ROYAL NAVY

NAVY NEWS

MARCH 2025

DASHING DUKE

WAVES crash over the bow of HMS Iron Duke as the Type 23 frigate shadows a Russian task group in the English Channel.

See Page 5

Picture: LPhot Daniel Bladen

Inside: ■ LANCASTER'S BIRD ■ SUTHERLAND RETURNS ■ RM IN ARCTIC

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THE ART OF THE ARCTIC

THE WORLD has become more uncertain in the last month, but there is something that is immovable amid the chaos of war in Europe and the political back and forth.

The UK Commando Force and Commando Helicopter Force are primed and ready to operate effectively in the Arctic Circle, in one of the planet's most inhospitable environments.

The backdrop of mountains and fjords are beautiful but brutal – and training is gruelling but vital for the protection of close NATO ally Norway and the alliance's northern flank.

The UK Commando Force – with Royal Marines at its heart – are rolling out new kit, including new rifle, the KS-1, and snowmobiles for faster and more effective Arctic warfare.

To highlight their continued development, innovation, and dedication to Arctic warfare, the Royal Marines hosted a number of high-profile visitors – from NATO, the Joint Expeditionary Force, the Ministry of Defence in the UK, and representatives from allies Norway and Sweden.

The Royal Navy's Second Sea Lord, Vice Admiral Martin Connell, was also in attendance as the Commandos laid on demonstrations and held discussions on their vital role in Northern Norway at Camp Viking in Skjold (74 miles south of Tromsø).

VAdm Connell said: "It's been a fascinating 24 hours inside the Arctic Circle with the UK Commando Force as they hone their winter warfighting skills, working alongside our Norwegian allies as we sharpen our commitment to NATO.

"Not many people can operate in this unforgiving environment."

The guests experienced first-hand the harsh conditions in which the Royal Marines, Commando Helicopter Force (CHF), and Army Commandos train for operations in the High North. Temperatures are known to plummet to -35°C, and polar nights mean the sun doesn't 'rise' until the end of January.

The visitors travelled in Wildcat and Merlin helicopters, and in the Commando Force's Viking-protected all-terrain vehicles of the Armoured Support Group (ASG), and were treated to an explosive demonstration of how the Commando Force would enable the precision targeting of high-value enemy targets.

They were able to get hands-on with the latest equipment and speak to those Commandos currently undergoing training as part of Winter Deployment 25.

Meanwhile, Royal Navy medics worked with Norwegian emergency services to rescue casualties buried under avalanches in critical training.

Medics from Plymouth-based 30 Commando Information Exploitation Group are required to tend to injuries wherever the UK Commando Force is operating, including in the extreme cold of Northern Norway – where they are currently undertaking winter training.

That means they must be prepared to deal with a whole range of injuries and ailments caused by the cold and the hostile Arctic environment, including avalanches – which can occur after snow slides rapidly from a steep incline after heavy snowfall.

The Norwegian armed forces, police and search and rescues team and air ambulance are deeply knowledgeable and must be well-prepared for the dangers of avalanches – making them ideal tutors for the British medics.

Together, they responded to a mock avalanche – from initial callout to rescue and recovery of casualties – in Norway's mountainous Helligskogen, near the border with Sweden.

"I have taken part in multiple medical scenarios in the past few years, but nothing has compared to this exercise," said Medical Assistant Madelaine Wilson, of 30 Commando's Medical Section. "It was very beneficial for all parties involved.

"It put everything into perspective of how fast you need to work in a cold weather environment and how vital it is to get casualties out of the elements, as shock can soon deteriorate and turn into hypothermia or even worse hypothermic cardiac arrest, as seen within the training exercise.

"The use of Norwegian services especially the air ambulance, really made the exercise feel realistic and highlighted the importance of cohesion and good communication within the team, throughout the exercise."

The medics worked with 30 Commando's Surveillance and Reconnaissance Squadron Group (SRS) – the eyes and ears of the UK Commando Force that are specially selected from across tri-service then trained to work ahead of the main thrust of allied forces to forge the way ahead, often deep behind



Images by LPhot Finn Stainer-Hutchins, RN POTY

enemy lines.

Crucially, SRS are highly-trained in Arctic and mountain warfare – being made up of specialist Royal Marines Mountain Leaders – and are masters of the cold and all that it can throw at them.

In this realistic training scenario, SRS and Norwegian search and rescue teams were called in to clear the area and locate casualties, making it safe for medical teams to come in.



In total, four casualties were triaged and treated at the remote mountainous site of the avalanche – with limited visibility and worsening conditions – before being evacuated to the nearest hospital.

For Commando Helicopter Force, nothing says 'thank you' quite like a special delivery of three years' supply of logs for the wood fire...

Commando Helicopter Force Merlin helicopters from 845 Naval Air Squadron once again showed their gratitude to the rural population of northern Norway by flying tonnes of wood into remote cabins to help stranded hikers.

The force sends a detachment of battlefield Wildcat and Merlin helicopters to Bardufoss for Operation Clockwork each winter.

Its personnel, vehicles and aircraft are granted almost total access to the land as they hone their individual and collective winter warfare skills.

As they do in the UK, the fliers thank their hosts: in Britain farmers in the Yeovilton area are invited on to the air base for a day's look around and helicopter flight.

And in Troms County, the commando aviators help the Troms Turlag hiking association which maintains a series of huts across this part of northern Norway – Dividalshyttene, or Dividal huts after the national park of the same name.

The cabins are open for use by hikers throughout the year as stopover shelters during fairer weather and also emergency refuges.

Though temperatures in the Bardu region right now are hovering just below freezing, they have dropped to nearly -20 Celsius this month and can fall as low as 30 or more degrees below zero.

At those temperatures even the commandos call it a day and retreat indoors, as should any trekkers hiking/skiing around the Bardu landscape – and yes, there are some.

The remote locations and few tracks mean the huts aren't especially accessible in summer, while in winter you'll only reach them on skis or tracked vehicles like the Commandos' BVs – and it would take them numerous trips to deliver such a heavy/bulky load.

Bundled into 600kg loads, instead the logs were slung beneath Merlin Mk4 helicopters and delivered three years' supplies of fuel to the remote cabins in a fraction of the time it would take by ground transport.

After a month or so training personnel to first survive, then work in the harsh Arctic environment, Clockwork shifts to operating the helicopters either from the air base at Bardufoss or in the field.

This year the focus is on working with/from forward operating bases – small detachments peppered around the wilderness which can offer fuel, food, ammo and basic support to the helicopters to allow them to complete their missions... including log delivery.

Nearly 2,000 personnel from across the UK Commando Force are operating in Northern Norway's harsh mountainous terrain during Winter Deployment 25, as they underscore the UK's commitment to the defence of the High North.

The Commandos are currently building up to an exercise that will test allies' collective ability to defend Norway from invasion. Exercise Joint Viking – the largest military exercise in Norway this year – is about defending the strategically important region.

More than 10,000 troops from seven nations are set to participate in Joint Viking across Norway's complicated coastline of fjords, inlets, and islands – and inland across the mountainous terrain.

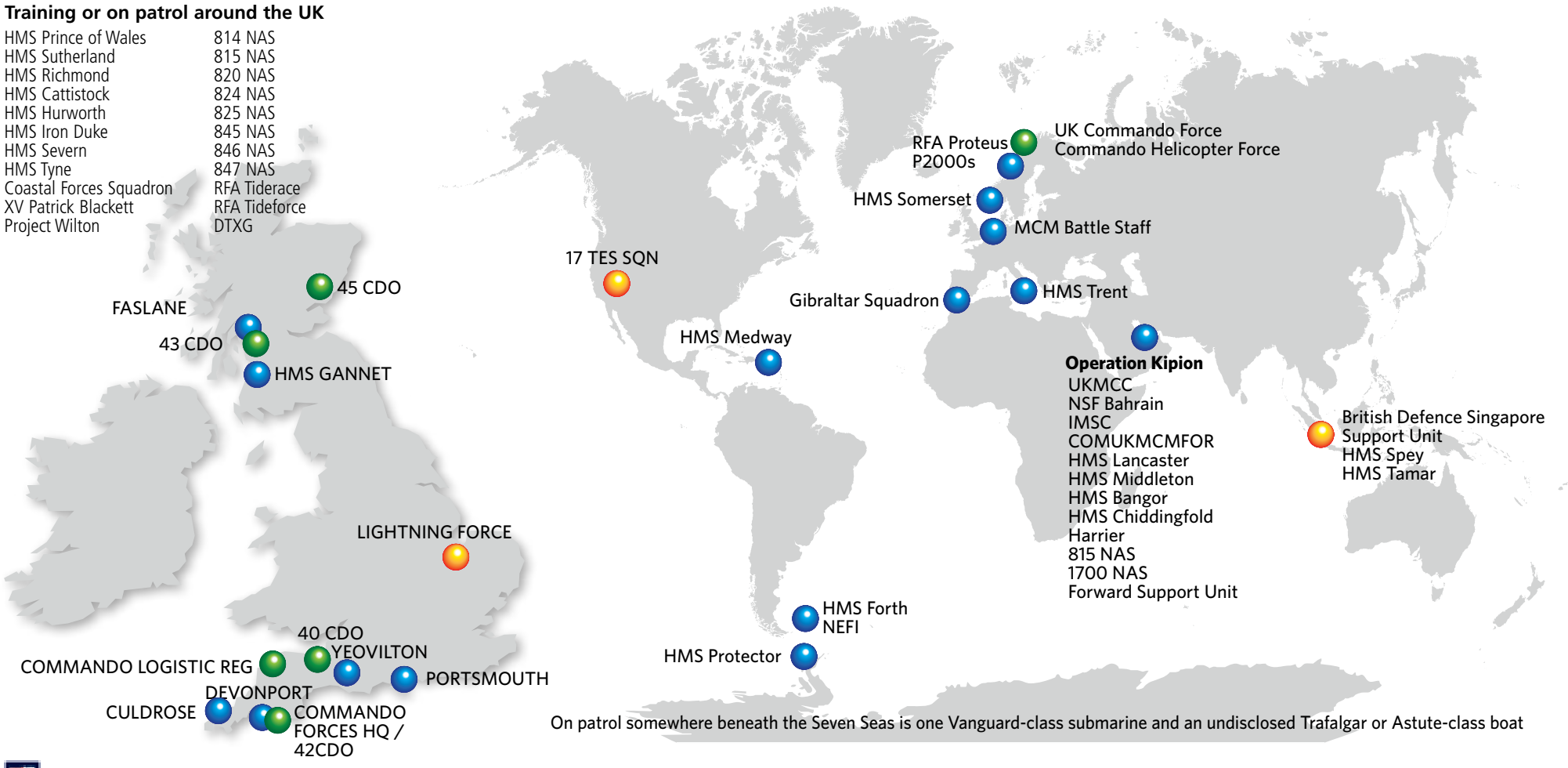
Primarily, Joint Viking will take place in Troms County in the northern reaches of the country, inside the Arctic Circle.

The British element will form the Littoral Response Group (North) for the exercise, bringing together amphibious ships, landing craft, helicopters, and troops under one potent force for raiding operations from the coast.

The Royal Navy task group is brought together to respond to crises and events in Europe's strategic waterways and chokepoints. Its sister group, Littoral Response Group (South), has the same responsibility for the Mediterranean and regions east of the Suez Canal.

Training or on patrol around the UK

HMS Prince of Wales	814 NAS
HMS Sutherland	815 NAS
HMS Richmond	820 NAS
HMS Cattistock	824 NAS
HMS Hurworth	825 NAS
HMS Iron Duke	845 NAS
HMS Severn	846 NAS
HMS Tyne	847 NAS
Coastal Forces Squadron	RFA Tiderace
XV Patrick Blackett	RFA Tideforce
Project Wilton	DTXG



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

GLOBAL | MODERN | READY

ROYAL Navy warships and aircraft shadowed a Russian task group in the English channel *(see pages 1 and 5)*. Led by **HMS Iron Duke**, the RN concentrated operation included **HMS Tyne**, a Wildcat helicopter from **815 NAS** and **RFA Tideforce**.

HMS Somerset hunted and charged full speed at allied submarines during an exercise to test hopeful commanders to the limit in Norway *(see page 11)*. Prior to the exercise, Arctic Dolphin, the frigate tracked suspected Russian spy ship the Yantar as it sailed through waters close to the UK.

More than 140 Royal Navy **mine warfare** specialists battled drifting mines, underwater explosions and drone attacks in a simulated exercise as part of strengthened NATO efforts to thwart subsea attacks *(see right)*.

Minehunter **HMS Cattistock** is preparing for a demanding deployment to the Gulf with training off Scotland (see pages 14-15)

Enjoying sunnier climes are the crew of **HMS Spey** *(see pages 16-17)* as the Offshore Patrol Vessel took part in La Perouse, the latest exercise organised by France's Carrier Strike Group on its Clemenceau 25 deployment to the Indo-Pacific.

HMS Spey then spent time alongside in Bali, where members of her crew helped to release baby turtles, conduct a beach clean and work on the reefs *(see page 21)*.

In the Arctic we find **Royal Marines** on their annual winter training *(see pages 2-3)*, where medics from 3**0 Commando Information Exploitation Group** worked with Norwegian emergency services to rescue casualties buried under avalanches in critical training.

Also in Norway are four P2000s – **HMS Blazer, Charger, Puncher and Trumpeter** – as the **Coastal Forces Squadron** vessels support NATO forces on Exercise Joint Viking, the annual winter workut aimed at bolstering the defence of Europe's northern flank *(see pages 2-3)*.

Stunning imagery which reveals the Royal Navy's operations countering Houthi drones in the Red Sea have won awards at the Senior Service's annual photography competition, the **Peregrine Trophy** *(see page 13)*. Leading Photographer Chris Sellars's dramatic image of the operations rooms of HMS Diamond as the ship fired a Sea Viper missile won him the **Navy News People's Choice Award**.

The Royal Navy has used its new mini-helicopter drone for the first time on drug-hunting operations in the Middle East *(see page 6)*. **Peregrine**, which is the first remotely-piloted helicopter operated by the Royal Navy, was launched from the flight deck of frigate **HMS Lancaster**.

Ships from the **Royal Navy Gibraltar Squadron** teamed up with personnel from the Gibraltar Clearance Divers Element to see how the squadron can support diving operations *(see page 7)*.

HMS Sutherland has returned to sea after a major overhaul in Devonport *(see page 9)*. The Fighting Clan is the final Type 23 frigate to receive the life extension upgrade.

Aviators from **820 NAS** and crew of the next-generation frigate **HMS Venturer** have both remembered rousing naval deeds 80 years on *(see page 25)*. The Culdrose-based squadron toasted their forebears who took part in the Palembang raids, while the frigate's crew honoured the unique heroic deed of their WW2 namesake.

The seventh and final Astute-class submarine will bear the name of legendary warrior **Achilles** *(see page 9)*. The hunter-killer is nearing completion at BAE's vast Devonshire Dock Hall facility in Barrow.

Veteran **Royal Marines** Musician George Latham has presented a rare statue of a RM musician *(see page 21)*, which will go on display at the band's School of Music in Portsmouth.

Leading Medical Assistant Sara Young has been named the first sailor of the year from the nation's flagship, **HMS Prince of Wales** *(see page 22)*.



MINE YOUR OWN BUSINESS

RN experts join NATO exercise to thwart subsea attacks

ROYAL Navy experts have battled drifting mines, underwater explosions and drone attacks in a simulated exercise as part of strengthened NATO efforts to thwart subsea attacks.

More than 140 mine warfare specialists were thrust into a virtual crisis as they battled to keep sea lanes clear at the Belgian Navy Academy in Ostende.

Allies are working together in the face of threats to subsea infrastructure and these biannual exercises – known as Dynamic Move – serve as a chance for NATO to work on tactics and procedures to allow the alliance to react rapidly against an attack.

In attendance were the Royal Navy's Mine Warfare Battlestaff, who can be deployed globally at a moment's notice to plan and conduct operations – bringing expertise in engineering, logistics, meteorology, intelligence and mine warfare.

The UK is bolstering its efforts to counter subsea threats alongside allies to defend critical national infrastructure, including fibre optic data cables and pipelines.

Ultimately, Dynamic Move – organised by NATO's Allied Maritime Command – keeps navies sharp and ready for operations to keep sea lines of communication safe.

Commander David Bryden, who heads up the Royal Navy battlestaff, said: "Effective co-ordination is crucial for the success of any mine counter-measures task.

"The exercise has enabled us to thoroughly test our ability to cohere a large group of mine counter-measures forces for a challenging mission and practice our processes to make maritime areas safe from sea mines.

"I would like to thank the Belgian Navy and NATO Maritime Command for hosting and delivering this exercise and I look forward to future collaborations."

Dynamic Move took place over ten days in Ostende on the North Sea coast and involved intensive interactive simulations that tested the teams and made them react quickly, with the scenario itself set hundreds of miles to the east in the Baltic.

Several academics also attended the exercise, giving training and briefings in subjects related to mine counter-measures warfare, including mine warfare legal aspects, amphibious operations and media training.

Commodore Simon Kelly, Deputy Commander of the UK's Strike Force said: "It has been incredibly valuable to work alongside our NATO partners here in Belgium Navy Academy and see our Mine Warfare Battlestaff applying their expertise in this challenging, realistic scenario. The innovative use of simulation has brought the scenario to life and our teams have gained enormous benefit from the tempo and challenge it has offered."

Dynamic Move continues in the early autumn in La Spezia, Italy.

Tracking Russian ships – see opposite page

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HMS Iron Duke making her approach on Russian warship Aleksandr Otrakovskiy

Images by: LPhot Daniel Bladen

RUSTED RUSSIAN IN IRON'S SIGHTS

ROYAL Navy warships and aircraft shadowed a Russian task group in the English Channel in a concentrated operation.

HMS Iron Duke, HMS Tyne, a Wildcat helicopter from 815 Naval Air Squadron and RFA Tideforce reported on every move of landing ships, RFS Aleksandr Otrakovskiy and RFS Ivan Gren, and merchant vessels Sparta, Sparta II and General Skobelev and oiler Yelnya.

The group of six Russian vessels departed the Mediterranean recently, sailing through the busy international shipping lane in the English Channel as they sailed towards a Russian Baltic port.

Commander David Armstrong, HMS Iron Duke's Commanding Officer, said: "Whilst this particular Russian task group was not assessed to pose a specific threat to the UK, this closely coordinated operation demonstrates our steadfast determination to protect our nation's territorial seas and Critical National Infrastructure; on which our economic prosperity depends.

"It is not enough to hope passing non-allied warships will not threaten our maritime security – we will be there to make sure they can't."

"This has been a particularly intense period for HMS Tyne," added Lieutenant Matt Cavill, Tyne's Executive Officer.

"It is credit to the team on board that they have been able to switch from the demands of delivering Navigation Training at Sea for the Royal Navy, to shadowing Russian Warships as they transit through UK Waters."

The Royal Navy maintained constant watch on the Russian task group, utilising a range of sensors and cutting-edge technology to ensure accurate reporting of the transit.

Plymouth-based frigate Iron Duke – the Royal Navy's Fleet Ready Escort – was activated to meet tanker Tideforce and patrol ship Tyne as the Russians entered the Channel.

While this is routine for the navy, it is still a skilled and complex operation, requiring close coordination and seamless cooperation with European allies, which deployed their own naval and air force assets.

Tideforce was the first UK ship to escort the task group, just west of Brest on the French coast.

The Russian group broke off into two groups in the Channel, with the Wildcat from 815 Naval Air Squadron and RAF P8 Maritime Patrol Aircraft providing critical information on movements from the air.

This latest operation follows the shadowing of a suspected Russian spy ship by HMS Somerset and HMS Tyne last month.

The Yantar was tracked through the Channel and Strait of Dover.

HMS Somerset, see page 11



RFA Tide Force escorting Russian warship Ivan Gren



Russian merchant vessel General Skobelev transiting through the English Channel



HMS Tyne escorting Russian merchant vessels through the English Channel



HMS Tyne and HMS Iron Duke sail together



RFA Tide Force escorting Russian ships through the English Channel



Iron Duke's Wildcat from 815 NAS





The bird is the word



THE bird is Peregrine.

Ten feet long. Capable of staying in the air for up to five hours. Always ready to pounce... although it does need refuelling occasionally.

The Royal Navy's new mini-helicopter drone has been used on the front line for the first time, supporting drug-hunting operations in the Middle East.

Peregrine is the first remotely-piloted helicopter operated by the Fleet Air Arm.

It's been launched from the flight deck of frigate HMS Lancaster, which is deployed to the Middle East on a long-term maritime security mission, during sweeps of the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Oman looking for smugglers and drug-runners on the so-called 'Hash Highway'.

Peregrine has been launched on sorties by day and night, scouring hundreds of square miles of ocean on every flight, feeding data, live radar picture and imagery directly into displays monitored in the warship's operations room.

"Being part of the team that used Peregrine in our counter-narcotics operations was a fascinating experience," said AB(AWW) Bradley Morris,

"The clarity of the images we obtained from miles away was impressive and highlighted the advanced capabilities we have at our disposal. It's exciting to see how technology is enhancing our operations at sea."

The drone is ideally suited to the long and demanding surveillance missions, preserving HMS Lancaster's crewed Wildcat helicopter to conduct interdiction or strike missions.

But the team from 700X Naval Air Squadron (NAS) have also operated Peregrine concurrently with the Wildcat to unlock the potential of drones and crewed aircraft working together.

Commander Sam Stephens, Lancaster's Commanding Officer, said the Peregrine operations with his ship marked "a key milestone in the evolution of the Royal Navy's uncrewed capability".

He continued: "Integrating this force-multiplier into the longest-serving operational Type 23 frigate whilst deployed on operations is a significant achievement. This is just the start, as we continue to unlock the game changing capability with every flight, gaining the advantage over smugglers and adversaries alike".

Lt Cdr Rob Guest, in overall charge of both the Wildcat and Peregrine embarked on the frigate, added: "Combining the maritime expertise of the Wildcat Flight with the development and integration of uncrewed air systems has been a crucial catalyst in providing the Command team with additional assets that complement the existing capabilities - a combination that is producing promising results for the future."

A team from the Royal Navy's dedicated drone squadron, 700X NAS, has been trained to operate Peregrine, conducting initial trials last summer before returning over the winter.

Peregrine requires a pilot, flying the drone remotely from on board Lancaster throughout each mission.

The mini helicopter is a Royal Navy-specific variant of the civilian Schiebel S-100, equipped with UK military tech: radar and an infra-red/electro-optical camera giving it the ability to 'see' at night and in poor visibility as it moves over the ocean at speeds up to 125mph.

During its operational debut, Peregrine located and monitored several board and search operations as Lancaster's Royal Marines boarded suspect dhows, seizing drugs and other contraband.



Peregrine is not the only tech enhancement the veteran frigate has received. She is now the first ship in the Indian Ocean fitted with a new counter-drone system – particularly important in light of attacks by Houthi rebels in the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden over the past 18 months.

Also installed is the Starlink communications system, which vastly improves WiFi/bandwidth access at sea – allowing sailors to video call loved ones from the middle of the Gulf of Oman during patrols over the festive season.

"Being away from home and family at Christmas could have been tough, but the ship's company really stepped up to make it special." said Leading Weapons Engineering Technician Meghan Cuthbert.

"Being with everyone on operations on Christmas Day and being able to video call our families through Starlink made us feel like a tight-knit team, all in it together."

Lancaster has recently completed a spell of maintenance in Bahrain which has seen upgrades to her weapon systems and sensors, and the complex task of replacing one of the frigate's diesel generators, cutting a hole in the ship to crane the old engine out and a new one in.



The maintenance period has allowed the ship's company to get stuck in to sporting activities ashore including a rugby match with the 'Golden Oldies' at Bahrain Rugby Club in front of a sizeable crowd, 15 runners took part in the kingdom's half-marathon, and five in the full marathon, with LET(WE) Joe Mitchell posting the fifth fastest time – and first in his age group – crossing the line in an impressive 2h 56m.

"Watching members of the ship's company take part in the half and full marathons was inspiring," said the frigate's Leading Physical Training Instructor Ben Povey.

"Seeing them push themselves and achieve personal milestones while representing HMS Lancaster and the Royal Navy was a proud moment. It's a testament to the dedication and fitness of our sailors, both on duty and in personal challenges.

"Similarly, playing the Golden Oldies was a great experience for our rugby team. The support from the ship's company and the energy on the field made it a fantastic match. It's moments like these, where we come together as a team both on and off the field that truly showcase the spirit of the Royal Navy."











Cutlass sharpens skills with divers



SHIPS from the Royal Navy Gibraltar Squadron added another string to their bow after a series of exercises with divers.

Project Augmentra saw HMS Cutlass carry out a number of serials with six members of the Gibraltar Clearance Diving Element (CDE) within British Gibraltar Territorial Waters to see how the squadron can support diving operations.

The exercises followed on from a historical joint dive with the Royal Moroccan Navy when sister vessel HMS Dagger escorted the diving support boat Crabb – named after the legendary Royal Navy WW2/ Cold War frogman 'Buster' – across the Strait of Gibraltar.

The latest exercise saw the divers embark Cutlass with their state-of-the-art Clearance Divers Life Support Equipment. The ship sailed close to the runway at Gibraltar Airport for the serials, which began with a successful diving casualty exercise to test Cutlass's ability to recover an injured diver in a variety of scenarios.

The two units conducted multiple waves of diving to not only practice their own individual emergency procedures, but also work close to a Royal Navy Patrol Launch.

Lieutenant Commander Jonathan Davies, the commanding officer of HMS Dagger, and a clearance diver by trade, said: "As a very-high-readiness squadron, we have now added another skill set to our portfolio.

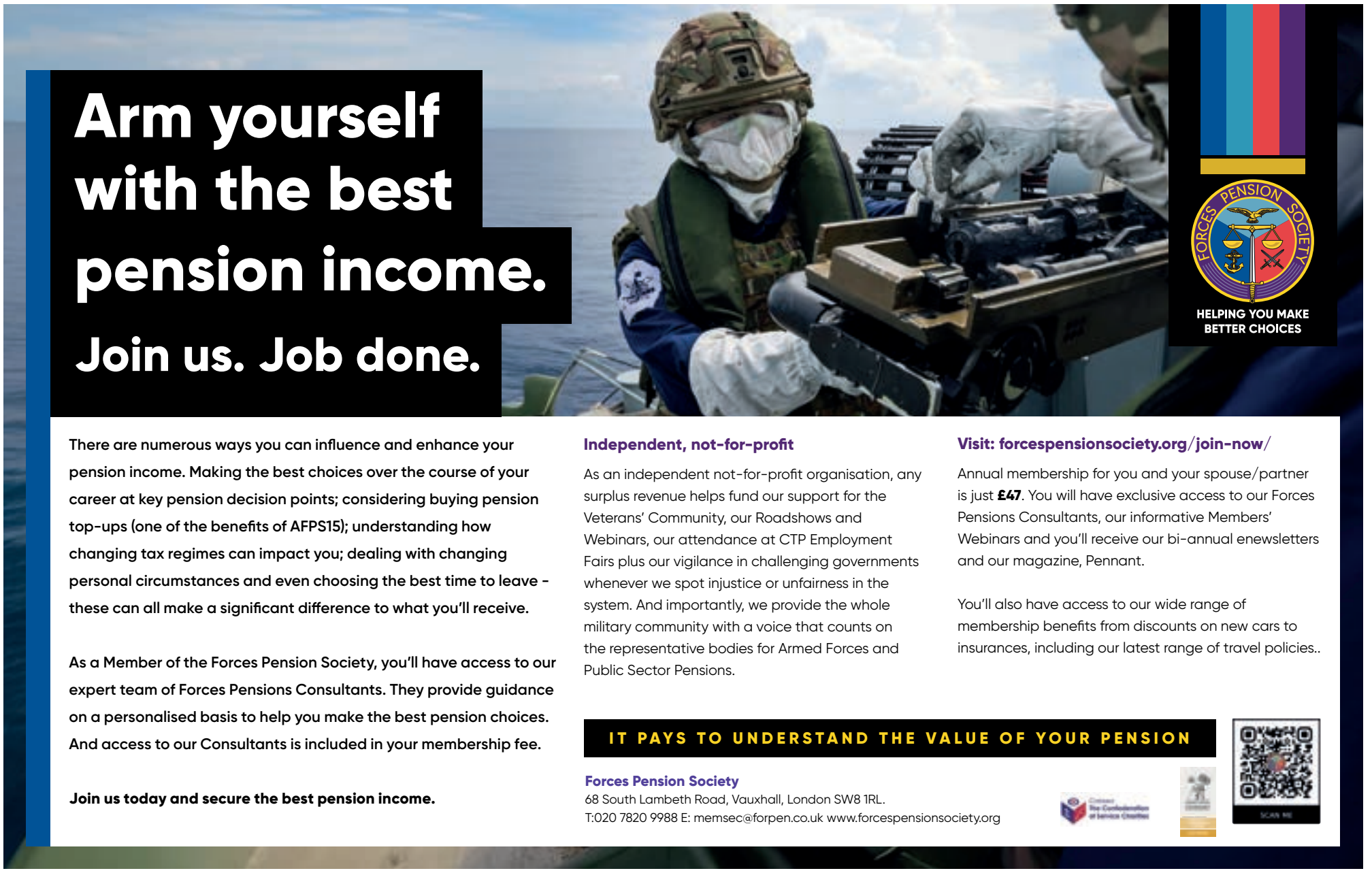
"Being able to join the capabilities of the already well-established units has provided UKSTRATCOM with an enhanced capability. This has the potential to contribute positively to our existing maritime security operations."

Chief Petty Officer James Roberts, the Officer in Charge of the Gibraltar CDE, said: "It was great to see the squadron and the clearance divers come together to prove a concept of utilising the launch as a dive platform.

"This has never been achieved before but has proven that the divers can deploy and safely recover divers to the launch during diving operations.

"This certainly now offers our Command more options when undertaking future tasking."

Already a successful start of the year, the two units will continue to work together throughout 2025 to further develop their capabilities.



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Fighting Clan back in action



HMS Sutherland has returned to sea after nearly four years after a major overhaul in Devonport dockyard.

The ship is the final Type 23 frigate to receive the life extension upgrades in the hands of defence firm Babcock – allowing her to continue in service into the mid-2030s alongside her sisters.

Sutherland sailed from Devonport to begin sea trials and training ahead of re-joining the Royal Navy fleet and serve on operations around the globe – namely on submarine hunting missions in the North Atlantic.

The ship underwent a full structural survey and a major upgrade, including more than 800 inserts and 11,500 weld repairs, demanding more than five kilometres of welding.

As a fighting machine, 'The Fighting Clan' has also received an upgraded 2150 sonar system, requiring the removal of the sonar bow dome – a major lifting operation involving specialist support.

She is also the last ship in her class to receive the Sea Ceptor missile system – now proven in action after HMS Richmond downed drones in the Gulf last year.

"HMS Sutherland has benefitted from a signification modernisation and extension of key weapons, sensors, and equipment in this extensive refit," said the ship's Commanding Officer, Commander James Wallington-Smith.

"This accomplishment is down to the hard graft and considerable efforts of both the ship's company and Babcock working closely together to deliver success. The ship and her crew are now ready to continue the next stage of trials and training in the return to operations."

Entire sections of the ship have been deconstructed and then rebuilt to allow engine, generator and machinery control upgrades: forward and aft switchboards, new diesel generator and motor generator sets in the forward and upper auxiliary machinery rooms, as well as the installation of several miles of new pipework and cables.

Prior to her return to sea, Babcock handed over the ship to the Royal Navy in a small ceremony onboard before she continued down the River Tamar into Plymouth Sound.

Sir Nick Hine, chief executive of Babcock's Marine Sector, said: "After a significant upkeep programme, it is fantastic to see HMS Sutherland starting sea trials and well on her way to achieving full capability before re-joining the fleet.

"Our team has provided trusted expertise, utilising our long-standing through-life support experience to ready the ship before she recommences her journey to support the nation's defence.

"We are proud to support these important naval assets and to work alongside our MOD and Royal Navy colleagues."

Pictures: LPhot Kevin Walton









Submarine is named Achilles

THE seventh and final Astute-class submarine will bear the name of legendary warrior Achilles.

His Majesty the King has approved the name of the £1.5bn hunter-killer which is nearing completion at BAE's vast Devonshire Dock Hall facility in Barrow.

Achilles will be the second warrior from the Trojan Wars in the class – joining Boat No.6, HMS Agamemnon, which is preparing to conduct her maiden test dive in the basin at the same yard.

The new Achilles will be the seventh Royal Navy vessel to be so named, tracing a long, proud history going back to 1747.

The name resonating most strongly will be that of Achilles No.5, the light cruiser which served from the early 1930s through to 1978 under three flags: the White Ensign until 1941, famously seeing action at the River Plate against the heavier guns of the Graf Spee; then the New Zealand Ensign, earning battle honours at Guadalcanal and Okinawa, and finally, the Indian ensign when serving the Commonwealth nation as INS Delhi.

More recently, Achilles was one of the Leander-class frigates which served the Cold War Royal Navy dutifully from the 1960s through the 1990s.

The new Fleet submarine, which already has around 17 crew, will be formally named at a ceremony attended by the boat's Sponsor, who has yet to be announced.

Detection system deal

BAE Systems has been awarded a £285m contract by the MoD to support the Royal Navy's combat management systems.

An eight-year programme, known as RECODE, is tailored to meet the RN's future operational needs and ensure the CMS is used across a wide range of naval assets. It includes:

- Maintaining high levels of safety, security and availability of combat systems across Royal Navy ships.
- Delivering the system on the Queen Elizabeth-class carriers, Type 45 destroyers and Type 26 frigates.

"We have a long and successful history with Naval Ships Combat Systems and RECODE represents an important next phase of our collaboration," said Capt Kevin Miller, from the Surface Ships Combat Systems Team. "Today's challenging landscape means we must adapt and evolve at pace."







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THE HUNT IS ON

IN THE FJORDS. HMS SOMERSET AND MOHAWK FLIGHT GO HUNTING.

ROYAL Navy frigate HMS Somerset hunted and charged full speed at allied submarines during an exercise to test hopeful commanders to the limit in Norway.

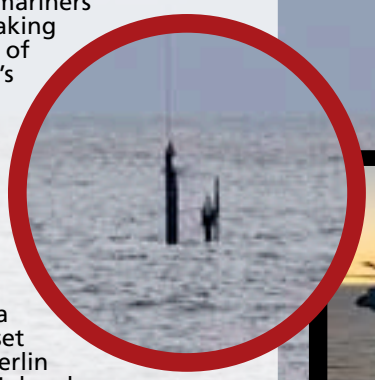
The Plymouth-based frigate spent two weeks in the fjords hunting Norwegian and Dutch submarines – firstly to test their trainee captains as they attempt to qualify for front-line command but also to develop the ship's own ability to detect, track and classify adversaries beneath the waves.

The exercise – codenamed Arctic Dolphin – saw the British warship and her submarine-hunting Merlin helicopter from 814 Naval Air Squadron operate with Norwegian, Danish and Dutch allies along Norway's complex coastline.

"This exercise has again proven the strength, co-ordination, and readiness of our NATO forces," said Somerset's Commanding Officer, Commander Matthew Court.

"Operating alongside our international partners we continue to demonstrate our commitment to security and stability at sea.

"I'm also incredibly proud of the ship's company for the professionalism they have displayed throughout the last two weeks, and our families and friends for their continued support."



The submariners were undertaking the equivalent of the Royal Navy's Perisher course –officially the Submarine Command Course – a punishing training process to become a front-line commander of a boat. HMS Somerset and her Merlin helicopter – Mohawk Flight from Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose's 814 NAS, 'the Flying Tigers' – played the role of the enemy, relentlessly pursuing the submarines day and night in a game of cat and mouse.

The ship carried out high-speed approaches – including charging towards the submarine at full speed – and a range of complex manoeuvres to test submariners in the confined waters of the fjords.

For the Merlin Mk2 crew this was the perfect chance to practise hunting diesel-electric submarines at night in the highly complex environment, making use of the helicopter's powerful sensor suite, including acoustic sensors, active dipping sonar and its active and passive sonar buoys.

The Merlin – one of the most capable anti-submarine warfare helicopters in the world – can also deploy radar, electric support measures and an electro-optical infrared camera to detect submarines at periscope depth.

The Merlin worked closely with allied aircraft and warships, including visiting Danish frigate HDMS Niels Juel. Vice versa the Dane's Seahawk MH-60R helicopter landed on Somerset's flight deck.









"The training has been a game of cat and mouse; there were occasions when we (the aircraft) had the advantage over the submarine and also occasions where the submarine made it very difficult for us," said Lieutenant Charlie Homer, Mohawk Flight pilot.

"The period also assisted broader training, working with our NATO allies. There was an opportunity to land on the HDMS Niels Juel to transfer personnel and fly alongside P8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft operated by the UK, Norway and USA, Danish Navy Sea Hawk and French NH90 Helicopters."

Mohawk Flight Commander Lieutenant Luke Maciejewski added: "This experience is invaluable in developing our tactics, ensuring our readiness to protect the UK's Continuous at Sea Nuclear Deterrent and the UK's critical under sea infrastructure against would-be aggressors."

Sailors from HMS Somerset were able to experience life in allied navies, including with Dutch Walrus-class submarine HNLMS Zeeleeuw.

"I had the great opportunity to visit HNLMS Zeeleeuw and witness Submarine Command Course runs from the control room," said Lieutenant Gregor Phillips, Submarine Liaison Officer.

"This was the best way to properly understand what 'Teacher' was trying to achieve with his student captains and allowed HMS Somerset to support their training to a much higher standard by creating challenging eyes-only scenarios through the periscope."

■ Prior to Arctic Dolphin, HMS Somerset and HMS Tyne shadowed Yantar, believed to be used by the Russian Navy for intelligence gathering, in the English Channel.

Somerset covertly launched her Merlin helicopter, which used its powerful sensors to locate the Russian ship as it made its way north towards the English Channel. The Type 23 frigate closed in on Yantar's location and intercepted it in the entrance to the Channel – south of the traffic separation scheme at Ushant, near France. The Plymouth-based warship took over monitoring duties from NATO allies after they shadowed Yantar in waters close to France.

Somerset used her cutting-edge radars and sensors to report on every move during the operation, as she maintained a close distance to Yantar through the Channel and the Strait of Dover.

Patrol ship Tyne was also monitoring the Yantar – last in waters around the UK in November when its activities were monitored by several Royal Navy units.

Tyne's Commanding Officer, Commander Hugo Floyer, said: "It's hard to overstate the importance of data cables, oil and gas pipelines, electricity cables for wind power and interconnectors that run under the sea, to the wealth and wellbeing of our island country.

"We are proud to play a part in protecting these vast networks that are out of our sight and often out of our minds, but are so vital to our nation and allies. The ship's company of HMS Tyne know how important this job is, and I know they are all incredibly proud to serve at sea and play a part securing the energy and data we all rely on every moment, every day."

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THROUGH THE LENS

THE RESULTS FROM THE ROYAL NAVY'S PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION FOR 2024

STUNNING imagery that peels back the curtain on the Royal Navy's operations countering Houthi drones in the Red Sea have won awards at the Senior Service's annual photography competition.

Leading Photographer Chris Sellars deployed to HMS Diamond and, latterly, HMS Richmond at the beginning of 2024, when the two British warships spent time patrolling the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden as Iranian-backed Houthis launched relentless attacks on merchant shipping.

The Royal Navy worked alongside allies to protect vital trade routes and HMS Diamond shot down nine drones and a ballistic missile during her patrols of the region.

Chris's images show the operations room of HMS Richmond in the tense moments when drones were launched at nearby shipping, with the Type 23 firing her Sea Ceptor missiles in response.

Another shows the dramatic moment a Sea Viper missile was fired from HMS Diamond – the bridge lit up with the powerful weapon launched from silos on the destroyer's forecastle.

That picture from Diamond won the People's Choice Award – voted for by the public – gaining 856 votes in an online poll.

"Being in the Red Sea on HMS Richmond and HMS Diamond has been the highlight of my career," said Chris. "Being the person who captures the hard work and dedication of every sailor onboard,and showing this to the world has been overwhelming.

"The feeling of being so close to action is indescribable and something I will never forget for the rest of my life."

Chris' images and those of the other skilled photographers – all of them serving sailors or Royal Marines – have been recognised in the Royal Navy's annual photographic competition for 2024.

The Fleet Regional Photographic Unit East won The Peregrine Trophy – for the best overall unit in the Photographic Branch – with their winning portfolio, including one from HMS Richmond in the Red Sea and a stunning aerial shot of the UK Carrier Strike Group operating with a NATO amphibious group among others.

The hardy bunch of Royal Navy photographers follow warships, units and commandos wherever they go, sharing their important missions with the world through still images and video, providing a behind-the-scenes look at life in the Royal Navy, from emotional homecomings to frontline ops. Leading Photographer Finn Stainer-Hutchins won the Photographer of the Year award for the third year running.

Finn deployed with the UK Commando Force to Australia – capturing Commandos as they operated 'deep behind enemy lines' in the Northern Territory during Exercise Predators Run.

He also followed the Commandos as they carried out mountain training in Wales ahead of their deployment to the Arctic this winter.

"I was very surprised to win Royal Navy Photographer of the Year for a third time on the bounce," said Finn.

"This year my portfolio was focused on the UK Commando Force on operations around the globe. I hope it highlights how integral the Commando Force is to UK global operations and the nation's security, showing the testing conditions they operate in."

Nearly 400 images and 18 videos were submitted for the annual competition, with judges impressed with how they portrayed the breadth of operations the navy carries out around the world.

IMAGES FROM PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 2024 LPHOT FINN STAINER-HUTCHINS






FRIENDS AND FAMILY WINNER BY LPHOT UNAISI LUKE



> "The feeling of being so close to action is indescribable and something I will never forget for the rest of my life."
>
> LPHOT CHRIS SELLARS

OPEN CATEGORY WINNER BY LPHOT EDWARD JONES



RFA PRIZE WINNER BY POPHOT ALEX CEOLIN

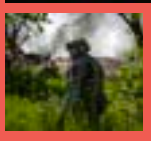
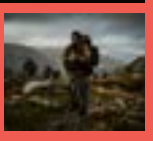


THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD WINNER BY LPHOT CHRIS SELLARS



CGRM PORTFOLIO PRIZE SELECTION BY LPHOT FINN STAINER-HUTCHINS



IMAGES FROM PEREGRINE TROPHY WINNERS FLEET REGIONAL PHOTOGRAPHIC UNIT EAST


LPHOT HENRY PARKS


LPHOT UNAISI LUKE


POPHOT BELINDA ALKER


POPHOT BELINDA ALKER


LPHOT CHRIS SELLARS


LPHOT EDWARD JONES

FULL LIST OF WINNERS

The Peregrine Trophy
Winner: Fleet Regional Photographic Unit (FRPU) East
Highly commended: HMS Prince of Wales

Royal Navy Photographer of the Year 2024
Winner: LPhot Stainer-Hutchins
Highly commended: LPhot Jones

The Commandant General Royal Marines' Portfolio Prize
Winner: LPhot Stainer-Hutchins
Highly commended: LPhot Smith

Global Operations Portfolio Prize
Winner: LPhot Stainer-Hutchins
Highly commended: POPhot Alker

Royal Navy Open Category Prize
Winner: LPhot Jones
Highly commended: LPhot Bladen

Maritime Air Prize
Winner: LPhot Jones
Highly commended: POPhot Ceolin

RNRMC Family and Friends Prize Professional
Winner: LPhot Luke
Highly commended: LPhot Luke

People at Work Prize
Winner: LPhot Jones
Highly commended: LPhot Stainer-Hutchins

The People's Choice Prize
Winner: LPhot Sellars. With 33% of the vote (856 votes). A view from the bridge of HMS Diamond as the destroyer launches its Sea Viper Missiles at a Houthi target in the Red Sea.

RN Short Form Story Telling Video Prize
Winner: PO Phot Clarke
Highly Commended: LPhot Smith

Royal Navy Videographer of the Year 2024
Winner: LPhot Bladen
Highly commended: LPhot Smith

Royal Navy Amateur Photographer of the Year 2024
Winner: Lt Richardson

Royal Navy Amateur Maritime Image Prize
Winner: Lt Richardson

Royal Navy Amateur Open Prize
Winner: Lt Richardson

Royal Naval Association Prize
Winner: LPhot Jones
Highly commended: LPhot Johnson

Royal Navy Amateur Videographer of the Year 2024
Winner: Lt Richardson

Royal Fleet Auxiliary Prize
Winner: POPhot Ceolin
Highly commended: POPhot Ceolin



LOCH, 'STOCK AND SMOK

RED sky at night, shepherd's delight.

Red sky in the morning, divers in the water warning.

There's no point having an ancient adage if you can't adapt it for present-day usage.

And there's no point having a 44-year-old warship if she can't keep pace with the latest subsea threats.

Proving she can is HMS Cattistock, launched in January 1981 - Ronald Reagan had just been inaugurated as US president, Ultravox's Vienna was climbing the charts and TV viewers were introduced to The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy - and confirming her operational effectiveness (once again) in January and February 2025.

Yes, you can teach old Catt new tricks.

Or rather you can teach the crew of old Catt new tricks, because they won't get the chance to prove what they can do with the ship herself.

The constant rotation of mine warfare crews means that the 50 men and women under Lieutenant Commander Rob Garner may have earned their spurs in HMS Cattistock, but they will pick up their medals for service in the Gulf aboard her sister Middleton when they take the helm in Bahrain this summer.

Crew 7 took charge of Cattistock – typically shortened to simply 'Catt', although older hands may remember her as 'Cattletruck' – last September having spent 12 months aboard her sister ship HMS Brocklesby in Portsmouth, overseeing her maintenance period.

The ship's age is just a number - the Hunt class' 'plastic' hulls mean they don't 'age' like regular warships and the equipment inside from engines and generators to galley fittings and mine warfare systems is upgraded and replaced frequently to maintain their cutting edge.

Whether the kit is from 1981 or 2025, however, it's useless if in improper hands.

Hence six months of regeneration, building up to forging a team ready to take on front-line minehunting operations, culminating in a spot of Operational Sea Training which, for small ships, means a trip to places like Campbeltown, Kintyre and Bute.

It's the second time during that regeneration Cattistock has been working off the Scottish west coast; she came up here in the autumn to begin bringing the warfare team back up to speed, mastering Sonar 2193, the bespoke minehunting sonar, the tried and tested Seafox Mine Disposal System to detect and neutralise naval mines, and putting the clearance divers in the water using air and mixed-gas diving sets.

The ship was then pressed into front-line duties unexpectedly when she was tasked to monitor the activities of Russian research ship Yantar loitering around the UK – a mission hush-hush at the time, but made public by Defence Secretary John Healey in January.

The vessel hung around in he UK's Exclusive Economic Zone for several days, prompting a concerted military response.

Cattistock worked with other Royal Navy units and RAF P8 Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft to 'man mark' the Russian vessel making sure it was never out of sight.

"This operational tasking cut new ground for a Hunt-class minehunter and it proved the enduring utility of a well-prepared, Royal Navy warship at high readiness and with surface and underwater capabilities," said Lt Cdr Garner.

"We played a vital role monitoring the Yantar's activity inside the UK's economic zone and I am extremely proud of my ship's company who rose to the challenge with determination and professionalism."

Being on live operations meant the ship was at sea for longer than normal – typically minehunters spend a few days, no more than about a dozen at sea before returning to port – operating in unfamiliar areas in severe weather and high sea states, at times pushing the ship and the crew to the limit.

Able Seaman (Diver) Jordan Shepherd, from Selsey, was awarded a Herbett Lott award in recognition of his expert seaboat skills on operations.

"I believe I played a key role in what was essentially the tip of the spear on operations to protect our nation's interests," he said.

"Since the dust has settled I have reflected on our time at sea and I can say I am very proud I was part of it."

The reward was a weekend break to Dublin. Being in the RN does offer some perks and many of the crew were able to get tickets for Croke Park to watch Ireland take on Fiji (the hosts won convincingly, 52-17).

"It was my first time visiting Dublin and it was great to experience a new city," said Engineer Technician (Weapon Engineer) Rhys Kelly, from Bridgend.

"The highlight for me was watching international rugby."

Cattistock's crew is a mix of old hands like her commanding officer, who has nearly two decades under his belt in the Navy, to young men and women like mine warfare specialist Able Seaman Ewan Craig, from Hereford, for whom Cattistock is his first ship.

"The training has been very challenging – but good fun," he said. "We've learnt a lot very quickly and I have enjoyed every minute of being at sea, especially live gunnery as a 30mm and heavy machine gun aimer."

Another rookie is Sub Lieutenant Sophie Huby, a native Scot from Elgin, is who is conducting her specialist training as a warfare officer.

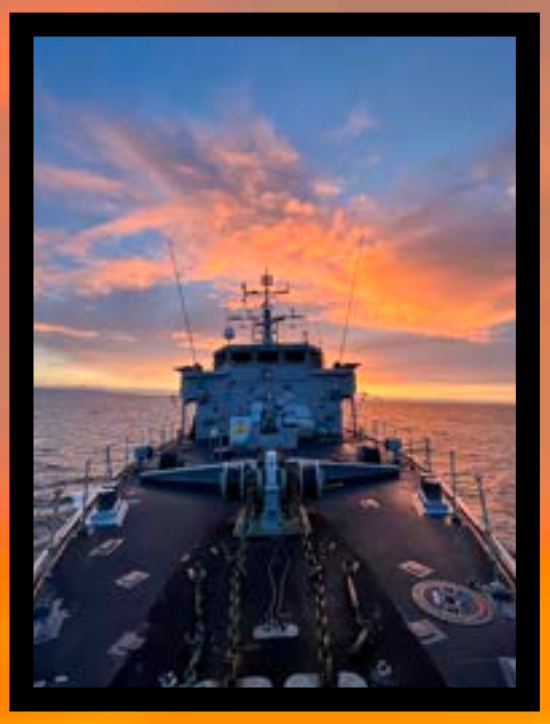
She has learned to 'hover' HMS Cattistock, maintaining the ship's exact position while minehunting.

"Ship handling is a vital skill for Officers of the Watch and 'hovering' is essential for minehunting, requiring quick and careful reactions," she said. "It has been really useful for me to learn how to do this in support of real operations and the ship's training."

The waters off Kintyre and Campbeltown in February are about 8 Celsius… nearly ten degrees colder than the coldest it ever gets in the Gulf. At its peak in August/ September, the waters off Bahrain











KING BARRELS

can top 35 Celsius.

Not only does the temperature impact how long divers can spend in the water identifying/neutralising mines and unexploded ordnance, but also the effectiveness of the sonar to 'see' through layers in the water.

And as the ship draws in sea water to produce both fresh water for crew, ablutions and the air conditioning – it places tremendous demands on the machinery to keep the sailors and systems as cool as possible.

It will make extreme demands of engineers like Leading Engineering Technician Rhys Owen, one of the 14-strong marine engineering department aboard, accounting for more than a quarter of the crew.

He's relished the transition from a much larger Type 45 Destroyer – which has meant significantly more responsibility, notably maintaining Cattistock's diesel generators which run 24/7/365.

"One of my first major tasks was a 12,000-hour maintenance – the most extensive overhaul an engine undergoes. This was my introduction to major maintenance as a leading hand, setting the standard for what was to come."

The job required stripping and replacing critical components, including the fuel pump, injectors, cylinder heads, turbocharger, aftercooler, crankcase breather, oil cooler, and thermostat.

Every part had to be torqued to spec and reassembled with precision to ensure peak performance. It was a complex and critical task that reinforced the importance of meticulous attention to detail."

The biggest challenge he faced – and overcame – was fixing a long-standing fault on one of Cattistock's generators which overheated due to coolant leaking, causing the engine to 'trip', rendering it unusable.

Rhys methodically set about fixing it.

"To pinpoint the root cause, I recorded key parameters in a detailed spreadsheet, identifying a pattern that pointed to trapped air within the coolant system. This trapped air was creating localised pressure spikes when the thermostat closed during startup.

"To resolve the issue, I developed a 'force bleeding' method, removing the aftercooler vent line and briefly running the generator to create turbulent flow, shifting and expelling the trapped air. The results were immediate - since implementing this solution, the generator has remained fully operational. Restoring it to service prevented unnecessary part replacements and ensured the ship regained its full power generation capability."

Coming from a destroyer where there's a 50-strong marine engineering department has been both a step up in challenges and an insight into extended team work.

"The tight-knit nature of small-ship engineering means that when a major issue arises, the entire section is involved," Rhys said.

"Other engineers have stepped in when needed, reinforcing the importance of teamwork in keeping the ship operational. The Marine Engineering Officer – a Warrant Officer 2 with 23 years' experience – has provided essential guidance, direction, and support in key decisions, ensuring that solutions align with broader operational requirements.

"Having an experienced mentor to discuss ideas with has been instrumental in developing confidence in my engineering judgment."

What Rhys has particularly enjoyed is the responsibility working in a small team of engineers means – both to him and Cattistock.

"This transition from Engineering Technician to Leading Engineering Technician has been a defining period in my development.

"The combination of technical problem-solving and leadership development has been a highlight of this role. In contrast to bigger ships, where tasks are distributed among a broader team, small-ship engineering requires full ownership of faults. There is no backup - you either fix the problem, or it becomes a critical failure.

"It's reinforced my ability to lead, make informed engineering decisions, and show initiative. At times, the demands have been relentless, but the experience has been invaluable. Being responsible for such a critical system during a high-tempo operational period has sharpened my troubleshooting skills and problem-solving abilities, making me a more capable and confident engineer.

"Keeping the ship at sea during this period has been both challenging and rewarding. Engineering at sea is more than just maintenance - it is about adaptability, collaboration, and ensuring that when the ship is needed, it is fully operational. The ability to systematically diagnose faults, implement effective solutions, and maintain critical systems under pressure is what ensures Cattistock remains sea-going."

Equally self reliant are Cattistock's small team of caterers. No UberEats, Deliveroo or even supermarket deliveries, just what Leading Hand Catering Services Manasa 'JJ' Jacobs and his team stock up on in every port – and then cook in the days which follow.

"I have been really grateful for the chance to showcase my culinary skills," said JJ, who is from St Vincent and the Grenadines and lives in Gosport.

"It is a big responsibility to run the ship's galley but I enjoy the challenge and love seeing my food being enjoyed by the crew."

It's the dedication and commitment of sailors like Rhys, JJ and Ewen and 46 more that make Lt Cdr Garner certain his crew are ready for the challenges in Bahrain.

"We're looking forward to our Gulf deployment and we will look proudly on our time in HMS Cattistock and the adventures we've had round UK waters. I think the crew have proven you really can teach an 'old Catt' new tricks!"

THE dead of night in the Sunda Strait. Somewhere out there is the world's deadliest volcano.

Tonight it's not the threat.

Under the dull red glow of the night light, a warfare specialist maintains tactical comms with the Canadian frigate Ottawa and Indian destroyer INS Mumbai.

It may look almost serene, but HMS Spey and her two friends are under attack from Rafale jets, launched from France's flagship FS Charles de Gaulle.

This is not a situation Spey should normally find herself in. She's not a front-line, guns-blazing, missiles-launching battlewagon, more a 'bobby on the beat'... unlike her Canadian and Indian colleagues.

But then you can't determine when or where conflict might break out.

Tonight, it's raging between the islands of Java and Sumatra - one of three choke points selected as the battleground for La Pérouse, the latest exercise organised by France's Carrier Strike Group on its Clemenceau 25 deployment to the Indo-Pacific region.

Named after a legendary navigator regarded as France's counterpart to Captain Cook, La Pérouse focused on the straits of Malacca (between Sumatra and Malaysia), Sunda (just 15 miles wide at its narrowest point and home to Krakatoa) and Lombok (between the namesake island and Bali).

Together, it's estimated more than half the world's shipping traffic pass through the three straits – making their security essential for global trade.

But what if conflict raged here? The exercise opened with Spey, Ottawa and Mumbai pitting their wits against a French frigate trying to hide from the task group (plus a maritime patrol aircraft) in the Java Sea.

The following night came the fast jet onslaught from the Charles de Gaulle, testing Spey's handling as she manoeuvred to avoid being strafed by fighter-bombers. The exercise scenarios included a simulated 'hit' by the attacking aircraft, leading to a major fire incident exercise requiring the crew to tackle the fire whilst continuing to fight the battle.

"Whole ship reactions to fire are full-on under normal exercise conditions but it was especially thrilling whilst under simulated aerial attack," said Able Seaman Ashley Sandbrook, who was part of the firefighting effort.

"It got pretty intense but your training kicks in and everyone pulls together to do what needs to be done."

The commanding officers of all the ships participating, including Spey's Commander Paul Caddy were invited aboard the Charles de Gaulle by the head of the carrier group, Rear Admiral Jacques Mallard who outlined the capability of France's flagship, its mission and plans for the future of the French carrier programme.

In return, the guests were also invited to describe their experiences of operating in the Indo-Pacific region – Spey has just clocked up her third anniversary in the region – before observing the launch of fast jets from the carrier's flight deck.

"Multinational exercise such as La Pérouse offer us a vital opportunity to train with our partners in the region, developing our ability to work side-by-side and test collective capabilities to support maritime security in sea lanes essential to the global economy," Commander Caddy said.

"An Indo-Pacific that is stable, free and open to all is essential for the prosperity, development and security of our allies and the United Kingdom. Exercise La Pérouse is a testament to the enduring value of collaboration and exemplifies the UK's approach: building partnerships to collectively address security challenges and protect the lifelines of international commerce."

The exercise concluded with two gunnery shoots: first, Spey sending warning shots from her 30mm Oerlikon across the bow of the Ottawa to simulate forcing an unwilling ship to submit to boarding.

Then the Brits at the head of a line of ships, tracking and firing on targets laid by the French multi-mission frigates.

Initially slated to attack two of the four targets laid, Spey's second shoot was called off after she destroyed the first target with the opening salvo from her 30mm cannon; exercise directors feared there would be insufficient targets left for the remaining three ships to practise their gunnery.

"What appears as a second of success is the result of hours in the ops room, and even more time if you account for the training required to qualify as an operator," said Weapon Engineering Technician Lukas Bishop, who had his finger on the trigger.

"Hitting the target first time is immensely gratifying, at the head of the column the eyes of our partner navies were on us, and we showed we can perform at the highest standard even when the pressure is on."

Nine nations participated over the eight days of the exercise, which was spread across more than 1,000 miles of ocean.

"Exercise La Pérouse has been a fantastic training opportunity for Spey," said Cdr Caddy,

"We have made the most of the chance to exercise the operations room and gunnery teams in demanding tactical serials. Putting the crew through their paces in response to a major fire while continuing to conduct evasive manoeuvres and simulate engaging low flying aircraft in coordination with partner vessels during an air defence exercise was an excellent test of whole ship reactions.

"Although offshore patrol vessels like Spey are not intended to fight on the front line, the enemy will get a say too! So it is important that we maintain our ability to operate the ship in tactically-demanding environments.

"Our success in these serials is a testament to value of the continuous practise and training we conduct at the unit level, and my highly motivated and professional ship's company."

Picture: LPhot Ollie Leach

STRAIT LINES



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EXCHANGE OFFICER ENDS UP IN HER HOMELAND

AN OFFICER from the Royal Australian Navy joined the Royal Marines HQ in Plymouth for a two-year exchange – and soon found herself back in her homeland.

Lt Cdr Courtney Bahr was assigned as the Maritime Planner in support of the Littoral Response Group (South) and one of her duties was the Commando Force's involvement in Australia's premier amphibious warfare exercise of 2024, Predators Run, deep in the outback of the Northern Territory.

More than 400 UK Commandos were deployed for six weeks near Darwin for military drills alongside hosts Australia, the United States and the Philippines – aimed at increasing their ability to fight and win together.

The Commandos deployed under the cover of darkness by helicopter and raiding craft from the coast, where support ships RFA Argus and Lyme Bay operated as part of a Royal Navy task force designed to react to world events and crises east of the Suez Canal and into the Indo-Pacific.

Upon her arrival in Darwin, Lt Cdr Bahr took up her role as Chief of Staff to the Commander of the Amphibious Task Force (CATF), and embarked in RFA Lyme Bay.

During her downtime Lt Cdr Bahr turned Aussie tour guide – with visits to the famous Mindil Beach Sunset Markets, Crocodylus Park and the waterfalls at Litchfield National Park where memories made included eating miniature pancakes while watching the sun go down over the Arafura Sea, *main image*.

Once Predators Run was complete, the CATF team headed for RFA Cardigan Bay in the Eastern Mediterranean – which proved a first visit to the area for Lt Cdr Bahr. Later the team moved to RFA Mounts Bay – and now hold the record of tactical command from all three Bay-class ships within ten days.

Next up on the CATF agenda was proving the Littoral Response Group's readiness to conduct anything asked of them. A two-day exercise tested a number of potential methods of contingency operations, ably supported by Type 45 Destroyer, HMS Duncan and her Wildcat helicopter in the position of overwatch.

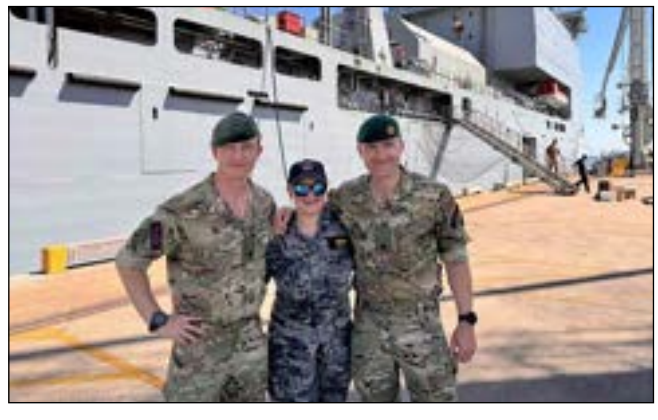
CATF Cdr Alex Knight said: "This exercise proved the ability of multiple force elements from across Defence to integrate to achieve support to contingency operations, and that the team is ready to respond across the full spectrum of amphibious and contingent operations."

The deployment proved to be a pivotal testing ground for not only Lt Cdr Bahr, but also the CATF Staff she supported.

The ability to be certified conducting a complex, geographically isolated and environmentally-dynamic exercise gave confidence to the team, their processes and the way in which they executed operations.

As an Australian, Lt Cdr Bahr was impressed by the way in which activity could be generated at such short notice, especially when flying across the world. She will never forget the flexibility and dynamic nature of UK Forces.





CATF staff at Florence Falls in Litchfield National Park and below, LRG planners, Major Jack South, Lt Cdr Courtney Bahr and Maj Grant Clarke

Navy duo complete qualifications on a cruise liner

ANYONE fancy a six-week cruise? Norwegian fjords. Sun-soaked Spain. The wonders of Lisbon?

Hands up all round.

Anyone fancy working a six-week cruise in one of the UK's newest and largest floating hotels?

Junior Royal Navy officers Luke Orrin and Matt Handisides were given the rare opportunity to guide a cruise liner and complete their qualifications.

Thanks to an exchange scheme between HMS Collingwood and the Merchant Navy, the duo joined P&O Cruises' mighty MV Iona as deck cadets, working on the liner's bridge alongside regular crew.

All warfare young officers must spend 365 days at sea to qualify as Officers of the Watch in the Royal Navy – allowing them to work on the bridge of a warship, safely guiding them on operations worldwide.

Even compared with Britain's biggest warship, HMS Prince of Wales, MV Iona – which operates out of Southampton – is a leviathan.

At over 85,000 tonnes she is nearly one third as heavy as the flagship aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales – and 60 metres longer.

It requires more than double the crew (1,800), accommodates up to 5,200 passengers across 15 decks. Whether 85 tonnes or 85,000 tonnes, the principles of safe seafaring and rules of navigation remain the same, from negotiating the 'maritime motorway' which is the Dover Strait, to manoeuvring a 344-metre-long vessel – more than 1,130 feet – in the confines of a fjord.

Having taken Iona to Norway, Matt and Luke (plus 1,800 shipmates) headed south to Portugal and Spain.

"The experience was extremely rewarding working with such a professional bridge team piloting such a large vessel into some extremely tight ports," said Matt.

"Working with a crew from all over the world exposed me to other cultures and ways of working. And it's given me a keen understanding of the considerations of the merchant fleet and how much overlap there is when it comes to the legal requirements at sea."

Luke added: "My time on Iona benefited me a great deal. It taught me not only how to keep a ship safe – especially one with around 7,000 people on board – but also how this part of the maritime industry operates compared to the Royal Navy which can be applied later in my career when interacting with cruise vessels."

As part of the exchange programme, Captain Andrew Wolverson and Staff Captain Chris Kennedy were invited to Collingwood to see the training the Royal Navy offers – not least the new 3D/virtual reality bridge simulator suite opened last year.

Lottery cash boost for two veteran vessels

THE future of the last surviving dedicated Battle of the Atlantic convoy escort ship has been secured thanks to a grant of £225k from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The ship is considered of local, national and international importance as a reminder of the longest-fought battle in World War 2, involving both Royal and Merchant navies working to ensure vital supplies reached the UK.

HMS Wellington, currently moored at Temple Stairs, Victoria Embankment, London, was bought by the Honourable Company of Master Mariners in 1947. Since April 2023, the Wellington Trust has been working on a revitalisation project and new business model to secure her physical and financial future as she was at serious risk of being lost.

The grant will enable the ship to be opened to the public this year so many can learn of the unique story of HMS Wellington.





During her service, she has been home to mascots such as a monkey and a cat.

She also saved hundreds of lives during the Battle of Atlantic rescuing torpedo victims, including Indian mariners, and the entire crew and passengers from the Royal Mail Liner Highland Patriot.

H M S Wellington was built in Devonport as a 1,200-ton Grimsby-class sloop in 1934 for service in New Zealand and the South Pacific. She was recalled to the UK in September 1939 at the outbreak of World War 2.

She spent most of the war on convoy duties – she's credited with completing 103, saving more than 400 lives in the process. Wellington also participated in Operation Torch (the invasion of North Africa) and Operation Cycle (the evacuation of troops from Le Havre after Dunkirk in 1940).

Meanwhile enthusiasts hope an £800k handout from the National Lottery will kick-start efforts to save 200-year-old frigate **HMS Unicorn**.

Unicorn is the third oldest warship afloat in the world – and the third oldest Royal Navy vessel still in existence behind her sister HMS Trincomalee (a floating museum in Hartlepool) and iconic HMS Victory in Portsmouth.

Since ending her active service with the Royal Navy six decades ago, the ship has served as a floating museum in Dundee.

After two centuries in the water, however, she's in urgent need of a major overhaul – part of a wider project to revitalise the waterfront in the Tayside city.

To unlock the £10m of funding to complete the ambitious project, the society needs to find £650,000 by April – so the initial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund is a big step towards the target.

Unicorn is a post-Napoleonic war frigate, but was never fitted with a superstructure/masts because the war was over and instead spent her entire career as a depot and drill ship – through most of the 20th Century she was home to reservists – until the late 1960s, when her naval service ended.

The emphasis over the past five years has been on moving Unicorn to Dundee's revamped East Graving Dock, restoring the ship and building a visitor centre.

The initial £800k – there's the potential of another £3.3m from the lottery later this year – will help, but the dock still needs emptying, repairing, a new caisson and a supportive cradle to house/support Unicorn.

You can learn more about the plans for Unicorn's future – and support fundraising – via **www.hmsunicorn.org.uk/project-safe-haven/saving-hms-unicorn/**

New memorial for Royal Oak

COMMUNITY leaders in Orkney are looking for views on a planned memorial complex honouring one of the Royal Navy's greatest 20th Century tragedies.



The loss of battleship HMS Royal Oak – and two thirds of her crew – continues to resonate more than 85 years after she was torpedoed in her wartime anchorage of Scapa Flow.

Ever since Orkney has been a place of pilgrimage for survivors – now sadly all gone – families and descendants, as well as historians.

There is a memorial at Scapa Beach – just outside the Orkney capital Kirkwall and a couple of miles north of the Royal Oak's last resting place.

Developed with the Royal Oak Association, Orkney Islands Council is looking to give the site a complete overhaul, creating a memorial garden – built around the existing obelisk – and building a visitor centre.

The latter would take on the mantle of the existing HMS Royal Oak memorial building at Scapa – which in the main provides a home for wreaths previously laid at the wreck site. The new centre would provide more space to tell the story of the ship and her crew, as well as act as a quiet place for general contemplation.

In addition a series of memorial plaques are planned, listing the names – 835 sailors, including 134 boy seaman (aged under 18) – of those lost.

Before the project goes any further and funding is sought, the council is consulting both Orcadians with public and online displays, and anyone else with a connection with Royal Oak.

Bid to honour HMS Exmouth

EIGHTY-FIVE years after they were lost at sea, divers hope the crew of a wartime destroyer will sail again.

They want the naval family to support fundraising efforts to honour the men of ill-fated HMS Exmouth – and help the RNLI at the same time.

All 190 men were lost when the destroyer was torpedoed by German submarine U-22 off Wick in northern Scotland.

A team of divers returned to the wreck last summer to survey the remains of Exmouth and 'raise' the White Ensign for the first time since January 21 1940.

They were so moved by the experience that they wanted the names of her crew to live on.

With the RNLI in the process of building a new lifeboat for the namesake Devon town, the charity's 'Launch a memory' initiative allows just that (and helps offset the £2.2m cost of the Shannon-class lifeboat).

The names of the Royal Navy men will be added to the numbers and letters on the wheelhouse, so each time the lifeboat crew launches, HMS Exmouth's crew will be there above them.

"This is great initiative and it really strikes a chord with me," said Lieutenant Commander Jen Smith, project leader, who serves at Northwood.

The aim is to raise £9,500 – £50 for each man lost - but donations of any amount are most gratefully welcome.

So far the divers have raised just over £3,500, and with the campaign due to close in April, they are pushing hard to reach their target in the next few months. You can support the campaign via: **https://www.justgiving.com/page/hms-exmouth**

HANGING UP HELMET AFTER NEARLY 40 YEARS



ONE of the stalwarts of naval aviation has hung up his helmet for the last time after an eclectic career spanning five decades.

For more than half his 38 years in the Senior Service, Lieutenant Commander Ross Spooner has been associated with the Merlin.

It was in a Mk2 that he conducted his final flight, sharing his vast experience with a student aircrew from 824 Naval Air Squadron featuring some confined area landings on Tresco in the Isles of Scilly and a winching exercise to drop their aircrewman on the top of Wolf Rock lighthouse.

"It's still a joy to see the next generation coming through," he said.

"Teaching and flying is just fun. If you can look out at the flight line, strap one of those aircraft to your back, and not feel excited, then you're in the wrong job. I genuinely believe that."

Having grown up in Gweek and going to school in Helston, both on the doorstep of the air station, Lt Cdr Spooner joined the Navy as a 16-year-old apprentice air engineer in 1987 – the same year as the prototype of the Merlin flew for the first time.

Having spent five years maintaining Sea King helicopters, Lt Cdr Spooner was commissioned as an air engineering officer.

He then began aviation training as a maintenance test pilot, a career he continued for around a decade, converting to the Merlin helicopter.

Qualifying as a helicopter instructor, Lt Cdr Spooner moved over into front-line aviation.

He said: "I wanted to stay flying and stay at Culdrose as I really enjoyed it."

After active service in Iraq and Sierra Leone, he was appointed the senior pilot of 814 Naval Air Squadron, then was promoted to commander, leading 820 Naval Air Squadron between 2014 and 2016.

"For me, being the commanding officer of 820 was the best job in the world. I'd still be there now if I could," he added.

Having briefly left the Royal Navy in 2017, Lt Cdr Spooner dropped down a rank and rejoined RNAS Culdrose as a Royal Navy reservist.

He has spent the past seven years with 824 NAS as an instructor, teaching trainee aircrew how to fly and fight the navy's premier submarine-hunting helicopter.

Carriers do battle

SAILORS from the Queen Elizabeth-class carriers came together for a day of competition and camaraderie.

HMS Temeraire, in Portsmouth, hosted the inaugural Battle of the Carriers which saw more than 300 service personnel from HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales go head-to-head across various sporting disciplines, competing for the ultimate bragging rights in this prestigious showcase.

Truly a day to remember – the Royal Navy & Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) was delighted to be able to support such an occasion.

The day's activities ranged from fast-paced football matches to the intense rivalry of tug-of-war, with each event pushing competitors to demonstrate their physical prowess, determination, and team spirit. Points were scored in each discipline, building excitement and anticipation as the final results approached.

Whether on the pitch, the court, or the sidelines cheering for teammates, sailors took part with enthusiasm and good humour.

Anne Carr, head of grants at RNRMC, said: "We're incredibly proud to support initiatives like this which provide sailors with the opportunity to connect and represent their ships with pride.

"The success of this event truly highlights the power of community and shared purpose, and we look forward to being part of many more such occasions in the future."

The Battle of the Carriers was more than just a competition; it was an opportunity for both ships; companies to enjoy a well-deserved day of respite.

The mental and emotional benefits of events like this cannot be overstated – allowing individuals to recharge, make new acquaintances, and represent their ships in a positive and light-hearted environment. Overall, the result ended in a draw.



Glen Young, SO2 Sports Development – Team Leader 1, said: "It was wonderful for the RN Sports Team to host the Battle of the Carriers with more than 300 service personnel taking part in a plethora of sports.

"The event was highly contested building team cohesion, morale and more importantly a fun environment for people to thrive, relax and enjoy some downtime.

"Sport is a fundamental part of service life, and it is important we provide these opportunities to further enhance the benefits that come from such events and provides a reset from busy day jobs."

New partner for charity

ROYAL Navy & Royal Marines Charity (RNRMC) is proud to announce that Envitia, a digital services and software company, has joined its Bridge Partnership Scheme as a Silver Partner.

Over the years, Envitia has been involved in supporting charitable causes, particularly those linked to the armed forces and other community initiatives and are known for their commitment to social responsibility.

By becoming a Silver Bridge Partner with RNRMC, they have the opportunity to collaborate closely with the charity, strengthening our relationship, and making a lasting, positive impact on the lives of service members and their families.

Dom Eade, chief executive officer at Envitia, said: "As an SME, we live and breathe our social values - focusing on our people and their families, to enable them to serve our customers in the best way they can.

"It is truly an honour to support RNRMC as a Silver Partner – we value all that you do to improve the lives of members of the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and their families, in their time of need."

Alicia Burnett, major giving and events manager at RNRMC, added: "I am excited to welcome Envitia on board and look forward to strengthening our relationship over the coming months.

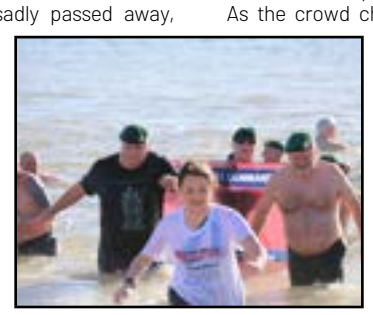
"Our corporate sponsors play a vital role in supporting RNRMC's mission to enhance the lives of naval personnel - past, present, and future. We are confident that our shared values and determination will help us make a meaningful difference together."

The Bridge Partnership is a strategic alliance between companies and RNRMC, offering organisations like Envitia the opportunity to actively contribute to the charity's vision: a world where sailors, marines, and their families are valued, and supported throughout their lives.

Icy waters, warm hearts

THE Cold Dip Commando: The Timspiration Tour made waves across the UK, honouring the final wish of Royal Marine veteran Tim, who wanted to take on one last challenge.

While Tim sadly passed away, his family and Commando comrades have ensured his legacy continues - 31 extreme cold dips, in 31 UK locations, all in support of four causes: The Royal Marines Charity, Lymphoma Action, The Bowra Foundation, Rock2Recovery.



Recently, more than 100 Royal Marines, veterans, and supporters gathered in Portsmouth for one of the challenge's toughest dips yet.

Among them were RNRMC team members Joe Standen (RM veteran), Kev Bell (RN veteran), Adam Silverthorne, and Shannon Cooper, braving the icy waters in true Commando spirit.

As the crowd cheered and the sun shone over the Solent, participants waded into the freezing sea, driven by camaraderie, resilience, and the shared goal of raising £10,000, with the total currently at £53,951.

Each shiver, gasp, and victorious cheer was a testament to the strength of the Royal Marines family and the enduring legacy of Tim's inspirational challenge.



Camps return for Easter

EASTER places for Kings Camps are now live - giving children an active and fun week-long experience.

In partnership with the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity, Kings Camps are proud to offer subsidised rates of £90 for all serving personnel this year.

This special rate is available for camps located on or near military bases, as well as civilian camps across the UK, ensuring that those who serve have access to affordable opportunities for rest and recreation.

Alexandra, from Cardiff, said: "Our son had such an incredible time – the variety of activities kept him super busy and he thought all the camp staff were really lovely."

From sports and games to building confidence and friendships, Kings Camps has it all. Coaching staff are selected for their outgoing and energetic personalities, dedication to child development and ability to inspire children.

Secure your spot and give your kids a school holiday they'll never forget.

Vishnu, from Plymouth, said: "This is now our second time using Kings Camps and our little boy loves it more and more each time. The staff are wonderful and attentive."

Check out the venues and dates at **kingscamps.org/kids-camps-at-military-bases.**

Honouring leadership

THE eighth Annual Coastal Forces Squadron Commanding Officers alumni dinner was held on HMS Warrior in Portsmouth.

The Royal Navy & Royal Marines Charity provided funds toward the event that brought together former Commanding Officers of the Coastal Forces Squadron for a memorable evening of reflection and celebration.

This year's dinner was the largest alumni dinner to date, with 150 officers in attendance. The addition of the Royal Navy Gibraltar Squadron to the Coastal Forces Squadron made the event even more unique, highlighting the Squadron's expanding role and reach.

Speeches were delivered by the Commander of the Coastal Forces Squadron and the senior officer attending, the Chief of Defence Staff. Their addresses focused on the Squadron's progress over the past year, its recent achievements, and its ongoing development.

ROYAL NAVY & ROYAL MARINES CHARITY
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TURTLE-Y AWESOME

ROYAL Navy sailors from HMS Spey cleaned valuable nesting sites of damaging plastics and released baby turtles into the wild during a conservation mission in Bali.

The Offshore Patrol Vessel visited Bali as part of multi-national Indonesian Exercise Komodo and, while visiting the island helped environmental groups on their critical work.

They joined sailors and personnel from other nations, including Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, in a series of activities with the highlight for many being the release of dozens of turtles at Nusa Dua Beach.

The first moments of life after hatching are critical for the baby reptiles who have to make it from their birthing nests to the ocean. The release by the sailors ensured a high survival rate – boosting the creatures' population and securing future generations.

> "IT WAS A PRIVILEGE... TO PROTECT AND REJUVENATE THE MARITIME ECOSYSTEMS WE ALL DEPEND ON"

Able Rating William Lonergan, who took part in returning the baby reptiles to the wild, said: "Supporting environmental protection and conservation is one of Spey's primary missions in the Indo-Pacific region. However, it's a rare opportunity to get this 'hands on' supporting conservation.

"Our Indonesia hosts explained to us the importance of marine life to the local ecosystem. We were all given a baby turtle to release, mine was called Terry. Helping him find his bearing towards his ocean habitat is an experience I'll never forget.

"Fair winds and following seas Terry."

While some of HMS Spey's ship's company got hands on with the turtles, others were ensured the future of another part of Indonesia's ecosystem.

Leading Hand Kasey Easson took part in the planting of mangroves among other international visitors with their efforts rewarded with drinks and chocolate brownies made from the mangroves' leaves.

Mangroves are an important part of Balinese culture and planting them offers numerous environmental and human security benefits. Aside from being a food source, mangroves also filter salt water through their roots converting it into fresh water.

They also protect coastlines as they are a natural buffer, shielding coastal areas from storms, tsunamis, and erosion. Mangroves typically have a life span of 20 years.

"It is gratifying to know that the mangrove tree I planted today will go on to provide sustenance and protection to communities in Bali for decades," said Kasey.

"Individually our actions may seem small but our combined efforts with our allies and partners; working together we can have a real impact in addressing the environment security challenges that affect us all globally."

The wildlife and habitats of Bali are often affected by plastics and other waste washing up on its pristine beaches so a beach clean was also among the activities for the day.

Medical Assistant Sophie Broughton, Able Rating Jago Biles and Sublieutenant Kamil Rahman, a Royal New Zealand Navy exchange officer, helped with the beach clean on Mertasari Beach alongside school children and Indonesian Navy cadets. Most of their bags were filled with plastic which will be recycled.

The conservation day as part of Exercise Komodo was a chance for the Indonesian Navy to highlight the impact of climate change and the affect human behaviour has on its environment.

HMS Spey were keen to show their support and hear about the efforts being undertaken, in one instance with the planting of coral reefs.

They got to learn about how coral replanting ensures the diversity of the marine ecosystem and supports the food chain.

Lieutenant Andrew Yarwood attended the presentation on the coral reefs and said it was a great opportunity to learn about the importance of the activity.

He said: "It was a privilege to be part of today's demonstration of our multinational commitment with defence partners to protect and rejuvenate the maritime ecosystems we all depend on.

"As the greenest ship in the Royal Navy HMS Spey is an exemplar of using modern technology to operate in a sustainable manner. Today's activities were a tangible demonstration to partners and allies of the Royal Navy's commitment to environmental security and stability."





Veteran musician's precious present

A RARE statue of a Royal Marines musician has been donated to the elite military band by one of its former stalwarts.

In a career spanning four decades, George Latham performed for kings, queens, presidents, sultans, at the Bicentennial of the USA and the funeral of Sir Winston Churchill and paraded at the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana in 1981.

For good measure he was praised for his bravery as a stretcher bearer in the Falklands, crewed 'Green Goddess' fire engines during a firefighters' strike in Glasgow in the 1970s, and delivered his younger daughter Claire when the midwife couldn't make it in time.

Among his prized possessions is a rare statue of a Royal Marine drum major – a figure he now wants to donate to his beloved band for safekeeping and to inspire future generations of musicians.

Now in his mid-80s and unable to travel too far from his home in Liskeard due to suffering from terminal cancer, George made the short trip to HMS Raleigh in Torpoint – home of the Royal Marines Band Plymouth… and his last establishment before he retired in 1986 – to formally hand over the statue, which will go in display at the band's School of Music in Portsmouth.

He joined present-day musicians to see what's changed – or not – in the nearly-40 years since he retired and treated them to a moving cello performance.

"I never expected all this — I thought I'd get a letter back thanking me for my gift to the Royal Marines School of Music," said George.

"This has been tremendous, totally not what I was expecting, it's been a fantastic day."

The statue was an ever-present fixture during his career – and hence a beloved family asset.

"We moved 12 times during my service with the Royal Marines Band, and the statue has come with us," George explained.

"It's done well to survive those moves, I'm a good packer – you have to be in the Royal Marines.

"I'm hoping it will take pride of place in the school and inspire the next generation of Royal Marines Musicians, who will have a most fulfilling career as I've had."

Major Ian Davis, Director of Music RM Band Plymouth said the Service was "a very close-knit family".

"It's wonderful to have someone like George come along to tell us his stories, share his experiences and inspire us through what his generation were up to, and how music is always the overriding passion with all Royal Marines Musicians," he continued.

"The statue is particularly impressive. Often military statues have something which is slightly wrong, but we can't find anything out of place – the uniform and the details are absolutely perfect. It's going to have a prominent position at the Royal Marines School of Music in Portsmouth."

One of 13 siblings originally from Warwickshire, George played tenor horn with the Salvation Army Band before deciding music would be his career as well. He joined the Royal Marines Band Service aged 14 in 1952, learning to play the euphonium and cello at the School of Music, then based in Deal.



Once qualified he performed at sea and on land, across Europe, with carrier HMS Ocean and the former Royal Yacht Britannia, a two-year tour of the Indo-Pacific with cruiser HMS Tiger, across Europe and the Med with HMS Ocean, and with a series of RM Bands (in Deal, Lympstone, Stonehouse and Raleigh).

As well as our late Queen Elizabeth II, George has played before the rulers of Norway and Oman, to packed houses at Earl's Court during five Royal Tournaments, and across the USA for the country's 200th birthday celebrations during a three-month tour in 1976.

While serving at HMS Raleigh in the late 50s, George met his future wife Evelyn. They were married within three months and have now been together for 66 years.

During the Falklands, George performed the musicians' wartime role: medical support, acting as a stretcher bearer aboard the liner-cum-troopship, and was singled out for his bravery during one air raid.

As 'rope man' he was lowering a casualty down the ramp system on board when Argentinian Mirage jets screamed in, firing their cannons and unleashing either bombs or rockets. Everyone took cover except for George who, as the rope brake man, felt compelled to stay at his post and not let the casualty fall.

Naval Children's Charity

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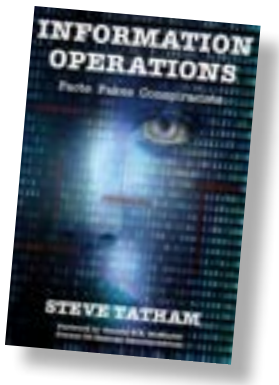
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Top of the info ops

DO YOU love dogs and hate fake news/mis-/disinformation?

In which case, a new study by a senior Royal Navy officer is just the ticket.

Captain Steve Tatham, who serves on the staff of the Maritime Reserve at Navy HQ in Portsmouth, is one of the leading authorities on information operations in the West – it's dominated his 35-year career in the Senior Service, during which time he's commanded the UK's Psychological Operations Group for nearly three years, spanning operations in Afghanistan and Libya.

He's also a much-sought-after lecturer in his specialist field, regularly addressing staff colleges across NATO, and has used his knowledge and experience to pen two books, one covering the 2003 Iraq conflict and aftermath, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds*, followed by what has become one of the go-to texts covering Information Operations in conflict and pre- and post-conflict environments, *Behavioural Conflict*, written with former Commander of British Forces in Afghanistan, General Andrew Mackay.

For his latest study – *Information Operations: Facts Fakes Conspiracists* (Howgate, £19.99) – he looks at the last decade or so of global events/conflict/tensions, including Brexit and the success of President Trump and the MAGA movement, and how the military can navigate the complex world of fake news, conspiracy theories and social media.

The work has been praised by defence journalists, authors, former US National Security Advisor HR McMaster – who has also written the foreword – and senior military figures such as the former Commander Joint Forces Command General Sir Richard Barrons.

And the dogs? Well, like Captain Tatham's previous books, all royalties go to Hounds for Heroes, the charity which provides injured/disabled UK Service personnel/members of the Emergency Services with specially-trained assistance dogs.

Sara's silver service wins maiden title

THERE will be many who follow, but Sara Young is the first 'sailor of the year' from the nation's flagship to be crowned in the vessel's affiliated city.

The 25-year-old leading medical assistant originally from South Africa received a stunning silver replica of HMS Prince of Wales from the Lord Lieutenant of Bristol – and honorary Royal Navy Captain – Peaches Golding.

Due to the size of the Portsmouth-based warship, she cannot physically visit Bristol (unlike her other affiliated city of Liverpool).

But she does send her men and women to key events in the city's calendar such as remembrance ceremonies and provides regular updates on activities.

The sailors, led by Commanding Officer Captain Will Blackett, were hosted by Bristol's Armed Forces Champion Councillor Jos Clark and Lord Mayor Councillor Andrew Varney in the latter's parlour, before moving to the Bristol's Merchants' Hall – billed as the city's most prestigious venue.

From now on the civic dinner will be used not just to celebrate the aircraft carrier and its links with the West Country powerhouse, but also formally honour her most inspirational sailor.

The prize is a specially-commissioned miniature of HMS Prince of Wales, produced by one of the nation's finest silversmiths, Grant Macdonald of London. Although Sara is the holder for the next 12 months, the trophy will remain aboard the flagship for safekeeping.

To earn that inaugural title Sara organised widespread first-aid training for many of her 800-plus shipmates – including the use of mock casualties to make the instruction particularly realistic.

Already singled out by FOST assessors when the ship undertook comprehensive training ahead of her maiden deployment later this year, Sara frequently temporarily filled posts typically held by more senior/experienced shipmates, ensured her fellow medics and trainees maintained the highest of standards and always sought to enhance her own skills – and those of her sick bay colleagues.



Capt Blackett said the leading seaman was "an outstanding sailor, medic and individual" who could be "rightly proud of her performance".

He continued: "I'm delighted that our fantastic Sailor of the Year, Leading Medical Assistant Sara Young, is to receive this inaugural award from our affiliates in Bristol.

"With such a large ship's company, I could have selected hundreds of Sailors of the Year' but there has to be one, and she has embodied the very best of the Royal Navy and HMS Prince of Wales. We're proud to be supported by the people of Bristol as we prepare for our planned deployment which is now fast approaching, and the traits that gave us a 'Sailor of the Year' are the ones which will lead to success on operations in 2025."

What made the event particularly memorable for the recipient was the presence of her family.

"I am so pleased to be named 'sailor of the year," Sara said. "It's really special to have my father present for the dinner, travelling all the way from South Africa.

"I want to thank my line management, the captain and my family for all the support and motivation they have given me."



MEWSIC starts to play

THE first of the Royal Navy's next-generation electronic warfare systems has rolled off the production line as final fests and upgrades are made.

The Maritime Electronic Warfare System Integrated Capability – thankfully shortened to MEWSIC (pronounced 'music') – will be installed on current and future major surface warships: Queen Elizabeth-class carriers, Type 45 destroyers and the future Type 26/31 frigates.

MEWSIC provides a sensor upgrade to the Navy's existing EW capability, which is a cornerstone of identifying enemy forces, equipment and movement, directly impacting on planning and the conduct of operations.

The first production model has been set to work at Elbit Systems UK facility while the updated Combat Management System has been delivered to Portsdown Technology Park overlooking Portsmouth to complete the development of the software.

MEWSIC is one half of the overarching upgrade to the Surface Fleet's electromagnetic warfare capability under the Maritime Electronic Warfare Programme (MEWP).

The other is a 'trainable' launcher for EW decoys to confuse anti-ship missiles, Ancilia, designed and built by SEA (Systems Engineering and Assessment) in Barnstaple.

The £135m system – which will replace Seagnat on existing destroyers and future frigates – swivels rapidly and adjusts the angle the decoy rounds are fired at to maximise their effectiveness, something its predecessor cannot do.

It means there's no need to manoeuvre the ship to counter the incoming threats: Ancilia will face them directly.

What takes anti-ship missile defence to the next level is the integration of Ancilia with MEWSIC's Electromagnetic Warfare Command and Control.

It's a new capability allowing the automatic fusing together of detected electromagnetic emissions with the tactical picture to give the team in the ops room increased situational awareness, helping them to better understand the operational environment and deliver the right countermeasures to the right place at the right time.

For all the tech, some things still need to be done manually – notably loading and re-loading Ancilia with decoy rounds, which falls, as with Seagnat, to a ship's electronic warfare specialists.

Over three days, they practised doing just that (*pictured above*) – and offered feedback and suggestions to the designers – to make operating the system as simple and effective as possible.

When ready for installation with MEWSIC, two Ancilia systems will be fitted to each Type 26, 31 and 45

Kent takes charge at Hampshire base

WO1 Nick Kent has taken over from WO1 Michael Reid as the Base Warrant Officer at HMS Excellent.

WO1 Reid had been in post since January 2023 and achieved a significant amount during his tenure. Ranging from HMS Bristol leaving the Island, the Coronation of the King, new kitchen facilities in the accommodation areas, Royal visits, infrastructure issues and ensuring that all ship's company and lodger units received the assistance and guidance required.

Excellent was Mike's second BWO job (after HMS Sultan) and he is relishing the new challenge of becoming the first Executive Warrant Officer of the Carrier Strike Group – not least giving him the opportunity to get a global deployment under his belt for the first time in his 34 years of Service.

This moment marks WO1 Kent's inaugural step in his Executive Branch career (PT Specialisation), and his enthusiasm and determination to embrace the role of Base Warrant Officer.

Accepting the BWO cane, WO1 Kent said: "It is both a privilege and an honor to assume this esteemed position. I look forward to supporting the Command in upholding the standards, ethos, and traditions of both the establishment and the Royal Navy."

Revamped block takes eccentric's name

WHAT was once the canteen is now a bright, smart modern office space/atrium for employees at Royal Naval Armament Depot Coulport. They gathered in the overhauled structure to see Commodore Sharon Malkin, commander of the nearby naval base at Faslane, formally open it – and reveal the new name: The John Kibble Building (*pictured right*).

For those not acquainted with the name, Kibble was something of an eccentric Victorian, known to dabble in various activities such as engineering, astronomy, and photography (at one stage in the 1850s he possessed the world's largest camera).



However, his most impressive accomplishment was cycling across Loch Long on floats – his invention, something which has never been repeated by anyone to this day.

As for his direct connections with Coulport, the 'Kibble Crystal Art Palace' by the shore of Loch Long served as his home until 1871... once it had been dismantled and brought by barge from Glasgow.

Reconstructed on a larger scale with an addition of a circular dome, 150ft in diameter, to create an impressive front entrance, it remained until 2003.

It was subsequently dismantled and restored off-site, before re-opening in the Botanic Gardens.

As for the newly-renovated structure at the armaments depot which now bears his name. it's home to office space and is available for staff to book out for various training events or conference meetings with a total capacity of 150 souls.

Among the many desks and workspaces available, there are also several individual soundproof booths that can be used for more privacy.

There are two main conference rooms, also soundproofed, that are designated for training use, each with a capacity to hold 25 delegates.

In addition to revamping the old canteen, the complex's gym has also received an upgrade as part of the renovation.

Clinical carrier visit

CIVILIAN clinical consultants from Portsmouth University Hospital Trust and University Hospital Southampton visited HMS Queen Elizabeth.

The aim of the visit was to better understand the collaboration between the NHS and the Defence Medical Services in support of defence operations.

Consultants from ten clinical specialities visited and were briefed by the carrier's Commanding Officer Captain Claire Thompson, who explained some of the dynamic challenges that were faced by the ship's company while at sea.

They were also given a tour of the ship and her medical facilities by Principal Medical Officer Surgeon Commander Matt Osbourne, who presented a briefing on the management of both operational and occupational patients.

That was to give guests an idea of some of the clinical challenges faced by the medical team while deployed on operations, but also share areas of experience and provide an opportunity for innovation, both locally and at the strategical level, thus improving the outcome for and recovery of patients.

"Keeping Service personnel fit for the maritime environment provides unique challenges," explained Surgeon Captain Dan Connor, Military Clinical Director of Joint Hospital Group South who organised the event.

"Senior clinicians from targeted specialities visited to better understand the challenges of life at sea. They embarked to exchange ideas about how we can work together to best return injured or ill patients to fitness, enabling them to fulfil critical operational roles."



Faslane focus on mental health

STAFF across HMNB Clyde were encouraged to attend a day-long event dedicated to mental health and wellbeing awareness.

A mixture of military and non-military organisations were present, all aimed at supporting individuals, families, and children. Organisations in attendance included, Royal Navy Family & People Support (RNFPS), Change Mental Health, Forces Children Scotland, Samaritans Scotland, Alzheimer's Scotland, and Home Start to name a few.

One organisation raising awareness was Forces Children Scotland – an organisation delivering face-to-face mental health and wellbeing services for children and young people across the armed forces communities.

Gary Seath, Marketing, Communications and Development Manager for Forces Children Scotland, said: "We understand that for this community of children and young people, life in a naval family can prove different, compared to their peers from Royal Air Force and Army families; particularly when it comes to experiencing longer parental deployments, which can impact mental health and wellbeing, education and learning and so much more."

"Attending events of this nature are so crucial to enhancing our ability to reach greater numbers of serving families, to let them know about the face-to-face services we deliver in Argyll and Bute, as well as our Your Mind Matters Mental Health and Wellbeing Hub and Digital Deployment Pack resources available on our website."

During the event, Rosie Green – daughter of Commander Jimmy Green – sang covers of various songs to entertain the visitors, plus her original song, *When I Get There*, which she previously used to raise money for Change Mental Health.

Other groups in attendance were, Royal Navy Royal Marines Charity, Gam Care, Space, Forces Mutual, Argyll & Bute Rape Crisis, Naval Families, Living Well, Scottish Action for Mental Health, Help for Heroes, and Men Matter Scotland – a charity aimed at providing help and support for men. Originally started by a group of dads, this organisation has now grown and is home to over three and half thousand members.

Youngsters offered free sailing lessons

ARE you looking for a fun activity with your children over the Easter holidays?

Why not sign them up for one of Royal Navy Sailing Association's sailing weeks, which are exclusively available free of charge to children of serving RN, RM and RFA personnel.

Taking part opens up other opportunities, not least becoming part of RNSA's Youth Crew.

Sailing weeks will be hosted at water sports centres across the country, including Scotland, the West Midlands, Berkshire Hampshire, Dorset, Devon, and Cornwall.

No previous sailing experience is required, the only stipulation is that young people of Service personnel must be aged between eight and 17, with a residential option available for older children.

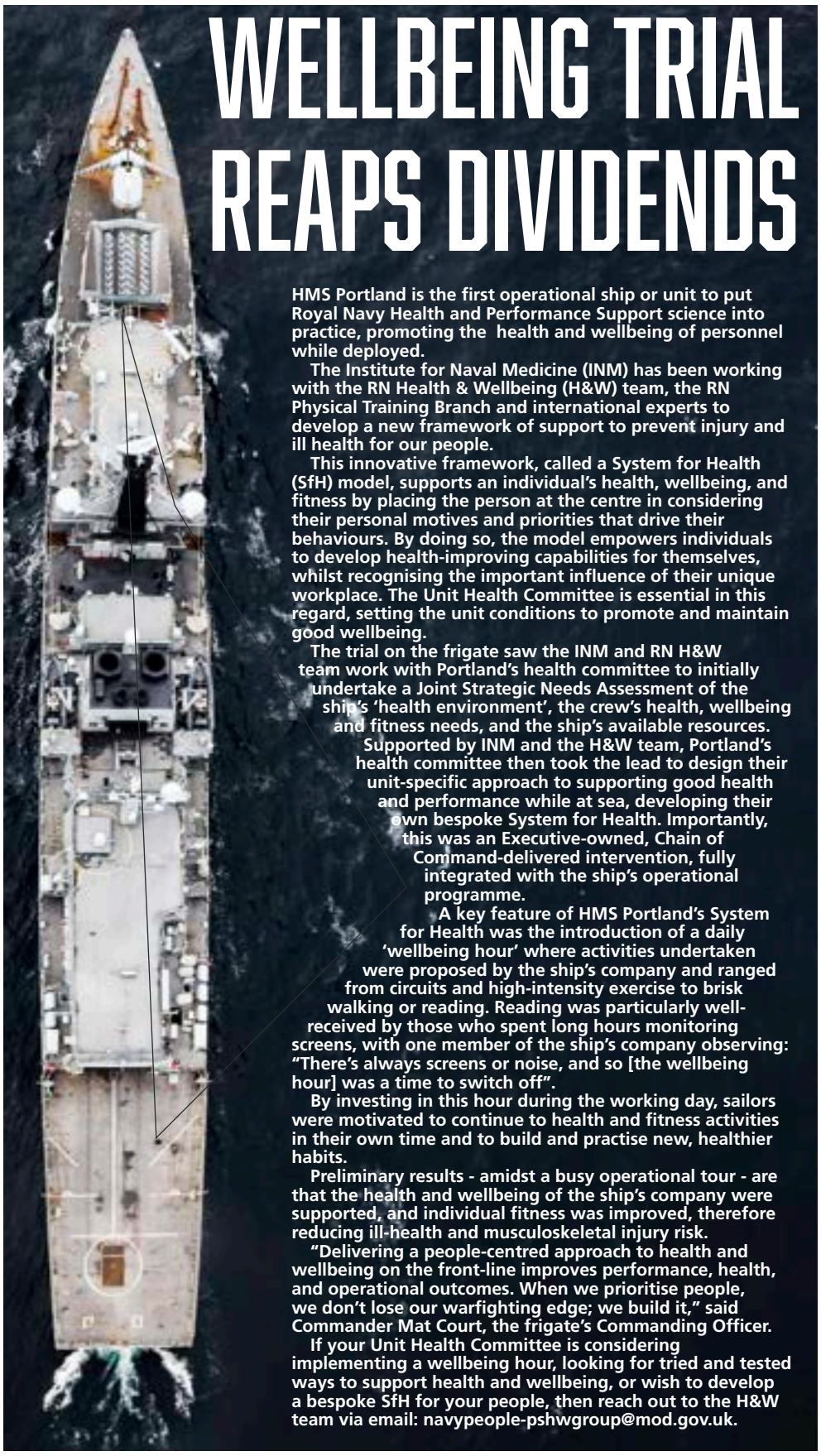
'Beginner' sailing weeks cover sessions of Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Youth Sailing Stages 1 and 2, plus Swim England water safety sessions. For over 16s, sessions cover the RYA National Sailing Scheme Levels 1 and 2.

'Improver' sailing weeks for those who have previously completed the beginner's course, sessions will cover RYA Youth Sailing stages 3 and 4, while for over 16s, sessions will cover the RYA National Sailing Scheme Level 3.

Places are provided on a first come, first served basis. Applicants must input their parent or carer's service number to reserve a space.

The sailing weeks are funded by Greenwich Hospital and delivered through the not-for-profit Andrew Simpson Foundation.

Each young person is eligible for one sailing or windsurfing week per year. For details/registration, visit **rnasyouthcrew.org**.



WELLBEING TRIAL REAPS DIVIDENDS

HMS Portland is the first operational ship or unit to put Royal Navy Health and Performance Support science into practice, promoting the health and wellbeing of personnel while deployed.

The Institute for Naval Medicine (INM) has been working with the RN Health & Wellbeing (H&W) team, the RN Physical Training Branch and international experts to develop a new framework of support to prevent injury and ill health for our people.

This innovative framework, called a System for Health (SfH) model, supports an individual's health, wellbeing, and fitness by placing the person at the centre in considering their personal motives and priorities that drive their behaviours. By doing so, the model empowers individuals to develop health-improving capabilities for themselves, whilst recognising the important influence of their unique workplace. The Unit Health Committee is essential in this regard, setting the unit conditions to promote and maintain good wellbeing.

The trial on the frigate saw the INM and RN H&W team work with Portland's health committee to initially undertake a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment of the ship's 'health environment', the crew's health, wellbeing and fitness needs, and the ship's available resources. Supported by INM and the H&W team, Portland's health committee then took the lead to design their unit-specific approach to supporting good health and performance while at sea, developing their own bespoke System for Health. Importantly, this was an Executive-owned, Chain of Command-delivered intervention, fully integrated with the ship's operational programme.

A key feature of HMS Portland's System for Health was the introduction of a daily 'wellbeing hour' where activities undertaken were proposed by the ship's company and ranged from circuits and high-intensity exercise to brisk walking or reading. Reading was particularly well-received by those who spent long hours monitoring screens, with one member of the ship's company observing: "There's always screens or noise, and so [the wellbeing hour] was a time to switch off".

By investing in this hour during the working day, sailors were motivated to continue to health and fitness activities in their own time and to build and practise new, healthier habits.

Preliminary results - amidst a busy operational tour - are that the health and wellbeing of the ship's company were supported, and individual fitness was improved, therefore reducing ill-health and musculoskeletal injury risk.

"Delivering a people-centred approach to health and wellbeing on the front-line improves performance, health, and operational outcomes. When we prioritise people, we don't lose our warfighting edge; we build it," said Commander Mat Court, the frigate's Commanding Officer.

If your Unit Health Committee is considering implementing a wellbeing hour, looking for tried and tested ways to support health and wellbeing, or wish to develop a bespoke SfH for your people, then reach out to the H&W team via email: navypeople-pshwgroup@mod.gov.uk.

Bedtime reading not just for kids

ON THE back of the success of the 'Storybook Waves' initiative, allowing serving personnel to record bedtime stories for their children, the naval charity Aggie's are launching a series of Storybook Waves Specials to extend this vital connection to every member of a service family.

The first of these specials was last month's Valentine's campaign, which saw over 50 members of the RN, RM and RFA able to visit their local Aggie's hub to record a poem for their loved ones.

This was then edited by Aggie's amazing volunteers and sent out along with a carefully-curated Valentine's gift box which included wildflower seeds, love heart sweets, a craft pack for making an origami heart, plus a card and poem.

"Storybook Waves is all about making families feel connected during times of separation," said project coordinator Alexa Lowe.

"This was our first time branching out from stories for children and we're thrilled it's been so well received; we hope it spreads some love and helps families and partners feel close to each other.

"We've got Mother's Day next and something very special in the planning phase so we're really excited to see how many families we can reach, especially with our 150th anniversary coming up next year. This is a totally free service, and we couldn't do it without the support and funding from RNRMC and Greenwich Hospital. For further details, contact your local Aggies pastoral worker or visit **www.aggies.org.uk/storybook-waves**.

Caledonia's rebirth continues with permanent CO



THERE'S a new commander for HMS Caledonia as Capt Stuart Cantellow becomes the first permanent commanding officer since the unit recommissioned in April 2023.

The former MOD Caledonia site at Rosyth has been re-establishing Royal Navy protocols and under the MOD title, was led by Chiefs of Staff of the Naval Regional Commander.

Captain Cantellow's arrival marks the next step toward HMS Caledonia reaching its full operational capability, establishing itself as a key location for the Royal Navy in Scotland. It'll support a wide variety of lodger units and the shipbuilding and maintenance programmes on the Forth.

The captain, who took over from Lt Col Gary Giles RM, said: "I am deeply honoured to take command of this exceptional base and its remarkable personnel. Caledonia has a storied history within the Royal Navy and will play a vital role in its future.

"I am proud to be able to build on its legacy and am confident that together with the team here, we can continue to achieve great things and embrace a bright and ambitious future for HMS Caledonia."

You said, We did...

WHY can't we use Standard Learning Credits (SLCs) to gain a driving licence for a motorcycle?

Previously, Standard Learning Credits could only be used towards gaining your first UK Driving Licence and funding for additional licence categories or advanced driver training was only permissible during a service person's resettlement.

However, changes made last month now mean these limitations have been removed, offering broader support for those seeking additional driving training/qualifications.

SLCs can now be used towards obtaining all categories of UK licences (categories A, B, C, D, and E).

The funding can be used for driving lessons, online learning packages, all theory and practical tests, advanced driver training, and Compulsory Basic Training for motorcycles. It can also cover upgrades and additional categories beyond the initial license or your first licence.

"This welcome change gives RN personnel the power of choice when using SLC funding for their driving licences, giving them the decision to drive a car or motorbike," said Lt Harry Brittain from the Royal Navy Learning and Development Hub in Devonport.

"We look forward to a significant uptake in the scheme and getting our shipmates on the road."

All service personnel can apply regardless of rank, and applications will be assessed based on the relevance of the additional training/licence category to the individual's role and career development within the Service.

You will need to complete the Tri-Service Application F1950 and ensure it is signed by an authorised member of staff within your Unit education department and your line manager.

See **2025DIN07-018** for more details.

RNRM Lottery

The results of the January 2025 draws are:

January 4

£5000 – C Gaydeen (04-57-65); £1800 – S Hibbs (15-32-51); £800 – J Gibson (06-29-32); £600 – W Pagan (15-16-21); £500 – I Devery (11-15-32); £400 – D Tregarthen (08-43-68)

January 11

£5000 – T Hooker (02-12-58); £1800 – J Maclean (18-51-59); £800 – D Williams (04-06-47); £600 – J Boughton (20-26-58); £500 – T Roberts (27-50-65); £400 – M Slater (33-50-52)

January 18

£5000 – L Brice (01-18-49); £1800 – K Messom (48-51-52); £800 – M Ballard (03-07-64); £600 – M Tinney (03-32-46); £500 – K Friel (24-31-36); £400 – K Chown (01-36-47)

January 25

£5000 – J Brown (32-41-49); £1800 – E Melsom (22-25-53); £800 – W Scott (41-54-65); £600 – K Turner (01-08-46); £500 – S Colebrook (16-20-59); £400 – R Lake (21-36-55)

Extra Draw

£100 each to D Glen (03-10-20), A Griffiths (16-44-60), J Edwards (12-38-41), J Lancaster (17-45-51), R Jones (08-36-46), C Ford (09-55-69), J Paxton (05-47-59), J Mooney (20-26-28), A Graham (44-45-63), B Lace (25-38-64)

Birthdays, unexpected guests and a weekend in the capital for members of our greatest generation enjoying a

Surprise, surprise...



Once more unto the beach...

ROYAL Navy warships will escort the legendary 'little ships of Dunkirk' back to France in May for 85th anniversary commemorations of the World War 2 evacuation.

More than 70 of the small craft are expected to sail from Ramsgate in Kent to the French port, shepherded by a Royal Navy 'guard of honour' of around half a dozen vessels.

In doing so, they will recreate journeys made in May/June 1940 which rescued 338,000 British and allied troops from the teeth of the Nazis.

The Association of Dunkirk Little Ships will make the crossing for the first time since 2015 (*pictured*) – the 80th anniversary in 2020 was cancelled because of Covid – and will be accompanied across the Channel by a spectator fleet of modern craft alongside escorts from the Navy and RNLI.

The bulk of the Naval craft accompanying the little ships – which in 1940 comprised hundreds of fishing boats, pleasure yachts and lifeboats among a motley assortment – will be P2000 fast patrol vessels of the Coastal Forces Squadron.

Squadron Commanding Officer, Commander Carla Higgins, said: "It is hugely important to continue to commemorate such events in our history and highlighting the role such 'little ships' had to play in Operation Dynamo.

"Coastal Forces Squadron is very proud to be a part of this event, particularly since it has been 10 years since the last commemoration of this scale.

"It will be quite a spectacle to see so many paying their respects across the channel. We wish for fair winds for all."

The little ships will sail for commemorations from Ramsgate on May 21, arriving ten hours later in Dunkirk – weather and sea conditions permitting. Events will then take place until May 26.

■ One 'little ship' not making the trip – but hoping to again when her restoration is completed – is the Medway Queen, now open again after the winter break – with more of the ship accessible to visitors.

The paddle steamer, which rescued 7,000 troops from France, had spent 15 years as a pleasure steamer in the Thames Estuary, before being converted at the outbreak of war for service as a minesweeper.

Pressed into action for Operation Dynamo she was used for training for the remainder of the conflict.

After a return to her pre-war role until the early 1960s, the ship was used as a nightclub before eventually being taken over by a preservation society whose goal is to her return Medway Queen to working order as a tribute to those who served in her.

Until now the ship's promenade deck has been out-of-bounds to visitors with disabilities as it could only be accessed by visitors capable of coping with the ship's stairs.

It opens up the coffee and souvenir shops, engine-room, toilets and upper aft saloon to visitors with restricted mobility.

The ship is open on Saturdays between 11 and 4pm, with tickets (£10) allowing repeat visits throughout 2025. Medway Queen is berthed at Gillingham Pier.



Where did you get that hat?

PROBABLY from these two fine gents from HMS Flying Fox, who fulfilled a lifelong wish for a delighted Margaret Grey.

In the 1940s, she hoped to join the Wrens and walk around town proudly dressed in uniform, cap and all – but circumstances never allowed.

So when personnel from the RN's Regional Command Wales and Western England heard, they offered to do a little to redress that, presenting the 100-year-old with a cap and tally from Bristol's Naval establishment – the unit where her chief petty officer father once served as an electrician.

The sailors dropped in on the former headmistress at St Monica Trust's Charterhouse Care Home in Keynsham to mark the milestone.

In the aftermath of WW2, Margaret was planning to join, becoming a Wren after completing her A Levels and "earning that lovely cap with the white stripe.

"Unfortunately, both my parents became seriously ill, which meant I couldn't join the navy as I wouldn't have been able to go overseas and leave them on their own."

Instead, she went on to enjoy a long, rewarding and successful career in teaching, retiring as head teacher of St Mary Redcliffe and Temple School in Bristol in 1984.

"Despite not being able to become a Wren, I did eventually warm to teaching and quite enjoyed it," she added.

"But I'd never have become a teacher if I'd been able to go and serve overseas."

Warrant Officer John Morrish RM wasn't able to help with the latter, but he was able to present Margaret with the much-desired headwear.

"It's been a really great honour to present this Royal Navy cap to Margaret and chat with her about her wonderful life. It's genuinely been inspiring to meet her and share memories of her father's time in the Royal Navy and serving onboard HMS Flying Fox."

She offered her naval guests some wise advice: "Whether it was the Blitz, coping with my parents' illness or dealing with a class of unruly children, you've always got to get on top your work and make sure that everything gets done. If you say something is too hard, or you can't do this or that, then things will just go from bad to worse."

'I made – and lost – good friends...'

WHEN 100-year-old Sybil Parker looks back on her long and eventful life, one job stands out – serving in the Women's Royal Naval Service.



It was at the height of the Second World War when 17-year-old Sybil saw a poster advertising the WRNS which read 'Join the Wrens and free a man for the Fleet'.

The teenager thought to herself, "that's what I'll do", and shortly after she was working on the staff of the Commander-in Chief, Portsmouth.

She worked at Fort Southwick, an underground complex deep below Portsdown Hill, as a watchkeeper in the Signals Distribution Office.

Sybil recounted her time there when she was hosted at HMS Excellent on Whale Island in Portsmouth as part of her 100th birthday celebrations.

She was joined by loved ones and received a letter on behalf of First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Ben Key from Rear Admiral Ivan Finn, Director Acquisitions.

Looking back on her time as a Wren, one loss stands out. Sybil had a Canadian friend called Captain James Morley and watched as the small wooden marker denoting his ship was removed from the map board after being hit by enemy fire.

She found out ten weeks later that he had been killed on D-Day at Juno beach.

"It was a strange time. I made a lot of friends but it was also very sad," she said. "On one of the toughest days, I remember sitting next to the main signal officer typing up deaths and injuries of people, some of whom I knew.

"I had such a lump in my throat but you couldn't show any emotion as it was definitely a time of 'stiff upper lip'. In my break I went off and wept."

Sybil married Norman Kenneth Parker, training was in the RAF, training to be a pilot. But halfway through he was one of many told they no longer needed pilots and was offered a navigators' position, which he refused.

Norman ended up as a Bevan Boy down the mines. After the war he became a surveyor and estate agent. He died aged just 38 in 1962 when Sybil was pregnant with their fifth child.

Sybil remained in the Royal Navy until the war's end and then became a secretary at the Nuremberg war crimes trials, remaining in the city for three years.

She subsequently held a number of other secretarial roles at Esso, the NHS and at Southampton Airport with a company which made engine parts for Concorde.

She considers her happiest time to be working in the Southwick Tunnels.

Now living in Hedge End in Hampshire, she enjoys family time with her two daughters and two sons still living and 22 grand and great-grandchildren.

Nice one, Cyril

WITH his son and daughter in Canada and Australia, it fell to the naval family – members of Aberdeen's Royal Naval Association – to provide some of the personal touch to Cyril Whittaker's 102nd birthday party.

They added the naval dits, camaraderie and not least a bottle of Pusser's Rum as s/m Kenny Turnbull sounded the call 'Up spirits' as friends, staff and fellow residents at Woodlands Care Home.

At 102, Cyril is one of the UK's oldest Silent Service veterans having served in HMS Spirit during World War 2 – after a stint as a radio operator in a North Sea minesweeper.

He spent most of his time in Spirit in the Far East, operating out of Perth.

Originally from Yorkshire, Cyril relocated to Aberdeen post-war after meeting his future wife Margaret while he was undergoing training in the Granite City.







When Ken met Len(ny)

AND not just Sir Lenny but other celebrities and politicians during a whirlwind couple of days as D-Day veteran – and magazine cover star – Ken Benbow was royally hosted in London.

At 99 Ken (*pictured holding the walking aid*) is a veteran of some of the fiercest – and most famous – RN actions of World War 2: the Atlantic Convoys, Normandy landings and finally kamikaze attacks by Japanese fliers.

Last year he featured on the front cover of the BBC's flagship magazine, *Radio Times*, as part of its D-Day 80th anniversary coverage.

A few months later and the Royal Naval Association member was invited to the capital as Radio Times hosted a 'cover stars' party at Claridges.

After the train to Euston (first-class, naturally), Ken met former Defence Secretary Ben Wallace before being whisked across the capital by the taxi charity for military veterans.

Ken, from Garstang near Preston, joined the Royal Navy as soon as he was old enough, initially protecting Atlantic convoys in the sloop.

After supporting the D-Day landings and ended up in the Pacific theatre leading up to VJ Day. His ship, HMS Crane a sloop, covered 147,000 miles and was twice hit by torpedoes which failed to detonate.

He and some of the other D-Day survivors as well as famous faces from the world of the arts and entertainment were treated to an evening packed with laughter, story telling – the celebs were keen to hear the veterans' war stories – and general fun.

"It was a really wonderful night and we were treated like royalty. We even met Sir Lenny Henry!" said Ken.

The former sailor has become a bit of a celebrity late in life – not just for his wartime service.

He hit the headlines worldwide early in Covid lockdown in 2020 when a care worker at his home presented him with a cushion featuring a picture of his late wife Ada to comfort him. The naval veteran was moved to tears by the gesture – as were TV viewers and social media users worldwide who watched the clip.

After a night in a suite at Claridges hotel, the capital adventure continued with a meeting with MP/veterans minister/former commando Al Carns and local MP Paul Foster, a former Royal Engineer.

He and fellow D-Day veteran Richard Brock from Lancaster – another survivor of the liberation of Normandy who played a starring role in last year's 80th anniversary commemorations – were treated to lunch in the sumptuous surroundings of the Naval and Military Club before returning home for a well-earned rest.

Aviators of 820 Naval Air Squadron and crew of next-generation frigate HMS Venturer have both remembered rousing naval deeds 80 years on

Stirring echoes of 1945



THE EPITOME OF CARRIER STRIKE

DARING AVIATORS DEAL DEVASTATING BLOW

NAVAL aviators at Culdrose toasted their forebears 80 years to the day of one of the greatest raids in Fleet Air Arm history.

On January 24 1945 – and repeated five days later – fighters and bombers from a formidable carrier force struck at oil refineries in Japanese-occupied Indonesia – a devastating example of what today we call carrier strike.

Largely forgotten today, the Palembang raids showed how precision bombing by carrier-based air power could deliver a strategic blow to the enemy, in this case destroying two refineries.

As the Royal Navy prepares for a major deployment of its carrier strike group this spring, today's fliers at RNAS Culdrose remembered the largest and most successful strike in the history of the Fleet Air Arm.

Palembang is one of 14 battle honours earned by 820 Naval Air Squadron, which operated Grumman Avenger bombers in 1945.

Today its Merlin Mk2 helicopters are integral to carrier strike operations – protecting HMS Queen Elizabeth and Prince of Wales from submarine threats, providing airborne early warning and vectoring the carrier group's air power on to targets.

Another Avenger squadron at Palembang – the operation was codenamed Meridian – was 857 NAS, most recently a Sea King squadron based at Culdrose.

Its final commanding officer was Captain James Hall… today the air station's commanding officer.

"The name 'Palembang' is not something most people in this country would be familiar with. It is not one of the great stories which we tell about World War 2," Capt Hall said.

"It is however proudly remembered by the Fleet Air Arm for its significance as an example of how carrier-based air power was used by the Royal Navy to strike at a strategic target.

"This year, as we prepare for the deployment of our carrier strike group, the importance of what was achieved at Palembang and how it changed the nature of warfare has not been forgotten.

"We recognise the bravery of the aircrews who took part and we remember the sacrifice of those who lost their lives in the attacks."

Around 220 Royal Navy aircrew in more than 120 bombers and fighters from four carriers were committed against the sprawling refinery complexes.

The two refineries at Palembang – captured from the Dutch in 1942 – accounted for half of Japan's crude oil output, three million tons a year, and three-quarters of its aviation fuel.

The job of destroying the sites fell to British Task Force 53 with aircraft carriers Indomitable, Indefatigable, Victorious and Illustrious which launched 48 three-man Grumman Avenger bombers, each carrying four 500lb bombs, supported by more than 70 fighters: Fireflies, Corsairs and Hellcats.

Fighters attacked Japanese airfields across Sumatra while the bombers and fighter escort crossed the central mountains to attack Palembang running the gauntlet of Japanese fighters, barrage balloons and heavy anti-aircraft fire.

The refineries were knocked out for two months and never returned to full production before war in the Pacific ended in August 1945.

Civilian and Japanese casualties are not known, although Allied forces claimed 30 fighters shot down and 38 destroyed on the ground.

Some 41 attacking aircraft and 30 aircrew were killed. Nine more aircrew bailed out, were captured and taken to Singapore where they were executed in the notorious Changi jail shortly before Japan surrendered.

Written by Graeme Wilkinson, RNAS Culdrose

'I CONSIDER THIS IS A SUICIDE MISSION...'

A VIVID description of the second attack on Palembang on January 29 1945 was left by Sub Lieutenant Eric Rickman, an Avenger pilot with 854 NAS, who was assigned to destroying a pumping station.

The day before the strike, his commanding officer Lieutenant Commander 'Charlie' Mainprice made a startling admission.

"He said: 'I have to tell you that I consider this a suicide mission. I asked the admiral to send the fighters in first to shoot the balloons down, but he refused because he said it would tell the Japs we were coming. I believe they will know that anyway because there's no other worthwhile target in the area'.

"I consider this strike to be so dangerous that if anyone would prefer not to fly, I shall respect his wishes. I shall not, repeat not, think any the less of him for not going'.

"I could hardly believe my ears – a senior naval officer saying I need not go if I didn't want to? Nobody spoke. 'Right, gentlemen,' said the CO, 'tomorrow morning then'."

Next day the force reached Palembang at 12,000 feet. As the fighters engaged enemy aircraft overhead, the bombers closed in on their targets.

"The CO called, as he always did: 'Line astern. Go!'. We were a formation of six, having one particular target. We all



Corsair pilots are briefed aboard HMS Illustrious

dropped back to 100-yard intervals.

"Ahead of me I could see three Avengers, then the balloons, and below me – yes – there was the pump house, very small.

"Between us and our target, I could see a [barrage] balloon cable. I thought Charlie (the CO) would go round it of course – but he didn't.

"To my horror, he hit it, shearing off most of his port wing – just like a hot knife through butter – then going into a vicious one-wing spin. He was only at 1,000 feet or more, so he blew up in front of my eyes when he hit the ground.

"The second Avenger rounded the cable and made its attack, that's the senior pilot, and the next just ahead of me, another 854 pilot – I couldn't believe my eyes when he hit the same cable as the CO with exactly the same result.

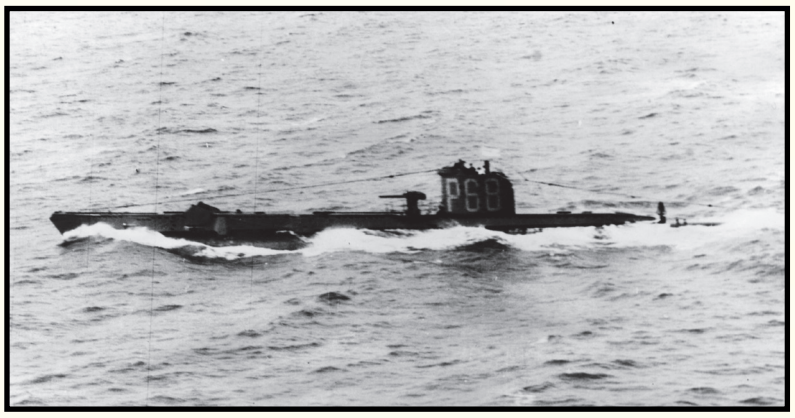
"I felt sick and angry: 'Why the hell didn't they see that cable?'. I was petrified in a sense – my mind couldn't work – but I had to jerk myself back to reality because I hadn't bombed. I thought: 'Time to bomb! Crumbs! Yes, here's the cable', jinked round the cable, and pressed the bomb button, and at about 300 mph started to pull up.

"As I got low, I suddenly found myself looking at a black wall of cloud from the burning oil tanks, with jets and gouts of flame in it all the time, and I was so close to it, I couldn't do anything but go straight into it.

"The turbulence from that burning oil was so violent that the stick was whipped out of my hand and the seven-ton Avenger was tossed around like a cork.

"When we emerged from the smoke, on our side at about 500-foot, I grabbed the stick, got the aircraft level, went down to tree-top height and headed for the coast where we had to rendezvous, blasting away with my two front guns at anything that I saw worth firing at – lorries, houses, whatever.

"I left the coast and was beginning to climb, and I looked back and around – as you always have to keep your eyes open for fighters – and I saw another Avenger, back, down, much lower. It wasn't trailing smoke. It wasn't on fire, but I realised it was on a shallow dive. Presumably the pilot had been killed or wounded. It blew up as it hit the sea. Just like that. Three in two minutes, you know? Jeepers."



SUBMARINE VERSUS U-BOAT

UNIQUE ACT BENEATH THE WAVES

CREW of new frigate HMS Venturer honoured the unique heroic deed of their World War 2 namesake exactly 80 years ago – an action still relevant in the 21st Century Royal Navy.

On February 9 1945, the then HMS Venturer – a V-class submarine – torpedoed a German U-boat off the coast of Norway, scuppering a top-secret Nazi mission.

Although such actions are the mainstay of some Hollywood blockbusters – The Hunt for Red October, U-571, Hunter Killer – U-864 is the only vessel sunk by another submarine while both were submerged.

The action has never been repeated, but the tactics used by Venturer's captain Lieutenant Jimmy Launders in 1945 – the Zero Gyro Angle (or 0GA in submariner speak), firing a 'spread' of torpedoes to allow for error/sea conditions (which can divert a torpedo's track), the draught of the target and also any evasive action taken – are still taught to today's submarine skippers.

Even though technology and weapons are vastly different – the torpedoes HMS Venturer carried were 'fire and forget' (today's are wire guided, so they can be steered on to a target should it move or they stray off course) – there is much about Launders' attack which make it a classic 'kill'.

"There are a number of great submarine stories, especially from this era – this is one that the whole Submarine Service can be inspired and proud of," said Rear Admiral Andy Perks, the head of the Silent Service.

"The Service is fortunate to have fantastic people operating and maintaining our submarines as much today as we did 80 years ago. The technology may have changed, but the ethos of striving for innovation and excellence endures.

"Lieutenant Launders' legacy lives on and keeps us focused on those that make up with Submarine Service as much today as we did during his time."

Whilst there was a degree of luck – or fate– in the encounter, most importantly Lt Launders placed himself in the best position to fire his salvo – today known as the optimum firing position.

The story begins in January 1945 when U-864 left Kiel on a secret mission, codenamed Operation Caesar, to deliver advanced technology to Japan: Messerschmitt engine parts for jet fighters, guidance systems for V2 rockets plus 64 tonnes of mercury.

She might have made it to the Far East but for a mixture of luck, poor seamanship and British intelligence/ingenuity.

The boat was damaged while transiting the Kiel Canal – badly enough for her to put into Bergen in occupied Norway for repairs… which were subsequently delayed by an RAF raid on the U-boat pens.

By the time U-864 departed Norway, British intelligence had deciphered radio messages outlining the U-boat's mission – and HMS Venturer (*pictured above patrolling on the surface*) was sent to intercept her.

On February 9 1945, Venturer's hydrophones ('underwater ears') picked up the German submarine off the island of Fedje, just 30 miles north of Bergen.

The Brits trailed the U-boat for three hours, following its zig-zag course before Lt Launders decided to act, taking a calculated decision to fire a spread (series) of torpedoes at his foe at intervals of 17½ seconds, estimating where U-864 might be.

The Germans took evasive action and avoided the first three torpedoes… but not the fourth, which tore the boat in half, killing all the crew. U-864 was the second U-boat dispatched by HMS Venturer – one of 15 German vessels sunk by the British submarine.

Venturer was transferred to the Norwegian Navy post-war, while Jimmy Launders (*pictured below*) remained in the Service, rising to the rank of captain by the time he retired in the mid-70s.

He died in 1988, but his family have donated the submarine's bell – marked HMS P68 (her pennant number) – among other effects to the crew of the new frigate.

That bell formed the centrepiece for a short service of remembrance at Rosyth, where the new Type 31 frigate is under construction, where the 20 crew assigned to the vessel were reminded of the 1945 encounter.



"We have enormous pride to have this incredible storey associated with the new Venturer. We also take inspiration of this action and try to use Jimmy's 'thinking differently' approach with our work now, to make Type 31 the best it could be for the modern generation of sailor where technology and people are uniquely symbiotic," said Senior Naval Officer Commander Chris Cozens.

Today's Venturer is the first of five Inspiration-class frigates being built for the Royal Navy by Babcock in Rosyth and is due to emerge from her assembly shed to undergo completion in dock later this year.

The names of the quintet were specifically chosen to honour deeds by vessels which resonate to this day in naval annals.

The ships will perform general duties on patrol around the globe when they enter service later this decade.





VOLUNTEERS NAMED IN HONOURS FOR SERVICE





FOUR Sea Cadets stalwarts were recognised for their voluntary service for young people with British Empire Medals in The King's New Year Honours list.

WO1 (SCC) James Bryan RNR *(top right)* of London Area has worked tirelessly to develop training and mentoring programmes for young leaders in Sea Cadets and London's other cadet forces.

He was also the driving force behind London Area's Platinum Jubilee activities and their Coronation Parade at Greenwich in 2023.

Gail Cramp *(top left)* is the tireless Chair of Sunbury & Walton Sea Cadets and has spent over a decade leading an incredible fundraising effort for new unit facilities.

Roy Heppenstall *(bottom right)* has been an active President of Newton-le-Willows Unit since 2008, where his leadership and mentoring skills have been highly valued.

Roy is also the lead volunteer behind the town's Remembrance Parade and founded a veterans group which worked with cadets to create a community Garden of Remembrance in 2023.

Finally, CPO (SCC) Stuart McCourt *(bottom left)* has given 20 years of exceptional service to Whitehaven Unit, including several years as Commanding Officer – during which time he devised and funded their brilliant 'Bee Bomb' initiative to help cadets across the UK create wildflower areas for pollinators.

Earl welcomed in inspiring visit

CADETS and volunteers at Queensferry Sea Cadets were honoured to host Andrew Hope, Earl of Hopetoun, during a recent training evening.

The visit showcased the incredible skills and dedication of cadets as they engaged in activities ranging from ceremonial drill to seamanship and navigation training.

Lord Hopetoun, who observed the evening with keen interest, said: "To cover the full range of experiences from rocket science to drill was commendable and combined with the most marvellous enthusiasm."

The Earl also highlighted the longstanding connection between TS Lochinvar and Hopetoun House, including the cadets' proud contributions to events like the annual Cancer Research Race for Life.

Lt (SCC) Andy Malarky RMR, Commanding Officer of TS Lochinvar, said: "We are incredibly proud of our cadets and volunteers. Lord Hopetoun's words were a great encouragement, and we look forward to building on this partnership to inspire and support even more young people."

This visit exemplifies the life-changing impact that Sea Cadet units have, providing young people with opportunities to grow, learn, and contribute to their communities.

Fallen former Sea Cadets are honoured in Falklands

A POIGNANT ceremony honouring 12 former Sea Cadets who lost their lives during the Falklands conflict in 1982 was held at the Liberation Memorial in the capital Stanley.

The wreath-laying, led by SLt (SCC) Robert Streeter RNR of Woking Sea Cadets, served as a solemn reminder of the sacrifices made by young cadets who transitioned from training to active service in defence of their nation.

At the morning service at Christ Church Cathedral the Rector, the Rev Hayley Argles-Grant, blessed the wreath and recited the Sea Cadet Collect. The ceremony then moved to the Liberation Memorial, where attendees gathered to pay their respects.

Among those present were the Governor of the Falkland Islands, Alison Blake CMG; the Rector; the Head of the Maritime Authority, Chris Moorey; the Harbour Master, Stuart Barlow MNI; and Colonel David Fuller, Chief Surveyor and Deputy Lieutenant of the East Riding of Yorkshire.

Notably, a veteran who had served on HMS Coventry—a former Sea Cadet himself—attended, adding a deeply personal connection to the event. Mr Barlow read the Exhortation and Kohima.

The initiative to honour these fallen cadets originated from a project led by Lt Cdr (SCC) Ray Mitchell RNR.

His efforts to identify former Sea Cadets who died in conflict culminated in the planting of crosses in the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey in November 2024, as previously reported in *Navy News*.

This ceremony in the Falklands was a continuation of that tribute, bringing the remembrance full circle to the very land where these young servicemen fought and fell.



SLt (SCC) Streeter RNR, who was on holiday in the Falklands, seized the opportunity to ensure their sacrifice was remembered in the place where they gave their lives.

Reflecting on the significance of the wreath-laying, he said: "Remembrance is something we discuss with our cadets. It's not just a day in November; it has meaning all year round.

"Honouring these former Sea Cadets in the Falklands was a way to connect their sacrifice with values we instil in our cadets today—service, courage, and commitment."

Colonel Fuller, who also serves as Vice Chairman of the Yorkshire and the Humber Reserves and Cadet Forces Association, laid a wreath on behalf of the Lord Lieutenant, symbolising the enduring gratitude of the nation.

The presence of former members of the now-closed Falkland Islands Sea Cadet Unit further underscored the enduring legacy of the Sea Cadet Corps and its impact on those who serve.

The Falklands' unpredictable weather added a symbolic touch to the occasion. As attendees left the Cathedral for the memorial, rain began to fall—a reminder of the harsh conditions faced by those who fought in the conflict. Yet, the weather did little to dampen the resolve of those gathered to honour the fallen.

This ceremony was not just a moment of remembrance but a testament to the enduring bond between the Sea Cadet Corps and the Royal Navy.

It highlighted the courage of young cadets who answered the call of duty and paid the ultimate price, ensuring their legacy lives on in the hearts of those who continue to serve.

There is now discussion over creating a permanent memorial to the fallen former Sea Cadets.

Flitwick and Ampthill busy start





FLITWICK & Ampthill Unit got the year off to a flying start with a range of courses and training for its cadets.

They started off with running basic marine engineering, intermediate first aid and basic climbing courses for South District cadets.

Shortly after, both their Unarmed Drill and RMCD teams (and their respective Squad Commanders) won their categories at South District's Drill and Piping Competition *(pictured top left)*, with further gold medals for the Senior and Junior Piping teams and individuals.

A memorable month culminated in Able Cadet Dominic gaining his Bronze Wings at the Naval Aviation initial course and winning selection for the Silver Wings course later in the year.

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First Sea Lord's new cadets



SIX Sea Cadets enjoyed an unforgettable experience as they took part in the traditional investiture ceremony for First Sea Lord's Cadets in Portsmouth.

The historic setting of HMS Victory and the presence of the First Sea Lord himself, Admiral Sir Ben Key, made it a very special day indeed for the whole group.

They were joined by their families and supports, as well as five other young people from the Volunteer Cadet Corps and Combined Cadet Force RN, Sea Cadets' area officers, chief executive Martin Coles, and Captain Sea Cadets, Captain Neil Downing.

Cadet Corporal Saul, of Northern Area, said: "What an honour to tread these boards on this most famous ship in my number one uniform for this amazing service, I couldn't be prouder.

"And to share the moment with mum and dad really just put the cherry on top.

"Collecting my award in the same spot where Nelson would plan his battles was surreal and something me and my family will never forget."

The cadets showed the sort of composure and professionalism that will stand them in good stead in a year of high-profile duties, and soon showed signs of becoming a close-knit team.

The cadets are selected for their ability to act as ambassadors for Sea Cadets and thrive on a year of engagement with the Royal Navy at official ceremonies and important functions.

First Sea Lord's Cadet is a hugely prestigious role for every sea cadet who is keen to gain a unique insight into higher naval policy and the work of senior serving officers.

Cadets in the role are also representing the Royal Navy on the national stage and have the chance to feedback on their experience to the Navy Board – helping to enhance the partnership between the navy and its cadets.

Each Sea Cadets area is once again represented by a very strong and deserving candidate, nominated for being an effective role model for their peers in demonstrating the naval values of loyalty, discipline, courage, commitment, integrity and respect.

Representing South West Area, **Leading Cadet Aleena** has gained qualifications in everything from offshore power to adventure training.

She is also highly proficient in skill-at-arms, having taken part in several inter-service shooting competitions.



An active member of the Cadet Voice programme, Aleena enjoys representing her fellow cadets from unit to national level. She also serves her community as Mayor's Cadet for Conwy and received a special award for her poppy appeal fundraising from the Royal British Legion.

Her ambition is to join the Royal Navy Submarine Service as a mechanical engineer.

Petty Officer Cadet Henery is proud to represent Southern Area, with his commitment and passion for boating helping him to attain an array of badges – including RYA Sailing with Spinnakers – during his cadet career.



He has also impressed in achieving his Cadet Drill Instructor qualification, while his leadership skills helped Southern Area's Armed Guard team become national champions in 2023.

Embracing his status as a senior cadet, Henery enjoys supporting his fellow cadets, assisting unit volunteers and playing a key role in unit and community ceremonies.

He hopes to fulfil his dream of joining the Royal Navy as a warfare officer.

Motivated by a deep love for the water and a desire to challenge himself, Eastern Area's **Petty Officer Cadet Joshua** is a qualified SCC Coxswain and has competed in several rowing regattas.

Becoming a Powerboat Instructor in 2024, he then relished the opportunity to develop his skills and knowledge on an offshore voyage aboard the powerboat TS John Jerwood.



Proudly leading his unit in drill competitions and community parades, Joshua passed his Drill Instructor Class 2 course in November 2024.

His long-term goal is to become either a mechanical engineer in the Royal Navy or an aircraft technician.

Cadet Corporal Saul of Northern Area enjoys planning lessons or creating training resources for other cadets.

As a qualified Drill Leader Class 2 he particularly loves teaching drill, but also likes to pass on his fieldcraft skills. A keen drummer and his area's lead drum major, Saul once performed a ceremonial mess beating for high-ranking officers at Scone Palace.



Another major achievement was representing his detachment in the 2024 Gibraltar Cup – where tackling the endurance course on Woodbury Common convinced him to pursue a career as a Royal Marines Commando.

An avid swimmer and kayaker, South West Area's **Leading Cadet Mia** is working towards becoming a Kayaking Instructor having passed the BC Foundation Safety & Rescue Training in 2024.



Whether taking part in competitions, outdoor activities or community fundraising, she is renowned for her infectious enthusiasm and selfless support for others.

A distinguished former Solihull Mayor's Cadet, Mia has achieved qualifications including Intermediate Catering, Advanced First Aid and BTEC Level 1.

She is currently working towards her Silver DofE Award and hopes to study architecture at university.

Leading Cadet Katie has thrived on the challenge of performing as a bell lyrist with the London Area Band, helping them to win the Lord Mayor's Band Competition in 2024.

Her success in becoming a Cadet Drill Instructor has been another highlight of her Sea Cadets career, while her exceptional communications skills and professionalism have seen her selected as Deputy Lord-Lieutenant's Cadet for Merton.



Also achieving SCC Coxswain and BTEC Level 1 qualifications, Katie's commitment to hard work and learning makes her a valued mentor to her fellow cadets.

After the ceremony on HMS Victory, the new First Sea Lord's Cadets were thrilled to be given a guided tour of the Royal Navy's latest flagship, HMS Prince of Wales.

"This was an amazing experience," said Saul. "Not many folk can say they have been aboard the oldest and the newest ships in the fleet in the same morning."

After bonding over a buffet lunch in HMS Nelson, the cadets soon departed for a weekend of training at RMR London, to learn about their new role and develop the skills needed to become outstanding ambassadors.

Saul added: "We took part in debates and discussions, effective communication exercises, media training and an amazing mess night in the Officer's Mess where we had to engage with VIPs.

"We put everything we had learned to the test, having fully planned and prepared the night alongside colleagues from the other Royal Navy Cadet Forces. We were all very proud with our effort."

All six cadets are relishing the chance to put their new skills into practice as they carry out their duties – beginning with the traditional highlight of the Mountbatten Festival Music at the Royal Albert Hall this month.

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TAKING TO THE COLOMBIAN SKIES



TWO Royal Navy and two Royal Marines went to Colombia to compete in the 2025 British Paragliding Winter Open.

The team arrived with three days of flying before the competition started which allowed the pilots to brush up on their cross country skills and to learn the area.

They went to Colombia with various degrees of experience, with one having competed for Team GB, and for another this was their second competition. Between them all they flew 3,000km over 150 hours.

The competition consisted of seven tasks, one for each day. After the morning brief on the mountain the team had 1.5 hours to plan the best route to take, update their flight instruments, complete final checks of their kit, launch, and fly to the start line.



Once in the air it is a constant tactical debate as to whether to spend time climbing to increase the distance you can glide by in the hope that you get a thermal, or whether to take a shorter climb and catch another thermal further away which could be stronger.

Deciding which route makes a big difference, if you decide to stick to the mountains you'll have further to travel but will find lifting air much easier, or you can take the short racing line but may not find a thermal and have to land.

Each race was around three hours, leaving time for the team to recover back on the ground, which consisted of helping a local give English lessons to locals, swimming, running, optimising their kit, and exploring the local area.

The team competed against some of the best pilots in the world, with Lt Col Richard Mackie almost making a podium spot, coming fourth in the sports class.

He said: "This competition provided an invaluable training benefit to all, as it saw us flying alongside world leading pilots, which will put us in a great position when it comes to the inter-services in June.

"Competing wouldn't be possible without the generous support from the RNRMC, Temeraire, the RN Hang gliding and Paragliding Association, and Chain of Command."

Personal bests were also beaten, with Lt Max Davidson achieving a 4.5hr flight duration, and Cpl Aaron Hall achieve his longest distance of 122km.

The forces undertake sporting events to build physical and mental resilience. Paragliding is an excellent example of this as it takes a lot of planning and mental resilience to maintain level flight in turbulent conditions whilst trying to race in a busy airspace.

Lt Davidson, said: "The highlight of the trip was flying wing tip to wing tip with vultures who were kind enough to point out the thermals for us."

Cpl Hall, of the RM Band Service, added: "It was great to be back in the air after the weather in the UK made flyable days few and far between.

"Having competed for the GB juniors team, it was great to see familiar faces at the event."

FROSTBITE CHALLENGE FOR SMALL-BORE SHOOTING CLUB







THE Royal Navy Small-bore Shooting Club held its first Frostbite Competition at Worplesdon Rifle Club in Surrey.

Postponed after a storm, the competition saw competitors from as far afield as Kent and Somerset take part in freezing temperatures.

The contest, which involved shooters aiming at targets between 50 and 100 yards, was run as a handicap with the top shots being given -20 point penalties, while the most junior shooters were awarded +10-point leads.

The main winners were Lt Cdr T Westmass, Sub Lt Cameron McKenzie and PO Robynne Brown, who took first places in the aggregated scores.

A Tyro competition was also held for Royal Navy entrants who hadn't shot in a RN lead competition before. ET Hanri Terblanche won by a narrow margine.

The pairs competition was won by Lt Neil Umpleby and Sub Lt McKenzie by 12 points.

The Small-bore shooting club looks now to hold an Open Championships in August before the NSRA National Meeting to start scoping who will make the Long Range Interservice Team in September.

VALKYRIES CELEBRATE AS THEY REACH FINISH LINE

AFTER three thousand miles and 46 days, the all-female rowing team HMS Oardacious the Valkyries have finished the World's Toughest Row.

They were elated to reach the finish line of Nelson's Dockyard in Antigua after setting off on the other side of the Atlantic before Christmas.

The Royal Navy rowers of skipper Lieutenant Commander Izzy Rawlinson (Marine Engineer - Submariner), Petty Officer Aaby Aldridge (Survival Equipment Technician), Lieutenant Commander Nic Hall (Warfare Officer) and Lieutenant Commander Ali Aindow (Mine Clearance Diver Officer) crossed the Atlantic in 46 days, 12 hours and 26 minutes.

Families and loved ones of the Valkyries cheered them on as they came in sight after a gruelling month and a half battling blisters, aches, lack of sleep and exhaustion from rowing two hours on and two hours off.

With lit flares and cheers coming from the crowd gathered at Fort Berkley, the women stepped off the boat together and onto land for the first time in weeks.

This is the fourth HMS Oardacious team that has successfully completed the World's Toughest Race but it is the first ever all women's Royal Navy team.

They are fundraising for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity and the Young Women's Trust which encourages women into traditionally under-represented environments such as STEM, both in and out of the Royal Navy.

Izzy, Aaby, Ali and Nic brought a wide range of skills, knowledge and drive to complete the race, which set off from the Canary Islands in December.

Along the way, the rowers saw dolphins, bioluminescence and a meteor shower which helped keep spirits up. A particular moral boost for the team was their 'treat Tuesday' where each team member had pre-packed a treat, which ranged from foodie treats to spa face masks.

Speaking after stepping off the boat, named "Captain Jim" in loving memory of Royal Navy Captain Jim Simpson who died in 2020, Ali said: "It tests you in ways you never thought you'd be tested. It is absolutely incredible to be here today."



Picture: World's Toughest Row



ON THE SLOPES

MORE than 100 Telemark skiers gathered for the RNRM Telemark training camp on the Stubai Glacier in Austria.

Exercise White Dagger saw 110 personnel from 28 different units take part – from Marines to Colonels, with a sprinkling of Royal Navy ranks.

At a height of between 2,500 and 3,500 metres with air temperatures as low as -15 degrees, the students were put into ski groups, under the watchful eye of chief instructor WO1 "Banjo" Haigh RM.

Sixteen ranks started as beginners to skiing, 50 as Telemark novices and ten were on the Telemark Leaders Course to become instructors, under the direction of Maj Jack Duckitt and Cammy Gunn (BASI 3).

The RMA Telemark Branch saw around 28 members serving and retired join for their first AGM, a great get together for the Corps family before the RMA headed home

Week two and a nice and much needed dump of powder arrived followed by a couple of blue-sky days, all the students skiing had come on leaps and bounds. Finally, the Thursday race day arrived. The standard throughout was impressive, some good candidates for the RN team identified.

Skiing novice Marine James Thompson, from 42 Commando, said: "It was an amazing trip and brought on my skiing ability tenfold, I recommended it to all."

Telemark novice Lt Ed Shackleton, of 45 Commando, said: "Most of our group had never tried this sport before, but all could alpine ski. Having only seen skiers lunging down the slopes in a stress position or using Pusser's Planks in Norway, we were rather sceptical of "freeing the heel!" However, after a few days we had caught the bug and our lives had been changed forever."

AB Georgina Altham, of HMS King Alfred, who was on the Telemark Leaders (TML) Course, said: "The first day of instructing was a bit of a wake-up call. I was used to skiing fast. My race skis are set up for long carving turns at speed, and I've spent countless hours focusing on fine-tuning turns for maximum efficiency. But as we ventured out for the first day of the course, I quickly realised that this course wasn't about speed or precision for myself—it was about becoming a well-rounded skier and learning how to teach. The instinct to push hard on long, fast, carved turns had to be dialled down significantly.

"My final day before heading back to the UK presented glorious conditions. The heavy snowfall from earlier in the week had been compacted into the most incredible piste conditions. We were straight back into short turns to make sure everyone was at the standard required for the course before Thursday's race.

"I'm thrilled to share that I successfully passed the course! I'm now looking forward to putting all that I've learned into practice and teaching next season."

Results:

1. Mr Cammy Gunn – Civ BASI 3; 2. Mne Ollie Wooton – 42 Cdo RM; 3. WO2 Steve Farrant – 42 Cdo RM

RN Level 1 (Beginner) Championship:

1. Lt Sam Leslie – CTCRM; 2. Mne Alisdair Groocock – 43 Cdo FP Gp RM; 3. Mne Ed Smith – 43 Cdo FP Gp RM

RN Level 2 (Novices) Mens Championship:

1. Lt Ed Shackleton RM – 45 Cdo RM; 2. Mne James Digney – 45 Cdo RM; 3. Mne Dusschooten – RNLMC

RN Level 2 (Novices) Ladies Championship:

1. Lt Lily-Mae Fisher – RNAS Yeovilton; 2. Lt Kate McManus – HMS Drake

Unit Championship: Presented by the Corps RSM & Tourist Board.

1. 45 Cdo RM; 2. RNLMC; 3. 30 Cdo IX Gp RM; 4. 42 Cdo RM; 4. 43 Cdo FP Gp RM; 6; RM Poole.

The overall Flying Dutchman Prize went to: Mne Claus RNLMC.

Veteran Title for over 50 went to: Mr Robert "Topsey" Turner – Former ML1 (presented on behalf of "Ginge" Booth former ML1)

Ranks who passed the TML Course:

Capt Hamish Richardson-Vargaysch – 45 Cdo RM; Cpl Cal Law – SRS, 30 Cdo IX Gp RM; AB Georgie Altham – HMS King Alfred.

Roll on Exercise White Dagger 2025, from November 30 to December 13.

WINTER ARRIVES AT INVICTUS GAMES

SEVEN serving sailors and Royal Marines who have battled incredible adversity took part in the first winter sports edition of the Invictus Games in Canada.

Team UK had a 62-strong squad competing in the sports event for service personnel who have experienced life-changing injuries and illnesses.

Serving personnel included Lieutenant Olivia Blandford-Guyon, Lieutenant Commander Rich Galpin, Lieutenant Commander Steve Irwin, Marine Keanen Murphy, Able Rating James Saltmarsh, Able Rating Nisar Utmanzai, and Major John Whiteman.

That magnificent seven made up the Royal Navy's contingent heading to the Vancouver Whistler Games, where more than 500 competitors from 20 nations competed in adaptive sports, including new winter sports: alpine skiing and snowboarding, Nordic skiing and biathlon, and wheelchair curling.

They were added to the core Invictus Games sports of indoor rowing, sitting volleyball, swimming, wheelchair rugby, and wheelchair basketball.

The final few days of the games saw a torrent of emotions, team success, and personal achievements.

Team UK won silver medals in the wheelchair rugby after a nail-biting final against France and reached the semi-finals in wheelchair volleyball.

After hosting a spectacular event, Canada handed the Invictus Games flag back to the UK, who will host the next games in Birmingham in 2027.

Lt Cdr Galpin travelled to Invictus after battling a knee injury that saw him bed-bound for six weeks and unable to run again. He took part in the skeleton, just missing out on a medal with a fourth place finish, as well as the biathlon, indoor rowing and basketball.

He said: "I can't put into words how it feels to be selected – the feeling is indescribable. For such a long time, I hadn't been myself. But after I found out I had made the team, I remember calling up my wife, who started crying and said, 'Oh my god, I've got my husband back.' She could tell by the tone of my voice how much it meant to me."

Lt Cdr Irwin's fight with cancer meant a muscle in his leg was removed, leaving him unable to use or feel part of his leg and, ultimately, no longer able to continue his work as a pilot.



He won a silver medal with Team UK in the wheelchair rugby *(pictured below)* and bronze in the swimming mixed 4x50m freestyle relay.

Mne Murphy was shot in the stomach while off-duty in his native South Africa in June 2023. He spent nearly a month on life support and has had 11 surgeries, with more still needed.

His recovery has been long and challenging, both physically and mentally.The Royal Marines have played a significant role in his recovery, providing support through the Royal Navy Recovery Centre Hasler. He credits them with saving his life, saying, "They've helped me more than I can say."

Engineering Technician AB Utmanzai suffered a rare brain bleed, which left him in a coma for several days over Christmas 2022. Despite issues with balance, coordination, and stuttering speech, Nisar fought his way back and has since returned to work.

He said: "My hand-eye coordination has been massively degraded since the injury, and that is one of the main things I want to improve. The Games will help to prove to both myself and the Navy that I am an asset, despite the setbacks I've endured."

Cornishman AB Saltmarsh has Functional Neurological Disorder (FND), which he just woke up with one day. It started with a head tremor, and over the course of 72 hours, he lost functionality of his leg and arm and began having cognitive issues. Through lots of grit and rehab, he's regained moderate use of his leg and arm and is currently a patient at the Royal Navy Recovery Centre Hasler, where he continues to work on recovery and resilience as his condition fluctuates.



Pictures: Cpl Tim Hammond

Major Whiteman *(pictured above)* began experiencing seizures and was diagnosed with PTSD, a result of the tours he completed in Iraq and Afghanistan. He still suffers from stress-based epilepsy.

He said: "It took me so long to come forward with my PTSD because I put it off and saw it as some form of weakness. Being a part of Team UK has enabled me to be around like-minded people, and I just feel like I can open up more."

Lt Blandford-Guyon took part in swimming, wheelchair basketball, and biathlon. Olivia worked as a Critical Care Nurse throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, firstly in Europe's largest ITU in Birmingham, and then in a military hospital in Bagram, Afghanistan. Working throughout the pandemic was traumatic for Olivia.

Eventually, in January 2023, she went off sick with burnout and mental health issues but is now on a phased return to work.

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Warspite veteran dies aged 104

ONE of the country's oldest sailors has died at the age of 104.

Alan Norman Martin – known to friends and family simply as Norman – served through most of World War 2, and most of it in the Mediterranean.

At 104, he was one of the last men to see action in the bitter battle for Crete in May-June 1941, serving aboard battleship HMS Warspite.

The Navy suffered heavily in trying to stop the German invasion of the island with Warspite herself badly damaged by the Luftwaffe and forced to retire.

The battleship – which earned more battle honours than any other single ship in RN history – was subsequently sent to Seattle to undergo repairs, an experience Norman particularly enjoyed, as he told his family decades later.

Warspite returned to action as did Norman, but he was drafted to new minesweeper HMS Spanker in 1943, remaining with her till the war's end.

The Algerine-class vessel's wartime service was focused exclusively in the Mediterranean, clearing minefields around the islands of Elba and Sardinia, supporting the 'forgotten D-Day' (the invasion of southern France in August 1944) and, in the final months of WW2, swept mines from ports and waterways on both sides of the Adriatic.



Demobbed in early 1946, Norman worked for many years as an engineer at Leicester knitwear machinery factory Stibbe.

A keen fan of the city's rugby union team, the Tigers, and an avid dancer into his 90s, in retirement Norman was equally at home in the peace of his garden, where he cultivated tomatoes, rhubarb, sweet peas and damsons – which he gladly shared with friends and neighbours.

He travelled the world with his late wife Alice and never tired of sharing his naval 'dits' with his family – three children and seven grandchildren.

In later life he became well known in Glenfield – on the western outskirts of Leicester – trundling the streets in his mobility scooter.

He died at home on January 22. A memorial service celebrating his life took place at Glenfield Methodist Church.



Alan Norman Martin pictured in retirement and inset, in his RN uniform in 1940

Deaths

Lt (CS) Tony Cokes MBE. Joined as a boy telegraphist and served in HMS Glasgow, Tyne, Torquay, Victorious, Tiger, Lion, Scarborough and Bulwark. Shore establishments: Ganges (three times), Portsmouth W/T; Mercury, Sea Eagle, Afrikander, Mauritius, Heron (twice), MOD (2SL Staff), CinCNavHomeStaff, Whitehall W/T; Croydon, CIO, MOD (DNR Staff). Died January 27, aged 89.

Clive Henry Stannard, AKA Stan. Chief Mechanician. Served from 1952 to 1974, with HMS Victory his last ship. Died January 13, aged 90.

Roger David Singleton, CPO TASI. Served from 1956 on 1976 on ships including HMS Trowbridge, Ulster, Torquay, Mohawk, Phoebe, and Lowestoft. Died January 20, aged 84.

Paul Daykin. Trained as signalman at HMS Ganges in 1958 and served in HMS Albion, Tyne, Bermuda, Salisbury, President, Vidal and Warrior, then joined the South African Navy. Died in Cape Town on February 2.

Hugh 'Mac' McFadden. Served from 1966 to 1973 as a radio operator in HMS St Vincent, Mercury, Fife, Dainty, Verulam, Centurion and Diomede. Member of the Limavady branch of the RNA. Died aged 74.

Dave Flampson, former submariner. Member of Wansbeck branch of the RNA. Died January 31, aged 88.

Ask Jack



John Moor: I would like to know if anyone knows any of these three gentlemen in the photo. I found it in the belongings of my late Uncle John Moor (1935 - 2021), and I am not sure of their connection. On the left is J. Maddison and on the right is A. Williams.

Emily Jackson
emily.jane2@hotmail.co.uk

EL Cullum: While sorting out items relating to my late father, Brinlea Stacey, known as Fred, I came across a number of photographs of him during his career in the Royal Navy, the Royal Naval Reserve and Colchester Sea Cadet Corps. A familiar face stood out, that of Uncle Ned, EL Cullum. He served with my father and I would like to know what happened to him. He used to live in Stowmarket, Suffolk, but would appreciate hearing from anyone who can help.

Mrs Christine Stacey Heath
Chrissyann17@hotmail.com

Sailmakers: I was rated as a Sailmaker's Mate (Leading Hand) in 1961 and was the youngest member of the last class to undergo training. I was wondering if any of my former branch members are still with us.

Alastair Duncan, Chief Sailmaker
Alastairduncan215@gmail.com

HMS Mercury 1986-1987: I am after video or photos of the passing-out parades at HMS Mercury in 1986 and 1987, when I was the guard commander.

RS(SM) George Carnegie.
07442 174176 or email carnegieen@talktalk.net

Hugh Kepple Harry Jeans: I am researching my great-grandfather who served as an engineer on Royal Navy submarines during World War 2. I know he served on HMS Sybil. I would love to hear from anyone who can help me.

Noah Studeman
Noahstudeman@gmail.com

HMS Ganges: I am trying to trace shipmates from the January 1957 intake, under the command of CPO Perky Mellows, of Granville Division.

Robert Jacob
robertjacob201701@gmail.com

Charlie Johnson. Attended Claydon Area School in Suffolk and left at 15 to join the RN in the mid-1960s. Went on to serve aboard HMS Ark Royal (IV) as a leading hand.

Trevor Shaw
t.jshaw@btopenworld.com

RFA Tidepool: I served on RFA Tidepool during the Falklands Conflict as 3rd Engineer Officer.
After the end of the conflict we were escorted around Cape Horn to Chile to hand the ship back over to them as they had allowed us to 'borrow' it back following its sale to them earlier in the year.
Is anyone able to provide details of the RN ship escorted which took us back round the Cape to Punta Arenas as I have lost my records of that passage.

Norman Killin
killinclan@talktalk.net

Reunions

HMS Mohawk Association: Our next reunion will take place at the Royal Hotel, Weymouth from March 14 to 17. For details call IOW Tours on 01983 405116 or email **rob.proud@mypostoffice.co.uk**

HMS Hermes: Our reunion takes place at the Everglages Hotel, Chester, on April 11 to 14. 1-3 night packages available or just attend the gala dinner. For bookings contact Just for Groups on 016038886740. For membership inquiries email **hmshermes.association@gmail.com** or call Carol on 07894 500707.

HMS Bulwark, Albion & Centaur Association: The 2025 reunion is confirmed at the Royal Maritime Hotel Portsmouth, from April 25 to 28. Contact Denis Askham at 07773651213 or email **askhamd3@gmail.com**

Fleet Air Arm Association: 2025 Reunion and AGM to be held at Holiday Inn Southampton May 9 to 10. For booking form and more details go to www.faaa.org.uk or email the treasurer **alan.key899@gmail.com**

HMS Ganges, Benbow 27 Mess, 24th May 1965: Our 60th anniversary reunion will be at The HMS Ganges Museum, Shotley Gate, on Saturday May 24. We will be having a long weekend in the area, but if you can only do a couple of hours on the Saturday that will be great as well. Wives and sweethearts welcome. Please contact: - Jim Worlding at email **jimworlding1@gmail.com** Tel 01480 431747 snail mail 67 Roman Way, Godmanchester, Cambs, PE29 2RW

Submarine Service: What is expected to be the largest gathering of submariners in years takes place in Plymouth in July 2025. Two days of events have been organised at the Warrant officers and Senior Rates Mess at HMS Drake on Friday July 25 and Saturday 26. T-boaters interested should contact Richard 'Figgy' Figgins and Ian 'Tally Ho' Talbot at **Trafalgarclassreunion2025@outlook.com.**

Friends of HMS Eagle: Reunion Weekend will be held at the Keppel's Head Hotel, Portsmouth, from September 5-8 2025. All commissions, plus wives/partners and guests welcome. Meet and greet Friday evening; visits/tours of Portsmouth and dockyard area Saturday followed by gala dinner and 'Up Spirits' then dancing and entertainment in the ballroom. Contact Danny du Feu **ddf.photography@gmail.com/07711 083465**.

HMS Troubridge Final Commission Association 1966-69. This year's reunion will be at the North Euston Hotel, Fleetwood, September 29- October 2. Contact association secretary Bryan Pace at **Romft1@GMail.com.**

HMS Medway Queen. Are you connected with the Medway Queen – one of the last large ships involved with the Dunkirk evacuation still with us? The team lovingly restoring the paddle steamer want to celebrate her 100th birthday this year by involving every one who has played a part in bringing her back to life.

In May 1940 she was sent across the Channel and brought back around 7,000 troops from Dunkirk, securing her place in naval history. Former crew, staff, anyone involved in the long restoration of the ship or has a story to tell about the ship and their experiences aboard, especially families of Dunkirk veterans saved by the ship should contact Pam Bathurst at **pambathurst@sky.com** or Medway Queen Preservation Society, Gillingham Pier, Pier Approach Road, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 1RX.

HMS Lowestoft Association: The 2025 reunion takes place at the Queens Hotel, Southsea, PO3 3LJ on October 14-15. All who served in Lowestoft during her RN service (1961-1985) are welcome to attend (including wives/partners/guests). Bookings direct with Events at the Queens hotel on 02392 822466, for further details and a booking form please email: **admin@hmslowestoft.uk**

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Submissions for the Deaths, Reunions and Ask Jack columns in next month's Noticeboard must be received by
March 14 2025

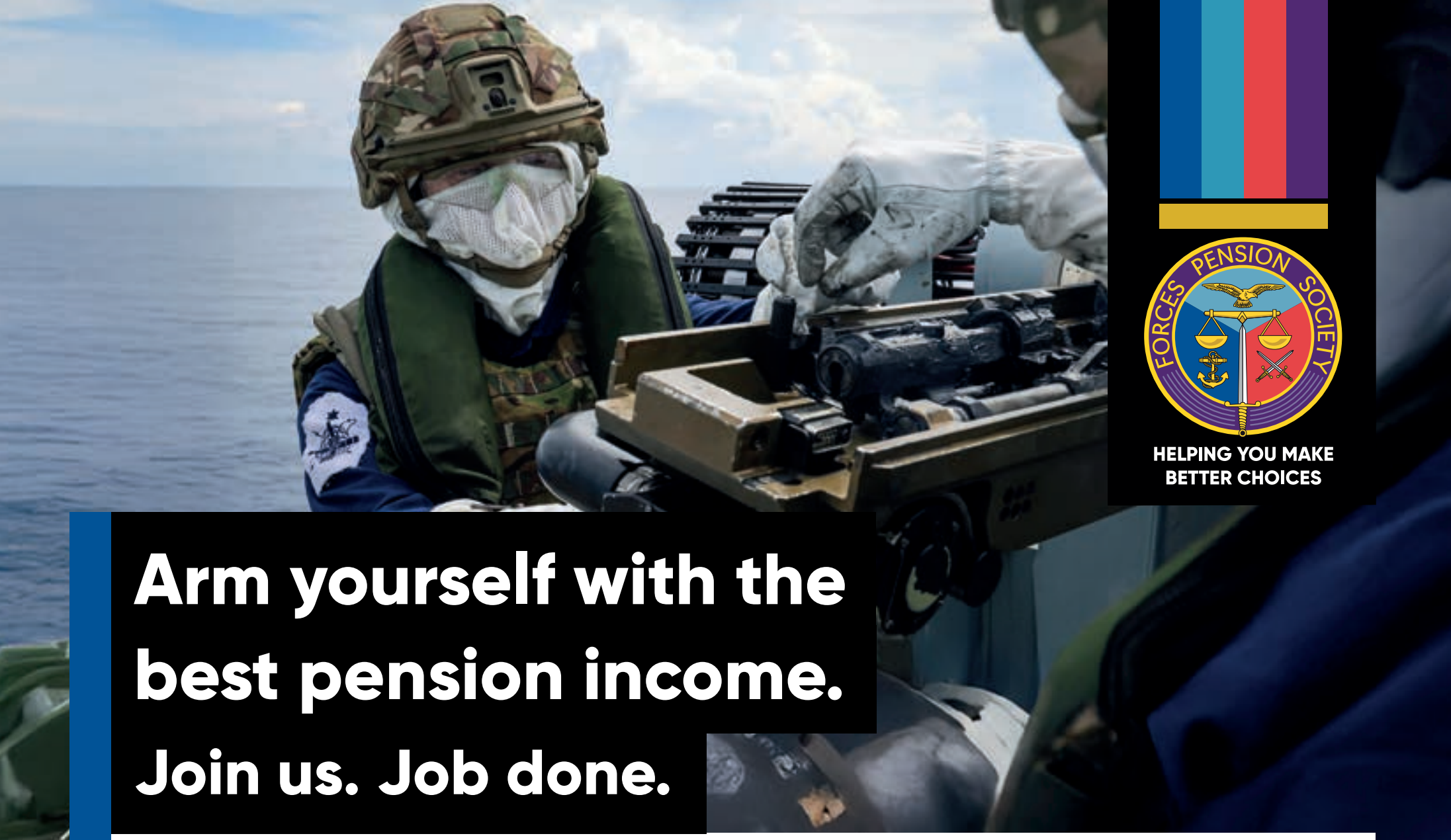
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