Control and Fighter Controller branches into Battle Space Management Operations.

HMS Sultan's band performed at the Painted Hall at Greenwich for the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve Yacht Club's annual dinner while HMS Seahawk supported their unit command at the St Nazaire Parade and service in Falmouth in April.

HMS Drake's band played at a rescheduled concert in Tavistock before supporting Britannia Royal Naval College's band at their families day.

As the weather warmed, and typical to Britain the rain came down, there was no slowing down the RNVA with activities at unit level, national level and international level.

It started with National Armed Forces Day in Falmouth with a marching band comprising musicians from nine of the ten RNVA bands. Then a combined band played at HMS Collingwood's Open Day/Field Gun competition before their most high-profile event of the summer.

They were at the Challenge Cup final at Wembley Stadium in August where a marching band of 66 performed in front of 58,000 spectators. The band accompanied Lizzie Jones as she sang the national anthem and *Abide with Me*. They also performed a selection of music during the intermission between the women and men's finals.

The King's coronation created an opportunity for celebration at all military establishments and the RNVA were out in force up and down the UK attending various parades, galas and open days.

HMS Neptune's band played at HMNB Clyde's coronation fair while HMS Collingwood's band paraded through Lee-on-the-Solent.

Tim Healy of HMS Drake Corps of Drums was head hunted by the Greek Ambassador and was asked to attend three events overseas, including a coronation dinner and events commemorating the Battle of Crete.

It is not only community events the RNVA has been involved in. They also supported three large fundraising events.

A contingent from the band joined other

musicians to take part in Cancer Research UK's Race for Life in Portsmouth while an unofficial engagement in support of Shaftsbury event Fun in the Field helped raise £10,000 for SSAFA.

Towards the end of summer, HMS Drake band performed at the annual medics rugby challenge at Brickfields in Devonport. A concert band played in support of the lone RMBS bugler with £7,000 raised by event organisers for the RNRMC.

With autumn on its way, the association bands support their bases with performances at Trafalgar Night, Tarantio Night and Pickle Night mess dinners. Autumn also saw the RNVA say goodbye to Bd CSgt Page and welcome VBI Bd CSgt Saleh who was thrown into the deep end with two band parades in London – the Royal Navy Association parade and the Merchant Navy parade.

November ceremonies and wreath laying up and down the UK saw every band out on parade and supporting their communities.

A swift music pack change then ensured the bands were ready for Christmas and a season of carol concerts and lights switch on events.

Anyone who wants to get involved with the Association is welcome – whether they own an instrument or not. And, although previous musical experience is advantageous it is not essential.

The RNVA gives players the chance to experiment with different genres, meet like-minded music enthusiasts and travel.

There are bands at Collingwood, Sultan, Nelson, Seahawk, Heron, BRNC, Drake, Queen Elizabeth, Northwood HQ and Neptune. Contact your local band, BDCSgt Saleh ([stephen.saleh199@mod.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.saleh199@mod.gov.uk)) or Surg Cdr Schofield ([susan.schofield684@mod.gov.uk](mailto:susan.schofield684@mod.gov.uk)).

# Farrow family's Sultan links remembered

THE Commanding Officer of HMS Sultan, Captain Jo Deakin, made a special presentation to the son and granddaughter of one of HMS Sultan's first Commanding Officers when they visited the base.

Capt John Farrow OBE was Commanding Officer of HMS Sultan from 1957-1959. His son Capt Malcom Farrow and granddaughter Alice Farrow attended Ceremonial Divisions, before being presented by Capt Deakin with a copy of Captain John's official portrait, which had been taken during his time in the role.

HMS Sultan has long been established as the home of Royal Navy Marine and Air Engineering, whose history stretches across nearly seven decades.

It was Admiral of the Fleet Sir George Elvey Creasy, who ordered Capt Leonard Ingram, to commission HMS Sultan as the Mechanical Training Establishment of the Royal Navy on 1 June 1956.

Capt Ingram oversaw the transition of what was formerly the helicopter school, HMS Siskin (1945-56) to HMS Sultan, before handing over the reins to Capt John Farrow in January 1957, a role which he held, as the first full term captain until February 1959.

Captain John's son Malcolm, spent part of his childhood, living at Sultan before following him into the Royal Navy in 1962.

Initially joining as an engineer, Malcom decided to switch from engineering, becoming a seaman and



Capt Jo Deakin with Capt Malcom Farrow and Alice Farrow, alongside a portrait of Capt John Farrow

subsequently a signal officer and Electronic Warfare officer thereafter. Malcolm's last sea job was on the staff of Admiral Sandy Woodward in HMS Hermes in the Falkland War, but he retained his Naval Connections as Trafalgar 200 where he was Director of the International Festival of The Sea and the St Paul's Cathedral service for Nelson in 2005.

Granddaughter Alice has also maintained the family links with the Royal Navy, having served four years within the Royal Navy Reserve and subsequent

post in support of services charities, she is now the Director of Marketing and Communications at the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity.

Malcolm said: "Growing up in Sultan was great fun, I can remember living in Sultan House, watching the aircraft coming into the old airfield and exploring the moat alongside the fort.

"There was a lot of responsibility, but I always remember looking back at the things my father and mother did here with great pride."

## ROYAL NAVY NAVY NEWS

Navy Command, Leach Building, HMS Excellent, Portsmouth PO2 8BY

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### Reprographics

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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. November's winner was: Jonty Powis, from Swanwick.

## Deaths

**Freshwater, Raymond Thomas, ME1.** Served Feb 1960-May 1969 in HM Ships Londonderry, Carron, Bulwark, Grafton, Triumph, Bellerophon, Belfast. Member of RNA and HMS Londonderry Association. Died November 9, aged 81.

**Milburn, Ivan, CPOWTR.** Served in HMS Jupiter, Fearless, Centurion, Dolphin and Neptune. Served in Falklands on RMS St Helena. Coached RN and RM volleyball teams in England and Scotland. Died November 5.

**Hookway, Frederick Robert George, known as Bob. Master at Arms.** Served from 1957 to 1980 in HMS Ganges, Osprey, Zest, Whitby, Vernon, Orion, Urchin, Ursa, Mauritius, Victory, Excellent, Neptune, Aurora, Monkton, Collingwood, Nelson, Brighton, and MAA at Royal Tournament. Awarded Long Service medal. Died November 25, aged 83.

**Hudson, Michael, Leading Stoker.** Served 1964-72. Joined HMS Ganges, then served in HMS Bulwark (65-67) and submarines HMS

Otus (67-70) and Renown (70-72). Died Bolton, Lancs, November 26.

**James, Ian. SA(S).** Served in HMS Tenby. Died November 16.

**Dickson, John, Radio Supervisor.** Served 1963 to 1985 in HMS Euryalus, Falmouth, Abdiel, Ton Class Minesweepers and HMS Hecla during the Falklands campaign. Also shore based in Mauritius, Lochinvar, MHQ Pitreavie and RNR Dundee. Qualified RN Football referee. Died November 4, aged 78.

## Ask Jack

**Vicky Grosvenor.** Your friend from the 1990s, Colette 'Letty' Leydon, is interested in getting back in touch. Originally from Windsor, where she worked in a veterinary practice and volunteered as a Special Constable with Thames Valley Police, Vicky joined HMS Raleigh in 1998 as a Wren Writer 2nd Class. The two friends maintained contact via letter for a while, but eventually lost contact. Contact [colettel1000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:colettel1000@yahoo.co.uk)

**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 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 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

**FRADU:** I would like to contact the following former Fleet Requirements and Air Direction Unit Hunter pilots who mounted detachments at RAF Gibraltar from 1980 to 1983: Tommy Thompson, Godfrey Underwood, Simon Willoughby and Derek Morter.

Tony Fairburn, Sqn Ldr (Rtd)  
[tony.fairbairn@btinternet.com](mailto:tony.fairbairn@btinternet.com)

## 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@mypostoffice.co.uk](mailto:rob.proud@mypostoffice.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 PO5 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 next 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, Herne 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)

■ If you are sending your notice via email, please include your full address and telephone number.

■ Reunions appear in date order, and requests to place an entry in a particular edition cannot be guaranteed.

■ Please send in reunions at least two months (preferably three) before the month of the event. There may be a delay before items appear, due to the volume of requests.

■ Entries are free to non-commercial organisations. Items pertaining to commercial work, books and publications for profit can only appear as paid-for advertising.

■ The Editor reserves the right to edit or refuse publication of submitted notices.

### 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 those 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 January 12 2024**

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