



NAVY NEWS

APRIL 2026

FROZEN ASSETS



Royal Marines emerge from the icy depths of an Arctic fjord on German submarine U-35 to carry out a daring commando operation as part of major NATO mission rehearsals.
See pages 16-17

Inside: ■ Anson in Australia ■ Bulldog takes a bow ■ Tamar time

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Above, Crossing the Line ceremony on the casing; Submariners line the casing of HMS Anson as the Astute-class submarine makes her way into HMAS Stirling near Perth, Below, supervising a RAN engineer during maintenance work in Perth; Commanding Officer Cdr Aaron Williams; Indigenous Leader Barry Winmar conducts the welcome ceremony



Far left, Crew members from HMS Anson with personnel from both the Royal Australian Navy and US Marine Corps on board; Left, Admiral William Houston, Director Naval Nuclear Propulsion, Department of Navy/ Department of Energy, VADM Jonathan Mead AO RAN, Director General Australian Submarine Agency (ASA) (centre) and RADM Andrew Perks, Director Submarines at HMAS Stirling as HMS Anson comes alongside the base for a Submarine Maintenance Period



DEEPS DIVE

A ROYAL Navy submarine has completed a visit to Australia for an historic visit to strengthen the UK's commitment to the security of the Indo-Pacific.

HMS Anson docked at HMAS Stirling – the Astute-class boat's first visit Down Under – as part of the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the UK and the United States, known as AUKUS.

The visit was a crucial part of the ongoing process of supporting Australia to develop the skills and capabilities necessary to operate, maintain and steward conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines.

Waiting for the submarine – normally based at Faslane on the Clyde – was Second Sea Lord Vice Admiral Paul Beattie.

"It's my first time in Western Australia – I could not have been made more welcome.

"It's very clear that this is a state with a proud maritime history and one that understands what it means to be a maritime power.

"I am here for HMS Anson's maintenance period at HMAS Stirling – marking the first time that Australian personnel have done maintenance on a UK nuclear sub – and a true demonstration of both our nations commitment to AUKUS.

"Announced four years ago, it is profound how much progress has been made on AUKUS – most visibly the world class facilities at HMAS Stirling – now the hub for submarine rotation and, in time, the home of Australia's own nuclear submarine fleet.



"From a UK perspective, we are particularly proud to be partnering with Australia on the next generation submarine, SSN AUKUS – a design that will draw on the experience of both the UK and US navies and build deep industrial integration with Australian shipyards.

"But SSN AUKUS is so much more than a defence acquisition: it is a strategic partnership that binds our industries together for the next 50 years."

During her visit to the base, near Perth, the boat hosted a series of high-profile engagement activities. The boat, which stopped in Gibraltar before making a non-stop transit through the Mediterranean Sea and Suez Canal also underwent a maintenance period with the Royal Australian Navy while she is in Western Australia.

Commanding Officer of the A-boat, Cdr Aaron Williams, said: "The crew of HMS Anson are excited to be in Australia. Travelling a distance unsupported of over 8,000 nautical miles, we are ready to showcase what HMS Anson has to offer.

"The highlight for me of this voyage, covering 9,000 miles, was crossing the line. It's a tradition since the 17th century, we surfaced for some well-earned air and King Neptune visited us and made the sailors swim through slop before diving and continuing about our business. Our job is to leave here resilient, ready for operations and prove we have an exceptionally capable submarine."

During her maintenance industry partners and Royal Navy personnel worked with engineers from the Royal Australian Navy as they learn how to operate nuclear-powered submarines.

LET(WESM) Henry, 30, from Lancashire, is a sensors maintainer and joined the submarine service in 2025. He said: Life on a submarine: for a lot of people we wake up, shower, get dressed, go to scan. Our beds are narrow, stacked three high. It can be impossible to find your own space if you need it, our

rest times are spent in the mess or you take your downtime wherever you can.

"Joining the submarine service was an opportunity for me for personal growth - it put me so far out of my comfort zone. I wanted to be a better version of me and this job is giving me that. As submariners, we have much more responsibility at the junior ranks and rates compared with the Surface Fleet.

"From my mathematics degree at Keele to now, where my career would take me is something I'd given a little thought to, but surfacing off Western Australia was a definite 'pinch myself' moment – I don't think I've ever seen blue sea and skies like it. It's a world away from home and the furthest I've travelled. It's almost an alien world to me – I'd never left Europe before!

"When you go home you recognise brands, buildings, trees - it's so different here, but in a good way. It's the complete opposite to where I ever thought I'd be growing up.

"As a kid, you dream about where you'll travel to and what you you'll do. As an adult the realities of life hit, so you could say this is a dream come true.

"I'm getting into the maintaining side of the job – it can be stressful but seeing a problem through is very satisfying. The work pattern of six on six off can make the days feel long, but you get into a rhythm. The food is really good; the chefs did a fantastic job on the way here."

He added: "Family is the most important thing to me – being able to get emails off and then getting that reply is the ultimate boost.

"The anxieties over being on board are true: we don't get to see the sun! Being a submariner is about facing fears, insecurities and worries, and at the end of the next day, you're a better person for it.

"I'm really looking forward to visiting the zoo, cultural sites, museums and having some downtime. I don't know when I'll get the opportunity to come here again so trying to make the most of it.

And the navy has really looked after us – our accommodation is spot on!"

Surg Lt Oliver, 27, who joined HMS Anson in 2024, said: "As a submariner, you're expected to take on other roles on board so it's an opportunity to learn and do something completely outside of my profession and comfort zone.

"People go through careers learning one thing – this is so different and varied – and, for my stage of career, it's also where

I can be fully independent and make autonomous medical decisions I otherwise wouldn't make in the NHS. Being on a submarine means I also get to experience fields I'd never otherwise come into contact with: nuclear engineering, navigation, weapon systems."

WO John added: "I am the 'Nuke One' – I coordinate all the marine engineering personnel on behalf of the engineering officer. I am the senior, most experienced non-commissioned officer on board. I take charge of all the training programmes, as well as all of our qualification boards.

"I have been in the submarine service 19 years, and the greatest thing about being a submariner is being a large part of a team. Everyone pushing

towards one goal, which is the command aim.

"This is a journey I have taken before in these waters but a lot of our personnel haven't and it's about spreading our experience and the younger personnel and exposing our less-experienced personnel to new challenges."

WO Graham, who has been a submariner for 30 years, is the senior weapons engineering rating aboard, looking after all the torpedoes and missiles.

"The trip's been really good out to Australia, we could feel it getting warmer every day," he said.

"It's been really good to go somewhere quite different. If I had my time again I would absolutely do this all over again. It's a great career for anyone joining up. Working with my son is really good, I get to see him grow, learn new skills and most importantly, I get to see what he gets up to when he goes on a night out."

His son ET George is also a weapons engineer, working daily on the maintenance of weapons and sensors, weapon-handling systems, machine-guns and so on.

He added: "The best part of my job is when I get to play with the missiles, moving them about and loading them. We get to go to the top of the submarine to rig the machine-guns.

"Day-to-day life on a submarine can be a bit the same but you get into a nice routine, do a bit of phys, watch some movies, spending time with your mates.

"I've got stories with my dad that potentially no other person would have, going on jollies, spending time with him, swimming, everything."

Logistics rating AB Aishah said: "It's my first time in Australia and I've been really looking forward to what the country has to offer. I've been a submariner for two years and one of the best parts of the job is meeting different people, different crews.

"It is a great experience. This trip has been great, it's had some highs and lows but one of the best bits was Crossing the Line. It was great to get on the casing covered in slop, it breaks up the working day."

AUKUS will expand the Royal Navy's submarine fleet with up to 12 new attack boats as well as deliver a new class of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia.

The new vessels will be the most powerful attack boats ever operated by the Royal Navy Submarine Service, which is also marking its 125th anniversary this year, and will replace the seven Astute-class boats.

AUKUS will also see the development of cutting-edge advanced technologies to complement the submarine force.

It is estimated that AUKUS will bring 7,000 additional jobs to the UK, while Australia estimates 20,000 direct jobs will be created over the next 30 years.

HMS Astute visited HMAS Stirling in 2021 as part of the Carrier Strike Group 2021 deployment and last year the USS Vermont visited Perth for a first of its kind submarine maintenance period under the AUKUS agreement. The visit by HMS Astute came weeks after Australia announced the AUKUS partnership.

Pictures: LPhot Kevin Walton, PO Phot Unaisi Luke and LAC Thomas Clarke-Kelly



DOWN UNDER

Training or on patrol around the UK

HMS Sutherland	HMS Mersey	845 NAS
HMS Portland	XV Patrick Blackett	846 NAS
HMS St Albans	Coastal Forces	700X NAS
HMS Duncan	Squadron	RFA Tiderace
HMS Cattistock	Project Wilton	RFA Tideforce
HMS Hurworth	814 NAS	RFA Tidesurge
HMS Ledbury	815 NAS	DTXG
HMS Trent	820 NAS	
HMS Severn	824 NAS	
HMS Tyne	825 NAS	



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



LEAD FIGHT WIN

ROYAL Marines emerged from the icy depths of an Arctic fjord on a German submarine to carry out a daring commando operation as part of major NATO mission rehearsals (see pages 1, 16 & 17).

Commandos surfaced around 200 miles inside the Arctic Circle aboard attack submarine U-35 as part of Cold Response 26, the largest military drills for the alliance in the region this year involving 14 nations and more than 25,000 troops.

Also in the Arctic are **Commando Helicopter Force** (see pages 14-15) who have qualified 30 new aviators and pushed the boundaries of helicopter operations across nearly 500 hours of sorties during three months in extreme cold of Northern Norway.

At the other end of the world was Astute-class submarine **HMS Anson** (see pages 2-3) as she completed a visit to HMAS Stirling near Perth in Western Australia as part of the trilateral partnership known as AUKUS.

Royal Navy patrol ship **HMS Tamar** is ready to resume front-line Pacific patrols after completing her regeneration in Australia (see page 13). Ten tense – and intense – days of training and assurance resulted in a thumbs-up for the crew, who will now prepare for the next phase of their lengthy deployment: patrolling the South Pacific islands.

Type 45 destroyer **HMS Dragon** departed Portsmouth in March heading for the eastern Mediterranean (see page 5) to bolster British defences in the region. She will join Wildcat helicopters from **815 NAS** and a Merlin Mk2 from **820 NAS**.

Sister ship **HMS Dauntless** (see page 19) spent a week working with the French nuclear-powered aircraft carrier FS Charles de Gaulle as it prepared for France's largest military exercise in decades.

A third Type 45 destroyer, **HMS Duncan**, battled an onslaught of drones, aircraft and missiles as she 'defended' critical national infrastructure during training exercise Sharpshooter off the coast of Wales (see page 6).

Patrol ship **HMS Tyne** and a Wildcat helicopter from **815 NAS** shadowed two sanctioned Russian cargo ships and their escorting warships (see page 7) in UK waters as part of a concentrated NATO effort from the Mediterranean to the North Sea.

Sailors from **Tyne** also paid their respects at Tyne Cot and the Menin Gate Memorial in Belgium during a stopover in Zeebrugge (see page 24).

Two shipbuilding milestones were passed in a matter of minutes on a key day for the Royal Navy's future frigate force (see page 11). Work began on the fourth Type 31 warship, **HMS Bulldog**, followed by the second ship in the class, **HMS Active**, emerging from a giant assembly hall in Rosyth.

The MOD has placed a multi-million-pound order with a family-run firm in the West Midlands to provide 30 **anchors**, more than two kilometres of chains, plus supporting equipment for much of the Fleet – including both Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers (see page 23).

A team of engineers strengthened their knowledge of the complex world of high-performance cars during a visit to Ricardo in Sussex (see page 21). Personnel from **Forward Support Unit Archimedes** and **Brunel** paid a professional engagement visit to the firm's HQ in Shoreham-by-Sea.

The **Royal Marines** family turned out in force to pay its respects to their own as the remarkable lives of WW2 veterans **Jim Wren** and **Don Butt** were celebrated (see page 25). Jim, who died aged 105, was possibly the country's oldest Royal Marine. Serving personnel attended his funeral in Salisbury and also attended the funeral of 100-year-old Don in Somerset.

Finally, the very best imagery and video of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines on operations at home and across the globe over the past 12 months has been recognised in this year's **Royal Navy Photographic Awards** (see page 9) with **Petty Officer Alex Ceolin** taking the title of the Service's top photographer and the coveted Peregrine Trophy.



Staff prep for NATO mission

A SENIOR Royal Navy team has used the largest military exercise in the Arctic to prepare itself for NATO's most important mission at sea.

The staff of the Commander UK Strike Force – 116 personnel normally based in Portsmouth Naval Base – helped to direct the biannual Arctic exercises designed to safeguard Europe's northern flank from any Russian aggression.

Warships, aircraft, helicopters, drones, armour and 25,000 personnel (11,800 on the ground, the remainder in naval and air forces) from 14 nations were committed to Cold Response (see pages 14-17 for extensive coverage), which ran from the beginning of until mid-March, focused in northern Norway – but also extended to Sweden and Finland.

While it was under way, forging a powerful allied force capable of defending a region whose climate is as challenging as its terrain, a second exercise was run concurrently to test the British staff.

For three weeks they swapped Portsmouth for Haakonsværn Naval Base, five miles from Bergen, from where they took charge of warships from the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Turkey and the UK's own HMS St Albans, plus naval air power.

In July, the UK is due to take on responsibility

for command of NATO's premier naval force: the Allied Reaction Force (Maritime).

The international task group is formed quickly to respond to a specific emergency or crisis, and comprises as many or few vessels/aircraft/personnel as the mission requires.

In Norway, that group was already at the disposal of the staff – almost all Royal Navy personnel, plus exchange officers from Turkey, Germany and France, and half a dozen NATO liaison officers – in the fjords and in the Norwegian Sea.

Then it was a test of the many facets of command the staff are likely to face for real when in charge of a large, three-dimensional, modern, multi-national naval force: joint manoeuvres, air-sea coordination, logistics, and real time decision-making.

"NATO is vigilant to threats in all areas, across all domains. What we are proving here is that the UK stands ready to defend and deter against aggression on NATO's northern flank," said Rear Admiral Mark Anderson, Commander UK Strike Force.

The staff exercise in Norway – known as Dynamic Mariner – builds on a table-top/planning workout held in Portsmouth just before Christmas.



Training on new mine kit begins

THE first sailors have received training in the latest uncrewed mine warfare systems to give the UK the edge in the underwater battlespace.

The Mine Hunting Capability (MHC) programme delivered two uncrewed surface vessels and three sets of uncrewed underwater vehicles, known as SeaCat.

A small cadre from the Mine and Threat Exploitation Group (MTXG) have already received comprehensive instruction in the use of the new systems from the manufacturers.

They are now sharing that knowledge, delivering bespoke courses to colleagues so they can operate the latest autonomous mine-countermeasures kit safely and effectively.

The training course they've introduced covers technical understanding, safe operation, mission planning, deployment, recovery, data exploitation and routine maintenance of both the surface vessels and the SeaCat.

It was designed to give sailors using/maintaining the kit the knowledge and confidence to use it on front-line operations.

MTXG's Operation Conversion Unit, a team delivering training on specialist equipment used in minehunting operations, now have a 12-month programme of training planned, including the delivery of R300 UUV, ARCIMS USV, SWEEP.

Programme director Jon Reed-Beviere said: "This course demonstrates how rapidly the Royal Navy is adapting to autonomous mine countermeasures technology and building the expertise required to operate it safely and effectively."

POMW Gareth Miles, Yankee Unit 2, Trainee on the Seacat Course said: "A positive from the SeaCat course was the instructors and the way they taught the course, using their knowledge of equipment and going into detail about how the SeaCat works for the RN."

"This was taught at a good pace and in an approachable manner."

Warship sails to join Royal Navy helicopters in Eastern Mediterranean



Royal Navy Wildcat helicopters from 815 NAS are now in Cyprus, where they were joined by a Merlin Mk2 surveillance helicopter from 820 NAS



Sailors aboard HMS Dragon watch as loved ones wave them off from Portsmouth

Pictures: LPhot Jayden Lovelady; LPhot Henry Parks; PO Phot Chris Sellars; LPhot Tim Lombard



Dragon on mission

ROYAL Navy destroyer HMS Dragon is on her way to the Eastern Mediterranean to bolster British defences in the region.

The crew's loved ones joined hundreds of well-wishers lining the seawall as Dragon slipped out of Portsmouth Harbour, while drone-busting Wildcat helicopters departed from RNAS Yeovilton, and a Merlin Mk2 helicopter from RNAS Culdrose in Cornwall arrived in Cyprus.

The Portsmouth-based warship will use her Sea Viper missile system to help safeguard UK assets and interests – assisted by Wildcats from 815 Naval Air Squadron equipped with Martlet missiles able to deal with the aerial drone threat.

The decision to send the Royal Navy assets came as Iran's attacks continue to target British interests in the region and the UK Armed Forces continue to adapt to the changing threats.

It builds on the UK's increased defensive presence in the region in recent weeks, including deploying radar systems, air defence, and F-35 stealth fighters which are already conducting air defence sorties.

Fleet Commander Vice-Admiral Steve Moorhouse said: "I am proud that our highly-professional personnel have responded in a short time to ensure HMS Dragon and the Wildcats from 815 Naval Air Squadron are fully prepared for their mission."

Based in Portsmouth and each with a crew of around 200 sailors, the Royal Navy's six Type 45 destroyers are the Fleet's first line of defence against aerial threats – aircraft, missiles, drones – and are capable of protecting an area up to five times the size of Cyprus.



HMS Dragon can track hundreds of targets simultaneously – and eliminate them with the Sea Viper system which can launch eight missiles in under ten seconds and direct up to 16 missiles on to their targets simultaneously, closing in for the kill at up to four times the speed of sound, manoeuvring at G-Forces no human can endure.

The system – and the highly-skilled men and women operating it – proved itself time and again in the Red Sea when HMS Diamond repeatedly downed drones and at least one missile launched at passing shipping by Houthi rebels.

Last year Dragon herself became the first British warship to destroy a missile travelling at supersonic speed during an international exercise off Scotland, obliterating the target despite its attempts to corkscrew and weave to avoid Sea Viper.

HMS Dragon's Commanding Officer, Commander Iain Giffin, said: "My ship's company have worked tirelessly to ensure we are ready for our mission to the Eastern Mediterranean."

"I am proud of the professional manner in which they have responded. We are trained for this, we are ready for this, we have the equipment and people, we have the support of the British people and, most importantly, our families and friends."

As for the



Wildcats, based at RNAS Yeovilton in Somerset, the new Martlet missiles they carry are designed to take out fast-moving, agile threats on the sea and in the sky.

Although still to be tested in action, the Wildcat-Martlet combination has proved successful repeatedly on test ranges with aircrew destroying aerial drones.

Maritime Attack Helicopters from RNAS Yeovilton were loaded onto an RAF C-17 transporter for the four-hour flight to Cyprus.

The Commanding Officer of 815 NAS, Commander James Woods, said: "The deployment of 815 Naval Air Squadron Wildcat attack helicopters to Cyprus demonstrates our ability to respond rapidly to emerging threats and protect UK interests wherever they arise."

"We bring a highly-capable strike capability, and in this role they are providing a vital layer of defence against uncrewed aerial systems targeting UK Sovereign Base Areas."



"I'm immensely proud of the professionalism and adaptability shown by our engineers, logisticians and aviators. The current threat environment demands speed, adaptability and close integration with joint partners, while our advanced sensors and precision missiles ensure we can detect, track and, when necessary, defeat hostile drones before they threaten our people or infrastructure."

"This deployment highlights the flexibility of Maritime Aviation Strike, delivered by Wildcat HMA 2, and the commitment of 815 NAS to protect UK interests abroad and at home. Our people train constantly for exactly this kind of mission, and it's a privilege to see their professionalism and combat readiness delivering protection of Cyprus."

The airborne surveillance and control (ASaC) Merlin from 820 NAS provides a defence against aerial threats. With a crew of three, the helicopter can fly up to a mile from the ground and look 'over the horizon' to give advance warning of incoming drones or missiles.

The Commanding Officer of RNAS Culdrose, Captain James Hall, said: "Our aircraft from Merlin Helicopter Force are held at readiness to respond at short notice to any threat to UK interests."

"820 NAS already has experience of providing force protection from similar threats, having deployed ASaC aircraft on active operations in the Red Sea last year during the transits of the Carrier Strike Group led by HMS Prince of Wales during Operation Highmast."





Imagery by LPhot Damien Bye

IN THE FIRING LINE

HMS DUNCAN FACES ONSLAUGHT OF DRONES AND MISSILES

ROYAL Navy destroyer HMS Duncan battled an onslaught of drones, aircraft and missiles as she 'defended' critical national infrastructure in a concentrated test off the coast of Wales.

The Portsmouth-based warship headed to the Aberporth Range in Cardigan Bay for 72 hours to face attacks from swarms of surface and aerial drones moving up to 200mph, as well as virtual missiles, to ensure the ship is ready to defend against whatever modern naval threat is thrown against her.

The training – codenamed Sharpshooter – is designed to replicate the intense stresses and strains of real-life operations, like the conditions faced by HMS Diamond in the Red Sea as the Houthis fired drones and missiles from Yemen at merchant shipping in 2024.

HMS Duncan and her attack helicopter from 815 Naval Air Squadron used their advanced weapons, radars and sensors to identify, track and neutralise the attacks – including firing Martlet air-to-air missiles, heavy machine guns, Phalanx Automated Gun, 30mm gun and the 4.5in naval gun.

HMS Duncan's Commanding Officer, Commander Dan Lee, said: "Sharpshooter was an invaluable opportunity to test our systems and our people in a demanding environment.

"The ship's company rose to every challenge, delivering successful layered-defence engagements while simultaneously dealing with realistic

damage-control scenarios.

"I am immensely proud of how the team performed; their dedication ensures that HMS Duncan remains ready to fight and ready to protect."

Duncan operated in Defence Watches throughout Sharpshooter – meaning the ship maintained a high-readiness posture, while responding simultaneously to internal incidents, including fighting fires and damage control.

The ship was able to maintain combat effectiveness and fight off continued threats while dealing with these incidents around the clock, day and night.

Able Rating Jaya Furnell (Above Water Tactical): "I don't normally get to fire at live moving targets, so it was a brilliant experience.

"I focused, took the shot on my Heavy Machine Gun, and the Uncrewed Aerial Vehicle went down in six rounds. It was exciting to claim the first kill of the exercise."

The warfighting scenario placed Duncan within a notional task group protecting critical national infrastructure and restoring maritime security in a highly contested region.

The training was delivered by the Royal Navy's specialist Fleet Operational Standards and Training teams and defence firms QinetiQ and Inzpire.

They faced Hammerhead Uncrewed Surface Vessels able to travel up to 50mph on the water, as well as QinetiQ's Banshee Whirlwind aerial drone capable of flying at over 200mph.

They also shot at simulated maritime vessels, aircraft and mock cruise and ballistic missiles – with Duncan virtually 'firing' her Sea Viper system.

The ship's Wildcat helicopter engaged targets using its Martlet missiles, which can hit targets up to six kilometres away.

HMS Duncan met their overall objectives of Sharpshooter by tracking and neutralising five aerial targets and sinking two Hammerheads.

Petty Officer James Ings, a maintainer of Duncan's 4.5in gun, said: "It was a good week for the gun. We put more than 200 rounds down it and did some proper naval gunfire support as well.

"The 30mm medium calibre gun threw up a few faults, but that's engineering – you figure it out and you get it working again.

"Each time we fixed it, it was back up for the next shoot. That's the job, and it was good to see it doing what it's meant to do."

Will Blamey Chief Executive, UK Defence, QinetiQ, added: "We are proud to deliver dynamic, real-life scenarios that best-prepare our armed forces for the complex warfare challenges of today and tomorrow.

"Our combination of live and synthetic threats mean we can evolve training scenarios to ensure we are providing the very latest in threat representation, helping our warfighters to achieve mission-readiness at pace."



SHADOWING DUTIES

THE Royal Navy shadowed two sanctioned Russian cargo ships and their escorting warships in UK waters as part of a concentrated NATO effort from the Mediterranean to the North Sea.

Portsmouth-based patrol ship HMS Tyne and a Wildcat helicopter from Yeovilton-based 815 Naval Air Squadron were dispatched to intercept Russian Navy Ropucha-class landing ship Aleksandr Otrakovsky and merchant vessel Sparta IV.

During the Russians' voyage through the Atlantic, English Channel and into the North Sea, British warship Tyne utilised powerful sensors and radars to report on every move, with the Wildcat simultaneously flying a sortie over the Channel to provide additional surveillance and security.

The Russian vessels were first intercepted by HMS Cutlass of the Royal Navy's Gibraltar Squadron as they sailed through the Strait of Gibraltar's Traffic Separation Scheme, before an allied warship tracked their journey north. Then, HMS Tyne was activated for monitoring duties in the Atlantic approaches to the Channel.

Just 48 hours after this operation was complete, HMS Tyne and a Wildcat were activated again to track another Russian Ropucha-class warship, Aleksandr Shabalin, and cargo vessel MV Sabetta as they sailed westward through the English Channel.

Defence Secretary John Healey MP said: "I am proud of everything that our exceptional Armed Forces are doing to



HMS Tyne tracks Aleksandr Shabalin and cargo ship MV Sabetta



HMS Tyne reports on RFN Aleksandr Otrakovsky



View from the Wildcat as HMS Tyne tracks RFN Aleksandr Otrakovsky

keep Britain safe – both around the UK and on deployments overseas.

"While our UK forces are in action in the Middle East to protect British people, British interests and our partners, this operation sends a warning to Putin: we are watching you. Iran's dangerous indiscriminate attacks will not distract us from deterring Russia and supporting Ukraine. We are ready to track, deter and defend our nation."

HMS Tyne's Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Matt Cavill said: "Maintaining the security of our Island Nation is paramount to ensuring we can project a global presence.

"The way in which we collaborate with allied nations assures us of the collective strength which we require in an uncertain world.

"Operations such as these are vital to demonstrate resolve, protect our waters and gain intelligence to support future

operations."

Commander James Woods, Commanding Officer of 815 Naval Air Squadron, added: "This activation demonstrated the professionalism, speed and effectiveness that 815 Naval Air Squadron brings to operations at home and abroad. Our aircrew and engineers delivered clear, timely situational awareness and integrated seamlessly with HMS Tyne.

"Wildcat remains a potent maritime strike platform, providing a visible and persistent presence at sea. The aircraft's ability to support UK precision-effect capabilities with Martlet and Sea Venom reinforces the vital role it plays in maritime security.

"This routine tasking reflects our continued vigilance and underscores the very high readiness of our people and aircraft as we work to safeguard the UK's national interests and support our NATO commitments."

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Around the globe, around the clock – RN’s outstanding photographers at work



PO Phot Alex Ceolin, right, won the coveted Royal Navy Photographer of the Year award with her portfolio which included the image, above, of Royal Marines in the Arctic



Clockwise from above left, LPhot Bill Spurr won the RFA Professional title; LPhot Ollie Leach’s image of HMS Dragon; PO Phot Clarke’s winning entry in the Submarine Service category; LPhot Finn Stainer-Hutchins took this image of RM in the Arctic



PO Phot James Clarke won three awards

Simply the best

FROM Royal Marines launching a night raid on an Arctic inlet...

To a commando boat team racing across Sydney Harbour at sunset...

And destroyer HMS Dragon silhouetted against the endless Atlantic...

While hunter-killer HMS Astute charges on the surface at speed...

And a stunning Christmas video which impressed millions of viewers around the globe.

The very best imagery and video of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines on operations at home and all over the globe over the past 12 months showcases the work of the Senior Service – and the skill of its small band of full-time professional photographers who work around the clock.

The Royal Navy Photographic Awards – known by sailors as the Peregrines – are the Senior Service’s Oscars, rewarding men and women who record everything sailors and Royal Marines do and where they do it: training, ceremonial duties, international exercises and front-line missions.

Petty Officer Alexandra ‘Alex’ Ceolin from Plymouth takes the title as the Royal Navy’s top photographer over the past 12 months for her canon of work covering the UK Commando Forces.

And she also collects the coveted Peregrine Trophy – awarded to the best photographic unit in the Navy, again for their portfolio over the past year – on behalf of the two-strong team she leads.

Alex hails from Newcastle and has served her country for the past 12 years, first as a communications specialist aboard frigate HMS Somerset, then transferring to become a photographer.

The job has surpassed expectations, taking her to Tokyo, the USA, Norway, Cyprus, Africa and throughout the Mediterranean, documenting some of the Royal Navy’s most dynamic and demanding activities.

“The greatest privilege is the unparalleled visibility being a photographer gives you across the entire Service. You see everything, capturing moments which not only record naval history, but also showcase the extraordinary work of sailors, marines, and units worldwide – it’s both an honour and a responsibility.”

She leads the photographic team – her colleague Finn Stainer-Hutchins is a three-time winner of the Photographer of the Year trophy – with 30 Commando IX Group based in Plymouth, following the Royal Marines wherever they go.

It’s 13 years since the commando unit last took the most coveted prize in Navy photography – which she attributes to a combination of hard work, professionalism and a shared creative vision.

As for the individual prize: “I feel deeply humbled. The Photographic Branch is filled with exceptionally talented photographers, all producing imagery of the highest calibre. With such strong competition across the branch – the standard is truly second to none – it makes recognition like this all the more meaningful.

“Above all, this isn’t a personal accolade, but a reflection of the extraordinary people, operations, and moments I’ve had the privilege to document through my lens.”

Petty Officer James Clarke collects three

titles: best image of the Fleet Air Arm and Submarine Service, plus Videographer of the Year.

It’s his evocative Christmas video *Silent Night* – inspired by the actions of HMS Diamond defending shipping in the Red Sea – which stands out and has been seen by 1.4 million people on Royal Navy social media channels – not to mention many more who watched it when it was published by mainstream media outlets as well.

“It ended up being compared in the national press to the John Lewis adverts, which was a nice moment for the team,” the 34-year-old from Knutsford in Cheshire said.

“It’s a great feeling to have picked up multiple wins in this year’s competition. It makes it even better knowing the winning images and videos will be on display at the new Royal Marines Museum in Portsmouth later this year.

“The competition is a great reminder of what the photographic branch can do and its importance, especially at a time when imagery and digital media play such a big role in how stories are told.”

James was serving as a Royal Marine with Somerset-based 40 Commando helping islanders in the Caribbean recover from devastating Hurricane Irma in 2017 when he saw a Royal Navy photographer at work recording events – sparking an interest which led to him qualifying as a full-time shooter in 2021.

He now heads the Royal Navy’s Video Production Unit, which produces high-end quality short films to promote the work of the Senior Service.

Beyond imagery and moving footage used in news and media outlets and on social media channels, Royal Navy photographers are used to gather intelligence, record front-line operations and material/machinery defects to assist with the day-to-day work of the Naval Service.

The annual awards trace their history back several decades – owing their name and origin to the Royal Navy’s former home of photography at HMS Peregrine/Ford Air Station in West Sussex.

Today the contest rewards and showcases the imagery and video captured by the Royal Navy’s small cadre of professional photographers, plus amateurs, serving personnel, naval veterans and cadets who feel compelled to record the daily activities of the Naval Service.

The judges – a combination of leading picture editors from national media outlets and agencies, and experienced military and civilian photographers – pored over 486 images, and watched 13 video submissions.

Warrant Officer 2 Owen Cooban, the Royal Navy’s senior photographer, said the 10 judges had spent several days considering the winners, having been struck by the breadth – and quality – placed before them, particularly material from front-line operations.

“I have been a Royal Navy photographer for two decades and the quality of our imagery – and video packages – gets better by the year,” Owen said.

The winners will receive trophies at an awards evening planned for September, while the public will be able to see an exhibition of this year’s winning and highly-commended entries when the new Royal Marines Museum opens in Portsmouth Naval Base in the autumn.

The full list of winners is:

The Peregrine Trophy: 30 Commando Information Exploitation Group Combat Camera Team (POPhot Alex Ceolin/LPhot Finn Stainer-Hutchins).

Royal Navy Photographer of the Year: PO Phot Alex Ceolin.

Royal Navy Videographer of the Year: PO Phot James Clarke.

Commandant General Royal Marines’ (Stills): LPhot Finn Stainer-Hutchins.

Commandant General Royal Marines’ (Video): LPhot Gaz Smith.

Global Operations (Stills): LPhot Finn Stainer-Hutchins

Global Operations (Video): LPhot Gaz Smith

Royal Navy Open: PO Phot Lee Blease

Surface Fleet: LPhot Ollie Leach

Submarine Service: PO Phot James Clarke

Fleet Air Arm: PO Phot James Clarke

Royal Fleet Auxiliary Amateur: Matthew White

Royal Fleet Auxiliary Professional: LPhot Bill Spurr

Royal Navy Amateur Photographer of the Year: Mne Sajan Rai

Royal Navy Amateur Videographer of the Year: Mne Sajan Rai

Royal Navy Amateur Open: ET(WE) Simon Evans

Royal Naval Association Veteran: Chris North

Royal Naval Association Amateur: ET(WE) Simon Evans.

Royal Naval Association Professional: LPhot Ollie Leach

Royal Navy Royal Marines Charity Family and Friends Pro: PO Phot Lee Blease.

Royal Navy Royal Marines Charity Family and Friends U18s: Raef Dolly.

Royal Navy Royal Marines Charity Family and Friends Over 18s: David Cronin.

Cadet Amateur Photographer of the Year 2025 U18: Cadet Aiden Forry, Tamworth Sea Cadets.

Cadet Instructor Amateur Photographer of the Year 2025 Over 18: PO Lauren Swann, Borough of Poole Sea Cadets.



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you've gotta roll with it...

HER 455ft-long battleship grey and red hull given a turquoise hue by the laser and light show, HMS Active is slowly revealed to the world.

Out of sight, a few hundred yards from this spot, there are more lasers at work, carving through plates of steel to a pre-programmed design, plates which will one day form the hull of HMS Bulldog.

One winter's evening. Two milestones in the Type 31 frigate programme on the north bank of the Forth, minutes apart.

Hundreds of workers, sailors, military, business and political leaders, led by Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry Luke Pollard, watched as the first steel was cut for the fourth frigate in the Inspiration class.

And then they waited in the cold as night descended on Rosyth and the 28-metre-tall doors on Venturer Hall were opened and HMS Active – weighing several thousand tonnes – was carefully rolled out on a self-propelled modular transporter (a gigantic remote-controlled trailer).

In time she'll join her older sister HMS Venturer undergoing fitting out in one of the dry docks at Babcock International... and then take her place in the Fleet, operating out of Portsmouth Naval Base.

Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Steve Moorhouse, the senior naval officer observing proceedings, said the double milestones reflected "the momentum, ambition and national commitment behind the regeneration of our future frigate force."

"The Type 31 Inspiration class represents a major step forward in modernising our fleet. These are capable and adaptable ships, designed to give the Royal Navy the flexibility it needs in a fast-changing strategic environment. Their combat systems and modular design will allow upgrades throughout their life, ensuring they can meet both today's threats and those we cannot yet see."

Active and Bulldog will perform general duties around the globe – from maritime security operations and providing disaster relief through to full-scale warfighting if required – while Type 26/City class vessels, currently under construction in

Glasgow, will conduct anti-submarine patrols.

Four of five Type 31 frigates are now under construction at Babcock's yard. Aside from Venturer, there's HMS Formidable, ship No.3, whose keel was laid down just before Christmas. A final vessel in the class, HMS Campbeltown, will follow.

All five take their names from Royal Navy predecessors which transcend history through their deeds.

The actions of the crew of HMS Bulldog changed the course of World War 2 by seizing an Enigma coding machine from a crippled German submarine in May 1941. It would help Alan Turing and fellow codebreakers at Bletchley Park read hitherto indecipherable radio messages; breaking Enigma is credited with shortening the conflict by as much as two years.

HMS Active served extensively around the globe for 17 years, most notably in the Falklands in 1982 when her guns pounded Argentine positions to support ground forces closing in on the capital Stanley. Subsequently sold to the Pakistan Navy, her career spanned a remarkable six decades.

Among the hundreds of people watching Active emerge from the assembly hall was 66-year-old Mike Hurley, who spent near 24 years in the Navy as a marine engineering – including service aboard HMS Active in the Falklands.

"I was pleasantly surprised to see that the Active name is being used again as my last sighting of her was on a YouTube video being torpedoed after completing her service as the PNS Shah Jahan – a sad end, so great to see the Active name living on!" the Mancunian said.

His Active was associated with Burnley (one of her anchors is on display to this day, fittingly in Active Way). So too the new one, which will share the Lancashire town with the good folk of Wolverhampton; the West Midlands city hasn't enjoyed an affiliation with the Royal Navy in more than 60 years. (For completeness, HMS Bulldog will be linked with Manchester and Swindon.)

Some 1,250 people are being employed directly in the construction at Rosyth and sites around the UK, while the same number are working nationwide to support the Type 31 programme.

"The combination of HMS Bulldog's steel cutting ceremony and the roll out of HMS Active demonstrates the breadth and depth of shipbuilding capability here in Rosyth and signals to the country and our allies the commitment the Royal Navy is making to our future defence," said Commander Thomas Hetherington, HMS Venturer's Senior Naval Officer.

David Lockwood, CEO, Babcock, added: "Delivering the steel cut for HMS Bulldog and the roll-out of HMS Active on the same day is a powerful demonstration of the drive and delivery focus of our Type 31 programme as we build the next modern, future-ready fleet for the Royal Navy."

"These milestones show the maturity of our facility, the success of the design and build process, and the skill and dedication of our Babcock team."

"We are not only building a new class of ship at Rosyth, we are also at the forefront of a national endeavour that is strengthening the UK's shipbuilding industry, supporting sovereign and allied maritime capability, while creating an advanced industrial footprint and expertise that will support the future of global shipbuilding for generations to come."

Picture: Jack Eckersley



Automatic for the (gunnery) people

SAILORS and engineers on HMS Glasgow have thoroughly tested its unique gun system for the first time – without firing a single shot.

The 5in main gun on the Type 26 warship, undergoing completion at BAE Systems' facility in Scotstoun, Glasgow, is fed shells from a magazine deep inside the hull (depicted above by a computer graphic as photography in the compartment is off limits).

Using a system not merely new to the Royal Navy but new to the gun itself – the 5in Mk45 is installed on more than 250 allied warships, from the US Navy's Arleigh Burke destroyers to Australian, and New Zealand and Japanese frigates and destroyers – Glasgow's crew can select the shell they want from the safety of the operations room, and an automated system does the rest.

A moveable mechanical 'arm' in the magazine selects the required shell – rather like picking a drink or bar or chocolate in a vending machine – transfers it to a hoist, which feeds the 'ready to use' magazine directly beneath the gun itself, ensuring a constant supply of shells to fire in action.

The automated system means sailors no longer form a chain feeding fresh shells during a shoot – as they do with the Navy's current main gun.

A series of dummy rounds were loaded into the magazine and extensively removed from their racks by the automatic system.

Automation makes the new weapon safer: there's no requirement to lift heavy shells, deal with moving machinery, risk injury to hearing from the clangs and bangs as the gun fires.

Although Glasgow will primarily hunt hostile submarines, the ship can perform a multitude of tasks and missions if required from disaster relief to air defence and bombardment of enemy positions with its main gun.

Her gunners will have a wide range of shells to choose from for different threats and situations from star shells to light up a battlefield at night, through proximity shells which detonate near to their targets, shells with timed fuses, and standard shells which explode on impact. There's also the potential to fire guided shells – which travel twice as fast and far as their regular counterparts.

Weapon engineer Petty Officer Lee 'Tiny' Sanderson is the first 5in gun maintainer in the Royal Navy and is in awe of the weapon and the impressive system supporting it, hailing the combination as "the future of gunnery in the Royal Navy".

Tiny continued: "Firstly you have the impressive 5in gun itself with its obvious benefits over the 4.5in – not only in firepower, but also reliability."

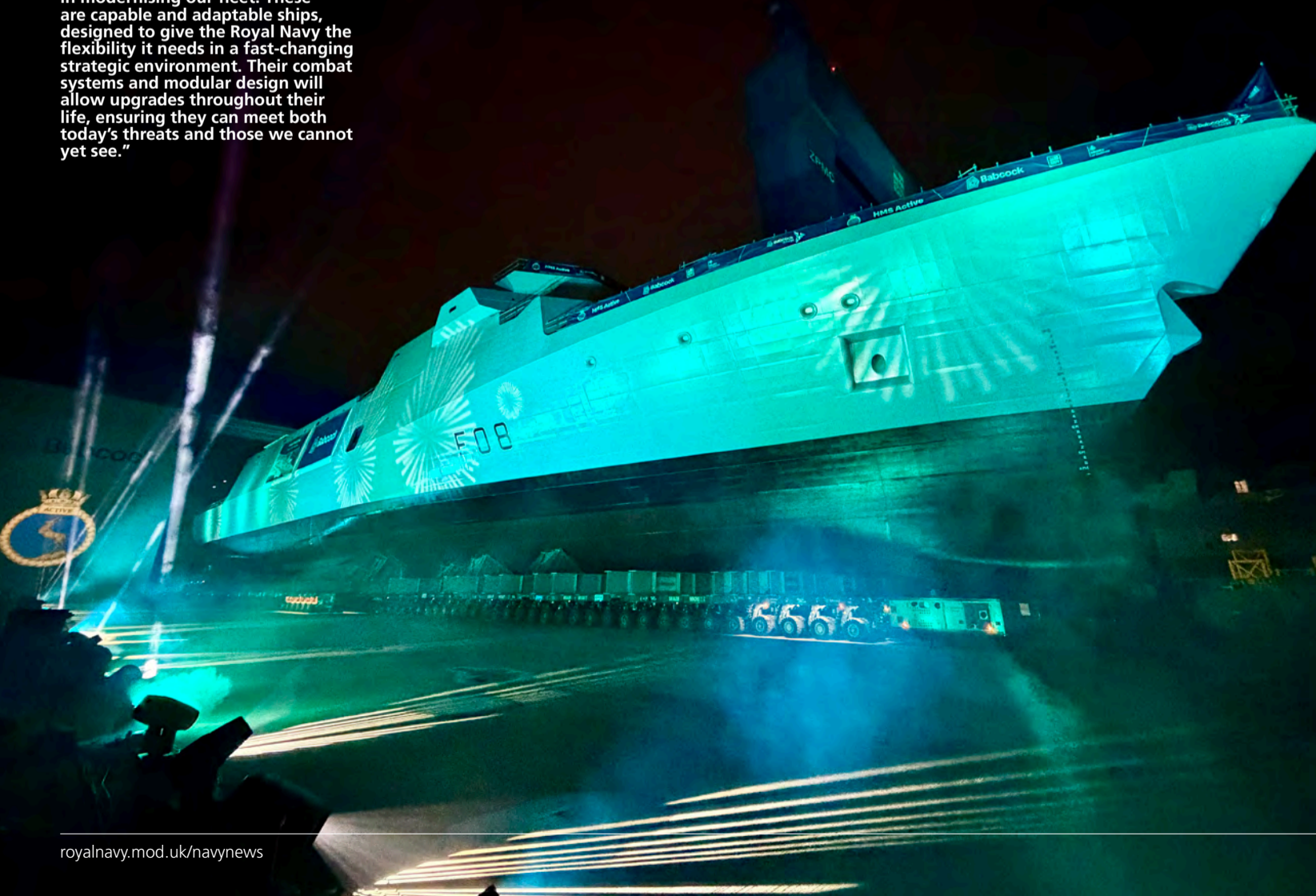
"We also have – bespoke to the Royal Navy – the Ammunition Handling System, a fully automated magazine loading system, which will allow us to reduce the workforce needed to conduct a shot."

Depending on the ammunition and propellant used, shells (weighing up to 31½kg) leave the muzzle at speeds up to three times the speed of sound and then continue towards their target.

Tiny added: "Being fully integrated into the ships warfare systems via the new Gunfire Control System, it means the gunners can now select which type of round they need direct from the operations room without direct input from the gunbay or deep magazine team, making it the most advanced gun system the Royal Navy has ever had."

And just in case the automatic system fails or is damaged in action, it can be re-loaded manually.

"The new automated ammunition handling system on HMS Glasgow, paired with the 5in Mk45 gun, delivers a major boost in firepower and safety by moving ammunition automatically with no manual handling," said Stephen Carbery, BAE's gunnery engineering manager.





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ASSESSMENT

U S T R A L I A



THERE are few more peaceful places on earth than Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

An area almost as large as Germany stretching for a distance equivalent to London to Athens.

More than 1,600 species of fish, over 400 varieties of coral and a myriad of marine life. Nature in perfect harmony. Utter tranquility. Until

FIRE! FIRE! FIRE! FIRE IN THE GALLEY. SSEP TO MUSTER...

Bringing (organised) chaos to paradise, a couple of dozen Britons with good intentions: to ensure HMS Tamar is ready for her renewed mission in the region.

After ten tense – and intense – days of training and assurance, the patrol ship's crew received the thumbs-up to carry out the next phase of their lengthy deployment: patrolling the South Pacific islands.

Tamar underwent an overhaul in Singapore followed by further maintenance in Cairns, in between patrols of the Australasia region, trials and training, all building up to resuming regular duties as one of the two Royal Navy warships deployed long-term to the Indo-Asia-Pacific region alongside her sister HMS Spey.

Before she could do so, an expert team of assessors flew out from the UK to ensure both the ship and the 55 men and women who operate her are up to the rigours of taking a warship to sea more than 9,000 miles from her home base of Portsmouth.

With the Navy increasingly deploying ships for extended periods around the globe and frequent rotation of crews, the assessment by the Fleet Operational Standards and Training (FOST) organisation has adapted: specialist team travel around the world to deliver it when and where it's needed.

That could be the exercise areas off the Isle of Wight... or over the Great Barrier Reef in Tamar's case.

The team – medics, engineers, warfare specialists, logisticians and communicators – arrived in Cairns in north-eastern Australia, a port which has become a second home to HMS Tamar.

They squeezed 72 training serials into ten days, covering every imaginable action, operation and emergency the ship may face.

The visit quickly switched from scrutinising equipment, engineering standards and records to practical exercises of increasing complexity and scale so the ship and her crew can rapidly adapt and overcome whatever the vast Pacific region has in store.

"We drew on staff from our Portsmouth, Plymouth and Faslane divisions, all whom are subject matter experts and have a passion for helping sailors develop and excel," said Commander Philip Blakeman, the leader of the team assuring HMS Tamar.

"I am so proud of what we do at FOST Ships, helping ships improve their performance and help sailors develop and excel."

"But it is a team effort, the professionalism and effort of the crews we train is the essential building block for FOST to be able to develop high performance teams."

From small fires to significant flooding, defending the ship from attack, as well as defence engagement, boarding and gunnery training to prepare for the mission in the region.

Among those passing judgment on Tamar's sailors was Lieutenant Commander Jackson Miller, a Royal Australian Navy exchange officer, who has previously been based at HMAS Cairns, assessing the team on the bridge for the navigational and ship handling

skills.

"I am one of many exchange officers shared between the Royal Australian Navy and the Royal Navy, it has been a great experience so far," Jackson said.

"I did not expect to be back in Australia so soon, although it is a nice escape from winter in the United Kingdom!"

Seaman specialist Able Rate Alexander Mansfield was among those being assessed: "It has been my first time going through FOST, and it has been a challenge but I feel I have developed so much as a sailor, with the training staff helping me achieve my potential, and looking back I enjoyed it!"

The final exercise scenario saw the ship dealing with widespread damage, stressing all parts of the crew from the bridge to the bilge, with the crew's efforts ensuring Tamar could float, move and fight.

Having passed this final test, HMS Tamar will return to operations and while FOST team return to the UK.

"FOST have delivered a tough but rewarding training package for the ship, which has helped us improve our overall performance and ensure our readiness for future tasking," said Tamar's Commanding Officer Commander Tom Lindsey.

"We have all benefitted from being tested as a team and we say goodbye to FOST confident that we have met the most demanding training standards that any warship can be put through.

"The thoroughness and professionalism of the staff were only matched by the enthusiasm and fighting spirit of my own Ship's Company who are now more ready than ever to carry on our mission, wherever that takes us across the Indo-Pacific."

Pictures: Cdr Philip Blakeman, Sub Lieutenant Henry Dace

RUNNING LIKE CLOCKWORK



Imagery by PO Phot Lee Blease and AS1 Mark Dollard

THE UK has qualified around 30 new Arctic commando aviators and has pushed the boundaries of helicopter operations across nearly 500 hours of sorties during three months in the extreme cold of Northern Norway.

Yeovilton-based Commando Helicopter Force have been deploying to their second home at air station Bardufoss, some 200 miles inside the Arctic Circle, in some guise since 1969.

In those 57 years many things have changed, but through it all CHF's squadrons – 845 Naval Air Squadron and 847 Naval Air Squadron – have been honing, perfecting and pushing their Arctic skill sets on Operation Clockwork.

This year is no different, with 14 new pilots and 13 aircrewmen qualified to fly the Commando Merlin aircraft in the Arctic, while four new pilots and one aircrewman can now operate the Commando Wildcat in this environment.

There have also been a number of milestones, with CHF working closely with Norwegian Coastal Rangers, extracting them from the mountains following a long-range march in treacherous weather.

They have also worked on 'Eagle Basing' – the art of operating their Merlin and Wildcat helicopters from austere locations.

The Merlins have worked with Royal Marines Over Snow Reconnaissance Vehicles (snowmobiles), trialling their ability to lift and shift them using underslung loads and putting them inside the helicopter itself.

Commander Alex Hampson, Commanding Officer of 845 Naval Air Squadron, said: "The team have returned to Norway once again and have hit the ground running.

"They have achieved an unprecedented number of flying hours and trained more of those new to the Arctic than I can recall, all setting the conditions perfectly for advancing

our capabilities and ability in the High North, supporting and being supported by our NATO allies.

"If my team can perform here (and they have), they can perform all over the world, when called upon."

The annual deployment allows each element of CHF to train alongside UK Commando Forces, led by the Royal Marines, whilst both contribute to the UK's NATO commitment in the region. This harsh and extreme arctic environment brings the most testing conditions that arguably, our people will face, in the world. If they can do it here, they should be able to do it anywhere.

This year has seen an increase in presence from the CHF elements, all working in unison through basic survival exercises, through a purely UK work-up period into the biennial Cold Response mission rehearsal. This year's Cold Response, commanded and led by the Dutch, brings together several NATO nations, all working together to expand and develop their capabilities in this region, all working towards a collectively increased readiness and capability should they be required to respond to a threat.

CHF is almost unique in the capabilities that it brings, from ground recce troops and fuellers to aircraft and support staff – CHF has the ability to deploy, operate and recover.

Mobile Air Operations Team (MAOT)

As the UK's advance-force Helicopter Landing Site (HLS) reconnaissance unit, Commando MAOT has continued to develop its core reconnaissance skills in the High North, an environment that adds challenges to almost every activity. All aspects of mobility, communications, and HLS selection are constrained by extreme cold and demanding terrain. However, these conditions provide an opportunity to refine and master

the fundamental reconnaissance skills required to operate effectively in difficult environments. The varied terrain means ground access is often limited, making rotary-wing aviation essential for manoeuvre. Utilising Over Snow Reconnaissance Vehicles (OSRVs), Commando MAOT can project deep into otherwise inaccessible terrain to open aviation corridors that support advancing forces and logistical resupply by Commando Helicopter Force, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of the Commando Force.

Engineering

The High North provides numerous engineering challenges and the effect this extreme environment can have on aircraft, let alone service personnel, cannot be understated. Each member of the CHF engineering cadre is specially trained to operate effectively in this landscape, learning basic warfare skills to supplement their engineering knowledge. Unlike other maritime aviation forces, the Commando Helicopter Force regularly train to operate for extended periods away from aviation infrastructure, making do with the assets at hand and embodying the "Junglie" spirit for which they are known.

Back at RNAS Yeovilton, CHF are used to the temperate UK climate and not so long ago for 845 NAS, the heat of the South China Sea and Australia, it's people are now thrust into the severe minus temperatures. When faced with temperatures as low as -20c and beyond, not only does "spanner turning" become more difficult, but so does simply starting and existing in and around the aircraft. Putting engineers onto the aircraft requires a significant amount of cold weather clothing which can restrict movement. Specifically when working in confined areas such

as engine bays and the transmission decks; gloves make tactile movements more difficult. Simple dexterous tasks are now much harder with a layer of Gore-Tex between a hand and a flush screw. The temperature of metallic tooling drops as much as the ambient air making the risk of cold burns greater.

Also, in deep snow, damage can be obscured, to the extent where a simple inspection can take hours in clearing snow and ice from view. Yet despite this, aircraft remain available to deliver force elements at readiness for Operation Clockwork and for both this and last year, the flying rate has exceeded expectations by a considerable margin.

For all the difficulties the High North provides, it grants opportunity as well. Pushing the aircraft and people to their limits in the environment requires innovative approaches to assuring serviceability. New smaller and lighter equipment, more efficient maintenance practices, and enhanced environmental protection techniques allow the Commando Merlin and Wildcat to operate further and for



longer than previously expected. Each year the limit of endurance is tested alongside new technologies, which then become adopted as standard practices, helping the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) and CHF remain the foremost authority for operating in the extreme cold weather, pan-defence.

Merlin

845 NAS deployed a detachment of Commando Merlin to Northern Norway to complete the aircrew 'Environmental Qualification' and then participate in Cold Response. Whilst deployed, they have also provided support to Commando Forces and completed aircrew refresher flying for those who have previously operated in the Arctic.

This preparation is crucial to ensure operational aircrew are ready for the challenges specific to the extreme conditions of the High North. These challenges include operating in harsh weather, flight in recirculating snow and operating aircraft that have been subject to extreme cold; where ice forms on exterior surfaces, oils thicken and elastomeric bearings stiffen. For pilots new to the disorientating effects of white out, the snow cloud created by an aircraft's downwash during the final 50' of an approach is a sizeable challenge.

Arctic training in the High North culminates with Cold Response, a multinational effort to rehearse Joint Operations with NATO partners in this hugely challenging environment.

This gives CHF the opportunity to train with partner nations including the Netherlands' 860

Sqn operating their NH90 helicopter (slightly smaller than Commando Merlin) and builds on a relationship that 845 and 860 have been developing for several years, both in the UK and Norway.

The deployment marks a key annual commitment to maintaining the UK's ability to operate alongside NATO partners in extreme environments, ensuring the force stays ready for operations wherever they may be called.

Wildcat

The Arctic presents challenges not only in its extreme temperatures and weather, but also the complexity of operating around the many fjords, mountains and barren snowscapes. 847 NAS is no stranger to the Arctic though; the light utility and escort roles the squadron's Wildcat helicopters have repeatedly shown their ability to mitigate these challenges and provide a unique capability for our Commando Forces.

The projection of aviation at range, in short timelines, particularly across international boundaries, has been a key focus of the squadron, and one that has been worked on during Cold Response.

Alongside Merlin helicopters from 845 NAS, 847 NAS conducted aviation assaults, raids, and personnel recovery missions, by day and night to support 40 Commando and 45 Commando. NATO inter-operability was confirmed by planning, briefing, and executing these missions with NH90 helicopter crews from the Royal Netherlands Navy. Strengthening our NATO bond further, 847 embedded an Air Liaison Officer on board HNLMS Johan De Witt,

reinforcing NATO tactics and processes to enable more efficient, and more effective execution of missions and tasks.

Operating in austere conditions away from the comfort and infrastructure of the main operating base was also tested. 847 NAS successfully accomplished 'Eagle-base' missions from Arctic field locations with only a handful of engineers, and the minimum of kit.

In addition to all of this, the Squadron found time to undertake a live-firing range package, work with 29 Commando, gain deck landing currency on HNLMS Johan de Witt, and gain multiple Arctic Environmental Qualifications for junior Aircrew.

Aviation Combat Support (ACSS) Squadron

Commando Helicopter Force crews are placing particular emphasis on the ability to operate from austere, widely dispersed locations, an increasingly vital skill in modern conflict. By basing Commando Merlin and Wildcat helicopters away from established airfields and instead using remote valleys, frozen lakes, and improvised landing sites, the force sharpens its capacity to remain agile and hard to target.

This disaggregated approach not only boosts survivability in a contested environment but also ensures CHF can continue to support Royal Marines and NATO partners even when traditional infrastructure is limited or under threat. One of the challenges in this approach is sustainability, which ACSS enables through dispersed resupply and refuel from locations of opportunity.

Royal Marines work with German U-boat U-35 at last light in the Arctic Circle.
LPhoto Finn Stainer-Hutchins

SUB ZERO RA

ROYAL Marines emerged from the icy depths of an Arctic fjord on a German submarine to carry out a daring commando operation as part of major NATO mission rehearsals.

Commandos surfaced around 200 miles inside the Arctic Circle aboard attack submarine U-35 as part of Cold Response 26, the largest military drills for the alliance in the region this year involving 14 nations and more than 25,000 troops.

The expert marines – part of specialist units designed to carry out reconnaissance and direct naval gunfire from behind enemy lines – slipped silently away on inflatable raiding craft from U-35 to conduct their mission before returning and disappearing beneath the waves.

The aim of the mission was to slip in unseen and remain hidden while reconnoitering ‘enemy’ positions and calling in naval gunfire from allied warships before making a stealthy getaway.

It was conducted by specialist elements of the UK’s highly skilled Commando Force: The Surveillance and Reconnaissance Squadron (SRS), Shore Reconnaissance Troop (SRT) and 148 Commando Forward Observation Battery.

Second in command of SRS, whose identity cannot be revealed for operational reasons, said: “In the High North’s harsh and unforgiving domain, where extreme climatic conditions and

adversary vigilance dominate, the ability to covertly insert reconnaissance teams ashore via Inflatable Raiding Craft (IRC) launched from a submarine is indispensable.

“It delivers the stealthy edge needed to penetrate denied areas, deny the enemy sanctuary, collect vital intelligence on subsurface and littoral threats and shape the operational environment before any escalation.

“This insertion capability from below the waves provides critical initiative to NATO in one of the planet’s most strategically contested regions.”

The SRS and SRT are at the very tip of the Royal Marines spear, trained to conduct operations in advance of the main allied force, carrying out raiding, reconnaissance and surveying missions to pave the way forward.

They are essentially the eyes and ears of the Commando Force.

Meanwhile, 148 Battery are specially qualified in calling artillery, naval gunfire control and airstrikes to support the Commando Force and UK Special Forces. They are experts in covert insertion, patrols behind enemy lines, concealment, encrypted communications and battle damage assessment.

Their mission in Norway saw them observe an enemy radar installation, calling in NATO destroyers to smash the facility to render the

adversary blind to task group manoeuvres off the Norwegian coast.

A Team Leader from 148 Battery, whose identity cannot be revealed for operational reasons, said: “We regularly train with NATO Special Operations Forces partners to practise naval fire support, but it’s been great getting re-qualified in this insertion method.

“Serials like this are similar to our historical roots dating back to the Falklands where 148 delivered naval gunfire prior to the retaking of the islands. Combining naval gunfire support with this is a key skill to support operations in the high north.”

Carrying out this mission along Norway’s lengthy, rugged coastline is essential to the UK being able to execute crucial operations for NATO in a hugely strategic part of the world.

It’s all part of a major UK deployment to the Arctic Circle, which has seen around 1,500 commandos operate in Northern Norway since January.

FJORD RECONNAISSANCE

Before the submarine action, members of SRT carried out discreet reconnaissance missions in the fjords.

Those from the Commando Force Boat Operators branch are trained to insert and covertly study complicated coastal areas and decide the best place to conduct large-scale

landings.

This is known as advance force operations – essentially going ahead of the main part of an allied spearhead to pave the way for follow on forces by securing beaches, taking out enemy positions and creating a foothold.

It is a job that requires great skill and daring, but the pay off can be huge – providing a tactical upper hand.

These robust commandos must be able to operate in all extreme environments around the world and have spent three months in the Arctic practising for fjord-based missions.

“As an advance force, this winter training ensures SRT are capable of projecting combat power from the sea, securing beachheads, and establishing critical footholds in austere or contested environments, providing follow-on forces with a decisive tactical advantage,” said the Officer in Command (OC) of the SRT.

The team operate small craft in harsh conditions, but to get the best data they must get out of the boat and swim, even in temperatures of -30C and in challenging sea states.

Each commando wears multiple layers of clothing to protect from the weather. They also have specialist glove and mitts systems, plus buoyant plate carriers, as well as maritime webbing, helmet, rifle and pistols.

“Swimming in near-freezing water builds



VIDEERS

A drone operates with members of 45 Commando during Arctic operations
POPhot Alex Ceolin



Members of the Shore Reconnaissance Troop move ashore during fjord operations
LPhot Finn Stainer-Hutchins



U-35 dives beneath the waves as Commandos move out
LPhot Finn Stainer-Hutchins

cold-weather resilience, strengthens mental toughness, and conditions operators to manage cold shock, restricted mobility, and heavy equipment whilst maintaining operational focus," added OC SRT.

"Operating on open water in extreme cold presents significant challenges—weapon systems must be carefully maintained to prevent freezing, dexterity declines rapidly without proper protection, and hypothermia remains a constant and very real threat—but overcoming these factors enhances discipline, preparation, and team cohesion."

DRONE MILESTONE

Marines will have an extra edge in Arctic combat after accomplishing a number of historic firsts as the UK looks to quickly develop how it utilises drones in warfare.

The UK's Commandos are operating their heavy-lift Malloy Aeronautics T150B quadcopters, primarily used for logistical missions, during their winter deployment to Northern Norway in support of major NATO mission rehearsals in the region.

The marine drone operators of Malloy Flight, Delta Squadron, part of Devon-based Commando Logistic Regiment, have successfully carried out a number of milestone sorties, including transporting 81mm mortars, machine guns, ammunition, blood, and a bomb disposal

robot across the battlefield.

These missions strengthen the Commando Force's ability to fight across the extreme conditions of the Arctic while reducing the need for high-risk, long range ground manoeuvres – relying on the drone to make logistical deliveries instead of navigating across the unforgiving environment in all-terrain vehicles or on skis.

The three-man team have faced temperatures as low as -28C, pushing their machines to the limit as they carried out flights at the Blåtinden Ranges in the Troms region of Norway.

Malloy flight commander, Colour Sergeant Dan Lyness, said: "As the first team to integrate into ground forces in the UK we have been able to bring our experience from working in the UK to the high north and learn to operate with all the challenges of operating in temperatures below zero.

"This is a completely new capability that we are learning to exploit to enable greater movement on the ground with a reduced risk to life leveraging modern technology to our advantage.

"Heavy lift Uncrewed Aerial Systems have been used extensively in the Russia/Ukraine conflict with many new use cases, so it is critical we master this emerging capability quickly, training in the high north is a key part of that."

The Royal Navy is developing its drone

operations as it looks to keep pace with developments seen on the battlefields of Ukraine.

The Malloy T150B, which was declared ready for front-line operations last year after years of rigorous trials, can lift up to 68kg, fly up to 40 minutes and has a top speed of 60mph.

It is designed to carry ammunition, weaponry, food, team and medical supplies to Royal Marines operating in all manner of extreme environments.

The first operational deployment to Norway with the Royal Marines saw Delta Squadron assist mortar troops from 40 and 45 Commando to keep them moving forward without the need to carry their own weaponry.

The Malloy T150 flew the barrel, tripod and base plate for their 81mm mortars to their new firing lines, while also moving ammunition tins.

Fire Support Group from Charlie Company, 40 Commando, also benefitted from the help of the Malloys, with their General-Purpose Machine Guns and tripods moved to new positions, taking the burden away from the teams on the ground.

The drone operators also passed on critical knowledge of how to load and receive cargos from the drones, making future operations more seamless.

Added to that, a bomb disposal robot was

flown to location, again freeing up the logistical burden.

Malloy Flight, made up of LCpl Will Cole, Colour Sergeant Lyness and Sergeant Ben Sykes, also helped medics develop tactics and procedures for flying blood boxes and medical packs to the front-line.

Coupled with these successes in the field, the drone operators worked closely with allies, mostly from Norway and the United States, to share tactical knowledge.

They also gave a brief to the Defence Secretary John Healey and 24 MPs from the parliamentary group, as well as defence seniors and commanders.

The Royal Marines Uncrewed Aerial System branch, currently 63-strong, work at Royal Navy Air Station Culdrose in Cornwall.

They are assured by 700X Naval Air Squadron to operate and maintain their drones, before being sent out on deployments where they are needed.

700X are the Royal Navy's drone experts and, last year, successfully made deliveries between warships during HMS Prince of Wales' major Carrier Strike Group 25 global mission.

They are playing a central role as the UK looks to equip its aircraft carriers with hybrid air wings, combining fast jets, long-range weapons and a range of advanced drones.

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Merci

DAUNTLESS



Clockwise from above left: HMS Dauntless prepares to RAS with the AFS Jacques Stoskopf; Dauntless' Wildcat launches a patrol; Dauntless and HMNLS De Ruyter are replenished by the AFS Jacques Stoskopf; A view of Dauntless from her Wildcat from 815 NAS

Pictures: Marine Nationale and 815NAS



ROYAL Navy destroyer HMS Dauntless spent seven days working with the French nuclear-powered aircraft carrier FS Charles de Gaulle as it prepared for France's largest military exercise in decades.

The Type 45 – along with a Wildcat helicopter from 815 NAS – took part in Operation Orion, working with French, Dutch, German, Spanish and Moroccan warships conducting intense anti-air warfare, surface warfare and replenishment exercises.

The operation, which involved 12,500 personnel, 25 ships and 140 aircraft, is a key phase within the wider French Carrier Strike Group Operation Lafayette 2026 deployment. The French carrier has an airwing centred on Rafale M fighters, alongside Hawkeyes and helicopters.

Orion concluded with a 48-hour 'war at sea' exercise where Dauntless worked with the French carrier and her escorts to protect the English Channel from hostile forces.

Portsmouth-based Dauntless successfully 'defeated' the hostile force (played by other NATO warships) attempting to gain control of the French and British coastlines.

LS(AWT) Tom Foley, operations room supervisor on Dauntless, said: "It's been an interesting experience working with the Charles de Gaulle task group.

"The team and I particularly enjoyed the war at sea exercise as it allowed us to be adaptive and tactical in how we were going to find and defeat the enemy.

"It being more free-play made it different from most exercises I've done before."

Dauntless, which took part in the UK Carrier Strike Group 2025 deployment led by HMS Prince of Wales, was replenished at sea by one of the Marine Nationale's newest supply ships, the AFS Jacques Stoskopf, which also supplied the Dutch ship HMNLS De Ruyter at the same time (*main image*).

The Wildcat provided key maritime awareness and targeting information, helping to locate and track surface 'threats' as part of wider NATO serials.

It also provided valuable training for aircrews in supporting the use of Sea Venom and Martlet anti-ship missiles.

Flight Commander Lieutenant Sam Burton of 815 NAS said: "This was an excellent opportunity for the squadron to refine warfighting capabilities with multiple NATO partners in the English Channel and underlines the UK's ongoing commitment to the Alliance and to maintaining credible, combat-ready force able to deter and respond to aggression."

Dauntless' Principal Warfare Officer Lieutenant Commander Joshua Tyrie added: "Building on the experience gained during Op Highmast, where HMS Dauntless was the primary air defender for HMS Prince of Wales, we had the opportunity to bring this expertise to support the Marine Nationale's Op Orion, integrating with the Charles De Gaulle aircraft carrier and her escorts to deliver world-class training, whilst developing tactics and proving our ability to integrate with our NATO partners."





RIVER & FIRE

WHERE'S the fire?

Well, it's off Wapping Street in South Shields at the Marine Offshore Safety Training Centre (between South Shields Boat Angling Club and the Saft battery factory... if you've got to the junction with River Drive you've gone too far...).

Tackling the blaze, a Royal Navy Reservist, one of 50 drawn to Tyneside for two days of vibrant, hands-on training, instruction and experiences making the most of what the North East's largest city and its famous river have to offer.

HMS Calliope in Gateshead served as the hub, providing personnel, equipment and the main location – making full use of local amenities (natural and man-made) for Exercise Northern Star.

Attendees faced simulated fires, casualties, storms, abandoning ship drills, alongside boat handling drills

up and down the river, leading up to a combined practical exercise designed to test teamwork, leadership and operational readiness.

It's the first time in many years that the Gateshead unit has successfully organised – and delivered – training at this scale: similar large-scale exercises for naval reservists are typically staged in southern England close to major Naval Bases and facilities.

As well as Calliope itself – which occupies a prime location on the south shore of the Tyne next to the iconic Millennium Bridge – facilities across the region were exploited to maximise the training opportunities, especially the MOST in South Shields.

The latter is equivalent to the Royal Navy's Havoc / Phoenix damage control complexes, with the added frisson of an 'environmental

pool' – a swimming pool with a wave machine and the ability to recreate storms... indoors.

It allowed for some particularly realistic experiences for participants: tackling fires, lifeboat drills, sea survival skills. This provided valuable familiarisation for the reservists, providing reservists hands-on experience whilst also giving them a feel for the challenges and potential dangers they may face in an operational environment mobilised – aligning with the drive to ensure the entire Naval Service is ready for action.

To spread the experience and knowledge and ensure a firm grounding in critical maritime skills, attendees 'rotated' through varied serials, including emergency response drills, casualty care and

waterborne operations.

"This weekend demonstrates exactly what Royal Navy Reserve units are designed to do: bring people together from across the region and deliver challenging, relevant training that directly supports the Royal Navy's operational needs," said Calliope's Commanding Officer Commander David King.

"This was a great showcase of the resources, talent and experience we have in the Northeast.

"HMS Calliope is proud to play its part as a hub for developing capable Maritime Reservists who are ready to contribute whenever they're called upon."

In addition to the 'technical' aspects of the program, the programme reinforced the value of

teamwork and leadership, bringing together personnel from different branches of the service, based at different units, at different stages of their careers.

For many participants, the weekend represented an opportunity to develop new skills, maintain operational readiness and build connections across the wider Reserve community.

"Being given responsibility for running the exercise was a great opportunity to put some of our leadership training into practice," said Calliope's Midshipman Whipple.

"The scenario challenged us to think clearly, communicate effectively and work as a team. It wasn't easy, but everyone really got stuck in and it made for a really enjoyable and rewarding experience."

Pictures: PO(Phot) Jim Gibson



820's new home takes shape

THE steel skeleton of the home to the aerial guardians of the UK's flagships is starting to take shape as a £100m transformation of Culdrose shifts gears.

The facilities supporting 820 Naval Air Squadron – the airborne 'eyes and ears in the sky' for HMS Queen Elizabeth and Prince of Wales – are undergoing a wholesale revamp at the Cornish base.

Two hangars for the squadron's Merlin Mk2 helicopters are receiving a top-to-toe overhauls, while a third has been flattened and a new one erected in its place.

820's Commanding Officer Commander Alasdair Woodward and the youngest member of the squadron Air Engineering Technician Taylor Kiltie were handed a ceremonial golden spanner to jointly tighten bolts on the first completed section of frame of the new hangar.

Work at 820 heralds a decade of investment and work to regenerate the Helston air station – home of the maritime Merlin force as well as the RN's aerial drone hub.

Other work on the sprawling site includes widespread infrastructure improvements, led by a new engineering training school for Merlin ground crew, all overseen by the Navy, Defence Infrastructure Organisation and construction company Kier.

As well as being better tuned to the needs of the Fleet Air Arm and the hybrid air wings of tomorrow, the impact of the new-look Culdrose upon the environment will be considerably reduced through a string of energy-saving measures: net-zero carbon emissions, solar photovoltaic panels, energy-efficient lighting, and air source heat pumps.

A look at the power behind the throne

A TEAM of engineers strengthened their knowledge of the complex work in high-performance cars during a visit to Ricardo in Sussex.

Personnel from Forward Support Unit (FSU) Archimedes and Brunel paid a professional engagement visit to Ricardo's engineering headquarters in Shoreham-by-Sea.

The visit formed part of an ongoing FSU commitment to deepen the technical knowledge of junior engineers, strengthen industry partnerships and expose Royal Navy engineering personnel to cutting-edge developments across the wider engineering sector.

Ricardo, an internationally recognised engineering, environmental and strategic consultancy, employs more than 2,700 specialists, delivering innovative solutions across energy transition, clean transportation, environmental services and safety assurance. Their work advances global capability in clean energy, high-performance powertrains, and next-generation transportation technologies.

Throughout the day, FSU engineers were guided through several key departments by a Ricardo representative, gaining insight into the company's engineering processes, research pipelines and advanced manufacturing capabilities.

The tour highlighted Ricardo's contributions to the development of McLaren engines, Bugatti



gearboxes, BMW power systems and early 20th-century engine innovations, offering a unique historical and technical perspective on the evolution of complex propulsion systems.

ET(ME) Kinsey of FSU Archimedes said: "I found it a very informative and interesting visit; from the moment we arrived we were given a warm welcome by both receptionists then taken for a tour by an extremely knowledgeable representative within the company. I found learning about the construction of the McLaren engines, Bugatti gearboxes, BMW engines and the

earlier engine innovations very insightful."

The visit allowed FSU engineers to see how advanced industry partners approach design, testing and manufacturing challenges that closely mirror those encountered within naval engineering environments.

By engaging directly with civilian engineering leaders, FSU engineers continue to broaden their technical awareness and cross-sector understanding, directly supporting their mission to maintain, manage and innovate across the Royal Navy.

Gib's Parrots boost security, cut red tape

THERE are not just apes protecting Gibraltar, but Parrots as well – thanks to the combined efforts of the team on the Rock to cut red tape around drone ops.

The Anafi Parrot quadcopter (pictured being trialled during HMS Anson's brief visit to Gib earlier this year) is now part of the intelligence-gathering apparatus at the disposal of the Royal Navy Gibraltar Squadron – and has been used to monitor/safeguard visits to the overseas territory by major UK warships.

The clearance to use it – and other smaller drones – in conjunction with Royal Navy warships is now considerably easier and smoother as a result of a concerted effort by personnel serving in Gib.

With the use of lightweight drones (under 25kg) growing, the existing regulations for operating such systems – known as 'ship-air release' – were proving to be a bottleneck.

The rules were designed for larger, more complex systems – and rightly remain in place. But the process was time-consuming, often taking weeks or even months to approve smaller lower risk drones, which could potentially hinder front-line operations and the Navy's ability to adapt to the rapidly-evolving world of drone technology.

To simplify the process, the team in Gibraltar worked with safety, maritime, and naval aviation experts to devise the documentation, risk assessments and procedures, even an app, all of which reduced clearances and approval from months to a matter of days.

The new accreditation process – labelled 'the tailored route' by personnel – was tested with Anafi Parrots aboard HMS Cutlass and Dagger, as well as the launches used by the RN Gibraltar Squadron.

The success of those trials means the simplified accreditation is now being considered for further drone operations from vessels as varied as XV Patrick Blackett, Vahana boats used by divers and craft operated by 43 and 47 Commandos.

The impact of the 'tailored route' has been profound, giving the navy a faster, more flexible method for deploying lightweight crewless aerial systems from ships and boats.

The admin burden has been significantly reduced and this scalable model is well-suited to accommodate the growing number of small drones entering service.

For the Royal Naval Gibraltar Squadron, it marks a new era in surveillance and operational capability.

"The ANAFI drones have enhanced our ability to deliver effective surveillance during both routine patrols and major tasking," said Lieutenant Commander Jonathan Davies Royal Navy, Commanding Officer RNGS.

"Whether supporting Intelligence gathering tasks or protecting high value units such as the Carrier Strike Group, the system's clear imagery significantly improves situational awareness and supports tactical decision making."

"The improved integration of remotely piloted systems reflects the Royal Navy's commitment to adopting modern technology that delivers operational advantage."

"As the Squadron continues to refine its procedures and explore more opportunities to further enhance its use, drone technology will play an increasingly important role in supporting both routine patrols and high-profile maritime security activity."

MEWSIC performance impresses

OPERATIONS room specialists put the Navy's next-generation Electronic Warfare system through its most comprehensive test yet.

Sailors from frigates HMS Richmond and Sutherland, EW experts from HMS Collingwood (the Royal Navy's home of warfare training) and the Joint EW Operational Support Centre, based at RAF Waddington, tried out the new MEWSIC system and software.

Under scrutiny was not the Maritime Electromagnetic Warfare System Integrated Capability (MEWSIC), but how sailors interact with it – human factors integration user trials.

Electronic/electromagnetic warfare capability is fundamental

to identifying enemy forces, equipment and movement, directly impacting on planning and the conduct of operations.

What's particularly impressive about MEWSIC to the next level is EWC2 – Electromagnetic Warfare Command and Control.

It automatically fuses all the received electromagnetic emissions with the tactical picture to give the team in the ops room vastly increased situational awareness, helping them better understand the operational environment and deliver the right countermeasures at the right time to the right place.

Which is where the human factor comes in.

Supported by experts and

engineers from Babcock and Elbit Systems UK, over three weeks of trials the EW operators were able to experience the system with a synthetic scenario running in the background – similar to how they'd operate in a tactical environment at sea.

Trials staff were on hand to document and assess the system's usability, the provision of enhanced situational awareness, reduction in workload and any potential areas which could result in human error.

"Being able to take part in the MEWSIC trials was an informative experience giving us the opportunity to directly help shape future equipment used by the EW branch," said Able Seaman (EW) Harry Triffitt

from HMS Richmond.

"The staff working on the project were very accommodating and helpful when it came to explaining the new system. Any feedback we provided as subject matter experts was taken into consideration."

This was Harry's first experience of getting to grips with MEWSIC – and he was impressed. For those of you in the EW realm, he says "the only way I can describe it is RESM [Radar Electronic Support Measures] on steroids... The system is fluid and allows liaison between the Electronic Warfare Director and Operator effortlessly."

Sports lottery results

January 3 2026

£5,000 – O Taylor (36-41-42); £1,800 – O Martin (14-43-70); £800 – T Stanley-Adams (02-31-69); £600 – A Frimpong (14-21-56); £500 – D Bryant (24-55-58); £400 – M McBeath (34-41-59);

January 10 2026

£5,000 – W McLundie (07-27-34); £1,800 – P Kontic-Coveney (05-21-68); £800 – K Pugh (01-56-64); £600 – S Gates (40-41-49); £500 – P Mahney (36-52-67); £400 – E Hannah (08-36-69)

January 17 2026

£5,000 – A Turlukowsky (07-33-69); £1,800 – C Steele (01-11-20); £800 – M Rout (02-44-45); £600 – T Dobson (30-56-63); £500 – M Shepherd (28-39-49); £400 – H Jefferson (38-55-57)

January 24 2026

£5,000 – T Ng'etich (56-57-60); £1,800 – I Dawes (17-42-62); £800 – J Lewis (08-31-45); £600 – D Hopkins (32-35-69); £500 – L Phillips (20-25-44); £400 – S Jepson (24-

48-64)

January 31 2026

£5,000 – K Challis (01-17-66); £1,800 – H Floyer (02-55-66); £800 – B Bradley (17-25-59); £600 – R Jamieson (12-51-69); £500 – M Flindall (02-49-51); £400 – M Denton (12-39-41)

January Xtra Draw

£100 each to: D Bartlam (09-32-49); L Young (02-15-40); R Nesbitt (18-21-65); M Rees (30-48-70); B Metcalf (09-29-37); S Tucker (12-49-59); J McCloy (09-45-57); D Latham (04-10-29); T Phillips (09-36-55); J Barber (18-25-70)

February 7 2026

£5,000 – T Hunter (22-35-41); £1,800 – M Bond (02-05-64); £800 – J Thornton (32-47-66); £600 – J Smith (01-20-63); £500 – E Lind (06-08-67); £400 – S Manifold (04-24-47)

February 14 2026

£5,000 – A Aindow (05-21-43); £1,800 – G

Sinclair (19-48-66); £800 – G O'Neill (36-51-67); £600 – S Axworthy (11-52-63); £500 – S Jones (44-51-52); £400 – D Moss (21-35-69)

February 21 2026

£5,000 – T Long (28-41-52); £1,800 – J Edwards (40-61-62); £800 – A Cothier (13-28-53); £600 – D Mumberson (29-50-64); £500 – F Mouldon (01-58-65); £400 – J Edwards (17-34-37)

February 28 2026

£5,000 – B Wilcox (14-25-68); £1,800 – P Johnson (18-31-35); £800 – J Dennis (04-10-33); £600 – M Marlow (07-25-37); £500 – J MacDonald (04-57-69); £400 – M Robinson (28-40-53)

February Xtra Draw

£100 each to: P Atkins (19-46-59); L Weeks (19-35-42); E Bauld (25-50-66); M Powell (37-42-67); J Connolly (25-57-60); M Platt (05-26-40); C Stafford (26-33-39); N Bell (03-17-45); M Baker (26-47-65); T Singleton-Kelly (01-15-38)



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Ride off in Triumph

A TRIUMPH. From Triumph. Courtesy of Triumph.
Riding away with a £9k Speed Twin 900CC Triumph motorcycle is ex-soldier Graeme Haswell, receiving the keys from the dealership of the same name from CPO Iain Hamblin of the submarine of the same name...
This is probably the final act in the life of HMS Triumph, the last of the Trafalgar-class hunter killer submarines.
She paid off last summer in a double decommissioning event in Plymouth, home of the class through their 45-year career.

To mark her passing, the legendary motorcycle firm – long affiliated with the submarine – donated a bespoke Speed Twin (a tank featuring Triumph herself) to be raffled off at just £2 a ticket.

More than 7,500 tickets were sold with the winner, former Royal Engineer Graeme, from Newcastle, being pulled out of the hat (not literally) at the Submarine Service Awards in October.

It took a little longer for the bike to be finished, while the proceeds from the raffle – which raised more than £15,000 – have been split between the Service's premier charity, the RNRMC, and Brian House Hospice in the boat's affiliated town of Blackpool.

It provides respite, palliative and end-of-life care for children and young people with life-limiting conditions on the Fylde.

Over the course of the link with the boat, Brian House has received regular visits from the crew – and regular donations courtesy of their fundraising activities on board (£6k last year).

CPO Hamblin paid what may well be the final visit to Lancashire to present an oversized cheque for £7,646.95 to Rebecca Moon, from Trinity Hospice and Brian House.

An ex-Royal Engineer, Mr Haswell heard about the raffle on BFBS radio and purchased his tickets via the RNRMC online shop.

Founded in 1902, Triumph Motorcycles is an iconic British manufacturer renowned worldwide for its engineering excellence, heritage and innovation. The donation of the motorcycle reflects the company's continued commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community and charitable initiatives across the UK.

For RNRMC, the funding will contribute towards delivering lifelong support to serving personnel, veterans and their families.

This includes providing financial assistance during times of hardship, funding mental health and wellbeing support, enabling family and relationship services, and supporting programmes that improve morale and quality of life across



the Naval Service.

For Trinity Hospice & Brian House, the funding will help provide compassionate end-of-life care and specialist support to adults and children with life-limiting conditions, as well as vital bereavement services for families.

The hospice delivers care free of charge to those who need it most, relying heavily on charitable support to continue its essential services.

The success of the raffle reflects the generosity of the Naval community and the strength of partnership between service personnel, charitable organisations and industry supporters. Through initiatives such as this, RNRMC continues to ensure that those who serve – and those who have served – are never forgotten.

Trio run length of mainland Britain



Pictured from left to right at John O'Groats are Duncan Fraser, Rob Cozens and Connor Davidson

THREE Plymouth-based sailors are running the length of mainland Britain.

Rob Cozens, Duncan Fraser and Connor Davidson intend to cover the more than 800 miles between John O'Groats – the northeasterly tip of the mainland – and its westernmost point in Cornwall, Land's End on foot in just 20 days.

In doing so the trio hope to raise at least £10,000 for four worthy causes.

Marine engineer Warrant Officer 1 Rob 'Squid' Cozens who's on the staff of the Royal Navy's training organisation based in Devonport, FOST, and Leading Hand Duncan and Able Seaman Connor, who both serve in frigate HMS Sutherland, will have to average at least 40 miles every day (which is more than 1½ marathons).

The run has been over a year in the planning and began on March 9 with the team leaving John O'Groats on the first leg – a slog of nearly 52 miles to Helmsdale, a village on the east coast of Scotland.

Supported by a back-up van throughout driven by Anthony 'Penny' Walsh, a former Royal Navy marine engineer, the team were due to arrive at Lands End as *Navy News* went to press.

"Running from John O'Groats to Lands End isn't just a physical test, it's a mental one," said father-of-three Rob, for whom the run is a key part of his personal recovery from a dark period in his life.

He says all three runners have come through – or are dealing with – problems, so the epic run is a chance to pay back the charities which have helped them.

Benefitting from the runners are: mental health charities Man Down UK and Bigmoose, Hatty's Fund which provides instruments for young musicians in Somerset and the Royal Navy's principal good cause, the RNRMC.

You can follow the trio's progress via Instagram: [Bobby_sailors_top_to_tail](#)

And you can donate via www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/duncan-fraser-1.



Film-maker's run to mark 75th

THE RNRMC is proud to support its Ambassador and Honorary Royal Marine, Chris Terrill, as he marks his 75th year with an extraordinary series of fundraising challenges in aid of the Royal Navy community.

Chris completed the 2026 Brighton Half Marathon, in the driving rain and against a freezing wind, finishing second in his age group.

At 55, he became the only civilian – and the oldest person ever – to earn his own Royal Marines green beret on merit, still his proudest possession.

In a remarkable display of determination, he previously completed the Brighton Marathon on crutches in 6 hours, 11 minutes and 11 seconds, just months after a hip replacement operation.

He undertook the challenge in

memory of his friend, Robert 'Bob' Hawkins MBE RN. The achievement was later ratified by Guinness World Records as the fastest marathon on crutches (male).

Chris said: "The Royal Navy family has given me far more than I could ever repay – purpose and motivation whenever I've needed direction, incredible friendships that have endured a lifetime, and inspiration drawn from the courage, humour and professionalism of those who serve. As I mark my 75th year, these challenges are not about personal milestones, but about honouring that extraordinary and all embracing community. This is my way of saying thank you."

To support Chris on his mission, visit <https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/chris-terrill>.



New logo for field gun contest

THE RNRMC has unveiled the brand-new official logo for the RNRMC Field Gun Competition during an event aboard HMS Victory.

The unveiling marked a proud moment for a competition deeply rooted in Naval heritage, uniting tradition, teamwork, and the spirit of friendly rivalry across the Service.

Gathered on the historic quarterdeck, attendees witnessed the reveal of a refreshed visual identity designed to carry the Field Gun Competition into the future while honouring its long-standing legacy.

The new design reflects both the modern Royal Navy and the timeless values the

event represents: discipline, camaraderie, and the drive to excel.

The setting aboard HMS Victory provided a fitting backdrop, linking centuries of Naval history with today's serving community. With its updated branding, the competition continues to inspire teams across the Fleet, Royal Marines, and the wider Naval family.

Adam Silverthorne, RNRMC Design & Brand Manager, who created and unveiled the new logo said: "The aim was to create an identity that incorporates RNRMC branding and reflects the teamwork and competitiveness of the event while respecting its heritage."



Families celebrated on HMS Duncan

HMS Duncan welcomed families and close friends on board for a special day at sea, giving loved ones a rare opportunity to experience life on board and witness the work of the ship's company up close.

The event brought the whole Duncan community together, strengthening ties between sailors and the people who support them at home.

The day offered a mix of demonstrations, time with the crew, and the chance for families to explore the ship in action.

Lieutenant Christian Smith: "It's been a fantastic day welcoming our families and friends onboard HMS Duncan as a way of expressing

our gratitude for the endeavouring support they show to us throughout our ongoing deployments.

"We'd also like to extend a massive thank you to RNRMC and our other naval partners for the support they continue to show us and to our families and friends for their support today on HMS Duncan's family's day.

"Events like this reflect the Royal Navy's commitment to supporting families and ensuring they remain connected, even during the challenges of service life.

"HMS Duncan's day at sea succeeded in doing exactly that – creating memories and strengthening bonds across the ship's wider family."



LOOK BACK IN ANCHOR

IT'S ANCHORS ahoy as more than 30 of the iconic objects are ordered for Royal Navy warships.

The MOD has placed a multi-million-pound order with a family-run firm in the West Midlands to provide anchors, more than two kilometres of chains, plus supporting equipment for much of the Fleet – including both Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers.

The huge order ends the UK's reliance in recent decades on anchors and ancillary kit being produced overseas.

Sailors from flagship HMS Prince of Wales' bridge team and seamanship department were invited to the Black Country with experts from the MOD's Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) organisation to see the traditional skills needed to forge the iconic items.

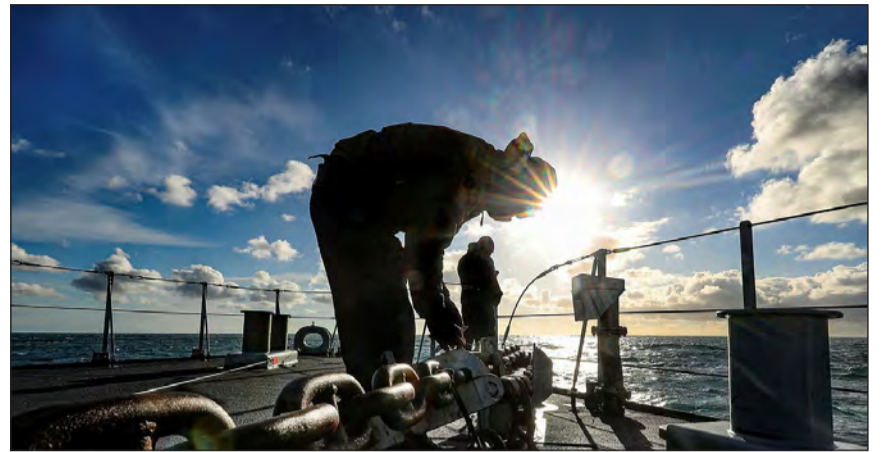
Established in 1910 and now believed to be the country's last anchor and chain manufacturers, Solid Swivel has been selected for the wide-ranging order – and will begin with the huge anchors for the carriers.

Each anchor is as tall (3.1 metres) and weighs (12½ tonnes) as much as a single-decker bus.

The firm will also produce the chains raising and lowering them. The port cable stretches for 14.5 shackles (398.75m or 1,308ft) – making it more than 100 metres longer than the ship herself – and features 29 links, each 60cm long. The starboard cable is shorter at 12½ shackles (343.75m), and features 26 links. The cables weigh 90 and 75 tonnes respectively; a London bus tops the scales at about 15 tonnes.

While the anchors for Britain's biggest warships attract attention due to their size and weight, they are actually used pretty infrequently by the aircraft carriers: HMS Prince of Wales dropped anchor just three times during her eight-month Operation Highmast deployment to the Indo-Pacific region last year, preferring berths in ports instead.

Frigates or particularly patrol ships, such as



One of HMS Tamar's crew works on the patrol ship's anchor chain; Left, the anchor chain of HMS Dauntless; Below a craftsman at Solid Swivel works on new anchor apparatus for the Royal Navy



HMS Medway in the Falklands or HMS Tamar in the South Pacific, are far more likely to lower/raise anchor as they visit remote islands, many of them without ports or harbours.

"Solid Swivel are delighted to be the nominated supplier to the Royal Navy for anchors, chain cable and fittings," said David Kertai, the firm's business development manager.

"As the last manufacturer in the UK capable

of making the entire anchoring package from the chain locker to the anchor we are proud of the great manufacturing heritage within the business. With 115 years of experience in forging steel products, we are able to not only produce high quality, safety critical components, but manufacture bespoke and specialised items to meet the fleets requirements."

Forging of the Queen Elizabeth-class anchors – which also involves two more Midlands family-run businesses, Somers Forge and Goodwin Castings – begins this month, starting with the shank, before fluke components are produced at Goodwin Castings and final assembly completed at Solid Swivel.

As for the retired anchors, they might be 're-homed', recycled or sold. In the past many have become public works of art displayed at sites linked with the navy, from 'gate guardians' at bases to serving as reminders of a site's naval ties.

THE FIREFLY SCHEME

FROM REGULAR TO RESERVES

- The Firefly Scheme offers the Royal Navy (RN) trained service leaver the opportunity to join the Royal Naval Reserve (RNR) or Royal Marines Reserve (RMR) through a seamless fast track process. (You will be ineligible if you left as an Untrained or Part trained Rank)
- The maximum joining age for RNR is 56 and RMR is 51 and you need to have a JMES of Medically Fully Deployable (MFD) or Medically Limited Deployable (MLD) on Discharge.
- RN/RM trained Ex-Regulars, who are within 36 months of Service Discharge date and trained service leavers from other Armed Services may also apply.
- The scheme offers the opportunity to remain or become part of the RN/Corps Family with its unique camaraderie.
- As a Reservist for an annual commitment of just 24 Reserve Days (achieved through your spare time) you will be well rewarded. Earning extra money, accruing an **additional pension** and subject to meeting the specified criteria, receive an **annual tax free bounty**.
- A stable work-life balance is also offered, with an initial two-year harmony period, meaning that you are **exempt from operational duties** for this period, unless you wish to volunteer.
- Please note that during this period you will still be expected to meet your annual number of Reserve Service Days (ideally 24).

For further information, contact

W02 Kenny Williamson RM at kenneth.williamson479@mod.gov.uk





Eve inspires Wren statue

ONE of the country's leading sculptors has begun work on what is believed to be the first statue of a Wren – a central figure in a new memorial to Coastal Forces.

Amy Goodman, who's previously been commissioned to sculpt Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and pioneering nurse Florence Nightingale, is representing three sailors in the £250,000 monument which will be unveiled near Victory Gate in Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard next year.

The inspiration for the Wren signaller is Eve Branson, mother of Virgin boss/entrepreneur Sir Richard.

A young Eve Flindt, as she was then, served as a signaller with the Coastal Forces. She spent a year on the Isle of Wight, describing it as 'one of the best in my life' – despite the tremendous sorrow of losing friends and colleagues.

She – and fellow Wren signallers – used hand-held Aldis lamps, ten-inch lamps or semaphore with flags to communicate with Coastal Forces craft.

Signallers had among the most poignant jobs – counting the boats home as they came back from operations... Mrs Branson's account of the "numbing sadness" of noting which ones had not returned is documented in the Coastal Forces exhibition in Gosport.

During both world wars, Coastal Forces craft proved a constant thorn in the side of whichever enemy they faced.

They fought in some 900 actions, fired more torpedoes than the Silent Service, and sank 400 enemy vessels – but at a heavy cost: some 300 craft (one in 12 boats) were lost in action.

Mrs Branson, who died in 2021 at the age of 96, lived a remarkable life to the full: philanthropist, ballet dancer, airline stewardess, real estate developer, military policewoman, probation officer and author... plus mother of three after marrying former army officer Ted Branson.

In later life Mrs Branson was an active member of the Coastal Forces Veterans Association and supported the restoration of MTB 71, now a museum piece in Gosport.

Ms Goodman says Mrs Branson remains "a hugely inspiring woman" – and helped blaze a trail for today's female sailors.

"It is incredible to think we are celebrating over a century of women in the Coastal Forces, and their extraordinary journey since WW1 to the current day where we have several female admirals and many women in other senior command roles," she said.

The boat element of the memorial is being built – to the original blueprints – at the Elephant Boatyard in Bursledon, near Southampton, where these same craft were built for action more than 80 years ago.

"We want to share the story with the public and let them feel pride in our Coastal Forces and excitement about the upcoming monument as the project takes shape," said Julie Farrington from the heritage trust.

"And we want to educate members of the public about the incredible stories of our Coastal Forces which are largely untold."

You can find out more about the project at www.coastal-forces.org.uk and you can make donations via www.coastal-forces.org.uk/monument-fundraising



PO Glynn, ET Lambe, Slt Vercoe & Slt Mumtaz attend the evening ceremony at the Menin Gate

Menin Blue: Tyne in WW1 tribute

SAILORS from HMS Tyne paid their respects at two of the most hallowed sites on the Western Front during a break from shadowing Russians (see page 7).

Crew of the Portsmouth-based patrol ship used the few days' break Zeebrugge to pay their respects to Great War dead – especially those connected with her namesake region.

First up: the largest Commonwealth War Graves cemetery in the world by number of burials, Tyne Cot, 11,965 souls, of whom only 3,621 – three out of ten dead – have been identified.

So named because the German strongpoints peppering the muddy, shell-cratered Flanders terrain reminded Tommies (many of them from the North East of England) of workers' cottages back home.

A small group from the warship held a short service of remembrance in front of the memorial panels bearing the names of members of the Northumberland Fusiliers with no known grave – one of four such memorials to Commonwealth WW1 dead across Belgian Flanders.

The sailors then walked up and down the seemingly endless lines of graves, including those of 15 sailors from the Royal Naval Division which fought in the closing battles for Passchendaele in November 1917, to grasp the scale of the sacrifice made by Commonwealth troops in the Ypres salient between 1914 and 1918.

Nowhere is the scale of that sacrifice more evident than the Menin Gate Memorial on the eastern edge of Ypres town centre.

Many of the dead marched through the original gate to the front. Since the late 1920s, a memorial arch has dominated the site, with the names of nearly 55,000 Commonwealth soldiers with no

known graves listed on the walls.

Each night at 8pm traffic through the gate halts and hundreds of people gather for a Last Post ceremony with wreath layings and tributes by veterans groups, descendants, schoolchildren, historians and curious onlookers and tourists – drawn from around the world.

HMS Tyne was represented each night of her stay in Zeebrugge – and no sailor who attended was not moved by the occasion.

"The towering gate filled with the names of thousands of brave soldiers was overwhelming," said Leading Engineering Technician Addison Prout. "It was a great honour to represent the military at such a profound place of remembrance."

Commanding Officer Lieutenant Commander Sam Fields laid a wreath, accompanied by his gunnery officer Lieutenant William Payne for whom the ceremony was particularly significant.

"This was an unexpectedly poignant evening for me," William explained. "I'd learnt just a few days prior about my Great Great Uncle, Private James Whelan of 1st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers, who was killed south of Ypres on 4 March 1915."

He found Pte Whelan's name on Panel 8 among the thousands of other dead.

"The opportunity to attend, see it for myself and subsequently partake in an act of remembrance with fellow ship's company is an honour I will carry with me for a long time."

"The vastness of space adorned wholly with names is a truly sobering spectacle. It induces a deep reflection on the very real horrors that these individuals faced and stands as a compelling reminder to us all on the need to remember them."

Portland's Penn is mighty

THE past met the future on Portland as the island's RNA branch joined its Sea Cadet unit for its annual celebration evening.

A dozen members of the branch were invited to TS Penn's Divisions and Awards evening to mark the achievements of its young people throughout 2025 – and look ahead to activities and events this year.

The unit was packed with proud parents, supportive families and friends cheering on the cadets.

The evening commenced with Colours and Divisions, with the latter inspected by Portland Mayor and shipmate Councillor Charlie Flack.

Fellow shipmate and Mayor's Consort, Maria Flack, then opened the awards presentations, sharing duties with shipmate Pete Shoemith as eight specialisation and proficiency awards were handed out.

Branch Chairman Dusty Miller presented boating



awards and shipmate Karen Miller the best Junior Cadets awards.

The mayor was again called upon, this time to hand out the Best Cadets awards to the Senior Cadets section.

Presentations then concluded with shipmate Dusty presenting the Portland Branch-sponsored Diamond Community Award which was shared by three cadets: Ordinary Cadet Ruby and Cadets Alexander and Vinnie.

And shipmate Pete Shoemith presented the other Portland Branch-sponsored trophy, Barton

Award, donated by previous Branch President shipmate Dick Barton, for Best Improved Piper to Ordinary Cadet Oscar.

Proceedings concluded with Evening Colours.

"It was fantastic to see so many people come together to celebrate the hard work, dedication, and spirit of the Cadets," said shipmate Dusty.

"It was a pleasure to be able to participate in the awards evening and that the Cadets were a credit to the unit. The branch looks forward to supporting the unit throughout 2026."

Happy birthday to U

SERVING and veteran sailors joined WW2 hero Jim Collorick as one of the last sailors to sink a U-boat in action celebrated his 104th birthday.

On Boxing Day 1942, destroyer HMS Hesperus rammed U-357, carving the boat in two and sending her to the bottom of the Atlantic some 350 northwest of the coast of Northern Ireland in a joint action with HMS Vanessa.

Nearly 85 years later Jim vividly recounted the action as he celebrated his birthday at a care home in Macclesfield, surrounded by family, friends and veterans.

"We finished up on December 26, 1942 by having a battle for several hours with a U-boat," he said.

"At eight o'clock at night it was pitch black. We got him in front of us and deliberately rammed him – we cut him in two."

Just six Germans were plucked from the water; 36 men went down with the submarine, while Hesperus returned home to Liverpool a few days later with a bashed bow as proof of her success – a picture Jim proudly displays to this day.

"In 1942 the U-boats were all over the place and we were always target number one. We were never hit – we were very lucky," he added.

He served as a radio operator/telegraphist and is rightly proud of the role he and his shipmates played in the key battle of WW2 – though he plays down his own part in it.

"We depended on the Atlantic lifeline for food and fuel, which the German U-boats very nearly cut," said Jim.

"Winston Churchill said in his memoirs that the only thing that really worried him during the war was the U-boat peril in 1942."

He added: "I didn't do anything special, but I am proud to have served. The great thing was the comradeship during the war, particularly in the dark days when there was plenty of action."

Thanking Jim for his service – and lavishing him with gifts – were Lieutenant Antonio Valente from the RNHQ Northern England and Isle of Man at HMS Eaglet.

Deputy Mayor Cheshire East Cllr Judy Snowball, Honorary Treasurer of Macclesfield Royal British Legion Peter Lake, alongside Jim's son David, fellow armed forces veterans, residents and staff from the care home.

"Listening to Jim speak about his medals, the missions he completed during the Battle of the Atlantic, and his service in the Royal Navy was incredibly inspiring. I felt genuinely humbled to be in the presence of such a remarkable man," said Lt Valente.

"What struck me most was how young Jim looked – if I hadn't known his age, I would have bet my mortgage he was in his early eighties. When I asked him what his secret was, he smiled and said, 'Sea air and rum, my good man.' Jim completely lit up the room, and I feel privileged to have met such a wonderful human being."



Final sub VC plaque

THE final of 14 memorial plaques to Royal Navy submariners awarded the Victoria Cross will be dedicated in Dover on June 6.

Petty Officer Thomas Gould earned the nation's highest military decoration for helping to remove two 100lb bombs from the casing of HMS Thrasher on patrol in the Mediterranean in 1942.

In recognition of PO Gould's deeds, Dover District Council have given the Submariners Association permission to site the final commemorative Blue Plaque on the Maison Dieu, Dover, on 6 June.

There will be a 20-minute service of dedication, led by the association chaplain, followed by a reception at the Maison Dieu.

TAG family set for reunion

A MEMORIAL service for Telegraphist/Air Gunners (TAGs) will be held in Lee-on-the-Solent's St Faith's Church on May 17 at 3pm.

The Telegraphist Air Gunners Association has held a Memorial Service on the third Sunday in May since 1953 when the Duchess of Kent unveiled the Fleet Air Arm Memorial. When the association dissolved, the Fleet Air Arm Association took over.

This year's service, the 73rd, will include veterans, family members of TAGs, retired senior Royal Navy officers, local MPs and a contingent of sailors from nearby HMS Sultan. It will be preceded by lunch at Lee-on-the-Solent Golf Club.

Contact Phil Carpenter secretary@flynavyfederation.org.uk or 07767 686902

Thank you, Don and Jim

THE Royal Marines family turned out in force to pay its respects to their own as the remarkable lives of WW2 veterans Jim Wren and Don Butt were celebrated.

At 105 former Japanese prisoner of war Jim was possibly the country's oldest Royal Marine and almost certainly the oldest survivor of the loss of HMS Prince of Wales and Repulse in the opening hours of war in the Pacific.

Originally from Sussex, Jim (pictured top) was rejected by both the RAF and Army when he tried to join up aged 19... but was encouraged by his uncle to try the Royal Marines... who accepted.

Upon completion of his training, he was assigned to WW1-era battle-cruiser HMS Repulse. Dispatched to the Far East with new battleship HMS Prince of Wales in a bid to deter Japanese aggression in the Pacific, instead they became among the first victims of the new conflict when they were pounced upon by enemy bombers in the South China Sea on December 10 1941.

Rescued by destroyer HMS Electra, Jim was only spared Japanese captivity for only a couple of months; he was caught trying to escape from Singapore and spent the remainder of the war in PoW camps, attributing his survival to the bond he forged with fellow marines in captivity.

"We didn't know when our next meal was coming from or when our next drink was coming from," he remembered.

"They had no idea how to deal with prisoners of war, the Japanese - no idea. The guards would cut you down if you failed to salute them or bow to them... you expect to die if you're fighting a war but not to perish



under those circumstances."

They endured three and a half years of barbaric conditions and daily maltreatment. News of Japan's surrender in August 1945 - announced by the prison camp commandant - came as a surprise... and none too soon.

"I shed a few tears, I can tell you, it was an emotional reaction through my whole body," Jim recalled. "At that stage, we had almost got to a point of no return."

Jim Wren remained in the military post-war, finally leaving in 1953 when he settled in Salisbury, the hometown of his wife Margaret.

He worked as a gardener/groundskeeper for both the borough and Westwood St Thomas School.

Serving Royal Marines and members of the Royal Marines Association attended his funeral at St Thomas' in Salisbury... as they did for the last act in Don Butt's life, where the RNA, RBL, and a bugler from the Royal Marines Band Plymouth ensured a suitable send-off for the 100-year-old landing craftsman at Sedgemoor Crematorium near Bridgwater in Somerset.

Don Butt (pictured bottom) re-discovered his Royal Marines family very late in life - for most

of the eight decades since he saw action he never talked about his war service with anyone.

He was a spritely 98 when he did, eager to complete his set of medals for his time in uniform: the Legion d'Honneur, in recognition of all those involved in the liberation of France from the Nazi yoke in 1944/45.

It was Don's dying wish to receive the decoration - and with his health deteriorating rapidly over the winter, French authorities faced a race against time to award it.

It was thanks in part to lobbying by veterans groups that the decoration was presented by Royal Marines just 11 days before his passing.

Don's family said that in his final couple of years the veteran took great pleasure from reuniting with the Corps family who regularly visited him, invited him as VIP guest to a Kings Squad passing out parade and was also invited to VJ day commemorations at the National Memorial Arboretum last year where he met the Queen.

Don Butt joined the Royal Marines aged just 17. Twelve months later his landing craft put troops - principally Canadians - ashore on Juno Beach on June 6 1944, before being employed to support the advance of American forces up the Cherbourg peninsula.

His craft was subsequently sent half way around the globe to support the invasion of Japan, Operation Downfall, cancelled when Tokyo surrendered following the dropping of the atomic bombs.

"Dad always said he had a happy life," said his daughter Karen Cetin.

"Things are in place to honour dad in Normandy in June and we hope he will be remembered as a humble, funny, thoughtful man."

Fifty five years in Morecambe Bay

Celebrating the deeds of submariners and keeping the camaraderie of life in a boat alive for the past five decades are Morecambe Bay Submariners Association.

Members gathered at the resort's golf club with civic dignitaries and fellow deeps from Barrow and Blackpool for an evening recognising five decades of service, connection and support in the submariner community in the area.

Lancashire's Vice Lord-Lieutenant Brigadier Peter Rafferty was guest of honour, with former Lancaster Mayor and Armed Forces Champion Councillor Roger Dennison a guest of the branch.

The event remembered shipmates past: Christine McGuinness and her son Jason attended in memory of their husband and father, a former branch member who died in 2024. And Shirley Orton, wife of former member John Orton, was also remembered, with the branch planning to mark the anniversary with her in the coming weeks.

The long-standing commitment of founding member Dave Andrew was thanked while Keith Holmes, branch standard bearer, received the Submariners Association Patron's Certificate of Appreciation for more than 30 years' dedicated service.

Attendees heard from the branch president who thanked the RNRMC and Greenwich Hospital for their continued support (they met 50 per cent of event costs) not just to the branch, but also to serving personnel, veterans and their families, and in enabling events which strengthen community connection and wellbeing.

And Brigadier Rafferty underscored the ongoing importance of military associations, noting the significant contribution made by the North West to the UK's Armed Forces.

Aviator's rescuer's medal fetches £9k at auction

The bravery award presented to a warship captain who gave his life trying to save Britain's most famous female aviator was snapped up for £9,000.

Lieutenant Commander Walter Fletcher was awarded the Albert Medal - today succeeded by the George Cross, the UK's highest bravery decoration not in the line of enemy fire - for his desperate attempts to save Amy Johnson.

The pilot was a household name in the 1930s - not just in the UK but around the world as the first woman to fly solo from the UK to Australia.

When war came she volunteered to serve with the Air Transport Auxiliary ferrying new, damaged or repaired military aircraft around the country.

On January 5 1941, she left Prestwick airfield in Scotland for RAF Kidlington near Oxford in foul weather.

Her twin-engine Airspeed Oxford trainer strayed wildly off course - by around 100 miles - and crashed in the Thames Estuary, probably out of fuel.

The crew of HMS Haslemere - a barrage balloon ship deployed in the mouth of the Thames to prevent low-flying German bombers attacking

London - watched someone bail out.

Lt Cdr Fletcher immediately ordered his ship head at full speed for the spot, then prepared to launch her lifeboat only for the pilot to be swept past just 20 yards from the vessel.

As the only unmarried officer aboard Fletcher decided to attempt the rescue himself and dived into the icy Thames.

He searched in vain for the aviator until his energy ran out and hypothermia probably set in - and Fletcher too needed rescuing.

Although he was picked up by his crew, cared for on board Haslemere and swiftly delivered to the Royal Naval Hospital at Gillingham, he succumbed to the cold.

He had no idea that the aviator he had tried to save was Amy Johnson. She too died - probably from drowning or hypothermia, although she may have been sucked into the blades of HMS Haslemere's propellers.

Fletcher received a posthumous Albert Medal for attempted lifesaving, a decoration presented to his family by King George VI in June 1941.

Eight decades later, it was auctioned at Noonans Mayfair where it fetched £1,000 more than expected.



Carrier loss honoured

A MEMORIAL plaque has been dedicated to a tragic WW2 aircraft carrier in the yard where she was built over a century ago.

With full naval ceremony, the monument to the men of HMS Glorious - plus the crews of her escorting destroyers HMS Ardent and Acasta - was blessed and unveiled at the legendary Harland & Wolff works in Belfast.

With shipbuilding returning to the yard as it plays its part in the construction of a new class of Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels, its owners Navantia UK felt it was fitting moment to remember the ill-fated carrier.

HMS Glorious was the largest warship built by Harland & Wolff at its Queen's Island yard during World War 1.

She started life as a battle-cruiser and saw action against the German Fleet in the North Sea, including escorting its ships when they surrendered in November 1918.

As with her two sisters in the Courageous class, Glorious was subsequently converted into an aircraft carrier.

In the spring of 1940 she was committed off Norway to provide air cover for Allied forces ashore when the Germans invaded.

As the campaign turned against the Allies, British troops were evacuated and Glorious embarked RAF Gladiator and Hurricane fighters - then made for Scapa Flow.

On 8 June 1940, she was intercepted by the German battle-cruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau some 700 miles north of Scapa Flow.

Despite a valiant effort by her escorting destroyers to take the fight to the enemy, all three ships were lost in an unequal battle which was over in little more than two hours. More than 1,500 men lost their lives.

Nearly 110 years to the day since Glorious was launched, veterans groups led by shipmates from Royal Naval Association Area 12 (Ireland), serving personnel, shipwrights and Navantia officials gathered to pay their respects and tour the site (pictured below).

Above all, present were representatives of the GIARAc Association which represents the families of men who served in all three ships and which designed the commemorative plaque.

They heard Commander Thomas Wardley, the Royal Navy's Senior Naval Officer Northern Ireland, praise the bravery of the men of 1940.

"We are here to remember those sailors lost in 1940," he said. "The destroyer men who turned toward gunfire. The flight deck crews who never had a chance to launch. Their conduct, especially in the final minutes, reflected the ethos that has defined the Royal Navy for centuries."

"And we are also here to remember that the legacy of sea power still matters today, that building RFA Resurgent and her sister ships here in Belfast is not about nostalgia, but recognising that sovereign shipbuilding capacity continues to be a critical strategic asset for the United Kingdom."

The shipyard is being reinvigorated with a £90m investment for the construction of the next generation of Royal Fleet Auxiliary support vessels. The Fleet Solid Support ships will be built at Navantia's yards, including Belfast, beginning with Resurgent. When complete she'll be the second largest vessel in the Fleet at 39,000 tonnes.

"Harland & Wolff has played an important role in the story of the Royal Navy, and it is right that we pause to reflect on that legacy," Navantia UK's CEO Donato Martinez said.

"As Navantia UK invests in the future of this yard and delivers the Fleet Solid Support ships for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, we are conscious that we are writing the next chapter on the same historic ground."

"Our commitment is to honour that heritage through the quality of the ships we build and the long-term industrial capability we are restoring here in Belfast."



Naval Quirks

IRONICALLY, IT WAS A BRITON, ROBERT WHITEHEAD, WHO INVENTED THE MODERN TORPEDO THAT CAUSED SO MUCH DAMAGE TO UK SHIPPING IN 2 WORLD WARS.

ANYWAY, BECAUSE OF HIS BUSINESS LINKS TO AUSTRIA, WHITEHEAD'S GRANDDAUGHTER WAS INVITED IN 1912 TO LAUNCH AN AUSTRIAN SUBMARINE.

ROMANCE BLOSSOMED: SHE MARRIED THE SUB'S CAP'N - GEORG VON TRAPP - AND THEIR CHILDREN BECAME THE "VON TRAPP SINGERS" OF "THE SOUND OF MUSIC" FAME!

I SEE WHAT YOU ARE GETTING AT CAP'N - THIS WHITEHEAD FELLER HAS A LOT TO ANSWER FOR!



Inspiring cadets recognised at Sevenoaks for hard work



SEVENOAKS Sea Cadets were proud to celebrate two of their young people following a remarkable start to the year for the unit.

After much hard work and application, Petty Officer Cadet Harry, 17, (pictured below right) completed his Dinghy Instructor course – receiving the feedback that he should start teaching as soon as possible.

This talented young sailor has also won bronze medals in the RS Zest category at the past two National Sailing Regattas and recently completed his Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award – which he is now looking forward to receiving at Buckingham Palace.

He said: "Completing my Gold DofE has significantly improved my leadership and

teamwork skills, especially when I was lucky enough to complete my expeditions on the rustlers [yachts].

"My advice to other cadets is to just book onto as many courses as possible as you get to meet new people, travel to new places, and learn loads of new skills to further support your interests."

Harry is currently enjoying the opportunities for leadership within the unit, where he is supporting junior cadets and learning to "encourage others and develop my communication and patience as everyone learns differently".

In February, Harry had received a West Kent District Award – in the form of the Derek Ireland Memorial Trophy – for his outstanding work to support others, having been nominated for his dedication to inspiring younger cadets to develop their sailing skills.

Another district award-winner – for most training days attended in 2025 – was Leading Cadet Jonathan, 16, (pictured left) who enjoyed a remarkable week at RNAS Cudrose in February, on the Cadet Naval Aviation Bronze Wings course.

Not only was Jonathan the first cadet in Sevenoaks Unit's history to complete the course, but he was also presented with the Top Cadet award.

"Going in a Merlin Helicopter

simulator and 'attempting' to take off from the back of a frigate was a highlight," said LC Jonathan.

"The course helped me gain huge amounts of confidence and taught me that perseverance is worth the effort. I'm lucky enough to be through to the Silver Wings course later this year, where I will develop the knowledge I've learnt."

Jonathan ultimately hopes to join the Fleet Air Arm as a pilot but still has some ambitions to fulfil within Sea Cadets.

He added: "I would like to obtain my Drill Instructor qualification and continue to play saxophone with the London Area Band.

"Everything I've learnt in Sea Cadets will help me achieve my goals and I want to thank everyone who has helped me get this far.

"Everyone involved at Sevenoaks is fantastic; they are some of the nicest people I know."

In addition to Harry and Jonathan's achievements, the unit was also delighted for Able Cadet Emily, 16, who was part of the Southern Area contingent representing Sea Cadets at the very first National Cadet Air Rifle Meeting at Bisley.

As well as finishing in an incredible sixth place overall, AC Emily won golds for top sea cadet and being part of the winning SCC team.



National award for Llanelli's marine engineer

LEADING Cadet Aaron, 17, of Llanelli Sea Cadets has been looking back on an exceptional month.

Over the course of the past few weeks, he was presented with his Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award, achieved his Advanced Peer Educator qualification, and received some prestigious national recognition.

The latter came in the form of the Fisgard Association National Marine Engineering Trophy for 2025 – awarded by the association of former Royal Navy artificers to the sea cadet with the best aggregate score on their Advanced Marine Engineering courses.

"Receiving the trophy felt

unbelievable," said LC Aaron.

"But also like a lot of hard work had paid off.

"I really enjoyed getting hands-on during the courses – turning what I learned in the classroom into something real,



by completing a top overhaul.

"The marine engineering skills I learnt have laid a strong foundation that I'm going to use to help work towards a degree in engineering at university and a career in the RN."

Aaron, who also praised the support of his unit, added: "I have enjoyed a wide range of experiences as a sea cadet, but my favourite would definitely be adventure training opportunities like campcraft and DofE.

"The best thing about Llanelli Unit is, without a doubt, the people – both the bonds I have with my peers and the way the staff always go above and beyond."

Bronze Wings graduates ready for take-off after course

THIRTY-two aspiring aviators are celebrating after earning their 'wings'.

The latest Cadet Naval Aviation Ground School course at Royal Naval Air Station Cudrose was a resounding success once again, with 32 young people receiving their Bronze Wings from Executive Officer Commander Richard Turrell.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of the station's senior personnel and the dedicated support of its squadrons and departments, every participant, from the Sea Cadet Corps and the CCF, was able to gain an understanding of the principles of flight, navigation, air engineering, flight deck operations, and weather forecasting.

With all this learning rigorously tested through exams and assessments, the top 11 candidates were then selected for the Silver Wings course later in the year at RNAS Yeovilton.

Cadets were also privileged

to learn first-hand about different roles in the Fleet Air Arm, including through engaging visits to the airfield fire station, the Royal Navy observers at 750 Naval Air Squadron, the Merlin Helicopter Force of 814 NAS, and the Sea Survival Team.

Other highlights included briefings on drone technology; viewing repairs in the engineering bay; and a unique opportunity to hear from air crew of HMS Prince of Wales.



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YOUNGSTERS CHOSEN AS FIRST SEA LORD CADETS



SIX of the Sea Cadet Corps' finest young people have been reflecting on their investiture as First Sea Lord's Cadets during a visit to HMS Victory.

Petty Officer Cadets Rebecca and Satvik, Leading Cadet Hadley, and Cadet Corporals Evan, Adam and Harry are all hugely proud to be serving the First Sea Lord and representing the Royal Navy throughout a busy year of high-profile engagements.

They will also be important ambassadors for Sea Cadets, while acting as advocates and role models for their peers at area and national-level cadet forums and competitions.

Joining six other successful candidates representing the Combined Cadet Force, Volunteer Cadet Corps and Sea Scouts, they were honoured to be invested by the First Sea Lord General Sir Gwyn Jenkins.

"You've already demonstrated the leadership, integrity and commitment that define the very best of our Service," the First Sea Lord told them, in the unique setting of Nelson's Great Cabin.

"You're now part of something with real history and meaning. You represent the modern, hybrid Navy – and its future."

The chance to speak with the First Sea Lord during the ceremony was a highlight of the day for every cadet.

"General Sir Gwyn Jenkins took his time to personally speak to each one of us about our time in cadets and showed genuine interest in what we had done," said LC Hadley.

"The atmosphere when he walked into the room changed completely," added POC Rebecca, who also enjoyed going on board HMS Dauntless for a taste of "a real, working, modern, Royal Navy warship."

Following the ceremony – which saw the cadets joined by proud Area Officers and family members – the new team took part in two days of intensive ambassador training at RMR London. They are now looking forward to enjoying close engagement with senior personnel and gaining unique insights into naval careers and strategic policy.

POC Satvik, 17, will represent Eastern Area Sea Cadets and channel an enthusiasm for boating that has seen him compete in regattas and take part in DofE rowing expeditions.

He said: "Becoming a paddle sports and rowing instructor have been proud achievements. It's rewarding to help other cadets enjoy activities on the water and support them in building confidence and finding their own passion for waterborne activities."



Satvik prides himself on being approachable to his peers and hopes his First Sea Lord's Cadet experience will help improve his "networking and public speaking" skills – by "representing cadets at events and speaking to senior officers."

He is looking forward to using his higher profile to "help ensure cadets' voices are heard", while "sharing ideas and experiences" with young people and adults across the organisation. He added: "Sea Cadets has made me much more confident and has helped prepare me for the future. It has given me amazing experiences, friendships, and memories that I will always value."

When not busy with Sea Cadets, Satvik is currently enjoying learning to play the piano, alongside his hobby of computing and coding – which he hopes may lead to a career "working in the field of IT, possibly within the Royal Navy."



Cdt Cpl Adam, 16, of London Area will make good use of his ability to "communicate with people in all walks of society" and is particularly looking forward to "meeting the Navy Board" and attending the Mountbatten Festival of Music.

As someone who thrives on outdoor adventure, Adam was "very proud" of being Section Commander of his Walton-on-the-Naze Unit's winning team in the Gibraltar Cup – "the first team to win for Lima Company in over twenty years," he said.

Being part of the unit's Royal Marines Cadets detachment "has given me confidence and self-discipline and increased my ability to communicate effectively," Adam added.

"This has helped me to believe in my own abilities and strengths and given me a more mature outlook."

A keen guitarist in his spare time, Adam describes his long-term goal as becoming an officer in the Royal Marines Commandos and believes the support he gains through Sea Cadets will help him to achieve that.

"Walton-on-the-Naze Unit has amazing, dedicated members of staff who are willing to give up their free time to support the needs of their cadets," he said.

"They encourage us to develop and grow as individuals, as well as grow as a part of the unit team."

Penarth Unit's POC Rebecca, 16, was selected by South West Area following an outstanding cadet career so far, defined, in her own words, by her "love all things Sea Cadets, which I feel comes across when I speak to anyone".

Having overcome her natural shyness by taking on



responsibilities including Mayor's Cadet for Penarth, she is hoping to improve her confidence even further as a First Sea Lord's Cadet.

She said: "Sea Cadets has given me an amazing amount of confidence and leadership skills through experiences I would not otherwise have had."

These experiences include being named 'Cadet of the Voyage' for her contribution to a second-place finish for TS Royalist in the first leg of the Tall Ships Races 2025. But Rebecca reveals that her proudest achievement – apart from becoming a First Sea Lord's Cadet – was passing her Petty Officer Cadet board. "It is the highest rank a cadet can achieve and being able to do that is massive, especially at my age."

Northern Area's Cdt Cpl Harry, 15, is looking to develop the leadership, communication and teamwork skills he has gained during his four years with Gosforth Unit – where he soon decided he wanted to be on the 'green side'.

Royal Marines Cadets has allowed Harry to fulfil his passion for the outdoors – whether through two voyages on board TS Jack Petchey or while perfecting the art of fieldcraft.

"Attending my first National Drill & Piping Competition at HMS Raleigh was one of my proudest moments – and where the drill bug got to me," said Harry, who became a Cadet Drill Leader last year.

He is most looking forward to using his ceremonial expertise while "taking part in the Trafalgar Day Parade and visiting Nelson's tomb" and is keen to "interact with high-profile people and Navy Board members".

Another guitarist, who also enjoys rugby and photography, Harry takes special pride in "being from a unit with so many cadets past and present who have achieved amazing things".

"In 10 years' time, I see myself as a Royal Marines officer who also volunteers as an CFAV instructor – to help give cadets the experience I'm having now," Harry added.

As a passionate advocate for volunteer recruitment, he knows it is the key to ensuring that "the hundreds of young people on waiting lists can join a local unit" – and receive the sort of support he has been so grateful for.

LC Hadley, 16, of Accrington & District Unit will be using his natural commitment and reliability to represent North West Area.

"I'd also say I'm a very diplomatic person," he added. "And I enjoy having conversations with people from all walks of life."

"Sea Cadets has given me skills that I couldn't have found anywhere else. Presentational and public speaking skills, teaching skills, leadership skills, and many more."

These include marksmanship, with Hadley's proudest achievement coming as part of the winning team in the 'Falling Plates' competition at the national Cadet Inter-Services Skill-at-Arms Meeting last year. He added: "My main hobby is shooting. I also enjoy playing the piano and the competitive nature of go-karting."

"As a First Sea Lord's Cadet, I am really looking forward to going to all the Royal Naval Parades in my area and speaking with cadets. Nationally, I am very excited about FOST, as we get the fantastic opportunity to go on a naval warship whilst it is conducting combat drills."

Hadley, who has achieved several sailing qualifications on board Sea Cadets' yachts, said: "I've recently considered joining the Royal Navy, after I have finished my university degree."

"I would also like to volunteer in my unit when I am older. The sense of community here is massive – everyone is friendly and works well together, and I would love to teach the next generation of cadets and support their transition into trustworthy role models."

The final member of the team is Southern Area's Cdt Cpl Evan, 16 – a sailing enthusiast who has been with Maidenhead Unit since January 2025. The fourth guitarist of the group, he also enjoys rugby, running and cycling in his spare time.

Describing how his strengths will support his new role, Evan said: "I am approachable to cadets, and I have the confidence to speak to adults, regardless of rank – to learn, as well as to give my ideas for the future of cadets."

He added: "Being able to go boating on the river Thames is amazing in the summer. The sense of family and togetherness within the unit is also really special."

A highlight of his cadet journey has been taking to the skies at RNAS Yeovilton. "I am most proud of making it all the way through the three-part Cadet Naval Aviation course – as one of six to be presented with Gold Wings at the end," said Evan, who was among over 300 applicants for the 2025 course.



Cadets relish STEM challenge at museum

SEA Cadets units competed against teams from the VCC, CCF and Sea Scouts in the Fleet Air Arm Museum's second Engineering (STEM) Challenge Day.

Following the success of last year's inaugural event, the young engineers were keen to put their skills to the test while exploring engineering careers – all supported by the experts of the RNAS Yeovilton STEM Team and the RN Youth Engagement Team.

This year's real-life Royal Navy scenario required cadets to create and design a working airframe model with landing gear (informed by research conducted in the museum), which could then be tested and demonstrated to the judges.

The task helped cadets to apply and develop their knowledge of simple mechanics and electrical circuits, while learning how to manage time and budgets with clear communication and teamwork.

The teams from Yeovil, Glastonbury & Street, and Burnham & Highbridge Sea Cadets units were hugely grateful for the opportunity and came away with their skills and knowledge greatly enhanced.

"The museum was fun and I also enjoyed building the plane and seeing the finished article," said a Glastonbury Unit cadet.

"I learned how the landing gear works, the properties of the push and pull mechanisms and that their use depends on the type of aircraft."



GARY WHITTLES DOWN THE COMPETITION



DARTS: The Royal Navy Championship 2026 was held on 28 February 2026 at The Phoenix Club in Waterloooville.

This was the very first RN Darts Championship, with the sport becoming recognised by the sports board, in 2025.

This event brought together 73 serving personnel in a singles competition played in the 501 Round-Robin, to knockout format, where the top 32 players from the Round-Robin stage, would go on to compete in a knockout bracket, to compete for the trophy.

The structure of a Round-Robin group stage, meant each participant played all others in their group, with results contributing to overall rankings. This structure allowed players multiple matches rather than

a straight knockout, providing more competitive exposure for participants of varying skill levels.

The standout story from the tournament was the performance of Cdr Gary Whittles, who emerged as the inaugural RN Darts Champion. Cdr Whittles displayed consistent scoring throughout the matches, culminating in a strong showing in the final stages.

In the final, Whittles defeated LET Daniel Appleby with a convincing 5-1 victory.

Cdr Whittles' tournament average was recorded at 68.69 with a First-Nine average of 77.79, reflecting solid scoring under pressure across all matches.

Along with putting his name

on the trophy, Cdr Whittles has also booked his place at Operation Bullseye, a charity tri-service darts event taking place in July 2026.

The inaugural RN Darts Championship has set a solid precedent for the future of the sport within the service. The successful execution positions the event to become a regular fixture on the RN sports calendar. With Cdr Whittles performance serving as a standard of excellence, future competitors now have a defined target to chase and supersede.

The RN darts committee are now looking ahead to upcoming development and inter-service fixtures, with the aim of further growing the sport within the RN, and pushing the standard to the next level.

MARINES MAKE THEIR MARK AT WOUNDED WARRIOR TRIALS

ROYAL Marines returned from the US with a haul of medals having taken on some of the best 'wounded warriors' from three nations.

A 15-strong team – three staff and 12 competitors drawn from across the Commando Units' Recovery Troops and RN Personnel Support Groups – were invited to California to take part in the Wounded Warrior Trials.

The competition brought together wounded, injured and sick service personnel for a week of sport, teamwork and determination which prepares American competitors for the US military's Warrior Games – and for their guests, the exposure to adaptive sports allowed each participant to demonstrate their adaptability and future potential – a significant milestone on the pathway to recovery.

They marines competed against Ukrainians and the US Marine Corps and Air Force in sports as varied as powerlifting, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair rugby, sitting volleyball, archery, cycling, swimming and shooting.

The competition opened with powerlifting where Corporal Oliver Flint secured the Royal Marines' first medal of the competition with a bronze.

There were no top three finishes for either the wheelchair basketball or wheelchair rugby team, but in the pool, Marine Bradley Wallis bagged one silver and three bronze medals with a series of impressive performances.

The archery team - Marines Ben Scott and Jake Braunz, plus Corporal Kris Curtis earned bronze in a hard-fought contest.

And simultaneously in the rowing, Marine Jake Wakeley powered his way to gold in the four-minute race, followed by Marine Harry Bridge who took silver. Wakeley added to his gold with bronze in the one-minute race.

Having won every match in the qualifying league in the sitting volleyball competition, the commando team fell at the semi-final hurdle to an extremely strong Ukrainian team... but took bronze in the play-off defeating the USAF's number one team.

And Marine Scott took silver and Corporal Byron Quainton-Davis bronze in the cycling.

While the marines were winning friends and medals at Camp Pendleton, 12 RN sailors were competing against US Navy counterparts in their Wounded

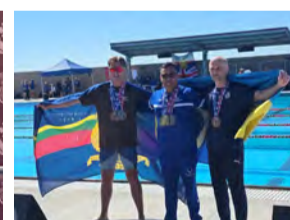
Warrior Trials at a Naval Air Station in Coronadom San Diego.

The RN athletes benefited from world-class coaching throughout, collaborating closely with former Olympians who have competed at the highest level. Their expertise – combined with access to innovative facilities and adaptive sporting equipment – enabled the Brits to perform at an exceptional standard.

It also sowed the seed for some of the Brits to consider aiming for a place at next year's Invictus Games in Birmingham.

"The Royal Navy's presence has strengthened the bond between our nations and reinforced the shared commitment we hold to those who have served and sacrificed," said Captain Stephanie Sayward of the US Navy, who felt her personnel benefitted from the presence of – and competition provided by – the British sailors.

"The healthy competition, mutual respect, and open exchange of experiences between our wounded, ill, and injured service members have not only elevated the level of performance but deepened our unity. Events like this remind us that resilience, courage, and camaraderie transcend borders."





ROCK ON IN COSTA BLANCA CLIMBING

ROCK CLIMBING: TWENTY Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel headed to Spain's Costa Blanca in January for Ex Calp Escalada, a week of intensive rock climbing designed to push physical limits, build confidence, and strengthen teamwork across the Naval Service.

The group, supported by six instructors from the Outdoor Leadership Training Centre (OLTC) including Royal Marine and Royal Navy PTIs, spent seven days tackling the region's dramatic limestone crags. For many, it was their first experience of outdoor climbing; for others, a chance to refine skills on some of Europe's best winter rock.

The aim of the expedition was simple: develop Command, Leadership and Management (CLM) skills in a demanding environment while giving participants the chance to learn, lead, and operate outside their comfort zones. The Costa Blanca proved the perfect classroom. Warm weather, varied routes, and steep, exposed terrain offered a steady progression from basic movement to more complex single pitch and multi pitch climbs.

Despite one day lost to poor weather, the team made full use of the remaining six days. Some participants completed more than 30 climbs over the week, demonstrating impressive stamina and determination. Four personnel achieved the Rock Climbing Foundation Course (RSF), gaining essential skills in belaying, rope management, and safe lead climbing.

For the novices, the learning curve was steep but rewarding. "Leading my first route was terrifying and brilliant in equal measure," LH Warrner "You have to trust your kit, your partner, and yourself. That moment of commitment is something I won't forget mate."

The mix of experience levels proved a major strength. Beginners benefitted from patient coaching and encouragement, while more experienced climbers took on mentoring roles and refined their own technique. OLTC instructors ensured everyone progressed safely and steadily, tailoring coaching to individual needs. Special credit goes to LPT Luke Machon and Cpl Ross Williams, whose knowledge of the sport and local area helped shape

the week's training.

A standout feature of the expedition was the integration of Royal Marine instructors within the OLTC team. Their operational experience, coaching style, and approach to resilience and risk management added significant value to the training. Working alongside RN instructors, they formed a balanced and highly effective instructional team.

This cross service collaboration has become an OLTC success. RM instructors bring a distinctive commando mindset, motivation and resilience. Their presence reinforces the message that adventurous training is not simply recreational but a vital tool for developing the qualities required of modern sailors and marines.

Climbing proved an ideal medium for this development. The sport demands composure, problem solving, and trust. Qualities mirrored in operational environments. Participants faced psychological challenges as much as physical ones: exposure, height, and the uncertainty of leading a climb all tested confidence and decision making.

Long days on the crag also required teamwork. Climbers relied on one another for safety, communication, and support. Evenings back at the hotel offered time to decompress, share dits, and reflect on the day's lessons. Reinforcing camaraderie and strengthening bonds across branches and ranks.

By the end of the week, every participant had led a single pitch climb, a significant achievement for those who had never climbed outdoors before. The combination of expert instruction, personal determination, and strong team spirit ensured that everyone left Spain with new skills and renewed confidence.

Ex Calp Escalada delivered far more than technical climbing ability. It developed leaders, strengthened teams, and showcased the value of RN RM collaboration in adventurous training. The lessons learned on the Costa Blanca will continue to shape the development of those who took part, influencing their approach to leadership, teamwork, and personal challenge long after returning home.



MARTIAL ARTISTS COME TOGETHER

MARTIAL ARTS: HMS TEMERAIRE pulsed with energy as sailors and marines from across the Service converged for the Royal Navy Royal Marines Martial Arts Association (RNRMMMAA) Q1 Grass Roots Camp. Blending first-time participants with seasoned competitors, the camp delivered high-tempo training, professional development, and a clear pathway to competition for personnel at every level.

The RNRMMMAA's programme spans Karate, Taekwondo, Kendo, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ) and more, offering one of Defence's most accessible routes into combat sports. This edition of the camp also ran a dedicated track for officials' development, enabling sailors and marines to qualify and give back to the community through

officiating.

Among those stepping forward were WO2 Bernard Mabey RM and Lt Mark 'Knocker' White RN, both training toward World Karate Federation (WKF) officiating qualifications to directly support Royal Navy competitors and ensure consistent, high-quality officiating across Service events.

The Association also recognised the long-standing contribution of WO2 Alan Curtain RM, who has supported the RNRMMMAA for over 30 years. For the majority of this time, he has served as Treasurer, enabling the procurement of equipment and the delivery of training opportunities that have underpinned the growth and sustainability of Royal Navy martial arts.



HISTORIC DOUBLE AT THE CROSS COUNTRY

CROSS COUNTRY: THE Royal Navy team headed to Tidworth for the Inter Services Cross Country Championships at Tedworth Park, often considered the premier event in the Armed Forces running calendar.

The squad arrived with good momentum after January's warm weather training camp in Portugal, and although conditions on the day were far removed from the Algarve, with wind, mud, and rain throughout, the team were keen to show that the training camp had been well utilised.

With only two of the top five finishers from December's men's race at the RN Championships at HMS Raleigh available for selection, including the absence of RN men's champion Lt Dan Soltys, both the men's and women's teams stepped up very well and delivered a historic double by winning both the individual titles at the same championships for the first time.

Lt Callum O'Neill RN secured the men's win after

a tight sprint finish ahead of Flt Lt Chris Davies (RAF); having initially crossed the line second, he was upgraded after the first finisher, from the Army, was disqualified for a rules infringement. In the women's race, Lt Chelsea Baker led from the gun and pulled away convincingly to finish almost a minute ahead of Capt Kate Olding (Army).

There were further strong RN performances, with AB George Vickers placing 3rd in the under 23 category and 15th overall, and LAET Mark Duffett finishing 8th overall.

Next year the RN will host the Championships at HMS Raleigh, looking to defend both individual titles and continue building representation in the team standings. In the short term many of the runners, including Lt Baker, turn their attention to the Inter Services Marathon Championships at the London Marathon in April.

Anyone wishing to get involved with Royal Navy Athletics should contact Mr Neal Edwards at NEAL.EDWARDS145@mod.gov.uk.

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Dedicated dad passes out of RN training – aged 40

AT THE age of 39 Darryn Pienaar left his job and homeland – including his family – to follow his childhood dream.

Aged 40 the South African became one of the oldest recruits in the recent history of the Royal Navy to pass out of training – earning plaudits from senior officers to boot.

He says the experience has proved eye-opening and – after initial doubts – hugely rewarding. The only regret: not seizing the day earlier.

Originally from Port Elizabeth (now known as Gqeberha), Darryn enjoyed a successful career mostly in the investment sector – but suppressing a yearning to join the Navy which he'd harboured since childhood.

Last year, he finally decided to follow that dream, applied to join the Royal Navy... then withdrew the application when doubts crept in, before finally re-applying with conviction.

When accepted by recruiters, Darryn flew 8,000 miles to the UK – his first visit to this country – leaving behind his mother and ten-year-old son who was, understandably, a little shaken up by his dad joining a Navy on the other side of the world. Darryn has assured him serving in the Royal Navy offers opportunity, purpose, and a stable future.

One of Darryn's biggest concerns when he arrived at HMS Raleigh in Torpoint to begin his conversion from civilian to sailor was whether he could keep up physically with fellow recruits, many of them half his age.

Over the ten-week training programme he

found the physical challenges manageable, even enjoyable, proving to himself that determination and discipline matter more than age.

He says he found the chance to meet and train alongside people from different backgrounds, ages, and walks of life – all united by a single goal – and their mutual efforts to get through training to have been among the most rewarding aspects of his journey so far.

And his age and life experience counted in his favour: he was appointed Class Leader thanks to his maturity and leadership qualities, as he guided, supported and motivated his fellow recruits, as well as offering a calm voice or steady encouragement during tough moments.

All of which earned him the Captain's Prize and Medal for best overall recruit in his intake, a trophy presented to him by Colonel Karl Gray, Commanding Officer of 47 Commando Royal Marines, guest of honour as Darryn passed out with classmates.

It's vindication for the 40-year-old who hopes others can be inspired to change careers later in life.

"Follow the dream. Don't live with regrets. You will meet great people and learn a lot about yourself."

Darryn now moves on to learning his new role as a seamanship specialist – responsible for the safe handling of ships, berthing, anchoring, re-supplying at sea, and tactical communications with other warships.



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Submissions for the Deaths, Reunions and Ask Jack columns in next month's Noticeboard must be received by
13 April 2026

Deaths

SA Steve Spence. (RNR) HMS President. Served during the 90s. Steve unexpectedly passed away at home on 21 January 2026

David Pughe, David, Lieutenant. Joined 1961

Ask Jack

HMS Malabar (Bermuda): I would love to catch up with anyone who joined the Royal Navy from 1974 to 1976, such as Pete and Rita Cole.
Tony and Lynne Smith.
anthony.smith1@btinternet.com

Victoria Barracks, Portsmouth: We would love to find anyone who joined the Royal Navy as ordinary seamen on 4 November 1952 at Victoria Barracks (now Pembroke Park, Southsea). Myself and Tony Batey later trained on HMS Indefatigable in Portland. We would both love to hear from anyone who served with us over the following ten years.

David Rutt darutts@xtra.co.nz or **Tony Batey** anthonyb919977@gmail.com

Steven Lewis: I am trying to find my friend who served in HMS Alacrity and the old Ark Royal. He lived in New Ferry, the Wirral and the last time I saw him was at his mum's funeral several years ago. I think he moved to Plymouth but can anyone can help me to track him down.

Jim Cadwallader
Jimcadwa@hotmail.com

as a Junior Seaman (2nd Class) one week after his 16th birthday. After HMS Ganges, specialised in communications and electronic warfare, including drafts to HMS Mercury, Plymouth, Decoy, Aurora, Hampshire, President, Sirius, Blake, Dryad, and

Fearless - as well as serving as a FOF1/FOF2 sea rider before joining HMS London. Ended his service in 2006 as a retired officer at RAF Thatcham. Died February 18, aged 80.

Nicholas Hugh Mason: I am inquiring about the life of Mr Mason, born in 1955 and served in the Royal Navy. He died in 2012. He attended Dean Close School between 1968 and 1974 and we were both in the same class and members of the Combined Cadet Force, RAF Division. It was a shock to discover he had died at the early age of 56.

John Williamson
j.williamson108@btinternet.com

HMS Picotee: I have been trying to locate a crew photo of Picotee. I organised the first memorial service for the ship in 1994 and many more since. I have gathered loads of info about her and some of the crew who were lost with my granddad. I am trying to write a book but would love a crew photo.

Debbie Laws
Debbielaws2002@yahoo.co.uk

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
Alastairduncan215@gmail.com



HMS Frobisher: I have found a brass plaque bearing the name of Danny Hinde. My father-in-law Albert Paxton was a stoker on the ship. I would like to unite the plaque with Mr Hinde's family.

Mike Ranson
Mikeranson@btinternet.com
01622 812356

HMS Harvester: I am trying to contact any living relatives of crew members from HMS Harvester. My grandfather was a stoker on the ship and died when the ship was torpedoed on 11 March 1943.

Steven Oldridge
Oldridgesteven@gmail.com or phone
07821 788144

Reunions

HMS Bulwark, Albion & Centaur Association: 2026 Reunion/AGM at the Roker Hotel Sunderland SR6 9ND on May 8-10 2026. Most rooms are booked but contact secretary Denis Askham askhamd3@gmail.com or call 07773651213.

HMS Lincoln 1968/69 Commission: We have had a reunion for the past 20 years, much enjoyed by all, however like many reunions, time is now

telling on those who can attend, and has sadly thinned out many who now cannot. Is there another small ships team also with the same issues who would consider joining us for 2026 get together. no date yet fixed. Yorky Sutcliffe 01282616855 or mikesutcliffe1958@outlook.com

HMS Troubridge Final Commission Association 1966-69. Our reunion takes place at

the Euston Hotel, Fleetwood, September 28-October 2, 2026. Contact Bryan Pace at Romft1@gmail.com

Bristol URNU: A 40th anniversary dinner takes place in the city on 5 September. Former cadets, staff and members are welcome. For further information, including ticket pricing, email tickets@burnu40.co.uk



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