



# NAVY NEWS

FEBRUARY 2026



Members of a Mobile Air Operations Team move through fine Arctic snow to pick up supplies delivered by a Merlin Mk4 of 845 Naval Air Squadron as this year's deployment to Norway, protecting NATO's Northern Flank, gets under way.

*See centre pages*

Picture: PO(Phot) Lee Blease, CHF

# ARCTIC SPOTLIGHT

Inside: ■ HYBRID NAVY MILESTONE ■ FORTH'S FALKLANDS MISSION

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#### **MIDWINTER.**

Bleak windswept location next to the Atlantic.

Groundbreaking machine. Short but history making.

Maybe the debut of Proteus, the UK's first autonomous full-size helicopter, isn't quite up there with the Wright Flyer at Kitty Hawk in North Carolina and the dawn of powered flight.

Then again maybe it is. Maybe it's the future.

It's certainly a future. Machines like Proteus – it is a demonstrator to show the art of the possible when it comes to crewless autonomous flight, in particular working with a combination of other robot systems as well as traditional, crewed aircraft: the much-touted 'hybrid air wing'.

That's for the future. For now, it's mastering the basics of flight, building up the complexity over the months to come.

Barely 24 hours after Storm Goretti slammed into Cornwall with biblical force, causing widespread damage and destruction with the Lizard Peninsula bearing the brunt of it, the winds had subsided, the clouds vanished, and the three-tonne helicopter, designed and

built by Leonardo, took to the skies.

As with all maiden flights, it's the portent of what's to come that matters rather than the sortie itself.

The Wright Flyer was never airborne for more than 60 seconds, never deviated from a straight line and never flew more than 1,000ft.

Proteus was slightly more ambitious: take off, hover at 50ft, manoeuvre, land. A debut flight of six minutes, a second in front of industry/government/RN senior figures lasting 12 minutes. Nothing fancy. It's more about what it augurs than what it did.

So far the pace has been impressive. Under four years from the Royal Navy placing a contract with the Yeovil-based helicopter manufacturers – and just weeks after ground-running trials at the Leonardo site – Proteus was airborne.

A Merlin Mk2 from just up the A3083 at RNAS Culdrose couldn't resist taking a sneak peak at the future, passing over Predannack while Proteus was conducting its trials. In a few years, the two could be airbed-fellows.

And what do we mean by autonomous? Well, it is *not* remote-controlled. It is not like flying a model aircraft.

# BREAKING THE MOULD



In place of the crew in the cockpit/cabin, sensors and computer systems driven by cutting-edge software which enable Proteus to understand and process its environment, make decisions, and act accordingly.

In addition Proteus can also soak up information passed to it by a warship/helicopter/or other drone, analyse that data and take action accordingly if required.

In a nutshell, Proteus is given an overall task by a mission commander; it decides how it carries it out.

One potential mission being considered for a production-line variant of a Proteus-esque helicopter is hunting submarines: patrolling a sector of the Atlantic and dropping sonobuoys in the location it determines is most likely to pick up a hostile boat moving through the depths.

Which is why such machines are being considered as crucial to the Atlantic Bastion concept announced at the end of last year: harnessing traditional, crewed warships and air power with the full panoply of drones and unmanned systems, AI, network capability to deny the depths of the waters between the Old World and the New to hostile submarines.

Now Imagine Proteus 'talking to' Excalibur, the large robot submarine, receiving instructions from the

operations room of HMS Glasgow, sharing sonobuoy data with the rear cab of a Merlin Mk2 or perhaps an Astute-class submarine, while Wildcats control Peregrine mini-helicopters scouting for surface targets.

It does sound something straight out of a sci-fi movie, but it's increasingly within touching distance – as underscored by the officer overseeing the Fleet Air Arm's future programmes, Commodore Steve Bolton. He says Proteus' maiden flight is a key moment in demonstrating the Service's "steadfast commitment to investing in autonomy as part of a hybrid air wing.

"This milestone signals our intent to lead technological innovation, to enhance the fighting effectiveness of the Royal Navy in an increasingly complex operating environment, and to maintain operational advantage against evolving maritime threats."

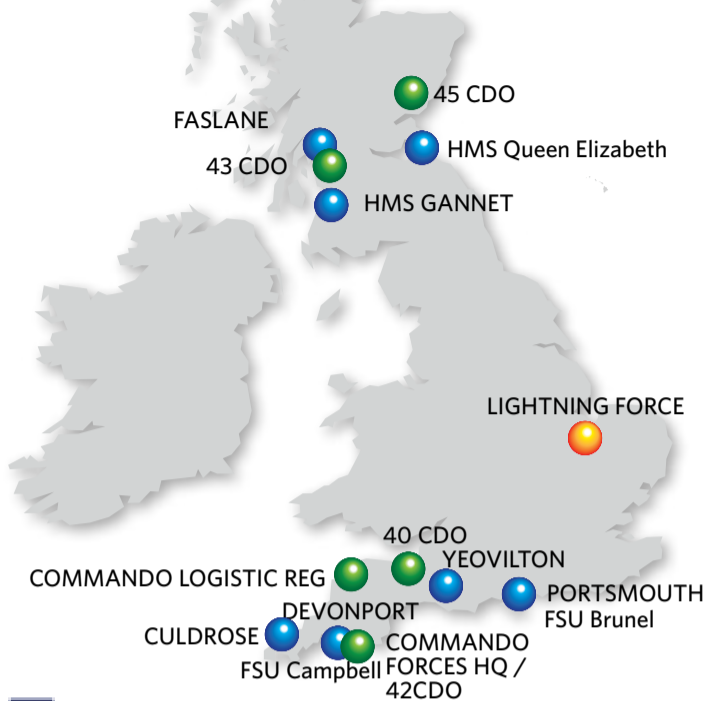
Nigel Colman, Managing Director Helicopters UK, Leonardo, said developing Proteus had been a collaborative effort, a testament to the ingenuity, skill and engineering prowess of all involved.

He expects to see machines like it "conducting the dull, dirty and dangerous missions in challenging environments without putting human operators at risk."

Pictures courtesy of Leonardo

## Training or on patrol around the UK

HMS Sutherland	HMS Tyne	825 NAS
HMS Portland	HMS Mersey	845 NAS
HMS St Albans	XV Patrick Blackett	846 NAS
HMS Dragon	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	



**LEAD FIGHT WIN**

OUR focus this month – and probably for a fair few after – is Norway as **Royal Marines** and the fliers from **Commando Helicopter Force** return to the Arctic Circle (see pages 1, 16-17).

This year's winter deployment comes as Norway and the UK place increased importance on their operations in the area with the signing of a new pact, the Lunna House Agreement.

British aviation history has been made with the UK's first truly autonomous full-size helicopter, **Proteus**, completing its maiden flight, operating from Predannack airfield in Cornwall (see pages 2-3).

The Duchess of Edinburgh visited **HMS Daring** (see page 5) during a visit to Portsmouth Naval Base. The Duchess is the Type 45 destroyer's sponsor and has closely followed her deeds and activities.

Falkland Islands patrol ship **HMS Forth** closed out 2025 supporting a combined Army-RAF-Navy exercise in remote South Georgia (see page 13). The OPV is heading back to the UK for the first time in more than six years, having handed over to **HMS Medway**.

Sister ship **HMS Tamar** continued her Indo-Pacific deployment with a high-profile visit to Australia's third city Brisbane (see page 15).

**RFA Tidesurge** and a Merlin helicopter from **814 NAS** shadowed a Russian submarine and accompanying tug boat during a three-day operation with NATO allies in the English Channel (see page 11).

The past met the future in Rosyth as the third of the Royal Navy's Type 31 frigates begins to take shape (see page 6). **HMS Formidable's** keel was laid in a traditional ceremony at the Babcock yard on the Forth.

Over to the Clyde and engineers flashed up the first of four engines which will power **HMS Glasgow** on operations into the second half of the 21st Century (see page 6). Four MTU diesel engines will provide the bulk of the power for the Type 26 frigate which is being built by BAE Systems in the ship's namesake city.

Ships **HMS Daring** and **HMS Puncher** celebrated their affiliations (see page 14) as the Type 45 destroyer cemented ties with Leicestershire and the P2000 reaffirmed her links with Eastbourne.

His Majesty the King returned to **Britannia Royal Naval College** in Dartmouth (see page 19) to pay tribute to the next generation of naval leaders – and their families.

Training for a new firefighting watch manager took place at Predannack Airfield, near **RNAS Culdrose**, where aircraft handlers are put through their firefighting paces (see page 23).

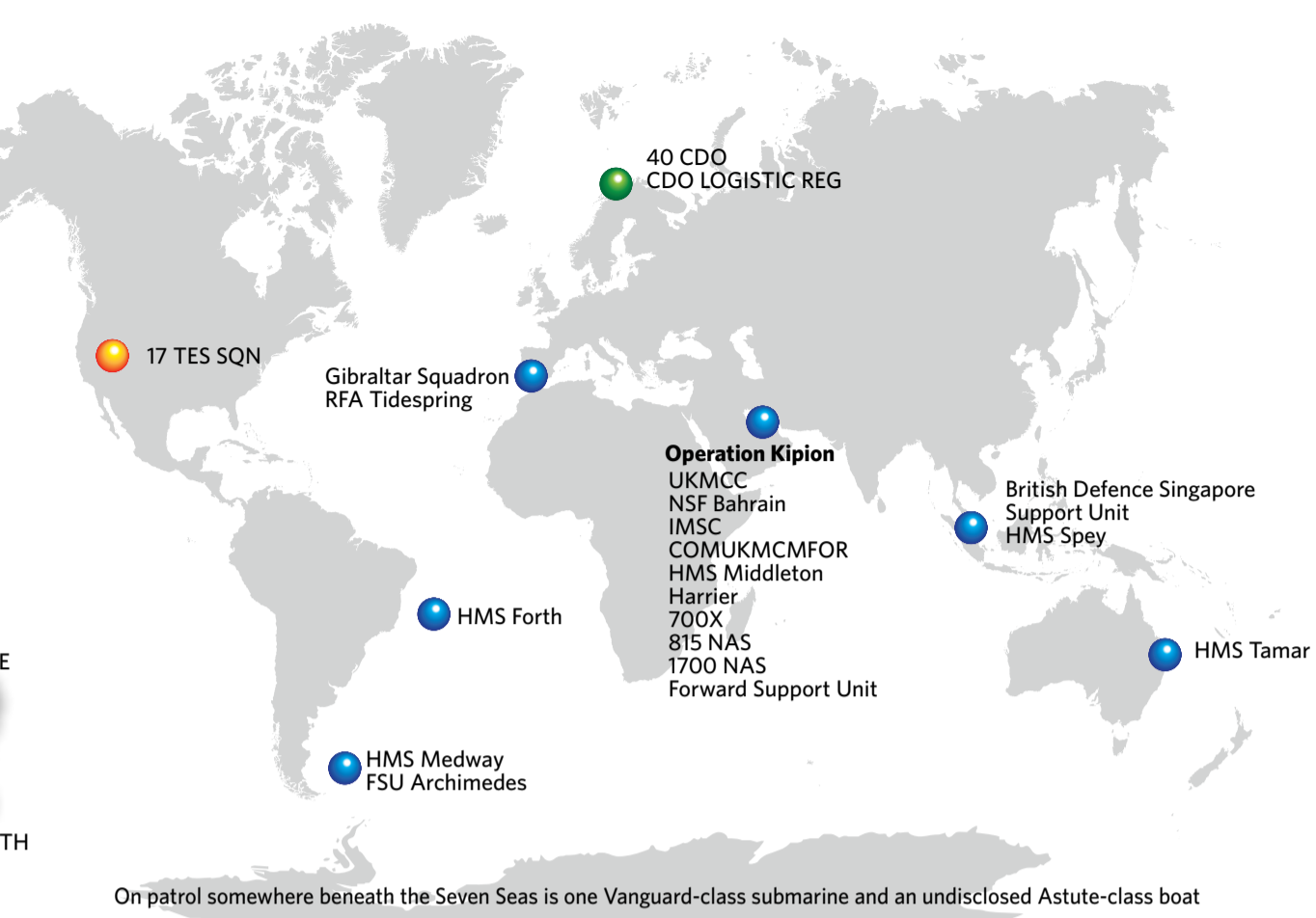
Iconic artefacts from frigate **HMS Northumberland** have found a permanent home in the Plymouth warship's namesake city (see page 14). The ship's bell and battle honours board will be cared for by Northumberland County Council, while the upper deck name plate has been donated to Bede Academy in Blyth.

The expertise of small engineering teams saved the Royal Navy £2m last year (see page 6). The **Forward Support Units** provided more than 88,000 hours of engineering support to the front-line fleet in 2025.

A £10m contract will see the Royal Navy use portable autonomous command centres for minehunting operations (see page 7). Thales has been awarded the contract by Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) which will support the Senior Service's vision of becoming a **Hybrid Navy**.

The Royal Navy's Atlantic rowers **HMS Oardacious** completed their epic 3,000-mile journey across the ocean, arriving in Antigua – 36 days and 12 hours after leaving the Canaries (see page 22).

We end this month's round-up with a call to action for budding photographers to submit their imagery of warships, sailors and Royal Marines into the **Royal Navy's annual photography competition** (see page 9).



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

# CASTLE IS KING

UNSTINTING efforts on the front line – or to ready Royal Navy ships for active duties – in 2025 have been recognised with the Surface Fleet's 'Excellence Awards'.

In home waters, or the Indo-Pacific, monitoring Russian naval activity or making UK shores safer by updating charts for mariners, the awards acknowledge work sung – and more often unsung – by surface ships and specialist diving/survey units.

Previously known as the Fleet Efficiency/Effectiveness Awards, beyond bragging rights, the awards permit winners to hoist a pennant featuring the symbol of the Surface Flotilla, two hippocampi (mythological sea horses).

Commander Commodore Ian Feasey and his staff – based in both Portsmouth and Plymouth – have pored over citations and reports from across the Fleet and determined that the premier title, the Naval Capability Award, presented to the men and women who've made an outstanding contribution to the effectiveness of the Fleet, goes to new minehunting 'mother ship' HMS Stirling Castle.

The ship was transferred from the RFA to the Royal Navy in July 2025 – and given a goal of returning to sea by October.

The rapid turn-around was deemed essential to ensure the Navy's Mine Hunting Capability programme – embracing autonomous systems and craft to find, identify and ultimately neutralise underwater explosive devices – remains firmly on track.

It gave Crew 6 from Portsmouth's 2nd Mine Countermeasures Squadron – assisted by the ship's outgoing RFA crew – just three months to learn how to maintain and operate equipment and systems most alien to the Royal Navy (Stirling Castle started life as a Norwegian commercial ship).

As such, the 55-strong ship's company – used to operating Hunt-class minehunters – have had to adapt ways of working (and thinking) to safely run Stirling Castle.

Eighteen weeks after beginning the

THE full list of winners:

- Naval Capability Trophy: HMS Stirling Castle
- Capital Ship Trophy and Pennant: HMS Prince of Wales
- Destroyer Trophy and Pennant: HMS Dauntless
- Frigate Trophy and Pennant: HMS Somerset
- Batch 1 Offshore Patrol Vessel Trophy and Pennant: HMS Tyne
- Batch 2 Offshore Patrol Vessel Trophy and Pennant: HMS Forth
- Mine Countermeasures Trophy and Pennant: MTXG X-Ray
- Hydrography and Meteorology Trophy and Pennant: HMS Maggie
- Inshore Patrol Vessel Trophy and Pennant: Gibraltar Squadron
- Diving Unit Trophy: DTXG Delta Sqn

- Above Water Warfare Trophy, Electronic Warfare Trophy, Seamanship Trophy: HMS Dauntless
- Under Water Warfare Trophy: HMS St Albans
- Fleet Intelligence Trophy: HMS Prince of Wales N2 Team
- Fleet Intelligence Trophy (Individual): Sub Lt F Tyne (UKMCC N2)
- Maritime Signals Intelligence Trophy: HMS Richmond CESM Team
- Maritime Signals Intelligence Trophy (Individual): LH(CT) McGreavy-Gill
- Engineering Trophy: MCM 2, Crew 7 ME & WE Depts
- Rulers of the Road Pennant: HMS Portland (96.7%)
- The Safe Guardian (new award focusing on safety/safe practices): MCM2 Crew 8

conversion, the Royal Navy crew sailed HMS Stirling Castle under the White Ensign for the first time and brought her into Portsmouth a few days later – a "phenomenal generation process," in the words of Commanding Officer Commander Phil Harper.

HMS Prince of Wales is named the top capital ship for her achievements leading the Carrier Strike Group deployment, while her escorting destroyer HMS Dauntless picks up four trophies (best

destroyer, above water and electronic warfare, and seamanship).

Having spent eight months of 2025 on Operation Ceto, monitoring potential hostile submarine activity in the North Atlantic, HMS Somerset takes the best frigate title.

The Gibraltar Squadron – fast patrol boats HMS Cutlass and Dagger plus four new Arctic RIBs – are at very short notice to respond to incidents in territorial waters in Gibraltar. By the end of 2025, they conducted more than 1,250 patrols around the Rock, from routine daily activity to escorting every British/friendly warship visiting the overseas territory.

Scoping the engineering trophy are MCM2's Crew 7 marine/weapons engineering departments assigned to first HMS Cattistock in home waters and HMS Middleton operating in the Gulf – in challenging conditions in both cases.

Cattistock was called upon to protect critical national infrastructure in the Western Approaches and monitor Russian warship and auxiliary activity in the Channel at the beginning of the year, while arriving in Bahrain at the height of summer, the engineers kept Middleton running in punishing temperatures, then guided her through a demanding maintenance period.



# Duchess of Edinburgh catches up with her destroyer



## Daring deeds



HMS Daring's ship's company welcomed their sponsor, the Duchess of Edinburgh, as she visited the destroyer in Portsmouth.

The Duchess was updated on the ship's lengthy refit and regeneration programme.

She last visited the ship in 2023 following the ship's Propulsion Improvement Programme.

On that occasion she notably donned white overalls, safety glasses and a helmet to tour the dry-docked vessel.

The air defence warship is now at the end of a lengthy refit and regeneration programme, which has been carried out both in the ship's home port of Portsmouth and at Birkenhead, where she became the second ship in her class to receive upgraded engines.

The ship returned to Portsmouth in 2023 to continue

her regeneration for frontline operations, and the Ship's Company will be moving on board in the coming weeks.

The crew of HMS Daring hosted Her Royal Highness for a lunch on board followed by a tour of the ship and meetings with various Royal Navy and BAE Systems personnel who have been involved in the upgrade programme.



HMS Daring's Commanding Officer Graeme Hazelwood said: "It has been a privilege to host Her Royal Highness, who we are honoured to have as our Ship's Sponsor.

"Having last visited in April 2023, it was a pleasure to showcase the huge progress that has been made towards returning the ship to operations, and for Her Royal Highness to meet the sailors and

industry partners whose hard work have made this possible."

For nearly two decades – from the ship's launch on the Clyde in February 2006 – the Duchess has closely followed Daring's deeds.

At the end of the visit the crew of HMS Daring presented The Duchess of Edinburgh with flowers and a cake for her birthday the following day and a thank you for her ongoing support and interest.

Prior to visiting Daring, the Duchess visited the Alford Schools of Military Music, a combined training and rehearsal facility that opened in 2023 for both the Royal Marines Band Service and the Army Corps of Military Music.

Here, after a tour of the space, Her Royal Highness was given a short performance and met with members of the Army Corps Band.

Pictures: LPhot Damien Bye *Red Leicester Day*, see page 14

## Engineering experts save £2m as they support RN fleet

THE expertise of small engineering teams saved the Royal Navy £2m last year through a mix of hard work, ingenuity and innovation.

The Forward Support Units provided 88,300 hours of engineering support to the front-line Fleet in 2025 – collectively more than ten years’ work – at home and half way around the globe.

The units were established to provide additional help to ships’ engineering teams through maintenance periods or when operating from forward bases overseas.

More recently they’ve been rebadged – FSU Archimedes (Portsmouth based, but also embraces teams based overseas, such as Bahrain and the Falklands), Brunel (Portsmouth) and Campbell (Devonport) – and remodelled.

So as well as their long-standing duties, they’ve helped the wider Engineering Branch by allowing engineers returning from sea to focus exclusively on engineering roles to protect the work-life balance, ensuring they are refreshed ahead of their next sea assignment.

FSU Archimedes provided support to RN units deployed in the Gulf region and aside from assisting with day-to-day maintenance for ships on operations, the team has prepared Bahrain in particular for the growing transition to autonomous mine-hunting systems in place of traditional minehunters, which also demands hundreds of pieces of equipment no longer needed in theatre returning to the UK.

In the Falklands, HMS Forth received 1,600 hours of TLC courtesy of the Archimedes team, who succeeded in resolving a major electrical fault on a Pacific 24 Sea Boat with limited resources – ensuring the craft didn’t have to be flown back to the UK for repair.

Both Brunel and Campbell Units were mobilised to support the RN’s premier deployment of the year, Highmast, in Japan and South Korea, but personnel were also deployed to support HMS Spey, pictured below, during her major maintenance period in Singapore and, less exotic, to Birkenhead to help HMS Stirling Castle regenerate following her transfer from the RFA.

At the HQ in Portsmouth, embracing Artificial Intelligence has helped to cut admin by around 500 hours – roughly three whole weeks of red tape, gone – while schemes encouraging engineers to learn about new technology and some of the new systems they will be working with such as the Type 26/31 frigates.

As for the impressive savings made in 2025:

- in-house thermographic surveys – to find potentially unknown defects, holes and generally assess the state of a vessel – were carried out on 30 craft, saving more than £250k;
- another £130k was saved bringing old/broken stores back into use;
- the biggest saving effected by the teams, however, came from maintenance work on the Navy’s two aircraft carriers which clawed back a cool £1.6m – rather than give the work to contractors.

Commander Will Jones said the collective effort of the FSUs last year had been both impressive and impactful, directly benefitting front-line operations.

“Through innovation and engineering delivery, the FSUs collectively achieved a superb milestone in 2025 by saving the Royal Navy an estimated £2 million.

“By prioritising continuous professional development and embracing new engineering technologies, the FSUs have empowered our engineers to deliver greater engineering support to the Fleet.”



## Formidable step New warship taking shape in Rosyth

THE past met the future in Rosyth as the third of the Royal Navy’s Type 31 frigates begins to take shape.

The keel of HMS Formidable has been laid in a ceremony merging naval tradition with modern shipbuilding techniques at the Babcock facility on the Forth.

Watched by hundreds of fellow shipwrights, engineers, technicians, their families, and VIPs the very youngest person involved in the Inspiration-class programme – Joolz Hunter, 17, a welding and fabrication apprentice from Rosyth, placed a newly-minted coin beneath the keel.

The coin – featuring Formidable’s crest on one side, the Babcock logo on the reverse – is believed to bestow the ship’s company with good fortune throughout the vessel’s career.

It’s a ceremony which in various forms goes back hundreds of years (the team restoring Nelson’s flagship HMS Victory found a coin under the main mast).

Work has been under way on Formidable since October 2024, when the first steel was cut, with various segments taking shape.

With keel laying, Formidable begins to take on the form of a warship as the first of 170 modules (each the weight of 15 family cars) which will make up the finished vessel that will patrol the Seven Seas performing general duties under the White Ensign.

Only HMS Venturer, the first ship in the class of five, has a crew at present; they are responsible for all three vessels.

“HMS Formidable’s keel laying ceremony marks a significant milestone in the Type 31 project’s relentless progress in delivering the Royal Navy’s Inspiration Class to operations,” said Commander Thomas Hetherington, Senior Naval Officer of HMS Venturer and Type 31 Ships.

“The ceremony blends the tradition of



Left, apprentice Joolz Hunter with Sir Nick Hine; Above, an artist's impression of HMS Formidable; Below, a Fairey Albacore is launched from the wartime Formidable



marking the birth of a ship with the undoubted technological advances that have been used in designing and building her for the extremely complex environment she will sail in.

“HMS Formidable will help modernise the Royal Navy’s frigate fleet and enhance the lived experience for our sailors as they continue to deliver on operations across the globe.”

His ship is in the water at the Babcock works undergoing final fitting. The second ship in the programme, HMS Active, is due to be rolled out of the assembly hall next year, while work will also begin on the fourth frigate, HMS Bulldog, which teenager Joolz is looking forward to get to work on.

“Being part of this project is incredible, I’m learning from experienced professionals and contributing to something that matters for the UK and has such a positive impact for our local community,” said Joolz, who is one of more than 300 apprentices taken on by Babcock.

Sir Nick Hine, Babcock’s Marine CEO, said the young apprentice and his colleagues were the embodiment of “the UK defence dividend in action”.

He continued: “Our workforce is delivering one of the most advanced defence programmes, that is driving economic growth and providing highly skilled jobs to our surrounding communities here in Scotland, putting Rosyth right at the heart of UK shipbuilding innovation and cutting-edge digital technology.”

The Type 31s, which will be based in Portsmouth, are one half of the replacement programme for the aging Type 23 frigates; they will perform general duties such as counter-smuggling operations, disaster relief, maritime security patrols), while Type 26 frigates being built on the Clyde will assume anti-submarine patrols.

## HMS Glasgow fires up her engines for the first time

FOR the first time there is the hum of engines aboard the first of the Royal Navy’s next-generation submarine hunters.

Engineers flashed up the first of four engines which will power HMS Glasgow on operations into the second half of the 21st Century.

Day-in, day-out, four mighty MTU diesel generators will provide the bulk of the power for the Type 26 frigate which is being built by BAE Systems in the ship’s namesake city.

The first of the quartet was switched on by engineers at the firm’s Scotstoun yard on the north bank of the Clyde, observed by members of the ship’s company.

Built by MTU, each diesel generator can produce up to 3 MegaWatts of power. Together, the four engines should drive the 8,000-tonne warship through the water at regular cruising speeds in excess of 14/15 knots (and for full speed, there is a Rolls-Royce MT30 gas turbine which generates a whopping 36MW).

As well as providing power to the

frigate’s propulsion system, the diesel generators also give life to all Glasgow’s systems: lighting, electricity, computing, air conditioning, fuel pumps, high-pressure air and amenities for around 200 crew such as the galley down to humble 240-volt plugs and USB sockets in mess decks.

“These diesel generators will be the beating heart of the world’s most advanced anti-submarine warfare frigates for the next 30 years,” said Warrant Officer 2 Alan Causer, HMS Glasgow’s propulsion manager.

“The MTU class are often referred to as ‘Ironmen’ engines, renowned for their durability and long service life.”

For the engineering buffs among you... the diesel generators use a common-rail fuel injection system, allowing precise control over the timing, volume, and pressure of the fuel, which results in better fuel economy and reduced emissions.

They are built with robust components designed for maximum uptime in demanding marine and industrial

applications – some 58,000 have been sold since they were introduced in 1996 and collectively they clocked up more than 345 million operating hours... which is nearly 40,000 years.

A single MTU generator could meet the power needs of around 1,500 average homes, or 140 electric vehicles travelling at 70mph on the motorway... while all four running concurrently could serve a town the size of Fareham, Aldershot or Newbury.

The switch-on is symbolic as it marks the beginning of the transition to the testing and commissioning phase of the ship’s life as she edges towards the end of construction.

When in service, Glasgow and her seven sisters – plus up to six being built for the Royal Norwegian Navy – will perform a core role in NATO’s defence of the Atlantic against activity by hostile submarines.

In the case of the Royal Navy Type 26s, they will be based in Devonport, replacing the submarine-hunting variant of the Type 23 frigates.





Picture: Thales

# Multi-million pound boost to minehunting

A £10m contract will see the Royal Navy use portable autonomous command centres for minehunting operations.

Thales has been awarded the contract by Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) which will support the Senior Service's vision of becoming a Hybrid Navy.

The contract, which has the scope to grow up to £100m to deliver next-

generation mine countermeasure capabilities for the Royal Navy, will see Thales design, develop and deliver the command centres.

It will see artificial intelligence integrated with software and systems to create a command centre which will control both above and below water uncrewed equipment.

The aim is to see the systems work

together to make them safer, more efficient and agile when used in minehunting missions.

The programme follows the announcement of the UK's Atlantic Bastion initiative, which was central to the Strategic Defence Review, and combines autonomous vessels and artificial intelligence (AI) with warships and aircraft to create a highly advanced

hybrid force to protect undersea cables and pipelines from Russian undersea threats in the North Atlantic.

Andy Lapsley, MHC Team Leader at DE&S, said: "These next-generation Remote Command Centres will transform how the Royal Navy conducts mine countermeasures operations."

"This contract demonstrates the potential that can be released by harnessing the combined strengths of DE&S, the Royal Navy and our UK supply chain that is envisaged by the Defence Industrial Strategy.

"Delivering the flexibility, speed and operational advantage our sailors need is a crucial step on our journey towards the hybrid Navy and demonstrates the UK's world-leading position in both Mine Counter Measures and maritime autonomous systems (MAS)."

The Thales M-Cube Mission Management System will be at the heart of the command centres. This combat-proven software suite is already used by multiple navies worldwide for planning, execution and evaluation of both conventional and autonomous MCM missions.

Also included will be Mi-Map - planning and evaluation software featuring advanced AI-powered automatic target recognition, it filters and refines raw data, streamlining and expediting the minehunting process.

Working with programme partners, Thales will initially deliver two centres that will seamlessly integrate platforms, systems and sub-systems.

Paul Armstrong, Managing Director for Underwater Systems activities, Thales in the UK, said: "This next-generation of autonomous command centres is part of a flexible suite of autonomous C2 from containerised solutions to vessel operations centres or large, shore operations centres.

"By collaborating across the supply chain, we are committed to supporting the UK with world-class technology and fostering growth and high-value skilled jobs across our UK operations."

Thales' investment in UK mine countermeasures has sustained more than 200 highly skilled jobs—particularly at Thales' Somerset and Plymouth sites. They will work collaboratively with other MHC suppliers, including TKMS Atlas UK, SeeByte, and QinetiQ, under MOD direction.

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# PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2025

BUDDING photographers are being encouraged to submit their imagery of warships, sailors and Royal Marines to be entered into the Royal Navy's annual photography competition.

The Royal Navy Photographic Branch is holding its 2025 competition – historically known as the Peregrine Trophy – which celebrates the spectacular and memorable moments of the Senior Service's actions around the world through stunning pictures and video.

There are categories open to amateur photographers, including cadets, veterans, serving sailors and marines, plus the general public.

Head of the Photographic Branch, Warrant Officer 2 Owen Cooban, said: "This is an opportunity for our professional photographers but also

servicing amateurs and the general public to showcase imagery from the Royal Navy's global missions.

"Royal Navy photographers are on the front-line wherever sailors and marines are operating, producing unique imagery that acts as a window into the navy but also as historic record of the actions of the service.

"The photography competition is about recognition and excellence of not just the branch's own but people out there who are behind the camera documenting the RN around the world.

"This year we're going into partnership with the National Museum

of the Royal Navy and we'll be displaying the winning imagery at the brand-new Royal Marines Museum in the Historic Dockyard in Portsmouth.

"The display will be 400 square meters large and one of the biggest exhibitions in the south. The display will be left up for most of the year allowing deployed photographers to see their work in a museum if they couldn't be at the awards ceremony which again is going to be in the RM Museum's auditorium.

"We are excited for this new collaboration and the public will get to see the amazing work the Royal

Navy has conducted in 2025."

Any images submitted must have been captured between 16 December 2024 and 31 December 2025. The closing date is 21 February 2026. To enter, serving personnel should access RNTM-09-031-25. Alternatively get in touch with [rnphotographiccomp@gmail.com](mailto:rnphotographiccomp@gmail.com) for further information.

Leading Photographer Finn Stainer-Hutchins is currently the reigning Photographer of the Year 2024 – having now won the contest three years in a row. Finn's work stood out among 400 images and 18 videos submitted for the competition, with judges overall impressed with how photographers portrayed the breadth of operations the navy carries out around the world. This year's competition promises to be even more hotly-contested.

*"We are excited for this new collaboration and the public will get to see the amazing work the Royal Navy has conducted in 2025."*

**To enter, serving personnel should access RNTM-09-031-25. Alternatively get in touch with [rnphotographiccomp@gmail.com](mailto:rnphotographiccomp@gmail.com) for further information.**



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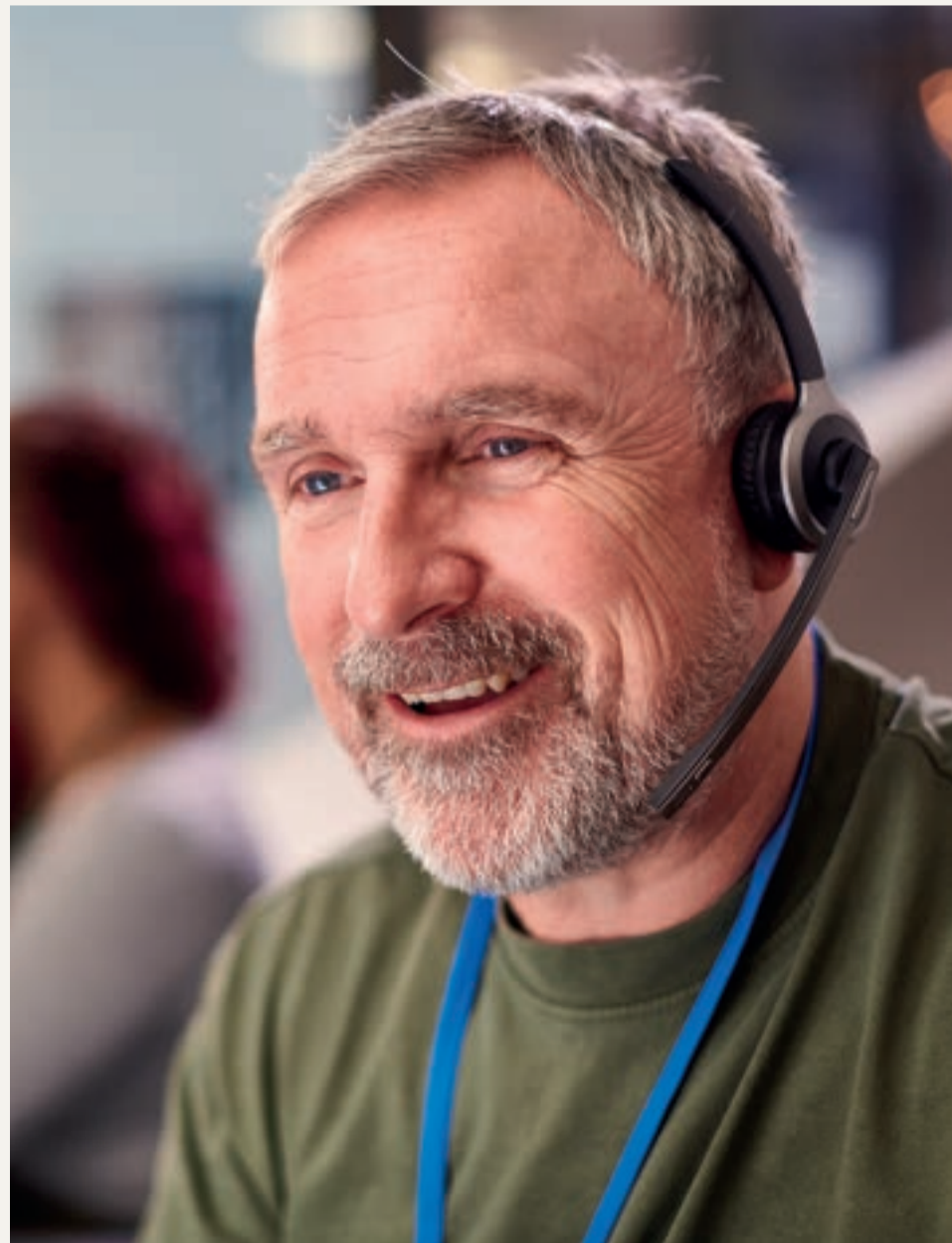


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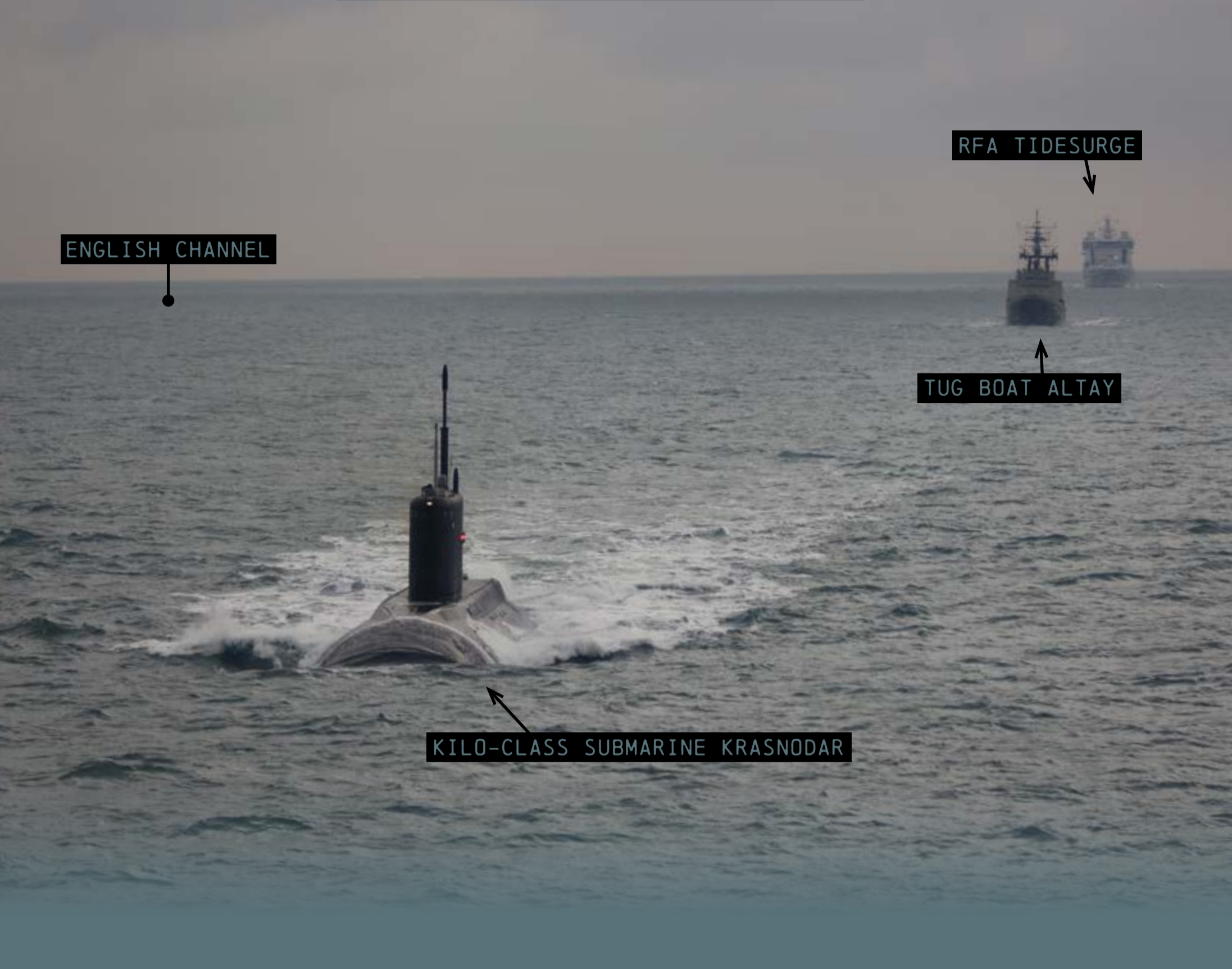
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# SUB FOCUS



ENGLISH CHANNEL

RFA TIDESURGE

TUG BOAT ALTAY

KILO-CLASS SUBMARINE KRASNODAR

## TIDESURGE AND MERLIN INTERCEPT KRASNODAR IN THE NORTH SEA

THE Royal Navy tracked a Russian submarine through the English Channel in a coordinated three-day operation with NATO allies.

This comes as the UK has seen a 30 per cent increase in Russian vessels threatening UK waters in the past two years.

A specialist Merlin helicopter from 814 Naval Air Squadron and RFA tanker Tidesurge shadowed the Russian Kilo-class submarine Krasnodar and accompanying tug boat Altay as they sailed westward from the North Sea, through the Strait of Dover and into the English Channel.

The Merlin helicopter, based at Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose in Cornwall, remained embarked on Tidesurge throughout the operation. Expert aircrew were prepared to pivot to anti-submarine operations if Krasnodar had dived below the surface. The Russian submarine sailed on the surface through the Channel despite stormy weather conditions sweeping the UK at the time.

Commanding Officer of RFA Tidesurge, Captain

James Allen, said: "There is nothing like a Russian submarine to focus the mind for any mariner."

"Our tasking over the course of three days involved



the teamwork and professionalism of all RFA Tidesurge ship's company, embarked 814 Naval Air Squadron Atlantic Flight and interoperability with near regional

NATO allies.

"We worked together as a show of presence and deterrence as we transited from the North Sea to the English Channel."

Lieutenant Commander David Emery, Flight Commander of 814 Naval Air Squadron's Atlantic Flight said:

"Maintaining an overt presence and continued overwatch of Russian vessels in UK waters is vital for national security.

"The flexibility and professionalism of the crew of RFA Tidesurge allows us to project our helicopter wherever, day or night, in the maritime environment."

The Royal Navy continued to track Krasnodar and Altay until the Russians reached the northwest of France, near the island of Ushant, handing over the shadowing task to a NATO ally.

The Merlin remained with Tidesurge until three days before Christmas, with the tanker beginning a period of maintenance and handing over duties in home waters to sister RFA Tideforce.



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# Goodbye to all that

**COME in P222, your time is up...**  
For the first time in more than six years HMS Forth will see her native land again imminently after completing her stint in the Falklands.

Not since the first day of November 2019 has the ship been seen in the UK. That's before Brexit. Before Covid. Before Liverpool's first Premier League title. Before the passing of either Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II or Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh. Before either HMS Queen Elizabeth or HMS Prince of Wales had deployed (in fact before Prince of Wales even arrived in Portsmouth for the first time).

In short, a lot has happened – and that list barely scratches the surface.

Before handing over to her sister HMS Medway (which stood in for Forth in 2023 when the latter was in refit), Forth paid her fifth visit to South Georgia as the island chain gears up for the austral summer and the Antarctic cruise liner trade.

The warship closed out her time in the British Overseas Territory supporting a combined Army-RAF-Navy exercise.

It was a balmy 10-12 Celsius by day on the islands, which lie about 900 miles from the Falklands.

But the waters around South Georgia are a mere 6 Celsius at the turn of the year and the proximity of Antarctica mean bergs of various sizes are commonplace, while the upper slopes of mountains which rise above 9,000ft are snow covered.

Operation Southern Sovereignty spanned an area of almost 1½ million square miles of the South Atlantic – a triangle covering UK military personnel and units in the Falklands, Ascension Island and South Georgia.

Forth acted as flagship from which Commander British Forces South Atlantic Islands, Brigadier Charlie Harmer, and his staff directed activities, ensuring unity of effort by land, sea and air.

Also embarked was a detachment from the Royal Irish Regiment, the current Roulement Infantry Company in the Falklands, and air support courtesy of RAF Typhoon and an A400M transporter from Mount Pleasant Complex.

The operation also featured a RIC detachment deployed to Ascension Island – like the Falklands one of several small, isolated British Overseas Territories dotted around the South Atlantic.

Beyond a test of logistics and operational objectives, UK forces supported a critical development project for the South Georgia government, helping to move stores from Maiviken Cove to the 'capital' Grytviken – a distance of under two miles, if there were roads.

There are not, so it took a combined RN-Army trek across the rugged terrain instead.

With help from the island's government and British Antarctic Survey, Forth's crew got ashore at Grytviken, explored the abandoned whaling station, and paid their respects at the grave of legendary Edwardian polar explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton.

Increasingly popular with eco-tourists/ Antarctic cruise liners, South Georgia can only be visited by sea – and is well worth the effort says Commander Grahame Graham-Flint, Forth's Commanding Officer who took charge of the River-

class vessel in mid-December.

He described it as "one of the most spectacular places on the planet".

He continued: "We visited Possession Bay, anchored in Stromness Harbour and came alongside at King Edward Point, surrounded by icebergs, fur seals, and snow-covered mountains – a truly spectacular place."

Brigadier Harmer said of the combined exercise: "Southern Sovereignty enabled me to test our ability to project power across the Joint Operational Area and in the sea, land and air domains concurrently."

"Whilst it reassures the population, ultimately it contributes to my mission to deter aggression in the South Atlantic Islands and demonstrates UK sovereignty in action."

Barely had Forth returned to East Cove Military Port (located a short distance from the main UK base on the islands at Mount Pleasant) than she was joined by Medway and crews of both ships were addressed by Brig Harmer.

He thanked Forth's 50-strong ship's company for their efforts, and welcomed their successors to the Falklands.

Over her six years Forth has conducted 155,000 nautical miles of patrols – the equivalent of seven times around the globe.

Most of her time has been spent sailing around the 778 islands which comprise the Falklands, providing reassurance to the 3,600 citizens, helping to enforce fishery protection regulations, working with the RAF and Army, and conducting general maritime security operations.

She's launched her sea boat on 250 occasions, while one third of her crew has traded places with shipmates flying out from the UK roughly every 7½ weeks – 42 changes of personnel in all.

Her crew have become an integral part of life in the Falklands, attending major events in islanders' calendars, such as Liberation Day in June (commemorating the end of the Argentine occupation in 1982) and Battle Day, marking the Royal Navy's destruction of Admiral Graf Spee's squadron in December 1914.

Away from the routine, Forth faced a race against time beating winter storms in 2021 to deliver Covid vaccines to Tristan da Cunha – one of the most isolated inhabited islands on the planet.

And the ship represented the UK alongside 16 nations whose ships mustered off Rio in 2022 for Exercise Unitas, the world's longest-running maritime exercise which has been held in the Americas for more than six decades.

Commander Graham-Flint said the islands would live on in the hearts of her crew.

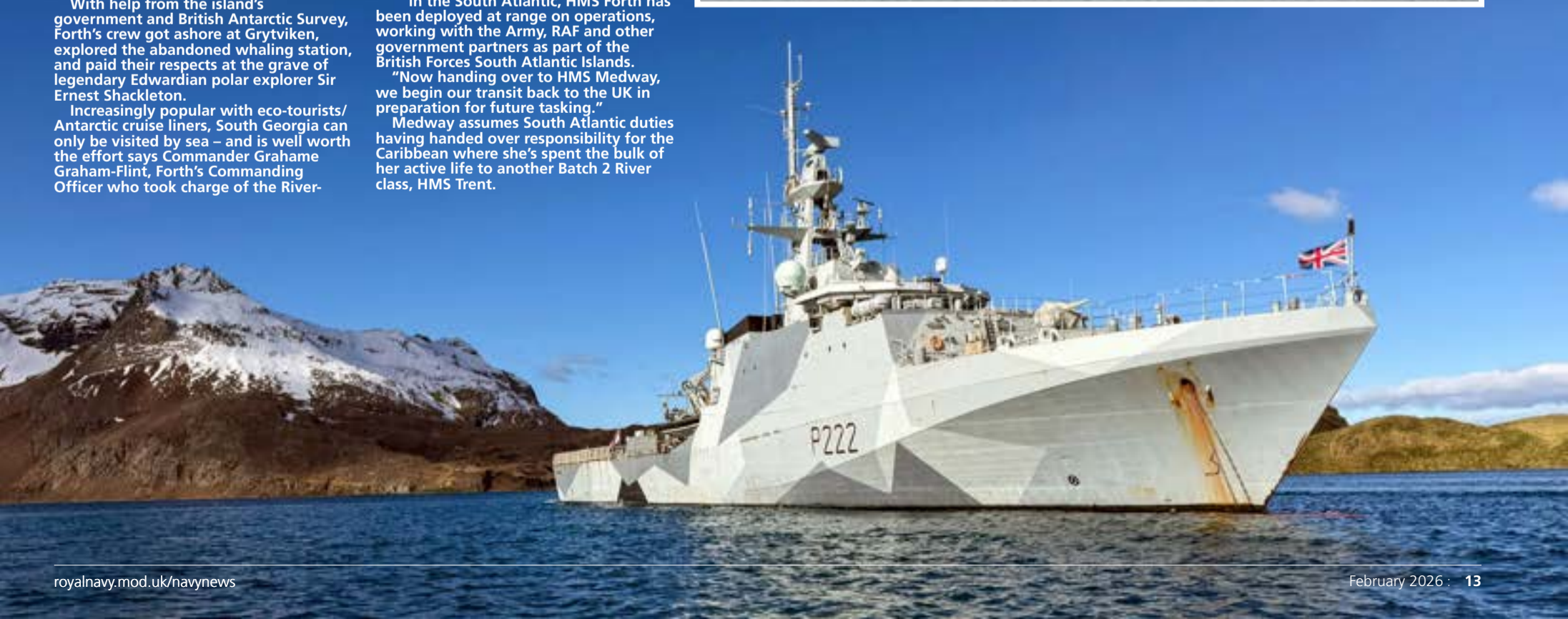
"Our thanks to all those that have supported our time here," he added. "Throughout our time in the South Atlantic, HMS Forth has been deployed at range on operations, working with the Army, RAF and other government partners as part of the British Forces South Atlantic Islands."

"Now handing over to HMS Medway, we begin our transit back to the UK in preparation for future tasking."

Medway assumes South Atlantic duties having handed over responsibility for the Caribbean where she's spent the bulk of her active life to another Batch 2 River class, HMS Trent.



Pictures: Cpl Katrina Knox, RAF



# It's a red Leicester day for Daring

RESIDENTS of Leicester and Leicestershire have a Royal Navy ship to call their own after cementing ties with cutting-edge destroyer HMS Daring.

Civic leaders and the Royal Navy have agreed that the Portsmouth-based destroyer will be affiliated once HMS Daring completes a multi-million pound transformation.

It means the ship will fly the flag for the city and county wherever she deploys around the world and in return, the people of Leicester and Leicestershire will offer moral and, at times, physical support to the destroyer and her 200-strong crew.

As a new ship's company gradually brings HMS Daring out of her major overhaul and engine upgrade in Portsmouth Naval Base, they are reviving other dormant aspects of an active warship's day-to-day life, including her affiliations.

All Royal Navy warships enjoy affiliations with towns, cities or boroughs and, occasionally, with entire counties, such as frigates HMS Kent or Sutherland.

For the past two decades Daring has been bound with the City of Birmingham (as well as the island of Guernsey), plus Army and RAF units, historic Livery Companies, cadets and veterans' groups.

With a new HMS Birmingham being built on the Clyde as the fourth of the Royal Navy's Type 26 frigates, she will take over ties with the West Midlands powerhouse, and Leicester and Leicestershire, with around 1.1 million residents, will take Birmingham's place.

The city of Leicester has previously had ties with battle-cruiser and then nuclear submarine HMS Renown, while minehunter HMS Quorn was associated with the namesake hunt and borough of Melton Mowbray until

she decommissioned in 2017, but there are no links between the broader county and the Senior Service.

As a landlocked county, naval connections are not obvious, although the dashing World War 1 naval leader Admiral David Beatty spent much of his time at Brooksby Hall near Melton Mowbray when not at sea.

Daring's sailors will keep Leicester and Leicestershire's leaders up-to-date with the ship's activities and operations, attend key events in the county, such as Remembrance parades, forge ties with sports clubs and veterans' groups, reserves from HMS Sherwood which serves the East Midlands and raise money for charities countywide.

"As we work to return HMS Daring to the front line, establishing lasting ties with affiliates is a key link to the nation and people we proudly serve," said the destroyer's Commanding Officer Commander Graeme Hazelwood, *pictured above with*

*Mike Kapur.* "This new affiliation with Leicester and Leicestershire marks the beginning of a new chapter and we celebrate the connection with a county rich in history, industry and innovation. We look forward to the relationship ahead and the chances to build close ties."

Mike Kapur, Lord-Lieutenant of Leicestershire, said: "This is a great honour. We're grateful to the Royal Navy for everything they do to protect the UK and I'd like to send my sincere thanks for this significant affiliation."

"Not only is it an opportunity to bolster understanding and awareness of the Royal Navy's work, it's also a chance to step up awareness of careers in the Navy and support the many hardworking charities across Leicester and Leicestershire."



# SPIRIT OF FRIGATE LIVES ON IN NAMESAKE COUNTY



she decommissioned in 2017, but there are no links between the broader county and the Senior Service.

ICONIC artefacts from frigate HMS Northumberland have found a permanent home in the Plymouth warship's namesake county.

The ship's bell and battle honours board are to be cared for by Northumberland County Council, while the upper deck name plate has been donated to Bede Academy in Blyth.

The ship was decommissioned in March after it was determined repairing/refitting her for extended service after 30 years was no longer economically viable.

Anything of use to the rest of the Type 23 flotilla or wider Fleet, as well as items of significant historical/cultural value were removed – not least three objects which symbolise the spirit and life of HMS Northumberland which, fittingly, was built on the Tyne by Swan Hunter.

The ship's sponsor Lady Anne Kerr and first Commanding Officer Captain Steve Bramley formally presented the bell and battle honours board to the county council for display at County Hall in Morpeth.

Another former Commanding Officer, Commodore Tristram Kirkwood, joined Dr Caroline Pryer, Lord Lieutenant of Northumberland, to hand over the name plate to the academy; it will be displayed in the entrance alongside images of the activities of the Combined Cadet Force.

The double presentation was part of an evening at the educational institute celebrating the Royal Navy's long-standing connections with the county, organised by the council and the Naval Regional Engagement Officer for the North East Lieutenant Paul McKenna.

More than 200 leading regional figures – ranging from civic officials, council leaders, maritime industry, community groups, military associations and charities – were hosted by the RN's Regional Commander Commodore Tom Knowles and the Leader and Chair of Northumberland County Council (Councillors Glen Sanderson and John Beynon respectively).

Cllr Glen Sanderson said: "We value our relationship with the Royal Navy – historically it has



played an important part in our region and we look forward to continuing to support the service today and in the future.

"We are proud to receive the Ship's Bell and Battle Honours board."

Commodore Tom Knowles added: "The Royal Navy is extremely proud of its continued friendship and affiliation with Northumberland. So, it is with an immense sense of pride knowing that these important artefacts will be looked after and cherished by the council, who intend to site the Ship's Bell and Battle Honours board on public display in County Hall for the community to be able to visit and see."

The North East has historically been a fertile recruiting ground for the Royal Navy, a range of industries and businesses in the region continue to support the defence sector and Newcastle has often been voted second only to New York as a great run ashore for sailors.

Coastal Forces Squadron P2000 patrol craft are based in North Shields; HMS Calliope on the riverfront in Gateshead plays a key role in supporting Maritime Reservists from the Royal Navy and Royal Marines; there are very active Sea Cadet and Combined Cadet Forces units peppered across the county; and Northumbrian Universities Royal Naval Unit gives local

students an insight into the Royal Navy.

The Corps of Drums of the Royal Marines Band (Scotland) provided a spectacular opening to the evening, while Petty Officer Michael Bishop and his team underscored the importance of STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – studies/careers to the future of the UK and the RN.

They had spent the afternoon staging a taster session for students, involving a 3D walkthrough simulation of a Vanguard-class submarine and the F24 electric race car project. RN divers, submariners, the Royal Marines and Maritime Reserves all laid on demonstrations of their activities, while the Royal Navy Presentation Team put those activities into the broader context of global operations, and Northern Powergrid signed the Armed Forces Covenant.

Proceedings closed with a Ceremonial Sunset, conducted by a combined guard from the ship's companies of HMS Archer, Trumpeter, Exploit, Explorer and Calliope and an ensign party of Cadets Keira Dawson and Eleanor Smith from Bede Academy's CCF Unit (Royal Navy Section), while the RM Buglers provided the music.

"The events provided our students with a valuable insight into the role of the Royal Navy and the importance it places on Science, Technology and Engineering," said Bede Academy Principal Andrew Thelwall.



# Puncher reaffirms ties with Eastbourne

PATROL boat HMS Puncher brought the curtain down on one of the busiest 12 months in her 37-year career by reaffirming her ties with an East Sussex seaside town.

Puncher's crew were invited to join civic leaders, veterans, cadets and other townfolk as Eastbourne re-signed its affiliation with the P2000 – and committed to support the rest of the Royal Navy and Armed Forces when applicable via a Memorandum of Understanding.

The P2000 spent 193 days away from her home in Portsmouth in 2025 occasionally on training, mostly on front-line operations in support of NATO or the Joint Expeditionary Force, venturing as far north as the Arctic Circle and as far east as the Gulf of Finland with sister vessels of the Royal Navy's Coastal Forces Squadron.

Puncher has been affiliated with the East Sussex resort – and many of its veterans/cadet groups, plus the town's RNLI station – since 1999 and the craft's size means she can use the small harbour.

But with the patrol boat squadron increasingly used for operational duties rather than giving university undergraduates (from London in Puncher's case) a taste of life in the Royal Navy, visits to Eastbourne have been less frequent in more recent years.

Between operational duties in Norway, the Baltic and the Baltic once again, Puncher did find time over the summer to spend a few days in and off Eastbourne, conducting joint training with the RNLI, then hosted Sea Cadets, Combined Cadet Force of Eastbourne College, the Royal Navy Association, numerous councillors, and the Lord Lieutenant – all of which

sowed the seedcorn to re-affirm ties.

Commanding Officer Lieutenant Keaton Leyland-Jones told those present at the re-signing that Eastbourne was "a great town" and regarded by Puncher as her "second home".

He said crew took inspiration from the stories going back to the Korean and Falklands War shared by the town's naval veterans and inspiration from the youth/cadet groups who showed enthusiasm in a life of service, possibly in the Royal Navy.

Eastbourne's Mayor, Councillor Margaret Bannister, said the affiliation with HMS Puncher was "a cherished part of our town's maritime heritage, a tradition that offers the ship's company a vital connection back to the land and demonstrates our appreciation for the important role of the Royal Navy."

"We are dedicated to strengthening this bond, building on the work we do through our Armed Forces Covenant, which we updated last year. We look forward to facilitating future opportunities for the ship's company to engage with and inspire our local community."

Lt Leyland-Jones added: "It is both important and a privilege for HMS Puncher and her crew to visit Eastbourne as often as we can."

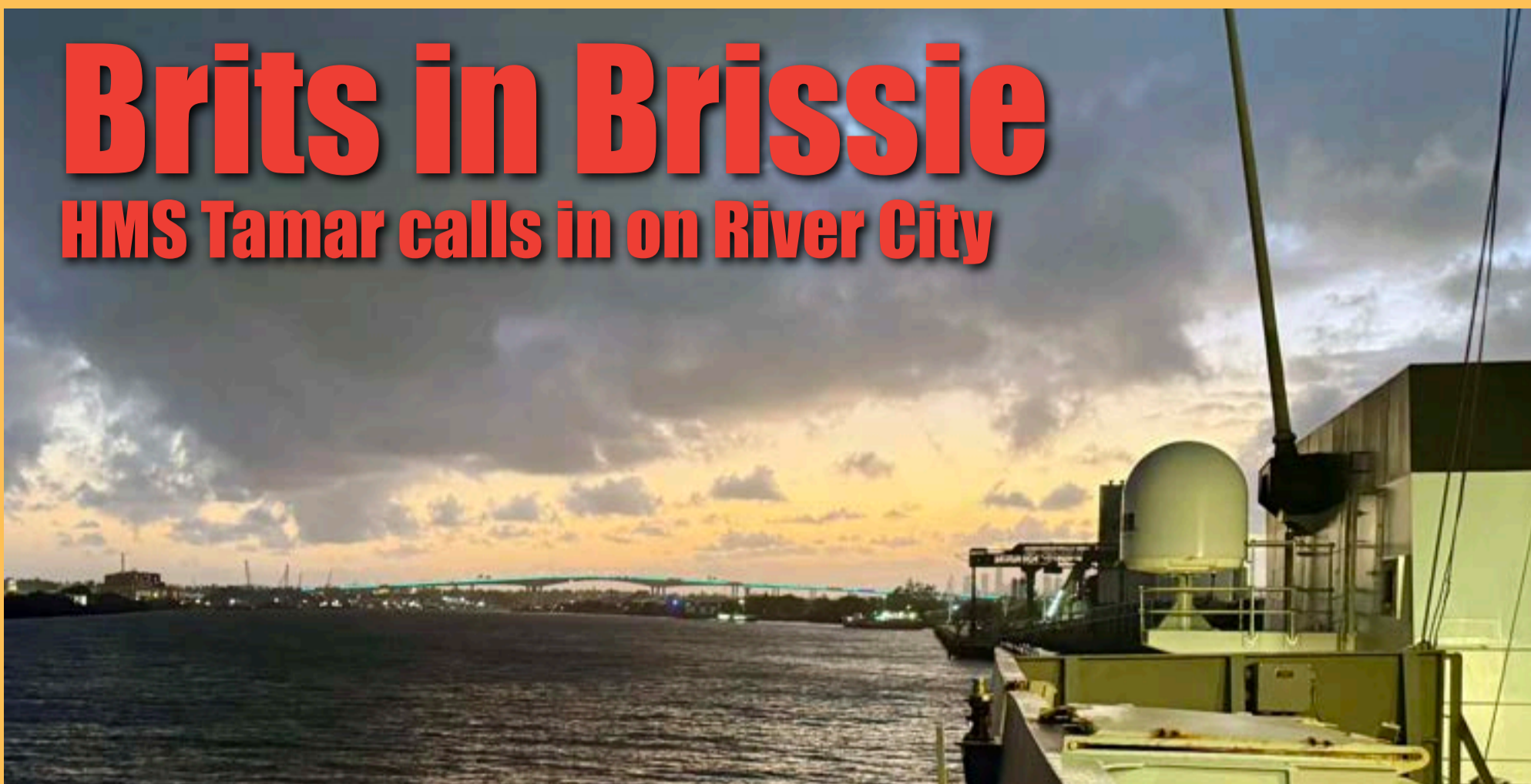
"We hope to serve as a source of inspiration and a reminder of the vital work the Royal Navy undertakes every single day to keep our nation secure."

"It is a tremendous honour to reaffirm our affiliation and I very much look forward to seeing it grow even stronger in the years to come."



# Brits in Brissie

## HMS Tamar calls in on River City



Main image: Brisbane as seen from HMS Tamar; Pictured clockwise from above; A view down the foredeck as HMS Tamar leaves Brisbane; Queensland Governor Dr Jeannette Young inspects the guard; Dr Young poses with the ship's bell; One of Tamar's warfare specialists trains the GPMG on a target.



Below, from left, Aussie tank crews introduce the sailors to the Abrams main battle tank; Tamar's CO Cdr Thomas Lindsey enjoys the view from the turret; Australian trade and defence experts invited aboard HMS Tamar in Brisbane; Tamar's sailors visit Brisbane Zoo

ROYAL Navy patrol ship HMS Tamar sailed into Australia's third city on the latest leg of her Indo-Pacific mission.

The River-class ship made the 850-mile journey from the northern port city of Cairns, which serves as the Tamar's 'home from home' when operating in the Coral Sea and environs – down the eastern seaboard for a combination of flag-flying, logistical support and also a chance to thank Australians for their support.

Once Tamar had berthed on the Brisbane River near the Gateway Bridge, she turned out her Guard of Honour to welcome Dr Jeannette Young, the 27th Governor of Queensland – The King's representative in this Australian state.

She received a ceremonial welcome followed by an informal tour of the ship and a reception where she met members of the Guard before taking a tour of the 2,000-tonne warship for an understanding of life at sea and Tamar's mission.

The highlight for Dr Young was the visit to sickbay, where she met Tamar's 'Doc' and spoke about what it takes to keep a ship medically fit and ready for any emergency.

In true British fashion, the visit concluded with afternoon tea courtesy of the ship's caterers.

Tamar is now into her fifth year operating in the vast Indo-Pacific domain – which stretches from Africa to Pearl Harbor – and relies on an extended logistics chain all the way back to the UK, plus shipyards/bases/contractors half way around the world who are not used to maintaining British warships with, in many cases, bespoke British equipment on them.

So a visit by Queensland defence industry stakeholders, including a tour and a discussion of the benefit the Royal Navy receives from a strong regional defence industrial base, allowed Team Tamar to thank their hosts and also discuss any challenges which might be smoothed out.

A good smattering of regional media filed on board as well – it's been three years since a Royal Navy warship last visited the Queensland capital, whose urban area embraces 2½ million people.

There was also time for the 50-strong crew to explore the city. They watched some international-level tennis, some Big Bash cricket (trying not to mention the Ashes), and visited the zoo which is apparently world famous.

"Visits like these help us build relationships with one of our closest allies, help our shared prosperity and create memories for life for our sailors," said Commander Tom Lindsey, HMS Tamar's captain.

"Collaborating with the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office partners in Queensland has been very productive and helped to amplify our output and the level of

engagement we can achieve as a visiting ship."

Upon sailing from Brisbane, the ship conducted gunnery training in the Coral Sea to test the marksmanship of the warfare team, with the ship's boats zipping around at high speed and manoeuvring deftly to present challenging 'targets' for their shipmates.

Prior to the visit to Brisbane, sailors from Tamar rumbled around the roads of north eastern Australia when they spent a few days paying a rare visit to the city of Townsville.

It's been 30 years (HMS Monmouth in 1995, thanks for asking) since the White Ensign was last seen in the city, which lies about 180 miles south of Cairns and 700 miles up the coast from Brisbane.

Its home to Lavarack Barracks, the Australian Army's largest garrison (circa 8,000 troops), including 2nd Cavalry Regiment and their brand new M1A2SEP3 Abrams.

It's the latest variant of the what has been the main battle tank of the US Army for more than four decades... and the Australians for the past two.

It's 66 tonnes of heavy metal thunder, armed with a 120mm gun and a 1,500HP engine powering it along off-road at 25mph, and more than 40mph on tarmac... as some lucky sailors found out.

The cavalrymen and women were superb hosts, offering the visiting Brits the chance to ride around in an Abrams, then enjoy a lift in – and operate the turret of – an ASLAV armoured reconnaissance vehicle (fitted with a slightly smaller version of the Tamar's main armament) and to meet the regiment's mascot, Courage, a ferocious wedge-tailed eagle.

HMS Tamar put into Townsville to take on stores and to ring in the New Year in this tropical city (which was blessed with a tropical downpour on December 31/January 1).

Team Tamar matched the soldiers' hospitality by inviting them on board for a look around and demonstration of what they can do.

"Having the opportunity to visit the 2nd Cavalry Regiment was a welcome change to the day to day running of the catering department on board," said Petty Officer Carl Tester, who head's Tamar's catering team.

"The friendly welcome and tour of the facilities would have been more than enough to take away as a cherished memory however being given the opportunity to take a ride in a 66-tonne Abrams main battle tank will go down as a highlight of my career."



# THE ARCTIC RETURN

AS ROYAL Marines and the fliers of Commando Helicopter Force return to the Arctic Circle this winter, there is a deepening bond between Norway and the UK that places increased importance on their operations in this hostile region.

In early December the two countries signed a pact – announcing their intention to operate a combined fleet of Type 26 frigates to hunt Russian submarines and protect critical subsea infrastructure in the North Atlantic, utilising the latest autonomous kit.

This new pact is named the Lunna House Agreement, after the house in the Shetland Islands that was requisitioned by the UK War Office and used as a base for the Special Operations Executive, which ran the 'Shetland Bus' – a clandestine group that transported agents and weapons to German-occupied Norway from 1941 until the surrender of the Nazis in May 1945.

The group's official name was the Norwegian Naval Independent Unit, which later became part of the Royal Norwegian Navy and was renamed the Royal Norwegian Naval Special Unit – Marinejegerkommandoen in Norwegian.

Its units like this one and their close cousin, the Kystjegerkommandoen (Coastal Rangers Command) that operate regularly with Royal Marines – weaving a strong historic thread between World War 2 actions and contemporary events, with the signing of the Lunna House Agreement.

Indeed, the agreement will see Royal Marines reassert themselves in

the Arctic – with plans afoot for year-round training in Northern Norway, broadening their current commitment of annual winter deployments.

The new Lunna House agreement also further commits the UK to defending their close NATO ally and the requirement to be ready for potential combat in the one of the world's most inhospitable environments - the Norwegian Arctic.

That places the Royal Marines in an important position as the UK's extreme cold weather and mountain warfare experts who will continue to spearhead British operations in the region, having honed their skills for more than 50 years here.

The UK Commando Force established an operations hub, known as Camp Viking – located in the village of Øverbygd, about 40 miles south of Tromsø – in 2023 and are returning this year with the deployment of 1,500 personnel, plus their all-terrain vehicles and helicopters from Commando Helicopter Force.

The commandos will operate across the coastlines and mountains of Northern Norway and take part in Exercise Cold Response – the largest military exercises in the country in 2026, which will demonstrate the unity of NATO and the ability of the alliance to deter threats in the high north.

Crucially it will see UK forces operate closely with their Norwegian hosts, but also marines from the Netherlands, as they train to defend this strategically important region across fjords and mountains.





## A NEW ERA IN NORWAY...

Lieutenant Colonel Chris Armstrong, Commanding Officer 30 Commando Information Exploitation Group, said: "The UK Commando Force is stepping up readiness to war-fight alongside our allies in the High North."

"As NATO's cold-weather specialists, we are ruthlessly focussed on mission rehearsals with our closest partners."

"Fusing intelligence, bold commando tactics, and cutting-edge technology – we remain poised for operations."

The UK Commando Force has been

undergoing a radical modernisation over the past six years, developing AI enabled targeting, multi-domain fires and uncrewed surface vessels (USVs) while strengthening partnerships to maintain their status as specialists in operations in the region.

That evolution continues apace as the Lunna House plans are rolled out to give NATO qualitative advantage in the region.

Commando Helicopter Force have been busy on their yearly top-up in the Arctic on Operation Clockwork – with personnel carrying out their

necessary cold weather survival courses and Merlin helicopters from 845 Naval Air Squadron conducting load lifting training with members of the Joint Helicopter Support Squadron.

A Wildcat helicopter of 847 Naval Air Squadron arrived in mid-January, brought into Bardufoss on an RAF C-17A Globemaster, pictured right.

The Yeovilton-based force have deployed annually to Norway for more than 55 years, honing their ability to operate across fjords and mountains from the Royal Norwegian Air Force base at Bardufoss.



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# King praises new generation of naval leaders

## Family affair



HIS Majesty The King thanked families and friends for their "sacrifices and contributions" which underscore military success as he saluted 200 future leaders of the Royal Navy and its global allies.

Nearly 55 years after he himself passed out of the same famous institution to begin his naval career, The King celebrated the achievements of a new generation of cadets at Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth.

On parade for the historic Lord High Admiral's Divisions, watched by friends and family, were more than 190 cadets who'd undergone the 29-week transformation from civilians to junior naval officers, as well as sailors promoted from the ranks, and international cadets who will go on to serve in the navies of the Bahamas, Kuwait, Malta, Oman, Qatar and UAE.

The Royal visit opened with a flypast by DA20 Dassault Falcons before His Majesty consecrated new Colours – a silk White Ensign featuring the King's Cypher – which will be entrusted to the College.

During Divisions, The King inspected UK and overseas cadets in the Royal Guard, and spoke with musicians from the Royal Marines Band, who performed the College's new march, Lead With Courage, commissioned to celebrate its 120th birthday.

Addressing all present before taking the salute, His Majesty said: "In this same spirit, today is also an important occasion for those who have supported each of you in reaching this memorable moment on parade and I am thrilled to see so many proud families and friends here amongst us.

"I can only say how profoundly grateful I am for the

sacrifices and contributions they have made, and will make, to your, and therefore the Navy's, success. Their support will be essential to every one of you as you embark on a life of service."

His Majesty also presented awards to four junior officers: warfare officer Sub Lieutenant Krish Hook received the King's Sword as the stand-out top junior officer of the three intakes over the past 12 months.

Runners-up Sub Lieutenants Jonathan Lavery (a marine engineer) and Toby Runyard (a trainee pilot) were presented with The King's Telescopes.

And logistics officer Sub Lieutenant Molly Edmunds received the Britannia Association Sword for demonstrating character which best embodied the Royal Navy's values.

Following the parade, His Majesty joined a reception on the Quarterdeck, meeting the newly-commissioned officers.

Throughout his visit, The King was accompanied by First Sea Lord General Sir Gwyn Jenkins, who also spoke to the massed ranks: "You inherit a proud tradition of operational excellence," he declared.

"In an era of global uncertainty, our strength lies in leaders who can fight and win. Be that exceptional leader – decisive, resilient, and unwavering in service."

Among those passing

out was Edward Coombs from Taunton, who worked as a consultant in the City and was an Army reservist before deciding he wanted to become a marine engineer.

"I joined for a sense of adventure and the opportunity to lead men and women all over the world. I wanted something that wasn't behind a desk all day where no two days are the same and the Navy offered this in abundance."

The 27-year-old said there was "never a dull moment during his training" and he had "definitely made friends for life". He did not enjoy his

dunking on Dartmoor while trying to ford a stream during one outdoor exercise, however.

Many of the cadets experienced their first time at sea with patrol ship HMS Forth in the Falklands. "It was one of the most amazing opportunities I've had – albeit very cold," said Midshipman Denholm Coxhill, aged 22, from Worthing in West Sussex, a budding warfare officer. "It gave us insight into what we have joined to do.

"On my first day, I had the overarching thought: Why did I do this? I look back on it now and thank myself I kept on going – now it's the best thing I've ever done."

Despite hailing from an RAF family, Midshipman Rory Gillies grew up on stories of life in the Navy from schoolmates and friends in his native Portsmouth and chose a career at sea.

"It's definitely a career like no other," the

23-year-old said. "I absolutely love it and would recommend it to anyone who loves spending time with interesting people and getting the chance to do something different and live a life outside the general nine-to-five that it can be easy to find yourself working in."

Captain Andy Bray, Captain BRNC, said the presence of His Majesty The King at the passing-out parade "makes this already momentous day truly historic. On behalf of the College and the Royal Navy, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all passing out."

His Majesty The King joined Dartmouth over 50 years ago, on September 16 1971, as a member of the Blake Division. As a graduate entrant, he spent six weeks at Dartmouth, learning about leadership, navigation and the ways of the Royal Navy.

During his Naval career, The King qualified as a helicopter pilot in 1974 before joining 845 Naval Air Squadron, which operated from the Commando Carrier HMS Hermes.

His final appointment was in February 1976, when His Majesty had command of the coastal minehunter HMS Bronington for his last nine months in the Royal Navy.

The Royal Family has very close links with the College and The King's father, grandfather and great grandfather, all spent time at Dartmouth. His Majesty, as Prince of Wales, last attended the Parade in 2021.



# For duty, service, devotion

## TWENTY-SEVEN sailors and Royal Marines were honoured by His Majesty The King in his New Year's Honours' List.

From the highest military position in the land through some of the longest-serving men and women in the Naval Service who have devoted their lives to public duty, all have an appointment with royalty in recognition of their efforts.

The end-of-year awards were combined with operational honours, acknowledging deeds, actions and commitment on the front line.

Most honours were awarded for longstanding efforts and dedication to the service.

The full list of honours and recipients:

### Knight Grand Cross in the Military Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (GBE)

Admiral Sir Antony Radakin KCB

### Knight Commander in the Military Division of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (KCB)

Vice Admiral M Utley CB OBE

### Companion in the Military Division of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (CB)

Rear Admiral J Parkin CBE

### Commander in the Military Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE)

Commodore S L Malkin ADC  
Brigadier C N Ordway  
Commodore R Readwin

### Officer in the Military Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE)

Captain A Clack RFA  
Commander S Dufosse MBE  
Lieutenant Colonel D Hartley (Operational)  
Captain S Herbert RFA (Operational)  
Captain M M Magzoub  
Commander M McBain MBE  
Commander R W Moore  
Commodore S Pearmain

### Member of the Military Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE)

Captain R V Angove Royal Marines  
Chief Petty Officer (Diver) P Brierley  
Lieutenant Commander R S Campbell  
Warrant Officer 2 (Phot) A Cheal  
Lieutenant Commander G R Lunn  
Sub Lieutenant A McMillan  
Lieutenant Commander C F Oakes (Operational)  
Lieutenant R Sookoo  
Lieutenant Commander (Sea Cadet Corps) F I E Taylor  
Warrant Officer 1 Engineering Technician (Marine Engineering) M B Thomas

### King's Volunteer Reserve Medal (KVRM)

Warrant Officer 2 J C Stewart Royal Marines Reserve

### King's Commendation for Valuable Service

Commander A Boardman  
Colonel R J Cooper-Simpson Royal Marines

### Officer in the Civilian Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE)

Andrew Scraggs

### British Empire Medal (BEM)

Elaine Smith  
Chief Petty Officer (Sea Cadet Corps) Christopher Gunton

### Royal Navy Commendation

Leading Hand (Police) G Beaumont-Smith  
Lieutenant (Sea Cadet Corps) N Daly  
Lieutenant Commander M N Dunbar  
Petty Officer (Seaman Specialist) C J Evans  
Petty Officer Engineering Technician (Marine Engineering Submarines) F Flynn  
Lieutenant Commander L D K Guthrie  
Mr W Humphreys  
Lieutenant Commander S H Humphries  
Mr J Joyce  
Lieutenant Colonel S S G Lerrwill Royal Marines  
Lieutenant Commander C Macpherson  
Chief Petty Officer Air Engineering Technician (Mechanical) K Martin  
Chief Petty Officer (Police) M Mitchell  
Engineering Technician (Marine Engineering) C J Robertson  
Chief Petty Officer (Mine Warfare) M Routliff  
Leading Hand (Mine Warfare) L Stone

### Royal Navy Team Commendations

HMS Caledonia Digital Infrastructure  
HMS Dauntless Logistics (Supply Chain)  
HMS Magpie Ship's Company  
Maritime Capability, Trials and Assessment

### Joint Commander's Commendation

Commander A Gaunt  
Lieutenant Commander K Gibson  
Chief Petty Officer (Cryptologic Technician) D Howe  
Former Petty Officer Engineering Technician (Marine Engineering) S Morgan  
Lieutenant Commander L Thompson

### First Sea Lord's Commendation

Commander I Allen Royal Navy Reserve (Retired)  
Lieutenant Commander J Bainbridge  
Commander W Basketfield  
Major T Brecht Royal Marines  
Sergeant W Brookes  
Sergeant A Carney  
Commander B Choules  
Mr P Clements  
Medical Assistant C Jones  
Leading (Mine Warfare) M Kell  
Captain H Knapman Army  
Chief Officer B Lee Royal Fleet Auxiliary  
Warrant Officer 1 Air Engineering Technician A Paterson  
Lieutenant Colonel C Smith Royal Marines

### Chief of Joint Operations Commendation

Lieutenant V Rogers

### Cyber & Specialist Operations Command Commendation

Commander R McClurg  
Surgeon Lieutenant Commander K John  
Petty Officer Logistics (Writer) D Pritchard

### Department of State Service Secretariat

Captain J Dransfield  
Captain J E J Holroyd

### Air and Space Commander and Air Member for Operations Commendation

Commander I Houlston  
Commander J Hughes

### Meritorious Service Medal

Warrant Officer 1 O Acid  
Warrant Officer 1 Warfare Specialist (Abovewater Warfare Tactical) C R Baker  
Colour Sergeant J Carter  
Warrant Officer 1 Engineering Technician (Weapons Engineering Submarines) A Clark  
Chief Petty Officer Logistics (Catering Services) P A Conybeer  
Warrant Officer 2 I D Dalton  
Warrant Officer 2 M C Edwards  
Warrant Officer 1 Engineering Technician (Marine Engineering Submarines) D Foster  
Warrant Officer 1 (Seaman Specialist) S Fraser  
Warrant Officer 2 R A Hall  
Warrant Officer 1 Engineering Technician (Weapons Engineering) C Nutbean  
Warrant Officer 1 (Royal Marines Band Service) D T O'Connor  
Warrant Officer 1 (Mine Warfare) A L Osborne  
Chief Petty Officer (Cryptologic Technician) D T Potter  
Lieutenant D C Ramsey  
Lieutenant N Seal  
Warrant Officer 2 Aircrewman (Commando) C P Taylor  
Warrant Officer 2 J C Torry  
Warrant Officer 1 Engineering Technician (Weapons Engineering) A E Twigg  
Chief Petty Officer (Diver) C Waghorn  
Chief Petty Officer Air Engineering Technician (Avionics) J A Ward  
Warrant Officer 1 Engineering Technician (Weapons Engineering) D N Williams  
Chief Petty Officer Warfare Specialist (Above Water Warfare) T Wilson



WO Angie Cheal encourages a competitor taking part in a recovery triathlon event at HMS Drake Picture: LPhoto Jules Ritsma

## '..People are always at the forefront of my mind...'

MORE than 1,000 sailors and Royal Marines have Warrant Officer Angie Cheal to thank for helping them recover from serious illnesses and injuries.

She's been made an MBE for her tireless efforts over the past eight years dedicated to the welfare and recovery of fellow Naval personnel so they can resume their careers – or, if unable, build new lives in civvy street.

The former naval photographer, whose images of helicopter carrier HMS Ocean in action during operations in Iraq in 2003 were used worldwide, has spent the past decade focused on colleagues' welfare in Devonport Naval Base at the Personnel Support Group and Recovery Headquarters (often referred to simply as 'PSG' in the military).

She spent her first couple of years in the welfare role as a divisional officer, supporting medically-downgraded personnel through complex recovery journeys.

But it was during the Covid pandemic in 2020 when she identified a significant gap in recovery provision following the loss of external charity support from Help for Heroes.

Concerned about the lack of structured recovery opportunities for long-term sick and injured personnel, Angie took the initiative to secure funding from multiple charities – including the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity and Greenwich Hospital – and began delivering recovery courses independently.

Since then she's worked tirelessly to design, develop and deliver a bespoke recovery programme for sailors and Royal Marines.

It uses adaptive sport and wellbeing activities to support physical rehabilitation, mental wellbeing and a renewed sense of value and purpose among Service personnel.

What began as a single initiative has grown into around 80 recovery courses annually, delivered by a five-strong team with much of the funding now coming directly by the Royal Navy.

In addition to her recovery work, Angie has also led specialist retreats supporting women in the Armed Forces who have experienced child loss, providing safe spaces for healing, connection and recovery.

In the words of the citation for her MBE, her efforts have had a "direct impact on up to 1,000 people, making the experience and recovery outcomes significantly better, and laid the foundations to support many more".

For the 51-year-old mum of two, who lives in Plymouth and hails from a naval family, working with the recovery team has been the most rewarding period of her long and varied career.

"I am immensely proud of what we have built; the people we support are always at the forefront of my mind and I am grateful for the assistance my command has given me over the past five years to see this project become what it is today," she said.

"It is an incredible honour to receive an MBE, and one that I accept with great pride on behalf of my very supportive family and everyone I have worked alongside throughout my career in recovery."



Sub Lieutenant Astha McMillan on a boat visiting outlying communities in his native St Vincent and the Grenadines in the wake of devastating Hurricane Beryl

## '...Simply the right thing to do...'

Astha 'Ash' McMillan used his naval expertise to help his native Caribbean island when hit by one of the most powerful storms of recent years.

Ash was on leave visiting family and friends in St Vincent and the Grenadines in July 2024 when Hurricane Beryl swept through the region.

Classed as a Category 5 storm with winds reaching 165mph, Beryl left eight people dead and caused an estimated £170m damage across the small island chain – home to 100,000 souls.

Thousands of people were displaced and needed evacuating, while on some islands which bore the brunt of Beryl's wrath, nine in ten homes were destroyed.

Ash, a logistician with 20 years' experience under his belt, immediately drew upon that and through his personal energy, commitment, leadership and determination, he helped to coordinate the relief effort by a significant number of organisations, from the island's government to international agencies.

In the words of his MBE citation "his swift actions saved lives, providing comfort and aid to devastated communities. His bravery and courage in the face of particular adversity, reflects the highest standards that underpin the Royal Navy's core values."

For the 44-year-old, who recently earned his commission as a sub lieutenant and is completing his training as a logistics officer at the Defence School of Logistics and Administration at Worthy Down, near Winchester, he hopes his MBE can inspire others, demonstrating that whatever your background and start in life, it should never limit what you can achieve.

"Receiving this award was an unexpected and deeply humbling honour," he said. "In the Royal Navy we're trained to step forward in times of need without looking for recognition, and supporting my fellow Vincentians in the aftermath of Hurricane Beryl was simply the right thing to do."

"Being able to help my country at such a critical moment, and to raise awareness of what people were facing back home, meant a great deal to me."

Originally from Mesopotamia on the island of St Vincent, Ash initially worked in a call centre before deciding he wanted a more challenging and varied career and joined the Royal Navy as a stores accountant (logistician) back in 2003.

In the 22 years of service since, he has deployed with former aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious, frigate Iron Duke, and destroyer HMS Dauntless. He took part in the 2006 evacuation of British citizens from Lebanon, has completed multiple Mediterranean patrols and one of the South Atlantic and helped prepare UK flagship HMS Prince of Wales for her sea trials.

He's served at every major naval base supporting both surface ships and submarines, and spent a lot of time with the Royal Navy's longstanding mission in the Middle East, Operation Kipion, from ensuring HMS Lancaster was ready for patrols to planning the decommissioning of minehunters operating in the Gulf, efforts for which he was commended.

Ash lives in Scotland and enjoys spending time with his daughter Aleisha and his partner Emily, as well as hiking the Scottish Munros and swimming.

## Conference focuses on domestic abuse

POLICE from across the Royal Navy joined interested groups and individuals at Yeovilton to discuss dealing with – and reducing – instances of domestic abuse.

Harrowing personal testimony, the importance of empathy and executing the MOD's Domestic Abuse Action Plan – all featured in the day-long conference involving guests speakers and experts from a variety of support organisations.

Under the banner of the slogan 'Stand with victims-survivors, signpost support', the event, organised by the Navy's D&I Networks, the RN Police, and Avon and Somerset Police, sought to shatter myths, spot signs of abuse – followed by positive intervention – highlight some of the latest lessons/developments in the field, and above all attempt to put an end to violence against women and girls as far as possible – and as early as possible.

For many attendees, the biggest impact was left by Superintendent Sharon Baker from Avon and Somerset Police and the RN's Commander Nicola Cripps, both of whom

shared their stories of being survivors of domestic abuse.

In both cases, they forged successful careers and outwardly – in the words of Supt Baker – gave the impression of being "happy and strong," masking the abuse suffered. Despite her position as a senior policewoman, she didn't speak out for a long time because she felt not merely frightened but also ashamed and embarrassed by her plight.

Both spoke, showed incredible bravery and courage when sharing their stories as domestic abuse survivors, underscoring the fact that domestic abuse can happen to anyone – regardless of age, gender, location, profession or background.

Belinda Parmar from The Empathy Business highlighted the importance of difficult conversations with empathy – a vital leadership skill when supporting domestic abuse survivors – who told all present she was honoured to be a "keystone speaker".

Andy Hill from Voice box talked of the need to promote healthy masculinity through the

prism of the Angiolini Inquiry (following the abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by off-duty police officer Wayne Couzens).

And Karen Evans explained how to turn the MOD's Domestic Abuse Action Plan into practice, with the emphasis on early prevention, through working with specialist organisation, to shape ways of intervening.

The conference was praised by Dame Nicole Jacobs, Domestic Abuse Commissioner of England and Wales, and Victim Witness Care Unit Director Nina Slocombe.

There is a wide range of domestic abuse support services, independent to the Chain of Command, for Service personnel and family members in the UK and overseas.

These services include the VWCU ([www.gov.uk/guidance/victim-witness-care-unit-vwcu](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/victim-witness-care-unit-vwcu)), unit support staff and specialist services ([assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/663b961074933dcbb6c42b/MOD\\_domestic\\_abuse\\_support\\_services.pdf](http://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/663b961074933dcbb6c42b/MOD_domestic_abuse_support_services.pdf)).

## Culdrose gets £140k gym improvements

RNAS Culdrose has spent £140k revamping its gym to support the health, fitness, and wellbeing of service personnel.

The strength and conditioning suite has been transformed, creating a bespoke and modern training environment downstairs in the sport centre.

The project has been led by physical trainer and exercise rehabilitation instructor Petty Officer James Best, who works in the centre's Primary Care Rehabilitation Facility.

PO Best was helped by the Physical Development Team and PO(PT) Steve Homer in partnership with Indigo Fitness, the MOD-approved supplier, whose expertise helped bring the vision to life through the

technical drawings created by Tom Haynes.

He said: "The upgraded space has been purposefully designed for multi-use training, accommodating a wide range of training modalities—from general resistance work to Olympic weightlifting—ensuring all users can train effectively and safely."

"In addition to supporting operational readiness and helping service personnel maintain the standards required for the Royal Navy fitness test, the facility is also open to approved contractors and civil servants, enabling them to maintain their own health and fitness within a high-quality and versatile environment."



# People first, better Navy

WHEN Rear Admiral Jude Terry took up the role of Director People and Training and Naval Secretary in 2022, she did so at a moment of real change for the Royal Navy and with a clear sense of what mattered most.

Four years on, as she prepares to hand over to Rear Admiral Andrew Rose, her tenure has been defined by a consistent, value-led focus on people: those who serve, and the families who support them.

Under the leadership of Admiral Terry (pictured above by LPhot Kev Walton inspecting cadets at Britannia Royal Naval College during the King's visit for Lord High Admiral's Divisions in December) leadership, the People and Training organisation has delivered a series of reforms designed to improve the lived experience of Naval personnel.

The team modernised recruitment and retention processes, including redesigning the recruiting system and streamlining medical assessments, reducing waiting times and supporting increased entries to HMS Raleigh.

As part of this modernisation, the organisation also introduced 'Zig Zag Career Pathways' and Lateral Entry opportunities - a new model enabling skilled civilians, ex-Regulars and Reservists to move more fluidly between Defence and wider industry.

This approach allows individuals to join - or re-join - the Armed Forces at a level that reflects their proven capability and relevant experience, widening access to talent and supporting a more flexible, future-ready workforce.

As a strong advocate Admiral Terry directed that all Cadets would be provided with PCS as the Royal Navy transitioned to Rig 22.

The Physical Employment Standards (PES) has replaced a single fitness test with role-specific, operationally focused assessments.

The P&T team has also developed the Initial Naval Training (Foundation) course, a new ten-week training package for all Officers and Ratings from June 2026, providing a shared foundation before specialist training.

Family engagement has been strengthened through close work with the Families and People Support (FPS) team and the roll-out of family roadshows, improving access to support and information.

Recognition across the Service has been enhanced through regular People and Training Awards and the introduction of Service Leavers' Events, ensuring achievements and transitions to civilian life were recognised properly, with families welcomed as part of those moments.

P&T has also delivered practical policy updates, including simplified promotion pathways, revised seniority rules and modernised appearance policies, as well as reducing mandatory training burden and supporting the restoration of service to personnel previously dismissed due to sexuality.

As Admiral Terry hands over the reins, she hopes that her legacy is not merely one of policy reform or historic firsts, but also a Naval Service shaped with care, compassion and a clear belief that putting people first strengthens everything else.

# Health drive continues

WHEN Carrier Strike Group 25 set sail in April last year, more than 2,500 personnel were equipped with CSG-branded sports bags containing essential items designed to enhance the well-being of all onboard, reflecting our commitment to their welfare and fostering unit cohesion.

Additionally, more than 500 personnel volunteered to participate in a DSTL Garmin Wearables trial, aimed at collecting and monitoring critical health data which will provide invaluable insights for future initiatives.

The RN's ongoing dedication to Unit Health Committees, Health Fairs, and the provision of Menstrual Support Boxes continues to benefit ships and establishments across the Fleet.

Through guidance and support for health initiatives, we have successfully allocated £30,000 in funding to operational units and establishment enabling the creation of bespoke health spaces. This includes a sports and recreation centre project in HMS Caledonia and upgraded personal development area for HMS Collingwood.

In September 25, we launched NCL2: Mental Wellbeing and Addiction Prevention, a streamlined yet comprehensive course designed to empower personnel by providing clear guidance and signposting to address mental health and addiction risks effectively throughout their careers.

Termly campaigns have



A 'welfare fair' aboard HMS Prince of Wales during last year's CSG deployment  
Picture: LPhot Bill Spurr

remained a key focus, featuring well-attended webinars on topics such as alcohol awareness, healthy eating and engaging leaders in women, alongside successful initiatives like bike week.

Collaboration with stakeholders, including Headspace, GamCare, DrinkAware, and Zero Suicide Alliance, continues to play a vital role in delivering impactful health and well-being support.

Headspace, a mindfulness and meditation app, is highly beneficial for personnel by promoting mental resilience and overall well-being.

It offers tools to manage stress, improve focus, and enhance sleep quality, which are crucial for maintaining peak performance in high-pressure environments.

Headspace now provides 1,500 'friends and family' licenses and from December 2025 will offer webinars.

The Zero Suicide Alliance offers free online training to help individuals recognise the signs of suicidal behaviour, develop the confidence to approach and support those in need, and potentially save lives.

The Healthier Weight and Alcohol campaigns kicked off last month.



# Practical preps pay off

WARFARE branch ratings from the Sea Preparation Squadron turned their hand to maintenance when they supporter HMS Spey's refit/maintenance package in Singapore.

Personnel from the world of Seaman Specialists, Electronic Warfare and Mine Warfare brought their own flare and specialisation to support this work package.

As well as ticking off plenty of sections in task books, the time with the Batch 2 River-class ship allowed the WTS ratings to enjoy one of the world's great city states and pay their respects at Kranji Cemetery, where 24,317 British and Commonwealth personnel who fought and died in the Pacific Theatre.

Lieutenant Commander 'Ras' Winch, Officer in Charge of the Warfare Training Section (WTS), remarked: "The deployment has provided an outstanding opportunity for our young WTS sailors to experience Naval life, both in the workplace and ashore.

"It has served as a vital component in delivering meaningful employment and fostering broader Naval exposure"

Meanwhile a bespoke two-day training package was laid on for Engineering Technicians from the Sea Preparation Squadron who will be heading to RM Poole and the MTXGasas: combined practical boat handling and technical workshops to enhance their skills.

Day 1 at the Army Sailing Centre, Thorney Island, focused on practical boat handling, including man overboard drills, navigation, and managing "bumps and grinds." The afternoon covered RIB inflatable collar repairs, outboard maintenance, and defect rectification.

The second day, hosted by HMS Sultan's Outboard Workshop, involved instructor-led training on dismantling outboards to component level, with emphasis on post-immersion

recovery systems.

Participants also practised fault-finding and defect rectification using specialist tools.

The training provided valuable hands-on experience, equipping participants with practical skills and operational awareness.

The on-water exercises were particularly beneficial, offering insights into real-world challenges.

This initiative underscores the importance of practical preparation for operational success.

## Saving cash and landfill

A RELATIVELY small, simple but successful initiative to help the environment - and save customers over £13k - at the Royal Navy's headquarters has been recognised by a national award.

By banning single-use paper cups for hot drinks bought at the café in Leach Building - the Royal Navy's administrative HQ on Whale Island in Portsmouth - has prevented nearly one tonne of landfill (52,649 cups in the first 19 months of the scheme).

And by offering a 25p for using your own cup/mug instead, food providers ESS Defence reckon they saved customers an estimated £13,200 of savings.

As a result, the programme is now being extended to all Royal Navy establishments.

It's earned both ESS and the Senior Service the Institute for Collaborative Working's Chairman's Award - in recognition of exceptional collaboration which has a significant impact - presented at the House of Lords.

In this instance, the RN set ESS the challenge of dramatically cutting daily waste. Before the 'No Single Wets' initiative was introduced in April 2024, fewer than 1 in 20 customers - Service personnel and civilians - drank out of re-useable cups.

"We are incredibly proud of the 'No Single Wets' initiative and delighted that it has been recognised," said Warrant Officer 1 George Reeves from RN Climate Resilience & Environmental Management.

"Implementing change is always a challenge, not least when it comes to sustainability, but working alongside ESS we've demonstrated what can be achieved by joining forces to build on our shared values. A huge thank you and congratulations to all those involved in making this such a success."

Bob Gray, Managing Director of ESS Defence, Marine and Aerospace said the campaign was the result "of a positive, committed approach to collaborative working between the ESS and Royal Navy teams.

"The results speak for themselves, and we're looking forward to supporting the Navy with the roll out across the rest of the estate."

'No Single Wets' was also Highly Commended at the recent Waste2Zero Awards.



## 200 years of providing help to Naval children

To continue to make a difference in their lives, improving their wellbeing and development, we need your support - donate today using the QR code below. To help us or to see how we can help you visit our website to find out more.

[www.navalchildrenscharity.org.uk](http://www.navalchildrenscharity.org.uk)  
023 9263 9534



Registered CIC: 1160182 and SC052322 in Scotland.



# Oar Force One



## AS MEAT Loaf (almost) sang: seventh out of 43 ain't bad.

Raising flares to light up the final minutes before dawn in Nelson's Dockyard, Antigua and Barbuda are the men of HMS Oardacious having completed their 3,000-mile journey across the Atlantic.

Whether day or night, lighting flares is the traditional celebration for all who reach the finish line of the World's Toughest Row.

The sailors celebrated just before sunrise on January 20 – 36 days and 12 hours after leaving the Canaries.

It put them seventh of the 43 teams and individuals who left La Gomera in mid-December, relying only on their own strength, assisted by currents and wind.

The rowers – air engineers Commodore Rich Purdy and Warrant Officer 1 Liam Huddy and submariners Surg Lt Cdr Addison Taylor and Lt Cdr Guy Wilton – faced highs and lows on their crossing, as well as constant exhaustion and a mostly monotonous diet.

They endured waves more than 30ft

high – seven more than the rowers' boat Captain Jim is long – and never managed more than two hours' sleep in a row, which they often forewent to help their shipmates, putting in extra shifts on the oars to fight for race positions.

That didn't bring the team victory – the winners, Swiss quartet 44 West, reached the finish line nearly seven whole days ahead of Oardacious.

But they did come in fifth in the category of four-strong teams, seventh overall, raised thousands of pounds for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity and enjoyed experiences money can't buy during their five weeks at sea.

"We've seen night skies full of stars with the full Milky Way and shooting stars, the vastness of the ocean, sunsets and sunrises, and we've climbed into the sea with literally miles of water below and around us," said Cdre Purdy.

"There's also been sea sickness, heat sickness, fatigue, hallucinations and a faulty auto-tiller – the boat's steering system.

"But thanks to the company of fellow

sailors, who have worked hard as a crew, we've supported each other through the highs and lows."

Surg Lt Cdr Taylor add: "For me, the high point was around New Year with the full moon which made it as bright as day and everything was clear and still. Pictures just don't do it justice.

"The low point was definitely the first 48 hours when everything I'd eaten over the past month came back up and I really wanted to die – but thankfully that passed pretty quickly."

The Oardacious programme is now in its fifth incarnation, going back to 2019. All five teams (last year's was the all-female Valkyries) have completed the row, helping not only the Service's principal charity, but also supporting mental health and wellbeing for serving personnel and their families. To date it has raised well over £1m.

The latter causes are particularly close to the team; their boat is named after submariner Captain Jim Simpson, who tragically took his own life in 2020.

Picture courtesy of the World's Toughest Row

# Race will give key support to families

THE Royal Navy Royal Marines Charity is excited to announce that Race Across the UK (RATUK) is back for 2026 – the ultimate endurance challenge for teams looking for adventure while raising money to support Naval families.

From October 6 to 9 2026, teams of two will race from Dartmouth to Inverness, travelling the length of the UK with no cars, no planes and no map apps.

Armed only with a paper map, their wits and what they can carry on their backs, teams will need teamwork, determination and a sense of adventure to reach each checkpoint and cross the finish line.

Teams are encouraged to raise £3,000. Every pound raised will make a real difference to Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Royal Fleet Auxiliary personnel and their families, helping those facing injury, illness, mental health challenges or financial difficulties.

Donations support vital services, from recovery programmes and wellbeing initiatives to family support and practical assistance, ensuring Naval personnel and their loved ones are valued and supported for life.

Funds raised through Race Across the UK help support people like Aimee, a serving Logistics Officer in the Royal Navy.

Due to health issues, Aimee was introduced to the Royal Navy Recovery Pathway (RNRP) – a coordinated programme of support designed for Service personnel managing health-related challenges. Through her Individual Recovery Programme, Aimee took part in a range of fully funded, recovery-focused

experiences supported by RNRMC and other military charities, helping to improve her physical health, emotional resilience and mental wellbeing.

Beyond the activities themselves, these experiences offered Aimee the opportunity to connect with others in similar situations, rediscover a sense of purpose and rebuild her confidence.

Aimee said: "The early recovery courses I attended brought me both joy and a sense of belonging during a difficult period when a lot of my time was spent alone at home away from the

everyday hustle and bustle of the Royal Navy.

"I made lifelong friends, and the courses gave me a sense of purpose and the opportunity to try new and exciting things.

"When I attend the courses now, not only do they bring me joy but they really give me the time and space to reflect on how far I have come on my own recovery journey.

"I am also now able to help others attending them who are at earlier stages of their recovery journeys by providing first-hand experience and insight into the Recovery Pathway."

Places for Race Across the UK 2026 are limited, and interested teams are encouraged to sign up early to secure their spot.

By taking part, participants can push themselves physically and mentally, while raising essential funds – making a real difference to the lives of those who serve and their families.

Registration is open now. For more information or to sign up, visit: <https://fundraising.rnrmc.org.uk/event/race-across-the-uk/>



## Praised for innovating

A MEMBER of the Royal Navy Police (RNP) has been awarded a Herbert Lott Innovation & Invention Award for transforming how the RNP trains and prepares its people for operations around the world.

As the first Training Manager in the RNP, C/Sgt Parker led major improvements that have modernised training, raised professional standards and strengthened operational readiness across the Force. His work has had a lasting impact on how the RNP develops its people and supports Royal Navy operations.

A key achievement has been aligning RNP training with nationally recognised policing standards, ensuring personnel are trained to the same professional level as civilian police. This has boosted both capability and confidence, helping the RNP

respond effectively to complex and demanding tasks.

Not only did he introduce a centralised digital training system, making it easier for personnel to access up-to-date training information and stay ready to deploy at short notice – C/Sgt Parker helped launch new leadership development opportunities and clearer training governance, strengthening leadership and consistency across the RNP.

Through innovation, forward thinking and commitment to improvement, his work has delivered real, service-wide benefits – making him a deserving recipient of the Herbert Lott Innovation & Invention Award.

Find out more about the Herbert Lott Innovation & Invention Award at [Herbert Lott Awards | The Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity](#)

## Heart-warming images are wanted

THE Royal Navy & Royal Marines Charity is proud to sponsor two categories at the 2026 Royal Navy Photographic Competition, supporting the celebration of creativity, storytelling and the lived experience of the Naval Service.

For this year's competition, RNRMC is sponsoring the Commandant General RM Stills category, as well as the RNRMC Family and Friends category, which recognises heart-warming images capturing moments between Naval Service personnel and the people who support them: families, friends and loved ones.

The RNRMC Family and Friends category will award four prizes across Royal Navy Professional, Royal Navy Amateur, Public Under 18 and Public Over 18 entries, encouraging participation from across the Naval community and the wider public.

From homecomings and family days to quieter moments of connection, the category celebrates the human stories behind service life.

RNRMC is proud to support the Royal Navy Photographic Competition and encourages serving personnel, families



and members of the public to take part.

Entrants can submit up to three images, taken between 16 December 2024 and 31 December 2025, via email to [rnphotographiccomp@gmail.com](mailto:rnphotographiccomp@gmail.com).

The deadline for entries is 21 February 2026. Judging will take place between 4-11 March with the results coming out on Friday 13 March.

*Pictured is the 2025 RNRMC Family and friends prize professional winner: LPhot Luke*

## Navy Commando runs around the world

A SERVING Navy Commando is on a record-breaking bid to run around the world on foot.

Endurance athlete Fred Stokes is leading the Earthstrider bid as he set off from the iconic Commando Memorial at Spean Bridge in Scotland.

Earthstrider is a 16,400-mile global run that will span up to two and a half years, crossing Europe, the Middle East, Australasia, North America, South America, Iceland and back into Europe.

If successful, 31-year-old Fred, who is taking a sabbatical from his day job, will become the youngest person ever to circumnavigate the planet on foot – a feat accredited by the World Runners Association.

Fred, an experienced submariner, officer and ultra-runner, is taking on this unprecedented challenge to raise vital funds for the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity.

"I wanted to do something meaningful for the RNRMC," said Fred.

"I've seen first-hand how much they do for people on operations, and for veterans who carry those experiences long after they've come home."

Fred, who joined the Royal Marines Band Service at the age of 17, spent five years both in the UK and overseas. In 2017 he joined Britannia Royal Naval College as a logistics officer and upon earning his commission was immediately sent to HMS Duncan.



In September 2020 Fred transferred to the Submarine Service and served as the logistics officer in HMS Vigilant, taking part in Operation Relentless before deploying to Alaska in 2022 for US ICEEX.

He deployed to Bahrain in May 2023 and when he returned to the UK at the end of that year, joined 24 Commando RE for training prior to completing the All-Arms Commando Course.

Upon completion of the course, Fred joined the Headquarters UK Commando Force as the Deputy Group Logistics Commander and served in the Indo-Pacific and Eastern Mediterranean. His most recent deployments were Catamaran and Tarassis.

For more information, visit [www.earthstrider2025.com](http://www.earthstrider2025.com).

ROYAL NAVY aircraft handlers are in the frontline in the unlikely event of an aircraft crash – on call at air stations at RNAS Culdrose and RNAS Yeovilton year-round, 24 hours a day.

They are also on standby in case of a fire anywhere on the Fleet Air Arm bases. When not serving at these fire stations, the handlers operate the flight decks of Royal Navy warships.

At Culdrose, their training ground is at Predannack Airfield, near the Helston base on the Lizard Peninsula, where the crews practise airfield rescue firefighting using specially

designed gas-powered rigs which simulate burning aircraft. The former Second World War airfield is also heavily used by the navy for drone training.

Pictured is recent training for a new watch manager, where the crews run through the sequences that follow an aircraft crash.

Leading Airman Robert “Chappers” Chapman, who is part of the training team, said: “We do training at the airfield at Culdrose, but that’s more about communication between the watch manager, the

crew manager and the air traffic control tower.

“Predannack is where we earn our bread and butter, and where we can make the training as realistic as possible.

“It is real fire, and although the casualties are dummies, it is as real as we can make it. Training like this is

essential so we don’t lose those rescue skills, and it helps build team cohesion.”

He said the crews practised the rescue of two people from a crashed aircraft - known as ‘Exercise State-1’.

They first pulled up in their multi-purpose response vehicles and laid down water jets on the blaze. The vehicles also carry specialist fire-suppressant foam, which would be used in a real emergency.

Donning breathing gear, the crews then

entered the aircraft to extract two casualties from the cockpit. Also pictured is the petty officer training manager, in the white helmet, overseeing the exercise.

As well as this fixed-wing aircraft, crews can practise on two rigs designed to replicate different types of helicopters. They were installed in 2023 to replace old aircraft airframes, which have since been removed from Predannack.

In August last year, Culdrose also opened a £4.4-million fire trainer, a two-storey structure which can simulate multiple fires in a building or ship.

These facilities are used by the four fire station watches and the Royal Naval School of Flight Deck Operations, where all aircraft handlers learn their skills before joining the fleet.

Picture: LA Robert Chapman



# HOT STUFF

## 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](mailto:kenneth.williamson479@mod.gov.uk)



# Rare sonar set could help wartime boat



DO YOU own a WW2-vintage Type 134C sonar?

Not a question we often ask – but it could help enthusiasts restore a wartime motorboat to her original state as a U-boat hunter.

More than 60 Motor Anti-Submarine Boat or MASBs were built for the Royal Navy in various batches/classes between 1938 and 1942 of which S32 is one of a handful of survivors eight decades later.

The ASR Whaleback project has already re-floated the boat (pictured) which was in a sorry state, and now plans to lift her out of the water to assess her condition before beginning the huge job of returning her to the way she was when delivered by the British Power Boat Company in Hythe in September 1941.

During work already carried out on S32, the team found what they believe are components of her original sonar fit – at the time known as ASDIC before the US term was adopted.

The Type 134C set installed consisted of dome containing the sonic element of the

device, which was connected to a display unit: a paper recorder with a mechanical device which worked out the optimum time to drop depth charges for the kill.

The system may – or may not – have been removed from the boat (records are sketchy), but many MASBs, dubbed the ‘Mosquitos of the Sea’ by the wartime propaganda machine, were converted into air-sea rescue boats to pluck downed Allied aircrew from the Channel/North Sea.

That’s how S32 began her active life (possibly with a Polish crew or, if not, by a combination of eight regular RN ratings and two reservist officers) operating out of Dover. Within a month of being handed over, crew had rescued their first airman: a Canadian.

The boat spent three years in the ‘Narrow Seas’ until deemed surplus to requirement and was paid off in the autumn of 1944.

Her civilian life is just as eventful. After 20 years on the Thames as a houseboat named Roxanne, the boat was converted into a yacht/

pleasure cruiser, renamed *Fervent*, and sailed to Gibraltar in the mid-1960s.

She was soon impounded by the Spanish authorities for involvement in smuggling, then spent six years in hands of a Spanish colonel, before being bought by a Brit who eventually turned the vessel into a floating fish and chip restaurant (The Codfather) on the Costa del Sol.

The boat was restored as a yacht in the mid-90s and came home to the UK in 2007, moored on the Norfolk Broads.

It was there that a team of enthusiasts found her in a wretched state in 2023. They succeeded in re-floating the motorboat last January and today is moored at Salhouse Broad near Norwich.

They welcome any details of the boat’s history/life aboard to plug gaps, any equipment or components from an MSB – as well as donations to continue the restoration process. See <https://asrwhaleback.com/> for details.

## Cossack’s history laid out on web

THE rich and proud history of HMS Cossack over 150 years has been told anew via a new website which taps the comprehensive archive of its veterans’ association.

Six ships have carried the name from 1806 through to 1961 and each is documented in remarkable detail, down to the names of crew members, their jobs aboard and even details of next of kin – where the info was available.

The histories are the various Cossacks are recounted in granular detail (down to daily movements), accounts of characters associated with the ships, combat and actions (Cossack No.5 famously rescued merchant sailors held prisoner aboard German tanker *Altmark*, skulking in a Norwegian fjord; she went on take part in the *Bismarck* chase the following year; her frequent appearances in the press earned her the nickname ‘The Daily Mirror ship’) and general life aboard.

And where there are gaps, association archivist Keith Batchelor hopes relatives, descendants and perhaps even any surviving crew can help provide the missing details.

The association archives also hold some quirky facts – such as the reward of two oxen for bombarding enemy coastal batteries in Korea in 1951; a Christmas tree decorated with painted condoms in one mess in 1946; and a village in western Australia renamed Cossack in honour of a visit by ship No.2 in 1871.

The Cossack name on a ship has been in abeyance since 1961 when the C-class destroyer was broken up after 15 years’ service in the Far East especially.

The name lives on via the headquarters of Royal Navy/Royal Marines Boarding School training at HMS Raleigh and at least two Sea Cadet Units.

The site, designed in conjunction with web developers Everyone’s A Winner Limited, can be found at: [www.hms-cossack.co.uk](http://www.hms-cossack.co.uk).

# The Wren photo detectives

ARE you a former member of the Women’s Royal Naval Service who trained at HMS Dauntless near Reading?

Or perhaps a descendant/relative of one such Wren?

If the answer is ‘yes’, then you could help with a 33,000-piece ‘jigsaw puzzle’ as a team of enthusiasts look to replace/recreate 35 years of missing records.

Between 1946 and 1981 when the site closed and training was moved to HMS Raleigh in Torpoint, HMS Dauntless took female civilians and turned them into members of the Women’s Royal Naval Service – more commonly known as Wrens.

The details of every single trainee were recorded in comprehensive ledgers – from the first day in February 1946 when the site was known as HMTE Burghfield (it was renamed HMS Dauntless in 1953) to July 1981 when the gates closed for the last time.

The ledgers were transferred to Raleigh and were last seen about 30 years being transferred between stores. Since then, nothing.

Probably no-one would have noticed until lockdown, when former Wren Mandy Powell (1976-87) began linking up with fellow Dauntless veterans, sharing photographs and stories of life undergoing basic training.

When they discovered the ledgers were missing, they decided to turn what was a fun pastime into an historical challenge, rebuilding the missing books to create a permanent record of the 33,000 young women who served Navy and Nation over that 35-year period.

The appeal to create a ‘digital/visual ledger’ – officially The WRNS Burghfield-Dauntless Project – is now into its sixth year and has seen calls put out by the



The Ladies of Warspite 123 – one of nearly 1,000 class photographs identified by the former Dauntless Wrens

Women’s Institute, Royal British Legion, newspapers, magazines, parish newsletters, radio stations (as far afield as Nova Scotia in Canada).

And it’s reaped an impressive harvest of images and information.

With a fresh class of Wrens joining roughly 42 weeks of the year, it’s thought as many as 1,400 Divisional photographs were taken.

So far Mandy and her colleagues have collected almost 1,000 of those images, impressively – with the help of fellow historians/enthusiasts – in putting names to 11,681 of the 22,822 faces on them.

Which leaves photos of 10,000 Wrens to find... and the faces of more than 19,000 women to identify.

It’s a race against time to find and id them, however. The youngest of the early classes from the post-war intake will be in their late 90s, those of 1981 vintage are over 60.

“The sad fact is that we are running out of time,” said

Mandy. “We are losing ladies quicker than we are finding them and we need to be able to spread the search much wider.”

She says beyond historical value the work has been richly rewarding on a personal level.

“The thought of just gathering data is pretty dry, but actually we are doing so much more.”

“We’ve helped people find old friends they thought they’d never be able to track down, helped families who’ve lost a relative they knew had been in the WRNS but nothing else – we’ve managed to give them background, occasionally share photographs and have found friends who were happy to talk to the family about that relative.”

“We’ve also been able to help families who have a relative with dementia or similar. Sharing photos from a similar time frame they have visual memories that help with conversation and reminiscing.”

If you have any divisional photographs or feel you could assist the project, contact Mandy via [ddpwrens@gmail.com](mailto:ddpwrens@gmail.com).



## Cheers! Deeps pick up Mel’s tab

RAISING a glass together are ex-killick greenie (aka leading electrical engineer) Melvin ‘Mel’ Dobbs and serving submariners, enjoying a weekend in the Big Smoke.

Around ten deeps popped up into Blackfriars’ Public House after participating in their act of remembrance on London’s Embankment, while ex-matelot Mel was in town celebrating his 70th birthday with his teenage granddaughter.

They parked themselves at a table next to Mel who commented: “It’s a few years since I wore that rig.” (nine years’ service back in the 1970s). He takes up the story:

“For the next couple of hours my wife and I had a marvellous time in their company with lots of reminiscing, banter and joking accompanied by a few pints of London’s finest ales. At some point in the proceedings a few more of their colleagues joined us.

“My granddaughter let it slip that we were celebrating my 70th birthday and this was soon followed by a loud rendition of *Happy Birthday* throughout the bar. I was subsequently presented with a 2025 submariner’s enamel poppy pin badge. It so happens that I am the Poppy Appeal organiser for my local British Legion branch and I proudly wore the badge at our local remembrance service in Norwich the following weekend.”

Mel bought the submariners a round... and they reciprocated. A good time was had by all until, like all good things, they have to come to an end. When it came time for the birthday party to end, Mel tried to settle the bill... only to find the submariners had paid for him leaving the veteran “totally gobsmacked”.

Mel continues: “Unfortunately we never got round to exchanging even first names and therefore I do not know the identity of any of the submariners but I know they came down from HMNB Clyde or what I know to be Faslane.

“I have to say that those few hours spent in their company made our weekend very memorable.

The group were a credit to Royal Navy and the Submarine branch in particular and I’m proud of the fact that I was once one of them, albeit along time ago.”

## Farewell to John

ANOTHER living link with WW2 has been broken with the passing of naval aviator John Barnes – possibly the oldest veteran of the 1939-45 conflict on Guernsey – who died aged 104.

The former lieutenant commander settled in the Channel Islands after 23 years in the Service, during which he claimed to have flown every aircraft possible during a career which spanned the war years through to the early 1960s.

Mr Barnes flew Fairey Swordfish on extensive convoy duties in the Mediterranean and later the Atlantic with 814 Naval Air Squadron. Only last summer, present-day personnel made the short hop from RNAS Culdrose to chat with a fellow Flying Tiger and present him with a squadron crest and badge.

The aviator is credited with the joint ‘kill’ of U-89 during the climactic month of the Battle of the Atlantic, May 1943, crippling the boat with depth charges as it moved into position to attack ships in convoy HX237. Surface ships then closed in on the crippled submarine to send it to the bottom with the loss of all hands.

Upon leaving the Navy Mr Barnes worked as a bursar at a boys’ school on Guernsey.

He died at Saumarez Park Manor residential home on January 6.



# Sheep in wolves clothing?

**PERHAPS not, for they sank too much shipping – military and merchant – killed too many sailors, caused too much misery.**

But U-boats were far from the threat to Britain's survival in World War 2 we've viewed them to be, most of their commanders were failures and their crews shared far more in common with their British or American counterparts than the *Übermensch* of Nazi propaganda would have you believe.

So argues author Roger Moorhouse in **Wolfpack** (William Collins, £25), a re-evaluation of the German *guerre de course* against British – and later Allied – supplied lines between 1939 and 1945.

In World War 2 historiography, the U-boat enjoys almost mythical status, up there with the Tiger tank, Spitfire, the fledgling SAS and the vaunted *Waffen SS*.

The author – traditionally more at home on land as a historian of central Europe between 1933 and 1945 – peels back the layers of mythology in a 400-page work which is as well-researched as it is written.

By mining the rich resources left by the war at sea (despite their appalling losses, a lot of official U-boat documents, logs and war diaries survive), personal accounts (the U-boat Archive in Cuxhaven is as much a treasure trove as the RN Submarine Museum in Gosport), and the voluminous material produced by the Royal Navy (intelligence, diaries, monthly assessments, interrogations of crews, after-action reports), the author gets to the heart of the German submarine campaign.

The result is not a traditional history of the Battle of the Atlantic/U-boat war – and it's certainly not a blow-by-blow account of U-boat operations – rather a broad brushstroke of the German submarine campaign, peppered with episodes, actions and anecdotes from the conflict, plus several 'themes' such as the experience of crews and the exploitation by the Nazi propaganda machine.

The result makes for a very breezy read – you can dip and dip out of *Wolfpack* and find nuggets in every chapter... or absorb it from cover to cover. Either way is equally rewarding.

Among the biggest surprises, especially given the criminal regime it served, is how 'clean' a war the U-boat men fought.

While the German Army bloodied its hands with a string of



**U-185 sinks after a concerted attack by aircraft from USS Core in the mid-Atlantic on August 24 1943**

Picture: US National Archives

atrocities in Poland and especially Russia, the German submariner, for the most part, abided by the rules of war at sea; aside from the infamous case of Heinz-Wilhelm Eck, who ordered survivors of the steamer *Peleus* gunned down in the mid-Atlantic to prevent his boat's position being given away, there is little evidence of atrocities and crimes committed by U-boat crews, systematic or otherwise.

That could, of course, be in part because victim and perpetrator frequently ended up on the sea bed.

For the statistics of the U-boat war are almost fantastic viewed from the distance of nearly a century: nearly 3,500 Allied ships sunk totalling almost 15 million tonnes (the British merchant fleet when war began was around 6,700 vessels/18 million tonnes).

For this the *U-boatwaffe* paid a fearful price: of 859 boats which sailed on patrol, 429 never returned, lost with all hands. Some 41,000 Germans went to war in submarines. Only 11,000 survived – a casualty rate of nearly 75 per cent. No-one in any service in any of the warring

nations suffered heavier losses.

And all for nought. For all the rhetoric during and after the war – by both sides – the U-boat never came close to bringing Britain to her knees. However many ships were lost, the Allied merchant fleet never totalled fewer than 14 million tonnes and, by the war's end, was well over twice the size it was at the war's outbreak.

Perhaps Britain – and in time the Allied nations – needed a bogeyman to galvanise the people, industry and military into a concerted response.

It succeeded. Even in the worst year of the war (1942), Allied shipyards outstripped losses. Technological advances such as ever-improving radar, ever longer-range aircraft coupled with escort carriers, weaponry such as the 'hedgehog' and the increasing effectiveness of the convoy escorts and tactics guaranteed the defeat of the U-boat in May 1943.

By then, men such as Günther Prien, who evaded the defences of Scapa Flow to sink the battleship *Royal Oak* in the first weeks of the war, Otto Kretschmer, the most successful U-boat commander of

them all, or the Joachim Schepke – not far behind Kretschmer, although he almost certainly inflated his figures, and a poster boy of the Nazi propaganda machine – and other 'aces' were either dead or in British hands (usually the former).

These success of these aces largely obscures the failure of the wider U-boat arm. Fewer than one in two German submarines even sank a ship, while the aces were disproportionately successful: one in 50 U-boat commanders accounted for around one third of Allied losses.

And after May 1943, despite individual successes, the U-boat was a busted flush: 99 per cent of merchant ships in convoy reached their destination in the final two years of the war.

If this suggests that this is a book packed with statistics, tables and charts, it is not. It is packed with anecdotes, tales of bravery – and cowardice – but mostly a combination of boredom and sheer terror: the monotony of patrols, the monotony of the meals, the monotony of the Atlantic which they sailed for days on end, rarely sighting

anything.

Crew punctuated such tedium with the occasional opportunity to relax: a dip in the ocean in warmer climes, 'crossing the line' ceremonies passing the Equator, sporting contests. Men loved a good shanty or, if the situation allowed, the chance to listen to German radio's weekly request show. In quieter moments they wrote letters home which, if they were lucky, might be given to a passing U-boat returning to base in France or Norway.

And then there was the horror. U-boat commander Erich Topp recalled a prolonged depth charge attack on his U-57 in the summer of 1940:

"From hour to hour, the air in the boat grows more oppressive. Outside the detonations roar, again and again... Then a jolt, the boat rises slightly, then falls again, the men stagger to their feet in the dark. Something scrapes along our flank, from stem to stern. The atmosphere is tense to breaking point."

Under such attack some men broke – a famous scene in the much-lauded TV series *Das Boot* is close to the truth: there were reports of men "trembling and weeping with fear", becoming catatonic or running through a boat uncontrollably – all very much against the Nazi image of the unflappable warrior.

The uncle of the author's mother-in-law was one of the 11,000 U-boat men to survive the war – but at a cost. Aged 22 when he went to sea, he never recovered from the horror of being depth charged and spent the rest of his life in psychiatric institutions. The commander of U-505 blew his brains out when his boat came under attack.

And it was not just the depth charge to be feared. Later in the war the cannon of submarine-hunting aircraft took a fearful toll. Gunner Franz Vorstheim was shot through the throat trying to fend off an attack on U-845. He was carried below for treatment, the wound spraying his blood all over the control room before he expired. There was also the cruel sea to be wary of; one in five of the 262 U-boat men whose boats survived patrols but they did not was washed overboard.

Most boats simply disappeared, their fate unknown to both senior officers at U-boat headquarters,

or their families. The latter would receive a letter perhaps a month after the submarine's last radio contact, but typically had to wait 12 months for a death certificate to be issued.

As the war progressed, there was no sanctuary ashore for the embattled U-boatman. His boat was attacked in its concrete pens by increasingly more powerful bombs, his home town – if he hailed from one of Germany's great conurbations – subjected to ever more devastating air raids.

Crews sent to sea in the final two years of the war were little better than cannon fodder. Young – the average age on some boats was just 20, one ill-fated U-boat skipper was a mere 22 years old – and inexperienced, it led to more accidents and decreasing morale.

"No one had any illusions whatsoever about what we were heading into," recalled Hans Goebeler, who served in the control room of U-505. "At the beginning of the war, our thoughts dwelled on the few comrades who had been lost; now we were struck by how few of our old friends were still alive."

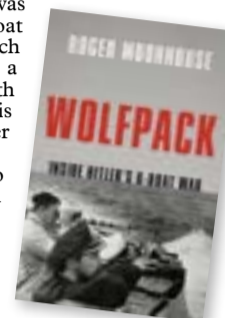
New inventions – the snorkel (to recharge batteries while still submerged), acoustic homing torpedoes, submarines powered by hydrogen peroxide (fast, but the fuel was volatile) – proved to be too little, too little and no match for the collective industry and ingenuity of the Allies.

And while their leader, Karl Dönitz was 100 per cent committed to the National Socialist idea – so much so that Hitler named his successor – often his men were not. Most U-boat captains were well-educated, Christians and hailed from northern Germany, far from the Nazi heartland of Bavaria. Some even openly criticised the Nazi Party.

There was only so far such criticism would be tolerated. Oskar Kusch, commanding U-154, removed Hitler's portrait from the officers' mess, branded the German dictator a madman, listened to BBC rather than German radio broadcasts.

Betrayed by his deputy (who had been passed over for command), Kusch was executed by firing squad. His denouncer got the command he wanted, U-193. She was sunk two days into her patrol.

Such was life and death in the U-boats.



## Solihull at the double for WW2 Wrens



**THERE** have been double celebrations at Solihull's Royal Star and Garter Home these past few weeks involving wartime Wrens Anne Knibb (left) and Janet Patterson (bottom left).

Anne, who was involved with codebreaking efforts, celebrated her 100th birthday, while fellow resident Janet, a spritely 102, belatedly received a medal for her WW2 service with the Women's Royal Naval Service.

Born in Solihull in 1925, Anne remembers hearing the Coventry Blitz in November 1940 – and seeing the sky glow red over the city, a dozen miles from her home.

She supported the war effort firstly by working in a munitions factory in Birmingham, then by joining the Wrens in 1944.

Anne was posted to HMS *Ferret* in Londonderry, where she worked with a team which helped decipher coded enemy messages.

Post-war she married Jimmy

and the couple had four children, while Anne worked as a secretary in a Birmingham office and was employed for several years at Solihull all girls' school Malvern Hall.

Royal Star and Garter staff arranged for Anne's favourite singer, mezzo-soprano Samantha Oxborough, to perform for residents on the morning of her birthday, before hosting a lunch for the centenarian and her family and friends.

As for Janet, neither she or her late husband Dennis felt their endeavours in World War 2 evidently warranted recognition. Neither applied for the 1939-1945 War Medal in recognition of her contribution to victory at the war's end..

Janet served as a film operator – a projectionist, and yes, it was a RN job – showing educational and instructional films to new recruits as part of their training.

She was assigned to HMS *Glendower* near Pwlheli

on the northern shore of Cardigan Bay – a satellite of HMS *Royal Arthur* – training 'hostilities only' sailors.

It was at *Glendower* – which became a Butlins holiday camp – that she met Dennis and the couple enjoyed many decades together until the latter's passing in 2021 at the age of 98.

Her children Gill and David decided the 80th anniversary of victory in WW2 was finally time to ask for the medal.

Gill said: "It was typical of my parents not to apply for the medal, they probably thought they weren't worthy of it. We think mum must be one of the last living people to receive this medal. She's an incredible person, and we're so proud of her."

Her mum added: "This is a big surprise. I never thought I would get a medal and now I have. I just need to wait for the right opportunity to wear it. I'm so grateful to my family for ordering on my behalf."

## Get set for Salford

SALFORD will host this year's Royal Naval Association annual conference and linked events.

Spread over three days (Friday June 12-Sunday 14), the weekend begins with a social evening at Central 11 bar with live entertainment, a warm welcome, guest appearances, and RNA merchandise for sale.

Saturday 13 is conference day at The Lowry Theatre, with the opportunity to take a free boat tour around Salford Quays (once the UK's third busiest port) in the afternoon.

Following the conference there is a three-course mess dinner at the Imperial War Museum North overlooking Manchester Ship Canal.

The final day is dedicated to remembrance and reflection with a drumhead service at Salford Quays.

With the UK Chinese Dragon Boat Festival also taking place over the same weekend at the Quays, shipmates hoping to attend are encouraged to book accommodation early.

# NEW CAPTAIN WELCOMED AT SUPERSESSION EVENT

A NEW Sea Cadets captain has been welcomed into the role at an event in Northern Ireland.

A supersession was held at HMS Hibernia in Lisburn – the first time this ‘handover’ ceremony has been held in Northern Ireland.

As well as allowing over 150 cadets, volunteers and VIPs to say farewell to Captain Neil Downing RN – in the surroundings of the Royal Navy Reserve unit he commanded from 2016 to 2021 – the event also marked the appointment of the first female Captain Sea Cadets, in Captain Hannah MacKenzie VR RN, pictured below.

“Being the first female Captain Sea Cadets is an absolute honour, but I just think it reflects the fact that diversity is really important in the Royal Navy and Sea Cadets,” said Captain MacKenzie.

“I’m looking forward to getting around the country to meet cadets



and volunteers and hear about their experiences.”

Captain MacKenzie joined the Royal Naval Reserve as a Comms Rating (SM) at HMS Calliope while studying at the University of Durham.

She transferred to the regular RN on graduation, joining Britannia Royal Naval College in January 2000 as an Officer Cadet.

Although a knee injury curtailed her regular service, following surgery and rehab she re-joined the RNR in 2002 at HMS Wildfire.

As a Junior Officer she completed sea-time on HMS Albion; on promotion to Lieutenant, she joined the Allied Worldwide Navigation Information System specialisation (AWNIS), participating in numerous exercises supporting UK and NATO commands on navigational safety matters.

She was appointed SO2 Specialist Engagement for Eastern England in November 2016, focussing on youth engagement to raise awareness of the Royal Navy.

Captain MacKenzie took command of HMS Wildfire in July 2020 and led the unit through the pandemic.

Captain MacKenzie formally took up the role of Captain Sea Cadets on January 1, 2026.

She added: “I am honoured to be joining Sea Cadets as Captain – a historic role which reflects the importance of our partnership with the Royal Navy.

“I want to help make that relationship even stronger, as both organisations take on the challenge of expanding our presence up and down the UK.

“I am excited to champion the ‘30 per cent by 2030’ growth ambition [set out in the Strategic Defence Review].

“This is an extraordinary time for the Cadet Forces, with cadets gaining recognition at the highest levels of Government and Defence.”

“This Supersession marks a truly historic moment for Sea Cadets,” said MSSC CEO Guy Holloway.

“The appointment of Captain Hannah as our first female Captain Sea Cadets reflects both her strategic leadership skills and the inclusive, forward-looking future of our charity.

“Her passion for developing people while championing inclusion and opportunity will be vital in helping Sea Cadets grow and provide amazing experiences for even more young people.”

Mr Holloway also paid tribute to Captain Neil Downing, pictured top right, for his “outstanding service and commitment to the role” during four years in which he was “instrumental” in increasing Sea Cadets’ engagement with the Royal Navy.

He also noted that Captain Downing’s commitment to supporting Sea Cadets units had seen him visit almost 150 across the UK – events which showcased his rapport with young people and hands-on approach to joining in with training.



After the announcement that he would be stepping down, Captain Downing told colleagues: “Before joining Sea Cadets, much of my career was dedicated to education, helping young people to discover their potential.

“It has been a privilege as Captain Sea Cadets to build on that foundation and strengthen the bridge between young people and the opportunities available in the Royal Navy and the maritime sector more widely.

“I have been inspired every day by the passion, commitment and talent of our volunteers and cadets. Being Captain Sea Cadets has been the pinnacle of my career.

“I want to say a special thank you to all of the cadets and dedicated volunteers who have made my time as Captain Sea Cadets so incredible.

“I’ve had an amazing time as Captain.

I wish Captain Hannah, my successor, and all of the Royal Navy Cadet Forces the very best for the future.”



## Promotion board success

THIRTY ambitious Leading Cadets stepped up to the challenge of the Southern Area Petty Officer Cadet (POC) Board – an exceptional turnout that reflects both the drive of young people in the Corps and the quality of experience that inspires them to achieve their potential.

The POC rate is the highest a sea cadet can attain and candidates are rigorously assessed on their personal drill, drill instruction, leadership, teaching skills as peer educators, and must also impress a Board President during interview.

Commander (SCC) Ray Mitchell GCGI RNR, Senior Staff Officer for Southern Area and acting as Board President, praised the commitment shown on the day, which was hosted at Farnham Sea Cadets Unit.

He said: “Petty Officer Cadets set the standard in every unit. Younger cadets look up to them – those gold badges really mean something. They show what’s possible with commitment, and they provide an essential link between our junior rates and our adult volunteers.”

Behind these achievements stand the dedicated volunteers who ran the Board and who support cadets throughout the year. The success of so many candidates in a single day reflects not only their personal commitment, but the consistent, high-quality mentoring provided by volunteers across the Corps.

Volunteers who can help develop the next generation of cadet leaders are always welcome. If interested, contact your local Sea Cadets unit.

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# Volunteers honoured for hard work and dedication

SEA Cadets was thrilled to learn of national awards and commendations for several of its incredible volunteers in His Majesty the King's New Year Honours.

Sefton Unit's Commanding Officer, Lt Cdr (SCC) Fay Taylor RNR, (pictured middle) received an MBE, in recognition of more than three decades of voluntary service to the Sea Cadet Corps.

As a driving force behind Sefton Sea Cadets, Fay helped TS Starling to overcome the challenges of the pandemic and flood-damaged premises to win the Stephenson Trophy for best unit in North West Area in 2022 and 2023, followed by the King's Award for Voluntary Service in 2025.

She also helped to save nine other units from closure by taking on temporary Chair duties – ensuring that Sea Cadets remains a vital presence in many economically disadvantaged areas.

At a national level, Fay has played a leading role in the growth of the charity's Royal Marines Cadets section – including providing vital support for the annual

Gibraltar Cup competition at CTCRM Lympstone – and has empowered a total of almost 9,000 cadets to represent the Royal Navy at the National Trafalgar Day Parade during her 22 years as the event's Executive Officer.

She also continues to be a powerful advocate for her fellow volunteers on the National Sea Cadet Advisory Committee.

A British Empire Medal was awarded to CPO (SCC) Chris Gunton, (pictured left) for his voluntary service to Greenwich Sea Cadets since 2012 – where his energy and enthusiasm support so many opportunities for young people, from summer camps to regular boating sessions.

The skills and experience Chris gained during his Royal Navy career helped the unit to make a leading contribution to the London Area Coronation Parade in 2023; achieve a Burgee Award for efficiency in 2024; and gain the ultimate recognition of a King's Award for Voluntary Service in 2025.

He has also been instrumental in

creating a parent and supporters group; refurbishing the unit's premises; securing a local boating hub; and setting up a Royal Marines Cadets detachment.

Lt (SCC) Nadine Daly RNR, the Commanding Officer of Clydebank Sea Cadets, (pictured right) was the proud recipient of a Royal Navy Commendation for her "extraordinary leadership and tireless dedication" to the creation of a thriving, high-achieving unit.

Since taking charge at the height of pandemic disruption in April 2020, she has transformed Clydebank from a unit at risk of closure into a one where cadets are joining offshore voyages, enjoying boating training weekends, and winning medals at Northern Area competitions.

The Corps also saluted the achievement of Salisbury Sea Cadets' Commanding Officer, S/Lt (SCC) Jordyn Bond RNR, who was awarded a British Empire Medal for services to Defence, in recognition of his career as a Senior Scientist at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, Ministry of Defence.



## Royal visit for youngsters

A GERMAN State Visit saw two Sea Cadets volunteers join Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla at a showcase for volunteering at Windsor Castle.

The event was attended by the Federal President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmer, and Germany's First Lady, Elke Bündenbender, and celebrated the impact of The Big Help Out volunteering campaign – which has inspired the launch of a similar initiative for Germany in 2026.

Sub Lieutenant (SCC) Fliss Rundle RNR, Officer in Charge of Bognor Regis Sea Cadets, and S/Lt (SCC) Jordyn Bond RNR, Commanding Officer of Salisbury Sea Cadets, were part of a Youth United Foundation stall alongside other youth volunteers from Scouts and Girlguiding.

The Sea Cadets representatives spoke to guests about how volunteering with the organisation has helped them to change the lives of hundreds of young people – by developing their life skills and confidence, delivering qualifications and supporting unique experiences guided by the customs and traditions of today's Royal Navy.

S/Lt (SCC) Rundle RNR said: "It was a great honour to be able to represent the Sea Cadet Corps in showcasing the amazing work that all of our volunteers do – both as part of the Youth United Foundation and alongside equally committed and passionate people volunteering across a wide range of areas."

"The King, the Queen, the German President and his wife all spoke to each of the volunteers in the Inner Hall of Windsor Castle, showing a genuine interest in the good work that they do."

"The King in particular was keen to discuss the number of cadets across the UK and how we maintain the throughput of younger volunteers to balance the older generations."

S/Lt (SCC) Bond RNR added: "This was a unique opportunity to showcase the dedicated service and outstanding contributions of Sea Cadets' volunteers to Their Majesties the King and Queen."

"Notably, both the King and the President of Germany highlighted the significant role of uniformed cadet forces in delivering positive societal impact and creating tangible benefits for the United Kingdom."

Sea cadets across the UK will be taking part in The Big Help Out between June 5 and 8 2026, with units looking to attract new volunteers with special events and open days.

The Sea Cadet Corps was honoured to launch the initiative for the Coronation in May 2023, at the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich – where more than 300 cadets performed the World's Largest Piping Lesson, as verified by the Guinness Book of World Records.

Thanks to The Big Help Out's success over the past three years, the President of Germany has instigated a similar volunteering initiative, "Der Ehrentag", which will take place on May 23 2026.



# POOLE UNIT WELCOMES VIPs

IN ONE of his final visits as Captain Sea Cadets, Captain Neil Downing RN attended a Parade Night at Poole Unit.

He expressed himself, "very impressed" with the classes he observed on topics from meteorology to drill.

Captain Downing spent the evening chatting with cadets and volunteers in what was encouraged to be a two-way conversation, with the Captain positively inviting questions.

The cadets in turn demonstrated their confidence and did not hold back.

At the end of the evening, Captain Downing made several presentations including one to Mike English – a former CO of Poole Sea Cadets, and subsequently a District Officer – in recognition of no less than 50 years of service to Sea Cadets as an adult volunteer.

Presenting the Captain's 50 Year Medal, Captain Downing praised Mr English's huge impact – which included a 15-year tenure as Commanding Officer at TS Drax, during which time the unit won the Stephenson Trophy (for best unit in Southern Area) four times and the Canada Trophy as best unit in the UK for 1991.

The visit followed a successful AGM for Poole when Commanding Officer, Lt (SCC) Reece Oliver RNR, revealed that during the last year, its 60 cadets had attained a grand total of 366 qualifications.

Unit President, Rear Admiral Nick Lambert, said that the volunteer instructors had been "absolutely fabulous" and commented on how the multiple activities offered by the unit provided "a considerable benefit to the community".

The Mayor of Poole Cllr Mark Howell, who is also a Patron of Poole Sea Cadets, thanked the volunteers for their "wonderful" dedication, which he said had helped to "keep the structure of Poole's society going."

As well as presenting awards, the Mayor also viewed plans for the proposed new unit headquarters, for which planning permission has recently been secured.

The new premises is the subject of a new fundraising push and will enable the unit to accept more young people from their waiting list and improve the experience of cadets and volunteers alike.



## Chief executive celebrates achievement at Salisbury

SALISBURY Sea Cadets hosted their Annual Awards Evening to celebrate the incredible achievements of its young people.

The unit was honoured to welcome Guy Holloway, CEO of Marine Society & Sea Cadets, who enjoyed the opportunity to learn about the completion of several high-level qualifications and even presented some of the top awards.

These included Best Sea Cadet for Able Cadet Tamar; Best Royal Marines Cadet for Marine Cadet Indiana; Best Junior Sea Cadet for Able Junior Cadet Fred; and Best Drill and Bearing for Ordinary Cadet Elizabeth.

"This brilliant event brought the community together in a celebration of youth development," said Mr

Holloway.

"The huge range of individual awards, qualifications and promotions achieved by the unit's cadets reflect not only the hard work and talent of these remarkable young people, but the tireless dedication of the outstanding team of volunteers here – led by their Commanding Officer, Sub Lieutenant (SCC) Jordyn Bond RNR.

"The commitment and teamwork shown by Salisbury Unit's cadets throughout the year has made them a huge asset to their community." He added: "And I congratulate the unit's instructors and trustees for creating a welcoming learning environment which has allowed every single young person here to fulfil their potential."

# GROWING ON AND OFF THE COURT

**BASKETBALL:** THE UK Armed Forces Basketball Team stepped onto the international stage with renewed energy, strong leadership, and a roster packed with experience. Under the guidance of newly appointed Team Manager PO Callum Onions and Women's Assistant Coach Sergeant Ashley Palmer, now in his third year, the squad arrived determined to make a statement.

## A Men's Team Built on Experience and Grit

The men's side featured a blend of returning talent and standout performers. Among them was one



of the tournament's top officers and a key presence on the court, LT Harry Stubbington. With only two true big men available this year, LT Stubbington impact was indispensable, delivering dominant performances whenever he checked in.

A welcome addition to the line-up was LH Aaron Nielsen, making his long-awaited return after a posting in the United States. His experience and composure brought an extra layer of confidence to the team.

At the guard position, the squad benefited from the consistency and leadership of Mne Oliver Adams, a standout from last season who again rose to the challenge. He executed the game plan flawlessly and took up the role of starting point guard, paired alongside Nielsen to form a reliable and dynamic backcourt.

Their collective effort paid off: the men's team secured a well-earned win, showcasing discipline, teamwork, and the trademark tenacity for which the Royal Navy contingent has become known.

## Women's Team Full of Promise and Raw Talent

The women's team entered the tournament with enthusiasm and a wealth of skill. The squad included LH Codey Scott, LET Andrea Craddock, AB S Brooks, AB Darcy

Pafford (the best player on the team for the tournament), and PO Jones, along with Pop ERI I-Molyneux O'Callaghan.

Although the results didn't fall in their favour this year, the players demonstrated impressive spirit and potential. Their development and team chemistry continue to grow, building solid foundations for future success.

## Leadership That Sets the Tone

Across both squads, the influence of the Royal Navy was unmistakable. The Navy's competitive edge, work ethic, and sense of presence brought a unique intensity to the tournament environment. This year's achievements were driven by the steady leadership of PO Callum Onions, Sgt Ashley Palmer, and Lieutenant Harry Stubbington, whose commitment shaped a focused and resilient unit.

## Proud of Every Player

Every athlete who represented the UK Armed Forces this year delivered with pride and purpose. Whether returning veterans or rising talents, each player played a role in strengthening the programme and setting the standard for seasons ahead.

One thing is already clear: the



UK Armed Forces Basketball Team continue to grow, compete, and inspire, on and off the court.

# TAKING AIM FOR A STRONG 2026

Images by: LPhot Kayleigh Stephenson

**NETBALL:** THE Royal Navy Netball Open and 2nd Team squads continued their strong preparation for the 2026 Inter-Services Championship with a highly valuable training fixture against the University of Chichester at the Ravelin Sports Centre.

This extended match play provided an excellent opportunity for both squads to test combinations, refine structures, and put recent training focus areas into practice. The partnership with Chichester University proved especially fruitful, with the students offering competitive opposition that allowed RN coaches to trial new tactics and assess potential pairings ahead of the March championship.

Last year, the RN Open Team impressed the netball community by defeating the RAF at the Inter-Services Championship - a win attributed not only to athletic performance but to



the strong, positive culture built within the squad. Athletes and staff alike have committed to an environment where every member can thrive, and the impact of that ethos was evident throughout the 2025 season.

With sights firmly set on securing more victories this year, both squads will soon head to Guernsey in February for a demanding five-day pre-Inter-Services training camp. The visit will include a series of intense matches designed to sharpen decision-making under pressure and further strengthen team cohesion.

The Royal Navy Netball Association extends its thanks to Chichester University for the competitive training match and their continued support in helping the squads prepare for the challenges ahead.



# DINNER AND A SHOW AT HMS SULTAN

**BOXING:** A spectacular display of amateur boxing was enjoyed by all, as the Royal Navy went toe-to-toe with the Army, at the HMS Sultan Boxing Dinner Show.

A combined Royal Navy team, from His Majesty's Ships Sultan, Collingwood, Nelson, 42 Cdo, 45 Cdo, and 847 Sqn took on personnel from the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME), The Duke of Lancaster Regiment, and guest fighters from Crawley ABC, Woking ABC, Golden Ring ABC, Poseidon, Baker Street ABC.

The competition was played out in a highly electric atmosphere, with the Show including a display by a Corps of Drums from the Gosport Division Royal Marine Volunteer Cadet Corps and a parade of the fighters.

The Boxing Dinner provides the perfect platform for novice boxers to take those first steps into a competitive boxing ring. In total, eleven action packed bouts were on the cards, and a total of five Army vs Navy bouts, all consisting of three, three-minute rounds.

The Fight of the night was the bout between AB Eccles and Archie Minter with the Crawley ABC boxer claiming the victory in front of the excited crowd.

Presentations were made to winning fighters by VIPs including Director People and Training, RAdm Jude Terry CB OBE, the Commanding Officer(CO) HMS Sultan, Capt Mark Hamilton, the CO REME, Lt Col Ed Mcann, the CO BRNC, and RN Boxing Chairman, Capt Andy Bray, REME Boxing Chairman, Brig (RETD) Simon Waddington and the Mayor of Gosport, CLLR Kristen Bradley.

Sultan Boxing Show Director, Leading Physical Training Instructor Tommy Everitt said: "It was brilliant to see such great boxing on display. For many of the fighters, this was their first time in the ring, especially in front of a crowd, and they should all be very proud. We hope to see many of them back in the ring, developing their skills and competing for the Navy Boxing Squad."

"Well done to our Royal Navy boxers and thank you to the REME fighters, Duke of Lancaster Regiment fighters for making it a great night."



# PAYING YOUR DEWS IN LIFTING VICTORY

**POWERLIFTING:** A BRITISH Forces Gibraltar Power Lifter wins first place in the 2025 British Powerlifting National Championships.

Leading Physical Trainer (LPT) Sam Dew, from British Forces Gibraltar has won the 74kg class at the 2025 British Powerlifting National Championships, the pinnacle of British powerlifting. This flagship event, held at the NEC in Birmingham from December 5-7, featured the best powerlifting athletes competing for national titles. Only the top 15 athletes in each weight class earn the right to compete. Sam qualified for the 74kg class by winning the category in 2024.

Powerlifting is a strength sport made up of three disciplines: the squat, with the loaded barbell across their shoulders the lifter squats down then returns to an erect position; the bench press, lowering the weighted barbell to their chest lying on a bench, holding it motionless, and then pressing it back up to an arms-length, locked position, and; the deadlift, which requires grasping the barbell on the floor and lifting it until the body is in a fully erect position with knees and hips locked and shoulders back.

It is a sport of maximal, controlled strength, emphasising technique and raw power rather than explosive speed, in contrast to Olympic Weightlifting. At the national level, competition is incredibly intense, and success depends not only on strength but also on precision, strategy and composure under pressure.

The athletes compete in weight and age classes and are allowed three attempts at each discipline, aiming to lift the most weight possible in each lift, with their best successful lift from each category added-up to determine a total score.

Sam, one of the leading physical training instructors for British Forces Gibraltar, opened his campaign with an impressive 272.5kg squat, which placed him in the lead after the first event. Motivated by the incredible atmosphere and drawing on his experience and composure against fierce competition, Sam then pressed 177.5kg on the bench, a 5kg personal best, extending his lead heading into the deadlifts.

Aware that the class included several exceptional dead-lifters, Sam approached his final lifts with careful strategy to protect his advantage. Despite the pressure Sam remained focused and calm stepping up to the final event and rose to the occasion as champions do. Sam pulled an impressive 270kg, matching his personal best and bringing his total to 720kg, a 7.5kg Personal Best in competitive power lifting. This outstanding performance



secured victory in the 74kg class and has met the qualification standard for Team GBR, earning Sam a selection place to represent Great Britain at the 2026 European Powerlifting Championships in Malta. 2025 National Champion Sam Dew said: "Powerlifting is a marathon, not a sprint, and my win at the Nationals was the culmination of years of hard training and repetition of the same 3 movements, day in day out. I am extremely proud of my achievement and very excited and honoured to represent team GBR at the upcoming European finals in Malta. Powerlifting is a great sport, and it

is for everyone. The community is filled with friendly and encouraging athletes and I hope my recent win can inspire some new people to take up the sport." Commander British Forces Gibraltar, Commodore Tom Guy said: "We are all delighted for Sam and very proud of his incredible achievement. He is one of our leading physical training instructors at British Forces Gibraltar and his achievements not only reflect his dedication to his role, but the high quality of people we are fortunate to have in Gibraltar and in the UK Armed Forces. We are looking forward to following his journey with Team GBR in 2026."

# A FROSTBITE SHOWDOWN

**SHOOTING:** THE Royal Navy Small-bore Shooting Club (RNSSC) gathered at Worplesdon Target Rifle Club in Surrey for the eagerly anticipated Frostbite Competition. Just a day after freezing temperatures gripped the area, competitors were met with milder conditions, setting the stage for an exciting day of marksmanship.

Now in its second year, the Frostbite Competition serves as an end-of-year highlight, offering new members a chance to experience the thrill of competitive shooting while connecting with the wider shooting community. This year's event drew 17 entries, including representatives from the Royal Navy, Royal Navy Reserve, Army, Police Sport UK, retired service personnel, and civilians. The competition tested a range of skills across three challenging stages. First, competitors tackled a 60-shot match at 25 yards, demanding pinpoint accuracy to hit the centre of the target, where even the smallest error could cost

valuable points. The second stage ramped up the intensity, requiring shooters to fire 10 shots at multiple targets within a tight 90-second window, blending speed with precision. The final stage introduced



25-yard skirmisher targets, small elliptical shapes that had to be hit as many times as possible within 60 seconds. This round tested not only accuracy and speed but also rapid reloading and quick decision-making. To level the playing field, a handicap system was implemented, with top shooters

incurring a 10 point penalty and newer participants gaining a 10 point advantage. This approach ensured a fair and inclusive competition for all.

The RNSSC celebrated a successful day, with three of its newest members competing for the Tyro Medal. Lt David Wilkinson RN emerged victorious, narrowly edging out AET Ben Francis thanks to his consistent performance in the time-limited matches. Meanwhile, Lt Helen Tamlyn RN dominated the main competition, securing first place in all three categories a fitting end to her stellar year, which included triumphs at the NSRA National Meeting in August. As the RNSSC wraps up a fantastic 2025 year, plans are already underway for an exciting year of training and competitions in 2026. The club is always on the lookout for new members, regardless of experience. Whether you're a seasoned shooter or a complete beginner, the RNSSC invites you to join and represent the Royal Navy in this rewarding sport.

# ROWERS GO FOR GLORY

**ROWING:** THE ROYAL Navy Indoor Rowing Championships 2025 were conducted as a hybrid event, with live racing hosted at HMS Temeraire, with those deployed and unable to attend in person able to submit remote verified performances prior to the live event. Consequently 40 'ergers', with 22 racing 'live', competed in 69 race slots for: 37x 2000m and 32x 500m.

Whilst there were some world class age group performances, there were also significant achievements by others new to this demanding sport, with many setting seasonal and personal bests. Race categories and medal opportunities incorporated Men/Women, Hwt/Lwt within 10-year age group ranges.

Trophies were awarded to the fastest 2K performances for Men & Women, Hwt & Lwt, Masters (>40) & Seniors (<40). Fastest RN Woman over 2K was PO Dani Brook (NAVY CSF) with 7 mins 29.9 secs, in the W Hwt (20-29 age group), to take the Senior 2k trophy. Fastest Master Woman was Emily Loftus (TEMERAIRE) in a world class 7 mins 11.7 secs (40-49 age group).

Seasoned Men's Lwt performer Adrian Walker (SDA JPT) with 7 mins 34.5 secs (60+ age group) took the Masters 2k Lwt Trophy with Lt Ollie Coulson (BRNC) taking the Men's Lwt Senior title rowing with an excellent 6 mins 41.6 secs (20-29 age group). Some stunning performances were set in the Men's Hwt 2k, in the knowledge that multi-World Championship medallist CSgt James Wade (30 Cdo) was on a career course and only able to compete over 500m. Lt Cdr Andy Cobbold (SULTAN) rowed 6 mins 16.9 secs (40-49 age group) to win the Masters title. The best 2K performance of the day was the ever-developing talent of LET Ewan McCrorie (FSUB), rowing 6 mins 12.3 secs (20-29 age group) to win the Men's Senior 2k title. Both these ergers have benefited from commitment to the demands of the RN Indoor Performance Programme under the tutelage of Coach Jim Thomson. McCrorie has set some phenomenal training performances on GB Rowing's world Class Development/Olympic Pathway programme.

500m erg sprints present a slightly different physiological challenge as time appears to extend exponentially, beyond the realm of possibility, over the last 150m. High level performances (mins:secs) were set by Men's Hwts: Wade (1 min 18.8 secs, 40-49), McCrorie 1.19.1 20-29), Cobbold (1.20.6 40-49). For Lwts: CPOPT



Rich Charrett (NELSON) won the 30-39 in 1.36.6. The Women's 500m Hwt categories saw age group wins for Brook (1.41.1, Hwt 20-29) and Musn Nicola Naven (CTCRM Band) 1.52.5 (Lwt 20-29).

CPOPT Darran 'Dazza' Hoare (TEMERAIRE) was the deserved recipient of the annual Doug Wylie Memorial Award for 'Courage and Commitment', in recognition of his outstanding commitment and determination to train and race, leading up to and beyond a full knee replacement, to still post high level 2k performances close to 6 mins 30 secs.

## RN AT BRITISH ROWING INDOOR CHAMPS 2025

Shortly after the RN Indoor Rowing Champs, 20 RN 'ergers' competed at the British Rowing Indoor Championships (BRIC), held at the NEC Birmingham, winning 5 medals and also taking 3x UKAF 2K titles, with many setting seasonal or personal bests, overcoming the arid atmosphere within the arena. The outstanding performance of the day was Lt Ollie Coulson (BRNC) winning the Men's Lwt Open 2k in 6 mins 35.6 secs. Notwithstanding Coulson's Gold Medal, Lt Cdr Rich Galpin (Navy People) was a triple gold medallist competing as a para-rower in the Adaptive IAR6 Categories of 2k, 4mins and 1 min – all in relatively short order, overcoming the inevitable onset of fatigue much better than his competition! Perennial high achiever Lt Cdr Stu Moss (SULTAN) took a Bronze in the Men's Hwt 54-59 2k in a world class 6 mins 31.7 secs.

There were many other notable RN Rowing Association performances with Emily Loftus (RNRA/Temeraire) taking 4th in the Women's Hwt 40-49 2k in 7 mins 16.7 secs, then taking much longer to recover on completion! Lt Cdr Andy Cobbold (SULTAN) realised the benefits of committing to a demanding long term structured training regime with a personal best of 6 mins 14.7 secs to finish 5th in the highly competitive Men's Hwt 40-49 2k, where nearly 100 ergers raced simultaneously. He also finished 5th in his 500m in 1 min 18.9 secs. Adrian Walker (RNRA/SDA JPT) was 4th and 5th respectively in the Men's Lwt 60+ 500m (1 min 40.6 secs) and 2k (7 mins 38.8 secs).

LET Ewan McCrorie (FSU-B) has set some phenomenal training and racing performances over the past 18 months, enabling selection for GB Rowing's World Class Start Development/Olympic Pathway programme. Whilst what might appear to be a lowly 25th in the Men's Hwt Open 2k in 6 mins 14.3 secs, this belies the fact that there were only 3 other non-current international GB rowers ahead of him and he set the fastest RN 2k of the day. McCrorie later rowed an 8th placed Men's Hwt Open 500m in 1 min 19.4 secs and joined Coulson (Men's Open Lwt) and Loftus (Women Masters Hwt) to win UKAF Land & Sea fastest 2k titles.

RN Indoor Rowing move on to compete at the World Rowing Virtual Championships (5k, 1k, 1min) in Feb 2026 and the World Rowing 'live in person' Championships (2k and 500) later in the year.

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# Divers complete 180-mile trek for colleague

ROYAL Navy Divers completed an epic 180-mile trek along the south coast to help a comrade.

The team at Bravo Diving Unit 1 in Plymouth – who deal with unexploded ordnance call-outs across the South West, most notably in 2023 with a WW2 bomb unearthed in Keyham – were spurred into action by the plight of a colleague.

Petty Officer (Diver) James King was a serving member of the team prior to a recent sea deployment and was due to re-join last summer before being diagnosed with Stage 2 bowel cancer.

James, who's served his nation for nearly two decades, has since been receiving treatment – which is progressing well – but the diagnosis has, understandably, had a significant impact on his life and family.

His fellow divers decided to get together to support James, who is serving in the naval base with the Plymouth Support Group for personnel recovering from serious illnesses and injuries.

The result, organised by Bravo's colleagues in Alpha Diving Squadron from the two squadrons' parent Diving and

Threat Exploitation Group (DTXG), was a lovely walk. In December. Between the south coast's two great naval cities. Wearing diving kit.

At any one time over the past eight days, four members of DTXG, have been plodding along the coast from their HQ at Horsea Island, to BDU1's home in Devonport Naval Base.

Whilst the SABA kit is state of the art and just what the divers need to do their jobs in the water, out of it, it's a 30kg millstone (on their backs rather than around their necks).

That's not been the worst of the 180-mile odyssey, however.

"The weather has been the most challenging aspect of this task," said Lieutenant Matt Bowden, Officer in Charge of Bravo Diving Unit 1.

"With storm Bram hammering the coastline, most notably around Lulworth Cove, it's been extremely difficult for the team. On one day in particular the combined ascent was in excess of 1300 metres which is higher than Snowdonia."

Most importantly, the walk has so far raised more than £14,500 for the cause.



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*The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of the MOD*

## Deaths



**Rev Dr Charles Stewart (Rtd Chaplain of the Fleet).** Served from 1975 to 2000 in HMS Intrepid, Hermes, Invincible, Culdrose, Faslane, Drake, Raleigh, Dartmouth, and Nelson. Awarded Falklands and Bosnia medals. Died November 8, 2025, aged 79.

**Commander Hugh "Bob" Pearsall (RN/RNR).** Joined the Royal Navy at HMS Ganges as a boy in 1953. He became a PO Seaman before being commissioned and transferring into the FAA as an observer. He left the RN in 1977 and continued his service with the RNR from 1978 to 1983. Ships and establishments served in included HMS Tyne, Torquay, Eagle, Ark Royal, President and Heron, where he was an instructor. Life member of RNA and former chairman of HMS President's Old Hands Association. Died November 29, aged 88.

**CPO (ERA)(SM) Leslie 'Monty' Burton.** Served onboard HMSMs Safari and Astute during WW2. Died 18 December 25 aged 101.

**LCH(SM) Thomas 'Butters' Stevenson.** Served onboard HMS Trenchant and HMS Triumph between 2018 and 2025. Died 3 January.

**Robert George Smith (AB).** Served from 1947 (aged 17) to 1955 based in Portsmouth. Served on HMS Sheffield C24 Cruiser. Tours of two years in Malta, West Indies, Middle East, USA, Canada, and Cuba. HMS Sheffield escorted HMS Gothic on which Queen Elizabeth travelled too Fiji for her tour. Completed Guard of Honour at the Cenotaph in London. Died 27 December 2025, aged 95 years. Possibly the last crew member of HMS Sheffield C24.

## Ask Jack



**HMS Collingwood:** I recently found this old photograph in an elderly uncle's house after he died at the age of 96 earlier this year. My uncle was in the Army but his surname was Hunt and I was hoping someone could tell me more about the image.

Sue Forknall  
[forknall2@virginmedia.com](mailto:forknall2@virginmedia.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](mailto:MikeRanson@btinternet.com)  
01622 812356

**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 and I am interested in his RN career.

John Williamson  
[j.williamson108@btinternet.com](mailto: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](mailto:Debbielaws2002@yahoo.co.uk)

**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](mailto:Oldridgesteven@gmail.com) or phone  
07821 788144

**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](mailto:Alastairduncan215@gmail.com)

**HMS Mercury 1986-1987:** I am after video or photos of the passing-out parades at Mercury in 1986 and 1987, when I was the guard commander.

RS(SM) George Carnegie  
07442 174176 or  
[carnegieen@talktalk.net](mailto:carnegieen@talktalk.net)

## Reunions

**The Penelope Association:** The 39th annual reunion takes place at the Best Western Carlton Hotel, 282 North Promenade, Blackpool, Lancashire FY1 2EZ from February 13-15 2026. It is open to all who served in the cruiser 1938-44 or frigate 1963-92 (or are relatives of those who did so). For details of membership and the reunion, contact [Secretary@hms-penelope.com](mailto:Secretary@hms-penelope.com)

**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](mailto:askhamd3@gmail.com) or call 07773651213.

**HMS Lincoln 1968/69 Commission:** We have had a reunion for the last 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 Sutcliff 01282616855 or [mikesutcliff1958@outlook.com](mailto:mikesutcliff1958@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](mailto:Romft1@gmail.com)

### NOTICEBOARD ENTRIES

■ Notices for this page should be brief, clearly written or typed and addressed to – The Editor, Navy News, Navy Command, Leach Building, HMS Excellent, Portsmouth PO2 8BY, or email: [news@royalnavymail.mod.uk](mailto:news@royalnavymail.mod.uk) or [editor@royalnavymail.mod.uk](mailto:editor@royalnavymail.mod.uk)

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**Submissions for the Deaths, Reunions and Ask Jack columns in next month's Noticeboard must be received by February 12 2026**

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