GUNLINE

Merry Christmas

ROYAL FLEET AUXILIARY

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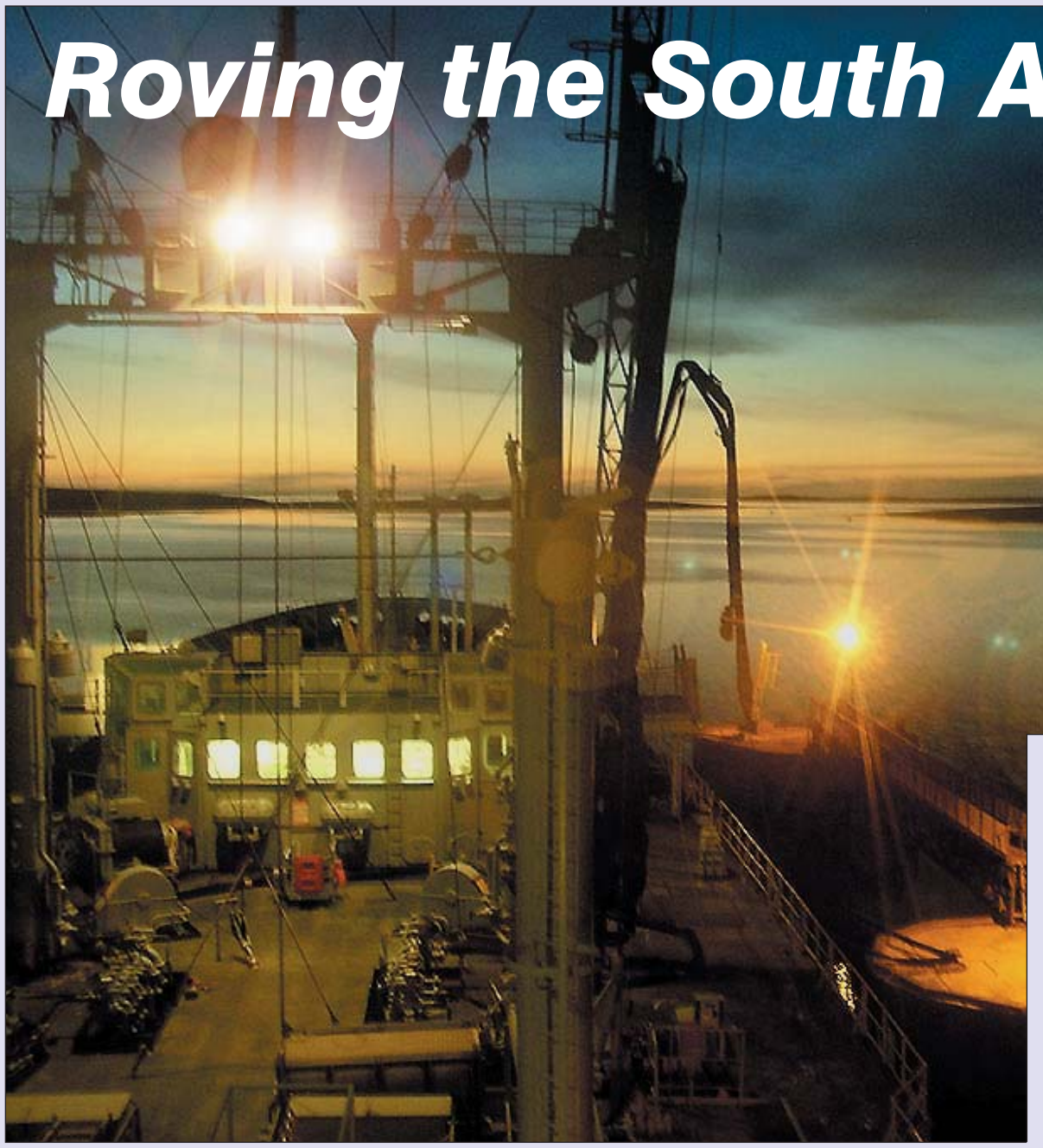
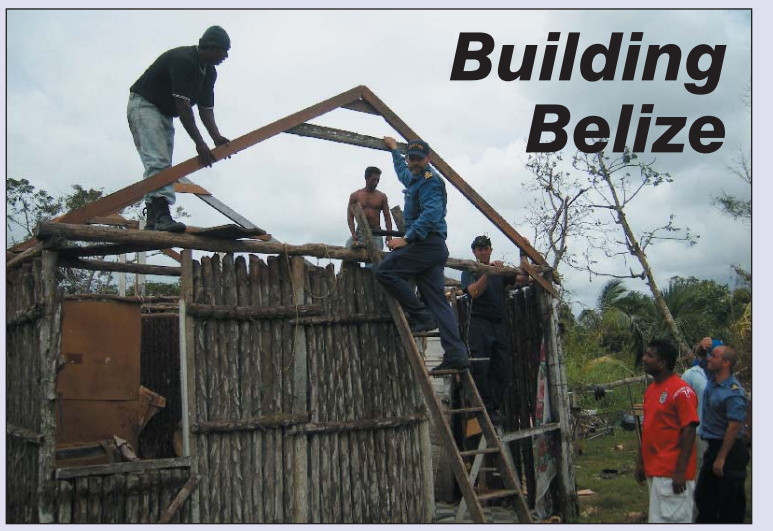
Roving the South Atlantic



This year a lot of focus has been drawn on the South Atlantic 25 years ago, but of course the RFA has maintained a presence there almost continuously ever since. Today the RFA is still working hard patrolling the Falklands and other Islands to stay in touch with the remote local communities and maintain a UK presence around the Islands. As this year's commemorations closed, it was time to get back to work. Captain Paul Minter provides an insight into life there in 2007….. **See pages *14 & 15***

Building Belize



As Wave Ruler returns to Devonport after her 18 month deployment, we look back at what has been one of the most successful deployments in APT(N) history. **See pages *2 & 3***

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From the Commodore...

The Challenges of Trust and Communication

For those of you who missed my last article I want to highlight a couple of paragraphs and use these to develop a theme for this article. For those of you who gained the immense enjoyment of reading the last article, I make no apology for reminding you of these important words:

The Navy Board endorsed:

"the immediate development and implementation of the evolved RFA which will provide a more integrated and effective organisation and reassure the long term employment of the RFA."

I posed the question in that last article: "what does that mean to us?" and went on to explain as succinctly as I could that the Blue Ensign will continue to fly on UK Royal Navy Auxiliary shipping for the foreseeable future. This endorsement of your worth is a product, (as I keep telling you,) of the fact that we are recognised as a *World Leader in Versatile, Valued and Integrated Afloat Support.* I also reminded you that for this endorsement to remain, we have to stay that way and that we can only do so if we adapt to our circumstances in this constantly changing and unstable world. We can do this by embracing and reinforcing our values of *Focus on Delivery, Reliability, Cost Effectiveness,* and of course *Learning*. I reminded you that these RFA Service values are over and above my expectation of your personal values of *Loyalty, Honesty and Integrity*.

I can hear some of you saying "Well that's easy then, if we are doing so well, we can just carry on as we have always done" It may or may not come as a surprise if I tell you that there could be nothing further from the truth and I will now give you a few thoughts on the subject, leaving you to come to your own conclusions as to why.

Our culture is a strange mix, it being the product of a broad mix of people from diverse backgrounds with many different expectations and experiences. We do have a high age profile in some areas and while this is good in some respects, it does mean that many will have expectations set in the early 1970s. These expectations will have been influenced by people who themselves may have had long careers spanning 30 or 40 years. So it is entirely possible to detect or attribute some influence from as far back as the 1930s and 40s! How the world has changed since then. I might add that you are spread around the globe and it is jolly difficult to get you all together in one place at one time for a chat, so that I might bring your expectations up to date.

Now, if I set the content of this previous paragraph against the very recent feedback from the psychologists of the Institute of Naval Medicine (some of you will have contributed to the focus groups in the past couple of months) I might reasonably deduce that we have problems with communication. They certainly pointed out communications as an area of concern and went on to highlight other issues of trust; so I can do no better than take these as the themes for the next couple of articles. Please do not take any of what follows as actual or implied criticism at a personal level, (unless of course your conscience dictates otherwise!) because from where I sit, trust and communication are both very serious issues that all of us must attend to in a dispassionate manner if we are to deliver and retain the trust of others and that vital endorsement by the Navy Board.

So, taking the theme of trust as my starting point, I have visited a couple of ships recently and asked of various groups "do you trust me"? I usually get a stony silence and some shuffling on the seats with a mumbled "not really"! OK, I recognise that you may be shy - but when I think about the reason for this response, I can only wonder if it stems from the traditional sailor/ship owner relationship of the 60s and 70s. If I refer you back to my thoughts about expectations, I am left wondering whether I can realistically expect this attitude to change in the next 30 or 40 years? How do I convince you that for your sake, as well as that of the greater good, I would want anything other than to live up to that endorsement and deliver what is required of us by the Navy Board? I know that some of you will respond by citing recent changes such as Leave Harmonisation, Concessionary Travel and even Pay Settlements as reasons not to trust "management" (a rather anachronistic term in this sense) but bear in mind that change is not something I initiate for any other reason than necessity or betterment, whether this be for the short or longer-term benefit. I will always welcome a considered challenge and logical argument, but find it really difficult to come to terms with a flat rejection or unrealistic expectation. Can I ask you to ponder this? Please do give this some careful thought, particularly with reference to the current level of public sector pay settlements.

As an aside, you might also ponder the fact that having elicited a silent response to the first question of "Do you trust me,"? I have then asked the assembled company if they trust their Captain, to which the response has been a similar muttering and shuffling! Now I know we all love to have a bit of a moan about "*The Old Man*" but on a dark and stormy night, whether it be in the busy shipping lanes or the rock strewn passages of the Norwegian Coast, I guess you must have some faith and trust in his abilities and indeed those of the team around him, because after all that team is you!

Although there is plenty more to be said and written on the subject, space is limited and I must draw some conclusions about trust. I believe trust lies at the heart of our business at sea and every one of us, regardless of our rank or job, is dependent upon any number of others. We draw strength from those around us and accept that to succeed and survive in the hostile environment of the seas, we have little option but to trust that others will do their best for the team and that they will put this obligation before their personal interest. We know that this team spirit, founded on trust, delivers extraordinary results whether this be on the sports field, in business, or during conflict. Trust is already present as we go about our daily business but on the basis of my own observation (that silence and shuffling on the seat) and the observations of the psychologists I referred to earlier, I think we need more of it. If you accept this (and I trust you will) then we need to know where trust comes from and how we can increase it. It is my belief that trust comes from each and every one of us and while trust is earned, it begins with the realisation that if we accept that we already trust others to some degree then we can look to ourselves to trust others more. We can promote trust within ourselves, we can increase our trust in others, as well as encouraging others to place their trust in us. Of course, if others are to trust us we must display those personal values of *Loyalty, Honesty and Integrity* and it also applies equally well at the next levels up. We must demonstrate our collective values of *Focus on Delivery, Reliability, Cost Effectiveness* and we must *Learn*.

Although it is not a subject to treat in a less than serious manner I cannot resist the temptation to finish this without that well-worn phrase: *"Trust me – I'm a sailor"*!

As ever, stay happy, but above all stay safe wherever you are.

After 18 Months - 21 Ports 15 Homes Rebuilt.... WAVE

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship Wave Ruler returns to the UK after the most successful deployment on counter drugs operations in recent history. She also gave disaster relief to a village destroyed hit by Hurricane Dean.

3/O (LS) Jamie Smith talks about the deployment.

RFA Wave Ruler's four major drug busts amassed a record haul of over 11 tonnes of cocaine, bound for the streets of the UK, Europe and the US. Her operational capabilities were enhanced for the duty by the embarkation of the Royal Navy's 218 Lynx flight and the Law Enforcement Detachment from the US Coastguard, thus boosting the ship's ability to conduct the highly successful deployment.

On top of the drug seizures she also shadowed and monitored seven hurricanes and most recently carried out disaster relief operations with HMS Portland to help Xaibe village in Belize, destroyed by hurricane Dean.

Many of the locals were touched by the help and assistance the crew of RFA Wave Ruler provided. Some acts were as simple as offering assurance and giving them tools. Members of the Wave Ruler's crew also helped with rebuilding homes for the local population.

The first of four major drugs seizures was in September last year from the fishing boat Donna Marie when intercepted after a night-time chase. The fishing boat's crew dramatically decided to set fire to the vessel in the hope of destroying their illicit cargo. Although ablaze, the crew from RFA Wave Ruler, the US Coastguard and 218 Flight managed to salvage the drugs cargo as well rescuing the crew from the fishing vessel.

The following month the motor vessel Miss Edith was tracked and boarded and again another significant illegal drugs haul was confiscated.

In November last year the fishing vessel Oliana 1 was stopped and boarded in a dawn raid after ignoring radio calls. Despite the crew's claim they were merely fishing, the search found bundles of cocaine rather than the claimed barrels of fish in the holds.

This latest seizure made her the most successful British drug busting ship in recent years.

The final drugs bust of the deployment took place in September this year when a smuggler's aircraft dropped a bag of drugs in-shore from the air. This drop was intercepted in international waters off the south coast of the Dominican Republic. This method of seizure was a first for RFA Wave Ruler.

The patrol also involves standing by to aid the British Dependencies in case of threats and damage by hurricanes and other emergencies. Therefore, on 15 August this year the ship was on standby for disaster relief and followed the hurricane across the Caribbean before the storm slammed into Belize causing severe devastation.

The Belize Government made a request for assistance to the FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office). On Wednesday 22nd the HQ team and the HLS team

FORT GEORGE RESCUE

1 October 2007 RFA Fort George, while en route to join a major NATO Exercise in the Adriatic, was called to provide medical assistance to a passenger on board the ferry Riviera Del Covero. The ship' Medical Technician was transferred across by RHIB to assess the condition of the 21 year old Italian male casualty who was suffering from severe breathing difficulties. It quickly became apparent that his condition was serious enough to warrant an immediate medical evacuation by helicopter. One of the ship's Merlin Helicopters from 700M Naval Air Squadron, normally based at RNAS Culdrose, was scrambled to provide assistance. The casualty was air lifted from the ferry and transferred safely to hospital in Split where he was left in the care of local authorities

Fort George assists with injured passenger

- 409 Sea Days - 11,000 Kg of Drugs Intercepted - and RULER RETURNS HOME!

(Helo landing site) from both RFA Wave Ruler and HMS Portland landed in Northern Belize. The teams were followed by numerous stores items including tarpaulins generators and ORP's (one man ration packs). The initial team was responsible for liasing with village leaders and the local authorities to assess where best to focus our teams and resources. The British Army was also on the ground and supplied local knowledge and transportation.

On day 2 of HDRO the bulk of the shore teams went in. Stick 1 from RFA Wave Ruler left at 0530. Once on the ground they were despatched to the village of Christo Rey that was a 30 minutes drive away. After liasing with the village leaders wife a list of 6 houses that required immediate help was drawn up. The 6 houses had lost their roofs to varying degrees. The first, owned by an elderly couple, had no roof at all. It was a major job, but with the assistance of the locals the 4 man team managed to put a new roof on. Stick 1 was supplemented by an RN team in the afternoon and the remaining 5 houses were repaired. The last of which was a fairly big project as well.

Stick 2 left the ship by helo at 1500 and were met at the landing site by the XO and taken to base camp at Xaibe, where they had 5 minutes to gather up tools and water before they were drafted into the local village to repair a roof. After 2 hours of hard graft the roof was repaired and the owners were very happy.

That evening when all the teams were back at the camp (a local school) everyone tucked into their ORP's and bedded down on camp beds, some of which had the luxury of mosquito nets. The highlight of that night was hearing a section of matelots screaming as the tarpaulin, which they had put up to keep the rain off, fell in on them during a major down pour in the middle of the night.

The 2 teams were up by 0530 briefed on the days tasks and away by 0730. Stick 1 was sent to Chan Chen and stick 2 went to Libertad. Stick 1 seemed to draw the short straw again and ended up with a complete rebuild. Stick 2 repaired the roof of a church and proceeded to cover 2 more houses with the trusty tarpaulin.

Day 3 saw stick 3 set off at 0630, once on the ground they were supplemented with an RN team and despatched to the town of Corozal in the back of a 4 ton truck. Timber work on the roof of the first house was carried out and then the tarpaulin nailed down. The teams handy work on another house was personally inspected by the Deputy Minister of Belize. A total of 3 houses were repaired during the day. By 1700 all personnel had been recovered back to the ship and the 2 ships detached from Hdro, having left behind many grateful inhabitants of Northern Belize.

Captain George Jarvis, who is retiring after leaving command of RFA Wave Ruler said:

"As this will be my last full appointment with the RFA service before retirement, I could not wish to have served on a more capable ship with such an excellent crew, including 218 Lynx Flight RN and the Law Enforcement Detachment (USCG).

Burning hulk of the Donna Marie set alight by her crew. Waver Ruler recovered all the crew and a significant amount of cocaine

"We covered the full scope of the deployment, from disaster relief following Hurricane Dean and the entertaining children from Anguilla, to the seizure of 5.5 tons of illegal cocaine from a fishing vessel last September. Work that offers so much challenge and adventure is rare.

"During our travels we have always received a warm friendly welcome from local dignitaries during port visits, and have been shown respect throughout the Caribbean for our professionalism and our pride in the RFA service for whom we work. No other career could have given me greater occupational job satisfaction."

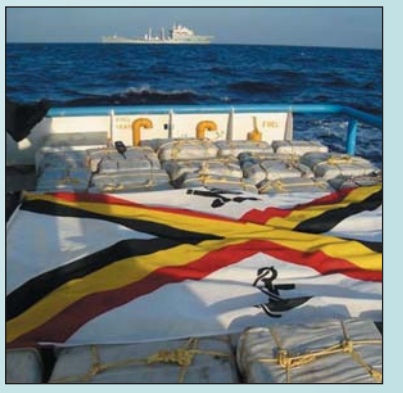
RFA Wave Ruler spent 407 days at sea covering 103,369 nautical miles (4.8 times round the world at the equator) and visiting 21 different ports in the Caribbean and North America.

Another roof rebuilt, another happy family

3/O (LS) Jamie Smith

Rebuilding Xaibe in Belize

Some of the contraband recovered from Maria



Bales of contraband from FV Oliana 1

Letters

Dear Commodore,

As I type this email, RFA Wave Knight is preparing to depart Dominican waters. Navy 214 is still working with the US Southcom transporting the last boxes of supplies and medicines to areas affected by the flooding caused by Tropical Storm Noel. Their work is almost complete as temporary repairs to roads and bridges, and the gradual recession of the flood waters have enabled trucks and other larger vehicles to take over the deliveries.

Despite being plagued by some technical faults, Navy 214 with its excellent crew (Taz, AJ and Damian - the DR Air Force liaison), managed to deliver well in excess of 6 tons of equipment and supplies to a number of affected areas. This in not always the easiest of circumstances: I have seen photographs of the helo being mobbed by desperate refugees.

Throughout the whole exercise there has been one common theme whenever I have spoken to American colleagues, US Coast Guard or the Dominican Airforce - admiration for the professionalism and devotion to duty of the air crew. I know from my visit to RFA Wave Knight this morning that the helo would not have been able to perform its tasks were it not for the skills and perseverance of the technical support crew on board. A job very well done.

I shall be writing to President Fernandez about the support RFA Wave Knight was able to provide to the relief effort here but I thought that you should be aware that your men and women in the field performed in an exemplary fashion. It would be a pleasure to have them back any time - hopefully not always because of a natural disaster.

Yours,

Ian A Worthington OBE

HM Ambassador, British Embassy

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

See article page 5……

Dear Editor,

Can I, through the Gunline just pass on my great thanks to all those that sponsored me on my Lands End to John O'Groats walk, particularly the officers and crew of the Mounts Bay, (my ship just prior to the walk). I eventually sent a cheque to the Prostate Cancer Charity for £1150, around half of which came from the ship.

Despite walking though some horrific weather in Cornwall,getting eaten by midges in Scotland and being bitten by at least one dog I completed the 1100 or so miles in 45 days (2 days ahead of schedule). I lost a total 12lbs in weight, but apart from very painful shin splints that plagued the last 200 miles suffered no major problems and had a great time.

Asst Cook Paul Mann

Dear Editor,

Is this the future deck team of the RFA? On the 14th October the sons of 1/0(X) Duncan Vernoum and 2/0(SE) Paul Whetnall paid a visit to Diligence who is in Bidstone currently. Jack and George were very impressed with their first visit aboard a ship and would have probably liked to have stayed and helped with testing gear!

Mrs Angela Vernoum

The RFA 1939 to the present

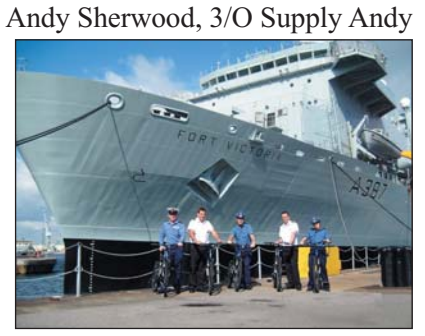
A new book is being researched by Mr Geoff Puddefoot, author of "No sea too rough" the acclaimed story of the RFA in the Falklands. Geoff is looking for personal anecdotes and stories to help tell the story of the RFA during the period starting with the Second World War, to the present if you can help or would like to contribute please drop Geoff a line at:

Geoff Puddefoot, 55 Perry Street, Crayford, Kent or at geoffjp@tiscali.co.uk

Just like "No sea too rough", this book will tell your story in your words.

Purchase of new bikes for RFA Fort Victoria

A successful bid for £1000 has been supported by the RFA Central Benevolent fund for the purchase of 6 high quality Giant mountain bikes for FTVA. The Ship is currently alongside in HMNB Portsmouth's No 3 Basin where she is undergoing maintenance work supported by the ships staff. The bikes will be used by the ships company for getting out and about in the Portsmouth area. A member of the Engineering Department regularly goes the extra few miles and has visited the Cities of Winchester and Chichester, averaging 20-30 miles each evening. Pictured are members of the Ship's Company L-R CPO (AET) Andy Sherwood, 3/O Supply Andy Simmons, CA Stwd Alex Baker, RTO Dave Yates and Stwd Karen Sadler. The new bikes are a welcome addition to the sports facilities available to the ships' company which also include CV and weight training equipment. Whilst the ship has been laid up she has been visited by a large number of groups wishing to know more about the RFA, these include The worshipful Company of Carmen, various groups of FLEET staff and more importantly groups from colleges and recruiting offices who are looking at joining the RFA for their chosen career. The ship has also parented 22 SG2 Deck trainees who have made a major difference to numbers of hands available to work on ships husbandry. The evidence of their efforts can be seen in the photo which shows the new gleaming hull and upper deck paint work. RFA Fort Victoria may be alongside but she is still alive and improving week by week.



Charity Sky Dive

Kerry Spiller, daughter of Captain Dave Buck, has recently completed a 10,000 feet tandem skydive to raise funds for the Children's Cancer Charity at Derriford Hospital in Plymouth.

The skydive, which took place at the Cornwall Parachute Club, Perranporth Airfield, was a life long ambition of Kerry's and she was delighted to assist this worthy charity to the tune of £1,000. Captain Buck presented a cheque for £217, raised onboard RFA Black Rover prior to her current Falmouth refit.

After getting her breath back, as well as re-adjusting hair and make-up, Kerry said "I am delighted to have completed this exhiliarating experience and to have raised a contribution for a worthwhile children's charity. Thank you so much to all the ship's company of Black Rover, who made such a tremedous and generous donation. I shall be visiting the ward in Derriford in October to meet the children and to see what the money will be used for".

Christmas Crossword By Chris White

EC CAPITALS

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Down

1 Sweden (9)
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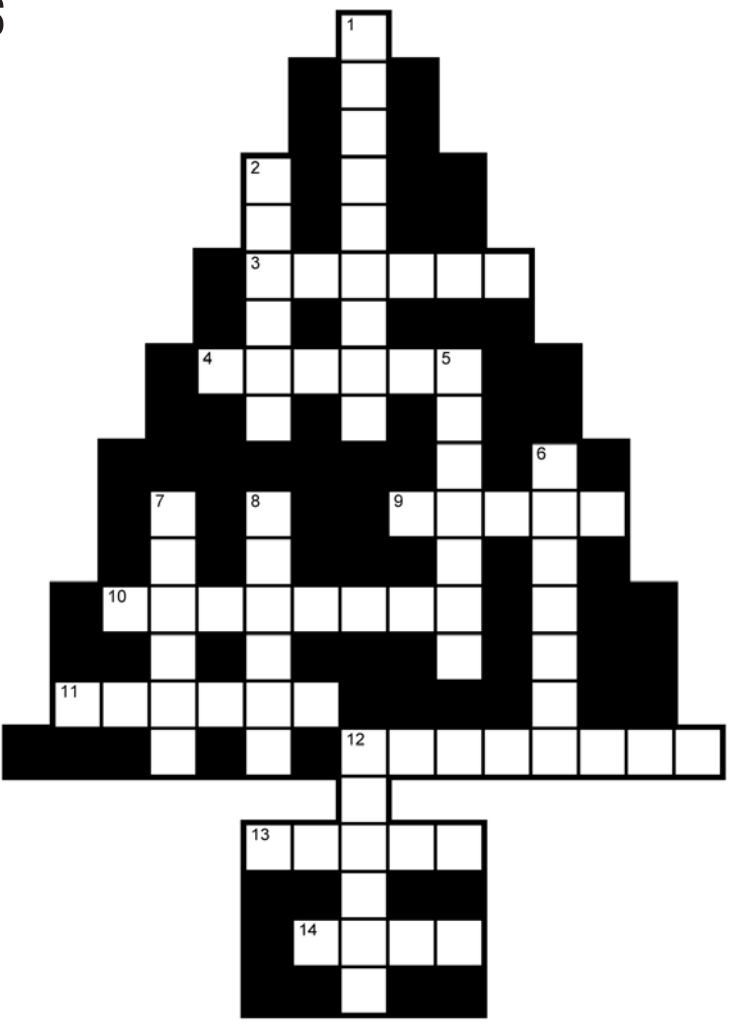
7 Austria (6)
8 Portugal (6)
12 Germany (6)



Send your letters to: The Editor, Gunline, FLEET-DCS-INFO-MEDIA MP, 1-4 Henry Leach Building, Whale Island Portsmouth, Hants, PO2 8BY, Tel: 02392 625379, Email: nick.covill617@mod.uk

LEITH FLAGSHIP!

RFA Mounts Bay recently had the privilege of acting as the Flag ship to the Flag Officer Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland, Rear Admiral Tony Johnston Burt OBE RN during the Edinburgh Military tattoo.

The entrance into Leith was a challenging evolution where there was barely 1 meter either side of the ship getting into the locks. Once through the locks the ships Dynamic positioning system was utilised to hold the ship in the harbour whilst the large Yokohama fenders were deployed. This started to draw the interest of the crowds and by the time the ship berthed alongside the Ocean Terminal shopping centre there was quite an audience witnessing the arrival of the largest ship ever to berth there. The look of disbelief on many of the faces was amusing as RFA Mounts Bay dominated the skyline and the shopping centre. The Royal Yacht Britannia looked rather small, but regal being berthed some 5 meters astern of us.

Almost immediately the ships company swung into action in order to prepare for the Royal Marine Association of Edinburgh's function which was to be held on the vehicle deck of the ship. The fevered activity of painting, cleaning, decorating and cooking was one to behold as the whole ships company pulled out all the stops to prepare the ship. Morale was boosted by the arrival of Sir Jimmy Saville OBE who stayed onboard for a couple of days. At a sprightly 81 years of age he had been hiking in the Scottish highlands before coming to Edinburgh to support the RMA. As an ex seafarer he was particularly keen to meet all of the ships team and spent the many hours wandering around and meeting all onboard never once being phased by the many stairwells onboard.

Matt Jones with Jim Davidson and a cheque to the British Forces Foundation

Sir Jimmy Saville watching the RM band

Mount Bay at Leith

The day of the RMA function arrived all too quickly, however with preparations made the night swung into action. Boosted with the assistance of additional RFA personnel and the Leith Sea Cadets the whole event ran like clockwork. Over 160 guests were entertained by an unarmed combat display and the Band of the Royal Marines Scotland. After an emotional medal presentation to those recently returned from Afghanistan, which was witnessed by their immediate families, a superb meal was served up by the ships catering dept with lots of praise being heaped upon our Chief Cook Pat Nolan. The final speeches were concluded by the guest of honour Lt General Sir Robert Fulton KBE RM the Governor of Gibraltar which then gave the chance for old comrades to reminisce of past adventures before the event was concluded. The whole event raised £3000 for the British Forces Foundation and a cheque was recently handed over to Jim Davidson by Matt Jones the RMA's event organiser.

The ships LSO 1/O Barry Deller barely had time to breathe a sigh of relief before we had to clean and spruce up for the arrival of FOSNNI the following day. A further morning of frenzied activity brought the ship quickly back up to standard and we were once again sparkling and ready for action. Supported by the South Queensferry Sea Cadets and the local RNR Force protection team the Admiral was met with full honours and was genuinely delighted to see his flag fluttering high above the Edinburgh skyline. RFA Mounts Bay had the privilege of supporting all four of FOSNNI's Tattoo nights including the pleasure of his honoured guests and the Salute taker at the tattoo. This "Naval Family" were all entertained to one of the best views of Edinburgh from the ships bridge and a fantastic meal served up by FOSNNI's staff before departing for the Tattoo. The ship received praise from all concerned and to quote one letter of thanks "it was a memorable night and the jewel in the crown, the scene setter for what was to follow, was Mounts Bay, all of your guests were greatly impressed".

Many of the ships company were given privileged seats to the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, enjoying one of the finest Military events in the UK today. Although the theme was essentially Scottish it was pleasing to see that the tattoo encompasses a truly International flavour and was a fantastic advert for the British Armed forces.

Due to a lack of access to the ship we were unable to open the ship to visitors, however we did organise escorted tours and entertained around 1000 people. The ship was also used as a training venue for the RNR and for liaison visits with the Police and Local Fire Brigades. The ship was centre stage, the shopping centre restaurants had a great view of all that was going on and the crowds gathered every time a bit of ceremonial was happening. FOSNNI was even cheered onboard from the gallery one evening!

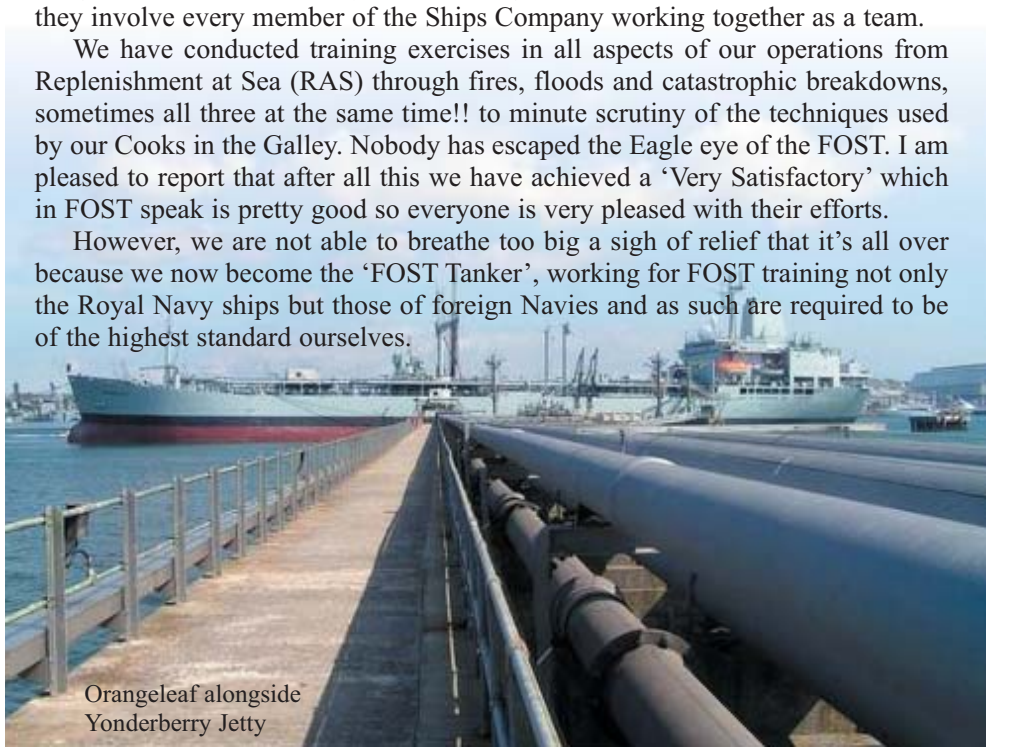
All too soon we departed and headed south for operations however our time in Leith during the Tattoo will be remembered by all onboard. A visit of this quality is a rare opportunity for an RFA these days and the ships company not only thoroughly enjoyed it but excelled at it and gained praise from all concerned. This has been a fantastic advert for the professionalism of the service and we have struck up some good liaisons and contacts for the lucky host ship next year. I for one, can't wait for the next opportunity!

Freshly Squeezed Orange

We have finally concluded an extremely testing couple of weeks under the watchful eyes of the Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) Staff. Their job is to train us in all the aspects of our running and operation of the ship to the highest standards so that we can become an effective Fleet Unit. As you can imagine as the exercises they put us through become more complex and difficult they involve every member of the Ships Company working together as a team.

We have conducted training exercises in all aspects of our operations from Replenishment at Sea (RAS) through fires, floods and catastrophic breakdowns, sometimes all three at the same time!! to minute scrutiny of the techniques used by our Cooks in the Galley. Nobody has escaped the Eagle eye of the FOST. I am pleased to report that after all this we have achieved a 'Very Satisfactory' which in FOST speak is pretty good so everyone is very pleased with their efforts.

However, we are not able to breathe too big a sigh of relief that it's all over because we now become the 'FOST Tanker', working for FOST training not only the Royal Navy ships but those of foreign Navies and as such are required to be of the highest standard ourselves.


Orangeleaf alongside Yonderberry Jetty

WAVE KNIGHT Provides Disaster Relief to the Dominican Republic Post Hurricane Noel

On the 2nd November 2007, Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) Replenishment Tanker WAVE KNIGHT was tasked at short notice to provide Humanitarian Assistance to Dominican Republic in the wake of Tropical Storm Noel. WAVE KNIGHT is currently situated south of Dominican Republic, operating in support of US Army SOUTHCOM based in Santo Domingo. WAVE KNIGHT is providing aviation support in order to distribute humanitarian aid to the most affected areas within the country.

WAVE KNIGHT's embarked Royal Navy Lynx helicopter (Navy 214) is working closely with US and Dominican Air force assets. Operations are controlled from San Isdro Military Airfield near Santo Domingo. Navy 214 has been operating in the vicinity of Azua transporting food aid from central distribution points to Palmar De Ocoa, Yayas De Viaiama and San Jose De Ocoa which have been isolated due to landslides and flooding. After being on task for just one and a half days WAVE KNIGHT and Navy 214 have successfully delivered almost 4 tons of food aid to areas in desperate need.

WAVE KNIGHT remained on task for the next week, with tasking for Navy 214 seeing her operating further inland as relief operations progressed.

WAVE KNIGHT's tasking was co-ordinated through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Captain I N Pilling RFA – Commanding Officer RFA WAVE KNIGHT

"The Royal Fleet Auxiliary Ship WAVE KNIGHT is privileged to contribute to the international efforts to assist those in need in the Dominican Republic. My team are keen, enthusiastic and well trained to assist in everyway required to relieve suffering ashore. Our thoughts are with those who have lost family, friends and all those who have been affected by the damage caused as a result of Tropical Storm Noel."

WAVE KNIGHT has been stationed in the Caribbean Area since October 2007 in order to provide contingent capability in support of UK overseas territories and deliver hurricane relief aid whilst continuing to support the Joint International Counter Narco-Terrorism Operations within the Caribbean Area.

For the period of the deployment, the ship has, in addition to her crew of 80, a Royal Navy embarked Lynx Flight, a US Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment and Royal Marine Sniper team. On top of the diesel and aviation fuel cargo totalling 16000 cubic metres, Wave Knight carries nearly 400 cubic metres of fresh water cargo and has a cargo hold of 500 cubic metres stocked with dry stores, many of which are held for emergency operations such as those faced in the wake of a hurricane. A variety of small boats are carried for use in the various operations WAVE KNIGHT may be tasked.

Issuing essential stores in the Dominican Republic

Refugees desperation for aid

Supply drop, one of many more to come

Captain Ian Johnson, Largs Bay's Commanding Officer demonstrates the control systems.

WADER DRILLS AND A ROYAL VISIT

Exercise Grey Heron, held in the waters of the Solent and the South West for two weeks from 24 September, is designed to train ships and personnel to undertake one of the key tasks that the Royal Fleet Auxiliary alongside the Royal Navy may be required to carry out anywhere in the world – an amphibious operation.

Grey Heron involved all elements of the Naval Service, including capital ships HM Ships Ark Royal and HMS Albion, Mounts Bay, Largs Bay and Fort Rosalie, Commando Helicopters from Yeovilton, Royal Marines from 45 Commando, 539 Assault Group and the Commando Logistics Regiment Royal Marines. In addition, personnel form the army's 17 Port Maritime Regiment together with RAF Chinook helicopters from 27 Squadron RAF supported the exercise.

HRH The Earl of Wessex, Commodore-in-Chief of the RFA took the opportunity to visit Mounts and Largs Bay during the exercise at anchor off Browndown Beach.

Meeting with the Commanding Officers and crew of the two new Bay's HRH witnessed first hand how such large and capable vessels are able to function effectively in an amphibious environment with a very small crew using the latest technology.

Much of the activity in the Solent was focussed on Browndown where 'wader drills' were carried out. These involved the discharge and transport of Royal Marines and Vehicles ashore from the Bays using Landing craft and helicopters.

It was not only the new Bays that had the honor of hosting a VIP visit during Grey Heron; RFA ARGUS, very busy with an exercise within an exercise, namely Medical Endeavour, also hosted the armed forces Minister Bob Ainsworth MP.

Since our last update, Mounts Bay has been proving her worth in an amphibious exercise named Grey Heron which took place largely in the eastern Solent off the Browndown beach and ended for us in the vicinity of Plymouth. This was a large exercise which sought to reinforce and refresh the amphibious operating skills of the Commando Logistics Regiment, 45 Cdo RM, the Lead Commando Group and those of the Staff and ships which comprise Task Goup 608.01. These included RFA Mounts Bay, Largs Bay, HMS Ark Royal, RFA Fort Rosalie, RFA Argus with the ATG headed by HMS Albion, currently Flagship for COMATG.

The major element for Mounts Bay initially was to conduct Wader drills with the troops of 45 Cdo RM and 539 Assault Sqn RM. These drills range from simple, single elements such as driving on and off Landing Craft, through to full scale combined assault procedures. Until recently the RM units have been deployed to operational theatres in Iraq and Afghanistan and this exercise was a much needed opportunity to revisit and develop the skills necessary to operate as an elite seaborne force.

Utilising our flooded dock capability, the ship saw countless landing craft, offshore raiding craft and mexe-flote rafts operate to and from the dock to ferry troop's ammo, stores and vehicles between ships and the landing zones on Browndown beach.

In addition to the continuous use of the dock we exercised the transfer of troops by utilising aviation assets, with Seaking and Chinook helicopters, demonstrating the ability to move fully kitted troops quickly between various platforms.

During our time as a GH unit we spent much of the time operating our DP system, with the ships sophisticated electronics magically keeping the thrusters operating in harmony to allow us to maintain a steady position with great accuracy and go about the core business of amphibious and aviation operations.

Whilst well in the depths of exercise, Mounts Bay had the pleasure of hosting many VIP's but specially a VVIP; HRH the Earl of Wessex visited the ship in his capacity as Commodore-in-Chief of the RFA. Prince Edward arrived on a Friday morning by Royal Flight helicopter, to be met by our CO and Commodore Thornton RFA. During his visit he met with many members of the ships company and was able to witness the landing of a Chinook helicopter from the bridge. He mixed with Officers, PO's and Crew members during a hot fork luncheon before getting a first hand demonstration of our dock, leaving by LCU to be taken to RFA Largs Bay to be given a comprehensive tour of our 'sister' ship.

Once the 'Wader' phase of our training was complete, the ship closed the stern door and pumped out the hundreds of tons of sea water which allowed us to provide the haven for dock-ops. We left the Solent, passing west of Nab Tower and set course for a point south of the Isle of Wight to rendezvous with the RFA Fort Rosalie to conduct a test RAS.

The Royal helicopter lands on MOUNTS BAY with LARGS BAY, ALBION and ARK ROYAL in the background.

HRH meets Commodore Thornton and Captain Ferris on MOUNTS BAY.

SOMEWHERE OUT IN THE ARABIAN GULF SAT THE FLEET'S FINEST TANKER, RFA BAYLEAF

Somewhere out in the Arabian Gulf sat the fleet's finest tanker, RFA Bayleaf. "Bay-Watch" the story continues……

It has been a while since the world has had an update from RFA Bayleaf the Arabian Gulf Ready Tanker.

After a slightly extended maintenance period in Dubai, Bayleaf sailed again in mid August. There was a mixture of new faces and quite a few familiar ones that had returned, including myself (3/O (X) Tanya Warner).

After conducting engine trials the mighty Bayleaf made best speed to rendezvous with the Indian Navy ships INS Rajput, INS Betwa and HMS Richmond. The three-day exercise kept everyone busy with a variety of tasks ranging from Gunex's and Replenishment at Sea (RAS) to Maritime Boarding Exercises - Bayleaf played the part of a 'merchant ship' for the Indian Navy Boarding Team to approach, board and search. Our busy replenishment programme continued with RAS's involving the Indian Navy (INS Rajput), Pakistani Navy (PSN Tariq), the US Navy, (USS J E Williams and the USNS Lewis And Clark, who managed to drink an impressive amount of fuel (4493 CZ) from our tanks in just two RAS's) and finally came the British Fleet of HMS Richmond and RFA Sir Bedivere. The latter replenishment being a little emotional for a certain member of Bedivere's team as it was 1/O (X) Graeme Barrett last replenishment in the RFA before moving on pastures new. I think I can speak for a lot of people to say he will be missed.

A three-week patrol would not be complete without a live shoot for the ships weapon teams. Man overboard drills for the crash boat crew and the Deck Officers, and not to mention various First Aid and Damage Control Training serials – little chance of getting bored.

It wasn't all work and no play and a BBQ was held to watch the sun go down. The galley had a break and CPO (D) Peter Quirk and PO (SE) Tam Venters donned their aprons and gloves and set to work rustling up a feast. Many thanks to CPO (CK) Franny Childs for the 'extras', the fish dish was fabulous -he doesn't get the reputation of being the best Chief Cook in the RFA for nothing!!

Bayleaf was now ready to be topped up with fuel, fresh stores and crew so a brief visit to Dubai gave the ships company a little bit of time to relax. The more adventurous tried Scuba Diving and Bayleaf's winter snowboarding team reformed yet again! (The Emirates Mall Ski centre is second to none!) The 'must have item' for many was an indoor remote controlled Helicopter - for a ship with no flight deck the air-lanes became very busy. A short pit-stop in Jebel Ali topped the ship up with some of the Middle East's finest Dieso and then it was out through the Straits of Hormuz and proceeded south deep into Pirate Territory.

Bayleaf was operating in new territory; Captain Kim Watts looked back at the ships records and noted that we hadn't been this far south off the Somali Coast before. This came with real risks and all members of crew had to be extra vigilant for piracy activity and anti piracy measures put in place. Don't be confused with the romance of 'Pirates Of The Caribbean', with cutlasses, wooden legs and eye patches. The modern weaponry is a little more advanced and they now come with fast speedboats, AK47's and RPG's. Many people find it hard to believe that pirates still exist, but they are a real threat to Merchant ships off Somalia and other areas of the world, with ships captured and ransomed back to their owners. Operating in this area ensured our awareness increased with briefings produced and presented and many new facts learnt. We didn't encounter any trouble – although other vessels in the area were no so lucky – so we conducted our replenishments and headed north again.

There was a little more of a Continental feel to this patrol with replenishments conducted with the French warship FS Cdte Blaison and the German warship FGS Augsberg. The American's were also good customers trading fuel for cookies (or so it seemed!) - a special thanks to the galley staffs of USS Porter, USS Stout and USS Arleigh Burke.

With no time to be wasted, a break in the replenishment programme gave the ships company time to train – a whole-ship Fire Exercise and not forgetting some 'nourishing' Action Messing plus Action Snacks!

Another live shoot allowed 3/O (X) Simon Fuller to practice his freshly trained Point Defence Officer (PDO)

There have not been many opportunities for the LSD (A) class to exercise the seamanship skills necessary to undertake replenishment at sea, so opportunities such as these present a welcome chance to fine tune our skills and keep our operational capability at the highest possible level.

Following our successful RAS we continued West to the next part of Grey Heron which saw 45 Cdo and 539 ASRM putting some of the Wader training in to more tactical use, as the exercise was stepped up to land assaults. We took station, one mile south of Plymouth Breakwater, where once again part of the English Channel made its way into the dock under the close supervision of our XO, Chief Officer Mike Jones.

This phase of the exercise was a chance for 539 ASRM to conduct raiding drills on Tregantle Fort, using fast Offshore Raiding Craft and smaller inflatable 'Zodiacs'.

While the training serials progressed, MTSB hosted a series of visits by the senior officers attending the 'Staff Course" at the Joint Services Staff College at Shrivenham. Entitled, "Joint Staff College Sea Days", the purpose of these visits, is for the tri-service and International students to gain an appreciation and understanding of the operational capability of the Navy and to our ship in particular, the close and effective integration between the RFA and the various elements of the Armed Forces which make the LSD (A) a true 'force multiplier' and vital component in Amphibious warfare.

Over two days we welcomed onboard nearly 250 officers from all Services including a large number of overseas military officers. They were ferried out to the ship by Landing Craft and brought into the dock before being taken off in separate groups for brief tours of the ship.

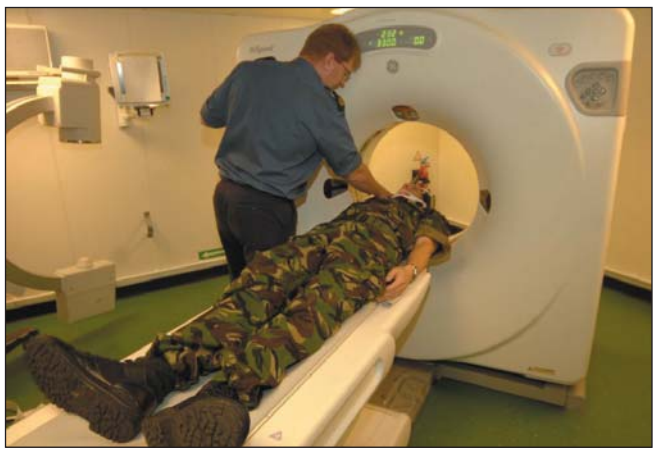
All too soon, Exercise Grey Heron came to its final stages and many of the troops left the ship, which then left MTSB to undertake a passage back into the Solent via the Needles passage to return a well exercised Mexe-Flote and its 17 Port and Maritime crew to their base port at Marchwood. Following our exit from the Eastern Solent there was enough time in our programme to make a trip towards our affiliated port, Falmouth, to undertake some regional integration and embark a small group of guests for a day trip along a sun kissed Cornish coast to our next port of call at Devonport.

Currently MTSB spends a short time in port to attend to its maintenance routines, crew changes, storing and making the final preparations prior to being called upon again to provide our high quality amphibious support in a forthcoming international exercise.

EXERCISE MEDICAL ENDEAVOUR

Over 180 of the Royal Navy's Medical Staff took part in a major medical exercise within Grey Heron. The Primary Casualty Receiving Facility (PCRF) contains one of the UK's largest High Dependency medical care facilities.

Captain Steve Norris and The Armed Forces Minister Bob Ainsworth on RFA Argus.



Argus MRI Scanner

RN Medics in the high dependency ward

The PCRF Complex within Argus is a fully equipped 100 hundred bed hospital facility offering services including an Operating theatre and Intensive Care through to Physiotherapy and a Pathology laboratory. Commander Tom McAuslin, Commanding Officer of the PCRF, says *"it offers a level of care to the deployed service personnel on a par with that of the NHS"*.

Both Regular and Reserve personnel man the facility. Normally they work in the Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs) ashore. MDHUs are integrated military units within NHS hospitals, allowing our personnel to maintain their clinical skills between deployments. MDHU Derriford and MDHU Portsmouth have supplied the majority of the staff, with smaller numbers coming from MDHU Northallerton and the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM) in Birmingham.

A wide variety of expertise is embarked including Intensive Care nurses, Consultant Surgeons and Anaesthetists through to Dermatology specialists. In addition, members of the Royal Marine Band Service (RMBS) are onboard to provide the PCRF with stretcher bearers. Major Burcham, Officer Commanding RMBS, is delighted that his team "have the opportunity to work alongside the PCRF staff and offer their experience in casualty handling".

Exercise Medical Endeavour exists to allow military medical staff the chance to work together whilst afloat in what is essentially their wartime role. The exercise occurs in two parts; in the first phase training has concentrated on allowing the PCRF staff to work together as a team when dealing with emergency situations onboard. This, its second phase, saw ARGUS moving to the Solent in her role as the PCRF, to be involved in the larger, land-based Grey Heron, in which a number of RN and RFA Units along with Royal Marine Commando Units based ashore took part. The tempo of the training increased with ARGUS receiving "casualties" from ashore and therefore putting the PCRF through its paces.

Naval Nurse Gareth Bott, who served onboard Argus in 2003 during the Gulf Conflict as part of the RMBS, feels *"this is an excellent opportunity to be back onboard ARGUS as part of the PCRF team and the experience will be of immense benefit to me in my future career in the Royal Naval Medical Service"*.

During the exercise the Rt Hon Bob Ainsworth, Minister of the Armed Forces visited and was given a tour of the ship by Captain Steve Norris, ARGUS' Commanding Officer. Mr Ainsworth was given a full demonstration of the hospital facility demonstrating every level of care from initial triage, through intensive care to recovery.

Dubai

USS Bonhomme Richard Alongside

Form an Orderly queue please… USS Bonhomme Richard, Denver

skills, under the watchful eye of the one and only 2/O (X) Gino Feleppa. Standby as it will be my turn soon!

One Saturday afternoon during my watch, somewhere off Socotra with the sea mirror smooth and not a breeze in the air, I noticed a disturbance in the water ahead of the ship. Altering course to investigate we could see Whales and Dolphins performing a magnificent display. A broadcast to the Ships Company and some steely manoeuvring gave the chance for some fantastic photograph and video footage.

One of the more memorable days for me was the firing of some time expired rescue Speed Lines – for demonstration purposes of course! Being the Officer of The Quarter (OOQ) who looked after these items, gave me a slight advantage on most of the other candidates who wanted to fire them - they were my babies to be fired and I got to choose the other lucky chap! There was only really one other person who had waited longer than my 6 years to fire one and that was 2/O (X) Andy Dixon the Navs. He had waited 10 years, so unfortunately for our Deck Cadets Greg Pedder and Alan Doyle, this was not to be their day. Not really knowing what to expect we went off to the poop deck, myself, the Navigator, Captain Kim Watts with the Cameras and the XO David Gilzean as the safety number. "Brilliant" is all I can say! Well worth the wait!

Another Saturday at sea and a BBQ for all, slightly different menu and different chefs. They came in the form of SG2 Rob Loughram and LH (D) Tony Skinner what a duo!

With his Dubai purchase - none of the events that took place during our time at sea went unnoticed – 3/O (X) Simon 'Steven Spielberg' Fuller and his Gucci Video camera. No one was safe from his sneaky film shooting and editing skills. Ever hear of the films "Bay Gun" and "Bay-Watch"? Neither had any of the ships company, although we all have now!!! His finest work, improving with each movie, could rival Hollywood, watch out for Film Premieres near you!

Muscat in Oman was a pleasant change from our normal storing venue – not quite the hectic pace of life of Dubai but a more gentle and picturesque feel..... but limited shopping..... This is where I finish off for now, alongside in Muscat where the temperature is a pleasant 31 degrees.

A Typical Week In The Life Of RFA Sir Bedivere On Patrol In The Northern Arabian Gulf

as-salaam alay-kum! ismee Captain Duncan Lamb!

Sir Bedivere is in the Northern Gulf in support of Iraqi training and coalition maritime operations. Those who have been appointed to Sir Bedivere recently may not recognise this particular week – an element of poetic licence has been used.

Al Basra Oil Terminal

Sunday *yawm al-ahad*
0700 and the start of another week with the Al Basra Oil Terminal appearing out of the dust haze at about 3 miles as Sir Bedivere approaches from her overnight patrol. First task of the day is to refuel a cyclone class US patrol boat – who needs a RAS tanker! At 0930 our main customers arrive, a crowd of bright orange lifejackets on the decks of an Iraqi patrol boat from Umm Qasr. The embarkation of over 50 Iraqi naval personnel, including a marine platoon and interpreter takes about 45 minutes. Also on the patrol boat are six mentors from the UK-led Naval Transition Team (NaTT) based in Umm Qasr and charged with training the Iraqi Navy to maintain security in Iraqi waters. Sir Bedivere has now become an international training platform. After safety briefings, and an explanation of the ground rules (in English and Arabic) the three Fast Aluminium Boats (FABs) stowed on the vehicle deck are checked, launched and the weekly training cycle begins. The FABs are launched by the CPO(D) and his team using the forward crane and every time they return, they have to be refuelled from the petrol tank on the vehicle deck. This task falls to the CPO(E) and his team – the air temperature of 40+C is an added "challenge", but marginally cooler than the engineroom temperature of 55C. Once the FABs are recovered and stowed, the ship repositions to its overnight patrol areas and the ship's company listens to a (lengthy) translation of "upper decks out of bounds" in Iraqi Arabic.

Monday *yawm al-ithnayn:*
FABs away at 0800 for an assessed boarding exercise for the Marines. Command and control training for the Iraqi senior officers takes place on the bridge before they are sent to the frigates on station for practical ops room work. Meanwhile 12 Iraqi Midshipmen commence familiarisation tours of Sir Bedivere. Externally, Sir Bedivere is called in for a short period to patrol sectors around the Khawr al Amaya Oil Terminal. The Marines successfully complete their boarding exercise and are cleared by CTF 158 to conduct tanker boarding sweeps. With a number of tankers due in to the deep water anchorage during the course of the week, it is going to be busy.

Tuesday *yawm al-thalaatha:*
First boarding exercise for the Marines. On this occasion, they are tasked to lead with a boarding team from a coalition warship in support. Sir Bedivere is tasked as on-scene commander providing close support. 0700 briefings take place on the bridge, the VLCC is called and told to expect the boarding in one hour. FABs are launched, Sir Bedivere positions 500yd off the anchored tanker and the boarding commences. The Master of the tanker takes in his stride a joint Australian and Iraqi boarding exercise with US Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) monitoring and a UK auxiliary in attendance – the coalition in full swing! The exercise is completed without incident by late morning and Bedivere repositions to embark CTG 158.1 staff from the command barge before dashing south into international waters to rendezvous with a Kuwaiti patrol boat for an exercise planning conference. The multi-national community on board broadens for a few hours.

Wednesday *yawm al-arba'a:*
A leisurely start to the day(!?) with a mid-morning boarding of another tanker in the anchorage, this time our Iraqi Marines are on their own. Once completed, we return to the vicinity of the oil platforms in order to refuel the on-task Iraqi patrol boat and change their crew. It is a particularly busy day for dhows – lost count at well over 100 contacts on the 6-mile radar range scale – I gave my PWO advice to the Officer of the Watch (OOW) – use the 3-mile range scale; it looks better. Of more immediate concern are the two other coalition ships we are sharing the same 1.5nm square box with! Good experience for the OOW! Late afternoon and we head south clear of other shipping in order to conduct AK47 firings off the flight deck – another first for the RFA?

Thursday *yawm al-khamees:*
Another boarding for the Iraqi marines, but with a (routine) VIP visit to keep us on our toes. CTF has joined us to act as host. We usually see an Admiral or two, a few Commodores and the odd Major General interspersed with various high-ranking civilians during the course of a patrol. I have threatened to paint stars on the bridge wing and they will not represent enemy units captured or sunk! The Iraqi Midshipmen are sent for acquaints to one of the frigates and to the command platform. The Iraqi contingent are particularly buoyant today – I'd like to think that it is due to the unparalleled training opportunity, but realistically, probably owes more to their football team's win over South Korea yesterday. The XO is also particularly buoyant by the end of the evening – this is due to having completed his final evening rounds of Iraqi toilets and bathrooms for the week! He has invited me to attend … I am usually too busy on the bridge.

Friday *yawm al-juma'a* and **Saturday** *yawm as-sabt:*
Disembarkation of Iraqi and NaTT personnel takes place on Friday morning and eventually, we have the ship to ourselves again. An opportunity to slink away to patrol the anchorage to the south, lick our wounds, do a little internal training and prepare for next week … Wrong! At 2200, we are called back to the north to take up patrol sectors around the Khawr al Amaya Oil Terminal to release a US warship to contain an oil spill 40 miles to the south. This task requires Bedivere to keep the fishing dhows and skiffs clear of a zone around the terminal. RNR armed force protection on deck is increased and all ship's defensive weapons are at immediate readiness. Various dhows push their luck and try to enter the sectors; they are warned on VHF, but without an interpreter on board (disembarked with the Iraqi navy), this is not effective. Flashing light is similarly ignored, however, intercepting them at speed whilst sounding warnings on the ship's whistle usually does the trick … although Iranian dhows are particularly uncooperative! The US warship returns at 0600 on Sunday morning and we are released from sector patrol – just in time to start next week's training.

Sunday *yawm al-ahad:*
Groundhog day. NaTT afloat training officer asks if we have had a quiet weekend – I manage to stop the XO hitting him.

All at Sea

Largs Bay made a brief call to London 20-22 October, the first ever LSDA to visit the Capital. Largs sailed from Portsmouth on the 19th as the sun was setting, having embarked 321 members of the Sea Cadet Corps from all corners of the UK. The Cadets participated in the annual Trafalgar Day Parade in Trafalgar Square.

This is the largest number of Sea Cadets ever to be at sea at the same time so needless to say there was great excitement amongst the Cadets. As this number was all in one hull, their high spirits was a fair challenge the XO's sense of humour!

That said the Cadets thoroughly enjoyed the experience and spent much of the time in brushing up their parade skills and band practice; they were required to be on parade and ready for inspection by the Deputy Commander in Chief by 1100 Sunday 21st.

Arriving off the mouth of the Thames at 1500 the next day, Largs then conducted a mammoth 6 hour pilotage up the river to Greenwich. The Thames and city of London at night was an unmissable experience for all, especially when viewed from the vantage point of the bridge, it even made up for missing the rugby Cup final (just!). The cadets were disembarked early Sunday leaving the ship's company the rest of the day to stretch their legs ashore and take in the sights. Monday it was back down the river and caps on backwards to meet our ETA at Plymouth. One of the many highlights of the passage was passing through the Thames barrier (successfully!) causing many of us to breathe in.

Cenotaph Contingent

Pictured left is Commodore Thornton with the November Ceremonies Contingent for the Remembrance Sunday Parades in Marchwood and the Festival of Remembrance in the Royal Albert Hall

RFA - NOVEMBER CEREMONIES CONTINGENT 2007
Pictured below from left to right:
CR1 David Campbell, LH(D) Chris Cole, A/Ck Adam Syrett, (Stwd) Mike Turner, Commmodore Thornton, C/O(LS) Simon Jordan Contingent Officer, Med Tech Don Clark, CPO(Stwd) Joe Brown, SG2 Steve McCartney, CR1 Steve Gill.

At Christmas

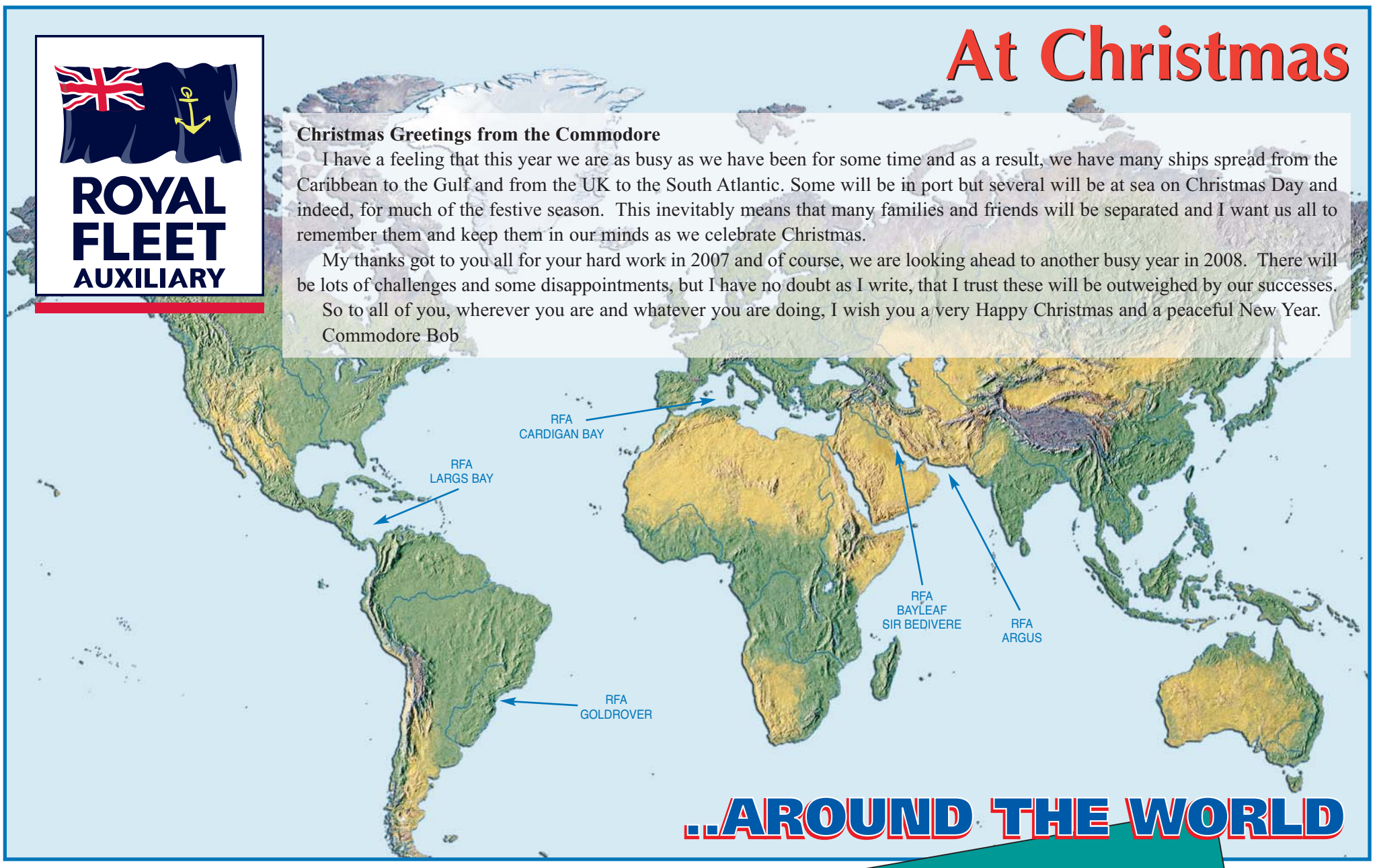
Christmas Greetings from the Commodore

I have a feeling that this year we are as busy as we have been for some time and as a result, we have many ships spread from the Caribbean to the Gulf and from the UK to the South Atlantic. Some will be in port but several will be at sea on Christmas Day and indeed, for much of the festive season. This inevitably means that many families and friends will be separated and I want us all to remember them and keep them in our minds as we celebrate Christmas.

My thanks got to you all for your hard work in 2007 and of course, we are looking ahead to another busy year in 2008. There will be lots of challenges and some disappointments, but I have no doubt as I write, that I trust these will be outweighed by our successes.

So to all of you, wherever you are and whatever you are doing, I wish you a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Commodore Bob



..AROUND THE WORLD

BLACK ROVER
Continues her refit in Falmouth, she will regenerate towards the end of November. BLACK will enjoy Christmas in Devonport before her OST in the New Year.

GOLD ROVER
After her time in Cape Town during November, she is heading for Rio De Janeiro for Christmas.

BAYLEAF
After Dubai, BAYLEAF is back to work in support of the Coalition forces in the Gulf until her Christmas break in Jebel Ali.

ORANGELEAF
Working very hard for FOST in their final term of the year, she will break off and head for Portland for Christmas.

WAVE KNIGHT
A very successful deployment to the West Indies, Wave Knight spends December returning to the UK where she will enjoy a well earned break in Portland over the Christmas period.

WAVE RULER
In refit in Birkenhead.

FORT GEORGE
Spends the middle of December in Devonport before heading north to destore in Glen Mallen before moving to Crombie for Christmas and a well earned refit in the New Year.

FORT AUSTIN
Having spent a short time in Crombie after a successful refit, FORT AUSTIN will move to the West Highlands for Christmas.

FORT ROSALIE
After her destore ROSALIE will be moving to Crombie for the Christmas period.

ARGUS
Heading to the Middle East during November, Argus has taken up her tasking for Op Enduring Freedom. She will enjoy a short break in Salalah over Christmas.

DILIGENCE
Out of her SLEP, DILIGENCE had a short maintenance period in Portsmouth before heading for her OST in December. She will be heading for Portland for Christmas.

SIR BEDIVERE
November and December saw SIR BEDIVERE in the Northern Arabian Gulf on national tasking. Broken by short stays in Bahrain and Kuwait, BEDIVERE will spend Christmas in Bahrain.

LYME BAY
Continuing her trials in December LYME BAY will look forward to Christmas in Devonport and a well earned rest.

LARGS BAY
Handed over from WAVE KNIGHT, LARGS is now enjoying the first LSD(A) operational deployment she will spend Christmas in sunny Key West.

MOUNTS BAY
Undergoing an AMP in Portland, MOUNTS BAY will remain there over Christmas.

CARDIGAN BAY
Completed her shakedown in November, CARDIGAN BAY will be the second BAY to go operational in as many months. She will spent the Christmas period steaming to the Middle East.

Provided courtesy of The U.K Hydrographic Office

RFA ASSOCIATION

RFA ASSOCIATION AGM

RFA Fort Victoria 14th November 2007

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BAGSHOT PARK

It is with great regret that I am not able to join you today for your Annual General Meeting, but I wish you success with your deliberations. There are some challenges to overcome and undoubtedly some turbulent conditions to weather, but nothing I am sure that you cannot cope with.

On a different subject, I was privileged to be able to wear the uniform of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary at a variety of events when I visited the Falkland Islands on behalf of Her Majesty in June for the commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the end of the Falklands War. I met a variety of veterans from the conflict including several from the RFA, I was able to visit RFA *Gold Rover* and laid a wreath at the RFA Memorial at Bluff Cove. I was also invited to inaugurate a new memorial to MV *Atlantic Conveyor*, the first specifically to mark the contribution made by the Merchant Navy. The memorial also indicates the final resting places of both HMS *Sheffield* and RFA *Sir Galahad*.

Just a couple of months ago I visited RFAs *Largs Bay* and *Mounts Bay* on exercise in the Solent. Back in May I was able to visit RFA Headquarters in Portsmouth so slowly I am improving my knowledge of the Service and gradually meeting a wide variety of the personnel who are currently serving.

Finally I want to thank you publicly for your timely gift at your dinner in April. "No Sea Too Rough" by Geoff Puddefoot is not just an excellent read, it gave me a fascinating and often humorous insight into the contribution the RFA made towards the liberation of the Falkland Islands. It undoubtedly helped me to understand better the enormity of the task, what a close run thing it was at times and how indomitable the human and – dare I say it? – British spirit is! While I was in the Islands I was truly struck by how immensely grateful they are for the Taskforce and what they did 25 years ago. As a direct result of those events the Islanders have worked hard to turn around the fortunes of the Falkland Islands so that any veteran or relative will be truly impressed by how the place has changed and what they have achieved. If any of you were involved in the conflict and have never returned to the Falklands I would urge you strongly to make the pilgrimage. You will be surprised by not just the welcome you receive, but also what you will find out.

Edward

HRH The Earl of Wessex KG, KCVO
Patron

November 2007

ACHIEVMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

From the Trustees Annual Report 2006

Our Branches continued to develop strongly during the year, characterised by greater numbers, and more activity and responsibility. Our national standard has now been joined by branch standards for Plymouth and London, and these symbols add significantly to the impact we are able to make at national events. The Solent branch hosted a superb RFA Reunion in Southampton in May, and this gave many old friends great enjoyment, and raised the largest amount of funds ever at such an event.

The AGM was held in the birthplace of our association movement, at the Thistle Hotel in Newcastle. This was well attended, and the meeting approved a number of constitutional amendments that became necessary in the light of four years experience. Earlier in the summer we submitted our case to become a constituent member of the Confederation of British Servicemen's and Ex-Servicemen's Organisations (COBSEO). We were accepted for membership in July, and this important recognition now gives us improved standing, access to greater information and activity, and access to the Veterans Minister. Two trustees were welcomed to the COBSEO AGM in London in October, and they were able to meet the leaders of the Services charities sector, and listen to the Chief Executive of the Charity Commission.

David Parry, a museum consultant, joined us in May to advise on the setting up and management of our archive collection. As a result of a further Awards for All grant of £5,000 and his advice, we have been licensed to operate museum software, and have been recognised by the Museum Documentation Association. Photographing and cataloguing the collection has been taking place this autumn, using the conventions of national collections - we are not yet accredited as a museum, but that could take place in the future if development and increased public access make it appropriate. We are building flexibility into the system and cascading knowledge and experience outwards so that changes of location and personnel can be accommodated in the future. We shall be consulting widely, of course, and no decisions will be taken until the next AGM, which is planned for 4th July in Portsmouth (possible venue RFA ARGUS).

A considerable amount of work has been put into preparation for the Falklands 25th Anniversary to ensure the Service and Association gain full recognition for their role in that conflict, and that our Veterans are able to participate in the planned national events. A sub-committee has been assisting in collating the material and memories from the conflict and an authoritative book is expected to be published as a result of that work.

As a cross-border charity the Association was affected by the establishment of a Scottish Regulator during the year. Although the need to register was debatable, the trustees decided to demonstrate a determination to operate in Scotland and to make a commitment to our Scottish Members. Our application was submitted in November, and the decision of the Regulator is awaited.

In December an Association Yearbook was produced and issued to Members. This new publication is a very useful work of reference, containing the Constitution and list of Members, as well as all the charity's contact information.

The AGM was held on board RFA FORT VICTORIA at Portsmouth on Wednesday 14th November, and it was well attended by 64 Members and guests. The meeting was held in two parts, separated by an excellent buffet lunch, and supported by high levels of traditional RFA hospitality. During the first session Commodore Bob Thornton addressed the meeting, delivering a thought provoking piece about change and the management of change in both the Service and the Association. On completion Commodore Bob presented a cheque for £17,000 to the Association - the results of Falklands 25 corporate sponsorship, involving many events and ships throughout this important year. This major boost to finances is particularly welcome at this time as we address the complex matters of re-structuring and re-location.

After lunch we moved up to the Dining Saloon for the formal agenda business, beginning of course with last years AGM minutes, and then the Trustees Report and Accounts. The Report highlights are shown in an adjoining box, and summarise the main achievements in 2006. The Accounts were examined by Mr Peter Nichols (HMS NELSON) earlier in the year, who commented very favourably on the presentation, and gave an "unqualified report" (that's the highest marking !) Total receipts for the year across all four funds amounted to £43,311 while total expenditure was £35,152, giving a net income of £8159. The total cash holdings at 31st December 2006 amounted to £32,987, giving us adequate reserves.

Having received the Report and Accounts we moved on to the election of chair and trustees. I was honoured to be entrusted with leadership of the Association for a final year, and in this coming month we are charged with finding solutions on the future management and location of the charity. The full elected committee now comprises: David Bass, David Cameron, Mike Day, Malcolm Parrott, Peter Robinson, Frank Andrews, Chris Locke, Shane Redmond, Alan Roach and Brian Waters

Following the elections the Dissolution Clause was amended to give the Scottish Regulator a say (in conjunction with the Charity Commission) in the disposal of assets should it ever be necessary to wind up the charity. We now have to advise both regulators of this change to the Constitution, after which we will be given a separate registered number as a Scottish charity.

Following the main business there was an open forum to explore the options on the way ahead for the Association. Brian Waters briefed the meeting on the options considered by the Re-location sub-committee, and there was a full and frank discussion on the direction and posture of the Association, and its affiliations.

The meeting concluded in mid-afternoon, and the ship's staff very kindly offered tours to those who had not previously visited an AOR Class ship. We must record thanks to Captain Bill Tait and all his team for a splendid day on board, and wonderful hospitality. As expected, no firm decisions about the future were possible at this AGM, but there was plenty of constructive discussion, with much for the Trustees and Members to ponder. We will meet again next year, hopefully with firm plans to lay before an EGM. In the meantime Pat and I and all the Trustees wish everyone a very Happy Christmas, and calm seas in 2008. We hope to see many old friends, and new ones, at the RFA Reunion in Edinburgh in May - details will be mailed in the New Year.

Rex Cooper

Commodore Thornton presents £17,000 cheque to the Chairman (Photo George Mortimore)

REMEMBERING IN 2007

A year captured by our contributors in the UK and Falklands

The images:(Clockwise from top left) 12th October - Richard Walker carrying the national standard at the Armed Forces Memorial dedication;11th November - RFA Veterans following the Cenotaph march-past (David Bolton); 11th November - Chris Locke (Southwest RFA standard) lays a wreath in rural Devon; 11th November - Standards at the Plymouth Hoe War Memorial (David Gerrard); June - the ATLANTIC CONVEYOR Memorial, Falklands Islands (George Burroughs); 11th November - Veterans march-past, Plymouth (David Gerrard); June - the RFA contingent at the Merchant Navy Falklands Memorial, Tower Hill (David Bolton); September - the Welsh National Falklands Memorial, Cardiff (Byron Jones).

AS GOOD AS GOLD

This year a lot of focus has been drawn on the South Atlantic 25 years ago, but of course the RFA has maintained a presence there almost continuously ever since. Today the RFA is still working hard patrolling the Falklands and other Islands to stay in touch with the remote local communities and maintain a UK presence around the Islands. As this year's commemorations closed, it was time to get back to work. Captain Paul Minter provides an insight into life there in 2007.

The Beautiful New Island Settlement

A VISIT TO NEW ISLAND AND PORT EDGAR

4th September 2007

With 30 knot winds blowing from the North West, Gold Rover made her approach to anchor in South Harbour in New Island, West Falkland. As we closed into the lee of the land, the wind dropped off to a more acceptable 20 knots as the ship finally anchored off the somewhat spookily named 'Coffin Island'.

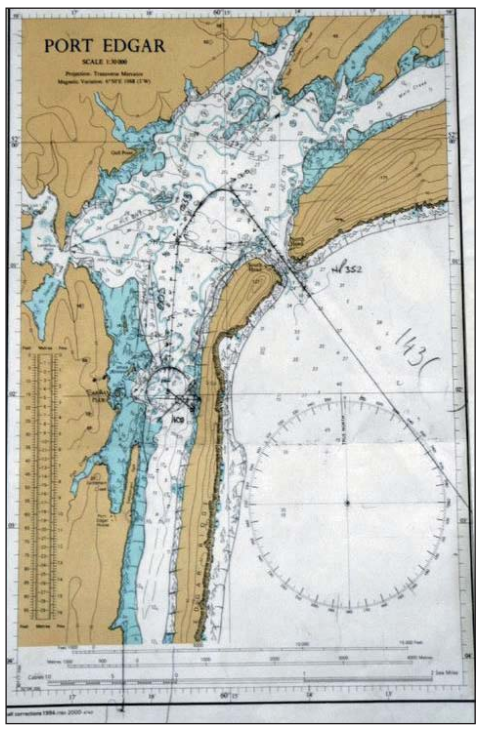
Having tried without any success for the previous three days, we finally made contact with the Islands Owner, Mr Ian Strange who regretted that he was not in residence on the Island but staying in Stanley. He was however happy for the ship's company to land and explore.

Although the weather meant that landing on the Tuesday was difficult, Wednesday morning saw a lighter Southerly wind which meant we were able to go inshore. Runs were made both morning and afternoon, and provided a valuable opportunity not just to stretch legs, but explore the wrecks and go wildlife spotting.

Sadly no penguins were spotted, although a few Albatross were seen to the west side of the island, and a couple of seals were there to welcome us as we landed ashore.

Continuing on our weekly patrol; a day after our visit to New Island; it was the turn of Port Edgar to endure a visit from the Gold Rover. Previous phone calls to Tex and Mandy Ashore had made the necessary arrangements, and we were told that the cakes were already baked and awaiting us!

After much poring over the chart, and a few nervous moments looking at the width of the entrance channel, we found ourselves heading into Port Edgar.



A QUICK TOP UP THEN EXERCISING WITH HMS SOUTHAMPTON

Following on from a number of RAS serials, and after satisfying our own fuel needs, there was a need to top up our cargo tanks in readiness for the forthcoming programme.

With a requirement for almost 2000 m3 of Dieso to top us back up again, we left our alongside berth at East Cove in the morning to head out to secure to the Single Point Mooring (SPM) fuelling buoy out in Mare Harbour.

By 1100, we were all secured onto the buoy, and preparations began to pick up the fuel hoses and start loading the fuel. All went smoothly, and by 1200 we were ready to start loading.

Successful loading was completed by 1630, and the ship then spent a quiet night secured to the buoy before slip clear to resume patrol duties around East Falkland.

Bright and early on Monday morning, as Southampton pulled off the Main Jetty at East Cove, Gold Rover prepared to slip from the Ro-Ro Jetty. Once slipped and clear, we proceeded to follow Southampton out for a co-ordinated departure at the start of what was planned to be a busy week of exercises between the two ships.

Once clear of the harbour, and making sure that we both kept clear of the incoming Falkland Islands Re-supply Ship, the Task Unit made its way easterly through Choisel Sound and out into the South Atlantic East of the Falkland Islands.

Monday's Programme:
Officer of The Watch (OOW) Manoeuvres; Communications Exercises; Gunnery Brief; Gunnery Command and Control Drills Exercise; Machinery Breakdown Drills, and completed with a SCREENEX manoeuvring exercise overnight.

Tuesday's Programme:
Close Range Weapons; Air Defence Exercise (ADEX); Gunnery Brief; Day into Night Flyex and again and completed with a SCREENEX manoeuvring exercise overnight.

Wednesday's Programme:
Flying Brief; Flyex (with HMS Southampton's Lynx helicopter); Communications Exercises; Gunnery Exercise for HMS Southampton's 4.5" Gun – with Gold Rover as a target!; and a Boarding Exercise with Gold Rover acting the part of a UN Sanctions breaker trying to escape the long arm of the law in the shape of HMS Southampton. Sadly the weather conditions and sea state precluded any actual boarding taking place, but a good verbal exchange was managed – and enjoyed by all. As on previous evenings and overnight, we completed with a further SCREENEX.

Thursday's Programme:
Communications Exercises; Replenishment at Sea (RAS) with HMS Southampton; ADEX; and Steering Gear Drills. The Surface Encounter Exercise (SURFEX) which was planned for the evening and overnight sadly had to be curtailed due to the weather.

Secured to the SPM (Single Point Mooring)

Gunnery training

Magellanic in Burrow

VISIT TO BLEAKER ISLAND SETTLEMENT

After anchoring conducting some necessary repairs to the trusty Viking's exhaust system, it was made ready and started ferrying members of the Ships Company ashore.

After a welcome from the Farm Manager, the intrepid team set out on the hunt of penguins and other local wildlife.

A lengthy walk along the west coast of the island up to the landing strip and the 'arrival/departure terminal' showed no sign of any penguins. It was only a matter of a few minutes further walk up the hill and to the east that the first penguins of the day came into view.

A group of nesting Gentoo penguins was sighted amongst the apparently oblivious sheep. Happy to be approached to about four feet away, numerous photos were taken before leaving them in peace and continuing a walk back along the East Coast of the island.

On reaching Sandy Bay, the team spotted the unmistakable sight of the burrows of the Magellanic Penguins. These shy characters were again photographed both sat on their nests, and peeking out from their burrows.

Continuing further along the East Coast, further groups of Gentoos were encountered before heading back towards the settlement and a quick cup of coffee and piece of cake. Suitably refreshed, it was back to the ship

After lunch the second group proceeded ashore and again more photographs were taken before finally recovering the Viking. A worthwhile day for all those who managed to get ashore, and the first significant opportunity to catch up with penguins in any numbers.

"OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW"

2 October

After out visit to Port San Carlos, and following on from a night on patrol to the North and East of the Islands, we met up after lunch with HMS Dumbarton Castle and HMS Clyde.

This was to be an auspicious occasion, with the final RAS for HMS Dumbarton Castle before she heads back home, and the first in Theatre for HMS Clyde.

Fortunately the weather conditions were favourable and it was to be Clyde as the first customer. Once alongside, it gave all those on board Gold Rover their first opportunity to see the latest addition to the Naval contingent in the South Atlantic.

After having taken her fill, it was the turn of Dumbarton Castle to pay her final visit alongside Gold.

As the event was one which was never going to be repeated, it provided an excellent opportunity to conduct a PHOTEX, and so a Sea King from 78 Sqn was on hand to record the event for posterity.

With Dumbarton Castle alongside on our starboard side, Clyde made her approach to port, and all three ships were seen alongside in a rare 'Three Ship RAS' scenario.

A VISIT TO SOUTH GEORGIA

7 October

After an eventful journey down from the Falkland Islands; which included strong winds, high seas, fog and ice; and after a last minute high speed dash to arrive as close as possible to our intended ETA, Gold Rover dropped anchor in King Edward Cove at Grytviken.

No sooner were we anchored – a mere quarter of a mile from HMS Southampton, than the trusty Viking work boat was set to work ferrying elements of the Falklands Resident Infantry Company (RIC) ashore, along with their equipment, stores and weapons.

Over the next 48 hours, whilst still anchored in the harbour off Grytviken, we participated in Exercise Cape Reach – a Disaster Relief Exercise – along with HMS Southampton the RIC, and elements of the Falkland Islands Defence Force (FIDF).

During our stay – as well as providing our contribution to the exercise – we managed to land many personnel ashore for sightseeing and leg stretchers.

After almost three days at anchor, we embarked the Commander British Forces South Atlantic Islands (CBFSAI); Brigadier N Davies MBE, MC, and weighed anchor for a quick trip round the coast to visit Gold Harbour.

A FINAL DAY OUT IN THE FALKLANDS

24 October

With only a few days left in the Falklands, the Executive Officer, Navigator and one of the Cadets took a Land Rover out with the intention of reaching the most Southerly suspension bridge in the world. A previous attempt to reach the bridge had foundered due to a poor road conditions, but the signs were good – bright sunshine and dry roads.

After three-quarters of an hour on the road, and having passed through Goose Green, we reached the point of the previous abandonment. On this occasion, we experienced little difficulty on a bone-dry track and eventually caught sight of the bridge the other side of a rather sturdy fence. After a short walk in bright sunshine and a rather strong wind, we reached the bridge itself. Although manifestly not in a great condition, the bridge was an impressive sight – some 80m in length, spanning a deep and fast-flowing creek.

After crossing the bridge back and forth and taking a few photographs, we departed well satisfied and, emboldened by our success, decided to make the trip to San Carlos. On the way out of Goose Green, we stopped and paid our respects at the Parachute Regiment memorials commemorating the battle and the Argentine cemetery. We then set off up an undulating road to San Carlos, which allowed the Executive Officer to showcase his driving skills in full.

After cresting the largest rise yet, all of a sudden we found San Carlos water laid out in front of us – we were looking down the length of 'Bomb Alley'. Surmounted by dark, brooding low cloud, it was a thought-provoking sight. We stopped briefly to take in the view before continuing into San Carlos itself. After a difficult approach, we made it to the cemetery and memorial. We spent a few minutes taking in the scenery and at the memorial itself and signed our names in the visitors' book before departing. We made it back to the ship ahead of the weather closing in behind us after what was an excellent day out.

To follow GOLD ROVER's story onwards from the Falklands to Tristan Da Cuna and beyond please check her website at www.rfa.mod.uk

RAS with HMS Clyde (right) and HMS Dumbarton Castle

At Anchor with HMS Southampton in South Georgia

The World's southern most suspension bridge at Bodie Creek

RFA Mounts Bay Radio Controlled Helicopter Club

Mounts Bay is renowned for doing things first, the first out of the yard, the first to sea and the first to operate multiple aircraft from her deck at the same time……..

Recently Mounts Bay hosted a number of important visitors including a Royal VVIP; however, none perhaps quite as well known (at least in rotary wing circles) as the unannounced arrival above the flight deck late one Saturday afternoon. A last minute unplanned serial saw MTSB prove that she had the ability to operate a class of aircraft not previously seen on the LSDA before. What we are talking about is actually a fleet of powered radio controlled helicopters. On board MTSB, the flying club is lead by the Chief Engineer, Joe Richardson with others members including The Navigator, Dale Checksfield, The CPO(E) Paul Webb, PO(S) Jonathan Picknet and the PO(SA) Terry Mullen.

Just to highlight the CEO's interest, he has on board a collection of no less than 16 RC Helicopters including the mighty 'Airwolf', a 'glow engine' powered unit capable of causing quite a draft.

On a quiet Saturday afternoon at sea after a hectic period involved in Exercise Grey Heron, the weather was the best it had been all week and with the flight deck already prepared for flying, the embarked squadron emerged from the hangar (aka the CEO's cabin). Prepare for flying checks were completed, the deck 'fod plod' conducted and the nets lowered before the aircraft was ranged on deck and pre flight checks completed. Despite some initial engineering issues the latest aircraft to grace the deck eventually lifted off into a circuit before a CCA (Chief Controlled Approach) to land on, conduct rotors running refuel and re-launch.

The Chief Engineer with the mighty Airwolf.

Navs with 'GDAC' stabilisers fitted can save a potential disaster!

The versatility of Mounts Bay's deck was demonstrated when a second aircraft joined the circuit for some Deck Landing Practice for a trainee pilot. Despite some initial expensive accidents (crash on deck) and an unexpected anymouse report the Navigator managed to successfully launch and, with the aid of his stabilising balls, demonstrated a development in basic flying skills, not quite ready to show the chief up though!

Demonstration flights were carried out much to the delights of the assembled ships crew and personnel of 45 Commando. Regretfully though, the visitor had to depart before the US government could catch on, after all, Stringfellow Hawk is still on their 'wanted' list for 'pinching' a piece of expensive hardware and refusing to give it back!!!

The visit was a much needed boost for the Mounts Bay Permanent Embarked Flight as the concept is still in its 'infancy'. Pilot training is though steadily progressing and it is hoped that the first batch of trainees will soon be able to remove their training balls. As with any new undertaking, it is taking some time to overcome initial 'teething' problems. But, with increasing machine reliability and firm guidance; the Flight Commander is confident of a successful conclusion to the project.

Sabre Rattlin'

Whilst in Cardigan Bay at Gibraltar I was given the chance to spend two mornings in HMS Sabre, one of the 2 patrol vessels that make up the Gibraltar Squadron. The Royal Navy use these patrol boats to give escorts to RN & RFA ships when entering and leaving Gibraltar. The visits were organised by 2nd Officer James Larkins as he thought I could see how the RN went about its duties in Gibraltar and learn the subtle differences between the two Naval fraternities.

Cardigan Bay Docked Down in Gibraltar

The first morning was a GUNEX. We left HMS Rooke, the base for the patrol vessels and headed out to 2.5 miles southeast of Europa Point. On the way, passing a recent incident where a bulk carrier had a collision and is now sitting with a 25m gash in her hull and her bow on the seabed just off Europa Point.

Once at the location for the GUNEX we deployed a small target to shoot at and opened the range to about 200 yards. We then stopped and made sure we had safe firing limits either side, which was difficult at times due to the density of shipping and pleasure craft in the area. HMS Sabre is fitted with 2 GPMG's, one on either quarter. These were used at the same time to try and hit the target which upon recovery did have a few holes in it!

Once all the crew had done their shoot, unexpectedly the XO said *"your turn now"*. I was given a pair of ear defenders taken to a gun and told, *"Stand there, put that against your shoulder, pull that back, push that forward, look through there and squeeze the trigger when ready"*. Ok. These GPMG's were fitted with an electronic sight which made things quite easy. I came close to the target, maybe even hit it. It was good fun though and my thinking that I was now going to have a fast and fairly gentle ride back to HMS Rooke on the Sabre was wrong. The CO asked me if I wanted to go back in the FRC that was accompanying us. Anyway I thought why not?

Sabre looking astern

I transferred to the FRC and held on tight as with 400hp on the stern I knew it wasn't a slow boat. So off we went at 40knots. Thankfully it was a calm day with only a very small gentle swell but still enough to make the rib go airborne once or twice. Once safely ashore we waited for Sabre to return and helped tie her up before being taken back to Cardigan Bay.

The second morning was again on the Sabre, this time in company with my CO Captain Shaun Jones, to provide escort duties to HMS Cornwall making a routine visit to Gibraltar to fuel. We again headed out to the southeast of Europa Point and waited for the Cornwall to appear over the horizon. We were told she had suffered a machinery breakdown and could be late but it obviously wasn't major as she pushed on at 22knots past Europa Point. The Sabre had no trouble keeping up as she took up station behind the Cornwall with her GPMG's manned and our cameras clicking. We regularly changed station on the Cornwall to provide all round cover which also gave plenty of good photo opportunities.

As we came in we negotiated our way round the ships in the anchorage in Gibraltar Bay and the Cornwall proceeded into the harbour with the Cardigan Bay and the Rock of Gibraltar towering over her in the background. Once the escort was over we proceeded back to HMS Rooke taking a little detour on the way to see the magnificent sight of the QE2 which had come in as we had left earlier that morning. All in all I had two good fun mornings courtesy of the Royal Navy and learnt how the Royal Navy maintains a welcome and enduring British presence in Gibraltar.

FRC - Fast Rescue Craft

James Holloway Cdt(X)
RFA Cardigan Bay

FTGE Missile RAS

Sea Dart between ships

RFA Fort George and HMS York carried out an at sea Seadart missile replenishment as part of the NATO Noble Midas Exercise in the Adriatic. The operation was carried out in near perfect conditions apart from several fishing boats that blocked the ship's way and had to be averted by co-ordinated ship manoeuvre. This was carried out using the procedure "Corpen November" where both ships simultaneously adjusts course in 10 Degree steps - quite a feat when both ships are linked so close together at over 12 Knots !

RFA Fort George and HMS York are part of the Maritime element of a large NATO Reaction Force Exercise, Noble Midas taking place in the Adriatic. In all there are 8400 Personnel aboard 36 Ships, 2 Aircraft Carriers, 3 Submarines and 50 Aircaft with the balance of the British contingent being made up from HMS Illustrious, HMS Superb, HMS Chatham and HMS Northumberland. The successful replenishment allowed both Ships to practise a challenging evolution during a busy Exercise period.

Trips round the Bay

The Landing Ship Dock Auxiliary, RFA Mounts BAY, which entered service with her Dedication Ceremony held in Falmouth, September 2006, and was subsequently granted the honorary Freedom of her affiliated town, in April of this year, returns to Falmouth Bay in the afternoon of Saturday 6th October. She will embark some of the town's civic leaders for a passage to Plymouth to acquaint themselves with the ship, her role and capabilities.

Captain Ross Ferris, the ship's Commanding Officer, emphasised how important it was for the ship to maintain close contact with her affiliated port and said how pleased they were to be able to repay the compliment, in a small way, for the kindnesses and honours bestowed upon her by the town.

Although Mounts Bay is almost new, she has proven her worth and capability in a number of major exercises already, from Sierra Leone to the north of Norway. This year alone, the 16,000 tonne Landing Ship, has visited many ports in northern Europe, conducted major exercises in Scotland and the Baltic as part of the UK's Amphibious Task Group often in support of 40 Commando Royal Marines, and provided the Naval presence in Leith during the Edinburgh Miltary Tattoo. She is currently working with 45 Commando, and Plymouth based 539 Assault Squadron Royal Marines and remains busy to the end of the year with a period where interoperability and cooperation with the Netherlands Amphibious Forces is reinforced, several smaller exercises and a visit to the Arctic Circle.

RFA Mounts Bay

FORT ROSALIE

Following on from the completion of Exercise Neptune Warrior in the Baltic Fort Rosalie has had a busy and varied programme. Throughout she been the high readiness support ship for the Amphibious Task Group but she has also undertaken the role of training ship at Plymouth for Flag Officer Sea Training. Here Fort Rosalie provides a platform for vessels under training to practice operational and warfare manoeuvres with, such as approaches for replenishment. In other serials she plays a stricken ship adrift requiring a tow, or an illegal vessel trying to avoid the patrols and smuggle goods into a port.

Fort Rosalie has undergone various audits, internal as well as those conducted by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. All to ensure we are keeping up with all the current regulations and requirements and to highlight any defects that may have to be rectified either immediately or during the next maintenance period.

Since May Fort Rosalie has enjoyed several foreign visits to Brest in France, Oporto in Portugal and Douglas Isle Of Man, each for regional engagements. In addition to this Fort Rosalie also undertook Maritime Security Operations.

Internal training continues apace and the current challenge is to integrate a substantial crew change and bring operational capability to the required standard.

The past months have taken their toll on machinery and husbandry and to rectify this a four week maintenance period is due to begin prior to the commencement of a busy autumn programme of exercises and training.

XWORD ANSWERS

Across: 3 Athens, 4 Dublin, 9 Sofia, 10 Helsinki, 11 London, 12 Brussels, 13 Paris, 14 Riga. **Down:** 1 Stockholm, 2 Prague, 5 Nicosia, 6 Vilnius, 7 Vienna, 8 Lisbon, 12 Berlin.

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