



NAVY NEWS

AUGUST 2023

KING OF THE CASTLE

Royal Navy Motor Boat Apollo leads the Senior Service's new minehunting mothership, RFA Stirling Castle as she works with autonomous and uncrewed minehunting vessels for the first time during trials off Portland.

See pages 20-21

Picture: LPhot Edward Jones



Inside: ■ NATO duties ■ Royal Marines go Dutch ■ Submarine hunting

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From the Liza



In the dip in quest to find 'the enemy'

THE Royal Navy Merlin Mk2 helicopter hovers effortlessly, fewer than 200-feet above the sea.

Below, the surface is fractured into lines – wracked by the fierce downdraft of the aircraft's three Rolls Royce engines.

The crew is 'in the dip' – with the helicopter's sonar lowered on a cable deep into the ocean below.

The helicopter's nose depicts the winged head of a ferocious tiger with gaping mouth, for this is 814 Naval Air Squadron – nicknamed the Flying Tigers – and part of the navy's elite Merlin Helicopter Force which specialises in anti-submarine warfare.

In this case, the crew is searching for an 'enemy' submarine – played by the Norwegian vessel HNoMS Utvaer.

This exercise is in passive sonar, the subtle science of listening covertly underwater for the tell-tale sounds of a submarine.

For now, the Norwegians are proving elusive.

The rear crew face backwards and remain focussed on their screens and displays.

The observer, who is the mission commander and always keeps one eye on the fuel and recalculating their return journey, monitors the radar and radio chatter while at the same time directing and suggesting possible sonar options.

Beside him sits the aircrewman, intent on his display screens as he scrutinises the ocean for possible noise.

Concentration intensifies as the aircrewman highlights a possible 'hot contact'.

However, swift analysis reveals it is only a surface target, and, shortly afterwards, one of the pilots visually confirms a passing speedboat in the distance.

The helicopter retracts its sonar and lifts away, skipping across the sea, now bright and glassy under the intense Scandinavian spring sky. Out here the huge helicopter is in its element. It zips nimbly across the sea with surprising speed and agility.

In the far distance, indistinct snow-capped mountains frame the narrow, broken coastline of Norway. Further north, in a separate exercise area, a P3 patrol aircraft attempts to locate a German submarine.

Upfront, the two pilots see a second Royal Navy Merlin helicopter, hovering low in a rainbow of spray. This is their companion from 824 Naval Air Squadron, known as their 'playmate', which is also hunting the Utvaer.

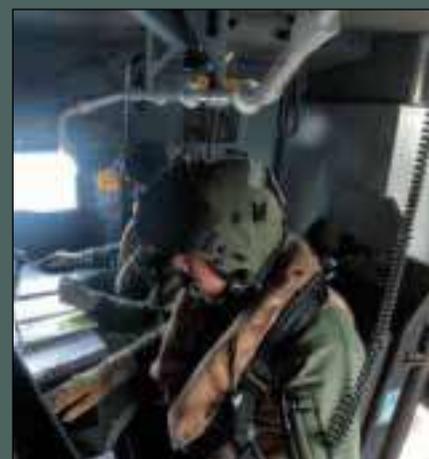
A wall of previously deployed sonobuoys, or 'brickwork', reveals the presence of the submarine and the Flying Tiger begins to stalk its prey, tracking the Norwegians across the exercise area.

Eventually, the submarine comes up to periscope depth and the exercise is reset.

The submariners, given a new course and heading, sink away again into the deep and the helicopter flies off in advance to resume its listening position in the dip.



Main image: The observer (left) and aircrewman (right) are intent upon their screens during an anti-submarine warfare sortie



From left, Supply Chain AB Tom Reid, Members of the Survival Equipment Section, Trainee air engineering technicians able ratings Aaron Duffield and Lee Bannister, Aircrew during a sortie; Personnel from 814 and 824 NAS

Hard to hunting eels

Submarine hunters leave Cornwall base to pit their wits against Norwegian and German boats

ROYAL Navy submarine hunters pitted their wits against underwater 'foes' from Norway and Germany in the challenging waters of the fjords.

Around a hundred men and women from 824 and 814 Naval Air Squadrons, normally based at Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose near Helston in Cornwall, made the journey north for Exercise Green Eel – or Gruner Aal as it known by the Norwegians.

The detachment was based near Bergen in the west of Norway. The Haakonsværn Helikopterbase nestles on top of a steep, rocky hill topped with pine trees and stunning views to the fjords and naval base below.

With its modern, Scandinavian-designed buildings, the Royal Navy sailors dubbed the facilities 'Tracy Island', for its likeness to the futuristic headquarters from TV puppet show Thunderbirds.

Three Merlin Mk2 helicopters took part in a series of exercises against Norwegian and German submarines.

The commanding officer of RNAS Culdrose, Captain Stuart Irwin, said: "The ability to work closely with our allies in Norway during Exercise Green Eel has been a superb opportunity for all involved and gave us excellent access to train with live conventional submarines.

"First and foremost, this was an opportunity for our trainee aircrew on 824 Naval Air Squadron to complete the final stages of operational flying training in the Merlin anti-submarine warfare helicopter.

"It gave them the experience of locating and tracking real submarines and enhanced the skills and techniques they will now take to the Merlin Helicopter Force's frontline squadrons."

Green Eel also proved a test for the four-strong weather forecasting team – a completely different environment from the squadrons' usual 'playground' off the Lizard Peninsula and the Channel.

"We've been having such a good run of weather that I've never known a forecast where I haven't predicted cloud below 5,000 feet for so long," explained senior meteorological officer Lieutenant Adelaide Banyard.

"I keep looking for local effects but even the Norwegians say the weather has been usually calm.

"I have to do my job without all our usual meteorological kit. Here I just have my laptop. That's the difference with civilian met' officers who tend to stay in the same place all the time, but in the military we deploy anywhere in the world."

With little darkness at this time of year and keen to get as much benefit from the exercise as possible, sailors frequently worked 12-hour days for the duration of Green Eel.

There has been downtime, personnel enjoyed the sights of Bergen and environs, as well as Norwegian hospitality.

"It's a lovely place to be and everyone is really friendly," said Air Engineering Technician Grace Brown who was particularly impressed by her hosts' new facilities.

"The Norwegians have really taken care of us. Most of us have been out swimming in the fjords or taken the cable car up into the mountains. We've had barbecues and they even organised a football match."

For front-line aircrew such as 814 Squadron's aviators – they support anti-submarine warfare operations around the UK and North Atlantic especially, operating from shore bases or the flight decks of Royal Navy frigates – Green Eel offered invaluable experience against live opponents.

It also allowed the engineers and support personnel to build on their experience, working with the UK's allies at distance from their main base in Cornwall.

Captain Irwin added: "Anti-submarine warfare is as vital in today's world as it ever was, with our reliance on undersea pipelines and global communications.

"Merlin Helicopter Force is very much a part of defending that critical national infrastructure, and we regularly operate in the North Sea, North Atlantic and the Arctic.

Commodore Trond Gimmingsrud, the chief of the Norwegian naval fleet, said: "The Royal Navy and the Royal Norwegian Navy have worked together on a number of exercises and operations lately – confirming our commitment and ability to operate seamlessly.

"During Gruner Aal, we have also worked together with the German Navy – improving our understanding and skills in anti-submarine warfare.

"The ability to operate from the same base and with short distance to the exercise area has allowed us to frequently share experiences between German and Norwegian submarines and British Merlins. That has made us all better, and I am already looking forward to the next iteration of this annual exercise."

On his first deployment with the Royal Navy, trainee air engineering technician Able Rating Aaron Duffield said: "It's been great. I've been on the line (marshalling aircraft) a lot more and doing more of the job while I am here. I've been up a couple of mountains and into Bergen too."

Able Rating Tom Reid, part of the logistics team, added: "The Norwegians working on the squadron have been above and beyond in helping us. This was my first time to Norway. I'll definitely come back here on holiday."

Leading Survival Equipment Technician Nikki Cherry, in charge of her team of three who oversee the aircrews' kit, added: "A lot of our preparation work all happens before we arrive. It's been really good.

"It's definitely one of the best detachments. It's been lovely getting to see some of the country in our downtime and being able to go and see Bergen."



ewman
marine

who took part in Exercise Green Eel in Norway



Report and pictures: Graeme Wilkinson

Training or on patrol around the UK

HMS Richmond 824 NAS
 HMS Hurworth 825 NAS
 HMS Iron Duke RFA Tiderace
 HMS Severn RFA Stirling Castle
 HMS Portland DTXG
 Coastal Forces Squadron
 XV Patrick Blackett
 Project Wilton
 814 NAS
 815 NAS



17 TES SQN

HMS Dauntless
815 NAS

HMS Medway
NEFI

HMS Mersey
Mersey

HMS Northumberland
RFA Tideforce
814 NAS

814 NAS
824 NAS

45 Cdo
HMS Albion

HMS Trent
HMS Forth
Gibraltar Squadron

Operation Kipion

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

British Defence Singapore
Support Unit

HMS Tamar
HMS Spey

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



GLOBAL | MODERN | READY

A LOOK at the future leads the content for this month's edition, starting with RFA Stirling Castle (see pages 1, 20 and 21) as the ship conducted trials with autonomous boats.

The bow and aft sections of HMS Cardiff, the RN's second new Type 26 sub-hunting frigate, have rolled out of the sheds at BAE Systems' yard in Govan as construction reaches a milestone (see page 6).

The first crew have joined HMS Venturer – the lead vessel of five Type 31 Inspiration-class Royal Navy frigates (see page 6). Nine men and women, led by the warship's Senior Naval Officer Commander Chris Cozens, are the first of ship's company which will grow to more than 100 when the ship joins the Fleet.

Looking to the future – and reflecting on the past – are Royal Marines as they marked the 50th anniversary of Europe's oldest military partnership of its kind, the UK-Netherlands Amphibious Force (see pages 14-15). The two NATO allies shared plans on developing new specialist warships designed to land the punch of their renowned marine forces onto coastlines around the world.

HMS Duncan has sailed from Portsmouth on a six-month mission leading an international task group in the Mediterranean (see page 5). The Type 45 destroyer will serve as flagship of NATO's Standing Maritime Group 2 – a force of around half a dozen warships which patrols from the Pillars of Hercules to the Bosphorus ensuring security, safety and peace across the Mediterranean.

Royal Navy warship HMS Northumberland led a multi-national task group in the High North with allies from the Royal Norwegian and United States Navies (see page 5). The frigate was joined by Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker RFA Tideforce, Norwegian frigate HNoMS Otto Sverdrup and United States Navy (USN) destroyer USS Thomas Hudner.

One of the busiest destroyers in the Royal Navy, HMS Defender, has returned home to Portsmouth – bringing the curtain down on the first act of her career ahead of a two-year refit (see page 11).

Gearing up for an impending mission to Africa is offshore patrol ship HMS Trent, which will work with Royal Marines of 42 Commando and regional allies to promote and enhance security on the Continent (see page 9).

Survey ship HMS Scott has returned to Plymouth after a year away surveying a patch of the Atlantic the size of Spain (see page 19).

Regular combined training for Royal and US Navy mine warfare forces in the Gulf was given extra bite with the input of fearsome US Air Force A-10 Thunderbolts (see page 7). More at home over land, the tankbusters tested the defensive skills of RFA Cardigan Bay and HMS Bangor and Chiddingfold plus two US warships during a 12-day exercise, Neptune's Kilt.

Divers from the Diving and Threat Exploitation Group hosted Ukrainian Navy divers and bomb specialists to provide training in the detection, identification and disposal of explosive ordnance devices and mines. The training, which also included personnel from NATO allies, took place in Scotland (see page 13).

One of the Navy's most experienced 21st Century aviators gives us a rare insight into the world of the fast-jet pilot (see pages 16-17). Now retired, Commander Nathan Gray flew upwards of 50 aircraft as a front-line flier and later test pilot, leading up to becoming the first person to land on and take off from HMS Queen Elizabeth in an F-35B.

Falkland islanders have honoured the 258 people killed in the 1982 war by naming features across the chain – harbours, bays, ridges, hills and islands – in their memory (see page 30).

And finally, under flawless Falmouth skies, there was a flawless performance by the men and women of the Armed Forces on their annual day of celebration (see page 23).

Strangling a vile trade

A ROYAL Navy-led task force delivered a record-breaking haul of drugs in its six months tackling crime in the Indian Ocean.

Twenty-two tonnes of illegal narcotics have been seized by warships of the international Combined Task Force 150, the result of 14 successful 'busts' which have deprived criminal or terrorist gangs of at least £161m.

Hauls of hashish, heroin, methamphetamine and captagon (fenethylline) tablets have all ended up on the bottom of the Indian Ocean after interdictions by ships from the US and French Navies, US Coast Guard, and the Royal Navy's HMS Lancaster.

The ships are part of a wider international effort which has also involved vessels from Pakistan, India and Italy policing more than three million square miles of the Indian Ocean from the Gulf of Oman to Madagascar and the Mozambique Channel in the south.

Their actions have been directed from Bahrain by the task force staff, mostly Royal Navy, but supported by colleagues from the Italian and Royal New Zealand Navies, and the Royal Air Force.

Led by Captain James Byron (pictured inset), they formally handed over responsibility for the mission to the French Navy, six months and one day after taking the helm.

He said his team had observed a dramatic increase in more damaging and addictive drugs being trafficked in the region – around seven tonnes of the total haul has been heroin and methamphetamine.

And at least some of the success is down to specific 'surge operations' – bringing together as many ships, helicopters and aircraft as possible in a concentrated patch of ocean, allowing no room for the traffickers to escape.

"Putting good people next to bad people to stop them doing bad things has been our calling card," said Captain Byron who has now completed his sixth tour of duty in Bahrain; the Kingdom has been the hub of Royal Navy operations in the Middle East for decades.

"This has been without doubt the most fulfilling of my recent deployments to Bahrain, working alongside superbly talented and motivated individuals, my very own 'little pack of gundogs' have been determined to sniff out illegal narcotics and stop this vile trade.

"My favourite moment of the deployment has got to have been working with Norton, the narcotics sniffer dog – and as I go home to my family and my own spaniels, I do so



An impressive haul of drugs interdicted by USCG Cutter Emlen Tunnell on the deck of a fishing vessel – one of the first successes under Capt Byron's time in charge of CTF150



knowing we have done a great job, with heads held high."

Although the ships and their boarding teams which are assigned to the task force have grabbed most of the publicity over the past six months, Captain Byron's staff are fully aware of the impact of their successful operations.

"I have had an incredible six months deployed in Bahrain," said Lieutenant Rachel Cox. "I have learned so much from the amazing team and working with our international partners has been an opportunity I'll never forget."

"A highlight for me was accompanying Captain Byron to the Seychelles and seeing first-hand the impact that our counter-narcotics operations have on their communities."

A small team – the battlewatch – provided 24/7/365 monitoring of events across the task force's domain from headquarters, among them battlewatch officer Lieutenant 'Mac'

McKenna.

"I feel the opportunity so far has been really interesting and has opened the door to a new chapter in my naval career – working on the battlegroup floor has been remarkable and professionally rewarding" he said.

"I have made some great friends working alongside our international colleagues. It has been a real privilege to learn and share cultural and naval experiences from a wide range of international partners, including, our hosts from Bahrain, but also South Korea, Turkey, Brazil, Jordan, Egypt, USA, Italy and New Zealand, to name a few. I think it simply comes down to the basic fact we share a common outlook in life. We are all sailors."

Although command now passes to the French under Captain Yannick Bossu, the UK connection continues, with four Royal Navy personnel assigned to his staff.

"The CTF 150 baton may have passed over, but the hard work to counter terrorism and the scourge of drugs will continue in good hands," said Captain Byron.

"Everyone in the UK team wishes our counterparts the very best of luck for their six months 'at the wheel'."



SEEN from her Merlin helicopter – whose observer with the camera evidently likes arty B&W imagery – HMS Northumberland takes on fuel from tanker RFA Tideforce... which is also filling up HNoMS Otto Sverdrup.

Out of shot – taken somewhere in the High North – is US destroyer Thomas Hudner.

The ships came together shortly after combined exercises with the US Navy's Carrier Strike Group 12, which increased knowledge between NATO allies, including the world's biggest carrier (indeed world's biggest warship), USS Gerald R Ford, and her escorts.



The High North force aimed to demonstrate the UK's commitment to supporting and collaborating with Arctic allies, as well as enhancing the Royal Navy's long history of operating in the region. Northumberland's foray into these water follows sorties by her sister HMS Kent back in the spring and F238 herself last September.

With that experience under her belt, the Plymouth-based frigate acted as the task group commander in the Arctic.

"Alongside our Norwegian and American Allies, with our fellow UK crews of RFA Tideforce and HMS Defender, our operations in international waters were a physical

demonstration of the UK's enduring commitment to the Arctic Council's vision for maintaining peace, stability and constructive cooperation in the Arctic," said Commander Will Edwards-Bannon, the frigate's Commanding Officer.

"I am hugely proud of the achievements of my team over this demanding operational period which saw Northumberland lead a capable and credible multinational task group in the High North.

The Arctic poses challenges that are not faced anywhere else in the Northern Hemisphere including strict environmental compliance with the Polar Code, the risk of sheet ice and permanent daylight due to the sun never setting at such high latitude this

time of year.

Throughout the operation the ships conducted exercises together using their helicopters, including Northumberland's Merlin Mk2 and USS Thomas Hudner's MH-60 Seahawk.

The task group also achieved several replenishment serials with Tideforce and a coordinated manoeuvring exercise to further develop allied expertise and air-maritime integration.

British and Norwegian sailors also traded places to gain experience in how each respective navy operates on a day-to-day basis.

Northumberland embedded several

of her youngest sailors on board the Norwegian frigate, providing them a great opportunity to form personal friendships and experiences with our NATO allies early on in their careers.



"The opportunity to embark on board HNoMS Otto Sverdrup, meet their sailors and see how the Royal

Norwegian Navy conducts operations in the Arctic Circle was a real privilege, and is definitely one I'll remember for the rest of my career," said Midshipman George Pease who passed out from Dartmouth in April 2023.



NATO North

NATO South

ABOUT to cross HMS Duncan's 'T' is Hellenic Navy frigate Aigaion – a new addition to NATO's Standing Maritime Group 2 in the Mediterranean, just like the Type 45.

Last month Duncan took charge of the group and will remain its flagship until the year's end when she returns to her native Portsmouth.

The group – the premier NATO force in the region – is in a state of change as Duncan takes the helm; long-standing members of the group have left, and new vessels such as the Aigaion taking their place.

The group typically comprises five or six major warships (frigates/destroyers) and a supporting vessel (currently Germany's Rhein), with the participating vessels normally attached for six months at a time.

Together they carry out a wide-ranging mission across nearly one million square miles of water: conducting specific exercises and operations, working with allied and



FGS

partner nations across the region, representing and promoting the alliance during port visits and responding rapidly to major events if required.

Duncan assumed flagship duties from the US Navy during a ceremony in the southern Italian naval base of Taranto.

A 24-strong staff, three quarters of it Royal Navy, supported by NATO comrades from Greece, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria and Spain, will direct the group's activities, under the command of Commodore Paul Stroude.

Under US command, the force has frequently operated not as a united task group, but 'disaggregated' as outgoing Commanding Officer Rear Admiral Scott Sciretta calls it: spreading the ships out across the Mediterranean to increase the area patrolled and allow the group to 'multi-task'.

"What I was extremely impressed with is the professionalism, determination, capabilities and regional experience of all the Allied ships and crews we worked with," he said.

He handed over the reins aboard Arleigh Burke destroyer USS James E Williams in the presence of NATO's Maritime Commander Vice

Admiral Mike Utley RN, who underscored the continuing importance of the naval force.

"Whilst this may mark a change in the leadership, it is also a sign of continuity – a continuity underpinned by the three decades this Task Group has patrolled these waters, as we celebrate the passing of leadership from one NATO ally to another," he said.

"It is a reminder of the promise that exists at the heart of the Alliance: that in our collective strength lies the guarantee of peace and stability for all our nations."

During Commodore Stroude's tenure of the task group, more than a dozen major warships from eight contributing NATO nations will join the force at times or replace departing vessels.

"Taking command of this NATO task group is a huge privilege but an enormous

responsibility, made more so since Russia's illegal and brutal invasion of Ukraine last year," Commodore Stroude said.

"When coupled with an ever-present terrorist threat, we are facing some of the gravest security challenges since World War 2, and global peace and stability cannot be taken for granted.

"However, nothing illustrates the strength, resolve and capability of the NATO alliance more than task groups such as this.

"Under my command this group of first class ships will work tirelessly to deliver reassurance and security to our regional allies and partners, while maintaining the capability to deter our adversaries. If necessary, we are ready to defend NATO territorial integrity."

Picture: PO(Phot) Lee Blease, HMS Duncan





Venturer's aces

IN MATHS the teacher will tell you that nine 'won't go into' 31.

We have proof to the contrary. Nine go into 31 perfectly.

We're talking about the first nine sailors assigned to Type 31 frigate HMS Venturer, sailors charged with breathing life into cold steel.

It falls to them not merely to give Venturer (currently several huge brownish blocks in a huge construction hall in Rosyth) a soul, but help turn her – and the four other ships in the Inspiration class which will follow – into a man o'war capable of conducting patrols the world over.

That spans everything from forging affiliates with the town or city which will embrace Venturer, to associated military and cadet units, city guilds and charities to the nitty-grit of developing the ship's routines and bringing her systems to life, writing the 'Type 31 operators' manual' in the process.

Which is a challenge. The 31s are 30, 35 years ahead of the 'standard' (non-specific submarine hunting) Type 23s they replace, but with little over half their predecessors' crew... in a ship which is nearly one third as big.

Commander Chris Cozens, Venturer's Senior Naval Officer, said he and his trailblazers relished the challenges to come, working side-by-side with experts from Babcock – the ship's builder – and the MOD's DE&S team, overseeing the T31 programme to bring the frigate to life.

When operational, the Inspiration class are expected to fulfil wide-ranging roles around the globe, wherever the presence of a major Royal Navy warship is required – such as curbing drugs trafficking in the Caribbean or Middle East, working with NATO in the Mediterranean, providing humanitarian relief and assistance to those that need it, up to conflict and confrontation.

To that end the five ships are armed with Sea Ceptor air defence missiles, a 57mm and two 40mm guns, a 4D radar – which is brand new to the Royal Navy – and carrying either a Wildcat or Merlin helicopter and up to three sea boats.

"This is a once-in-a-generation chance to bring an inspirational and innovative ship into service quickly through highly-experienced, empowered Royal Navy engineers, logisticians and operators who will be at the forefront of this new model, trusted to deliver," said Commander Cozens.

"HMS Venturer is the epitome of the National Shipbuilding Strategy, procured in a very different way where industry and Defence work seamlessly side by side. It is privilege to be part of the team bringing in the very latest maritime technology to serve Britain's global ambitions."

He regards the sailors under his charge as "the beating heart of the ship", endowed with both great power and responsibility "turning cold steel into a warship".

With 37 years' RN service under his belt, Executive Warrant Officer, Warrant Officer 1 Pete Johnson is among the most experienced sailors not merely assigned to Venturer, but in the entire Service.

"What an absolute honour it is to be part of the Royal Navy team joining what is currently a very new and complex engineering project. As with all warships, the heartbeat is its ship's company and I look forward welcoming, developing and growing as one, as our people join."

And paving the way for junior ratings – who proudly wear the first 'HMS Venturer' cap tally in decades – is Leading Writer Andrew Fleming who said: "It's a privilege to be part of the first crew of the first of the new Type 31 Inspiration-class frigates."

"I look forward to the challenge of standing by the ship in build as we progress towards sea trials and acceptance into service."

Commodore Steve Roberts, Deputy Director Ships Acquisition who is leading the Type 31 programme, added: "I am delighted to wish the ship's company of HMS Venturer

every success in bringing her to life as an operational warship. This is an exciting milestone in the Type 31 Programme, and I look forward to working with them to deliver this important capability for the Royal Navy."

All units of HMS Venturer are now in production, where the ship herself is taking shape in the namesake assembly hall.

"Welcoming the first of HMS Venturer's crew, joining the ship at our Rosyth facility is a another significant milestone on the Type 31 programme," said Derek Jones, Type 31 Managing Director at Babcock.

"Our customer and the mission we share inspires Babcock Team 31 every day, and we look forward to continuing to work closely with our Royal Navy and MOD partners as the programme progresses."

Once accepted from Babcock, all five ships will undergo a period of capability upgrades under the MOD and demonstration trials before entering service with the Royal Navy.

Picture: LPhoto Bill Spurr, FRPU North



Take a bow, Cardiff

THIS is the imposing fore section of HMS Cardiff making its debut in public.

By now it's been joined by the aft... and the two huge pieces of the future Type 26 frigate connected to create a single warship.

The two sections were constructed independently at BAE's Govan facility, before carefully being inched out of the assembly halls and on to the hardstanding – like the first ship in the class, HMS Glasgow.

And then comes the delicate act of seamlessly joining the sections – and the miles of cabling and pipework running through the vessel – with pinpoint accuracy.

"The emergence of HMS Cardiff is a very proud moment for everyone involved in her construction. We have now completed all major units of the ship and in the coming weeks our skilled teams will bring the vessel together in preparation for float off next year," said BAE Systems Naval Ships Managing Director Simon Lister.

"The roll out is further evidence of our solid progress on delivering the Type 26 programme and presents an opportunity for us to celebrate the achievement being made with our colleagues, suppliers, customer and the cities of Cardiff and Glasgow."

Cardiff will be the last of the 26s to have her sections integrated on the hardstand in the open air.

A new £100m outfitting hall is being built at Govan for the remainder of the class to be largely completed under cover – and hence not victims of the sometimes inclement weather.

Once joined, work will resume completing/fitting out Cardiff before she lowered into the Clyde and towed to BAE's Scotstoun yard for completion... the state HMS Glasgow currently finds herself in.

Picture: BAE Systems



Definitely not anywhere...

OLDER readers may remember *The Beautiful South* being rather disparaging of Rotterdam ... it could be anywhere...

But that's not what the crew of HMS Richmond when they dropped in on the Netherlands' second city.

Rotterdam was flattened in World War 2 – the city became a byword for destruction by bombing like Coventry, Hamburg and Dresden – and initially rebuilt in brutalist style.

But in recent decades the city has earned a reputation for cutting-edge architecture.

Rather than a berth in the container port (Europoort Rotterdam) at the mouth of the Nieuw Maas, Richmond sailed 18 miles up river and a prime berth at the city's cruise terminal, next to the impressive Erasmus Bridge (known locally as 'The Swan' due to its distinctive shape – and one of the icons of the 'new' Rotterdam).

Around 65,000 ships have sailed in and out of the world's busiest port this year... but only one (to date) has flown the White Ensign.

Hot on the heels of Britain and the Netherlands celebrating half a century of close military ties between their two amphibious forces (see pages 14-15), HMS Richmond paid a short visit to Rotterdam to further cement those links.

Once alongside, Richmond hosted a sizeable group of diplomats from NATO nations – the visit took place on the eve of alliance's summit in Vilnius last month.

The deputy head of Lithuania's embassy in The Hague joined counterparts from Belgium, Canada, Ukraine and the UK for lunch, tour of the frigate and a discussion of geopolitical events... with the emphasis understandably being Ukraine.

The diplomatic visitors offered the sailors some fascinating insights into ongoing support Ukraine is receiving – and underlined NATO unity.

"It was great to welcome this high performing Royal Naval warship to Rotterdam and learn more about what she does, along with my colleagues from Lithuania, Belgium, Ukraine and Canada," Lucy Ferguson, the UK's Deputy Head of Mission (effectively

Deputy Ambassador) told the frigate's Commanding Officer Commander Christopher L'Amie.

For his ship's company, the Rotterdam visit was a reward after a hectic spring which has seen Richmond come through Operational Sea Training off Plymouth and represent the Service at Armed Forces Day in Falmouth (see page 23).

Passing OST was especially satisfying because more than half the ship's company had never experienced instruction and assessment by the Fleet Operations Standards and Training.

Richmond was the first ship in quite some time to complete all of her main assessed serials first time, "a fantastic achievement and a great reflection of the hard work which everyone onboard put in to ensure she is ready for future anti-submarine warfare operations," said a delighted Commander L'Amie.

"OST really set us up for success on future operations, and I'm confident we can take on any tasking the Royal Navy asks of us."

After Armed Forces Day and a bit more patrolling home waters, the visit to the Netherlands brought the curtain down on the first half of 2023 for Richmond.

"Rotterdam was my first foreign run ashore with the Royal Navy, and definitely didn't disappoint," said Sub Lieutenant Karl Britnell.

"Everyone was really friendly and made us feel very welcome. I spent the first night exploring Rotterdam with the wardrobe, and cycled around Amsterdam the second.

"All in all, good food, good weather and great people."

IT specialist Engineering Technician Adam Tucker added: "I really enjoyed my run ashore in Rotterdam. A highlight was mooring up next to the Erasmus Bridge and visiting the Markthal.

"The food and the culture were great with lots of things to do and see. Overall it was a fantastic run ashore."

Richmond is now undergoing maintenance and summer leave for her sailors, before returning to front-line duties in the autumn on national tasking.



Minehunting forces in the Gulf face additional challenge as A-10 tankbusters entry the fray. Can they

HALT THE 'BOLT'?



TWO unmistakable silhouettes.

On the left a Bay-class support ship. On the right, a US Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt making a pass as British and American forces combine for training in the Gulf.

RFA Cardigan Bay led three RN minehunters (Middleton, Chiddingfold and Bangor) into Neptune's Kilt – a combined British-US Navy-US Air Force workout largely focused on dealing with mines... but with the added frisson of jets.

The latter were supplied by the US Air Force's 75th Air Expeditionary Fighter Squadron: four A-10s, more at home on the battlefield than over the ocean.

Even without lightning, Thunderbolts – generally better known by their 'Warthog' nickname – are very, very frightening: it's the go-to machine of choice when the US military needs to knock the stuffing out of enemy ground forces, especially armour.

The qualities which make the A-10 such a renowned

tankbuster – manoeuvrability at low speeds/altitude, highly accurate weapons-delivery involving a varied payload of bombs, missiles, rockets and guns, the ability to 'loiter' for a long time and a lethal payload of guns, bombs – make the battle-hardened jet capable of providing air-to-surface support over the waves.

The Warthogs shared Gulf skies with two mighty MH-53E Sea Dragon helicopters – used by the US Navy to haul sweeping kit through the water and clear patches of sea of a mine threat – while minehunter USS Dextrous and destroyer USS Paul Hamilton made the final pieces of the Neptune Kilt jigsaw.

The 12-day exercise built on lessons learned earlier this year when the British, French and US Navies combined to share skills.

'Hostile forces' peppered key sea routes with mines; the

UK-US force was expected to clear them, allowing the safe passage of merchant shipping once more.

To this bread-and-butter mine warfare operation were added attacks by 'enemy' vessels to keep the warships on their toes... and later the Warthogs weighed in, forcing crews to deploy new tactics not routinely used during peacetime.



The British participants also hosted six guests from the US Naval Academy (the equivalent of the Royal Navy's Britannia Royal Naval College).

The trainee US Navy officers lived and worked alongside British sailors, learning more about their daily routines and some of the different ways the Royal Navy works compared with their own.

Officer Cadet Sam Clyburn, who worked alongside the American trainees said, "I really enjoyed working with the US midshipmen. They had

a good attitude and seemed to really enjoy their time with the Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary."

Equally delighted with Neptune's Kilt was Commander Richard Hurman, Commander UK Mine Countermeasures Force who was in charge of Neptune's Kilt, including the American ships' involvement.

"The operation was a great success and proved the UK and US can operate within a combined Task Group to deliver cohesive mine warfare operations, while reassuring our regional partners," he said.

Captain Derek McKnight, the Royal Navy officer who is in deputy command of the US Fifth Fleet's 5th Fleet's mine counter-measures force in the Gulf: Task Force 52, added: "This exercise has enabled us to increase our proficiency in mine countermeasures and enhance the integration of our tactics from the air and sea.

"As a combined U.S.-UK task force it is an honour and a pleasure to work closely together."

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African adventure awaits

ON THE cusp of front-line operations is HMS Trent – ready for a late summer in Africa.

Following extensive maintenance in Gibraltar, the offshore patrol vessel is now back to fighting fitness.

The third of five second-generation River-class ships Trent is permanently forward deployed to the Mediterranean and Africa to work with allies, uphold maritime security and fly the flag for the UK and Royal Navy.

Since late May, Trent has been back at sea, her 40-strong Ship's Company bringing her back to life and demonstrating her readiness to assessors from Fleet Operational Standard and Training who first determined the crew were qualified to take the 2,000-tonne warship back to sea... and are back this month to prepare the crew for their next operational patrol.

That patrol will take the ship back to West Africa – a repeat of her summer/autumn mission in 2021 – with Trent and an embarked team of Royal Marines from 42 Commando training military and law enforcement agencies in the region and learning about the 'pattern of life' in the area of operations, crucial if you're to root out terrorists/pirates/smugglers among the hundreds of boats and ships going about their lawful daily business.

Equally important to understanding traffic off the Iberian Peninsula and Africa's western seaboard is the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre (MAOC) in Lisbon.

With the ship berthed in Portugal's capital the Command team led by Commander Tim Langford, Trent's Commanding Officer, headed to the headquarters, whose focus is on the illegal trafficking of drugs in the North and South Atlantic.

MAOC staff highlighted the tracking routes and methods currently used in the North and South Atlantic, where Trent will be operating in the coming

year and discuss recent operations; a direct comms link will be established between the ship and HQ.

To further that understanding of West African water, Trent's Command team also met Portuguese Naval officers to discuss the recent operations by their patrol ship NRP Setúbal – whose size, crew numbers and role make her very similar to the RN vessel.

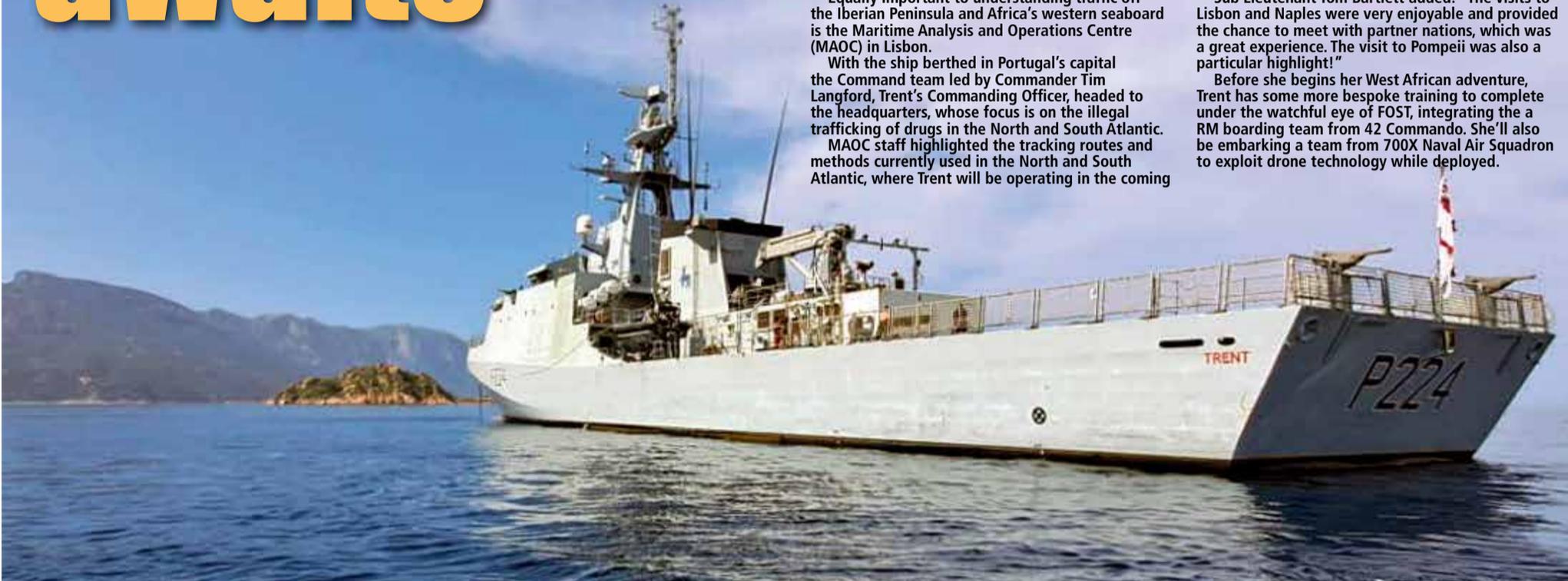
Where do you go from Lisbon? Naples, naturally. After further training in the Med, the ship spent a few days in Naples, part break for the sailors – a donation from Greenwich Hospital Trust paid for a visit by crew to the nearby ruins of Pompeii – part ceremonial they supported UK Ambassador to Italy, Rt Hon Ed Llewellyn as he hosted an official birthday celebration for His Majesty The King, and part operational, this time courtesy of the headquarters of US Sixth Fleet, who shared their knowledge of recent activity off West Africa.

"I'm delighted that Trent's Ship's Company was able to support such a successful visit to Naples," said Commander Langford.

"As we look forward to our impending deployment it marks the Ship's return to delivery of forward deployed regional and defence engagement"

Sub Lieutenant Tom Bartlett added: "The visits to Lisbon and Naples were very enjoyable and provided the chance to meet with partner nations, which was a great experience. The visit to Pompeii was also a particular highlight!"

Before she begins her West African adventure, Trent has some more bespoke training to complete under the watchful eye of FOST, integrating the a RM boarding team from 42 Commando. She'll also be embarking a team from 700X Naval Air Squadron to exploit drone technology while deployed.



From left, HMS Trent off the coast of Naples; UK Ambassador to Italy, Rt Hon Ed Llewellyn visited HMS Trent in Naples; HMS Trent off the coast of Lisbon in Portugal

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Defender preps for act 2

ONE of the busiest destroyers in the Royal Navy returned home to Portsmouth – bringing the curtain down on the first act of her career ahead of a two-year refit.

Since her maiden voyage from Glasgow more than ten years' ago, Defender has steamed the equivalent of 12 times around the world, covered every major ocean – bar the Antarctic – and most of the world's seas, and was first Type 45 to conduct winter operations deep inside the Arctic Circle.

More importantly... across the last decade, the ship's sailors chomped through 42km of sausages and ate four times the 8,500-tonne destroyer's weight in baked beans.

The ship fired more than 7,000 rounds of their main naval gun, sailed more than 300,000 nautical miles and destroyed three target drones using their Sea Viper missile systems.

Defender's refit is scheduled to include the Type 45 Power Improvement Plan – giving her three new efficient engines to replace two original diesel units, a major upgrade to the principal weapon, the Sea Viper anti-air missile system to both deal with the latest threats and increasing silo capacity by 50 per cent, plus other major work which cannot be done as part of routine maintenance.

Commanding Officer, Commander Peter Evans, said: "We are marking a happy but solemn bookend on an amazing ten years of front-line service."

"Defender has delivered the best availability of any Type 45 destroyer and has operated all over the world; this is not solely down to British Engineering, but to the elite sailors who operate, maintain and support our efforts."

Defender has been at the heart of joint operations with the UK's allies, having completed four operations and four exercises this last year alone, escorted the first UK carrier global task force deployment in 2021, and is routinely the escort of choice to defend



the US aircraft carriers – a privilege that is not normally entrusted to any other nation.

Her final visit before arriving in Portsmouth was to Glasgow – a fitting end, because this is where she was laid down and launched.

During the visit, she handed over her affiliates to HMS Glasgow, one of the Royal Navy's new generation of submarine-hunting frigates.

Engineering Technician Oliver Goodwin, a sailor on his first deployment, said: "It has been really fun but challenging experience."

"Going to both the Mediterranean and Norway we experienced loads of different places, but the real highlight was experiencing Formidable Shield 23 where we were sailing close with many other ships – it was awesome."

Commander Evans joined HMS Glasgow's Senior Naval Officer Commander Phil Burgess and Glasgow's Lord Provost Jacqueline McLaren in Glasgow city's council chambers for



the official act of handing over affiliates.

Even before the formal transfer of the affiliation, HMS Glasgow has been forging links with her namesake city, from working with local schools to hosting the Lord Provost to give her an insight into the ship's role – and the skills needed to build a £1bn submarine hunter.

HMS Glasgow – currently undergoing completion at the BAE works in Scotstoun – is the first of eight City-class Type 26 Frigates to be built on the Clyde.

"It is with great pleasure that the affiliation previously held by HMS Defender now fully passes to the ninth Royal Navy Ship which bears the name of the city," Commander Burgess said.

"We look forward to building on those ties that we have already begun to establish with the people and organisations in Glasgow."



Commercial ship trials for Tideforce

REPLENISHMENTS at sea are the bread and butter of Royal Fleet Auxiliary operations but for tanker Tideforce recent trials saw them successfully refuel a commercial vessel.

She worked alongside MV Raleigh Fisher in Portland and across the south coast to see how an RFA tanker could provide a wider range of service to the commercial world and vice-versa.

Tideforce both gave fuel to the commercial ship and received it in the series of tests and manoeuvres.

It comes as the Royal Navy is looking at developing replenishment operations between commercial tankers and RFA ships to sustain task groups and warships for even longer.

Prior to both operations, the crew of MV Raleigh Fisher were given invaluable instruction and advice from the Royal Fleet Auxiliary in the safety of RAS equipment.

Alongside Portland, the replenishment procedures were conducted in slow time with the crew getting to grips with military terminology and new equipment. As a result, successful series of dry hook ups were achieved and new skills developed.

Then while at sea, a series of approaches were conducted for both ships' personnel to be confident in the approach. With both the Master of Raleigh Fisher and the Captain of Tideforce content, a gun line was passed, a jackstay and fuelling hose connected.

Building on the success of the initial RAS trials, fuel was then passed from the MV Raleigh Fisher to RFA Tideforce, proving the concept of the capability. This also included an alteration of course and speed while connected.

While an early stage of the trials, it was a significant stepping stone towards greater collaboration with the British merchant fleet.

Captain Chris Clarke, Commanding Officer of Tideforce, said: "I last undertook such operations in 1982 during the Falklands campaign and I wondered whether the underpinning seamanship and navigational skills would be at a sufficient level to deliver this operation safely and successfully."

"And so what a privilege it has been for us to work with our fellow professional mariners on Raleigh Fisher. They have been so receptive to the work and dangers associated with replenishment operations at sea."

"For all of them this was a first and to have achieved so much, so quickly, is a testament to their dedication and drive to ensure they could deliver fuel safely whilst separated just 35 metres and underway."



Victorious set for major refit

PREPARATION work has started on HMS Victorious ahead of her planned major refit to ready her for future tasking.

The maintenance programme on the Vanguard-class submarine, taking place in Babcock's Devonport facility, will sustain more than 1,000 jobs in the south west region and will see the boat modernised and improved to continue operational patrols into the 2030s.

The multimillion pound, long-term programme will involve 1,000 Babcock employees from those working directly on the boat to others working in production, design, commissioning and the wider supply chain.

HMS Victorious' arrival is in tandem with significant investment in the naval base's facilities, creating additional jobs for people in the region. As well as supporting the maintenance of existing and future classes of submarines, it will also enhance Devonport Dockyard's ability to deliver major defence projects.

Brigadier Mike Tanner, commander of HMNB Devonport, said: "I am delighted to announce that the work has begun to prepare HMS Victorious as she commences her major refit."



"This activity will sustain jobs and key skills for the City of Plymouth and wider south-west region for the foreseeable future."

Paul Watson, managing director of Babcock's Devonport facility, added: "As part of the UK's critical continuous at sea deterrent, HMS Victorious represents one of the most complicated pieces of engineering there is."

"Work on the vessel has started and the capability, knowledge and experience our people have gained through the delivery of similar projects supporting the Royal Navy fleet, along with new and innovative and collaborative approaches with our customer, means we are well prepared to deliver this important project."

HMS Victorious and the rest of the Vanguard fleet are key components in the UK military's longest operation – Operation Relentless. As since 1969, at least one nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarine is maintaining the continuous at sea deterrent posture at all times, deterring the most extreme threats to the UK and our way of life.

The Vanguard fleet will be replaced by the Dreadnought-class submarines from the early 2030s.

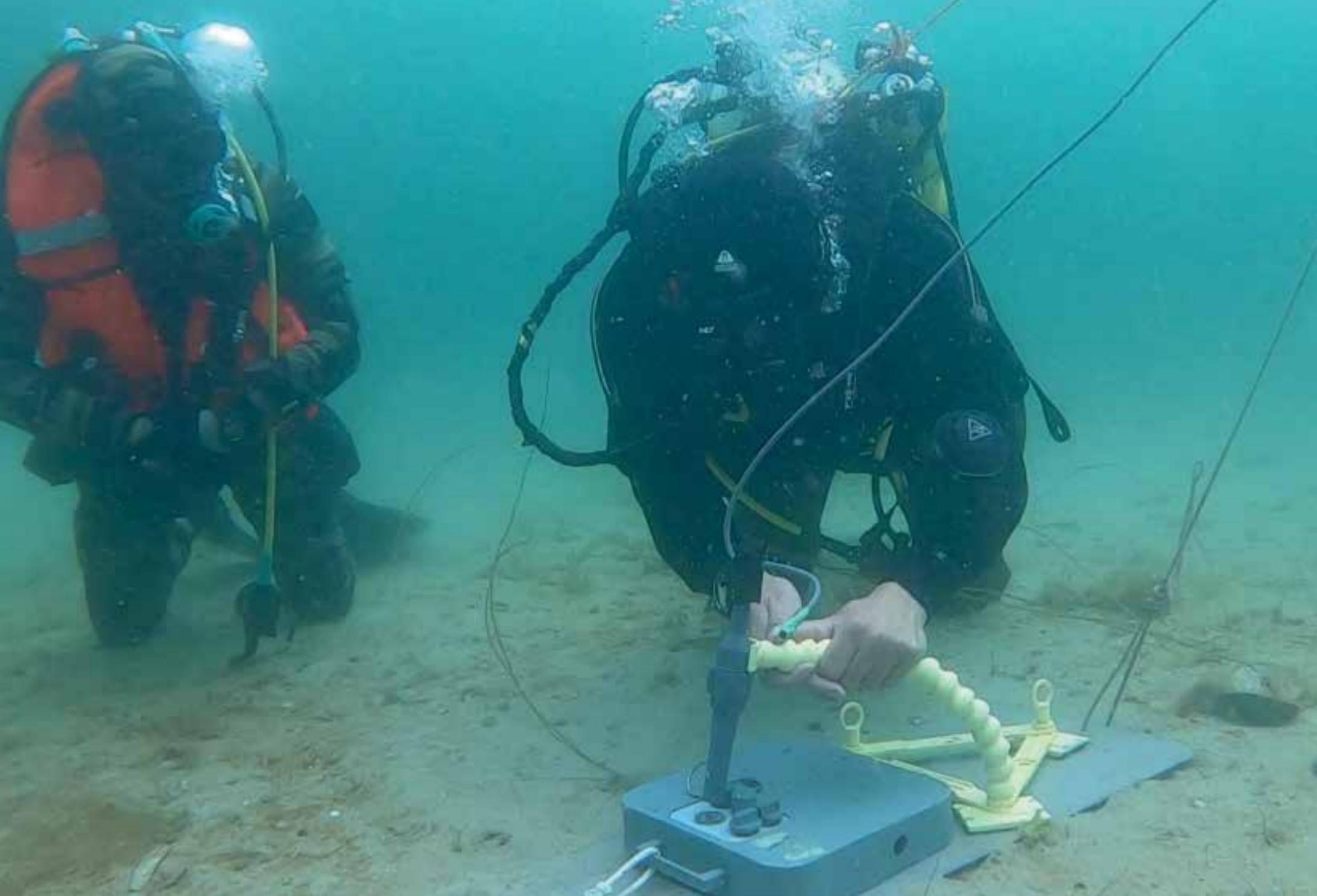
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DIVERS TRAIN UKRAINIAN COUNTERPARTS

UKRAINIAN troops are learning how to disarm and diffuse Russian bombs, booby traps and mines from their towns, fields, rivers and lakes once they have driven the invader out of their country.

Royal Navy divers, bomb disposal and mine warfare experts are training their Ukrainian counterparts on finding and safely neutralising mines and other explosive devices blighting their land, ensuring that once the war is won, Ukrainians and commercial shipping can live and thrive without fear or risk from explosives.

Specialist personnel from the Royal Navy's Diving and Threat Exploitation Group (DTXG) – renowned as experts in dealing with explosive threats on land through extensive experience in Afghanistan, and at sea with the UK's hugely-respected mine warfare forces – used the remote waters of Loch Ewe in north-west Scotland to pass on their knowledge and expertise to Ukrainian Navy divers, Ukrainian explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) operators and personnel who work with uncrewed underwater vehicles.

It builds on training the Royal Navy has provided over the past 12 months to Ukrainian personnel – just one element of the United Kingdom's widespread commitment to training and supporting Ukraine in opposing the illegal invasion by Russia.

Sailors from Delta Diving Unit 1 and DTXG's Operational Support Squadron delivered the training alongside personnel from NATO allies, including the United States, France, Belgium and Georgia.

The focus of the training was building on the existing knowledge and skills of the Ukrainian Expeditionary Mine Countermeasures and to help prepare them for future operations.

Training progressed from clearing deep water shipping lanes to rendering shallow water and beaches safe for amphibious raids. It also covered clearing ports, jetties and any other infrastructure from potential threats.

Lieutenant Ali Aindow, Officer in Charge of Delta Diving Unit 1, said: "It's been great to be working with our close allies and partners again.

"We have been able to reinforce relationships and cohere into a single multinational force able to find and

destroy underwater or maritime threats for the Task Group Commander."

She added: "The Ukrainian Navy divers have been great, it's been a brilliant opportunity to share experience and learn techniques from each other.

"The Ukrainians are really focused and their enthusiasm for the training has been amazing."

Teams trained with crewless underwater vehicles – submarine robots packed with cutting-edge technology such as sensors which generate images of objects so operators can identify the threat. Once identified, divers moved in to neutralise the device and make the area safe.

They dealt with all types of exercise targets – free-

floating buoyant mines, ground mines and improvised explosive devices in, on and around the water.

"This training has delivered real value," said Lieutenant Commander David Starkey, Commanding Officer of DTXG Delta and Echo Squadrons.

"The operational capability of all the nations has improved and this continued effort, working together again has led to a really integrated team developing to counter explosive threats in the maritime environment.

"The relationships between the units and personnel continues to grow, bound by a common purpose and shared values.

"It demonstrates how we are stronger as a coherent team and how together we can defeat aggression to our nations' sovereignty."

Lieutenant Frank Macleod, Officer in Charge of the Operational Support Squadron's uncrewed underwater vehicle department, added: "The Ukrainians have been fantastic, these motivated and very professional sailors are extremely proficient using UUVs.

"We have learnt together over the last few weeks and delivered a very credible search capability."





Pictures: PO Phot Arron Hoare



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HERE'S TO THE NEXT 50 YEARS



THE UK and the Netherlands will explore opportunities to develop new specialist warships designed to land the punch of their renowned marine forces onto coastlines around the world.

In Den Helder, on the 50th anniversary celebration of Europe's oldest military partnership of its kind – the UK-Netherlands Amphibious Force – the two NATO and Joint Expeditionary Force allies shared plans on ships to carry the vehicles, boats, aircraft, and weaponry of their highly-trained marines – and, vitally, land them ashore wherever they're needed.

As the Dutch celebrated their Navy Days at the naval base in Den Helder, the Statement of Intent on the new Multi-Role Support Ships was made between UK Defence Minister for Procurement James Cartlidge and Dutch Defence Minister Kajse Ollongren.

The Royal Navy's amphibious flagship, HMS Albion, played host to events around the announcement, which included the signing of a new memorandum of understanding – the original of which was signed in May 1973 – that will agree to grow the relationship between the two navies and marine forces further.

Both announcements mean the two

countries' navies and marines will be tightly knitted for generations to come, building on an already rich history of shared knowledge, training, deployments, operations, and equipment.

First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Ben Key, who was in Den Helder, said: "This year is a particularly special one to be in Den Helder alongside our Dutch friends, celebrating both Navy Days and the signing 50 years ago of an agreement that has enabled our amphibious forces to train, exercise and deploy together."

"It has resulted in our closest and most significant amphibious relationship."

"I am delighted that our nations have today signed an agreement to deepen this through further exercises and training but most significantly, to pursue the next generation of littoral strike ships, setting the stage for the next 50 years of our cooperation."

The UK's future Multi Role Support Ships will be designed to operate in amphibious task groups – known as Littoral Response Groups, which are able to rapidly deploy and react to crises around the world.

They will increase the capacity and clout of these task groups, which focus on areas of strategic importance to the

UK and NATO and can bolt onto Carrier Task Groups, offering the ability to put Commandos Forces and equipment ashore where it is most needed.

HMS Albion has just completed her latest deployment leading the Littoral Response Group (North) in the Baltic Sea, arriving in Den Helder after involvement in NATO's large-scale Baltops exercise and working with allies from Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Poland.

While in the Netherlands, Royal Marines competed with their Dutch counterparts in various sports fixtures – including boxing, Brazilian ju-jitsu, football, and rugby – to mark the 50th anniversary, and there was a joint demonstration in Den Helder of amphibious warfare skills.

UK and Netherlands forces have worked continually together for more than 50 years with the UN, NATO and Joint Expeditionary Force and, in the current global climate, this strong relationship is more relevant than ever.

Recently, both countries announced a partnership with the US and Denmark to deliver high priority air defence equipment to Ukraine, addressing its most urgent air defence requirements as Russia continues its illegal invasion.



Clockwise from far left, Royal Marines from HMS Albion, take part in a display with their Dutch counterparts, using the Polaris MRZR-D4 Ultralight Combat and Tactical Support Vehicles; A Royal Marine taking part in the display; HMS Albion arriving in Den Helder; UK Minister of Defence Procurement James Cartlidge and Dutch Defence Minister Kajse Ollongren sign the MOU, watched by First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Ben Key and Commander of the Royal Netherlands Navy, Vice Admiral Rene Tas; HMS Albion arrives in Den Helder; Royal Marines and Dutch Marines during the demonstration; A Royal Marine is lowered from a Wildcat onto a landing craft during the capability display



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GRAY SKIES

The difference between life and death is milliseconds.

With his stricken Harrier trainer just 50ft above the ground at RAF Wittering in Cambridgeshire – and almost at right angles with it – Nathan Gray ‘punched out’.

His instructor, a legendary figure in the circles of naval aviation, ‘Jak’ London, pulled the ejection cord a fraction of a second later.

By then the Harrier had passed the point of no return; the ejection seat was propelled into the ground, killing its occupant.

The official investigation into the crash deemed it ‘unsurvivable’. The final published report massaged that slightly: *barely* survivable.

Because six months later, Nathan Gray returned to the cockpit and resumed his training.

The accident in December 2002 is a, perhaps *the* defining moment in his blossoming career as a naval aviator.

It certainly impacted on the now 47-year-old retired commander every time he climbed into the cockpit.

“Pilots talk about ‘angels on their shoulders’. I’ve always felt that Jak is flying alongside me,” he says.

“Jack died trying to make me a pilot. I told myself: I will complete this. The accident gave me the fire in my belly.”

And so Jak London is a near-ever-present figure in Nathan’s memoirs – he bookends them with that fateful day in 2002... and his return to the crash site to honour Jak’s memory 20 years later.

Few modern day aviators have the combat and cockpit experience of Commander Nathan Gray - from Chipmunks and little MiGs through to the F-35 Lightning, the world’s most advanced carrier-borne aircraft... and a good 40 or so types and models in between. Now a civilian test pilot, he’s put his 20-year flying career down on paper in a fast-moving memoir which is as much a tribute to another Fleet Air Arm legend as a personal story. Nathan spoke to Richard Hargreaves.



In between are some 300 pages of the highs and lows of the past two decades of fast jet aviation in the Fleet Air Arm.

Growing up in Stoke in the 1980s, a young Nathan Gray had set his heart on a career in the RAF. Classmates, even his teacher mocked: “People from round here don’t become pilots.”

The RAF careers office in Stoke weren’t especially encouraging either... but suggested the youngster might want to join the Air Training Corps.

He did. And he got to fly. In a Chipmunk which, for the uninitiated, is about as basic as fixed-wing flying gets. His pilot for his acquaint flight was Royal Navy who told the surprised teenager: “We have pilots too.”

As did a Royal Navy recruiter at a freshers’ fair at Manchester University.

The young Gray wasn’t interested, until the recruit threw down a challenge.

“Fine. You go on your way, young man, and join the Air Force, and try and be a pilot. Because the last thing you will want to do is face the challenge of the toughest aviation in the world...”

And with that Nathan Gray chose the Fleet Air Arm over the RAF, filling out an application form in the (long-defunct) lads’ mag *Loaded*.

A decade (ish) later and as a qualified jump jet pilot he was serving with Joint Force Harrier in the skies of Afghanistan.

We only ever received rather sanitised accounts of the aerial combat in Helmand courtesy of the squadron public relations officer, who might

bundle up some Gucci images of Harriers over the Hindu Kush. With no ‘enemy air force’ with which to contend, it could be seen as something of a one-sided cakewalk.

Not so.

“It was hard, a real war, down in the weeds, not something clinical, surgical – it was our version of fix bayonets,” says Nathan.

On each sortie pilots carried \$10k – money to buy their freedom if captured, although the reality if forced to be bail out would more likely have been torture, degradation and probably decapitation, all live on the internet.

So when some Allied troops were captured by insurgents in a Toyota pickup truck, Nathan Gray was ordered to intercept – and destroy. The pilot questioned the instructions. The fighter controller confirmed the order: “Affirmative. They’re as good as dead. They’ll thank you for it.”

He didn’t take the shot, rather scoured the area and eventually located three missing Royal Marines.

“A lot of air-to-air combat can be impersonal,” says Nathan. “That wasn’t the case in Afghanistan. On my first tour with a Royal Navy Harrier squadron, we were alongside the Commando Helicopter Force, there were Royal Marines on the ground – the operation was all-encompassing Royal Navy and you will do whatever you can for your shipmates, for your oppos. It was very personal.”

Visceral even. On the same sortie as

locating the missing marines, Nathan expended all his weaponry – known as ‘Winchestered’ – trying to suppress Taliban fighters. There were still three or four insurgents doggedly holding out.

Out of ammo, the pilot decided to ‘weaponise’ his Harrier, deploying his speed brake (‘the flying shovel’) and flying at head height to literally hit them with the jet moving at several hundred miles an hour. Twenty minutes later back at base in Kandahar he asked the ground crew to check the speed brake for any damage... or traces of blood.

It’s clear that the strain of such operations took their toll – just as much as fighter pilots in the skies of southern England in 1940. Two months was about the maximum an aviator could take before needing a break – not that the author has any misgivings about dropping ordnance on enemy troops. He made a point of attending every ‘ramp ceremony’ – when bodies of the fallen were shipped home from Kandahar – as a reminder. “I had no regrets about what I was doing – in fact I would do what I did 10 times over, given a second chance,” he writes. The Harrier was saving Allied lives. *British* lives.

The author was on exchange with the US Marine Corps’ version of the Harrier, the AV8B, in the USA when he learned his government had pulled the plug on the jump jet in the brutal 2010 Defence Review.

It had an immediate impact on

Pictures courtesy of Nathan Gray, US Marine Corps, Lockheed Martin and LPhot Kyle Heller



Nathan Gray's career: he – and all other Brits on exchange – were ordered to cease flying and told to leave the USA within a fortnight.

Despite years and millions of pounds invested in their training, the two rookies under Nathan's tutelage left the Fleet Air Arm – one for the Royal Canadian Air Force, the other for Cathay Pacific.

He took up a posting as an instructor for future RAF fast jet pilots at Linton-on-Ouse in the Tucano... until the opportunity arose to join the wonderfully-named Empire Test Pilots' School.

And that opened the door to serving as a test pilot in the USA... and potentially fly the F-35 with the US Navy at Pax River.

The road to the Lightning was a long one – through various helicopters and jets, including the F-18. "Every time I touched one and began my pre-flight walk-around, I would have to pinch myself," he says. "A lad from Stoke-on-Trent preparing for another sortie in one of the most capable fast jets ever put together..."

He passed out of test-pilot training top of class – the first Brit to do so – and that led to the pinnacle of current naval aviation: mastering the F-35.

It is an aircraft like no other, a "stealth gladiator" which may be two generations ahead of the Harrier on paper – but otherwise worlds apart. "There are no visible pins, no hinges, no rivets, bolts, panels, exhausts or

cooling vents," he says. "All of that stuff is designed and hidden within the structure. Instead, there is a transformative being – one solid mass of lethality."

As advanced as the F-35 is, Nathan Gray looked to the past before his maiden landing on HMS Queen Elizabeth on September 25 2018.

First the Naval Historic Flight took him up in their Swordfish – a reminder of how far aviation and technology has progressed in 80 years.

Then he sought out the family of Edwin Dunning – the first man ever to set an aircraft down on the deck of a moving warship (a Sopwith Pup on HMS Furious in Scapa Flow on August 2 1917).

Dunning's family dug out the aviator's hip flask, log books and other ephemera to help the F-35 pioneer plan the inaugural touchdown. "Although we didn't use the term at the time, Dunning was a test pilot, he came up with the idea, planned the landing, then carried it out." There were no simulators in 1917, just experience, bravery, skill and luck to call upon. Dunning's ran out five days later, killed while making another landing attempt.

Edwin Dunning weighed up the risks and benefits and took a chance – this is what Nathan calls "the hazard spectrum" of the book's title. "We all do it – in all walks of life – you look to mitigate risks as best you can. And sometimes you just find yourself in dangerous situations."

And this is at the core of being an outstanding pilot. Confidence, not cockiness. Nerves but not a bag of them. "I don't know any naval aviator who doesn't get nervous or feel lonely," he says. "It's a dangerous business."

"You need to be a little bit nervous, have some doubts, but you also need to be sure of your own ability. And you have to project your confidence outwardly – after all you've been trained to be the best in the world."

Landing a Sea Harrier was "all on you". By the time the final variant of the jump jet was in service the pilot enjoyed "a little assistance". Touching down on deck in an F-35 is "more comfortable... but you still have to tell the F-35 what to do. It is not easy."

Certainly the first landing wasn't easy – plagued by communications problems. Otherwise, the jet and ship worked in perfect harmony and history was made. Many calls were made from the ship to senior figures back in Blighty: then Prime Minister Theresa May, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson and a lot of gold braid.

The response of the head of the Fleet Air Arm, Admiral Keith Blount, was worthy of the great David Beatty 100 years earlier. "Thank f*** for that..."

Among those watching the first landing – via Sky and BBC News – was Andrew London, Jak's older brother, now a retired solicitor.

"It must have been a tremendous thrill for you after all you have been through, and I would like to think that

perhaps Jak was with you, when you made that landing."

Certainly the late aviator weighed heavily on the author's mind. Jak London died at the age of 43 – it seemed the right age for Nathan Gray to call time on his career in the Fleet Air Arm.

Nathan realises he 'dipped in' through much of his career "going from one glamour posting to the next". He'd avoided most desk jobs, or spending months at sea, instead spending the bulk of his career in the cockpit.

"Just to fly one aircraft is phenomenal. To fly 40 or 50 different types is a good number – although not Winkle Brown territory," referring to the legendary naval test pilot who flew a record 487 aircraft, "and a dazzling array of American airborne fighting machinery, ending up with the best of them all, the F-35".

So, if he could, would he buy one? Er, no.

The F-15 is "phenomenal", the F-16 "sporty, like an F1 car". The F-18, the mainstay of US carrier aviation, "a joy to fly", the Harrier is "a true feat of engineering, unbelievably ingenious".

And then there's the F-35B "which takes the Harrier to the next level. It's the most refined, capable aircraft. It's in a completely different universe."

His aircraft of choice is the Harrier – not the naval variant ("a bit of a handful and temperamental") but the US Marine Corps AV8B or the RAF GR7/9

("versatile, stable, amazing").

The end of his military career has given him time to reflect on the past 20 years in the cockpit, reflections which have turned into a memoir.

After a quarter of a century of military writing – official reports, logs, documents – putting pen to paper has been as challenging as learning to fly.

"It's also opened up Pandora's Box, things you locked away during your career, such as revisiting the crash. So it's been difficult at times, but also cathartic," the 47-year-old says.

"It's written to be a page turner – not a standard military biography, not full of acronyms, but a journey. If it inspires just one person – to join the military or even become a pilot – then that's more than I can ask for."

But will the Navy of tomorrow need pilots? His job in civvy street is developing autonomous/crewless aircraft.

Nathan Gray made history as the first pilot to land on a Queen Elizabeth class carrier. But will a human being be the last 50 years hence?

"I think there will still be an element of crewed aircraft, but whether that's someone in the cockpit, or piloting remotely – that's the question," he says.

"Flying is my passion. But my career started with an accident and I would do anything in my power to prevent something like that happening again."

■ **Hazard Spectrum** is published by **Headline**, priced **£22 hardback**, **£13 e-book**.



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SUN SETS ON SCOTT DEPLOYMENT

Survey ship home after productive year in the Atlantic

HAVING uncovered the secrets of a patch of the Atlantic the size of Spain, HMS Scott returned to Plymouth after 12 months away.

In her year away from the home, the survey ship – named after the legendary Antarctic explorer – has hoovered up data from more than 500,000 square kilometres of the North Atlantic as her sonar scanned the ocean to depths of thousands of metres.

The information Scott has gathered on her deployment will be analysed by the UK Hydrographic Office, allowing them to update charts to the latest and highest standards.

The ship – which celebrated 26 years in the Royal Navy at the end of last month – has enjoyed the most productive period in her career.

Since she left home in July 2022 she's travelled 45,000 miles, surveyed an area of the sea floor equivalent to the size of Spain – or twice that of the UK. Her efforts have earned her Surface Flotilla Excellence Award and Efficiency Pennant for two years in succession.

"Operating at thousands of miles from help, my crew have pulled together and shown remarkable resilience and determination to overcome many challenges, and maximise our operational capability to deliver record-breaking results," said Scott's proud Commanding Officer Commander Tom Harrison. "Each crew member can be hugely proud of their achievements."

Although the ship herself has been away from the UK for a year, her crew regularly change, while Scott undergoes regular maintenance in overseas ports, such as Gibraltar.

The model – which mirrors that used by the five offshore patrol ships deployed around the globe – allows Scott to remain at sea for longer, spending more time surveying and less time 'getting there'.

It's also allowed for some memorable port visits for the

crew including Tenerife (where the ship began and ended her latest deployment), Brazil, St Lucia and most recently New York and Portsmouth (the one in New Hampshire).

Those visits have allowed the crew to train and work with some of the UK's allies, demonstrate what the Royal Navy in general – and HMS Scott herself specifically – can do, and generally fly the flag for the country.

In particular, sailors welcomed more than 10,000 New Yorkers aboard when the ship visited the Big Apple for the city's annual Fleet Week event, parading through the heart of Manhattan, and enjoying privileged access to some top venues.

In between there have been extended times at sea as Scott's sonar suite mapped the sea bed.

For those not surveying – or directly involved in running the ship – numerous activities onboard have helped to pass the time when off duty: fitness circuits, badminton and table tennis tournaments, afternoon sports on Wednesday and spinning classes maintained the sailors' physical fitness while Friday night quizzes, weekend barbecues, ship debates and Sunday 'coffee mornings' have gone a long way in maintaining morale and collective spirit.

"With a small ship's company, we have the advantage of mess integration, making it a more personable and enjoyable deployment for all," said Able Seaman Bethany Cummings, who looks after the administrative needs of her shipmates.

"The camaraderie is fantastic and can be a saving grace for the days when you miss home."

Scott will now undergo some maintenance in her home base over the summer before returning to the Atlantic later this year for further survey work and another year of data gathering ahead of her life extension package in 2024.



Clockwise from above left, HMS Scott berthed at Pier 88 in New York; Scott's crew pose with US personnel during Fleet Week in New York; Firefighting training; Dodgeball on the flight deck; A thumbs up from the seaboat crew; The view of New York from the Commanding Officer's window



STIRLING DEBUT



A MINEHUNTING 'mothership' and autonomous vessels were trialled together for the first time in a milestone moment for the future of the UK's mine counter measure operations.

The three boats joined RFA Stirling Castle in Portland, Dorset, for a series of tests as the navy looks to adopt autonomous minehunting systems.

Royal Navy Motor Boats Apollo, Hydra and Hazard zipped around the water off the south coast as part of initial loading trials with the recently-purchased Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship.

The trials were carried out alongside partners Defence Equipment & Support (DE&S), the procurement arm of the Ministry of Defence.

The main aim of the week was to prove autonomous vessels could be hosted on board Stirling Castle and eventually controlled or remotely-piloted from the ship.

This will be the norm for the ship when she officially joins the RFA fleet following a naming

ceremony in August and deploys on operations.

Using autonomous and uncrewed equipment removes the threat to naval personnel by keeping them well away from the minefield, leaving robots systems to do the legwork.

It also allows more extensive searches of the sea.

Rear Admiral Ivan Finn, Director Navy Acquisition, added: "These trials marks a key milestone in the delivery of the Royal Navy's Mine Hunting Capability programme.

"Following her rapid procurement and delivery at the start of the year, RFA Stirling Castle has now embarked her first autonomous mine countermeasures systems.

"This has been achieved through the hard work of her ship's company, the Maritime Autonomous System Trials Team, the Defence Equipment and Support delivery team, and our industry partners

"We can now look forward to having Maritime

Autonomous Systems permanently embarked and ready for operations over the coming months."

The navy's Maritime Autonomous Systems Trials Team (MASTT) embarked on Stirling Castle to oversee the week-long trials and were pleased with the initial fusing of ship and autonomous boats.

Lieutenant Commander Jason Munson, Officer in Charge of MASTT, said: "The trials marked a significant milestone in the Mine Hunting Capability Programme.

Operating from a host platform will allow our autonomous vessels to be used in a wider range of environment.

"The integration with RFA crew has been really successful, and the lessons learnt will contribute to getting this equipment to the front line."

Andy Lapsley, DE&S Mine Hunting Capability (MHC) Team Leader, added: "This is an important step in the incremental development of maritime

autonomous systems, exploiting new technology to increase performance and reduce risk to sailors.

"This event was a truly collaborative endeavour across various DE&S departments, the Royal Navy, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and industry partners. It paves the way for significant advances in the global deployment of this capability."

Stirling Castle joined the Royal Auxiliary Fleet to act as a "mothership" for autonomous minehunting systems.

When operational, the ship will launch and recover the vessels, as well as analyse the data they gather while scouring home waters for mines and underwater explosive devices.

In doing so, the ship and the autonomous boats will begin to replace traditional mine countermeasures vessels, instead exploiting a series of advanced payloads such as towed sonars and remotely-operated neutralisation systems from a Remote Command Centre.



Pictures: LPhot Stuart Dickson; LPhot Edward Jones



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Flawless day for Armed Forces

UNDER flawless Falmouth skies, there was a flawless performance by the men and women of the Armed Forces on their day.

The streets of the picture-postcard Cornish town were packed for the national celebration of all who serve – and have served – in the three Services.

They saw more than 1,100 military personnel, veterans and cadets march through the heart of Falmouth, just one standout moment on a day to remember on the South Coast.

Watched by The Duke of Gloucester, service personnel gave His Royal Highness a Royal Salute, before a flypast by the RAF Red Arrows, an A400M and Royal Navy Merlin helicopters brought formal proceedings to a close.

Now in its 15th year, Armed Forces Day is the culmination of a week of events celebrating the Armed Forces community and all that they stand for, thanking them for defending our way of life, protecting British citizens around the world, and strengthening our relationships with our allies.

It also recognises the service and sacrifices made by families of those personnel – acknowledged by His Majesty The King, who paid tribute to the “immense and dedicated” contribution of UK service personnel.

King Charles underscored “the selfless service and sacrifice” the Armed Forces make, while also thanking the wider Armed Forces community, including military families and veterans, for the role they play in allowing service personnel to fulfil their duties.

Upwards of 100,000 people are estimated to have converged on Falmouth over the weekend – pumping £7m into the local economy.

It’s the first time Cornwall has hosted the national event.

Despite being one of the least populous counties, it still counts 39,000 inhabitants – one in 13 people – as veterans, with one in every five Cornish residents enjoying a personal or family connection to the Armed Forces.

By far the largest piece of military hardware on show was frigate HMS Richmond, berthed in Falmouth docks.

Some 6,000 tickets to tour the ship – open to the public on both days of the weekend – were snapped up long in advance of Armed Forces Day.

And the frigate used the ‘quiet’ Friday on the cusp of the weekend

to host around 800 local school children interested in studying STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – as they look to their futures.

“Having the school children on board with their engagement, their enthusiasm, their willingness to learn, has been infectious,” said Commander Chris L’Amie, Richmond’s Commanding Officer.

The ship arrived in the Cornish port on the back of completing six weeks of gruelling Operational Sea Training – determining whether the ship is ready to deploy around the world (she is) – so a welcome break for the 200 crew who’ve spent time fighting fires, shoring up floods, fixing machinery and coping with mock war and disaster.

“This is a very special weekend for us – it’s a chance for us to show our ship off to both dignitaries and the public,” Commander L’Amie added.

“It’s always great to be able to show the people around, to show off the ship and her wonderful men and women, to show them where their taxpayers’ money goes and provides us with the great capabilities which HMS Richmond possesses.”

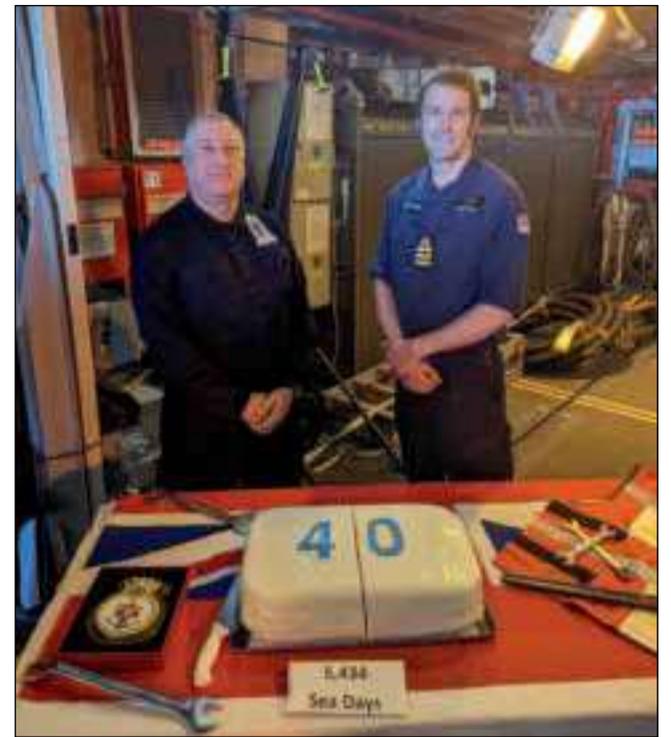
Among the senior VIPs and military leaders attending were, the Hon Dr Andrew Murrison, Defence Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families and General Gwyn Jenkins, Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said: “Armed Forces Day recognises the commitment and resilience demonstrated by our entire Armed Forces community every day of the year. I hope the entire nation will join me in paying tribute to this community and recognise all those who make so many sacrifices to uphold the freedoms and rights of the British people.”

Cornwall Council leader Councillor Linda Taylor added: “The Armed Forces are at the heart of every Cornish community, and these celebrations are based on respect, admiration and real gratitude.

Cornwall has always been of strategic importance – as guardian of the world’s busiest shipping lane, as an innovator of military invention, and as a proud home to service personnel and their families.”

Pictures: LPhot Barry Swainsbury and Air Trp David Allen, AAC



HMS Kent honour legendary stoker Paul’s 40-year career

VERY worthy of a cake from shipmates and handshake from his Commanding Officer Commander Jez Brettell is Chief Petty Officer Paul Musselwhite.

The chief stoker has completed the rare feat of 40 years in the Royal Navy – from 17-year-old rookie marine engineer to one of the most experienced damage control specialists in the service aged 57.

Shipmates on Kent took time out to recognise his achievement – which includes just short of 5,450 days at sea... nearly 15 whole years on the oceans.

Paul, from Wiltshire, passed through the gates of HMS Raleigh at the end of May 1983 when Spandau Ballet’s *True* and The Police’s *Every Breath You Take* were riding high in the charts, the UK was in the grip of an election campaign which would see Mrs Thatcher elected for a second term as prime minister, Roland Rat had recently made his TV debut and Bond fans were gearing up for Roger Moore’s penultimate outing as 007 in *Octopussy*.

The marine engineer’s subsequent career, mostly with Portsmouth-based ships, is a snapshot of all the RN has done – and how much it has changed – over the past four decades.

His first ship was the unique destroyer HMS Bristol (only one in the class was built) which took him to the Great Lakes and Canada, plus the 1984 World’s Fair in New Orleans.

He then was transferred to HMS Ark Royal to bring her into service and another trip to the USA, this time to Fleet Week in New York where the carrier’s Harrier jets famously ‘bowed’ to the Statue of Liberty.

Paul served in all three Harrier carriers: *Invincible*, *Illustrious* and especially *Ark Royal*, surviving the bombing of the latter in 1992: an RAF Sea Harrier pilot accidentally dropped a practice bomb on the carrier rather than a towing target; the 28-pounder penetrated the flight deck and eventually exploded in the bowels of the ship wounding half a dozen crew and causing £60k damage.

It’s not the senior rating’s only time in harm’s way. Paul’s a veteran of the first Gulf War (1990-91), the Bosnia and Kosovo campaigns, enforcing the southern no-fly zone over Iraq (1991-2003) and helped evacuate British citizens from Libya during the North African nation’s civil war.

He’s enjoyed two patrols of the Falklands with HMS York, at least one Christmas in Rio, six months in the Baltic with frigate HMS Iron Duke (and three successive appearances at Kiel Week).

And he finally got further east than Singapore after 39 years with HMS Kent as she accompanied HMS Queen Elizabeth’s carrier group to the Pacific Rim in 2021.

In between there have been a string of jobs ashore (Portsmouth Naval Base, Gibraltar, an instructor in damage control at HMS Excellent and teaching welding/cutting to future marine engineers at HMS Sultan).

And there’s been the odd run ashore (the first Ponta Delgada in the Azores, the most recent Stavanger in Norway with Paul recommending pretty much anywhere in the USA as his favourite visits, alongside Jamaica, Majorca, Gdynia (Poland), Kiel, Gibraltar and Malta.

Severn is pride of Wales

HMS Severn is the pride of Wales after being named the country’s top military unit over the past 12 months.

The Portsmouth-based patrol ship – which is affiliated with Newport – was singled out for saving the lives of more than 40 people.

In December last year, the Fleet’s dedicated navigational training vessel was assigned to Operation Isotope, the military operation supporting Border Force and civilian authorities in attempting to curb people traffickers ferrying migrants across the Channel.

The ship was on patrol in the small hours of December 14 when an inflatable craft carrying migrants started to sink.

HMS Severn was alerted and headed quickly to the scene, whereupon she launched both her sea boats and rescued more than 40 people.

Six months later, the people of Wales used the country’s national Armed Forces Day event in Newport to recognise deeds over the past 12 months.

The Armed Forces in Wales Awards are presented to individuals, teams or units with a Welsh connection which have made an outstanding contribution to defence.

Named winner of the overall Armed Forces Award for 2023, HMS Severn was represented by her Commanding Officer Commander Brian Drewett, Gunnery Officer Lieutenant Ollie Thomas, and sea boat coxswain, Able Seaman Ewen McCole.

“It was a honour for HMS Severn to be recognised for all the hard work that went into the events of December 14 last year,” said Commander Drewett. “It is testament to the training, resilience and courage of our people, that they were able to perform so admirably.”

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40 HOURS ON TRAFALGAR WAY



I'M what is known as a Middle Aged Man in Lycra (MAMIL) and an avid road cyclist riding with my local club and the RNRMC, writes Lt Cdr Rob Evans RNR.

I've got into more long distance riding having completed John O' Groats to Land's End in 2014 and more recently London to Edinburgh and back to London in 2022.

I thought this year I would take on a new challenge. The Trafalgar Way 600km in 40 hours cycling event starting from Falmouth, Fish Strand Quay. Controls at Lewdown Victory Hall, Abbotsbury, Salisbury Sleep Stop – Bishop Wordsworth's School, South Parade Pier, Portsmouth and The Admiralty, plus eight information controls. Oh and 7,500 metres of hill climbing what's not to like!

The Ride the Trafalgar Way route broadly follows that taken in November 1805, after the Battle of Trafalgar took place on October 21. News of the British Navy victory, as well as the death of Admiral Lord Nelson needed to be sent back to the Admiralty, London.

Lieutenant John Richards Lapenotiere was handed despatches and ordered to sail and deliver them to the Admiralty as soon as possible. When his ship landed just off the coast of Falmouth on 4th November, so would begin his epic 38 hour journey post chaise (via a horse drawn coach) to London, making 21 stops along the way to change horses.

The route taken is now known as the Trafalgar Way. In 2005 (as part of the bicentenary celebrations) Axminster renamed a section of road in the town to The Trafalgar Way.

Over 200 years later 30 riders would closely follow that journey, passing through all but one of the 21 stopping locations (the route doesn't go through Woodyates), only this time on their bicycle!

Passing through the cities, towns and villages of Truro, Fraddon, Bodmin, Minion Launceston

and Okehampton before passing Dartmoor and descending into the cathedral city of Exeter, Honiton, Axminster – passing along a road renamed The Trafalgar Way in 2005, then onwards to Bridport cycling along the Jurassic Coast, Dorchester and Blandford Forum before passing through the cathedral city of Salisbury, Andover, Overton, Basingstoke, Hartley Wintney, Camberley and Sunningdale before heading into central London via Parliament Square finishing at Admiralty House, Whitehall. That was the plan!

Having taken a train from Bristol to Camborne on the Thursday prior to ride I stayed at my father's house and caught up on all things Fleet Air Arm! This being as my dad was a retired Aircraft Handler back in the 60s and early 70s and me serving 34 years as an Air Engineer Artificer and AEO.

Early Saturday morning dad dropped me off for registration at half 5 at Fish Strand Quay, Falmouth. Falmouth was also the centre for the Armed Forces Day celebration for 2023 and the roads would soon be closing to allow essential preparations to be completed.

A final check of the bike and attached kit, my bike was a titanium gravel bike with various bags attached with all the kit I required for two days in the saddle and the return home: spare warmer clothing for cycling through the night, first aid kit, charging pack, energy bars, one set of civvies and sun screen! 30 riders set off along the cobbled main high street of Falmouth and onwards to the many hills of Cornwall! 2,500 metres of climbing all by the time I reached the welcome to Devon sign! In all I would climb 7,500 metres during the ride!

Along the Jurassic Coast I met up with another event rider and we would continue the rest of the ride together which was a welcome boost to my sanity after cycling so long on my own. At Dorchester around midnight on the Saturday night I tried to get 30 minutes sleep in bus shelter before

moving on to Salisbury. No such luck with Saturday night revellers returning home after enjoying the sun and no doubt quite a few beers!

Continuing cycling through the night and as the sun rose I was near the main check point at Salisbury and tried to get another 30 minutes sleep. This time it was more successful as the terror shake from my phone snapped me out of my slumber! This would be my final snooze for 150 miles until finishing the event at 0145 Monday morning.

Riding near Lee-on-the-Solent and through Gosport to catch the ferry to Portsmouth brought back memories of my time at HMS Daedalus as an Air Engineer Artificer Apprentice and HMS Sultan as an avionics instructor and later during my engineer officer training.

The Gosport ferry was a photo opportunity of HMS Queen Elizabeth before negotiating the traffic of Portsmouth and Southsea and then climbing over Portsdown Hill towards Basingstoke. A final intake of pasta at a service station near Bagshot and then head down for the final phase towards Central London.

Negotiating potholes, London buses and late night delivery drivers focussed the mind as I inched closer to the finish at Admiralty Arch. Riding along the Mall in the dead of night and seeing the Arches lit up was a welcome sight and after a few photos it was then in search of my hotel room for sleep before my train journey back to Bristol.

An arduous ride made more difficult with the hot temperatures. Overall I had cycled for 39 hours and burnt 14,461 calories! I had lost 2.5kg in weight during ride, a bit of a crazy way to lose weight! Would I do it again? Currently no but give it time I may change my mind! I kept a steady flow of photos on my personal social and cycle club social media pages while HMS Pegasus PR kept updates on theirs. This all helped raise funds for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity.

Hooray-tio for Trafalgar Night

JOIN the RNRMC and supporters all over the country for the world's largest Trafalgar night dinner – an evening steeped in history and heritage.

Every penny you raise will help to ensure vital support is available to our remarkable service men, women and their families whenever and wherever they need it.

Each October since the early 19th century, Officers in the Royal Navy have joined together to commemorate the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Nelson's famous victory is celebrated in mess decks and ward rooms all over the world, and now we are bringing it home to you.



The Trafalgar Night dinner is a grand affair with a number of long standing traditions including parading a baron of beef, Ships of the Line (chocolate replicas of the Victory) speeches, toasts are more. You could choose to follow these traditions during your Trafalgar Night at Home or have fun with the theme and make the evening your own. Why not come up with a creative way to recreate the Ships of the Line?

Your generosity means we can continue to make a positive difference to the lives of those who serve or have served in the Royal Navy. With mental health issues, unemployment and feelings of isolation and loneliness soaring due to the pandemic, your support is needed now more than ever.

Thanks to your support we are able to tackle a wide range of issues that people experience throughout their lives, from supporting those with financial and relationship difficulties to those affected by bereavement, injury or disability.

We partner annually with around 60 different organisations and charities to deliver bespoke support for Royal Navy families and children, conscious that although one person may join, the whole family ends up serving.

Registrations for this event will open soon, so keep an eye out at: <https://www.nrmc.org.uk/trafalgar-night-home>



Medics take on their own Tour de France

COLLEAGUES from Defence Medical Services (DMS) took part in an Adventurous Training (AT) epic when they cycled through Normandy, France.

A four-person DMS cycling team, with an equal gender split, took on long stretches of the French coastline on June 11 to 16 as part of an AT package that also raised money for an official service charity.

With Briton Adam Yates wearing the famous Tour de France yellow jersey, at the time of writing, there is no better time to be talking all things two-wheeled.

Comprised of Surgeon Rear Admiral Fleur Marshal, Leading Naval Nurse Chloe Dymond, and Surgeon Captains Dickie Heames and Christopher Streets, the squad made their way across 225 miles.

A far cry then, from the destruction of 79 years ago, where Allied forces made landfall and liberated this part of France from the enemy.

With the recent passing of the last French survivor of D-Day, we are reminded of the immense courage required of these men.

The cycling quartet took some time out to visit the British Normandy Memorial and reflect on the sacrifices our forebears made to give us the way of life we perhaps take for granted.

Such a detour was especially poignant, given that our medical personnel treated thousands of wounded, from both sides, on the beaches and in the countryside during the campaign.

The bike ride, which not only developed the mental and physical stamina of the team, helped foster social bonds and gave the individuals a real sense of perspective.

It also raised over £1,500 for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity.

To find out more about AT and where it can take you, please refer to JSP 419.

Helping veteran Tony get back on track

THE Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) has been supporting The Poppy Factory with funding since 2016 to aid their support for Royal Navy and Royal Marines veterans with health conditions on their journey into employment.

A varied catering career in the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy and HM Prison Service was cut short for Tony Gale when his mental health took a sharp downward turn. Rebuilding his resilience and confidence took time.

With the support of The Poppy Factory, he is now back at work and looking to the future again, with a fresh qualification in food safety from a top university.

Employment support for Tony was made possible through a recent grant of £24,000 from the RNRMC, awarded to The Poppy Factory in May 2023.

Tony shares with The Poppy Factory:

"I joined in 1977 as a Steward and served for six years, then joined the Merchant Navy as a Chief Steward and 2nd Cook and Baker/Chief Cook/Steward for another 15 years.

In the services, they break you down and build you back up into what they want you to be. It's difficult because civilians don't generally get it.

I became ill and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder in 2014. It just went downhill from there. By the time I came was referred to The Poppy Factory in 2019, I was in

a situation where I couldn't communicate with people. I would go all day on my own.

I always remember Katy, my Employment Consultant, saying to me that I didn't have to talk. She didn't ask lots of questions about my past, she just let me get it out in my own time. She was always there when I was feeling bad and I wanted to talk, and that helped tremendously.

I had no idea what I wanted to do for work. Katy helped me think about my hobbies and interests [...] I didn't think it would be possible to do that, but we found a way forward. I was able to enrol on a two-year course at the University of Birmingham in autumn 2020.

Organisations like The Poppy Factory and RBLI have given me resilience and purpose again and helped me back into the workplace with a long-term commitment to academic study.

Now that I have my qualification, I'm excited to see what the future holds. I feel like I'm nearly back to the person I was years ago, and I've got my confidence back again.

When things were bad, I don't think I could have got much lower.

Now, apart from winning the lottery, I don't think I could get much higher."

To find out more about The Poppy Factory, visit poppyfactory.org.

To find out more about the work that The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity does, visit nrmc.org.uk.



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HELPING TO PROTECT CAIRNGORMS' WILDLIFE

EIGHTEEN Officer Cadets from East Scotland, Belfast and Glasgow, deployed to Rothiemurchus Lodge in the Cairngorms for planned sport and activity.

The entire group spent day one supporting voluntary conservation work pre-arranged by the Commanding Officer of URNU East Scotland with the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

This was specifically focused at Glebe Nature Reserve in Kingussie which is undergoing significant reshaping. This will enable the area to be enjoyed by the public and help protect and promote the wildlife present.

The URNU students were involved in a number of tasks which included: tree and gorse removal, restructuring of several areas in the Reserve to allow for additional paths, tables and benches and laying material to promote the growth of more local fauna including moss and shrubs.

A/Mid Charlotte-Ann Oragani-Esamal, a final year Chemistry student at Edinburgh Heriot-Watt University, said: "All OCdts got stuck into helping with this fantastic conservation project in Kingussie."

"Work involved removal of young birch trees, clearing away a shed and the bric-a-brac in it, and pulling up old posts from the ponds. I found the activity tiring but rewarding as I could see the outcomes of the tree removal I was helping do, and because it was nice to give something back to the area we were visiting."

Day two saw the entire group depart early for Fort George and Culloden Battlefield to learn all about

the Jacobite rising and Bonnie Prince Charlie.

A/Mid Lauren Mitchell, a student at Belfast University, said: "Fort George and Culloden were great places to visit, exploring the past and learning more about present military history".

The afternoon was spent having fun and enjoying the Scottish water Paddle Boarding on Loch Morlich close to Rothiemurchus Lodge.

Later on in the week the group split for up various activities. Group activities included trekking through the Cairngorms, completing two Munros including Ben Macdui, the UK's second highest peak.

Others departed in the morning for a guided tour of a local whisky distillery and then went Trout fishing or horse riding in the afternoon at centres in Rothiemurchus.

OCdt Patrick Hartley, a final year Physics student at University of Edinburgh, said: "We did live bait fishing for around two hours at a centre near the lodge. I had never done it before and in that time our group caught five fish."

"I found it quite thrilling and exciting once I got a catch, as it went from calm to hectic in a matter of seconds. It was a new experience to me and I definitely found it worthwhile."

OCdt Shannon McKinney, a student at Belfast University, added: "We took a trek across the Cairngorm countryside admiring the beautiful scenery of the Scottish Highlands. We trotted to a nearby river and got to ride the horse while they took a dip in the water."

Dasher award presented

THE first Dasher Award has been presented to URNU East Scotland at the University Royal Naval Units' annual conference held this year at MOD Garats Hay.

The units wrote their own citation highlighting their achievements for the year to be assessed jointly by the sponsors of the award, and members of the Senior Leadership Team at Britannia Royal Naval College. The award is made to the URNU judged overall to have had:

- the most success in recruiting and retaining officer cadets and training staff.
- the most challenging, interesting, enjoyable, and varied programme of activities and events including opportunities for time at sea, adventurous training, sport, and command, leadership and management training.
- the most success at charity fundraising activities and engagement with the community, other University Service Units, schools, youth cadet forces and local businesses.
- provided a welcoming, caring, supportive and nurturing environment, progressing towards achieving a high level of diversity and inclusion within the Unit.
- assisted the largest number of cadets to join the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Maritime Reserves and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service, or the other Armed Forces and Emergency Services.

Named for HMS Dasher a World War 2 escort carrier which was lost in the Firth of Clyde in March 1943, the Dasher Award is sponsored by the Honourable Society of Knights of the Round Table, a 200-year-old philanthropic society currently presided over by former First Sea Lord, Admiral Lord West.



Knight of the Round Table, Dame Mary Richardson, presented the award. Dame Mary, whose father was the butcher in HMS Dasher and was lost in the tragedy, presented the award to Chief Petty Officer Steven 'Squash' Court, Coxswain of URNU East Scotland.

Fancy way of helping out

UNIVERSITY Royal Naval Unit Birmingham (BURNU) have demonstrated their commitment to supporting local causes by selecting Fisher House UK as its beneficiary for the year.

Fisher House provides military patients and their families with a "home away from home" while their loved ones receive hospital care.

This invaluable service provides accommodation to both serving personnel and veterans as well as financial and logistical support to alleviate the stresses associated with a loved one being in the hospital.

Fisher House is a non-profit organisation and relies solely on donations to continue its vital work in ensuring that family members can stay close to military patients.

Medical professionals say that having their family close and being cared for can be beneficial to a patient's recovery.

In response to this, BURNU developed a unique fundraising scheme using the charity's local mascot, a 6ft fuzzy bear costume, to hike up mount Snowdon.

To increase the challenge while making a positive impact on spectators and raising funds for a worthy

cause, Officer Cadets climbed in fancy dress.

Upon arrival, the team was warmly greeted by locals who were impressed by their initiative and amused by the sight of the unit in their fancy dress attire.

The group used the opportunity to spread the word about the charity and collect donations while they climbed. The exercise was a remarkable success, with the team rallying to raise a total of £1,820, more than 80 per cent of their target. The local engagement has been a highlight, with more people becoming aware of the amazing work Fisher House does in the community for the armed forces.

Fisher House has kindly invited the Birmingham University Royal Naval Unit to see the impact of their work, and the team looks forward to engaging with them again in the future. In summary, one of BURNU's Officer Cadets said: "The exercise was the right amount of challenging and fun, climbing the mountain in fancy dress and bringing smiles to everyone we passed was a nice experience."

"I'm so happy we could raise so much for Fisher House because their work is amazing!"

Mario and Luigi are pictured tackling Snowdonia for charity

Farewell to trusty frigate

ANOTHER fantastic opportunity for URNU East Scotland saw 14 Officer Cadets visit HMS Montrose in Montrose Harbour before she was decommissioned earlier this year.

The warship has supported missions all over the world including becoming the Royal Navy's first Type 23 frigate to be forward-deployed in the Gulf region in 2019.

It was an honour for students at URNU East Scotland to be one of the last groups to bid the ship farewell.

The tour of the weapons systems, hangar and Ops Room was a fascinating insight for Officer Cadets, particularly those wishing to pursue a career in the warfare branch.

Officer Cadet Alexandra Wallace, a second year history student at University of Edinburgh, added: "I can imagine being reminded of this visit to HMS Montrose when we find ourselves in front of an Ops Room monitor in the future class of frigates, proudly representing the next generation of Royal Navy personnel."



Naval Children's Charity

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

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

www.navalchildrenscharity.org.uk

023 9263 9534

caseworkers@navalchildrenscharity.org.uk



Goodbye, 'Mr Merlin'

AFTER 44 years in the cockpit, the Fleet Air Arm finally bade farewell to Lieutenant Commander Steve Gibson – whose name runs through the Maritime Merlin Force like a stick of Blackpool rock.

Every single pilot of a Merlin Mk2 – mainstay of anti-submarine operations protecting the Fleet from the prying eyes of hostile boats – has been trained by the helicopter pilot, instructor and Falklands veteran.

Friend, former colleague on 814 Naval Air Squadron... and not least former First Sea Lord Admiral Sir George Zambellas presented Steve with his gold valedictory certificate at 824 NAS in Culdrose – the squadron he has served for more than two decades.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed serving in the Fleet Air Arm. It has always been a real passion for me," said Steve, who hangs up his Merlin gloves aged 68.

"Serving with 824 Squadron for over 20 years as an instructor has rewarded me with a real love of Merlin and I shall inevitably miss it."

He started out in marketing until a depressing press conference for a new toilet cleaner made him realise he wanted a more exciting and demanding career.

Entering the Fleet Arm in 1979 aged 26 (Steve is pictured below as a midshipman in his tropica uniform), Steve was sent to liberate the Falkland Islands in 1982 in the Corporate task group, serving as a Sea King pilot with 826 Naval Air Squadron on carrier HMS Hermes.

Speaking last year of his experiences in the South Atlantic, he said: "We were quite lucky on our squadron in that we didn't lose anyone but I saw some sights that did affect me. I witnessed a Sea Harrier explode just after take-off and all those pictures you see of HMS Sheffield as a burning hulk, our crew took those pictures. I'll never forget that."

In 1988 he left the regular service but remained a member of the Royal Naval Reserve. He said: "When I was serving as a reservist, I'd give all my holiday to the navy. One of my regrets was having left in the first place, because my heart was always with the Navy."

In 2003, he took the opportunity to rejoin RNAS Culdrose as a full-time reservist and began work at training unit 824 Naval Air Squadron. He worked as an instructor on the Mk1, then Mk2 Merlin and later moved to the pilot simulator.



From 'rush with love

A sense of duty. Family. Heritage. Pride.

These are the feelings of descendants of the Windrush generation for their trailblazing ancestors whose stoicism, determination, drive and spirit continue to inspire them three quarters of a century later.

Families such as Royal Marine Lance Corporal Jordan Dawes and his dad Kirk, a former police officer, today living in Solihull in the West Midlands but who trace their heritage back to Jamaica.

Seventy-five years ago Kirk's father Andrew Dawes took the decision – with the first generation of settlers from the Commonwealth, to answer the call to rebuild a war-battered Britain.

He was followed by his wife Hylma and later by their eldest children who joined their parents in their new home in the West Midlands.

Andrew and Hylma have sadly passed on, but as the Dawes looked back through the family album, Jordan's uncle and Kirk's older brother Donovan, who came to Britain at the age of 11, recalled the hardships they faced.

Life in 1950s Britain was, says a now 70-year-old Donovan, "kind of hard at first. Dad worked hard – very hard, from morning to late at night to look after all of us". The youngster struggled to settle in Britain, endured widespread racism – inhabitants in Wolverhampton signed a petition opposing more black families moving into the neighbourhood – often cried, and longed to return to Jamaica.

"But I overcame that and I came to like this country. So I decided to stay here, move on. I got a partner, had children..."

His younger brother Kirk, now 65 and born in the UK, faced many of the same challenges – perhaps more – as he chose to join West Midlands Police as a teenager in 1976.

The only black officer of 108



Commando Jordan Dawes flicks through the family photo album with his dad Kirk and uncle Donovan (back to the camera)

Picture: LPhoto Unaisi Luke

recruits, he faced down many of the prevailing attitudes of the day. "I asked myself: 'Do you want to be a copper or not.' And I did," he says. "So I took it. Because when I put on the uniform, I could not have been more proud – and it was the first time that my dad seemed genuinely proud."

For the next three decades Kirk served the West Midlands force with distinction, championed the cause of black and Asian officers, tackled issues and crimes as wide ranging as drugs, burglary, guns and the rise of gang culture. When he retired in 2004, he was decorated by The Queen for his service.

"We all make our choices in life and there is something in this family – representing your

country is a 'biggie'," Kirk said.

"When you look at the UK, it's a diverse country – and you have to have a real reflection through every organisation if we are to build relationships which work."

Just as he strove to that goal in the police, so his son Jordan works to that end in the Forces.

A Royal Marine for the past six years, by trade the 29-year-old is a specialist in heavy weapons who has served around the world with the Corps: training alongside the US Marine Corps in the Mojave Desert and in the Gulf region with the UK's Amphibious Task Group. He's a three-time Inter-Service champion with the Royal Navy's

basketball team, as well as representing the Corps and UK Armed Forces in the same sport.

He's currently assigned to the Positive Action Team which works in the Birmingham area to help those under-represented in today's military – women and ethnic minorities – join the Services.

The commando is both in awe of his grandparents' generation – who took the bold step to forge new lives for their families – and draws on that heritage daily in his service as a Royal Marine.

"They came over here to make better lives, not just for themselves but also to build what was considered the 'mother nation'," he says.

"They had to show some of the same core values, the spirit and pride that comes from Jamaica. And that's the fire which lives within me and will do until I die."

MEs take on tough physical challenges

MARINE engineers from His Majesty's Ships Queen Elizabeth and Glasgow face tough physical challenges in the name of worthy causes over the next six weeks.

Provisional **Leading Engineering Technicians Harrison Deary** and **Paul Blissett** are taking on the 'Three Peaks Challenge' – scaling the highest mountains in England, Scotland in Wales inside 24 hours – while Glasgow's PO Colin Chalmers is taking on a 50km 'ultra marathon' around the southern Lake District.

The carrier duo have set their sights on a modest target of raising £500 to honour a Falklands sailor in Norfolk – and help Service veterans.

Petty Officer Richard Dunkerley was one of 22 men killed when frigate HMS Ardent was repeatedly bombed during the San Carlos landings in May 1982.

The Royal British Legion ordered a memorial bench in the senior rating's memory to be installed in Stalham... but thanks to the cost of living crisis, the project has proved to be more expensive than originally planned.

Enter Harrison and Paul and their 24-hour challenge to scale Snowdon (Wales), Scafell Pike (England) and Ben Nevis (Scotland) on August 17 and raise the money needed to paint, install and maintain... with any extra funds donated to the RBL to continue its good work.

You can back them via www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/davidpaul-dale?utm_term=53DEjp2kA.

Meanwhile, HMS Glasgow marine engineer **Petty Officer Colin Chalmers** has precisely one more month to prepare himself for a 50km

ultra marathon around the Lake District.

The senior rate is a fitness fanatic, loves a personal challenge and is a passionate believer in well-being and looking after your mental health.

Those passions combine in the Lake District on September 17 and the Ambleside 50k which begins and ends in the namesake town, taking in Coniston Water and Great Langdale en route.

Colin has set himself the challenge of raising up to £10k on behalf of the new frigate's favoured charity, Place2Be which was recommended by the frigate's sponsor, the Princess of Wales.

The national charity provides support to children, families and school staff to tackle mental health issues; one in six children/young people now have a diagnosable mental health condition – that's five pupils in a typical class of 30.

Team HMS Glasgow have already raised £2,000 for two Glaswegian schools which benefit from Place2Be's support, Holy Cross and Gowan Bank primaries.

Colin is moved by the "vital work" Place2Be carries out to tackle the Lake District 50km run – which is 8km/5 miles longer than a traditional marathon – and add considerably to donations on behalf of his ship.

"Together we can make a real difference to children's mental health and ensure that children do not have to face these problems alone," he says.

You can show your support for the senior rating at: www.justgiving.com/fundraising/colin-chalmers2.



Bahamas? No, BRNC

The weather and the backdrop are a bit of a give-away.

But four Officer Cadets from the Royal Bahamas Defence Force celebrated their national Independence Day whilst under training in Dartmouth.

Officer Cadets Wellington Ramsey, Adrian Miller (both pictured), Nyasha Ferguson and Wayne Munroe saw their national flag raised on their home country's 50th anniversary Independence Day.

They are due to pass out of the alma mater of the RN Officer Corps on August 10, ready to join the largest of the Caribbean navies (11 large vessels and several small craft conducting fishery protection, people trafficking and counter narcotic operations among other duties).

With about 1,600 personnel the RBDF is a purely naval force – unlike other Caribbean and Commonwealth states there are no regular land-based military formations in the country.

MyNavy on my mobile

PUT power at your fingertips with the new MyNavy app.

Now available for download on the App Store/Google Play, the MyNavy mobile app is packed with features which make it easier to manage your career on the go.

It allows you to seek out job opportunities, use interactive maps to find your way around new locations and access all the training material, videos and podcasts you'll need to get you there.

The app will also keep you up to date with your core training, medical info, kit requirements and travel plans thanks to a handy checklist which will tell you exactly what you need to do – and when you need to do it by.

In addition, some some features can now be accessed offline (with more being added).



Scoping success

A SCOTTISH firm which has been providing the Silent Service with their 'eyes' since World War 1 has been awarded a £169m contract for periscopes for next-generation Dreadnought submarines.

Thales Glasgow has been selected to provide state-of-the-art 'optronic masts' – 21st Century successors to the iconic periscope – for all four future nuclear deterrent submarines (HMS Dreadnought, Valiant, Warspite, and George VI).

The Glasgow arm of the huge international defence firm traces its history back to 1917 and Glaswegian engineering and optical firm Barr and Stroud, who were asked to produce a periscope for new Royal Navy M-class submarines.

Since then the firm, which was taken over by Thales in 2000, has become a world-leader in optics/periscope design and progress through to the modern-day optronic masts.

These masts – periscopes which do not penetrate a submarine's hull, but do record a 360-degree digital image for the command team to analyse at their leisure – also provide night vision and thermal imaging and support communications on top of assisting with targeting, navigation and situational awareness.

Such masts are already fitted to all five Astute-class submarines in service with the Royal Navy (and will be installed on the final two boats in the class, Agincourt and Agamemnon).

The contract for the 'integrated optronic combat system' masts for the Dreadnoughts will sustain more than 150 jobs – a fraction of the 30,000 people across the UK involved in the broader programme to deliver the four new submarines.

Cross of honour



ONLY around 53,000 people hold the medal Royal Navy officer Lieutenant Edmund Read proudly wears on his uniform... and most of those are German.

He enjoys the relatively rare distinction for a non-German of wearing the *Ehrenkreuz* – Cross of Honour – in bronze, presented by Berlin to military personnel who have served the Bundeswehr with distinction.

He was singled out for his work at the spiritual home of the German Navy's Officer School – counterpart of the Royal Navy's Britannia Royal Naval College – encouraging future naval leaders, but also fostering Anglo-German relations.

Edmund served as the RN exchange officer at Marineschule Mürwik (pictured below).

Located on the outskirts of Flensburg on the German-Danish border, the academy mirrors the Royal Navy's Dartmouth college – both were built around the same time, in a similar style (inside and out), with the goal of training officers for one of the world's premier navies.

It falls upon the British exchange officer to coach and mentor one of 14 divisions of new-entry officer cadets through their challenging year-long transition from civilian to junior officer, a course which is physically and academically rigorous where days are long but the weeks fly by.

Throughout – apart from the obligatory English lessons (it's the standard NATO language) – Edmund has to deliver his lessons and lectures, not just to his division, but to other cadets, spanning issues as varied as leadership, navigation and warfare in his host's native tongue.

He's also expected to teach one lesson to all cadets on the similarities (of which there are many) and differences (of which there are few) between the two navies.

The role also calls upon whoever holds the post to represent their navy/nation at public events and ceremonies – given significant freedom to do so by the naval attaché in Berlin.

"In terms of job fulfilment, I'm not sure the navy has anything better to offer," Edmund says. "As a representative of the Royal Navy and the UK, you are a liaison between the two navies in which ties are extremely deep, and are called upon to represent the RN across northern Germany."

His stint at Mürwik has been extended twice – not least thanks to Covid, which posed as many difficulties to training German sailors as did Brits ("ripping up the rule book of training"). In addition, much of the exchange took place against the turbulent backdrop of Brexit proceedings.

Never one to allow such trifles to get in the way, Edmund has championed closer cooperation between Mürwik and Dartmouth. British cadets now regularly use the Germans' superb navigation facilities before they go off to sea.

And in return, German cadets now train alongside their British comrades (pictured above) including a leadership exercise on



Dartmouth with the Royal Marines.

And Edmund's exploited the presence of Royal Navy P2000 patrol boats when they venture into the Baltic, integrating them into a revamped leadership exercise for cadets, including land, sea and amphibious phases.

One area the Germans have found fascinating is mess culture – dinners are now much more common at Mürwik, while Trafalgar Night (above, centre right) is a 'sell out' with senior officers jostling with cadets for seats at the mainstay of RN officer life.

This has been Edmund's second spell at Mürwik. Back in 2010 he was on exchange at the school – extended by the dust cloud from the Iceland volcano Eyjafjallajökull – and met his future wife Dana, now a former German naval officer. The

couple live in Cologne with their two young children.

He was invited to the German Embassy in London for the presentation of the medal by Defence Attaché Brigadier General Michael Oberneyer (above, centre left).

"In many ways, I feel like I should be the one giving the Germans a medal of honour, and not receiving one instead," Edmund said.

"The interaction with the future of the German Navy and their officer cadets was the most rewarding part of the entire four years.

"Having parents of your cadets thank you for your training and support after they pass out at the end of a year, having both watched their children's development closely, was truly an honour."



A fanfare for His Majesty from Royal Marines buglers – just a few of the 700 military personnel supporting the Honours of Scotland ceremony. Picture: PO(Phot) Jim Gibson

Royal salute at King's Scotland ceremony

ROYAL Navy personnel joined Army and RAF colleagues in Edinburgh celebrating His Majesty King Charles III receiving the Honours of Scotland.

The Honours – the Crown of Scotland, Sceptre, and Sword of State – are the oldest crown jewels in the British Isles.

During a service of thanksgiving at St Giles' Cathedral, the King was presented with the regalia, some of which date back to the 15th Century.

Royal Navy personnel from around the UK formed part of the Guard of Honour to escort the crown jewels from their home in Edinburgh Castle to the Cathedral, while members of the Royal Marine Band Scotland provided musical support at the Palace of Holyroodhouse.

"It has been an honour and a privilege to take part. We have been in training for four weeks for the event," said Able Seaman Kalen Cutts, normally based at HMS Excellent in Portsmouth, and a member of the Royal Navy Guard of Honour.

"My mother, Helen, and father, Gary, were watching at home in Rotherham. I know they will have been really proud that I was here representing the Navy."

In all around 700 military personnel took part in proceedings in the Scottish

capital, with the RAF's Red Arrows providing a stunning finale with a fly-past over the heart of Edinburgh.

"It is an incredible honour to be involved in such a historic occasion which celebrates His Majesty's close links to and love of Scotland," said Brigadier Andrew Muddiman, Naval Regional Commander for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

"As a former Naval Officer, His Majesty also maintains close links with the Royal Navy and was based in Rosyth when in command of HMS Bronington.

"I am delighted that the Senior Service has been so ably represented. All will have a tremendous sense of pride that they could be here today in Edinburgh for this special event."

The service, which included both traditional and new elements, featured music written especially for the occasion, a Psalm sung in Gaelic and passages from the New Testament in the Doric language.

Also present was the Stone of Destiny, the ancient symbol of Scotland's monarchy, which has been used for centuries in the inauguration of its Kings.



(Milli)second triumph

THIS is what it means to win one of the hardest sporting events in the RN calendar two years running.

Celebrating are members of HMS Seahawk's Field Gun Crew, who retained the coveted Brickwood's Trophy. The winning margin: just one third of a second.

Victory was made all the sweeter for the Helston heroes as runners-up were arch Fleet Air Arm rivals HMS Heron.

The latter posted a time of 1m 19.47s to Seahawk's 1m 19.12s.

"Any field gun run is always hard, once you get into the final, one little mistake can cost you," said No.1 trainer Chief Petty Officer Luke Retallack.

"Last year we won by half the length of a gun. This year was half a wheel length.

"We are now back-to-back champions – that's something Seahawk has never achieved in the history of the competition."

The RNRMC Field Gun Competition

is a true test of dedication, strength and teamwork as the 18-strong crew fire, manoeuvre and reassemble their field gun and limber at break-neck speeds.

The Seahawk crew also won the Powerful Sports Cup for the fastest aggregate time across the competition and the Powerful Trophy for the fastest run.

Nineteen military teams from across the UK and as far afield as Cyprus, and a combined NATO crew, threw their hats in the ring for this year's contest, the climax to and highlight of HMS Collingwood's annual open day which once again drew thousands of visitors keen to see what goes on at the RN's home of weapons engineering/warfare in Fareham.

Beyond learning about the establishment, they were treated to military displays by Phase 2 trainees, a motorcycle display team, free funfair and attractions to keep everyone entertained.

Picture: Keith Woodland



Landmark move for Falklands dead



Unique armada chronicle on show

YOU have just days to see one of the greatest treasures in British naval history before they return to storage for months, perhaps years, to protect them.

The Armada Maps chart the Royal Navy's defeat of the Spanish fleet - or armada - in 1588, one of the defining moments in the history of the navy, nation and Europe.

The ten hand-drawn maps - compiled just one year after the victory - follow the progress of Spanish force (141 ships and 24-thousand men) and the better led, better trained and more professional British fleet which thwarted their invasion plans.

The clashes with the Spanish in the summer of 1588 are the first battle honours awarded in Royal Navy history, held by some of the greatest names in the Fleet such as HMS Ark Royal.

Due to the exceptionally fragile nature of the maps and the dangers of exposure to light, they can only go on public display for 45 days at the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth before returning to the archive for preservation.

That ends on Tuesday August 8 and it could be several years before individual maps, let alone the entire collection, receive another public airing.

The maps were acquired for £600k in 2020 through crowdfunding and support from the Art Fund and National Heritage Memorial Fund, ensuring they didn't leave the UK in the hands of a private.

"The defeat of the Armada was a turning point in forging our nation's identity and the maps act as a powerful commemoration of this pivotal naval battle," explained Professor Dominic Tweddle, Director General of the National Museum of the Royal Navy.

"Our job is to tell epic story of the Royal Navy, its impact on Britain, as well as the world, from the earliest times to the present day, and to that end we're delighted to display the complete Armada Maps Collection for the first time."

The maps are thought to be the earliest surviving representations of the 1588 campaign with each chart detailing the position in the Channel of individual ships on both sides of the battle. In addition, also on display is a rare map from May 1588 of the Spanish Armada off Lisbon.

Visitors can digitally engage with the maps through a touchscreens and animation created specifically for the exhibition.

Thank you, Eric

IT IS farewell, sadly, to another of our greatest generation and the dwindling number of those who experienced June 6 1944.

As a stoker in minesweeper HMS Cockatrice Eric Drube (pictured at 75th anniversary events in Portsmouth in 2019) saw constant action through the summer and autumn, keeping first the Seine Bay free of mines, then clearing the Scheldt estuary and waters off Walcheren during operations around Antwerp in October/November 1944; the crew were issued arms and were expected to fight ashore if Cockatrice was badly damaged.

On D-Day, the ship was assigned to 18th Minesweeping Flotilla which swept and marked what was designated 'Channel 6', the run-in to Gold Beach, for the landing craft to move in.

He watched the subsequent invasion - enjoying a grandstand view' to what was an almost surreal experience, likening the landings to pub fight on a grand scale.

Thereafter, Cockatrice remained off the Normandy coast for two more months in support of Operation Neptune.

It may never have happened, for during training at RNAS Donibristle/HMS Merlin, the young sailor was struck down with diphtheria - and probably meningitis as well - leaving him paralysed down his left side and from the waist down.

He was transferred to Chatham to recuperate to be closer to his family, who lived in Trottscliffe, Kent, and eventually recovered, having learned to walk again.

His reward was stoker training



aboard the old battleship HMS Revenge in Southampton, her guns removed, she instead provided the fleet with freshly-trained marine engineers, in Eric's case, assignment to Cockatrice in May 1944.

Once amphibious operations were over, Cockatrice continued sweeping duties in North and Irish Seas and Channel. At the war's end she escorted heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen to the UK from Germany.

Upon being demobbed in 1946, Eric eventually settled in Bletchley with his wife and their four children. He worked as an engineer until his retirement and was an active member of the Algerines Association.

A frequent attendee at Navy Days and D-Day commemorations in London and Portsmouth, he was awarded the Legion D'Honneur by the French in 2014 for help in liberating the country, and at the 75th anniversary commemorations was introduced to Canadian premier Justin Trudeau and Prince Charles.

Eric died aged 99 on June 17.

There's some corner of a foreign field that is for ever England.

Never were the words of Rupert Brooke more apt - though we must add Scotland, Wales and Ireland to his original verse - than in the Falklands, where islanders have named beaches, bays, harbours, islets and inlets after the 258 souls killed in the 1982 conflict.

Every British Serviceman killed in the liberation of the islands - 255 in all - plus three locals who lost their lives have been honoured by today's inhabitants of the South Atlantic island chain, an honour connected with last year's 40th anniversary of the war.

The result is the Falkland Islands Memorial Map, with 258 previously-unnamed stretches of coastline, beach or ridges among other geographic features, plus a string of roads around the Mount Pleasant complex, now bearing the names of all those listed on the Roll of Honour.

So you can pay your respects by climbing Rundle Rocks on the western approaches to the capital Stanley in memory of Royal Marine landing craftsman Marine Anthony Rundle, killed when landing craft Foxtrot Four was bombed in the closing days of the conflict.

Or HMS Glamorgan's Petty Officer Michael Adcock, a victim of an Exocet missile strike on the destroyer, immortalised with a namesake lagoon on Lively Island.

And Briggs Beach on the rugged northeastern shore of East Falkland, a permanent reminder of Petty Officer David Briggs, another victim of an Exocet missile, this time aboard HMS Sheffield.

The map (a detail showing Choiseul Sound and the newly-titled features is pictured inset) is the work of three islanders - Rosemarie King, Ken Passfield and Sally Poncet - who've spent the past two years contacting around 70 landowners and the



families of the fallen to obtain permission and approval.

The next stage of the project will be to provide photographs of the newly-named sites so families can visualise the tranquil spots.

All 258 families have received copies of the map and a copy has also been produced for the Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel at Pangbourne College in Reading.

The Bishop for the Falkland Islands, the Right Rev Jonathan Clark, blessed the large replica chart, which has been funded by the 40th Anniversary Committee in the islands, in the presence of chapel trustees, Sara Jones (whose husband Colonel 'H' Jones received a posthumous VC for his bravery) and Sukey Cameron (Falkland Islander and former representative of the Falkland Islands' government in the UK).

"We are honoured to be able to display this map in the chapel for the benefit of all the families and veterans who regularly visit it," said Major General Jeff Mason, chairman of the chapel trustees.

"To have special places in the Islands, named after each of those who paid the ultimate price, will be an everlasting tribute to them."

The dedication ceremony was followed by the annual Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance in the chapel, attended by some 570 people, including next of kin of those who died and veterans of the 1982 war.

The list of features and the personnel they honour can be found at: www.royalnavy.mod.uk/-/media/royal-navy-responsive/documents/useful-resources/falkland-islands-40th-place-names_061122_forpdf_08112022.pdf

■ Meanwhile, a haunting tribute to the 258 Britons killed liberating the Falklands in 1982 will remain on show throughout the summer in Portsmouth.

The Standing with Giants art installation has been on show at Fort Nelson - on Portsdown Hill overlooking Portsmouth Harbour - since April and was due to be

taken down in early July.

It features 258 silhouettes of figures made from recycled building materials by Oxfordshire artist Dan Barton to represent the 255 Service personnel, plus three islanders, killed in the South Atlantic conflict.

Due to visitor interest, however, the free exhibition, already attended by thousands, has now been extended until Sunday September 3.

Hand-in-hand with the artwork is another exhibition at the Victorian fort:

What Portsmouth Saw, which tells some of the personal stories of homecomings to Portsmouth in the summer of 1982.

It draws upon personal, official and news archives - including footage from the BBC, photographs taken by newspapers, and also features a small display of guns which were used in the conflict.

Admission to the art installation is free and included with admission to the museum which is open 10am-5pm daily.

Is Bronington coming to Portsmouth?

A HOME in Portsmouth Naval Base potentially awaits the 'King's own warship' - veteran minesweeper HMS Bronington - if enthusiasts can save her.

A plum site in the historic dockyard has been offered to the 70-year-old warship providing she can be salvaged and restored.

The ship was commanded through most of 1976 by a then Lieutenant/Lieutenant Commander Wales, but currently she's in a sorry condition, partially sunk at her mooring in Birkenhead.

Despite outward appearances, surveyors say she is not beyond restoration - hence the concerted efforts by the HMS Bronington Trust to save the ship as a museum, a role she performed for many years after retiring from RN service in the 1980s.

The trust was granted charitable status last year, which opened the door to potential lottery funding.

To access that funding, however, a viable

plan has to be drawn up - and the trust must raise a substantial part of the funding.

The immediate future is focused on finding a fund-raising consultant to build the case for the ambitious restoration project and submit an application for funding from the National Heritage Memorial Fund.

A five-stage plan has been drawn up to save, preserve and finally restore the minehunter with the first three steps alone - getting Bronington out of the water, moving her to a shipyard and creating a special steel cradle to support the ship - estimated around to cost upwards of £1m.

The final stages of restoration focus on general preservation of the vessel and removing any toxic materials from the vessel, followed by finally task of restoring Bronington to a state worthy of display to the public (estimated to take two-three years) which would be assisted by a large and very active Ton-class association.

The outline plan for Bronington's restoration follows a similar course to Normandy veteran LCT7074, which now enjoys pride of place on Southsea seafront at the revamped D-Day Story museum.

Crowdfunding and donations from veterans (collectively and individually) have raised more than £13k via www.gofundme.com/f/help-restore-hms-bronington to support the project to this point.

Mike McBride, trustee director, said the response to date had been "humbling", with the King showing keen interest in progress.

Mr McBride is confident the ship will be saved: "Everything is in place to rescue HMS Bronington and return her to her final squadron base port of Portsmouth - if we can get funding."

"She would look good next to HMS Warrior, and would complement the HMS Vernon-Mine Warfare Memorial up the road at Gunwharf Quays."



Orcadian depths reveal secrets

THIS is the wreck of a Royal Navy warship whose loss shook the Fleet, nation – and Empire – to the core a century ago.

Divers working with the Scapa Flow Museum in Orkney took advantage of the exceptional weather to re-visit two of the islands' most famous shipwrecks – and record them with the latest underwater cameras and technology.

In doing so, they show the shattered stern of cruiser HMS Hampshire as no human eye can see her.

The ship was lost in just 15 minutes when it struck a German mine off Marwick Head on Orkney's north-west coast on June 5 1916.

Just a dozen of the 749 souls aboard survived; among the dead was the man leading the nation's war effort – War Minister Lord Kitchener.

It had been the face of the field marshal calling Britons to arms in the famous propaganda poster. In 1916, he was probably as well known across the Empire as King George V.

His death – leading a delegation to Russia in support of the war against the Central Powers on the Eastern Front – came less than a week after the Royal Navy had failed to deliver a 'second Trafalgar' at Jutland. Together, the two events shook public and political confidence in the Senior Service.

Over a century later, the wreck has been partially salvaged – one of the cruiser's propellers can be seen at Scapa Flow Museum – and the challenging conditions/protected status limits diving.

But the museum, which celebrates the role of the Royal Navy in Orkney – the vast natural harbour of Scapa Flow was its principal base through both world wars – has been given permission to dive on the Hampshire, and also the wreck of WW1 battleship HMS Vanguard, for historical studies.

Videos, still images and photogrammetric survey data collected will inform, update and enhance digital



3D models of the two sunken titans.

Vanguard mysteriously blew up in harbour in July 1917, killing all but two men aboard; 843 souls died in an instant. The cause of the explosion has never been determined.

Local divers from Huskyn Charters, who regularly survey wrecks in the islands on behalf of the MOD, carried out the latest surveys "with great care and professionalism", said Nick Hewitt, the Scapa Flow Museum's Culture Team Manager.

He continued: "The end result will be an improved digital resource for visitors to the museum and one which helps tell the story of Orkney's role in the world wars as the UK's key naval base – and the immense losses borne out here."

The museum, which is one of five shortlisted as the best of 2023, recently signed a deal with the National Museum of the Royal Navy to work together; the latter helped clear the way for the diving to take place over official war

graves.

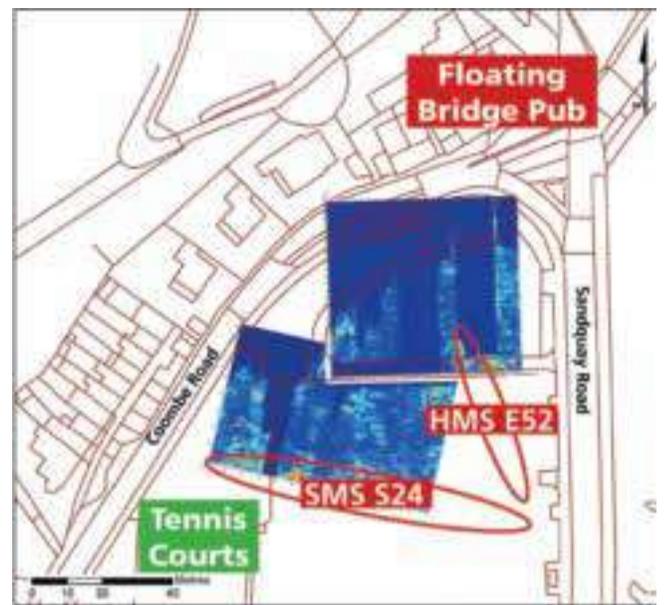
"The study of wrecks is important in understanding the events around their loss, which are sometimes obscure," said the national museum's Director General Professor Dominic Tweddle.

"Orkney Islands Council does an exemplary job in protecting the many wrecks in they care and we are delighted to support them."

Councillor Gwenda Shearer, chair of Orkney Council's Education, Leisure and Housing Committee, said the survey work carried out on the wrecks was of "national significance".

She continued: "More than 100 years has passed since both these disasters, and Scapa Flow is no longer heaving with naval vessels – but this work will help ensure the scale of the losses are sensitively retold and remembered."

Underwater imagery: Marjo Tynkkynen; Photogrammetry: Kari Hyttinen and Chris Rowland



... as does park in Dartmouth

SCIENTISTS are a step closer to confirming a Dartmouth urban legend after nearly 90 years by 'finding' a Royal Navy submarine buried in the town park.

Experts from the University of Winchester used ground penetrating radar to scan the site where the old boat was believed to rest – along with landfill – which created Coronation Park.

The vague outline of what is thought to be HMS E52 can be made out on the resulting scans – as well as a second object, a German torpedo boat, longer but also more narrow.

The findings were made by Dr Simon Roffey, Reader in Archaeology, and Dr David Ashby, who manages Winchester University's Soil Laboratory.

The pair were intrigued by the research of Lieutenant Tom Kemp, who last year put a name to the submarine locals had talked about for years.

After extensive research in the archives, serving submariner Tom – who teaches navigation at Britannia Royal Naval College overlooking the town – identified the craft as HMS E52.

But for confirmation there really is a boat under the park, technology was needed. Enter the duo from Winchester.

The park covers an area of around 20,000 square metres – roughly the size of three football pitches... and 80 times the size of the submarine.

Working with Tom, the scientists focused on the corner of the park – close to a spot where canoes and dinghies are stored – thought to hide the submarine.

The radar sent sound pulses through concrete and tarmac, but anyone expecting the tell-tale outline of a submarine and conning tower will be disappointed. Whatever was buried in the park 80 years ago, says Tom, "probably bears very little resemblance to a submarine any more".

To the trained eye, however,

the concentrations of red on the radar scans suggest large metallic objects lying about one metre beneath surface.

The team have come to the conclusion that E52 probably lies in the northeast corner of the park, while roughly at right angles to it is another large metallic object, most likely a German Torpedo Boat Destroyer, S24, bought for scrap like E52 after WW1.

The positions of the two 'finds' corresponds with a contemporary aerial photo of Dartmouth in the 1920s which shows the submarine and another craft sitting on the mudflats.

"The 'submarine under the park' is a local legend, and it could make a wonderful tourist attraction if we could identify its exact location," said Simon, an ex-RN submariner who served in O-class boats in the 1980s.

"We know that there was a torpedo boat there but everyone assumed that it had been moved. Maybe it was stuck fast in the mud and they just left it there."

To compound the challenge of identifying the submarine is another Dartmouth urban legend also suggests that US troops who camped in the park in the latter stages of WW2 buried some of their kit in the park rather than ship it home when they left.

The team are seeking permission from the local authority to dig small bore holes in the park to hopefully identify a piece of equipment or metal unique to E52.

"It's been my personal hobbyhorse for the better part of the past year," says Tom. "Confirming the final resting place of one of His Majesty's Submarines – and a pretty successful one at that – would serve to remind and reiterate that our naval heritage is all around us and can often be clawed back from obscurity. Our time and energy could scarcely be better spent."

Putting the TV into TorreVieja

IF YOU are a regular viewer of Channel 5, then keep watching over the coming months – you may well see shipmates from RNA TorreVieja.

Some of the branch's recent activities have been captured on camera by the channel's Bargain Brits in the Sun show.

Its cameras followed branch treasurer Carl Loudon and shipmates to the offices of Cruz Roja TorreVieja (Red Cross) as they made a donation from recent fundraising activities – including raffles and voluntary contributions to the monthly meeting – to the local Red Cross president, Bibiano Vera.

The filming continued while the branch committee joined remaining shipmates at their monthly Menu del Dia at Piccolino Pizzeria in the suburb of Aguas Nuevas for a meal and Raffle, once again collecting for charity.

The gathering was the usual lively event with some 38 very talkative shipmates 'forgetting' that they were being filmed – you know Jack, never misses an opportunity to be noticed...

You will have to wait until the programme is aired to find out what they actually said in an endeavour to raise the profile of the RNA in Spain.

Congratulations to our champions

IN HONOUR of Their Majesties the King and Queen's service to the country, Royal Voluntary Service has launched the Coronation Champions Awards for volunteers, an official Coronation project.

The awards celebrate extraordinary volunteers across the country who have made an exceptional difference to their communities. With the support of Her Majesty, The Queen, a passionate advocate of volunteering and President of Royal Voluntary Service, the awards recognise exceptional volunteers from across the country.

Thousands of people from all over the UK who have impacted their communities through supporting a range of worthy causes were nominated. From these nominations, 500 volunteers were handpicked by a judging panel, presided over by the Queen Consort, to be 'crowned' Coronation Champions.

Sea Cadets are proud to announce that some of our extraordinary volunteers are among those selected:

SLT Marlene Rhodes, Rickmansworth & Watford Unit.

Marlene began volunteering at Rickmansworth & Watford Unit when her daughter, Helena, became a sea cadet in 2016.

Her son, Dominic, also joined Sea Cadets the following year.

Marlene started volunteering for the unit for two hours a week to start with as her other son, Declan, has severe cerebral palsy that required a lot of her time and attention.

When the unit found themselves without a commanding officer, Marlene stepped in and took charge in September 2020.

Her leadership saw the unit grow to be the second largest in the area, with



some 70 cadets. For the past three years, Rickmansworth & Watford has also been the second highest scoring unit at annual review in the entire area.

Despite all the demands on her time, Marlene also finds the time to help out and support other units in her district.

Despite all this success, she remains "the most unassuming, humble volunteer you could meet", as described by the person who nominated her.

The Royal Voluntary Service said: "The entry standard was incredibly high, and we received nearly 5,000 nominations. We think Marlene is truly amazing."

As a Coronation Champion, Marlene was awarded two standing tickets for the Coronation Concert at Windsor Castle, as well as an official Coronation Champions pin and



a signed certificate from both Their Majesties. **Jeremy Williams, Rhondda Unit.**

Jeremy has been awarded the title Coronation Champion for his 38 years of dedicated service to the young people of Rhondda Unit and the many other groups that he supports in his community as well as for his incredible work during and after the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure young people were engaged in activities and not left behind.

Jeremy organised sending out hundreds of care packages to cadets and their siblings during the pandemic.

He also sought and obtained funding for loaning out iPads to all the unit's cadets so everyone could keep in touch.

When the Covid regulations eased, he arranged for a minibus to go around so volunteers could visit the cadets and see



how they were getting on. Jeremy has been supporting the unit as Unit Management Team (UMT) Chairperson for the past two years.

"I was completely gobsmacked and lost for words when I was told I was picked to be a Coronation Champion," recalls Jeremy.

"It was a massive honour to have been nominated in the first place, let alone be selected as one of the 500 eventual winners."

"We don't do what we do in our charity for awards, we do it because we love the opportunities and experiences we can offer the young people in our communities."

Jeremy attended the Windsor Castle Coronation Concert, taking along the unit's Administration Officer, Lucy Thomas, as his guest.

Ruth Verner, Ballymena Unit.
Ruth got involved with Ballymena Sea

Cadets after her son joined as a junior cadet in 2015.

In January 2016, she joined the Unit Management Team, taking over as the Unit Chairperson in September that year, a position she still holds.

In April 2021, Ruth was appointed as the District Chairperson for Northern Ireland District, progressing on to become the Northern Area Chairperson in November 2022.

"When I first joined the Sea Cadets, it was an organisation I knew nothing about, yet I was so impressed with how dedicated every adult volunteer was in providing opportunities and experiences for our children," said Ruth.

"In my seven years with Sea Cadets, I have witnessed first-hand so many young people who have relished every course, voyage, or experience, and have been able to use what they have learnt at Sea Cadets in day-to-day life."

"The accredited qualifications they earn through our charity has also helped add points to enable places to be offered at university."

"The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is also offered, and again, this is something employers love to see on CVs."

"Sea Cadets is so much more than a 'youth club'. We are a youth organisation dedicated to encouraging and empowering our young people to be all they can be, and I feel privileged to be part of their story."

Ruth attended the Secretary of State's Garden Party at Hillsborough Castle, which was attended by King Charles III and Queen Camilla.

She took Pauline Nelson, Ballymena Unit's Treasurer as her guest.



A day to remember

LC Maisie (17) from Fishguard Unit was one of only 30 cadets who was invited to attend the King's coronation, which she describes as "truly momentous", "historically significant" and an experience she will never forget.

Maisie was selected for the honour out of the thousands of sea cadets around the country.

"It was such an honour and privilege to have been chosen to represent the Sea Cadet Corps at King Charles III's Coronation, whilst also acting as a representative of my area (South West) in my role as their First Sea Lord Cadet for 2023," Maisie said.

She watched the parade from a special cadet forces spectator area at Admiralty Arch before leading the viewing public down The Mall towards Buckingham Palace.

"I was fortunate to have a front row seat as the gold state coach made its way past Admiralty Arch on route to Westminster Abbey," Maisie said, "We had the honour of leading the viewing public down the Mall towards Buckingham Palace."

After the coronation, she had "a fantastic view" of the Royal Family as they waved to the crowds from the balcony. Maisie also enjoyed chatting to other cadet force members, such as Army and Air cadets and get some insights into their roles. Each of the six sections of the Cadet Force; the Sea Cadet Corps, Royal Marines Cadets, Volunteer Cadet Corps, Combined Cadet Force, Air Training Corps and Army Cadet Force were represented at the coronation.

Unforgettable day out

A 17-year old sea cadet from Jersey Unit was "super excited" to be handpicked to represent her unit and her island at the coronation of King Charles III.

Victoria describes how stunned she was to receive the invitation for a front-row seat at the coronation.

"I was in shock to start with... I couldn't believe it, it was so unexpected," she said. "It will be a story to tell for generations. How many coronations are you going to witness? Not very many, obviously, and I'm really honoured to have been able to witness it properly."

Victoria was one of the few to be selected for this privilege due to her performance at a recent promotion board to become Petty Officer Cadet.

"The promotion board required many different skills in order to pass each of the six assessments," said Victoria.

Spending the night before the coronation in Portsmouth, Victoria had to get up at 3am to get to London by 6:30am and position herself at the Admiralty Arch for the processions.

"We witnessed the parade including the King and Royal Family going both to Westminster Abbey and then back again to Buckingham Palace," said Victoria.



"It was a great view, and I was truly honoured to have been able to witness it."

Victoria thoroughly enjoyed meeting the other cadets from all over the UK who were also seated at the Admiralty Arch and having such a great view of the newly-crowned King and the Royal Family.

"It was an amazing experience, and I am truly honoured and grateful to have been able to play a small part and witness history in the making," Victoria said.

The Commanding Officer of Fishguard Unit, Lt David Thompson, said that it was "absolutely amazing" that Victoria was selected to take part.



Date at city cathedral

SEA cadets from Merseyside East and West Districts took part in the official commemoration service at Liverpool Cathedral to mark the coronation of King Charles III.

The cadets lined the route for civic dignitaries, politicians, armed forces, public services, faith leaders and other youth and community organisations who attended the historic service at the iconic cathedral on St James's Mount in Liverpool, in partnership with the Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside.

The maritime city rolled out the red carpet for the first coronation in 70 years, with dozens of street parties and a live broadcast of the coronation on a big screen in the Eurovision Fan Village at the Pier Head. Liverpool's Town Hall was all lit up in red, white and blue in celebration.

King Charles III and Queen Camilla visited Liverpool only a few weeks before the coronation to officially unveil the Eurovision stage at the M&S Bank Arena. They royal couple also visited Liverpool's Central Library during their trip.



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Glamorgan cadets' tribute to those lost on namesake



SEA Cadets from HMS Glamorgan remembered those who died in their namesake ship.

The county-class destroyer was struck by an Argentine Exocet missile, killing 14 of her crew, during the Falklands Conflict in 1982.

Penarth Sea Cadet Corps (SCC) Unit bears the same name as Glamorgan, and its proud cadets and staff held their annual Remembrance Parade in the presence of the Lord Lieutenant for South Glamorgan, Mrs Morfudd Meredith, and the Penarth Mayor Councillor Melissa Rabaioiti, along with other distinguished guests, parents and friends.

The parade was led by Leading Cadet Jack Read and included many of the units cadets.

After the formal presentation, wreaths were laid by the Lord Lieutenant, the Unit's Officer-in-Charge, Lt Helen Davies.

Also in attendance was CPO John Callaghan who was a member of HMS Glamorgan's crew in 1982

and is now a SCC staff member.

Prayers for the men who were so tragically killed on that fateful day were led by Petty Officer Rebecca Ali.

Those who were remembered were:

- POAEM(L) Michael ADCKO
- CK Brian EASTON
- AEM(M)1 Mark HENDERSON
- AEM(R)1 Brian HINGE
- (LA)CAEMN David LEE
- CK Brian MALCOLM
- AEA(M)2 Kelvin McCALLUM
- AB(R) David McCANN
- MEM(M)2 Terry PERKINS
- LCK Mark SAMBLES
- LCK Tony SILLECE
- STD John STROUD
- LT David TINKER
- POACMN Colin VICKERS



Cadets join forces with Blind Veterans UK

CONWY Unit (TS Aberconwy) joined forces with Blind Veterans UK, the national charity for vision-impaired ex-Service men and women, as well as RAF and army cadets, scouts, cubs and beavers to host a Big Help Out event as part of the King's Coronation celebrations.

The event, held at Blind Veterans UK's Centre of Wellbeing in Llandudno saw more than 100 people interested in volunteering take part.

Visitors had a chance to learn more about the local volunteering opportunities available with the represented charities, who had stalls set up and highlighted the benefits of joining the cadet forces.

The event was also an opportunity to further build relations between the represented organisations.

"We had a steady stream of visitors and Blind Veteran UK members visit us throughout the day, many having a go at our first aid and knot tying demonstrations", said Sub Lieutenant (SCC) Les Radley VR RNR, Commanding Officer of Conwy County Sea Cadets.

"This was a very positive experience for all of the cadets and staff attending as well as Blind Veterans UK. It also gave the cadets a perspective on a lot of the things we try to teach and reinforce on why the Sea Cadet ethos and values are so important in modern day life."

Veteran Billy Baxter, who served with the Royal Horse Artillery, opened the event in his role as Llandudno Town Crier – Billy is UK's first ever blind town crier. Conwy Unit's junior cadets treated the audience with semaphore displays, led by junior cadet Lola, who gave a presentation on the history of semaphore before the display.

"I felt so proud standing in front of everyone and showing them what we do," said Lola, ten. Sea cadets also took part in team-building games with the other cadets and scouts. Sea cadets closed off the event with a drill display, encouraging the other groups to join in. There was also a lot of media interest in this event, which featured in local newspapers and on ITV News Wales.

Rosina Hearn, Community Engagement Lead at the Llandudno Centre said: "We're incredibly proud to have played our own small part in the Big Help Out initiative. It's been so inspiring to see the activity that took place up and down the country. The aim of the event was to inform people about the huge variety of volunteering opportunities in the local area for both adults and children, but the day also saw friendships being made and lots of laughter... It was wonderful to see the centre so busy and full of energy, we think the Big Help Out was a tremendous success."

Sea Cadets and Blind Veterans UK are also working together to host a military-themed week at the Centre of Wellbeing to commemorate the Battle of the Atlantic. Conwy Unit are also planning to lend a hand in other events, including naval-themed bingo and bowls as well as dinners and drills nights. Conwy Unit's cadets will also be volunteering regularly at the Llandudno Centre over the summer.

Blind Veterans UK are encouraging new volunteers to get stuck in and help, such as by visiting a blind veteran at home, driving them to events or befriending them over the phone to help rebuild their lives after sight loss. If you, or someone you know, served in the Armed Forces, including National Service, and are now struggling you can get in touch by calling 0800 389 7979 or visit blindveterans.org.uk/support

Big help out a massive hit

BRISTOL Unit (TS Adventure) ran a successful Big Help Out event that saw some 100 people roll up their sleeves and help them smarten up their unit.

Doors opened at 10am and cadets, their parents, volunteers, friends and members of the community got stuck in, working hard to spruce up the premises. The hard work continued until 6pm, when everyone was treated to a BBQ as a way of saying thank you.

"The day involved cleaning and tidying both the inside and external parts of the premises as well as cleaning and preparing the boats for the impending boating season. The pontoons were also jet washed, thoroughly cleaned and all the algae was removed," said Tim Moran, Chair of Trustees of Bristol Unit. "There were plenty of opportunities for budding painters too and lots of weeds that needed eradicating!"

Two dozen adults and cadets also cut back the overgrown hedges on the premises, a huge task that was achieved within a few hours, thanks to so many people willing to help out. Adults got busy painting classrooms and the main deck, internal dividing walls were taken down and the ship room was given a long overdue tidy up. Six trips were made to the local recycling centre to dispose of items, including old heaters.

"A group of mums noticed that our carpets and floors really needed some TLC and gave the unit the most thorough Hoovering I think it's ever had," said Tim. "A small team of handymen put up some new pictures, awards boards and trophies."

The unit also had a team helping with IT infrastructure and another team examining 20 boat trollies and trailers to check for defects and pump the tyres. There was even a team manning the information desk to advise potential volunteers on all the ins and outs of volunteering for Sea Cadets.

Even a downpour in the afternoon didn't dampen spirits, with cadets continuing to clean the racing buoys and tarpaulins out in the rain.

Bristol Unit's Big Help Out event received a lot of media interest, with BBC News coming to film the event, and BBC Radio Bristol and The Bristol Post newspaper interviewing some of the cadets and volunteers who took part.



Tribute for serving

SEA CADETS from across Cornwall came together in Cornish maritime town of Falmouth to thank all the service men and women who serve or have served our country.

Some 150 sea cadets and Royal Marines cadets aged 10-18 joined other cadets forces to honour all the individuals who are part of the Armed Forces family by taking part in a spectacular military parade through the streets of Falmouth, alongside regular and reserve personnel from all three services and veterans.

The South West Area band of Sea Cadets provided musical entertainment for the day.

The day featured an action-packed programme of events and activities including free concerts as well as flying displays and fireworks over Falmouth Bay. TS Jack Petchey – a Sea Cadets offshore power training vessel that gives young people the chance to experience nautical adventure and fun – was also brought into Falmouth Harbour for this significant occasion.

"I am proud to be involved with the Armed Forces Day, it is an extremely important day for retired and serving military people and their families," said First Class Cadet Joshua, aged 14, from the local Falmouth and Penryn Sea Cadets Unit.

These celebrations are particularly close to Joshua's heart, since his own father, Billy, has been a member of the Royal Navy for the last 33 years.

"Seeing my Dad in his uniform makes me proud...going to visit him in the different places he has worked has made me interested in the military because I have grown up with it," Joshua explains.

Joshua joined Sea Cadets two years ago, when he was 12. He has already gained sailing, First Aid, Marine Engineering and Camp Craft qualifications during this time. "Sea Cadets already given me opportunities to learn many new skills and values for life including self-discipline, leadership and teamwork," Joshua said.

"I am so pleased that Josh enjoys Sea Cadets as much as he does," said Joshua's dad, Billy.

"I am proud of him for many reasons but his desire to be involved in all that is on offer makes me super proud. He is making new friends and learning new skills and has grown into a fine young man since joining Sea Cadets."

Captain Sea Cadets, Captain Neil Downing RN said: "Sea Cadets is extremely proud and honoured to play a part in celebrating and honouring everyone in the Armed Forces family: from the veterans who have contributed so much to our freedom and way of life, to the current personnel who provide such dedicated service around the world.

"They have been the backbone of our country for centuries and act as role models for our cadets, demonstrating the values of courage, commitment, respect and loyalty. We hope they feel appreciated and valued as we pay tribute to them."

Sea Cadets units across the UK have been involved in Armed Forces Day celebrations across the country, including in Northern Ireland.

Leader Sam gets stuck in

THE Officer in Charge of Maldon & District Sea Cadets recently took part in the famous Maldon Mud Race, an event that drew in more than 15,000 visitors to the seaside town.

More than 300 participants took part in the race held at the Maldon Promenade Park, many of them decking colourful and creative costumes for the occasion, ranging from pirate to dinosaur ensembles.

The event raises thousands of pounds every year for multiple charities, including Maldon & District Unit.

"I took part in the mud race as I wanted to raise funds to help support our cadets and our unit – plus, I enjoy a challenge," said CPO Sam Ridgeway, Officer in Charge of Maldon & District Sea Cadets.

Spectators cheered on the participants, who dragged themselves through the thick mud as they vied to win the challenge. "It was really tough, I did get stuck in the mud a few times and got pulled out

by a guy with a rope," CPO Sam Ridgeway describes. "The atmosphere was amazing and there were so many great people taking part. [Comedian] Jo Brand started the race and there was also a BBC team participating in the event. The music and stalls were amazing and added to the atmosphere. It was a really great day."

Maldon & District sea cadets went along to cheer on their OIC at the race, as did cadet's parents, Sam's family members and work colleagues, some of who supported Sam through sponsorship as well.

The event offered a full day of stage entertainment thanks to BBC Essex, which included a DJ set from soul legend, John Leeche. There was a range of stalls, attractions, street food and a fun fair for visitors to enjoy too.

"Some of our older cadets wish to take part next year, said CPO Sam Ridgeway, "I hope they do as it's a wonderful experience!"





Challenging times at summer camp

THIS year, for the first time, we had a mix of year groups attending Dean Close School CCF RN's Summer Camp.

We arrived at HMS Raleigh, where initial recruits hoping to join the RN go straight from leaving school, on Sunday evening and spent Monday doing a lot of walking.

We started in Plymouth doing an exploration task around the city, The Hoe and the Barbican.

The afternoon involved modern orienteering around Mount Edgcombe Country Park.

On Tuesday we spent a day on power boats on the water and were lucky enough to see a couple of submarines that were alongside in Devonport Dockyard.

The next day, after breakfast, we made the journey to Dartmouth to get a flavour of the Britannia Royal Naval College. The visit started with a really interesting tour of the college, followed by the Low Ropes Course, in which Jess H broke the individual record for cadets to top the leader board.

While doing the low ropes we were thrilled to see a Merlin Mk4 helicopter come in to do some landing exercises on the field next to us. In the evening we went bouldering, which everyone enjoyed enormously.

We were so privileged to have a free run of the college, to see drill and a fitness competition being performed on the parade ground, before getting to do our own drill on the famous parade ground.

Sessy M and Clarice McE both found the photos of their fathers' Passing Out Parade, which made them very proud.

On the final day we spent some time in the Britannia Museum, before taking on the Field Gun run, and coming in second on the leaderboard, despite having a smaller than recommended team.

This was a great experience, for both cadets and staff alike, and everyone returned with a smile on their face, albeit a little tired!

Awards were given to Jonny H for Best NCO, and Jess H for Best Cadet, but everyone took on challenges and worked as a team throughout their time away.



THE CCF RN Section of the CCF at Lancaster Royal Grammar School, were given the wonderful opportunity to participate in a water-sports activity day at Killington Lake in South Cumbria, *writes Olivia R, from Year 12.*

The day involved sailing and canoeing, allowing us to develop our skills. With the weather as lovely as it was, it was a perfect day to be afloat!

First was canoeing with Jumper and Phil, two qualified paddle-sports CCF HQ AT Instructors who travelled all the way up from Portsmouth to run this event for us.

We began our session by using our teamwork and collaboration skills to inflate a giant paddleboard to be used later and to carry the canoes down to the lake.

We then launched from the shore and carried out some drills to practise our paddling. After we had perfected our canoeing and paddling technique, we travelled around the lake to play some games, testing our speed and agility in the water.

By the end we were all remarkably wet after having been splashed by our fellow cadets and for some, even having had an unplanned dip in the lake!

The final part of the morning's activities included the giant paddleboard that we had previously inflated.

We were challenged to get all of our group on the paddleboard at the same time, which unsurprisingly led to disaster with many cadets including myself falling headfirst into the lake! We concluded using the paddleboard as a waterslide into the lake.

After a re-energising lunch break, it was time to head back out to the lake to complete the sailing part of the water-sports day with Phillip Prince.

Phillip reminded us about the basic rules and techniques for sailing and then we launched our dinghies and set sail.

The conditions were becoming increasingly windy and so it was good fun using this to our advantage to pick up speed. At times this was also slightly precarious with some cadets capsizing or being thrown out of their dinghy, though this added to the overall enjoyment and excitement of the day, allowing us to be able to adapt and overcome the challenges of the changing weather.

Sailing was an amazing experience, and as a group, we are all very grateful for being given this opportunity, with huge thanks to Jumper, Phil and Phillip Prince who all kindly offered their guidance and expertise to allow us to have an enjoyable and memorable afloat day.

On point

SHERBORNE'S CCF RN Cadets have had a marvellous couple of days down at Jupiter Point on their Summer Term Field Trip.

CCF RN/RM HQ Chief Instructors, Alice Moore and Dave White, had everything perfectly organised - just couldn't sort out the lack of any wind!

Even that did nothing to affect the cadets' enjoyment of what was a wonderful and memorable trip.

The cadets were instructed throughout by Graham Nurser, Laurie Mason and Stephen Perry.



Edwards reign

FOR the second time in a row, students from the CCF RN Cadets section at King Edward's School in Birmingham won the West Midlands Regional Field Gun Competition.

The crew took the title in a competition-best time of 2min 40sec, overcoming a strong challenge from Warwickshire Army Cadet Forces.

New memorial to those lost on Glamorgan

FORTY-ONE years to the day the only ship to survive an Exocet missile strike returned home to Portsmouth, a new memorial was dedicated to HMS Glamorgan.

A plaque was unveiled and tree planted in the Royal Naval Association's Memorial Garden, remembering the 14 members of her ship's company lost in the Falklands.

The ship was struck by an Exocet – possibly the most feared weapon in Argentina's arsenal, having already knocked out HMS Sheffield and the support ship Atlantic Conveyor – after bombarding enemy positions around Port Stanley on June 12 1982... just two days before the war ended.



The response of the crew during and after the attack ensured Glamorgan did not suffer their fate, but the missile still inflicted widespread damage; the hangar was smashed, the fully-fuelled and armed Wessex helicopter exploded and fires raged in the galley below. Thirteen men were killed, a 14th succumbed to his injuries a couple of months later.

All 14 are commemorated with a memorial window in Portsmouth Cathedral, a bench at the National Memorial Arboretum and a slab of Glamorgan granite near the spot in the Falklands from where the missile was launched.

Now there's a fourth in Portsmouth Naval Base.

The dedication was attended by many members of the ship's company and family, wreaths were laid by Admiral Sir Ian Forbes who was operations officer on Glamorgan and Vice Admiral John McAnally on behalf of the RNA.

Remembrance Crosses were laid in memory of the 14 who lost their lives with one in memory of those who have died since the conflict.

"We felt that there was still one link missing in the chain and Portsmouth Dockyard was our home port," Commander Alan Watt, Chairman of the HMS Glamorgan Falklands Association, said of the decision to dedicate a new memorial which is attached to a catalpa bignonioides nana tree.

"To have the opportunity to have something in the naval base in the Royal Naval Association's memorial garden, which already includes benches for two of the ships lost; HMS Coventry and HMS Sheffield, seemed extremely fitting."

Scope for success with Dreadnought contract

A SCOTTISH firm which has been providing the Silent Service with their 'eyes' since World War 1 has been awarded a £169m contract for periscopes for next-generation Dreadnought submarines.

Thales Glasgow has been selected to provide state-of-the-art 'optronic masts' – 21st Century successors to the iconic periscope – for all four future nuclear deterrent submarines (HMS Dreadnought, Valiant, Warspite, and George VI).

The Glasgow arm of the huge international defence firm traces its history back to 1917 and Glaswegian engineering and optical firm Barr and Stroud, who were asked to produce a periscope for new Royal Navy M-class submarines.

Since then the firm, which was taken over by Thales in 2000, has become a world-leader in optics/periscope design and progress through to the modern-day optronic masts.

These masts – periscopes which do not penetrate a submarine's hull, but do record a 360-degree digital image for the command team to analyse at their leisure – also provide night vision and thermal imaging and support communications on top of assisting with targeting, navigation and situational awareness.

Such masts are already fitted to all five Astute-class submarines in service with the Royal Navy (and will be installed on the final two boats in the class, Agincourt and Agamemnon).

The contract for the Dreadnought 'integrated optronic combat system' masts for the Dreadnoughts will sustain more than 150 jobs – a fraction of the 30,000 people across the UK involved in the broader programme to deliver the four new submarines.



Navy win against RAF but Army take T20

THE thwack of bat on ball and the cries of 'howzat' could be heard on a gloriously warm and sunny day at the beautiful historic ground of Arundel Castle.

A total of three matches in a T20 tournament between the Army, Air Force and Navy were played against the stunning backdrop of the castle, nestled behind the woods.

In the first match, the Royal Navy opened bat and between the two opening batters, Lt Louise Worsfold and Surg Lt Cdr Anna Sales put on 51 runs before Worsfold was bowled out in the seventh over for 33.

The run rate started to slow and the next wicket to fall was Cdr Charlotte Yemm for 2 followed by Sales run-out in the next over who scored 16, after that the only score of note was by PO Fiesha Green, with a plucky 13 to her name.

The final score for the RN was 110 for 7 wickets from 20 overs, with 36 runs being attributable to extras.

The RAF got off to a shaky start losing an early wicket to Worsfold, followed another wicket to Sales in the 4th over and by the



tenth over, looked to be in an unobtainable lead, with the RAF 36 for 5; but, if nothing else, the RAF were tenacious and among strong support from their team mates, they applied the pressure to the Royal Navy, who started to wobble in their bowling resulting in a nail-biting finish of 108 for 9 wickets from 20 overs and a narrow 2 run win by the Navy. During the rest of the competition, the

Army showed their strength and dominated the next two games, with strong and convincing wins against the RAF and Royal Navy, to retain the Inter-Services T20 trophy.

If you are a cricketer and want to join in this positive journey of the RNCA, please contact your Unit PTI or Sports Representative or email Lt Cdr BJ Smith (CO HMS Victory) at Brian.Smith120@mod.gov.uk



Bases triumph on pitch

A COMBINED team of footballers from HMS Sultan and HMS Collingwood took the glory in the Royal Navy men's overs 30's 6-a-side tournament at the home of England football elite training, St George's Park.

After coming through the group stage with victories over HMS Queen Elizabeth A (3-1) and HMS Heron (3-0), a 2-2 draw against CTCRM saw them top their group and qualify for the final.

Up against a team from MOD Main Building the combined Sultan and Collingwood team proved too strong for their opponents, winning the match, to claim the trophy, 4-2.

Picture: LPT Elliott Clark



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COMMANDO Helicopter Force engineer CPO Tim Drury took part in Exercise Guanaco in Patagonia. He looks back on the hiking expedition, which followed a mountain course in Wales and some adventurous training in Scotland.

The travelling to the Torres Del Paine National Park in Chile was exciting. I was full of adrenaline, excitement to what the journey would bring.

The first stop Chile, Santiago, the capital, and once settled at the hotel we decided to explore. The city itself was fascinating, loads of people watching to be had, different cultures excited me and cafes, restaurants for food and sociable drinks.

The next stop was about a three-to-four hour airplane ride to South Chile, Puerto Natales from Santiago airport. Breakfast consisted of Cheesy, Hammy, Eggy but not in the usual format we know in the Military. A continental breakfast with chocolate biscuits, fairly warmish watery yoghurts in Strawberry and Vanilla flavour, Nescafe Coffee, cornflakes, and ability to cook bread slices seemed to be the breakfast of choice for this hotel and others were similar.

The next day we hiked from the hotel to the bus departure which was about 10-15 minutes' walk and we had highlighted the location by visiting it the day before and checking it was the correct location.

This campsite had everything you needed, warm showers, indoor

toilets, cooking facilities, a restaurant and, if needed, you could rent the majority of the equipment, but it cannot be guaranteed so if you intend to do this ensure everything is confirmed.

No hiking was conducted on this day, and we settled for the night.

Day 1 – Britanico Lookout

This hike covered around 29km, lasted about eight hours with a total ascent of roughly 1,420m.

We decided to start this leg at 0800 with just a rucksack with warmers, waterproofs and snacks for lunch including water. The weather started around 7 degrees Celsius with elements of rain, clouds and limited visibility when climbing.

Adjusting to the climate was the key for me and it took time to adjust correctly. The hike itself was interesting, similar to the lakes in Scotland and Wales but more refined to tracks with loose shale, and rocks.

The terrain varied throughout, and the climb warmed you up. Some suspension bridges were walked across, and this was pretty cool. The final lookouts at times had great views and quickly became quite cold at height when taking pictures at the top, leading to gloves and warm equipment being worn.

Day 2 – Central Point

Hiking commenced once awoke around 0900. Legs were good, feet okay, and boots dryish. This 25km hike took eight hours 21mins with a total ascent 1,273m.

Some of the journey had been undertaken the previous day to camp Italiano but we turned off here to proceed with fully packed Bergens around 18kg to Central Point. This walk I found tough towards the end but it had good views, the weather was good, and I was feeling good. Again, we walked fairly quickly and at the end I felt maybe a little tired.

The time with the weight was long and this had affected my feet with some signs of blisters.

We were on ration packs

now; the calories were good and meals edible. Wi-Fi was down at the campsite.

Day 3 – Seron

Hiking commenced around 0930. We covered 13.64km in around six hours. My morale was good and the weather was warm with sunny spells. This walk reminded me a little of being around the Lake District.

Day 4 – Dickson

We hiked 18.39km at an average pace of 4km/h. Gortex was required at the start of this and with Gortex comes a lot of heat. I seem to get really hot in this and it messes with my heart rate.

It was quite a cloudy day heading west around the northern part of O circuit. The weather involved some heavy raining, slight wind.

The views of the northern part had lakes, some forestry tracks. Camp Dickson was in a beautiful location and the lake was close by.

Day 5 - Los Perros

We woke up to a beautiful view. The ground was snowy, and air was cold but manageable with the good old layering system. The tent was a little icy to put away but we managed it. The walk itself was 13km and was extremely forestry with little views apart from when we started to ascend.

The build of snow had excited me and finally get out the slushy muddy forest had completely wet the boots and changes of socks were required.

Day 6 – Grey

It was chilly and I was glad to be moving onto the glacier. The indifferent sleep I had here made the morning a little tougher to manage.

The start of the 16km recorded walk took eight and half hours but I missed the first 1km incline.

Once we got through the forestry part the world started to open up and you could see why people from all over the world visit

Patagonia and Torres Del Paine.

The 5ft deep snow provided a slow climb but the weather was beautiful, that dry cold reminded me of skiing adventures.

An iced over river provided some fun and one wet boot later we climbed to the summit. When we reached the top I felt quite amazing.

The climb itself wasn't the most intense and highest gradient but the views at the top: WOW! We have the memories and pictures and stayed here for a while.

Although I didn't know it the worst was yet to come...the descent.

It started off fine through the snow, people slipping and sliding on deep snow having a laugh (if only I had skis). When it started to get forestry then came thick deep ice. It was an ice rink.

For the first time in this the walking poles aided. I had not used them throughout the Exped but said I will try them for this day. I wish I had used them all the time now I knew what they provided for the hiker. I must have slipped over about ten times and also sled on bum down some of the paths.

Day 7-Paine Grande

We headed out and headed to back to where it all began and Paine Grande. This 12km walk was ahead of us and everyone was high in morale from knowing what they had achieved the day before and also personnel knew it was homeward bound pretty much with lots of travelling to be undertaken.

The grey glacier walks, and grey lake provided sights which I probably will only see once in my lifetime.

A few condor whizzed past and the swoosh they made, I absolutely could of boarded one of them and caught a ride home. Huge Birds.

The views along the way highlighted the grey lake mostly until we arrived at Paine Grande.

This was a good easy hike back.

Travelling back to the UK was long as expected with many changes along the way. I wouldn't exchange my 14-day adventure for any amount of money.



Walk on the wild side

Royal Navy senior rate reflects on AT adventure in Patagonia

Roaring success

TEAM Collingwood, made up of volunteers from MPGS and MGS personnel across various sites around Portsmouth undertook the annual Chichester Dragon Boat Race.

The event had 12 other teams from local businesses, organisations, and scouts, including a team from the Army Red Caps, who were the 2022 winners.

The event was organised to raise money for CancerWise, an independent charity that supports cancer patients and their family members.

Throughout the day each participating team took part in three heat races, with some going on to compete in the final.

In the first race, Team Collingwood faced the formidable force that was Chichester College, but they easily swept aside their opponents and set the fastest time of the day at 00:57 seconds, which was a particularly high

point of the day for the team.

Team Collingwood did remarkably well as they made it to the final, but unfortunately, they were beaten by 'Real Red Caps' for the second year running, to take second place overall.

Lance Corporal Richard Watson said: "As we congratulated them, we repeated our final word from last year, next year we'll have you!"

Staff Sgt Arnie Fern, who participated in the event for Team Collingwood said: "It was a good day out and the second year we had competed. None of us had trained for the race but it's a nice way of combining phys with raising money for charity."

"We are already talking about competing again and hopefully beating the 'Real Red Caps' next year."

The team raised a total of £160 through the Just Giving page.

Picture: Keith Woodland



New track for RN team

THE Royal Navy motorcycle team raced at the Croft Circuit in North Yorkshire for the first time.

Four of the team were at the event with one newcomer to the team. So we welcomed Paul to the team and wished him luck on his first race weekend. Ryan, Brian and Harry made up the rest of the team.

First out on race day was Brian on the new team Aprilia RS660. He finished 12th with a best of 1:34.

Ryan was out next, and built on his confidence on the new track and made some great progress after a steady start on the team BMW S1000RR. In the end he managed to get to 21st with a best time of 1:31.

Harry was in the mix next and had a great chance to get ahead in the Jamie Adam Memorial Trophy. Having got some of his braking issues under control he gave it his best and managed to make up some good places and had a great battle. He managed 12th overall and 11th in class at the end with his best time being 1:32.

Paul was up in his first ever race. He set off and made some great strides in getting the nerves settled, coming home in 34th with his best being 1:50.

The following day Brian was first out the traps again starting in 13th. He finished in 11th overall and 7th in class, managing a 1:33 on the twin. Race 2 saw him start from 12th and got a cracking start. After pushing his way through the pack in the 1st 2 corners he battled his way to 9th overall and 6th in class with a 1:32 best time.

Next was Ryan with his first race starting in 22nd, he pushed hard getting a best time of 1:30.5 and getting 18th overall and 16th in class.

Harry was out next in the 600 class with a 14th grid start. He was locked in another battle that had him pushing to his best time of the weekend of a 1:30.7 and 9th overall with an 8th in class.

Last to go was our new rider, Paul. Race number 2 of his career saw him in 35th on the grid. He again learned loads and finished the race in 32nd with his best being 1:48 in the race.

Brian won the trophy, beating Harry by one point.

If you're interested in representing the service as a motorcycle racer or helping us as pit crew, contact us on RNRMRRT@hotmail.com or search for us on social media.

RIDERS OF THE (DUST) STORM

HMS RALEIGH hosted this year's Royal Navy Royal Marine Cycling Association (RNRMCA) Cyclocross Championships, with riders from across the Fleet taking part.

In blistering heat the Royal Navy's top cyclocross riders took part in a race around an undulating off-road course within the training estate at HMS Raleigh.

Cycling in a 45-minute race, the riders tackled the dry and dusty course, where little shade gave any relief for the relentless Cornish sunshine.

Early on one rider took a nasty tumble and the race was suspended to allow safe treatment and transfer off the course. The race then restarted with the challenge to complete as many laps in 30 minutes.

Tackling the sharp incline and rapid descent in the vicinity of the RAS Rig and Triumph Firefighting School, the riders then followed the fence-line, tackling a couple of cheeky jumps and a gravel pit.

The overall winner was Corporal Ben Savage, with Officer Cadet Seb Siswick second and LMT George Comins third.

The fastest female was L/Cpl Bonita Deathridge and the winner of the veterans' category was Colonel Si Rogers RM.

Before the actual race, a few of the experienced riders delivered some grassroots training to a group of Phase 2 recruits around a shortened version of the course, showing them the techniques required to be safe and successful in the discipline.

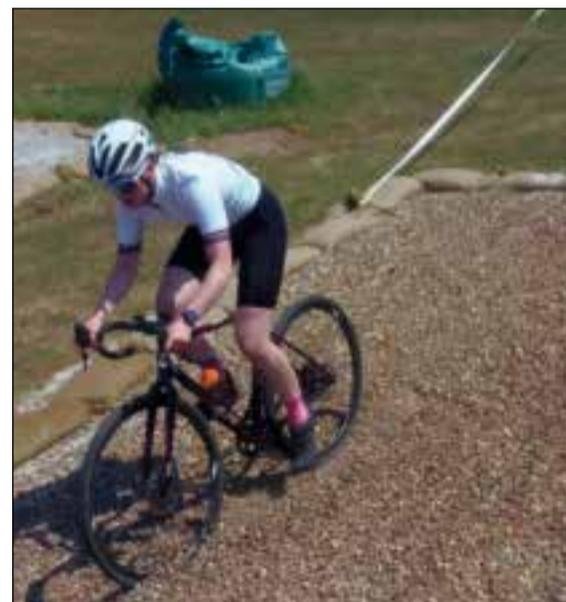
In a competitive 20-minute race afterwards, AB2 Beveridge was deemed the fastest rider and received an Amazon gift card, donated by the RNRMCA and presented by the Chair of the Association, Colonel Rogers.

Emphasising the importance to keep fit and to push your personal boundaries, Colonel Rogers told the recruits: "Cyclocross allows you to develop sharp decision making skills as you negotiate the terrain."

"You need to be aware of your surroundings, what others are doing and the implications of your own actions. All in quick time."

Thanking them for taking part, he added: "Anyone can give Royal Navy Cycling a go, not only in Cyclocross but also Road-Racing, Time Trials and Mountain Biking. Look at our website and get involved!"

Further details on the RNRMCA can be found at navycycling.co.uk



From left, AB Beveridge, Col Si Rogers; Cpl Ben Savage and L/Cpl Bonita Deathridge

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Deaths

WO1 Ian Drackett-Case. Served from 1963 to 1985 in HMS Ganges, HMS Portsmouth, HMS Sultan, MHS Terror (Singapore), HMS Triumph, HMS Torquay, HMS Ark Royal, HMS Galatea, HMS Drake, HMS Devonport, HMS Rayleigh, served in the Falklands War and last port was Portland Bill. He was a training officer at HMS Rayleigh and Fire Chief during his last few years of service. Member of Royal British Legion. Died June 17, aged 80.



Rod Spinks. Served from February 1957 to 1969 as Royal Marines Commando with 43



Cdo, 40 Cdo, Burma Camp and as a reservist for his final three years of service. Died June 6, aged 83.

Cdr John (Mike) Dickinson RNR. HMS Montrose, Cuxton, Kedleston, Brereton, Hodgoston, Stubington, Kilmorey, Helmsdale, Spey, Helford, Peterel, Archer. Died July 1, aged 80.

Eric 'Kipper' Herron BEM. Served from 1977 to 1989 in HMS Coruna and HM Submarines Dolphin, Rorqual, Otter, Sea Lion, Osiris and Neptune. Then HMS Rooke in Gibraltar and Royal Navy Communications Team. Died aged 81.

CPO Frederick W Shelley. Joined HMS Ganges in 1955 as a boy seaman and returned later as an instructor. Served on numerous ships including Kingfisher, Manxman and Naiad. Shore bases HMS Pembroke (East Camp), Rook, Rosyth, Vernon retired in 1986 after 30 years in the Royal Navy. Died July 1, aged 83. Missed greatly by Marcia, his wife of 63 years and their four children.

CPO(WEA) Gordon Wayne Cameron. Joined Submarine Service in 1980 and served until 2008. Served in HMS Resolution, Renown, Vengeance, and Victorious. Died on June 12.

Ask Jack

Commodore Christopher Belton: The Royal Bahamas Defence Force are trying to contact Cdre Belton, who was based in Nassau from 1980 to 1983. Cdre Belton is believed to have returned to the UK and was based at Devonport until 1985. Anyone who can help locate him is asked to contact **Dean Goodey@fcd.gov.uk**

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 of the 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 the Lord Austin survivors. I am in contact with the daughter of the Commander and the son of one of the crew of USCG 56 and we are wanting to share information with any of the

survivors' families about their rescue. We have the names of the seven crew members who were lost but none of the names of the survivors. If anyone has information regarding the survivors, they can contact me by email at **sggipson@msn.com**. **Gary Gipson**

FRADU: I would like to contact the following former Fleet Requirements and Air Direction Unit Hunter pilots who mounted detachments at RAF Gibraltar from 1980 to 1983: Tommy Thompson, Godfrey Underwood, Simon Willoughby and Derek Morter.

Tony Fairburn, Sqn Ldr (Rtd) tony.fairburn@btinternet.com

Johnny Craig: We are trying to contact Johnny for our 40th secondary school reunion. We know he joined the Royal Navy and served in submarines. He left St Columba's

College in Dublin in 1982, aged around 18.

William Simpson Whpsimpson@gmail.com

HMS Plym: I would like to trace the River-class frigate's unofficial timber crest. She left Devonport reserve in 1951/2 and deployed on Operation Hurricane in the Monte Bello Islands of Western Australia, where she was destroyed in the UK's first nuclear weapon test.

The ship was stripped beforehand and I have discovered an auction house sold a badge said to be from the frigate (K271) in 2007 but I believe it to be unofficial, something confirmed to me by Chatham Dockyard Historical Society.

Geoff Robinson 7 Mountfield, Borough Green, Sevenoaks, Kent TN15 8HX

Reunions

564 Artificer Apprentice entry: Our 55th reunion will be held in Warwick for those who joined at HMS Fiscard on September 9 1968. For details of the reunion held over the weekend of September 8 to 10 please call IOW Tours on 01983 405116 or contact Clive Adshead at **clive.adshead@virginmedia.com**

HMS Troubridge: Final Commission Association 1966-69 2023 reunion will be at the North Euston Hotel, The Esplanade, Fleetwood FY7 6BN, September 25 to 29. Contact Bryan Pace at **Romft1@GMail.com**

Series 49, HMS Fiscard: A reunion to mark the 60th anniversary of those artificers who joined on September 9 and 10, 1963, is planned for September this year. Venue to be decided. Anyone interested to contact: **alan.brown44@gmail.com** or the Fiscard Association and Old Caledonia Artificer Apprentices Association.

Friends of HMS Eagle: Reunion will be held at the Queen's Hotel, Southsea, from October 27 to 29. For details please contact Danny du Feu at **ddf.photography@gmail.com** or 07711 083465.

HMS Undaunted, Eagle and Yarmouth Association: The 2023 Reunion Dinner & Dance is confirmed at

the Bournemouth Carlton Hotel, East Overcliff Drive, Bournemouth BH1 3DN from Friday October 20 to Monday October 23 2023. Contact Whiskey Walker on 01268 58041 or email: **whiskey666@outlook.com** or **andyjmcaini@gmail.com** for further details.

Loch Class Frigates Association: The final annual reunion takes place at the Royal Maritime Hotel and Club from October 6 to 8. Contact Andrew Nunn at **andrew.nunn@blueyonder.co.uk**, phone 0117 9505835 or visit **www.lochclassfrigates.com**

Royal Navy Photographic Branch: Reunion takes place at The Liner Hotel, Liverpool from September 29 to October 2. All former and serving photos plus wives/partners and guests are very welcome to help celebrate 104 years since the branch was formed. Meet and greet on Friday evening. Saturday, visits and tours around Liverpool City & Royal Docks. Saturday evening consists of a Nautical Extravaganza experience, gala dinner & traditional 'Up Spirits'. For further details please contact Danny du Feu. Email: **ddf.photography@gmail.com**; Tel: 07711 083465.

HMS Lowestoft Association: Our 2023 reunion will take place at the Alexandra House Hotel, Swindon SN4

0QJ from September 29 to October 1. All who served in Lowestoft during her RN service (1961-1985) are welcome to attend (including wives/partners/guests). Book direct with SF Events on 01452 813173, for further details and a booking form please email: **admin@hmslowestoft.uk**

HMS Blake Association: Our inaugural reunion and annual meeting takes place at the Royal Maritime Hotel in Portsmouth on November 3 to 5. Call 02392 982182 Ext. 1 to book your accommodation using code GA000510. Full details on **www.hmsblake.co.uk** and HMS Blake Facebook page.

HMS Ark Royal: A reunion is planned at the Wallasey branch of the RNA from Friday November 17 to Sunday November 19. For details please contact Gordon Weir at **gordyweir@gmail.com** or John Williams at **jwill085@gmail.com**

HMS Bulwark, Albion & Centaur Association and HMS Tenby Association: The 2024 reunion is confirmed at the Beaches Hotel, Prestatyn, North Wales, from May 10 to 13. Contact Secretary Denis Askham at 07773651213 or email **askhamd3@gmail.com**. For HMS Tenby contact David Macalister on **dmac121dm@gmail.com**

£50 PRIZE PUZZLE



THE mystery ship in the June edition of *Navy News* (right) was the Beachy Head-class repair ship HMS Girdle Ness, formerly known as Penlee Point.

M Powell, from Wokingham, wins £50 for sending us the correct answers. This month's mystery ship (above) is a Town-class light cruiser laid down on the River Tyne in October 1934. She was decommissioned in 1958.

1. What was her name and 2. What was she originally destined to be called?

Please complete the coupon and send it to Mystery Picture, Navy News, Navy Command, Leach Building, HMS Excellent, Portsmouth PO2 8BY.

We will also accept emailed entries to **subs@royalnavymail.mod.uk** with



August Mystery Ship in the header.

Coupons and emails giving the correct answers will go into a prize draw to establish a winner. Entries must be received by September 12. More than one entry can be submitted but photocopies cannot be accepted. Do not include anything else in your envelope: no correspondence can be entered into and no entry returned.

The winner will be announced in our October edition.

MYSTERY PICTURE 342

Name

Address

My answers: (1)

(2)

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.

Reservists honoured at Wildfire's divisions

PRINCE Michael of Kent was guest of honour as Naval Reservists from northwest London and the Home Counties paraded for HMS Wildfire's Annual Ceremonial Divisions.

The unit - which is based inside the UK's military Northwood headquarters - is the hub for maritime reservists from across Middlesex, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire.

Scores of Wildfire sailors were joined on the parade ground by a string of local Sea Cadets (TS St Albans, Renown, and Whaddon), Merchant Taylor's Combined Cadet Force, the Hertfordshire Royal Marines Cadets and the Northwood Royal Navy Volunteer Band.

Watching, in addition to families, were local dignitaries, affiliates and the Commander Maritime Reserves, Commodore Mel Robinson.

Beyond an impressive display of military pomp and ceremony, divisions allowed Wildfire to honour its best and brightest who have stood out over the past 12 months with Prince Michael - Commodore-in-Chief of the Royal Naval Reserve - presenting a number of awards.

The Top Achiever Prize (Gloria Ademokun Trophy) went to Lieutenant Andrew Crawford, recognising the qualities dedication, enthusiasm and determination Gloria, a nursing officer, possessed.

Lt Crawford, who runs an operations team for Metro Bank by day, is an amphibious warfare officer, coordinating the movement of Royal Marines from assault ships to shore. When not deployed, he's Wildfire's training officer and was activated as part of the military response to the Covid pandemic.

The winner of best Initial Naval Trainee (Rating) was AB2 William Wilson who would have received the Matthews Trophy (named after Wildfire stalwart of 40 years, WO1 Tony Matthews, who retired last year) had he not been undergoing training at HMS Raleigh. He works as a project manager for Premiership giants Chelsea.

The officer counterpart of the award, the MacKenzie Trophy for best initial trainee went to OC Karlis Zivtins.

A metallurgical services engineer at Pyrotek, analysing metal quality in aluminium, defect root cause analysis in products, and the performance of ceramics in molten metal environments, Karlis is also a volunteer



Clockwise from above, Lt Andrew Crawford received the Top Achiever Prize from Prince Michael of Kent; OC Karlis Zivtins; AB Rowell Jarman; AB Brendan Carr; The Prince inspects the parade



instructor with Milton Keynes Sea Cadets, TS Whaddon.

Able Seaman Rowell Jarman - a portfolio manager specialising in payroll and HR software - left with the Salamander Prize donated by the Worshipful Company of Firefighters to Wildfire to present to the sailor who has consistently displayed selfless commitment, perseverance and reliability.

The final award was Wildfire's Commanding Officer's prize for the stand-out individual on the unit's books who has proved to be an asset

not just to Wildfire, but the wider Royal Naval Reserve. That person is Able Seaman Brendan Carr, a security industry expert and freelance producer/videographer, who has used those day-job skills to support initiatives linked to the Maritime Reserves transformation.

The event also saw Commanding Officer Lieutenant Commander Ian Dorward stand down as Equerry to His Royal Highness, handing over Royal duties to Lt Cdr Francis Heritage after five years in post.

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Submissions for the Deaths, Reunions and Ask Jack columns in next month's Noticeboard must be received by **August 12 2023**

The Commemorative Cold War Medal

AWARD is proud to have struck the commemorative Cold War Medal to pay tribute and honour those who served in Britain's and our allies Armed Forces from 1945 to 1991, a period of world confrontation during which our country was no more than 4 minutes away from annihilation.

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The Medal

Obverse: The obverse of the medal comprises the rolled-up flags of the three main players in the Cold War, the Soviet Union is being contained by the United States and the United Kingdom showing the dates 1945-1991.

Reverse: The reverse of the medal features the Russian Bear, set on top of a fortified wall, clutching a missile which is symbolic of the USSR stand-off, confronted by the Lion representing the forces of the United Kingdom and its allies. The Eagle of the United States completes the combined opposition to the Soviet Union at the time of the Cold War.

Ribbon: The ribbon has a configuration similar to that commonly used on Soviet medal ribbons with the red, white and blue on the left edge representing the Allies and the bright red of the Soviet flag on the right.

Medal Engraving: Your service number, rank, name & initials and service or regiment can be professionally engraved on the edge of the medal.

Individually Engraved Clasps: Specially engraved clasps (max of 20 characters) designed to match the finish of the medal highlight the details of your service.



Code	Description	Price
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