



NAVY NEWS

MARCH 2024



ARCTIC BLAST

Royal Marines of 45 Commando tear through the snow during training ahead of the most important NATO exercise in the Arctic for a generation.

See pages 2-3
Picture: AS1 Daniel Smither

Inside: ■ PITCAIRN ISLANDS ■ RICHMOND IN THE RED SEA ■ PRINCE OF WALES HEADS NORTH

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An instructor from 30 Commando's Surveillance and Reconnaissance Squadron returning to base after a day of ice climbing

Picture by AS1 Daniel Smither

SETTING THE STANDARD

THE focus is sharper. The method, the mantra is the same.

Be ready to survive, move and fight across the brutal Arctic.

Royal Marines are deployed to the frozen Arctic Circle once again. It's something the commandos have done for generations, but the importance of this deployment north has often ebbed and flowed with world events.

Given the turbulent times we currently find ourselves in and, with one of the main protagonists in world events on its doorstep, Arctic warfare has re-emerged even more as a central tenet of security of NATO and the UK.

With Finland joining NATO, Sweden soon to ascend and already Norway one of the UK's closest allies, the Nordic's Arctic regions – and all its complexities – must be mastered no longer just by its native armed forces but by NATO allies alike.

The alliance must be able to bring all its might to bear through the Nordic regions, its forces able to understand how to master the environment – ultimately defend its nations in the event of Article 5 (an attack on one is an attack on all).

Royal Marines draw on a rich Arctic warfare heritage – dating back to commando raids on Nazi-occupied Norway in the Second World War – and are a hugely valuable part of the NATO jigsaw here.

The commandos have returned to the Arctic this year as NATO limbers up for its most important exercise in a generation, known as Steadfast Defender.

That will test the alliance's ability to defend its flanks from an aggressor, bringing troops from North America and other regions to defend Europe.

That's a wider picture of more than 90,000 troops, 50 ships, 80 fighter jets, helicopters, drones and more than 1,000 vehicles, including tanks.

HMS Prince of Wales will be leading the UK's Carrier Strike Group at sea, but inland the Commando Force are tasked alongside allies to defend the Cap of the North – the region of Norway, Sweden and Finland north of the Arctic Circle.

Usually Norway hosts a bi-annual workout to operate with allies on defence of NATO's northern flank, but with Finland's membership and Sweden's expected ascension, the exercise – previously called Cold Response – now encompasses the wider region and has been renamed Nordic Response.

Royal Marines have been working up to this moment through the winter as new generations take on the Cold Weather Warfare Courses.

The Arctic warfare experts – the Royal Marines Mountain Leaders – are responsible for educating and instructing new commandos on what is required to survive, move and fight across the ice.

Course members learn to navigate by the stars, build shelters out of wood and snow, survive off the land and jump into freezing water – known as the ice-breaking drill – to test responses to cold shock.

The commandos are also taught navigation skills before taking to skis and snow shoes to learn how to quickly get across the ice and out-manoeuvre adversaries carrying weapons and equipment across training areas in the mountainous Troms and Finnmark county in northern Norway.

Marines take part in a biathlon when deployed in the Arctic – a winter sport combining cross-country skiing and rifle shooting.

The roots of the biathlons history sit heavily in Scandinavia and has developed as part of Norwegian military training.

It's the perfect cold weather challenge for the Commando Force across mountain roads and forests. It is a race of speed and accuracy, making it perfect for honing warfare skills.

Lieutenant Jones, who's just completed the course, said: "The instructors are passionate about what they do and this reflects on their knowledge and teaching in the field.

"This will likely be the hardest physical and mental challenge for most which I found was good and beneficial to push myself out of my comfort zone. Once you have finished you have a real sense of achievement."

This course produces a conveyor belt of Arctic commandos, ready to be melded together to the wider Commando Force and create a formidable extreme cold weather fighting force.

Marines of Zulu Company from Arbroath-based 45 Commando completed their course and are now working towards Nordic Response – bringing in specialists to attach to the company.

Mortars and signaller teams from within 45 Commando, engineers from 59 Squadron of 24 Commando Royal Engineers, a group of engineers from the French 9th Marine Infantry Brigade and a US Marine Corps Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company have all attached to Zulu for Nordic Response.

Z Company and their new arrivals worked with Viking armoured vehicles, including the mortar and ambulance variants, as they build towards Nordic Response.

"There was also time to practice the dismounted skills learned during the course, including ski mobility, break contact drills, avalanche rescue, and medical training," explained Captain James Temple, second in command of Zulu Coy.

"During the second week ranks conducted further ski navigation training and conducted live firing on skis. The integration package culminated with team lanes, enabling the teams to practice a series of tactical actions as previously taught and practiced."

Nordic Response takes place throughout March.



Training or on patrol around the UK

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



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



GLOBAL | MODERN | READY

THE third month of 2024 opens with the first major NATO exercise of the year getting underway in the Arctic.

UK flagship **HMS Queen Elizabeth** was due to be leading RN involvement in Steadfast Defender/Nordic Response... but it's actually her sister **Prince of Wales** at the heart of the Carrier Strike Group with **HMS Portland** and **RFA Tidesurge**. The carrier stood up and was turned around from a maintenance period to operational warship when the flagship was unable to take part due to a problem with a propeller shaft (see *opposite*).

Preparing for their arrival are major elements of the **Commando Forces** who've been knuckling down to winter training in the Arctic to be ready for the main event (see *pages 2-3*), while their air support, the **Commando Helicopter Force** have been doing likewise at Bardufoss. The latter thanked their hosts for allowing them to use their land by flying firewood to some of the most remote sites in the region - a national park on the border with Sweden where there are no roads (see *page 19*).

After six intense weeks in the line of fire in the Red Sea, **HMS Diamond** handed over responsibility for protecting shipping in the region from Houthi rocket attack to frigate **HMS Richmond**, which is taking part in Operation Prosperity Guardian at the same relentless pace (see *page 11*).

To give you an idea of just how big the operational theatre covered by patrol ships **HMS Spey** and **Tamar** is, the pair have been separated by more than 10,000 miles on their Indo-Pacific mission this month. Spey has made her first foray to the populous Indian Sub-Continent and Sri Lanka (see *pages 14-15*)...

...while the crew of **HMS Tamar** outnumbered inhabitants when they conducted a goodwill/scientific/environmental visit to and patrol of the Pitcairn Islands (best known as the resting place of the Bounty) (see *the centre pages*).

New minehunting support vessel **RFA Stirling Castle** arrived on the Clyde to begin integrating with the mine warfare experts who will soon be operating from her (see *page 6*)... while the people at the forefront of that new minehunting technology, **Mission System Team 3**, offer an insight into their work (see *page 9*).

After a lengthy absence from these pages due to her 'PIPkeep' (refit plus 'PIP' engine upgrade) the mighty **HMS Dragon** awakens. The destroyer has taken the first steps of her regeneration by firing up those new engines for the first time (see *page 6*).

The Royal Marines have been getting to grips with their new fast boat, the **Commanding Raiding Craft**, both in waters off the South Coast (see *page 7*) and in the Mediterranean with the **Littoral Response South**, which has been conducting widespread training (see *pages 16-17*).

Congratulations to **HMS Trent** who've dealt several sucker punches to drug cartels in the Americas, with a series of busts in conjunction with the US Coast Guard to seize nearly £300m of illegal narcotics (see *page 6*).

On a unique exchange with the USCG's counter-narcotics helicopter squadron (though sadly not on the ops with Trent) is Fleet Air Arm pilot **Lieutenant Commander Bob Fleming**... known as British Bob... even though his real name is Dave... who sheds light on his experiences (see *page 23*).

HMS Protector has been reminded of the human impact on Antarctica clearing up tonnes of rubbish left by a previous expedition... and subsequently revealed by global warming (see *page 13*).

If you want good food, look no further than **HMS Trent** whose head caterer **Petty Officer Cat Taylor** has been named the best in her branch for her combination of culinary prowess, drive and motivational skill (see *page 29*).

The first Type 31 frigate, **HMS Venturer**, is starting to come to life. As her hull nears completion, she's been accurately weighed to ensure constructors' calculations are spot on, her bridge has been installed, and she has added the County of Essex to her affiliates (see *page 27*).

A PINNACLE MOVE FOR BRIG CANTRILL

A ROYAL Marine will be responsible for commanding and orchestrating the Royal Navy's global operations for the first time in history.

Vastly-experienced officer Brigadier Rich Cantrill will be named Commander Operations (COMOPS), the senior naval officer responsible for overseeing protection of home waters and Royal Navy and Royal Marine actions and activities worldwide.

Current incumbent, Rear Admiral Edward Ahlgren, will handover command to Brig Cantrill later this year, meaning for the first time a Royal Marine will take up the role based at the Maritime Operations Centre at the Northwood Headquarters in north-west London.

This senior Royal Marine has held prominent posts across defence and government, notably as deputy of the MOD's counter terrorism operations, a role in the Cabinet Office's Covid-19 taskforce and serving as Chief of Staff of the UK's Amphibious Forces as they countered pirates off the Horn of Africa in 2016.

The 49-year-old has been in the Royal Marines for 28 years, notably commanding 3 Commando Brigade after roles in Plymouth-based 42 Commando - first leading Lima Company on operations in Afghanistan before taking over the unit as Commanding Officer in 2014.

He is currently employed as the Assistant Chief of Staff overseeing operations at the Permanent Joint Headquarters in Northwood, which oversees activity across all three of the UK's armed forces.

Brig Cantrill said: "For officers in the Royal Navy passionate about command of operations COMOPS is the pinnacle, and I am absolutely delighted to have the opportunity to deliver that role on behalf of the Fleet Commander and First Sea Lord.

"For me it means a chance to return to my own service after a fascinating time in the joint domain, where I have learned a great deal about modern multi-domain operations, whilst working daily with the current COMOPS and his team.

"The delivery of Royal Navy operations, and the maritime contribution to joint operations, are fundamental to protecting the nation and helping it to prosper; it is my privilege to have the chance to contribute to these aims, as a servant to the people of all the Navy's fighting arms that deliver so much for our Nation, 24/365."

Brig Cantrill will assume the role as a Major General. Commandant General Royal Marines, General Gwyn Jenkins, said: "The Royal Marines are an integral and proud part of the Royal Navy. As the first Royal Marine to assume the prestigious role of Commander Maritime Operations, Maj Gen Cantrill's assignment represents a truly historic moment for the Royal Marines and Royal Navy and further highlights our close integration."

Traditionally the role has been held by a submarine warfare officer, but Brig Cantrill's appointment reflects



the evolving nature of the Royal Navy's operations, with emphasis placed on breadth as well as depth of experience.

Ultimately, this demonstrates that the best people are being appointed into the right roles, and always on the basis of a rigorous selection process.

COMOPS and his staff are responsible for the command and control of all deployed ships and submarines, Commando Forces and Fleet Air Arm

aircraft.

He oversees intensive anti-submarine warfare operations in the North Atlantic on behalf of the Fleet Commander and support the Chief of Joint Operations in the execution of all other global operations.

A highly experienced team of maritime operations specialists, experts in the full range of capabilities across the Royal Navy support COMOPS at the Maritime Operations Centre.

JETS FLY IN AS CARRIER HEADS NORTH



Pictures: AS1 Amber Mayall RAF; LPhoto Belinda Alker; LPhoto Dan Bladen



BRITAIN'S biggest warship has sailed for Norway to lead an international task group in one of the most important military exercises in a generation.

In just seven days, Portsmouth-based HMS Prince of Wales' ship's company made rapid preparations to be ready to lead the Royal Navy's involvement in the largest NATO exercise since the Cold War – Steadfast Defender.

She took the place of her sister HMS Queen Elizabeth which is unable to participate due to an issue with her propeller shaft coupling.

The crews of both carriers and dockyard staff worked around the clock to prepare her to sail with everything she needs.

Captain Will Blackett, HMS Prince of Wales' Commanding Officer, said: "I am immensely proud of how my ship's company and their families responded to the short-notice tasking.

"We have managed to bring the ship from 30 days' notice to immediate readiness in just one week. This has been a monumental effort by the whole enterprise, including HMS Queen Elizabeth, Portsmouth Naval Base, and our numerous defence and industry partners."

The aircraft carrier will be at the heart of combined exercises involving the alliance forces, Steadfast Defender – a huge demonstration of NATO's resolve, unity and capability involving more than 20,000 UK military personnel alone deployed across Scandinavia and northern Europe.

She will lead a carrier strike group of ships including frigate HMS Portland and

Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker RFA Tidesurge, supported by US, Spanish and Danish vessels.

They form one of the most potent naval forces of the exercise – an allied fleet of 40 vessels, drawn from more than two dozen nations, committed to the seagoing element of Steadfast Defender.

Part of the deployment will see HMS Prince of Wales and her task group move to the High North and Exercise Nordic Response with the emphasis on protecting northern Norway, Sweden and Finland to defend the Nordic nations from 'attack'.

The carrier brings the capability of her F-35B Lightning stealth fighters from 617 'Dambusters' Squadron at RAF Marham, submarine hunting and airborne early warning Merlin Mk2 helicopters from RNAS Culdrose, and battlefield Wildcat helicopters of 847 Naval Air Squadron from RNAS Yeovilton.

Before heading for Norwegian waters, HMS Prince of Wales conducted a week's training in the North Sea with her air group to hone the skills of the 780-strong ship's company – plus nearly 600 men and women embarked with the F-35s and helicopters.

It was there she was joined by the UK's most advanced air power and, for the first time, UK Carrier Strike Group battlestaff.

Captain Colin McGannity, Carrier Air Wing and Strike Warfare Commander (better known as "CAG"), watched the F-35s landing.

He said: "It is always an exciting moment when F-35B Lightning join the Carrier Strike Group at sea. These fifth-generation aircraft

are the main strike element of the group.

"Once again, we will be integrating them and the rest of the Carrier Air Wing with our NATO allies. There's plenty of work ahead of us but I have every confidence that our talented and dedicated team will succeed.

"It's winter in the North Atlantic and we will face harsh weather and freezing conditions, but we are well prepared and looking forward to demonstrating our readiness to fight, whenever and wherever we get the call."

Commander Martin Russell, Commander Air (also known as "Wings") of HMS Prince of Wales has been preparing for the arrival of the aircraft.

"I'm really excited to see the F-35B jets of 617 Squadron embark in HMS Prince of Wales, the first time we have seen this squadron onboard, and the most F-35B jets we have operated at one time," he said.

"My team are keen to practise what they learnt about jets during our time on Westlant 23 last year.

"It's the jets that really make us an aircraft carrier and bring the flight deck to life."

Commander of Lightning Force, Group Captain John Butcher of the RAF, spoke of his pride on once again landing on an aircraft carrier.

He added: "I am looking forward to watching the different teams aboard HMS Prince of Wales integrate further with the embarked Air Wing over the coming days as we work together to further hone the UK's Carrier Strike capabilities."



RE-ENTER THE DRAGON

ROYAL Navy destroyer HMS Dragon is breathing fire once more and eyeing a return to the fleet in 2024 as work to install new engines reaches a notable milestone.

The Type 45 destroyer has been undergoing major upgrades in Portsmouth since March 2022 and, nearly two years on, one of Dragon's new engines has been started for the first time as part of critical trials.

The ship is the latest of her class – after HMS Dauntless and HMS Daring – to go through the Power Improvement Project (PIP), which addresses the resilience of the engines and power generation driving the many hi-tech sensors, systems and weapons on board.

To make the necessary upgrades, the two original diesel engines were removed and replaced with three more reliable, more powerful, cleaner generators.

Ultimately, the ship will be more powerful – 4,000hp to be precise – reliable, greener and ready to embark future weapons.

Before returning to sea, Dragon is undergoing trials afloat in a non-tidal basin in Portsmouth which test each of three engine installations is correct, integrated effectively into the workings of the ship, can be controlled remotely and, eventually, that they can all work together to power and propel the ship.

Dragon's Senior Naval Officer, Lieutenant Commander

Fiona Stephenson, said: "The inaugural roar of Dragon's new engines marked the beginning of the next chapter in our return to the fleet."

"I am proud of the hard work of our marine engineering team and industry partners and look forward to delivering as one team as we breathe fire into Dragon."

Marine Engineering Officer Lieutenant Commander James Baddeley added: "It is really exciting to see the PIP installation coming to life to increase the capability of the platform, the successful first start is testament to all the hard work which has gone into the design and installation onboard."

HMS Dragon is the first of the Type 45s to undergo PIP in Portsmouth, with HMS Dauntless and HMS Daring's work taking place at Cammell Laird.

HMS Dauntless returned to the Fleet at the beginning of last year, deploying to the Caribbean to support British Overseas Territories during hurricane season and counter drugs trafficking in the region. Her successful actions on that deployment underscored the success of the major engine upgrades.

PIP is being delivered under a major design and manufacture contract between the Ministry of Defence and BAE Systems, and delivered in collaboration with BMT Defence services and Cammell Laird.



BREATHING FIRE: An engineer works on the new engines



STERLING WORK ON MINE HUNTING

THE future 'floating home of minehunting' has begun integrating with the specialist team which is revolutionising the way the Royal Navy deals with underwater threats.

RFA Stirling Castle is the new 'mothership' for leading-edge mine warfare technology – technology which will both keep the UK's waters safe and reduce the risk to sailors.

She arrived on the Clyde in late January to take her place at the forefront of supporting the next generation of the Royal Navy's mine countermeasures capability.

Her arrival coincided with the departure of HMS Penzance, the last traditional minehunter on the Clyde.

The 6,000-tonne Stirling Castle began life as MV Island Crown, before undergoing conversion in Devonport which will allow her to operate as home to the Royal Navy's new autonomous mine countermeasures systems.

The ship's Royal Fleet Auxiliary crew are working side-by-side with Zulu Squadron of the Mine and Threat Exploitation Group (MTXG), the Royal Navy's mine countermeasures specialists based at Faslane.

As the mothership, Stirling Castle has the capability to lift and transport the Royal Navy's latest autonomous and remotely operated vessels to wherever they are required to keep the UK's shipping lanes safe.

"I am very proud to be in command of this wonderful ship with the capability that it is bringing in support of the UK's minehunting programme, which is at the cutting edge of autonomous systems technology," Captain Richard Reville RFA, Stirling Castle's Commanding Officer.

"We look forward to continuing our integration with MTXG to bring this exciting new capability into service."

To sustain operations and strike a good work/home life balance, two 27-strong RFA crews are assigned to Stirling Castle. Thanks to the vessel starting life as a commercial ship, they also enjoy a high standard of accommodation.

The threat from naval mines is rapidly evolving and this calls for the technology to keep pace.

MTXG are trailblazing this advance in technology, employing a full suite of current and future systems: Autonomous Surface Vessels (ASVs), Uncrewed Underwater Vehicles (UUVs), the joint French-UK Maritime Mine Counter Measures (MMCM) system, the Combined Influence Sweep (SWEEP) system, and Medium Underwater Autonomous Vehicles (MAUVs).

Those systems can be operated remotely by MTXG, using a portable command centre on land or from onboard RFA Stirling Castle, or they operate autonomously. Either way, they will be able to search a wider area more quickly than the Sandown-class ships they replace and without the need to expose RN personnel to the dangers of a minefield.

Over the past 12 months, the MTXG has been delivering operations and trials to develop autonomous systems, making use of a range of equipment to get a clear picture of the seabed in the Clyde Estuary.

The team are now looking forward to working with Stirling Castle and her crew on further trials to understand how the technology can be exploited to enhance operations.

The ship will travel south soon to complete some final training in Devonport before returning to Scotland, where they will spend most of the year working with Zulu Squadron.



COME MINE WITH ME: Minehunting specialists with their kit



TEAM STIRLING: Members of the ship's company

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?



THE DRUG BUSTERS!

A Royal Navy warship seized £290.66m of cocaine and narcotics in two huge blows to drug runners in the Caribbean.

British sailors, Royal Marines and a US Coast Guard team on HMS Trent intercepted a suspected smuggling speedboat south of the US Virgin Islands.

The smugglers began jettisoning their illegal cargo as they fled towards land, but Trent, her fast sea boats and an American patrol aircraft gave chase – eventually recovering 94 bales of class A narcotics, weighing 2,757kg and worth £220.56m.

This was HMS Trent's second drugs bust in the space of three weeks, having seized £70.1m of cocaine in a separate operation in January – pouncing as darkness fell as smugglers tried to escape.

A high-octane chase ensued under moonlight as the smugglers tried to offload their illegal cargo, but Royal Marines coxswains and the USCG boarding team closed in, took control of the vessel and detained four crew members.

As the sun rose, Trent's 60-strong crew scoured the ocean for the abandoned cargo, eventually retrieving 29 bales of cocaine weighing in at 876kg after an extensive ten-hour search across 24 square miles.

A marine, of Plymouth-based 47 Commando, who cannot be named for operational reasons, was driving one of the pursuing sea boats.

"This was a challenging operation and

required us to push the boats to their limit," he said.

"Despite their best efforts to evade us, and with our boats and the ship bearing down on them at speed, the 38ft go-fast finally gave up the chase and we were able to get alongside and enable members of the US Coast Guard to seize the vessel."

A US Maritime Patrol Aircraft circled overhead assisting the operation as Trent closed in after acting on intelligence reports from the United States' Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATFS) based in Key West, Florida.

The officer in charge of the USCG team, who cannot be named for operational reasons, said: "The size of this bust is rarely seen in the region, and it is one of the largest single seizures in recent memory."

"Being able to recover such a large cargo of contraband over a 24-mile search area is unheard of and speaks to the level of skill the crew of HMS Trent has demonstrated."

Commanding Officer, Commander Tim Langford, added: "The achievements of this ship and her crew in the last nine months have been spectacular, and it is brilliant to see the hard work and dedication of this amazing team paying off."

"Having already achieved a hugely successful deployment to Africa in the second half of last year, I am delighted that our shift to Atlantic Patrol (North) tasking has been heralded by such a significant

seizure of narcotics.

"The team is rightly proud of their efforts, and those of our USCG colleagues."

Trent then more than tripled her total seized with the second bust – again in a coordinated operation with the USCG and a US Maritime Patrol Aircraft.

The ship's sea boats – crewed by sailors, USCG personnel and Royal Marines – worked with the aircraft to pursue the speedboat, staying hot on its heels during a high-speed nighttime chase.

The traffickers dumped 20 bales of the narcotics – later recovered by HMS Trent – before they ran aground and were detained by authorities on the US Virgin Islands, where a further 74 bales were seized.

In all, the 94 bales of narcotics weighed in at 2,757kg and worth £220.56m

HMS Trent's Executive Officer Lieutenant Commander Mike Rydiard, who was in temporary command for the second drugs bust, said: "I am immensely proud of the combined team of Trent Ship's company, USCG team and 47 Commando Royal Marines who carried out the intercept and pursuit straight from generation in challenging conditions to get the right result."

A Seaman Specialist who was the bowman in one of Trent's boats for the pursuit added: "The chase was pretty exhilarating, and it was great to once again showcase our skills and take part in a successful operation."



Bales of drugs are recovered



The drugs are seized



Trent hands over their haul

ROYAL Marines will strike deeper and faster thanks to a revamped raiding boat for discreet commando operations.

Being rolled out for use on front-line operations around the world, the Commando Raiding Craft (CRC) is a redesigned version of the tried-and-tested Offshore Raiding Craft – commonly known in the Corps as the ORC.

After two decades' service with the Royal Marines around the globe, it's been given an overhaul to meet the demands of the commandos in the mid-21st century as they return to their WW2 raiding roots: coastal landings behind enemy lines with small teams wreaking havoc on enemy infrastructure and systems.

Repainted in grey to help concealment, the CRC also has new engines providing increased range – more than 200 nautical miles – and speed – up to 40 knots – and a new configuration with driving position moved from the back to front for better manoeuvrability.

It also has new cooling systems, mast, trim for better protection from sea conditions and a sophisticated electronic suite for communications and navigation.

The CRC has three crew who rotate on long journeys but also space to launch drones, carry payloads and to store a smaller Inshore Raiding Craft to deploy on some landings if required.

Crucially, this is a life extension and upgrade to the ORC and, although it is more than just a stop-gap, in the long run Commando Forces are developing a boat that will replace the ORC, CRC and larger Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel.

"The current fleet of craft were ageing and had limited range and capacity," explains Major Joe Brown, from the Commando Force Acquisition team.

"An opportunity was taken to revamp this fleet to deliver a considerable upgrade to the current craft through the development of in-service hulls.

"It is an example of developing for the future through maximising the potential within existing capabilities."

Plymouth-based 47 Commando – the amphibious warfare experts of the Commando Force – will be at the controls of the CRC wherever it deploys around the globe.

The unit's Commanding Officer, Colonel William Norcott, said: "The CRC is multi-purpose and more supportive of the Commando Force model, working in small disaggregated teams that are structured to deliver a lethal punch. You can configure the craft to



PICTURE BY: L/Cpl Lucy Aslett

STRIKE DEEPER STRIKE FASTER

the way these teams are operating.

"This is exciting for us, because it's a much more powerful craft, the coxswains will tell you, it's much more enjoyable to operate, it's more tactical and we don't need the different variants like we currently have.

"We are really excited to have something that does what it says on the tin."

In the meantime, CRC is already deployed on operations – namely with 47 Commando's 539 Raiding Squadron

and the Littoral Response Group (South) task force in the Mediterranean.

"We have achieved a significant amount of tactical development with the CRC whilst deployed on LRG(S)," said Major Dan Wake, Officer Commanding of 539 Raiding Squadron.

"We are now flying uncrewed aerial systems from the craft among other developments.

"The CRC in this role, with the new communications

architecture fitted to enable rapid information flow, is ably demonstrating a broader utility than simply moving people from ship to shore."

The LRG(S) task group – centred on 40 Commando and support ships RFA Lyme Bay and RFA Argus – is deployed to the Mediterranean ready to react to emerging crises or world events. The task group delivered more than 80 tonnes of humanitarian aid for Gaza on behalf of the UK in January.

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EYES ON THE FUTURE

THE use of autonomous equipment to support and enhance minehunting operations has taken a step forward over the past year, thanks to the successes of a Royal Navy minehunting team.

Over the past 12 months, Mission System Team 3 – part of the Mine and Threat Exploitation Group (MXTG) – has been delivering on operations and trials on the Clyde to develop autonomous systems to support the future of minehunting within the service.

They have been working with a range of equipment to get a clear picture of the seabed within the Clyde and their efficiency to deliver was part of the reason they won the Naval Capability Award at last year's Surface Flotilla Awards.

Mission System Team 3, known under the wide banner of Project Wilton, have helped reshape the Royal Navy's approach to mine warfare.

And in an ever-changing environment where technology and systems are being used to limit dangers to sailors, the work they are doing is setting the foundation for operations in and around the UK and further afield.

And the team are looking to build on the work of 2023 as they prepare for a busy and challenging 2024, with more trials on different autonomous equipment to understand and analysis its uses against existing methods.

Lieutenant Alex Gibby, Group Engineering Officer for MXTG, said: "Throughout 2023, Mission System Team 3 (MST3) has been delivering operational output, providing a clear picture of the seabed within the Clyde.

"We have also been conducting trials and developing the use of autonomous equipment in support of the overarching Mine Hunting Capability project and future Mine Counter Measures (MCM) in the Royal Navy.

"2023 also saw MST3 visually identify multiple bottom contacts with an ROV using sensors supplied by the Royal Navy's Fleet Hydrographic and Meteorology Unit. This allowed us to show the benefits of hydrometeorological and minewarfare combined operations."

This year, the team are looking forward to integration with minehunting "mothership" RFA Stirling Castle which will be used in autonomous operations.

This spring, they will also take part in trials to understand how different technology and autonomous equipment can be used to enhance a variety of minehunting operations.

Later in the year, they will build on integration with Stirling Castle to show how MCM operations can be conducted from different platforms and they will also test a small patrol vessel in operations away from UK waters.



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READY FOR

WE HAVE the watch now...

Sailing into harm's way in the foreground is HMS Richmond having relieved destroyer HMS Diamond departing the Red Sea.

And in the distance, the reason for both ships' presence in these troubled waters: a container ship making its way from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean and the world beyond to keep global trade flowing.

Since the second day of February it has been Devonport-based frigate Richmond patrolling the waters either side of the Bab al Mandeb narrows at the foot of the Red Sea after a short link-up to formally transfer responsibilities.

"I've got friends on Diamond, so it was slightly surreal for us to be so close and see them sailing past to head for some well-deserved rest," said Richmond's Leading Physical Training Instructor Amber Donaldson.

"They've done a great job out here but now it's our turn to continue the efforts to protect the merchant ships travelling these waters.



"I'm looking forward to working with other nations involved in the operation and hopefully visit some new countries if there's time. The ship's company are definitely ready for this mission and up for the challenge."

The frigate's Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Daniel Owen-Hughes, added: "The ship's company put in an incredible effort to get us to this point. Having left the UK in early January, we've spent the weeks transiting the Mediterranean conducting flying, boarding, gunnery and firefighting training to ensure we are best prepared for the task ahead.

"It's a very dynamic, changeable, situation but we've got the right tools, people and training for the job.

"We will work closely with our friends and allies to maintain a visible, persistent, presence in the region. This helps to reinforce the Royal Navy's commitment to protecting and maintaining the maritime security which is crucial to our national interests."

Richmond has maintained the

same tempo of operations as the destroyer which sailed more than 20,000 nautical miles during the first two months, but hasn't (as of us going to press) been required to fire her weapons in anger – though the threat to shipping remains undiminished.

Attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden have increased nearly fivefold since mid-November, with Iranian-backed Houthi rebels targeting passing vessels roughly every couple of days and scoring hits on at least three since the beginning of February.

In addition to conducting patrols on behalf of Operation Prosperity Guardian, the international force established shortly before Christmas to provide protection to passing merchant vessels, Richmond has also supported the wider maritime security mission in the region.

The frigate has a specialist Royal Marines boarding team from 42 Commando embarked who, with the support of Richmond's Pacific 24 boats and her Wildcat helicopter from 815 Naval Air Squadron, have been inspecting vessels in the Gulf of Aden ensuring they (and their

cargoes) are what they claim to be (one such 'flag verification visit' is pictured below).

As for Diamond, no warship spent longer in what has been designated the 'high threat area' since navies began operations in the region (and her Wildcat helicopter, callsign Roughcut, flew more than 53 hours of sorties over the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden making its crew the busiest in the Royal Navy).

Following RN tradition, her crew painted a series of drone wing silhouettes on the bridge to highlight Diamond's success in downing aerial threats – nine in all, eliminated by a combination of Sea Viper missiles or Diamond's 30mm guns - during her first stint in the Red Sea.

"The situation in the region is fraught, and ships in the force are firing on a daily basis – we hand over the baton with our best wishes to the fantastic team in Richmond who we know will do a great job," said Diamond's Commanding Officer Peter Evans.

"Having deployed at just five

days' notice we're used to quickly switching aim, and now our focus is on a short maintenance and ammunition re-supply period before we get back to our mission in the Red Sea."

Out of harm's way, Diamond made her way for the Rock for re-supply, re-arming and to give the ship's company an extended break from ops (which allowed some to meet up with loved ones last seen before Christmas).

Having hosted Defence Secretary Grant Shapps - he thanked Diamond's crews for their efforts on a short visit to the ship while she was on patrol - the praise continued once in Gibraltar as Armed Forces Minister James Heapey also passed on his gratitude, urging the crew not to clean the scorched Sea Viper silos as they were marks of honour (which does rather go against the grain of ship's husbandry).

Rarely are politicians short of words, but the minister was evidently stunned by both the ship and her crew, saying of his visit simply: "Wow, what a ship!"

Pictures: LPhoto Chris Sellars

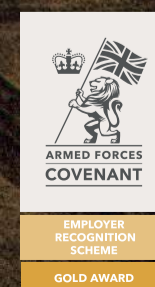


A SLICE OF THE ACTION





LEVEL
PEAKS





P-P-P-PICK UP A A LOAD OF RUBBISH

ROYAL Navy sailors have helped preserve the natural beauty of Antarctica by removing three tonnes of waste from an island.

Ice breaker HMS Protector returned to Brabant Island – on the west coast of the Antarctic Peninsula – for the first time since 2017 to continue work to remove abandoned equipment from an expedition in the 1980s.

Ice had frozen some waste into position but subsequent thaw and freeze cycles meant it could now be removed seven years on.

Twenty-nine members of HMS Protector's expedition headed ashore on the ship's Zodiac boats, including operations officer, Lieutenant Commander Hannah Lee, who also took part in the 2017 effort.

She said: "It was rewarding for the ship's company to be able to conduct a clean-up and preserve the natural beauty of Antarctica.

"I was part of the team that did the initial clean-up in 2016/17 and it was interesting to see how much the snow had melted and how much more equipment had been exposed.

"Unfortunately, we were not able to get everything off the Island due to permafrost and the severity of the landscape however, we have made it as safe as possible for the wildlife living there."

Over 15 months from January

1984, a Joint Services Expedition to Brabant Island – the second largest island of the Palmer Archipelago within the British Antarctic Territory – undertook a scientific mission.

Brabant had only been visited on six very brief occasions since its discovery in 1898 and the expedition sought to explore the island in three phases, travelling by boat, canoe and overland – each phase was landed and recovered by former ice patrol vessel HMS Endurance.

Nearly 40 years on, Protector returned for her second clean-up effort as part of the 'One Tonne Challenge'. First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Ben Key, asked personnel to spare time to rid beaches of one tonne of rubbish as part of an environmental drive.

Protector smashed that challenge three times over in one sitting on Brabant Island – with the locals, Chinstrap penguins, watching on.

Marine Garrett said: "It was quite shocking seeing all the mess left behind at first. But once we got together to gather up all the rubbish, we could instantly see the benefits of our work, quite a bitter-sweet feeling."

HMS Protector is the Royal Navy's polar research ship and is currently deployed in the Antarctic region promoting British interests and enforcing the Antarctic Treaty by working with partners including the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust and the governments of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands.



Dazzling debuts for HMS Spey



Clockwise from left, personnel take a look at the environmental work being done in Kochi; members of the crew tuck into Chef Pillai's authentic Indian dishes; HMS Spey arrives in Kochi; Chef Pillai chats with Spey's Commanding Officer, Commander Paul Caddy; Spey conducts training with corvette INS Kavaratti



Personnel from HMS Spey prepare to receive visitors in Colombo; Below tugs guide Spey into harbour



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HMS Spey sails in company with Sri Lankan patrol ship SLNS Samudura off Colombo



ROYAL Navy patrol ship HMS Spey has spiced up her adventures with debut visits to Sri Lanka and the Indian mainland.

Spey, which is operating in the Indian Ocean for the first time having spent the bulk of her Operation Woodwall deployment around the Pacific Rim/Southeast Asia and Australasia, spent three days in the port of Colombo to mark 75 years of relations between the two countries.

The visit paves the way for future co-operation between the two Commonwealth navies in a part of the world key not just to both the UK and Sri Lanka, but global trade and stability.

The patrol ship was greeted by a ceremonial welcome provided by the Sri Lankan Navy pipe and drums band – a well-received nod to Spey's Scottish heritage.

In response, the ship hosted a demonstration evening and reception, attended by British High Commissioner Andrew Patrick, Sri Lanka's Defence Minister, Premitha Tennakoon, as Guest of Honour and Vice Admiral Priyantha Perera, the head of the Sri Lankan Navy, and business leaders looking to forge links between the two countries.

The remainder of the short visit – which took place on the cusp of the 76th anniversary of Sri Lanka's independence – was focused on military discussions and improving understanding of both the ways of working of the two navies and their capabilities.

This will prove particularly useful in coming months as the Sri Lankan Navy is integrating in the Combined Maritime Forces – the international coalition of more than 40 like-minded nations dedicated to tackling smuggling, piracy, terrorist and criminal activity in the Indian Ocean/Gulf/Red Sea region.

The visit also provided an opportunity to explore Sri Lanka, with many of the 56-strong ship's company volunteering at ethical tourist sights, supporting the welfare of elephants and conservation of sea turtles.

And back on board, the sailors organised ship's tours

and equipment demonstrations for their hosts, while Commanding Officer Commander Paul Caddy called on senior Sri Lankan naval officers to discuss operations and co-operation.

Which was then put to the test with some combined training and exercises off Colombo with the patrol ship SLNS Samudura, a former US Coast Guard cutter which now performs general patrol duties (fishery protection, policing/counter smuggling, maritime security operations) for the Commonwealth navy.

"It has been a privilege to visit Sri Lanka in the lead up to the 76th anniversary of their independence and to celebrate 75 years of relations between the UK and Sri Lanka," said Commander Caddy.

"Like the UK, Sri Lanka has an important role in upholding the Rules Based International Order, particularly at this moment where we are working together on maritime security challenges in the southern Red Sea and our cooperation within the Combined Maritime Force is growing."

Prior to visiting Colombo, Spey sailed into Visakhapatnam in India to a ceremonial band, helicopter fly over and a warm welcome by their hosts, Indian Navy corvette Khanjar.

It is 79 years since Spey's namesake predecessor, a hard-worked WW2 frigate, sailed from Visakhapatnam with a task force to drive the Japanese out of Ramree Island in Burma... an infamous action as most of the defenders were killed by salt water crocodiles rather than the attacking Brits.

The welcome in Visakhapatnam was considerably more friendly. Spey's Commanding Officer Commander Paul Caddy was greeted by the senior Indian Naval officer in this part of the country, Flag Officer Commanding Headquarters Eastern Naval Command, Rear Admiral Rajesh Dhankar NM.

After a series of meetings, sports matches and shared

events in the city, Spey sailed for some combined training in the Bay of Bengal with anti-submarine corvette, INS Kavaratti, including some particularly close-quarters manoeuvres (the two ships were just 30 metres (100ft) apart at times

"This visit proved an important milestone for Spey," said Commander Caddy. "Our first visit to mainland India demonstrated the importance of our relationship to tackle shared challenges in the Indian Ocean.

"The hospitality and support provided was world class and the visit provided an opportunity to demonstrate the human bridge that the UK and India share."

Spey then continued to the west coast and Kochi, an historic trading city bridging the gap between East and West, the original resting place of explorer Vasco Da Gama and the home of Indian naval training.

The Overseas Patrol Vessels hold a unique ability to convene likeminded nations together around shared challenges.

As the greenest ship in the Royal Navy, Spey was the fitting host for an environmental symposium onboard, looking at ways for the maritime sector to come together to tackle climate change.

"HMS Spey's green credentials enable us to patrol even the world's most protected marine sites," said Lieutenant Bruce Clarke, who led one of the discussions at the event.

"It's excellent to see industry, the Royal Navy and academics come together to discuss the challenges facing the world's oceans and how Spey can play a role in supporting these discussions."

As home of Indian Navy training, there was the unique opportunity for Indian and Royal Navy assessors to put Spey's ship's company through their paces.

Sailors completed a fire-fighting exercise, including a challenging 'blaze' in the main engine room, and also demonstrated how they might respond to an attack in



harbour from a fast attack craft.

All of which is paving the way for closer cooperation between the two navies. Spey's Commanding Officer and Commodore Sarvpreet Singh discussed joint training/working, reaffirming the recent commitment by Defence Secretary Grant Shapps to enhance the UK and India's ability to train together. This year will also see the first Indian Naval Officer leading a cohort at Britannia Royal Naval College.

Spey also built on friendships made by frigate HMS Lancaster when she called into Kochi 12 months ago, not least a visit to youngsters at Don Bosco orphanage – the city's oldest children's home – to teach new skills and interact with its residents, while shipmates also volunteered at the Subhas Chandra Bose Garden in Ernakulam.

Three members of the ship's company attended an influential women's conference involving female leaders from business, academics, community, social justice and the military, who shared their experiences, among them Leading Medical Assistant Tash Wylie.

"It was an amazing opportunity to share knowledge and experiences with so many like-minded people from across society," she said.

Another friend from Lancaster's visit was Suresh Pillai – generally known in the culinary world simply as Chef Pillai – who brought his team to the frigate to serve up some authentic Indian food.

One of the world's best known and respected Anglo-Indian chefs, who's made his name in both Britain and India, he turned Spey's flight deck into an open air galley to cook and serve traditional dishes from the sub-continent.

This was an opportunity to demonstrate the talent of the chefs onboard who can transform from emergency feeding stations during humanitarian aid and disaster relief, to competing with a renowned Michelin-star chef whose teams served seven million meals across their restaurants in 2023.

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ONWARDS EAST OF SUEZ

A BRAND-new Royal Navy task group destined for operations across the Indo-Pacific is now finally about to sail through the Suez Canal following a five-month Mediterranean mission.

The Littoral Response Group (South) is designed to take Royal Marines on operations to far flung places across the Indo-Pacific of strategic importance to the UK, bolstering the efforts of patrol ships HMS Tamar and HMS Spey.

But, with the moniker 'response group' comes a certain level of flexibility, the ability to react to world events when needed. Being in the right place to deliver on the UK government's objectives.

That's exactly why LRG(S) has been operating in the Mediterranean since October. World events dictated it was more important, in the wake of the Hamas-Israel conflict, that the task group stay this side of the Suez Canal.

As the Middle East was plunged into further uncertainty and into renewed conflict, the LRG held its position in the eastern Mediterranean.

During this phase it stood by to protect British Nationals – evacuate them if need be from danger zones – and eventually deliver 87 tons of UK and Cypriot aid to the people of Gaza via Egypt and supporting UK Foreign Office efforts to evacuate 208 British Nationals from the region.

The Commander Amphibious Task Force, Commander Sam Stephens, said: "The UK has demonstrated once again, it will always back up political words with tangible and genuine action."

"The actions of the Royal Navy prove that the UK as an island nation can and will support its allies and partners



The MRZR vehicle during training in Cyprus



The new Commando Raiding Craft in action

anywhere on the globe.

"It has been a privilege to command the first rotation of the enduring LRG(South) deployment.

"Having deployed from the UK just days after the Oct 7th attacks, the last six months have been extremely busy, but have thoroughly proven the LRG(S) concept of an adaptable and agile force offering military options and political choice by maintaining readiness for contingent operations whilst projecting UK influence to the point of need anywhere in the world."

Crucially, the LRG – its air group of Merlin and Wildcat helicopters, its landing craft, its commandos and sailors – had to be ready for any eventuality and that is why intensive training took place, namely to practice evacuations and aid delivery at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus.

The Army's 17 Port & Maritime Regiment rolled out their Mexeflote – a landing raft to move goods and vehicles to shore – alongside Royal Marines landing and raiding craft, showing the LRG's impressive amphibious capabilities.

Amongst the many mission rehearsals LRG(S) has been busy proving new Commando Forces concept of 'mobility and agility' with the new Commando Raiding Craft, able to do long range insertion at speed (*see more on page 7*), and the new MRZR 4x4 tactical vehicle deployed by Landing Craft or from the back of a Merlin Mk4 a long way inland/behind enemy lines.

The LRG was eventually called into action to deliver aid at the Port of Said, where they offloaded some 10,000 thermal blankets and nearly 5,000 shelter packs for Gazans.

Turning their attentions to the European shores of the Med,

WITH BUSINESS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN NEARLY COMPLETE, ALL EYES TURN TO THE INDO-PACIFIC

the LRG headed to Albania to help pave the way for future training and co-operation between the two countries.

The LRG's Merlin helicopters conducted training with Albanian forces by day and night the ships hosted VIPs led by the country's president Bajram Begaj and conducted extensive reconnaissance flights of suitable locations for larger-scale joint training.

The Balkan nation's shoreline, bases and some of its Cold War installations have become training grounds for Royal Marines/UK amphibious forces when operating in the Adriatic, and previous Albanian Lion combined exercises have helped the military of both countries hone skills and gain a greater understanding of each other as NATO allies.

It's not been run in recent years, but with 2024 marking the 15th anniversary of Albania's membership of the alliance (and NATO's 75th birthday), the time proved ripe for renewing acquaintances. Two Merlins made a low pass of Tirana's sprawling Skanderbeg Square – a vast open area in the heart

of the capital which hosts major public events – during a joint press conference by the task force commander, Commander Sam Stephens, and the Head of Albanian Land Forces Brigadier General Ilir Xhebexhia as a show of solidarity.

Commander Stephens praised his hosts as a "strong NATO partner" occupying an important strategic position in an important part of the world and said the UK was looking to reinvigorate ties after a few years' hiatus of the regular Albanian Lion exercise.

He said Britain's military benefited hugely from Albania's "exceptional terrain and areas for training – a very different environment from the UK" and the alliance was even more important given the "growing threats to the world order... to strengthen regional security and counter threats – not only in Albania, but worldwide."

Having trained with Albanian troops and air forces, the Merlins became 'VIP taxis' as they flew Albanian dignitaries (President, First Lady, Cabinet, military leaders) and British

diplomats led by ambassador to Albania, Alastair King-Smith, to RFA Argus, at sea off the port of Durrës just west of Tirana.

The visitors were given a comprehensive tour of Argus, including its impressive hospital facilities, as well as a briefing on the force's mission and capabilities.

While guests were working up an appetite, Argus' chefs were demonstrating they can not merely keep several hundred sailors and Royal Marines happy on a daily basis... but can serve up a three-course meal to impress world leaders: crispy seabass fillet to start; Aberdeen Angus beef with red wine and garlic reductions, sautéed king oyster mushrooms, grilled asparagus spears and pommes anna; and if there was room... hazelnut chocolate tart to finish.

As *Navy News* went to print, the LRG was about to train with Turkish forces, before turning their attentions to business East of Suez for the long-term – namely in India and eventually Australia. Later in the year, they will take part in Exercise Predators Run alongside US and Australian forces.

LITTORAL RESPONSE GROUP (SOUTH)



RFA ARGUS

RFA Argus is home to a multi-spot flight deck and vast hospital facilities, her 'jewel in the crown' capability as the only Role 3 Primary Casualty Receiving Ship makes her a unique and quite literally life-

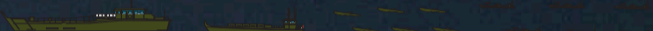
saving asset to any expeditionary force, boasting an advanced operating theatre, XRAY, CT Scanner, Intensive Care and over 100 beds - she can provide NHS standard care anywhere in the world.



RFA LYME BAY

RFA Lyme Bay has a vast well-dock for landing craft and plays host to the permanently deployed battle staff. Lyme is packed with high-mobility vehicles, including MRZR

offroaders, Vikings amphibious vehicles, tractors, cranes, quad-bikes, JCBs and trucks. A floating garage and nerve centre for operations.



COMMANDO FORCES

Centred on Royal Marines from 40 Commando, supported by specialists from across the Commando Force, including boat-raiding experts 47 Commando. An array of landing craft, including an Landing Craft Utility, Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel, six

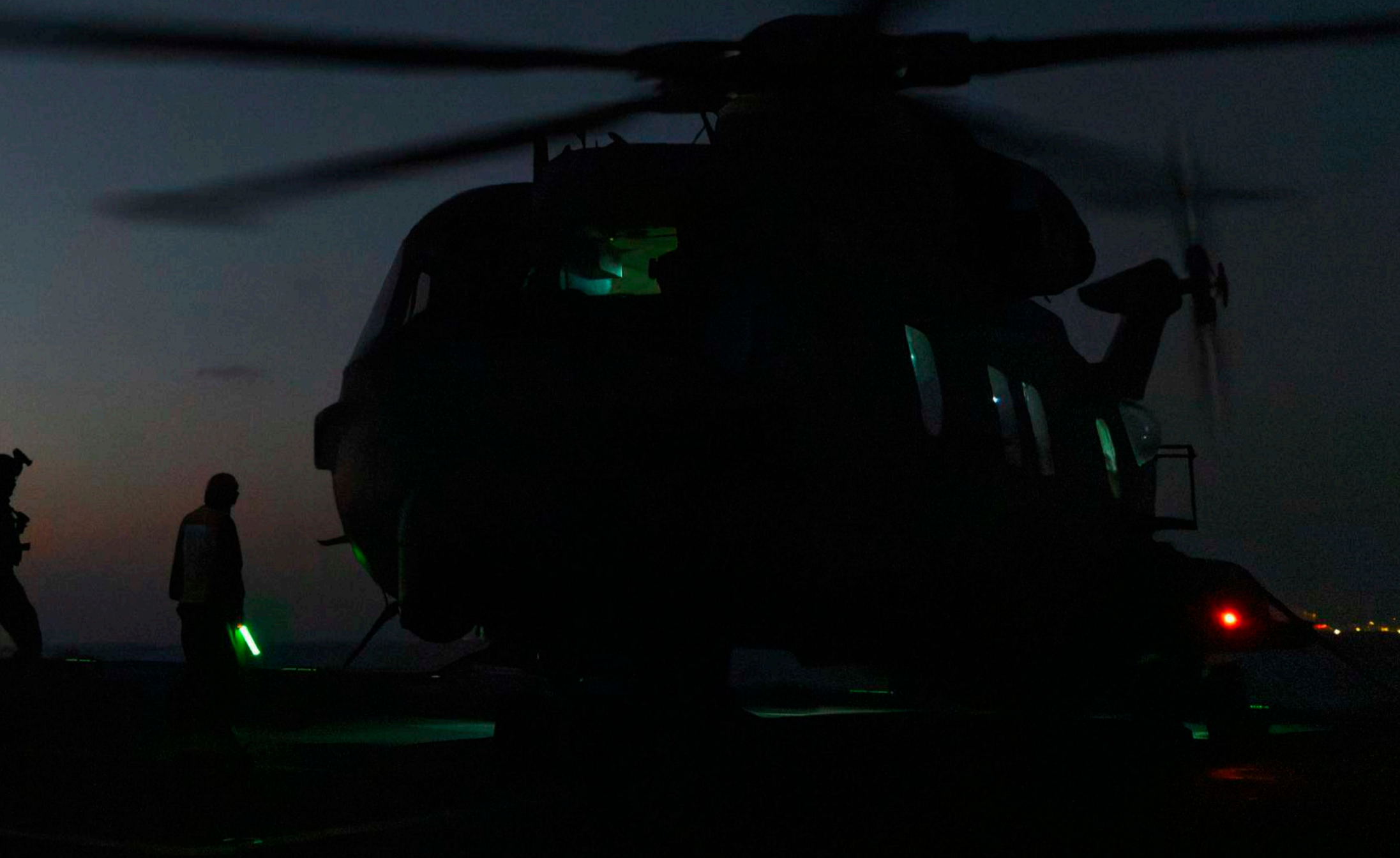
new Commando Raiding Craft and six Inshore Raiding Craft. Commander Amphibious Task Force battlestaff and surging forward from the UK during crisis response, Commander Land Forces (CLF) staff from HQ 40 Commando.



AIR GROUP

RFA Argus' flight deck is home to three Merlin MK4 helicopters from 845 Naval Air Squadron, which provide the lift from which

an entire Royal Marines Strike Company Group of circa 250 Marines from 40 Commando can deploy.



Images by: LPhot James Clarke, LPhot Mark Johnson and LCpl Tim Lombard



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LOGGING ON... MERLINS DROP OFF SUPPLIES

THE wings of the Royal Marines swapped guns, ammunition and supplies to help hikers in the frozen Norwegian Arctic.

As a 'thank you' to their hosts for permitting annual winter training (Operation Clockwork) deep inside the Arctic Circle, the commando aviators performed an unusual delivery mission – saving locals weeks of effort in brutal conditions.

The Commando Helicopter Force – based at RNAS Yeovilton in Somerset – makes extensive use of the fields around Bardufoss as crews practice 'whiteout' landings and take-offs, setting up makeshift refuelling points or camps to train personnel how to live, eat, survive in this harshest of environments.

The same terrain is also popular with winter hikers – the Royal Marines helped with the (thankfully successful) search for missing

walkers last month – for whom refuge cabins are provided should the weather close in.

Several such huts pepper the remote Øvre Dividal National Park on the Norwegian-Swedish border – about 40 miles southeast of Bardufoss air base, the hub of the Commando Helicopter Force's winter training.

Troms Turlag (The Norwegian Trekking Association) provides firewood for the cabins, which are all located more than 2,000ft above sea level – and there are no roads.

Instead, park authorities have relied on local volunteers riding snowmobiles through the wilderness for weeks to make the deliveries, potentially disturbing the local reindeer population and other wildlife.

Enter the Merlin Mk4s of 845 Naval Air Squadron, not only capable of carrying 24 Royal Marines into battle, but also supplies and

equipment (including 105mm howitzers and BV tracked vehicles) slung beneath the aircraft.

With the help of the Mobile Air Operations Team, experts on the ground who establish makeshift forward bases and ensure safe load lifting, the wood was prepared for both loading aboard the Merlin's rear cabin and in a giant sling net.

The aircraft flew through valleys before climbing the towering mountains of the national park to their drop off points near the cabins, delivering three tonnes of cargo in a matter of hours rather than weeks.

The delivery mission also serves as useful training for the commando fliers, safely transporting an awkward load to high ground blanketed in snow, far from any human habitation, in sub-zero temperatures, especially for some aircrew who had only recently earned

qualifications to operate in the Arctic.

Pilot Lieutenant Aaron Dempsey said he and his predecessors had benefited from more than half a century of training in northern Norway.

"From learning to maintain the aircraft in temperatures as low as -30 degrees, to landing in a snow cloud, this training is imperative to keep Jungle operators at the forefront of Great Britain's Arctic capability," he added.

"It was humbling to be part of this year's contribution to a long-established gesture of thanks to the Norwegian community."

The Merlins are accompanied by the Commando Helicopter Force's battlefield Wildcats of 847 Squadron at Bardufoss.

Once both squadrons have completed Clockwork, they will remain in northern Norway to support NATO's largest military exercise since the Cold War, Steadfast Defender.

PICTURE BY: POPhot Kyle Heller





PITCAIRN.
Pacific.
Paradise.

Where the pace of life has changed little since Fletcher Christian and his band of mutineers burned the Bounty to the waterline and settled here in 1790.

Where the birdlife has largely been spared the impact of predators, allowing Murphy's petrels, red-footed boobies, fairy terns, brown noddies and the red-tailed tropicbird breed and Pitcairn's very own reed warbler.

Where the flora thrives – 81 native plants, nine of them endemic – and the waters are rich with coral reefs and home to more than 36 dozen endangered species such as green turtles, humpback whales, and five species of fish unique to the island chain.

The good news is that there's no trouble in paradise.

And that's just how the islanders want it.

But that's because decisive steps are being taken to preserve it.

By them. By the British Government. By the Royal Navy.

All take the preservation of paradise seriously.

Its remoteness, its distance from regular shipping lanes make Pitcairn

about as removed from the hubbub of 21st Century life as possible.

But...

Though much cleaner, much richer in marine life than the busy waterways of the world, the Pacific waves which crash against the shores of the four islands in the Pitcairn chain are still blighted by many of the problems which plague the Seven Seas: plastics, waste, toxins and pollutants.

We've featured one of the Pitcairns before, Henderson Island, 'the most polluted in the world', its beaches and shoreline littered with detritus of the ocean for miles on end. There's no-one to remove it for Henderson is uninhabited.

Not so Pitcairn, 100 or so miles away.

Just 40 souls live here, almost exclusively descendants of the Bounty's mutineers.

At 2.8 square miles it's roughly the same size as Lundy or Lindisfarne with a rich eco-system, birds and plants especially.

To monitor and protect them, islanders have recently established a science centre to allow experts from all over the world to study whatever aspect of the Pitcairn environment they wish to, as well as test water

samples for temperature, acidity and possible pollutants.

Those samples are taken from a swathe of the Pacific, more than 300,000 square miles of ocean – that's roughly the size of Scandinavia – designated a marine protected area, the third largest in the world no less.

As it's relatively untouched by the activities and actions of humanity, it's a vital yardstick for helping scientists understand the oceans – as well as being an unspoiled patch of the Pacific.

Policing this huge patch of the Pacific is largely carried out by satellite monitoring/tracking vessels' AIS details.

But it's always nice to have a bobby on the beat. Especially one in dazzle paint.

HMS Tamar conducted a patrol of some of the protected area as a deterrent; the waters which border the designated area are rich with tuna... and popular with fishing vessels.

As yet those vessels have not breached the boundary – and there's no suggestion they will – but a patrol to deter any such thoughts can't do any harm.

That patrol brought the curtain down on Tamar's five day visit to

the island, a visit focused entirely on the environment and community.

It's the ship's debut in Pitcairn – and the second by the two Royal Navy patrol ships deployed to the Indo-Pacific (HMS Spey delivered Covid vaccines at couple of years back).

You don't just drop in on Pitcairn, you have to make a determined effort to visit.

The island lies 1,350 miles from Tahiti more than 3,000 miles from New Zealand and 9,000 miles from Tamar's home base of Portsmouth.

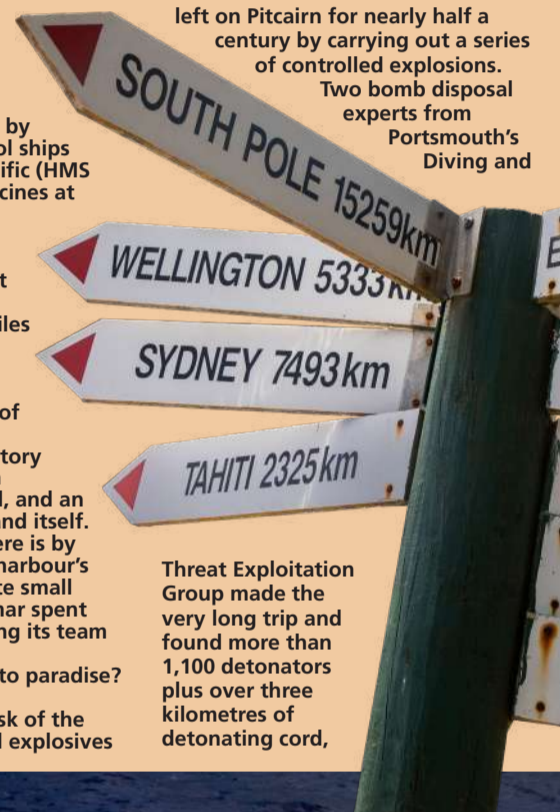
It's a UK Overseas Territory with a governor based in Wellington, New Zealand, and an elected mayor on the island itself.

The only way to get here is by sea – and even then the harbour's only able to accommodate small boats... which meant Tamar spent the visit at anchor, ferrying its team ashore.

And what did they do to paradise? Well, they blew it up.

The most important task of the visit was to deal with old explosives

left on Pitcairn for nearly half a century by carrying out a series of controlled explosions. Two bomb disposal experts from Portsmouth's Diving and



Threat Exploitation Group made the very long trip and found more than 1,100 detonators plus over three kilometres of detonating cord,



PRESERVING PARADISE



left over from construction of the island's small harbour in the 1970s, which was in a dangerous state and needed disposing; that was carried out with controlled explosions in a sheltered bay.

"On



behalf of the Pitcairn community we are delighted that the explosives have been dealt with," said Pitcairn's Mayor Simon Young.

"We have been concerned about the safety and storage of these explosives for many years, so we would like to express our thanks to the Royal Navy and especially the EOD team." The divers also found around three and a half tonnes of high explosive ammonium nitrate fuel oil, once used during quarrying operations on Pitcairn. A specialist team will return to the island in due course to render it safe.

Elsewhere, sailors helped provide muscle to help with the ongoing construction of Pitcairn's new community centre, offered advice on maritime infrastructure and the boats used to ferry stores between visiting supply ships and the harbour.

The arrival of HMS Tamar effectively doubled the Pitcairn population overnight and the sailors immediately knuckled down to community tasks in and around the sole settlement, Adamstown. "The islanders were immensely grateful for the support we provided, whether it be advice

on their maritime infrastructure; outreach support for the development of their community centre; or ordnance disposal," said Officer of the Watch Lieutenant Leo Jeune.

"It was a pleasure to meet and integrate with the community, and understand the challenges and unique aspects to living in the UK's most distant overseas territory, and, one of the most isolated communities in the world.

"Their friendliness and island spirit were mimetic of the communities we often miss when forward deployed away from our homes."

All Tamar's crew were invited to a banquet in the main square – and invited roughly half the island's inhabitants aboard their ship for lunch to thank them for their hospitality.

"It has been a childhood dream to visit the Pitcairn islands. From reading the books to watching films of Fletcher Christian – one of the most infamous mutineers in Royal Naval history – this place has become something of a legend," said marine engineer Chief Petty Officer Alex Duff.

"To think we anchored in Bounty Bay was amazing enough. We

watched Mel Gibson's *Bounty* film on the flight deck that evening, in view of the cliffs they would have seen when they made land. That set the tone for what was one of the most unique and interesting visits in my naval career."

Able Seaman Robert Stevenson added: "It was an amazing experience visiting and supporting the community at Pitcairn.

"I was amazed at how resilient they were, able to sustain themselves so far from normal infrastructure and civilisation. They were so appreciative of the support we gave, and in return showed us some of the most beautifully conserved natural environments I have ever seen."

For warfare officer Sub Lieutenant Patrick Digby – a keen ornithologist and botanist – the opportunity to visit Pitcairn was "truly a dream come true." He continued: "The preservation of both the marine and land environment is such that rare species thrive – with many not even yet classified by science.

"I was able to sight the Frigate Bird and – more exclusively – the Pitcairn Reed Warbler which is notable not only for its scarcity; but it neither warbles, nor lives in reeds!

"It was certainly a highlight of

my travels, and I will reflect on the privilege for years to come."

Tamar's Commanding Officer Commander Tom Gell said Pitcairn would live long in the memory of everyone aboard his ship.

"It was a privilege to visit and support one of the UK's most distant overseas territories and provide support to maritime security," said Commander Gell.

"It's been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the ship's company – Pitcairn is one of the most beautiful places on earth, a tropical paradise.

"The welcome received by my ship's company was exceptional, and we were well hosted in return for offering community outreach and support to Explosive Ordnance Disposal.

"The UK has a commitment to protect the pristine marine area around Pitcairn and it's a testament to the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt and the Royal Navy's forward deployment programme that Tamar has been able to follow in the footsteps of HMS Spey by making a second visit in as many years to the Pitcairn Islands, demonstrating our support for the community and commitment to maritime security in the region."

Pictures: PO(Phot) Jim Gibson





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BRITISH BOB IS A HIT(RO)



Main picture: Flying around Santa Ana volcano in El Salvador; below: Landing on HMS Prince of Wales; HITRON Interdiction Demo at Jacksonville Sea and Sky Airshow

A TRAILBLAZING Royal Navy pilot says embracing opportunities throughout his career led him to his current unique exchange – flying with the United States Coast Guard.

Lieutenant Commander Bob Fleming is the first Royal Navy pilot to serve with the Helicopter Interdiction Squadron (HITRON) – at the forefront of the US’s war on drugs.

Known affectionately by his US hosts as ‘British Bob’, he has spent the past 21 months in the States flying MH-65E Dolphin helicopters.

He was invited as a guest on podcast Flight Suit Friday (hosted by a group of US Coast Guard aviators) and outlined the main difference between the Wildcats he flies for 815 Naval Air Squadron compared with the Dolphin – and how he has found adapting to American flight safety, standards and protocols.

“I had this very good instructor when I was learning and he said the day you stop learning about aviation, is the day you give up completely.”

“I am always learning new things, new ways of doing stuff and I learned to fight for the fun opportunities.”

“I see people who are scared to put their neck out but they will regret not volunteering for it – for something different or something exciting. Fight for the opportunities, embrace them because you never know where they’re going to lead.”

“Take advantage of them because you don’t get them in a normal career. I did and they have led me here. I am flying for the USCG and I don’t think that’s a coincidence.”

“On a morning, I walk out to a USCG helicopter and I cannot stop smiling, it’s brilliant.”

Lt Cdr Fleming joined the Royal Navy in 2002 after flying in the Royal Air Force Reserves for five years. He became a navy pilot in 2003, starting off in a Lynx, progressing to the current Wildcat when it retired.

Although he has been involved in some search-and-rescue operations, the Royal Navy stopped providing the service in 2015. So his time with the US Coast Guard has been a step change in his normal operations in a Wildcat, which range from anti-surface warfare to counter-narcotics.

He also revealed a difference between the two services is the Wildcat only having one pilot – much to the shock of the hosts.

“One of the main differences is we’re single pilot,” he said.

“In the front-line aircraft there’s only one set of controls so when you’re the pilot, you are the pilot. There’s no one else to hand control over to.”

He also said the rules and regulations of United States airspace proved the most difficult challenge to overcome.

“Flying is flying so learning to fly a new type of helicopter hasn’t been too bad,” Lt Cdr Fleming added.

“You line up the numbers and it seems to do its thing so that’s great.”

“The airspace and rules and regulation have been the hardest thing. The whole construction of airspace is different, how you label them, how it operates, who you talk to, Coast Guard regulations. How you get around, who you talk to, flight monitoring is different.”

“It’s probably due to the fact we have a smaller geography in the UK. We can do things more locally but you’ve got to get massive coverage. Plus, you have way more airports and general aviation. It’s interestingly busy out here.”

During Lt Cdr Fleming’s time with the USCG, he has completed two deployments with the Coast Guard’s cutters, tracking and stopping go-fasts carrying illegal cargo. He has joined a ship in El Salvador for operations in central America and off San Diego.

He also landed on aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales during the ship’s deployment to the east coast of the United States.

And with half of his time with the USCG completed, Lt Cdr Fleming said: “It’s been a lot of hard work to get my mind around everything but I feel pretty comfortable now.”

You can listen to Lt Cdr Fleming talking about his time on the ‘Flight Suit Friday’ podcast at flightsuitfriday.castos.com/episodes/e82-british-bob.





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Register here:



REVAMP TO MESS

THAT's another fine mess you've gotten into... courtesy of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) and the RN's Rebalancing Lives Fund.

The generous donations of the former paid for 90 per cent of the improvements to the senior rates and warrant officers mess at RNAS Culdrose.

For many of our sailors who live on the Cornish air station, the mess is their living room and home-from-home.

Pictured is mess president

Culdrose Base Warrant Officer Mark 'Swiftly' Swift and mess committee member Petty Officer John 'Minty' Field, who organised the bid, which funded nearly two dozen new chairs and sofas.

As a thank-you from the senior rates' Minty is encouraging shipmates to set up regular donations to the charity.

These will then contribute to a wide range of projects for serving personnel and their families.

See nrnmc.org.uk/donate



New partner announced

THE RNRMC has welcomed the Portsmouth Naval Base Cycle Hub as one of its new charity partners.

The hub provides full bike servicing, repairs, sales of second-hand bikes and also new bike parts and equipment, such as clothing and lights.

You can also pop-in for free, no-obligation quotes or advice from manager Simon Lean.

Ten per cent of the profit from the sale of any second-hand bike will be donated to RNRMC.

All used bikes are sold with a three-month warranty having undergone a full service.

Simon also accepts donations of used cycles for refurbishment and onward sale.

The hub is open to all personnel living or working in Portsmouth Naval Base and can be found in Neptune building near the café and Costcutter from Monday to Friday between 8.30am and 4pm.

Call 023 9272 0713 or email repairs@navalbasecyclehub.co.uk



Support for Royal Navy Snowsports Festival



THE RNRMC provided funding to support this year's RN Snowsports Festival, helping with the running of events and providing free lessons and racing for all serving personnel and Reserves.

The festival was open to all Royal Navy personnel, Maritime Reserves and veterans, their friends and family, and catered to all levels of experience.

The winter athletes had the chance to compete and win across a number of winter disciplines: Alpine Ski, Snowboard, Telemark, Nordic, Bobsleigh, Bob-Skeleton and Luge.

This year, the RNRMC sponsored the Telemark Parallel Sprint. Congratulations to Lieutenant Commander Matilda Woodard, Sub Lieutenant Jonathan James, Able Seaman Giorgina Altham, and Marine Ollie Wotton, who each finished first in their respective races!

For the results, head to nrnmc.org.uk/news.

Pride as book is published

AS A fifteen-year-old schoolboy, Roy Washington watched the field gun competition in awe as the spectacle unfolded on TV.

Five years later, in front of an audience of 15,000, he proudly marched into the arena, heart pounding in his chest.

His book, *Ten Years before the Mast* is a personal account of ten eventful years in the Royal Navy, from participation in the spectacular Field Gun competition to incredibly close encounters during the Falklands War.

All profits are being donated to the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity.

For more information visit: tenyearsbeforethemast.com

Neurodiversity navigator

The RNRMC has joined forces with the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust to put in place a Neurodiversity Navigator, Bobbie Branson.

We are very grateful to those who spoke to us and identified support needs

for neurodiversity and delighted we can deliver.

Bobbie will be by your side, providing an invaluable signposting service for those seeking neurodiversity support.

While the primary focus is on families, Bobbie will

also be available to support all Service personnel and those transitioning from service.

To contact Bobbie visit nrnmc.org.uk/nrnmc-neurodiversity-navigator and fill out the contact form.

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AS FEWER than half the population have drawn up a will, we're working with Octopus Legacy to help you write your Will for FREE today.

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If you do use the service, perhaps consider a legacy gift to a charity such as

the RNRMC to make a difference, supporting your naval family after you've gone.

See will.octopuslegacy.com/nrnmc or call freephone 0800 773 4013.

If you live in Northern Ireland, Scotland or the Isle of Man, you will need to make a face-to-face appointment by calling the freephone number above.

Any questions for RNRMC? Please email wills@nrnmc.org.uk

DO YOU ever find yourself missing the events and comradeship of Service life, or want to try something new?

The RNRMC has teamed up with the Royal Naval Association to bring you the 'Thriving Together' programme – a year of action-packed experience days, sporting events and activities.

Taking place across the UK and Europe, these events and activities will give you a chance to reunite, step outside your comfort zone and connect with old (and new!) shipmates.

From cycling in Normandy to surfing in Devon, there is a varied range of activities planned and confirmed so far.

Through this programme, we hope there is something that will pique your interest, inspire, or simply get you out to enjoy the great outdoors with like-minded people.

More dates, venues and activities will be confirmed later. Keep an eye out on our social media for updates throughout the year.

To sign up please contact the Sports and Comradeship Coordinator (Chris 'Scouse' Reeves) at the RNA on scc@royalnavalassoc.com.

FAMILY BACK TOGETHER AFTER CHRISTMAS APART

THE RNRMC have spoken to a family about spending time away from each other due to deployment.

Back in December, we ran our 'Separated by Service' Christmas Appeal featuring Royal Navy family, James, his wife, Reanne, and their two children, Scarlette and Amber.

They spent Christmas apart due to James's service as a Petty Officer Marine Engineer down in the South Atlantic on board HMS Forth.

We caught up with Reanne following James's return home to find out how they were settling back into family life and how his return had played out on the day.

"The girls knew he was flying into Brize Norton that day and were telling all their teachers and friends at

school: 'My daddy's coming home today!'

"They were so excited.

When he picked them up from school, you could hear Amber shouting 'daddy' from across the playground.

They love having him home and the first week they get away with everything."

In typically stoic navy spouse fashion, Reanne accepts the challenges which come with Service life.

James works on a watch rotation of 13 weeks away and five weeks at home and

at the time of reading this will already be back on duty in the Falklands.

Reanne acknowledges that they have become accustomed to this pattern.

"As a family, this routine is better for us as we know what days he'll be here and when he'll be gone, so we can plan around it," she added,

"It's hard on the kids, but they take it like little troopers."

Reflecting on James' 17 years' of service, she said: "I'm proud of everything he does and I'll stand by him. It's nice having him home, it feels like the house is whole again."

We're thankful to the family for allowing us to share their story via our Christmas Appeal and in describing how it feels to be reunited, which we're sure will resonate with so many others in the naval community.



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The only weight is Essex

YOU can't put that on a weighing scales.

No, but it's still possible to precisely weigh one of the Royal Navy's next-generation frigates precisely.

HMS Venturer is the first of five Inspiration-class frigates and just shy of two years since she was laid down the warship reached a milestone in her construction.

Here comes the science bit:

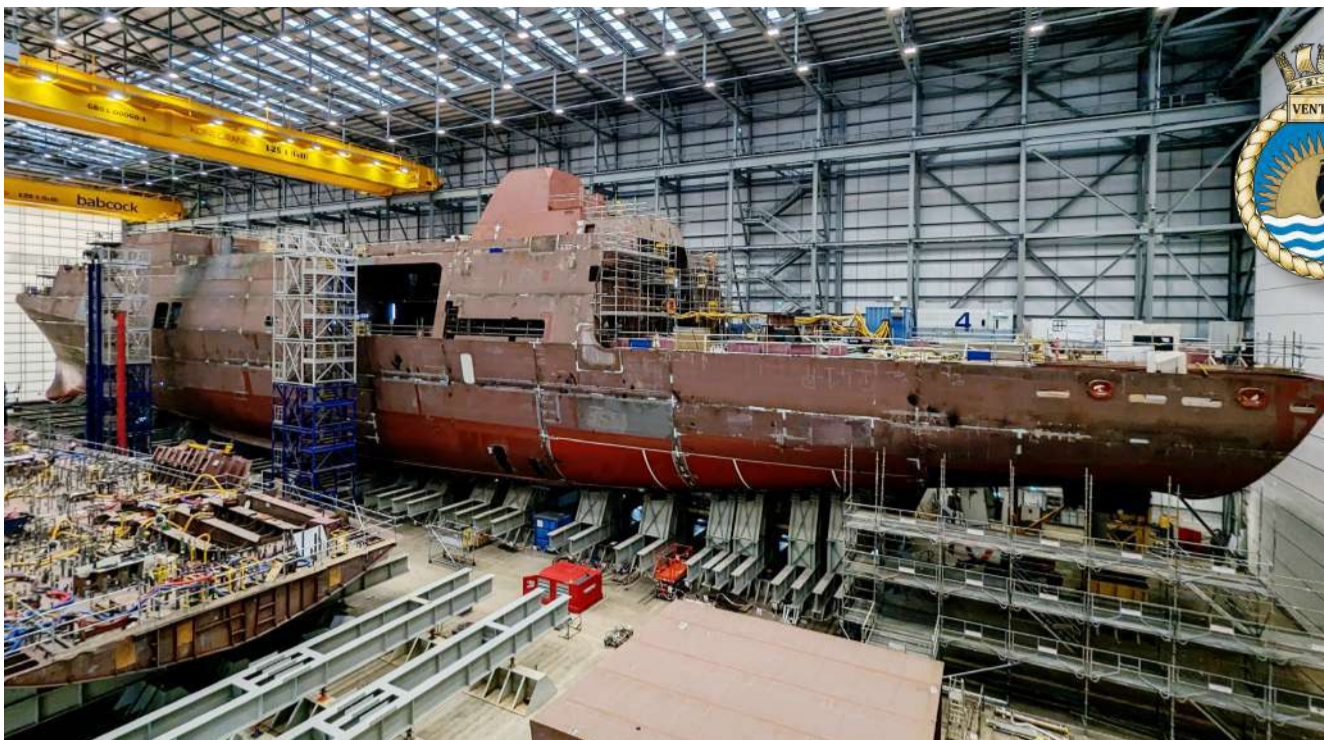
Throughout the design of a ship, the weight is estimated by naval architects, who take into account a raft of considerations: weight of materials such as the steel in the hull, the equipment and engineering and systems installed (engines, shafts, pipes, computers, wiring, weapons), consumables (food and stores), fuel and even the ship's company.

Much of that has yet to be installed (or join) the ship, but to validate that calculations to date are spot on, the entire ship as she exists right now was lifted and recorded three times.

Venturer is longer than 11 London buses. It took 84 power hydraulic jacks to raise her, while load cells took precise calculations of the weight.

Having successfully weighed the ship, the team at Babcock are completing the construction of the ship in the cavernous assembly hall at Rosyth alongside the second ship in the Type 31 programme, HMS Active.

Venturer is due to emerge from the hall this year to pave the way for work on Active (seen in the foreground, left in the image above) and the third frigate, HMS Formidable, to progress in the



County of Essex," said Commander Chris Cozens, the frigate's Senior Naval Officer.

"The rich naval and maritime history combined with its modern outlook is a fitting choice for a next-generation frigate."

"We both share a focus on community outreach, linking the sea to Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths and industry to benefit our national prosperity."

Frigate HMS Ashanti was affiliated with Southend until she ended active duties around 1980 and in the '80s and 1990s minesweeper HMS Orwell enjoyed ties with Harwich, which served as a key naval base through both world wars... and through which many boy sailors passed on their way to training across the water at HMS Ganges in Shotley Gate (which is in Suffolk, but thanks to its imposing mast still very visible from Essex).

"I am proud to call HMS Venturer part of Essex as it adds a new chapter to our county's deep naval history," said Essex County Council Leader Councillor Kevin Bentley.

"With the threats the UK is facing around the globe, it is more important than ever that we strengthen our ties with the Royal Navy and show our support for its brave Servicemen and women."

"We look forward to seeing HMS Venturer embark on her maiden voyage."

facility, while the first-in-class ship completes fitting out and installation of kit and systems which could not be added inside the assembly building.

Since the weighing took place in early February, Venturer's bridge has been installed and the ship has gained an affiliate: the county of Essex.

The 'Warship Integrated Navigation and Bridge System'

was first pieced together and tested at the National Maritime Systems Centre on Portsdown Hill overlooking Portsmouth.

It was inspected by some of the ship's company, before being dismantled and shipped to Scotland for installation on the frigate.

As for the affiliation, it's the first in 30 years between the Royal Navy and the people of

Essex.

County leaders have agreed to be bound with Venturer, linking the warship with more than 1.8m souls in East Anglia from Chigwell to Colchester, Braintree to Basildon.

All warships enjoy affiliations with towns, cities or boroughs. Occasionally, that extends to entire counties such as current frigates HMS Kent and

Sutherland, each linked with the county of the same name.

The link with Essex was born from initial inquiries from community leaders in Southend-on-Sea – a link which has been expanded to the wider county.

It joins the Worship Company of Ironmongers which is already affiliated with the new warship.

"It is wonderful that HMS Venturer is affiliated with the



Bulls-eye in Bahrain

SEA Darts returned to the Royal Navy inventory for a day as two of the world's top players dropped in on HMS Lancaster.

After the busiest month in her 32-year career, the frigate gave her 180 (ish) crew a welcome break in Bahrain, coinciding with the the Professional Darts Corporation's Bahrain Darts Masters.

Two-time world champion Peter 'Snakebite' Wright – instantly recognisable from his bright Mohican hairstyle – and Rob 'Voltage' Cross, a fellow former holder of the top title, were invited aboard the frigate by crew.

The pair were given a comprehensive tour of the warship, were filmed by TV crews covering the tournament (which was hosted at Bahrain's F1 motor racing circuit complex) and sat down for a Q&A session with the ship's company.

A few crew were able to throw some legs with the players and Peter (pictured above at the oche) donated a signed shirt along with other darts goods before the pair invited 40 sailors to join them as their guests... with Lieutenant Jamie Nicholls, Warrant Officer Ben Hayne and Chief Petty Officer Adam Powlesland enjoying VIP access. That led to some frequent appearances on the telly.

"Following a busy period at sea over Christmas and New Year, everyone really got into the World Championships on BFBS, with the new kid on the block, Luke Littler," said Lieutenant Nicholls, Lancaster's deputy marine engineer officer – and big darts fan.

"Hosting Peter and Rob on board was an amazing experience and to see the positive effect they had on the ship's company, made it extra special. The players, managers and media team thoroughly enjoyed their time onboard."

Adam added: "I have always been a huge fan of the darts, regularly attending events back home in the UK. To get two great players on board including Peter Wright who has always been my favourite player and to meet them and chat about the game was an unforgettable experience."

"Then to go and watch them play in a televised event is one I will look back on in my Naval career as a cherished memory."

(For those who don't follow the sport, Peter and Rob were both knocked out in the quarter finals, while teenage sensation Luke Littler lifted the title and took home the £20k prize money.)

Picture: ET(CIS) Mike Allen

Registered charity number: Royal Navy & Royal Marines Children's Fund 1160182

 **Naval Children's Charity**

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



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311 Twyford Avenue, Stamshaw,
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caseworkers@navalchildrenscharity.org.uk

Generous Glasgow's gift to kids

SCHOOLCHILDREN across Glasgow will benefit from the generosity and physical efforts of the city's own warship.

Sailors from the new Type 26 frigate dropped in on St Monica's Primary School in Milton to hand over the fruits of their recent labours: £1,600 – which amounts

The cash was raised through HMS Glasgow's 'shop' which sells themed merchandise – and by PO Colin Chalmers who was sponsored when he took part in the Ambleside 50km run.

The money will go to local mental health charity, Place 2 Be, which supports Glasgow children in their school years and also provides resources for parents and carers.

Five of Glasgow's ship's company – Senior Naval Officer Commander Phil Burgess, Weapon Engineer Officer Commander Alex Higgins, Warrant Officer 1 Darran Sullivan, Glasgow's Executive Warrant Officer, writer Petty Officer Hayden Palmer and Leading Engineering Technician Harry Taggart – made the short trip from Scotstoun, where the frigate is being completed, to Milton on the northern outskirts of the city where they were warmly welcomed.

"The children sang us a welcome song and gave us a couple of hand-drawn welcome signs which are now proudly displayed in the tea boat area," said Hayden.

The ship's donation will be shared among St Monica's, Oakwood Primary School and St Bartholomew's.

"Supporting charities and fundraising for worthy causes like Place 2 Be is a key part of HMS Glasgow's identity and connecting with the local community," said Cdr Burgess

"The challenges of mental health cannot be underestimated and it is vital we ensure that younger generations receive the support they require during this crucial period in their lives. Hopefully our donation will make a difference."

Thank you, RFA Peter

IT'S farewell to one of the most experienced sailors in the Naval Service this month as the Royal Fleet Auxiliary bids goodbye to Captain Peter Selby.

He's spent 46 years – mostly at sea in the majority of classes of RFA vessels over that period, having joined the Service as an Officer Cadet in 1978...when disco was all the rage, Labour's James Callaghan and Liverpool FC were European champions.

Capt Selby particularly enjoyed his time on the 'Knights of the Round Table', the Landing Ship Logistics such as RFA Sir Bedivere which were key to RN/RM operations from the late 1960s through to the beginning of the 21st Century.

As a first officer he completed the Principal Warfare Officer course in 1996 and served as the air warfare officer on HMS Argyll before joining the staff of FOST, passing his experience to RFA colleagues going through Operational Sea Training.

As a Chief Officer, Captain Selby served as XO of RFA Sir Bedivere, Fort Austin, tanker Grey Rover and Argus, returned to shore to serve in Navy HQ as Fleet Seamanship Officer and the staff officer responsible for RFA warfare.

For the past decade as a captain, he's commanded a number of auxiliaries, most recently RFA Mounts Bay in the Caribbean and her sister ship RFA Lyme Bay in the amphibious role.



P&T CORNER

WiFi boost to home ties

A GROUND-breaking comms system will give Royal Navy sailors deployed the ability to Skype/Zoom/FaceTime loved ones all over the globe.

Already successfully tested aboard RFA Argus and, most recently, on ice ship HMS Protector – where all crew were able to make video calls home from the edge of Antarctica over the festive period – StarLink is now being rolled out across the Fleet, with the emphasis on deployed/deploying units.

And yes, you read that correctly. Video calls. Not telephone – satellite or radio – but chatting with loved ones using personal mobile phones, connected via WiFi... in a part of the world where traditionally all forms of communication have been limited.

The trial on Protector was the most challenging test yet for a system intended to vastly improve comms/connectivity – and with-it morale/the 'lived experience' of a 21st Century Royal Navy.

Making the difference: Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellites and the StarLink comms system, which together have the potential to be a game-changer for the Royal Navy and its ability to enable our sailors to stay connected.

Traditional satellite communication systems are often hampered by latency, coverage, limited bandwidth and high cost, which means sailors have restricted access to the outside world.

The introduction of LEO satellites – positioned at altitudes between 180 and 2,000 kilometres above the Earth – offer several advantages over their higher-altitude counterparts.

Following trials on HMS Prince of Wales and RFA Argus in the Mediterranean, StarLink was installed aboard icebreaker HMS Protector

ahead of her annual Antarctic deployment, making use of a LEO system to provide enhanced Wi-Fi connectivity onboard.

This enabled the entire ship's company to stay connected with loved ones over Christmas/New Year – including the ability to directly message and video call – and continues through the remainder of the survey vessel's mission.

It also means broader internet access for personnel, allowing them to keep on top of many other aspects of their lives much more easily while deployed.

"StarLink provides a convenient way to stay connected with home, simplifying communications during deployments," explained Leading Engineering Technician Callum MacNeill, Protector's StarLink maintainer (pictured below chatting with family).

"It allows individuals to pursue personal projects while away, people onboard have been learning new languages, participating in open university projects and enhancing their skill sets using the latest kit; distant learning has become a lot more accessible.

"Life administration tasks, such as accessing bank accounts, paying bills, and managing routine obligations like MOTs, aspects often taken for granted back home are also now within our fingertips."

Ten StarLink sets have been bought by the Royal Navy for installation by summer 2024.

In addition to the system installed in Protector, enhanced WiFi access will be available in flagship HMS Queen Elizabeth, patrol ships Forth, Spey, Tamar and Medway, Lancaster and Diamond in the Middle East, and RFA Lyme Bay as spearhead of the Littoral Response Group (South) deployment.

Picture: LPhot Gareth Smith, HMS Protector



Welcome to the first P&T Corner, where we update you on recent initiatives and changes within the People and Training Directorate.



Making life better for ME

TO HELP stabilise the Marine Engineer General Service branch, we've adapted our training and personnel systems to be more flexible and sustainable.

Marine engineers fed back concerns about lengthy career training before joining ships where they were employed in a dual role: as watchkeepers on the machinery plant and engineers maintaining complex equipment.

They were clear that this workload was unmanageable, they did not have the time to hone their skills and they were overworked.

We have redesigned the departmental structure with separate watchkeeping and engineering sections and have additionally separated the training courses for each role.

The career progression model now allows personnel to choose how they are employed (as

an engineer or watchkeeper) and has received positive feedback from personnel who feel they have been given more focus and downtime.

We also reviewed the maintenance we were asking our marine engineers to complete and found that the maintenance tasks for a Type 23 frigate had grown from 8,000 tasks at build to more than 20,000.

Rationalisation of these tasks has reduced the maintenance burden by 40 per cent – which has again helped to improve the work/life balance for our people.

We are also looking at using regional colleges to help provide core engineering training, so that our people can receive engineering skills at a location close to their homes.

Two candidates are undertaking HND studies at Glasgow College as a proof of concept.

Recruitment changes bear fruit

A NEW recruitment process has been introduced featuring, among other changes, a streamlined medical process which is now incorporated into the candidate preparation course to shorten the recruitment journey and improve the potential recruits' experience.

The preparation course offers an opportunity to gain some lived experience and familiarity with what to expect during Phase 1 Training, should candidates be successful.

While this new recruitment process is still being implemented, initial improvements which are already having an impact include:

Application Numbers

January 2024 saw the highest number of applications of the recruiting year by far and the third highest of any month in the past ten years. The number of expressions of interest is set to be the highest in eight years.

Application Length

Before implementing the New Recruitment Process, over the past eight years, the average time from application to 'bid for entry' for RN Other Ranks was 271 days.

Under our new process, we have reduced this to 119 days (and we envisage potential to improve on this). This reduction is an improvement of more than 50 per cent on the old process.

All potential successful recruits at the Candidate Preparation Course will be offered entry to service within 31 days (with options to join earlier).

Average Entry to Raleigh

Entry into Phase 1 has improved under the New Recruitment Process with intakes throughout January 2024 being fully loaded each week.

Medicals

A streamlined medical assessment process began in August last year, providing a one-stop face-to-face assessment conducted during the candidate preparation course. This has reduced the medical failure rate.

You asked, we've acted...

■ **Why remove Branch badges from our working rig?** Branch badges will now be reinstated as part of the Rig22 rollout

■ **The new wet weather jackets no longer have reflective stripes:** the next iteration of the jacket is being designed with the inclusion of reflective safety stripes.

■ **It's hard to communicate with my Career Manager:** Additional career managers are being recruited, HMNB Devonport Career Management Cell has been reopened and a trial Career Drop-in Centre at HMS Collingwood was a success.

■ **Why aren't Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS) personnel entitled to wraparound childcare?** FTRS are now entitled to this important service, to find out more see 2022DIN01-079

The Navy's in his Blood

CONGRATULATIONS to Robert 'Blood' Reid whose 45 years of service to Navy and nation were singled out by one of the RN's senior officers.

Commodore Paul Pitcher – Commodore Surface Flotilla – thanked the Warrant Officer 1 for his commitment and dedication in front of his colleagues in Portsmouth Naval Base.

Robert walked through the gates of HMS Raleigh at the end of January 1979.

Britain was in the grip of strikes in the so-called 'Winter of Discontent'. Blondie's signature tune *Heart of Glass* was No.1. Quiz show *Blankety Blank* was brand new on the telly, as was David Attenborough's *Life on Earth* and Christopher Reeve as Superman was pulling in the punters at cinemas nationwide. You could pick up a family home for £15k while the Ford Cortina was the nation's most popular motor. And the Navy's first Harrier carrier HMS Invincible was still being completed.

Having completed basic training, Robert specialised as a Marine Engineering Mechanic (forerunner of today's Engineering Technicians) and then began his front-line career: nine ships from Leander-class frigate HMS Diomedé, through minesweepers and patrol vessels to helping to bring HMS Dauntless into service from build and most recently aboard the UK's largest warship HMS Prince of Wales coordinating training for new joiners.

One of the few RN personnel



Cdre Pitcher shakes hands with WO1 'Blood' Reid on a murky day in Pompey as the marine engineers FOST colleagues look on

still serving today from the Falklands conflict of 1982, he also helped protect shipping in the Gulf in the mid-80s during the tanker wars at the height of the Iraq-Iran conflict.

Today he shares his 45 years' knowledge and expertise as a damage control officer with Fleet Operational Standards and Training Team (FOST),

delivering key training to the rest of the RN to ensure they can cope with accidents and major incidents at sea.

"On a misty Monday morning I was privileged to congratulate WO1 Reid as he marked 45 years of service to his country. Few can match a career such as Blood's!" said Commodore Pitcher.

Increasing availability rewarded

EFFORTS to ensure ships spend more time at sea and less in harbour/undergoing maintenance were recognised at the appropriately-named Ships Availability Awards.

The awards, run under the banner of Project Renown – the pan-DE&S, Royal Navy and Industry initiative aimed at raising availability of surface vessels from 56 per cent in 2020 to 80 per cent by 2026 – reward and celebrate individuals and teams for their outstanding contribution to that end.

Nearly 350 teams, ship's companies and individuals threw their hats in the ring and 236 were deemed worthy of recognition across five categories:

- Leader in Availability
- Data for Availability
- Inclusion for Availability
- Innovation in Availability
- Teamwork for Availability

Twenty teams won awards in the 'final category, including five drawn from serving RN warships: veteran frigate HMS Northumberland, new Type 26 frigate Glasgow, patrol ships HMS Trent and Severn and carrier HMS Prince of Wales.

Rear Admiral Steve McCarthy, DE&S' Director Ships Operations visited Northumberland at their base in Devonport to thank the senior leadership team of the Ship's Marine Engineering Department One for their outstanding efforts in sustaining the ship on

operations as she enters year six of an originally-planned five years in Fleet Time. The citation praised the work of all 200 crew but specifically highlighted the engineering department for "a remarkable feat of engineering excellence".

Other than a trip by barge down the Clyde... and a trip back up it under tow to Scotstoun where she's still fitting out, HMS Glasgow hasn't gone to sea yet... but the efforts her ship's company are making now will make life easier for all when she does.

The Type 26's crew drew up the 'ships in build review', capturing lessons from both the construction of previous RN warships and the accompanying growth of their ship's companies.

The result is a 'ship management plan' which lays down out the requirements needed to ready the ship for entering service and achieving her in-service date.

In addition, the team brought online the 'transition tracking tool' which allows everyone involved to track and formally monitor the progress of the ship management plan.

It's working so well that both the review and the tracking tool have been adopted down the road in Rosyth by the team bringing the Type 31 frigates to life, led by HMS Venturer.

Admiral McCarthy said there was widespread evidence and feedback from all involved in the endeavour that Renown was

having an impact.

"People have reflected back to me that they see the impact of the Renown supply chain work that this year alone, has given the Royal Navy an approximate additional one and a half months of availability."

"What you do matters and there is so much opportunity to make things better".

All nominations were assessed by a range of senior officers and figures from across the Ships Domain and Navy Command.

The Queen Elizabeth Class (QEC) Capital Ships Team, who won a 'Teamwork for Availability' Award for their work on repairs and subsequent deployment of HMS Prince of Wales.

"The awards involved all areas across NCHQ, platforms, industry and DE&S, demonstrating that increasing availability is a team game," said Project Renown lead, Colin Yoxon.

"We will succeed together and I encourage everyone to continue to seek out improvements and efficiencies that benefit the enterprise and increase our ability to deliver defence outputs."

Mel Jonik, who heads the 'people workstream', added: "I have been so impressed by the quality of ideas and the work done towards the common goal of improving availability."

"All who were nominated, whether winners or not, should be proud of their achievements and nomination."

Fantastic plastic link-up

IT'S a small plastic switch which costs pennies to produce – but it's a small step in Anglo-US-Australian naval co-operation.

It's the first object produced by 3D printing as the three allied navies share tech details – without the need to transport spare parts thousands of miles around the globe.

Since the announcement of the AUKUS agreement – which, in time, will see the Royal and Royal Australian Navies operating SSN-AUKUS submarines (successor to the Astutes in the RN, and the first nuclear-powered hunter-killers in the history of the RAN) – the three allies have been communicating regularly, and it quickly became evident that everybody is interested in 3D printing.

At the same time major UK defence industries including Babcock, BAE Systems, Thales, and Rolls Royce – all involved in delivering the next generation of submarines – are already using technology to 3D print production parts for the Royal Navy.

All that's required is a 3D printer with the raw material for manufacturing and the CAD (Computer Aided Design) file to turn a 3D graphic projection on a screen into a physical object.

The Royal Navy has been looking into the use of 3D printers to produce simple, but crucial spare parts for equipment, for the past five years – saving a lengthy and complex supply chain.

Destroyer HMS Defender made extensive use of its printer to produce wing nuts, short sections of

water pipe, clamps, and door catches – heavily used in warships.

While 3D printers cannot replicate all parts, the simple items they have created proved remarkable durable – some lasted more than six months.

Above all the plastic substitutes frequently saved ships waiting for minor parts to be delivered half way around the world – and the cost of shipping them.

Which is exactly how the AUKUS 3D printing partnership began: a basic plastic control dial, which cost a tiny amount to produce, but would be slow and expensive to send internationally via air freight.

"3D printing will improve availability of critically-needed spare parts, allowing us to go back to sea faster and at reduced cost," explained Alex Champion, an Additive Manufacturing Engineering based at MOD Abbeywood.

"In the long term, any industry partner or Royal Navy ally could work together to remotely produce spare parts at the exact time and location where they are needed."

Plans were transmitted from a sailor in Australia to counterparts in UK (Warrant Officer Scott Barnett at Culdrose and Colin Down at DE&S DECA, the MOD's specialist avionics repair organisation near Chester), along with a document confirming the quality inspection requirements for the part and, hey presto, the AUKUS Additive Manufacturing relationship was born.

The parts were printed, tested and are performing as planned/expected.



Galley Cat rules

THERE are roughly 1,000 chefs and caterers who keep the Navy – and its many allies, guests and visitors – well fed with three meals a day.

And Petty Officer Cat Taylor of patrol ship HMS Trent is the one singled out as the Royal Navy's 'caterer of the year'.

Cat, originally from Weston-super-Mare, but now living with her family in Plymouth, will now be put forward for the top prize: Armed Forces Caterer of the Year.

Unlike other contests involving Service culinary experts, the Caterer of the Year title doesn't just judge a chef or cook on their prowess in the galley, but also their attitude, drive, support for comrades, and leadership.

In awarding the title to Cat, Fleet Caterer Warrant Officer 1 Carl Neville says she has demonstrated both exceptional leadership and culinary prowess.

HMS Trent has been widely praised for the quality of her catering services – especially in challenging or unusual locations (the ship spent the autumn in and around West Africa and is now in the Caribbean, waters normally patrolled by her sister ship HMS Medway).

"The award is a testament to her remarkable culinary talent and leadership qualities. It underlines her significant contributions to the Royal Navy's operational capabilities and welfare for those that are forward deployed," said Carl.

"This prestigious recognition does not only recognise individual accomplishments but also shines a light on the collaborative ethos and teamwork that are the hallmarks of every galley."

With only around 50 sailors typically on board Trent and five caterers, Cat performs one shift in four in the galley alongside her tight-knit team, who are expected to provide three hot meals for shipmates 365 days a year.

Cat's also the driving force behind ensuring the finest food is served to guests for the many defence engagement duties the patrol ship performs patrolling the Caribbean, where Trent and her sailors are 'roaming

ambassadors' for the UK on an almost weekly basis.

"I am truly humbled to have been awarded Royal Navy Caterer of the Year," said Cat.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I would receive such an award but I couldn't have achieved what I have without my department. They have played a huge role in our successes, always having my back, working hard and sharing in my love for food!"

Her shipmates are delighted for her. "Petty Officer Taylor is not only a great caterer, producing delicious meals, but a fantastic senior rating who has been a real role model for me in my first sea draft," said Logistician Gregory Fawcus who looks after HMS Trent's stores.

Correspondence officer Lieutenant Braddan Baillie added: "Petty Officer Taylor's food is the best in the RN – as my waistline can attest!"

Cat joined the Royal Navy 18 years ago at the age of 17 and has served extensively at sea – almost exclusively in Plymouth-based warships, including survey vessels HMS Enterprise and Echo, assault ships Albion and Bulwark, helicopter carrier HMS Ocean and frigates HMS Northumberland and Somerset. For good measure she's also served at the Royal Marines bases at Stonehouse in Plymouth and Lympstone.

"Our branch boasts remarkable talents – and Petty Officer Taylor is a shining example," Carl stressed. "Her dedication, stellar performance, and passion for her role sets such a high benchmark. Her contributions showcase the exceptional standards and devotion our catering teams are capable of, and as such we recognise the impact this has on the morale component of operational capability."

Trent's Commanding Officer Commander Tim Langford presented the senior rating with her award... which, in suitably humble fashion, she credited largely to her team's support and unwavering dedication.



FOR WHOM THE BELLS TOLL

IF A ship possesses a soul, then it's embodied in its bell.

So here's a story of three. One tolling in sorrow, a second completing a 'living memorial' to a much-loved frigate, and a third prized by the US Navy and recovered from the seabed.

And it's there we begin and the story of the ill-fated USS Jacob Jones (main image), the first destroyer in the history of the US Navy to be lost to enemy action.

IN THE final 18 months of WW1 the US Navy maintained a substantial presence in UK waters and the Western Approaches to help cope with the U-boat menace and keep open the maritime lifeline between the New World and the Old.

Jacob Jones was one of half a dozen destroyers escorting a troop and supply convoy from southern Ireland to Brittany in December 1917. As such "the ship played an important role safeguarding convoys carrying the troops and supplies from the US to the United Kingdom and France that were critical to Allied victory," said retired Rear Admiral Sam J Cox, Director of the US Navy's Naval History and Heritage Command.

When Jacob Jones was undertaking this tasking, she was torpedoed by U-boat ace Hans Rose in U-53. The warship went down in just eight minutes, enough time for around one third of the crew to take to life rafts or jump into the Atlantic to try to save themselves.

Although U-boat crews were vilified by Allied propaganda during WW1, Hans Rose not only rescued a couple of American sailors when his boat surfaced after the attack, but he also radioed the US base at Queenstown (today Cobh) to inform them there were men in the water in need of rescuing.

The wreck was discovered by the Darkstar technical dive team some three-dozen miles south of the Scilly Isles in August 2021. She rests on the seabed more



than 375ft deep.

Despite the remoteness and depth of the destroyer, US authorities remained fearful that unscrupulous trophy hunters might try to recover Jacob Jones' bell – one of the icons of any warship.

In December, the NHHC – guardians of nearly 3,000 shipwrecks and more than 17,000 aircraft lost at sea – asked the British Government for two favours: to preserve the sanctity of the wreck, and to recover the bell.

Admiral Cox said that the remains of USS Jacob Jones were "a hallowed war grave" and that it was US Navy policy

"to leave such wrecks undisturbed. However, due to risk of unauthorised and illegal salvaging of the ship's bell, the Navy History and Heritage Command requested Ministry of Defence assistance."

Using a remotely-operated vehicle, the MOD's Salvage and Marine Operations team not only recovered USS Jacob Jones' bell (pictured inset) but also placed a wreath and the Stars and Stripes on the wreck in tribute to the 64 men lost 107 years ago.

"I am proud of what the team have achieved," said Andy Liddell, head of SALMO. "To assist our Allies in the recovery of the bell from such a historic

wreck on the first deployment of the new remotely-operated vehicle is a massive achievement."

Admiral Cox added: "This most recent chapter in the story of Jacob Jones is one of collaboration and mutual respect for the site.

"The US Navy is grateful to the Salvage and Marine Operations Team for recovering the bell, which will serve as a memorial to sailors who made the ultimate sacrifice in the defence of both the United States and the United Kingdom."

After a ceremonial handover to the US authorities, the bell will eventually be given to the expert conservators of the NHHC Underwater Archaeology Branch in Washington DC before going on display as a permanent reminder of the sacrifices by the men lost.

A couple of months before the USA entered World War 1, 32 men lost their lives when HMS K13 sank on trials in Gareloch – home today to the Royal Navy Submarine Service.

The tragedy resonates with the tight-knit community, who hold two days of commemorations to mark the loss to this day, long after anyone with immediate links with the tragedy have passed.

In January 1917, HMS K13 was the cutting edge of submarine technology – roughly the counterpart of today's Astute-class boats based at Faslane.

Powered by steam on the surface to allow her to keep pace with the Fleet, but driven by electric motors when submerged like a conventional boat, when K13 dived it meant a complicated transition from steam to electric with valves and outlets closed

– and proved to be the boat's undoing as seawater accidentally entered her engine room.

There was a total of 80 people on board at the time – 53 Royal Navy personnel, 14 employees from the Fairfield yard on the Clyde where she was built, five sub-contractors, five Admiralty officials, river Clyde pilot Joseph Duncan, and two crew from sister-submarine K14.

A frantic 57-hour rescue mission followed with Captain of K13, Lieutenant Commander Godfrey Herbert, and Captain of K14, Commander Francis Goodhart, attempting to escape the vessel to aid the surface rescue attempt.

Sadly, Commander Goodhart died after hitting his head on the vessel's superstructure and drowning.

Eventually an airline was attached allowing the bow of the submarine to rise to the surface and a hole to be cut in the casing to evacuate the 48 survivors.

The memory of the men lost is kept alive by the West of Scotland branch of the Submariners Association, supported by colleagues from the Barrow-In-Furness, Essex, Dolphin, and Scottish branches, serving personnel from the Submarine Flotilla, Submarine Qualification Course (North), RM Band Scotland, and Clydebank and Helensburgh Sea Cadets for a service of thanksgiving led by Reverend Stephen Dray in Elder Park, Govan, followed by a visit to the Fairfield's Heritage Centre.

That was followed on the second day of events by a short service at

HMNB Clyde's church ahead of commemorations at Faslane Cemetery, where the majority of the crew that perished are buried. Alongside the serving and veteran submariners attending, was Alistair Swift who had travelled from Aberdeen to remember his grandfather Joe Swift, a survivor of K13.

"The weekend's events were truly humbling and a reminder of the importance of the history of the Submarine Service and the sacrifices of those who served and paid the ultimate price in support of their country," said the Submariners Association's Andy Knox.

During the service, K13's bell tolled for each of the 32 men who lost their lives (pictured top left).

Remaining in Scotland, residents of Montrose have a permanent reminder of their naval links.

The arrival of the bell from HMS Montrose, the veteran Type 23 frigate, completes the memorial display to the ship in her namesake community.

Throughout her 30-year operational career, the Devonport ship maintained regular contact with her namesake town and the wider Angus community, calling in on the small east coast port whenever her programme allowed.

Some 5,000 local residents filed aboard the ship on the frigate's farewell visit in March last year.

Since then the ship has been decommissioned, stripped of what might be re-used elsewhere in the Fleet, especially the Type 23 flotilla, while objects of no military but of tremendous

sentimental value were offered to the ship's company and those connected with HMS Montrose down the years.

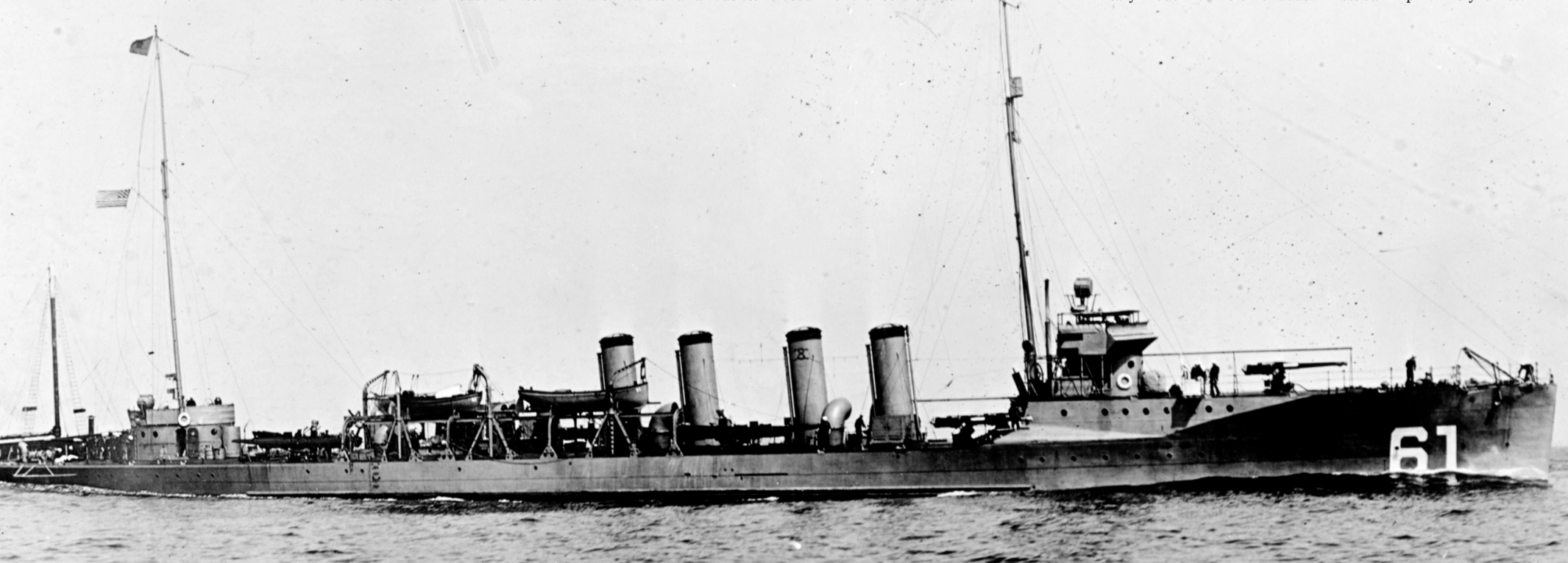
No object is more iconic on any ship than her bell – it's the items divers seek to recover from wrecks to prevent them falling into the hands of unscrupulous souvenir hunters.

Thankfully no such threat was posed in this case: it just took a request from RN veteran David Moxey via Angus MP David Doogan ... and the RN agreed to loan the bell as centrepiece of an exhibition which also features frigate's nameplate, White Ensign and a scale model of F236.

The display was unveiled by Mr Doogan and the RN's Regional Commander for Scotland and Northern Ireland, Brigadier Andy Muddiman, his Chief of Staff at Navy headquarters Commander Morgan McDonald, local VIPs, Provost Brian Boyd, Royal Navy and Royal Marines veterans and Gary Wilson who served aboard HMS Montrose while she was deployed to Bahrain (pictured above).

The frigate clocked up some 400,000 miles under the White Ensign on her patrols around the globe, spending the final years of her extensive career on an extended deployment in the Gulf/Middle East, proving particularly successful at intercept drug runners as part of a wider maritime security mission.

The display can be seen in the rather imposing Montrose Museum – one of the oldest purpose-built museums in Scotland – in Panmure Place, Fridays through to Mondays, 10.30am-4pm. Entry is free.



D-Day memento for Utah casualty

WHAT do you give a D-Day naval veteran to celebrate his 100th birthday (aside, of course, from a card from the King and Queen)?

How about a replica of the chart he used on that fateful June morning in 1944 when he safely delivered US troops on to the hostile Normandy shore.

As a 20-year-old, Lieutenant Richard Willis was second in command of a landing craft tasked with landing Americans on what was designated Utah beach – at the southern foot of the Cotentin peninsula in the western Seine Bay.

The landings at Utah – unlike the American assault at nearby Omaha Beach which turned into a bloodbath – encountered some of the weakest German resistance on D-Day.

But Lt Willis was nevertheless wounded in the attack – shrapnel was embedded in his leg; the former officer keeps a photograph of being carried ashore by stretcher bearers to this day.

And now there's another permanent reminder of June 6 1944 in his flat at Nynhead Court Care Home, near Wellington.

The team at the UK Hydrographic Office in nearby Taunton dug around in their archives and found the charts of Utah – drawn up by their predecessors eight decades ago – and reproduced one for the Vice-Lieutenant of Somerset, Ted Allen, and Rear Admiral Peter Sparkes, UKHO Chief Executive to present to the 100-year-old.

And as with most members of our 'greatest generation', the retired naval officer was rather surprised by all the fuss.

"I'm not sure what I've done to deserve this," he said, playing down his role 80 years ago. "I was just there. But D-Day was an experience I will never forget."

The chart – once labelled Top Secret – was inscribed: "Presented to Lieutenant Richard Willis...on the occasion of his 100th birthday. With the thanks and admiration of the Lord-Lieutenant and the people of Somerset." It joins the Legion d'Honneur, presented by the French Government, as one of the sailor's most treasured possessions.

"Landings onto opposed beaches are amongst the most dangerous combat experiences in any conflict," said Admiral Sparkes.

"The fact that D-Day landings were successful changed the course of World War 2. The sacrifices made in those days should never be forgotten. To honour one of our local veterans in this way is really the least we could do."

Mr Allen added: "It's an honour for me to be here to



Vice Lieutenant of Somerset Ted Allen watches as Rear Admirals Ian Moncrieff and Peter Sparkes (right) unveil the Utah beach chart for Lt Willis on his centenary

celebrate the milestone birthday of a remarkable man. The country owes all our veterans an enormous debt of gratitude and it was a joy for me to be able to express that gratitude on behalf of His Majesty."

Two other former senior military officers – Rear Admiral Ian Moncrieff and Brigadier Richard Toomey, both Deputy Lieutenants in Somerset – were also present at the birthday celebrations.

After leaving the Royal Navy, Mr Willis became a professional

artist and his work – particularly in maritime art – has been highly acclaimed.

Much of his work was influenced by his wartime experiences and he was the youngest ever exhibitor at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1942.

Sailors from HMS Collingwood's Victory Squadron were invited onboard D-Day veteran HMS Medusa to learn about her role – ahead of restoration and maintenance work they'll be carrying out on her later this year.

The motor launch escorted convoys in the Western Approaches, guided the invasion force into Omaha Beach on D-Day, protected minesweepers and was in Amsterdam on VE Day 1945.

Personnel learned about living conditions, how she's powered and Medusa's WW2 exploits.

Today, operated by The Medusa Trust charity she takes Royal Navy cadets, CCF and Sea Cadets to sea – upholding the memory of those who served onboard.

A youthful Sub Lieutenant Willis (below left) and (below right) Crowds gather as casualties from Normandy are brought back to the UK



Naval Quirks



Trust seeks volunteer

THE Royal Naval Benevolent Trust is looking for a former or serving rating/Royal Marine other ranks to volunteer as a trustee to help oversee its work.

The charity, now into its 103rd year, supports the non-officer cadre of both the Senior Service and Corps, past and present.

It has an annual turnover of £10m and a staff of more than 220 responsible for dedicated homes in Gillingham (Pembroke House) and Southsea (the new Admiral Jellicoe House) as well as grants and support to families and individuals in need.

A significant proportion of its trustees are drawn from other ranks and ratings. Only those who are or have served as such can make decisions on the approval of grants to individuals – the fundamental

tenet is sailors and marines helping sailors and marines, now and always.

There is an opening for an 'Ordinary Member Trustee' from early April, with an election in the last week of this month.

The charity is looking for a wide range of competences and the current trustees wish to continue to encourage diversity, with applications from junior rates/ranks as well as representation from minority groups very welcome. In particular, those with service in the Royal Marines or Submarine Service would be very welcome.

If you are interested and would like an application pack, contact Michele Stanley on 02394 216292 or email michelestanley@rnbt.org.uk. The closing date for applications is March 15 2024.



Stalwart Ron steps down

THE Trinity Club in Dorchester hosted the annual general meeting of Royal Naval Association Area 4 with shipmates from all over the area were welcomed by the town's mayor, Alastair Chisholm.

After ten years in post – and never a meeting missed – this was the final AGM for Area Chairman s/m Ron Burdekin (pictured), who's standing down.

Supported by his devoted wife Yvonne, Ron said he would continue to play a part in the association but felt now was the right time for him to step down from a role he had thoroughly enjoyed for such a long time.

In return, the Area 4 Committee named Ron the area's Lifetime Vice President, an award which left the recipient stunned.

Elected in Ron's place as chairman was National Council member Warwick Belfritt, who thanked Ron for his dedication to the role and confirmed it was



one which took up a lot of time – as he was already finding out.

The AGM also welcomed Chris Trevethan, RNA HQ chief-of-staff and Chief Executive Bill Olliphant, who gave an informative update on happenings at HQ level, updates on the reform of the wellbeing and welfare system as a whole and generally explaining where 2024 would be taking the Association.

Redruth's warm welcome

REDRUTH and Camborne Royal Naval Association branch held their AGM at the Redruth Club with more than half the membership attending. Officials were re-elected, the past year was remembered, plans laid out for the coming year and a group photograph.

The branch remains very active and has added three new members last year. It warmly welcomes visiting shipmates, as well as any new members, with a tot or two.

Meetings are held at the club in Penryn Street, Redruth, TR15 2SP, on the third Monday of every month.

RBL's thanks to Bodmin

The Bodmin branch of the Royal British Legion thanked the town's RNA counterparts for their efforts fundraising for the annual poppy appeal.

Former vice chairman and life member s/m Mike Frost,

together with former social secretary s/m Isobel Frost received the certificate on behalf of colleagues for drumming up donations, raising a healthy sum for the Legion at the town's supermarkets and elsewhere.

Living the beam

THE key role secret science played in helping turn the tide of World War 2 comes under the spotlight at the Fleet Air Arm Museum

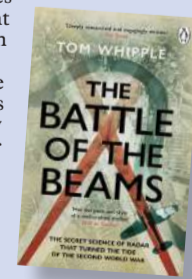
Radar and the battle of the airwaves was decisive in every aspect of the war in the air from the Battle of Britain through to the Blitz of Coventry and the Allies' devastating strategic air offensive in the second half of the conflict.

Award-winning science editor and Times journalist Tom Whipple will explore his recent book *The Battle of the Beams: The Secret Science of Radar That Turned the Tide of World War 2* in a lecture on Friday March 15 to

mark British Science Week. Relying on first-hand accounts, as well as papers recently released by the Admiralty, *The Battle of the Beams* fills a missing piece in the canon of World War 2 literature combining history, science, bravery and dogged determination

Doors open at 7pm for 7.30pm. Tickets (including tea and coffee) are available on the evening or in advance at: www.nmrn.org.uk/events/battle-beams-secret-science-radar

As the talk is taking place outside normal opening hours, access to the wider museum will be limited.



COMMAND CHANGES HANDS



IN A ceremony marked by tradition and camaraderie, the Loughborough Sea Cadets bid farewell to one leader and welcomed another.

The torch of command for the unit was passed from Sub Lieutenant (SCC) Kyle Wilson-Kean RNR to Sub Lieutenant (SCC) Paul Browning RNR.

The change of command ceremony, held among family and friends, signified a pivotal moment in the unit's history.

SLt (SCC) Wilson-Kean RNR, who has steered the ship of TS Venomous for four years, with dedication and passion, reflected on his time as the commanding officer.

He said: "It has been an honor and privilege to serve as the commanding officer of TS Venomous."

"The dedication and commitment of our cadets and staff have been truly inspiring."

As SLt Wilson-Kean steps down from his role, he leaves behind a legacy of excellence and a strong foundation upon which TS Venomous can continue to thrive.

SLt Wilson-Kean moves into the role of District Training Officer for Leicestershire,

SLt Browning is grateful that he will remain in the unit, supporting him.

Stepping into the role with enthusiasm and determination, SLt (SCC) Paul Browning RNR expressed his gratitude and excitement for the opportunity.

"I am immensely proud to be entrusted with command of TS Venomous," he said.

"This unit has grown in my short time here, and I am so proud of the amazing staff and cadets that make the cadet experience possible."

With a commitment to fostering leadership, teamwork, and personal development among its members, TS Venomous looks forward to a bright future under the guidance of its new commanding officer and strong staff base.

The change of command ceremony serves as a reminder of the continuity and resilience of the Sea Cadets, embodying the values of commitment, courage, integrity and leadership that are central to their mission.

As TS Venomous charts its course forward, it does so with gratitude for the past and optimism for the journey ahead.

New buoy for Eastbourne branch

THE Eastbourne Sea Cadet Unit were given a new buoy to start the year.

During their first meeting of 2024 Royal Naval Association – Eastbourne Branch presented the Sea Cadet Unit with a life buoy from the Leander-class frigate HMS Juno, launched in the 1960s and decommissioned in the 1990s.

HMS Juno had been affiliated to the town of Eastbourne and the life buoy will stand on the main deck of the Sea Cadet Headquarters alongside that of HMS Eastbourne.

Royal Naval Association – Eastbourne Branch President Rear

Admiral John Kingwell, himself a former Sea Cadet and currently also President of the Hastings and Newhaven and Seaford Sea Cadet Units, attended the meeting to hand over the buoy.

He presented it to PO (SCC) Abbie Wheeler, Commanding Officer of the Unit, accompanied by Royal Marine Cadet L/Cpl Hoare

and Sea Cadet First Class Thompson.

Both RM Cadet Hoare And Sea Cadet Thompson want to join their respective services, with L/Cpl Hoare wanting to be a Royal Marine Commando and Cadet Thompson aiming to be a Weapons Engineer.

Royal Naval Association – Eastbourne Branch said they wish them all the best in achieving their ambitions.

They added they are also grateful to S/m Bill Whaley who, having served on HMS Juno, kindly donated the life buoy, a ship's crest and a ship's picture with cap tally to the branch for the presentation.



High standards sees unit get national recognition

MORE than 3,000 boating hours and dozens of community events supported has seen a Sea Cadet recognised for its hard work and commitment.

Milton Keynes Sea Cadet Unit has won the Thomas Gray Memorial Trophy category at the 2023 Annual National Awards – an award given to the unit which is considered to have attained the second highest standard of all round efficiency in the previous year.

The unit was praised for the large number of boating hours, despite being quite far from the sea, and attaining a rare 100 per cent for its Unit Review.

Overall their 75-80 cadets logged 3,417 boating hours, supported 54 community events and earned 352 qualifications and awards.

The trophy will be received at the unit in the coming weeks.

Lieutenant Joy Tilley, Commanding Officer of Milton Keynes Unit, said: "This is the first time in our history we have received this prestigious award and we are immensely proud to achieve such an accolade.

"I am immensely proud of our unit and looking forward to another busy year, building on our success from previous years.

"Sea Cadets offers so many opportunities

to both adults and young people.

"It is important to remember that we are an independent charity that relies on volunteers in the local community to help make a positive difference to the lives of so many young people in your area.

"If you think you could help us, please get in touch.

"Likewise, if you are between the ages of 10 and 18 and are interested in becoming a Sea Cadet, we would love to hear from you."

Milton Keynes Sea Cadets, which is part of national charity Sea Cadets, gives young people a new perspective.

They broaden horizons and create possibilities.

Working across the UK with 14,000 young people between 10 and 18, Sea Cadets help them see the world with confidence, gained through the challenge of nautical adventure and a Royal Navy ethos.

Their aim is to help more young people to see the future that they want – and make that future happen.

The unit parades on Tuesdays and Fridays from 1915 to 2130hrs, and meets at Kiln Farm, Milton Keynes.

Visit tswhaddon.org to find out how you can join.



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Meet First Sea Lord's Cadets

CONGRATULATIONS to our six new First Sea Lord's Cadets, who were invested in the traditional ceremony onboard HMS Victory in Portsmouth in January.

As well as meeting with the First Sea Lord, Admiral Ben Key KCB CBE, the cadets also had the chance to get to know each other ahead of a year of high-profile duties on behalf of the Corps.

Their pride and excitement was summed up by Petty Officer Cadet Ashley of Dunbar Unit, who said: "Everything about the Investiture Day was truly amazing, however my favourite part was definitely the ship tours and seeing the difference between HMS Victory and HMS Prince of Wales.

"It feels so rewarding to be a First Sea Lord's Cadet and it's so nice to see that all my hard work over the years has paid off."



LC CHLOE JOYCE-RICHARDSON; Huddersfield Unit, West Yorkshire District (Eastern Area)



Chloe joined Sea Cadets in 2018 as a junior cadet and has progressed to a Leading Cadet in 2023.

Being part of Sea Cadets has allowed Chloe to gain many qualifications and she is particularly proud of achieving the Silver Duke of Edinburgh's Award, especially as it was undertaken during the pandemic. Respectful and personable, Chloe is supportive to all who she meets and represents Sea Cadets with genuine pride and passion.

She utilises her skills and experience to assist with the training and mentoring of her peers, while promoting their priorities with senior volunteers in her role as the unit's cadet representative.

Chloe also contributes her time to helping the unit's Trustee Management Team raise the funds needed to deliver inclusive, family events - organising bag packs and other activities to support the awards nights and Christmas parties that bring people together and strengthen engagement with the unit.

Outside of cadets, Chloe devotes her time to raising money for charity - taking part in the Race for Life for Cancer Research every year since she was eight.

As well as her love of water-based courses such as sailing and windsurfing, Chloe enjoys taking part in adventure training and mountain biking. Competitions are her favourite part of being a cadet, as they allow her to meet and engage with other young people with similar interests.

Chloe is attending her Petty Officer Cadet board early next year, where she hopes to demonstrate the personal growth and desire for achievement that Sea Cadets has cultivated.

POC GRACE PARSONS; Bournemouth Unit, Wessex District (Southern Area)



Grace joined Sea Cadets in September 2019 as a shy 12-year-old and has since become a confident and reliable individual.

During her initial months at Sea Cadets, she was able to go on courses, volunteer at a care home, complete Cadet Training Programme modules and start learning how to kayak.

Before entering lockdown, Grace was able to complete her new entry training and promotion to cadet.

Despite the restrictions, she continued to complete courses remotely on a range of topics, including marine engineering, and has since completed the CyberFirst Defenders course which she found to be a valuable and enjoyable experience.

Showing a strong commitment to her community, Grace has participated in a variety of drill and ceremonial events.

Within her unit, she regularly takes on the role of duty cadet and was recently chosen to be duty cadet at the 2023 Royal Naval Parade.

She has also represented Wessex District with distinction at a number of events including the district colours dedication ceremony in early 2023.

Grace enjoys boating, with a particular love for sailing and paddlesports.

She was able to complete her Paddlesport Instructor

qualification in 2022 and has since helped in the teaching of many cadets at her unit.

To develop her sailing skills, Grace has taken part in offshore voyages onboard the yachts TS Sir Stellios and TS City of London, and the powerboat TS John Jerwood, allowing her to complete her Day Skipper Theory onboard - making her a Cadet Navigation Instructor.

As a Petty Officer Cadet, Grace has had the opportunity to help out at her unit by planning and teaching a new entry training weekend, as well as running a basic navigation course delivered at the unit over a series of weeks.

She is currently working towards her Gold Duke of Edinburgh's award.

LC WILLIAM WOOLLER; Torpoint Unit, Cornwall District (South West Area)



William joined Sea Cadets in January 2019 and has since risen through the ranks to become a Leading Cadet, and his unit's most senior cadet.

He became an active member of the unit within his first few months, thanks to his strong parade night attendance and participation in all community events.

William has also made major contributions to competition teams, and has shown a great desire to gain the widest possible range of knowledge and experiences - including qualifications in everything from campcraft to seamanship, and a Silver Duke of Edinburgh's award.

An avid sailor, William has achieved RYA Sailing Stage 4; the RYA Dinghy Instructor qualification; and is making significant progress towards his

RYA Day Skipper qualification, supported by time on board the yacht TS City of London.

His flair for drill and ceremonial activity sees William deliver high personal standards of dress and deportment; these attributes have been particularly valued within the Torpoint Unit Continuity Drill Team - which William helped to become national champions in 2023.

He has since gone on to pass the Cadet Drill Instructor course with a class-topping grade of 84 per cent.

A talented clarinet player, William joined the newly formed Torpoint Unit band in 2019 and was part of the South West entry which was runner-up at the 2019 National Band Contest in the Tower of London.

A mainstay of the South West Area Band at a variety of ceremonial events and parades in recent years, William has also performed with the Massed Band of the Sea Cadets at three separate National Trafalgar Parades.

In October 2023, William was appointed a Lord-Lieutenant's Cadet for Cornwall after excelling during the selection process.

William is due to attend his Petty Officer Cadet advancement board this month.

POC MEGAN STOWELL; Newton-Le-Willows Unit, Merseyside East District (North West Area)



Megan has been a Sea Cadet since February 2018. She first demonstrated her leadership qualities while still a junior, and the unit's Cadet of the Year award for 2019 marked an impressive start to her cadet career.

From the beginning, Megan has volunteered to take part in

any event, activity and course that she can, and always encourages her fellow cadets to get involved too.

An accomplished performer on the national stage, Megan has represented the North West Area in the National Drill & Piping Competition for the past two years, where her abilities earned her the chance to represent the Sea Cadet Corps at 2023's National Remembrance Sunday Parade at the Cenotaph.

Megan also participated in the National Trafalgar Day Parade of 2022.

Passionate about improving the Sea Cadets experience, Megan is the Cadet Voice lead within her unit - an influential role in which she uses her excellent communication skills to ensure that the Command Team are aware of cadets' priorities.

As well as empowering younger cadets, Megan is also committed to working with adult volunteers to ensure new ideas are successfully implemented for the benefit of all.

Megan has a flair for creating learning aids, having helped to develop 'session resources boxes' to assist instructors and cadets undertaking the peer educator course.

A valued mentor to other cadets, Megan helps to run a variety of courses at unit junior drill days and is now passing on her experience to develop the leadership skills of able cadets.

Megan is now undertaking a Health & Safety apprenticeship with a company called Walker Engineering in Skelmersdale.

LC MILLICENT WALKER; Cheshunt Unit, London Northern District (London Area)



Millicent joined Sea Cadets in June 2017 as a junior cadet. Since then, her cadet journey has seen her achieve qualifications in physical training, shooting and boating, which have allowed her to build confidence, resilience and leadership skills.

Those qualities have helped Millicent to thrive as a valued member of her unit and London Northern District, culminating in her recent selection as a Lord-Lieutenant's Cadet for Hertfordshire.

Sheer hard work and enthusiasm epitomised Millicent's time as a junior cadet, resulting in a well-deserved Commodore's Pennant.

Millicent is a dedicated, loyal and competitive cadet who likes to be challenged, whether as an individual or part of a team.

A good example of this is her regular participation in London Area's prestigious adventure training competition, the Chosin Cup, where her campcraft and orienteering skills helped Cheshunt Unit to a fine third place

in 2023.

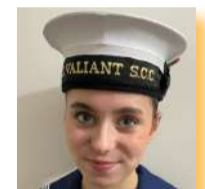
Applying her competitive spirit to 2022's Intermediate Physical Training (PT) course, Millicent's remarkable performance saw her awarded the 1956 Temeaire Trophy as the leading participant.

In qualifying as an Advanced Cadet PT Instructor, Millicent hugely impressed the staff of the London Area PT Team, who are delighted to be gaining a talented and highly effective instructor.

A proud, focused and determined cadet, Millicent won her unit's Cadet of the Year awards in 2021 and 2023.

Since her promotion to Leading Cadet, Millicent has acted as a mentor and role model for her division and the rest of the unit.

POC ASHLEY ARTHUR; Dunbar Unit, Edinburgh District (Northern Area)



Ashley joined Sea Cadets in June 2017, having been encouraged by her sister Abigail - then a Cadet First Class at their local unit.

Ever since her days as a junior, Ashley has been determined to grow and develop while embracing the fun and adventure of the Sea Cadets Experience.

Taking inspiration from the senior cadets and staff who made her feel so welcome and supported, she has shown great self-discipline to fulfil her potential while making lifelong friends and memories.

Achieving her dream of promotion to Petty Officer Cadet was a particularly impressive demonstration of Ashley's drive and work ethic, as she successfully overcame several challenges - including the fact that the unit had to find new accommodation when their building was condemned.

As Leading Cadet, Ashley's compassion for others allowed her to step up and become a role model for how to adapt and thrive during a period of change - as she played a key role in helping the unit settle into a new way of working.

Having developed her leadership and management skills within the unit, Ashley now has the self-confidence to apply them more widely on courses and offshore voyages throughout the Sea Cadet Corps.

Well respected by her peers and instructors, she took the lead in planning a successful fundraising open day for her unit.

Her uniform upkeep is the best in the unit, and the fact that she has won the unit's Cadet of the Year award for both juniors (2018) and seniors (2019) reflects her dedication to the highest standards.

Having strived to improve her teamwork skills and build strong working relationships, Ashley is rightly proud of the huge personal progress she has made.



LIPSON CADETS GET TASTE OF SAILOR LIFE AT BRNC

THE spirited cadets of Lipson Combined Cadet Force RN (CCF) had a weekend to remember after visiting Britannia Royal Naval College.

During their time in Dartmouth, they immersed themselves in a diverse array of activities that blended discipline, teamwork, and excitement.

Saturday marked the start of their adventure, beginning with the precision and coordination

of field gun drills.

The cadets honed their skills under the watchful eyes of seasoned Royal Navy instructors, learning the art of synchronisation and teamwork that lies at the heart of naval operations.

Following the morning drills, the cadets got the chance to have swimming sessions. BRNC Dartmouth's swimming pool offered the perfect

backdrop for developing their water-based skills.

The highlight of the day was undoubtedly the STEM activities on the Royal Navy Ship Bridge Trainer.

The cadets found themselves at the helm of RN technology, navigating through simulated scenarios that required quick-thinking and problem-solving.

It was a unique opportunity for Lipson CCF RN cadets to bridge the gap between theory and practical application.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, an evening of games unfolded, strengthening the bonds forged during the day's activities.

Laughter echoed through the historic walls of Britannia Royal Naval College as the cadets enjoyed friendly competition and team-building games.

Sunday brought another set of challenges and adventures. The cadets tackled the Low Ropes Course, testing their physical and mental resilience while conquering obstacles suspended among the top field.

The visit concluded with a comprehensive tour of Britannia Royal Naval College, offering the cadets insights into the rich history and traditions that have shaped the RN over the years.

It was a chance for Lipson's CCF RN cadets to witness first-hand the esteemed legacy they may one day become a part of.

The weekend at Britannia Royal Naval College was more than just a series of activities; it was an immersive experience that left an indelible mark on the cadets of Lipson CCF.

As they returned to their routine, the memories of field gun drills, STEM challenges, and the bonds forged at the College will undoubtedly inspire them to strive for excellence both within the CCF and beyond.



Former school pupil invites cadets on board P2000



A ROYAL Navy Lieutenant invited Cadets from his former school onto a P2000 to show them around and tell them about his career so far.

Lieutenant George is commanding officer of HMS Trumpeter and got in touch with Maidstone Grammar School to see if their Cadets would be keen to have a tour of the vessel.

As well as attending the school, he was also in the CCF RN Section in school from Year 9 to Year 13 and always wanted to make the Royal Navy his career.

George found the CCF gave him many opportunities that he would not have gained elsewhere;

he went on the Clyde Fleet Tender trip, he took part in the Damage Rescue Instructional Unit at Phoenix and spent a number of weekends at Britannia Royal Naval College on their multi-activity weekends.

Add in a few summer camps for good measure and this gave him a very clear career path for when he left school.

He also found that the camaraderie that the school instilled in him, was replicated in his Royal Navy life both on board and on shore.

George joined the Royal Navy directly after completing his A-Levels and, as he wanted

a career path that would lead to him commanding his own ship, he decided on becoming a Warfare Officer.

As a Junior Officer over the past seven years, he has spent time on HMS Daring where he was involved in escorting ships through the Gulf as well as HMS Forth as Gunnery Officer and Operations Officer which took him to the South Atlantic.

He has also conducted a number of Navigation Courses throughout his time.

Major highlights have included meeting up with the other sailors and staff from international ships that took part in Baltops and Kiel

Week.

One thing that George continually told the Cadets during the visit was they should grab all opportunities with both hands - something he learnt early on in Maidstone Grammar School.

He said the community spirit that comes from working in close confines on board a ship and the Naval Officer mentality was easy to foster as it stemmed from the spirit of unity that he found in MGS CCF.

The cadets presented George with one of their MGS CCF RN section T-shirts while he gave them a HMS Trumpeter plaque.

Reserves' head thanks Scottish personnel on visit to Rosyth base

THE head of the UK's Maritime Reserves visited HMS Scotia – the hub for eastern Scotland – to thank personnel... and their 'day job' employers for their support and commitment.

Commodore Jo Adey's time at the establishment in Rosyth included an employer engagement evening, a women and STEM event, time on the water and finally a whole-ship training day to see the unit in action.

HMS Scotia is the Royal Naval Reserve unit covering the whole of the East of Scotland with a ship's company of 70 reservists.

The unit consists of HMS Scotia based in HMS Caledonia, and Tay Division who train weekly in Dundee.

The unit has access to sporting facilities at Caledonia, as well as a dedicated training wing comprising Royal Yachting Association classrooms, Initial Naval Training-dedicated instructional spaces, as well as presentation rooms and a large drill deck.

The visit opened with an employer engagement evening, allowing members of the ship's company to show their 'daytime'

employers what takes place at a training night.

It also gave Commodore Adey the opportunity to thank the many understanding employers, and highlight the transferrable skills reservists take back to their respective workplaces: reservists need the support of their employers to allow them to train and mobilise – so 'open evenings' strengthen those relationships and ultimately say 'thank you' for that support.

The next day saw a demonstration of Scotia's new RIB, delivered last year and allowing sailors to train and improve their seamanship skills without a lengthy trek to other RNR locations.

It means Scotia personnel can hit the ground running when working alongside regular counterparts. The unit is also an approved RYA training centre, allowing reservists to gain RYA-accredited qualifications.

At a whole ship training day which aligned with an RMR Scotland training weekend, Commodore Adey addressed all present from Maritime Reserves Scotland, followed by an open two-way



discussions with all groups – allowing the sailors and marines to speak directly with the head of the Service.

For team Scotia, this type of exposure to the Maritime Reserves HQ ensure an excellent two-way flow of information and the unique opportunity to address the commodore directly on pertinent issues.

BOARDERS' DELIGHT



FOR the first time in history, Royal Navy Women won gold in all three snowboarding categories at the Inter-Service Snowsports Championships.

Six Royal Navy women competed in the snowboarding championships at the event which saw the RAF, Army, Royal Navy, and Australian Defence Force competing for glory.

The teams competed in Boardercross, Parallel Giant Slalom, and Slopestyle categories against strong opposition from the other services.

Due to the nature of Royal Navy careers and deployments, the teams have minimal training time prior to the championships and often less time than their competition.

This year, the snowboarders had two weeks in Les des Alpes, training and competing at the Royal Navy Snowsports festival before travelling to Meribel for the Inter-Service event.

The women's snowboarding team stayed glued to the podium at the Inter-

Service Snowsports Championships in Meribel, returning with team gold titles in all 3 categories as well as taking the crown for overall best team, a title that has only been achieved by the Navy once before in 2020.

Going for gold, PO Aaby Aldridge grabbed the top spot in Boardercross and Slopestyle, taking the Individual Overall crown as well.

The Parallel Giant Slalom saw a Royal Navy podium domination with MA Cara Jones taking gold, with team mate Lt Cdr Hana Rabuzin to her left in second place and AB Jasmine Maunder to her right in third.

AB Jasmine Maunder was selected to represent the Royal Navy as part of the UK Armed Forces team due to attend The British Ski and Snowboard Championships after she took bronze in the Boardercross and Parallel Giant Slalom.

An impressive medal haul for the Royal Navy women who return to the UK victorious.

IN THE MEDALS



GREAT Britain's four-man bobsleigh team won their first medal of the season, taking bronze at the World Cup in Lillehammer, Norway.

Royal Marine Taylor Lawrence and GB team mates Brad Hall, Leon Greenwood and Greg Cackett locked in the podium finish with a time of 1.40.15, just behind Germany who placed first and second.

After winning World Cup medals in the 2-man, 4-man, and Combined disciplines in the 22-23 season, this year began with all the Royal Marines GB team mates recovering from serious injury.

It was Captain Brad Hall's third World Cup appearance since an operation on his back in October and Arran Gulliver was missing from the quartet due to a hamstring tear.

The podium finish proves they are still up there with the best.

Talking to British Bobsleigh, Brad said: "Our starts are still going up so that is exciting for the crew to keep building from. We are in a good place and excited about what is next."

"To be back in the medals so soon after getting back in a sled – and with a month to go to the World Championships – puts us in a good place ahead of those Worlds in Winterberg."

Great Britain's second team to feature this year is piloted by Adam Baird, the Royal Marine responsible for introducing Taylor to the sport.

It is the first time since the 21/22 season that two British teams have competed, with Adam piloting his crew to 17th in a time of 1.41.51 on his World Cup debut.

Taylor and Brad Hall placed 6th in the two-man just the day before their top-three victory.




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SCAN TO EMAIL



BETTS WOWS AS THE RN LANDS BIG BLOWS

ROYAL Navy boxers took the spoils in a team event against Western Counties at air station Yeovilton.

In its 53rd consecutive year, the Royal Navy vs Western Counties boxing fixture was an intense competition with 11 thrilling bouts as the RN emerged triumphant, securing victory in eight out of the 11 bouts.

Notably, the team's success was further accentuated by the outstanding performances of the three representatives from the establishment.

AET Betts of 847 Naval Air Squadron delivered a standout performance in front of his home crowd, adding an extra layer of excitement to the event.

His skill and determination resonated with the spectators, creating an electric atmosphere.

The crowd's cheers echoed the pride of seeing one of their own excel on the grand stage, contributing to the overall success of the evening.

A further standout performance came from MNE Bell, who secured the most notable victory of the evening against Torbay ABCs Liam McCluskey and was rightfully awarded the title of the best boxer of the evening. The crowd was treated to a spectacular display of skill and sportsmanship from both teams throughout all competitions.

As the final bell rang, accolades were extended to the organisers, coaches, and officials for their unwavering support in making the event a success. The 53rd edition of this boxing fixture proved to be a great evening of sporting prowess, cementing its legacy as a celebrated tradition within the RNBA fixtures list.

RESULTS

AET Zain Abbas Vs Tom Merrifield (Blue Flames ABC) – Abbas, Split Decision
AB Burbury Vs Liam Fouracres (Yeovil ABC) – Burbury, Unanimous Decision
AET Mcilroy Vs Oliver Grooves (Torbay ABC) – Grooves, Unanimous Decision
ET Docherty Vs Fire Kirk (Chard ABC) – Fire, Unanimous Decision
MNE Bell Vs Liam McCluskey (Torbay ABC) – Bell, Unanimous Decision
AB Stuart-Macrae Vs Connor Hendy (St Pirans) – Stuart-Macrae, Unanimous Decision
MNE Slatter Vs Marc Plunkett (Bodysnatchers ABC) – Plunkett, Split Decision
MNE Crookes Vs Thomas Varey (Trowbridge ABC) – Crookes, Split Decision
AET Betts Vs Jamie Claridge (Weston Warriors ABC) – Betts, 2nd Round TKO
MNE Fanning Vs Louis Bacon (Kings ABC) – Fanning, Unanimous Decision
MNE Rands-Silva Vs Sebb Hudd (Sweatbox ABC) – Rands-Silva, Unanimous Decision



CARP CLASSIC

THE Forces Carp Classic is an annually run event in aid of military charity Blesma and Great Ormond Street Hospital.

The event is for all standards of carp anglers from beginners to those more advanced.

"We are actively seeking out new anglers each year and if you are keen on carp fishing, are currently serving or ex-serving then you should get over to France to experience this event," said co-organiser Tim Gray.

"We have a hundred likeminded Military anglers (Navy, Marines, Army and RAF) all gathering to have a firm, fair and friendly competition between ourselves."

Drop us an email: forcscarpclassic@hotmail.com to find out more.

SAM'S ELITE

AFTER a stellar year of racing in 2023, Sam Wordley has achieved his Elite Triathlon License from British Triathlon.

Sam Wordley is now the only professional Triathlete within the Royal Navy and only the second serving male pro currently in the British Military.

Training over 20 hours per week amidst his day job as an LC, Sam has multiple podium finishes at the highest profile Ironman races in the UK under his belt.

Not to mention, his third consecutive Inter-services Triathlon title and

Royal Marines Sports Person Of The Year, Sam has his sights locked in on the world stage for 2024.

A huge year for Sam, Royal Navy Triathlon and British Military Sport.

HOLDING OUT FOR A HYROX

HMS HERON gymnasium organised a 'Mini' HYROX competition for military personnel.

In total 30 personnel took part in the competition which was open to all military personnel, both Royal Navy and Army of all fitness abilities. The competition was held three times throughout the day as single males, paired males and paired females.

The HYROX is a global fitness race for everybody. It launched in 2017 in Germany and quickly established itself as the fastest growing fitness sport in the world.

Winner of the men's singles race Air Engineering Officer Lieutenant Commander Chris Weedon (39) said: "You can affiliate the HYROX race with the military. They have taken our circuit training and turned it into a professional race. I am glad the gym hosted this, and I think more bases should. We, as in the military, are built for this."

This mini version of the HYROX race consisted of 12 gruelling parts. An 800m run, 1km ski, 800 run, 80m burpee broad jump, 800m run, 1km row, 800m run,

200m Farmers carry (32kg Male / 24kg Female), 800m run, 100m Sandbag lunge (20kg Male / 10kg Female), 800m run before a final 100m wall balls (9kg Male/6kg female).

Despite it being a shortened version, the race still certainly pushed personnel to their limits. Able Rating Alex Todd (23) an aircraft engineer from 846 Naval Air Squadron, who previously struggled to pass his fitness test, said: "I had been keeping up with the lunchtime circuits and I really wanted to challenge myself, just to see if I could do it."

Alex added, "I don't really know how I did it. It was very hard, incredibly tiring. But I feel satisfied now I have finished it. I just kept telling myself 'Just get it done'."

The fastest singles time was achieved by Lt Cdr Weedon at 45:33, the fastest male pairs time was achieved by Chief Petty Officer Keer and Petty Officer Foxhall at 38:55 and the fastest female pair time was 1 Army Air Corps Captain Hannah and Lance Corporal Platts at 46:22.

DUCHESS ON THE SLOPES

THE 2024 Inter-Service Snowsports Championships had a visit from the Duchess of Edinburgh in Méribel, Coeur des 3 Vallées.

The Royal Navy telemark, alpine and snowboarding teams competed with the RAF and Army in Meribel at the Inter-Service Snowsports Championships.

The UK Armed Forces Winter Sports Association was delighted when their Royal Patron, the Duchess of Edinburgh paid them a visit to show her support.

HRH Sophie spent time socialising with the athletes, presenting medals, and learning about adaptive skiing and the

incredible work of the Armed Forces Para-Snowsport Team.

This year's competition made history for the Royal Navy as the first year a full female telemark team represented on the slopes, some of whom were introduced to the sport for the first time in Austria just two months before.

The infancy of the team did not stop them earning medals in the sprint and classic races, best newcomer, and overall team gold alongside their male counterparts.

It was a strong year for the Navy's snowboarders with all the women making it to the finals of the PGS race, finishing with

a gold Royal Navy podium in the slopestyle and overall team winner's title. The men claimed silver in the individuals, just missing out to the Army who won the overall men's title by one point.

The alpine ski team flew home with wins in the Super G and Super Combined races, with all members demonstrating strong skiing and recording top 10 results across the board.

The snow teams now travel back to the UK and hand the winter sports baton to the ice athletes, as the focus shifts to the Inter-Service Ice Championships in St Moritz.



MEN ON THE MARK TO BE CROWNED CHAMPS

THE Royal Navy Telemark Men's Team successfully concluded their 2024 season by winning the Team Combination Event title, becoming inter-service champions for the first time since 2020.

Twenty athletes from across the RN and RM attended the Navy Snowsports Festival (RNSF) at Les Deux Alpes from 13 – 27 Jan 24.

This was the first time that telemark has been represented at the RNSF, with a full telemark race programme of giant slalom, classic, sprint and parallel sprint races. A full race training and instruction package for novices was conducted during the first week of package and the telemark races conducted in week 2. For the first time the Navy were able to run a Women's competition as well, with many of the female athletes undertaking their first season on telemark skis. This was a considerable achievement, noting the complexities of telemark racing.

The overall RNSF results were as follows:

Ladies:

1st: Lt Cdr Kate Retallick RN
2nd: MA Tezney Murphy RN
3rd: AB Georgie Altham RNR

1st: Mne Ollie Wotton RM
2nd: AET Matt Deane RN
3rd: WO2 Steve Farrant RM

RN Telemark were delighted to be able to select a full Men's and Women's team to compete at the Inter-Services Snowsports Competition (ISSC), held in Meribel from 3 – 10 Feb. This was the first time that a women's team competition was held, with representation from all 3 services.

The RN Telemark Women's team consisted of: Lt Cdr Kate Retallick RNR (Team Captain), AB Georgie Altham RNR, SLt Abi Fells RN and MA Tezney Murphy RN.

The RN Telemark Mens Team consisted of: WO2 Steve Farrant RM (Team Captain), AET Matt Deane RN, Capt Ollie Frost RM, Lt Cdr Ramsay Shaw RN, Mne Ollie Wotton and Lt Tom Wotton RM.

Lt Cdr Kate Retallick RNR, AB Georgie Altham RNR, SLt Abi Fells RN, Mne Ollie Wotton and Lt Tom Wotton RM were awarded their RN Telemark Colours for representing the Navy at the Inter-Service Championships for the first time.

In the team competition the men's team dominated by being undefeated in all races, winning the Giant Slalom, Classic and Sprint races, and drawing



the Parallel Sprint with the Army. Unsurprisingly the men's team were crowned Inter-Service champions and winner of the team combination title.

Despite being predominantly novices, the women's team managed to win the sprint team event, and the team captain, Lt Cdr Kate Retallick RN finished 3rd in the individual competition and was the top ladies newcomer, awarded to the top placed athlete who was attending the Inter-Services competition for the first time.

In the men's individual competition the top

Navy athletes were Lt Cdr Ramsay Shaw RN in 3rd and Mne Ollie Wotton RM in 2nd, who was also awarded the men's top newcomer.

The RN continues to grow the women's and development teams and welcomes anyone who wants to try racing or telemark skiing for the first time. Taster sessions will be continued throughout 2024 at indoor/dry ski slopes and Navy Snow Sports Indoor Festival (dates TBC). For anyone interested in next season the novice training camp, Ex White Dagger, will be held in Stubaai Glacier 1 Dec – 14 Dec 24, prior to the Navy Snow Sports Festival 2025. Telemark will

again return to the RNSF in Les Deux Alpes 11 – 25 Jan 25. Free equipment hire and tuition will be provided for anyone wanted to learn or try telemark at the indoor events or NSSF.

If anyone would like further details on telemark skiing please contact Lt Cdr Ramsay Shaw on ramsay.shaw771@mod.gov.uk or 07815 019270. For details of any specific women's events please contact SLt Lily Chubb on Lily.Chubb100@mod.gov.uk. Further information on telemark skiing can also be found on the RNRM Telemark Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/RNRMTelemark/>



Out-of-this-world experience

THERE are diving expeditions.

And there are Royal Navy-led adventurous training diving expeditions in azure waters which you'll remember for the rest of your life.

Two weeks of first-rate diving and diving instruction was delivered to sailors and Royal Marines on Exercise Zen C in and off Cyprus.

The expedition provided 18 personnel with the opportunity to refresh and enhance their sub aqua skills and earn qualifications.

The first week consisted of a 'shakeout dive' before diver training which resulted in three individuals earning the 'sports diver' qualification in the warm, clear waters of the eastern Med.

With one of the team qualified as a dive leader, the second week saw the divers conduct a range of dives from the sunlit shallows at six metres (20ft), exploring tropical reefs, to the awe-inspiring depths of 40 metres (130ft) where comfort zones were stretched on one of

the top 10 wrecks in the world, the MV Zenobia.

Not content with conquering the underwater world, the exped delivery team provided additional training by endorsing individuals as small boat handlers.

The location of the training centre enabled all levels of training to be delivered from both shore and boat – and offered the cultural draw of neighbouring Larnaca to explore and relax.

"A truly unforgettable two weeks concluded with most divers achieving 19 dives," said Chief Petty Officer Baz Chambers from Portsmouth-based Deployable Regional Unit East, which oversaw Zen C.

"We had three newly qualified sports divers, a diver leader and an advanced diver, as well as everyone received O2 training and four earned boat handling qualifications."

"The entire team departed from London Heathrow having made new friends and great memories."



Allgau fun for outdoor leadership centre staff

IN ROME they asked: Who guards the guards?

In the Brecon Beacons, it was: who trains the trainers?

The answer: the trainers themselves, who spent a week deep in the Bavarian alps taking their knowledge and skills to the next level... or beyond.

Normally when we feature adventurous training, it's AT experts delivering challenging physical activities to ship's companies and units.

But a dozen instructors/staff from Talybont, where the RN has maintained the Outdoor Leadership Training Centre for a couple of decades to instil 'grit' in the ranks of its leaders, decided to make use of the relative lull in the depths of winter to push themselves and add new skills/qualifications to their names.

Exercise Draig Gwyn (Welsh for 'White Dragon') took them to Germany's Allgau region, about 70 miles southwest of Munich, and the villages of Oberjoch and Obersdorf.

Settling into Alpine lodges to immerse themselves in German culture, the team set about tackling sports and winter activities which were unusual, exciting, and perhaps dangerous in temperatures never above -3 Celsius and as low as -16.

All 12 from Talybont conducted Alpine skiing on the slopes around Oberjoch and neighbouring Obersdorf and Ifan to name a few. In addition to learning new skills the staff were also battling temperatures ranging from -3 to -16 degrees.

To deliver ski expeditions/activities safely, the Talybont team were tested with things going wrong on the slopes –

from a broken ski on piste through to white-out conditions of a sudden blizzard and every skier's biggest nightmare: an avalanche.

Making use of a training area Talybont personnel undertaking the Ski Foundation Level 2 course were challenged to locate a buried transceiver and employing a companion rescue to dig out a simulated buried skier.

And after a day on the slopes or peaks, there was little time for R&R as there was a meal for 12 hungry instructors to serve up.

"Training in Germany was unique and could not be replicated in the Brecon Beacons," explained Leading Physical Training Instructor Kurtis Jacques.

"Not only did the staff have to adapt day-by-day to the extremely low, challenging temperatures, they were also required to learn a new winter AT discipline – which provided real-life learning experiences and placed the staff back into the shoes of Phase 2 trainees and junior officers face when staff deliver training at Talybont

"The expedition was a huge success. All staff benefited from the exposure to a new environment and the stresses that brings."

And the benefit for the wider RN?

Well, the staff returned energised to start 2024, it gave them a good idea of what it's like to be on the receiving end of an AT course... which in turn makes them better instructors. And they also gained nine new qualifications to pass on their experience and knowledge to future RN leaders.

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Combat sports lesson for Teesside teens



NAVY NEWS

ROYAL Marines and sailors gave youngsters on Teesside an insight into how combat sports can channel aggression and steer them away from crime and gang culture.

The session at Stockton's Contender Gym could now be expanded county-wide after organisers were delighted with the response from the inaugural event, which was observed by local councillors, including Mayor Jim Beall, and local MP Matt Vickers.

"The theme for the event was for the careers service to partner with the department of the Corps colonels and local authorities to help fight against knife crime, drugs, and gang culture," said Warrant Officer 2 Dennis Harrison RN.

As area recruiting manager, he's been looking at different ways and locations where he can raise the profile of the Senior Service, such as 'combat sport academies' like the gym in Stockton.

"Contender Gym is working hard to instil values to children from diverse backgrounds and to provide an alternative to gang culture, drugs, and crime," Dennis said.

"We've been looking to do the same and have found that these values of courage, self-discipline and respect for others are very much in line with the Royal Navy and Royal Marine ethos.

"There is a requirement to increase our current visibility and identify untapped resources for engagement, including venues outside the traditional outreach model.

"Combat sport academies, across the North of



England have large memberships that include young people from a diverse spectrum. The students possess a level of fitness and values in line with our ethos. This initiative would allow for close engagement, away from the education setting."

Eight serving and reservist personnel rocked up at the gym to offer wide-ranging coaching and guidance from general physical drill to pad work for boxers and Muay Thai (aka Thai boxing), skills shared not just with Stockton's young people but also the local police.

The RN/RM team shared their drills, training and fitness advice over 90-minute sessions to children from

11 through to those in their late teens.

Among those taking on the marines in the ring was Keaton McLaren, a member of the gym who has Charcot Marie Tooth disease, a rare, progressive condition also known as Hereditary Motor and Sensory Neuropathy. Despite being extremely poorly, Keaton made a special effort for the chance to work with the Royal Navy and Royal Marines.

Those who completed the sessions left with photos of their experience, a certificate and useful details about a career in the Royal Navy/Royal Marines one day.

Deaths

CPO Roderick Donald Fraser, Gunnery Instructor. Served from February 1946 to January 1970 at HMS Ganges, Vernon, Sirius, Victory, Glasgow, Excellent, Daedalus, Maidstone, Nereide, Contest, Whitby, Dolphin, and Terror. Trained and led RN Ceremonial Guard at the Cenotaph in 1961 and 1962. Part of Sir Winston Churchill's gun carriage crew at his state funeral in 1965. Awarded Long Service and Good Conduct Medals. Secretary of Woking branch of RNA from 1983 to 2019, raising more than £3m for the Poppy Appeal. Died January 24, aged 93.

CPO GI Terence 'Steve' Stephens. Joined in 1955 and served in HMS Birmingham, Devonshire, Gurkha, Jutland, Norfolk, and Victorious. Took part in the state funerals of Sir Winston Churchill in 1965

and of Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten in 1979. Awarded Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977 and Long Service and Good Conduct Medal in 1979. Served as a guide on HMS Victory. Died August 11, 2023 in Guernsey.

Stutter, Jeremy 'Stuts', Petty Officer (Communications Yeoman), served 1980-2007. After basic specialist training at HMS Raleigh and Mercury, served in HMS Wotton, Phoebe, HQ Northwood and CBBFI. Left RN August 1985, rejoined November 1987 and served in HMS Phoebe and Diomedea, then Commcen Whitehall, Mercury OXP, Commcen Gibraltar, Northwood (twice), HMS Intrepid (twice), including paying her off, HMS Newcastle (in refit), Collingwood as an instructor. Left the RN a second

time, joined the RNR as a yeoman and served at Commcen Fort Southwick. Re-joined and served in HMS Fearless (final commission), Commcen Portsmouth, COMMARBAT Staff and HMS Collingwood Comms School. Died January 11, aged 59.

Keith Simpson, Warrant Officer 1 Stores Accountant. Served 1965 to 1997 at Pembroke, Lossiemouth, Nelson, Fife, Plymouth, Eagle, Sultan, Tiger, Sheffield (1982) Collingwood, OASIS project (St George's), York, Dolphin, Invincible, North Corner Group (EBS). Died January 24, aged 76.

Surgeon Commander Matt Craner. Passionate in his support and research for the MS Trust. Died February, aged 53. Visit www.matthewcraner.muchloved.com

Ask Jack

Exeter White Ensign Club will be closing in early 2024 after more than 40 years in the former Holy Trinity Church in South Street.

Over its lifespan the club, which serves as a hub for several veterans' groups in the city, including the WRNS, Royal Marines and Submariners' Associations, has collected more than 270 plaques/mounted crests of ships and units. All are being sold for £40 each

(including postage and packing), available from the club treasurer at 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. If anyone has information, please email sggipson@msn.com. Gary Gipson

Reunions

HMS Pellow: A final reunion of the Exeter RNR unit takes place at Livermead House Hotel, Torquay, on April 6. Contact CPO Chris Mills on icmills@hotmail.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.

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.

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 Tel: 01268 548041. Come and join us for the final bash.

HMS Medway Queen. Are you connected with the Medway Queen – one of the last large ships involved with the Dunkirk evacuation still with us? The team lovingly restoring the paddle steamer want to celebrate her 100th birthday this year by involving every one who has played a part in bringing her back to life.

As well as carrying hundreds of thousands of tourists from the Medway to Southend, 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) 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 or 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 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 March 15 2024

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