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RFA LARGS BAY BEATS THE RAIN TO UNLOAD ESSENTIAL CARGO IN HAITI

We were somewhere off Cherbourg, on our way to Cyprus. A head popped round the curtain: “We’re turning back” “Haiti?” “Yes, I‘ve just had a phone call, I’m going to make a pipe to the ship’s company.” So the CO told the ship of our change of tasking, and we returned to Marchwood the following morning to prepare for what was to be called OPERATION PANLAKE.

The next 10 days were a hectic period of planning and brainstorming, with innumerable “Requests for Information” from PJHQ and FLEET. Support from various HQ cells was superb, with instant help to normally intractable problems - extra laptops appeared as we berthed at Marchwood.

“I don’t know” became the most overused phrase on board, as everybody was asking everybody else what the plan was. The light at the end of the tunnel gradually became clearer, and initial rumours of 300 engineers

and a container from the Sun filled with teddy bears translated to the reality, when we sailed on Wednesday 3 February, with a mix of 40 four wheel drive vehicles and disaster relief stores including water purification equipment and 5700 sheets of corrugated iron sheeting and 15 containers for shelter. The load was provided by Department for International Development (DfID) and various charities, including The Red Cross and Save the Children Fund who provided some of the vehicles.

In addition, we were supported by an RN Doctor, Public Relations Officer, L/H Phot, CIS Ratings and a three man Vertrep team, an eight man Royal Marines Force Protection team and the Royal Logistic Corps provided a team of 38 including a stevedore gang and LCVP and Mexe crew, a total of 127 individuals focussed on one mission.

The Bay of Biscay is well known for its lumpy seas. In this case, the Bay seemed to extend until we passed near the Turks and Caicos Islands 2 weeks later, as we felt the force of a continuum of Atlantic depressions.

We kept ourselves busy with involvement in the “Race the ship to Haiti”. Members of the crew and embarked forces on RFA LARGS BAY ran, cycled and rowed the 4283 nautical miles to Haiti in a race against the Ship in order to raise money for the DEC Haiti appeal. The individuals logged their daily exercise in the gym and beat the Ship to Port Au Prince. If you would like to donate to the appeal yet please visit our Just Giving page www.justgiving.com/LargsBayracetoHaiti

We arrived off Port au Prince on the evening of 18 February, when Commanding Officer, Captain Ian Johnson said, “I am glad that we have finally arrived in Haiti. We have had some very heavy weather along the way so it is good to be in the calmer waters of the Caribbean so we can concentrate on the job in hand. The weather today is like a typical day at home; overcast and grey and we are conscious that the rainy season is upon us. My team are raring to go but before we unload any cargo we will

conduct a quick recce of the beach this afternoon, in preparation for the main event which starts at first light tomorrow morning. We expect to take approximately 14 hours to unload all the cargo.”

Unloading of the cargo commenced by Mexe the following morning. LARGS BAY took up a DP position about one mile off a ‘beach’ just north of Port Au Prince harbour. The harbour itself was inaccessible as much of the port had been destroyed in the earthquake. A subsequent visit revealed that many of the jetties and wharfs had simply disintegrated and fallen into the sea. There was a huge container crane sticking out of the water at a crazy angle and many buildings were destroyed. It is difficult to imagine the forces capable of producing such devastation.

LARGS BAY had been placed at the disposal of the World Food Programme (WFP). Over the next four days, the vehicle deck gradually filled up with aggregate bags filled with 50kg sacks of rice, the Mexe shuttling back and forth with 100 tonnes every few hours. The Cargo was topped up with several pallets of MRE – Meals Ready to Eat, and dried Peas.

LARGS BAY then sailed to anchor off Gonaives, a town 70 miles to the North West of Port au Prince, off loading by Mexe load of provisions comprising of 3600 sacks of peas, 4050 sacks of rice and 7392 cartons of ready to eat meals will be enough to feed 400,000 Haitians for a month to a WFP warehouse ashore, enough food to keep 200,000 people fed for a month. Mary O’Neil’, the Port Captain for the World Food Programme and principal organiser of the consignment said, ‘Our arrival in Gonaives displays the versatility of the excellent ship Largs Bay and the niche capability that it has brought to Haiti. This is the first time that the World Food Programme has worked so closely with any maritime military organisation and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Ship Largs Bay is just perfect for our needs.”

The roads were so bad, that the cargo the ship transports eases pressure ashore on the roads. This one load alone will keep 300 lorries off the fragile coast road and allow them to be put to essential use in clearing Port au Prince and the outlying environs.

On completion, the ship returned to Port au Prince, and repeated the procedure, taking the next load to Jacmel in the South, where up to 85% of the dwellings were flattened by the earthquake. The race to Haiti has been won, the next race was to discharge all the cargo, dry, before the onset of the rainy season.

Commodore Bill Walworth

From the fourth floor of Leach Building we can begin to see green shoots in the hedgerows, daffodils and at long last the sun. By the time you read this spring will be here. Ship focus over the past few months is covered pretty comprehensively in this edition of Gunline and I am delighted at the number of articles from our sea goers. In Abbeywood, Northwood and Whale Island everyone has been busy doing what they can to provide support to our ships, while taking our part in sharing out the money and resources, preparing for the Defence Review that will take place after the election and, of course, working with the Value For Money Review Group.

We were honoured when His Royal Highness, The Earl of Wessex took the salute at the passing out parade at BRNC Dartmouth in December and delighted that he continues to show a close interest in our activities. On the big day he talked to the RFA graduates and their families and made it an unforgettable day for everyone who passed out. You will be able to read articles from our people at HMS Collingwood and HMS Raleigh, the other major training establishments, where there is clearly high quality training going on. This investment in training gives enables us to do our jobs even more professionally and with greater personal satisfaction.

At sea after a long break, Fort Victoria is operational again and preparing for her role with the Carrier Strike Group, led by HMS ARK ROYAL. There are articles from the Gulf, where Cardigan Bay, Lyme Bay and Bayleaf continue to provide superb service and will be joined by Diligence. Gold Rover's trip in the South Atlantic, Wave Ruler's deployment to relieve her, Wave Knight back in the UK after her adventures last year, Argus refit and regeneration, Mounts Bay in Norway with the Amphibious Task Group and finally Largs Bay, reporting on her humanitarian operation to Haiti are all covered. By the time the next Gunline comes out fifteen out of sixteen ships will be operational.

We have an article from Wave Knight about the visit of the Value for Money team to FOST. The trip went well and the Group saw first hand the professionalism of the ship's company, the level of integration with the Task Group and the nature of our business. The team watched the RAS from HMS Westminster and the sight of her alongside Wave Knight with Fort Rosalie close on the other side was spectacular. The Review Group understands what we aim to achieve, the level of training and integration needed to achieve it and we continue to put across a strong case. They also recognise the importance of the assured delivery we provide as a result of our ethos and training and the importance of sponsored reserve status.

I think it is about time I thanked First Officer Mark Mundy for his work as editor of Gunline. He is our media guru, and where you read about the RFA you can be sure he has been involved at some point, if only to encourage the writers to produce the article. He works for RN media operations in Leach Building and is tasked to promote the RFA alongside the Navy and Marines. He does an excellent job and I am delighted there are so many articles for this edition because it shows he is effective, but equally it shows how much everyone else understands the importance of letting the world know who we are and what we do.

So, welcome to the spring 2010 edition of Gunline, I hope you enjoy it and my best wishes to you all at sea and ashore, as we look forward to the summer, a busy operational programme and taking our part in the coming Defence Review.

CAPTAIN NIGEL JONES RETIRES

Captain Nigel Jones stepped ashore from RFA Cardigan Bay on 31 January 2010 in the Asry shipyard Bahrain for the last time. After showing his pass at the barrier he proceeded to leave and was driven to the airport to catch his flight home to enjoy his final leave before retiring in late April after almost 41 years service.

His last month was a five week voyage in the extreme Northern Arabian Gulf in Command of RFA Cardigan Bay where he has been the 'Owner' Commanding Officer since January 2006. During the Christmas break in Dubai he was formally dined out by the Heads of Department at the Hyatt Regency Hotel where the highlight is a revolving restaurant. A fine meal accompanied by good wine was enjoyed by colleagues and friends.

Captain Jones arrived in Bahrain on 30 January and was met onboard by Commodore Tim Lowe, who had embarked at the Sitra Buoy to witness Captain Jones's final berthing in Command of an RFA. That evening Captain Nigel was given a presentation in the Officers Lounge by the officers and crew who presented cards to mark the occasion. After a collection which had previously taken place he was presented with a cheque so that he can purchase an item of his own choice.

He was additionally presented with a framed embroidered ship's crest to commemorate his time spent as "owner" of Cardigan Bay. As Captain Jones was abroad, his wife Sue was unable to attend the presentation. As she will be a very important part of his retired life, a card and flowers were sent to her at home.

His last evening aboard an RFA was informal with friends enjoying a relaxing reflective evening with a few drinks prior to a run ashore for dinner, all being part of his request for a no-fuss departure.

Sincere best wishes go to Captain Nigel and Sue his wife for his forthcoming retirement from all those in Cardigan Bay hoping that it brings prolonged good health and happiness.

The end of a long partnership as respective CO & XO owners since ship build; Chief Officer Martin Gould (L) presents Captain Nigel (R) with an embroidered ships crest.

1/O(SE) J.CHADWICK HEADS OFF TO THE SUNSET

After a long and eventful 21 years of service, the last seven of which have been working at FOST, I have retired from the RFA due to ongoing medical complications. I would like to express my thanks and good wishes to all those in the service who have made my career so enjoyable and rewarding over the years. Whilst having the opportunity to meet many of you on trips away at sea, I was also privileged to meet the vast majority of sea going personnel during my time at FOST. I can say that the RFA constantly strives to impress with their degree of dedication, professionalism and stoicism and sense of humour, at all levels, under all circumstances. I am proud to have served with you all and wish all members of the RFA continued good luck for the future. I will be happy to catch up with former colleagues and if anybody wishes to get in touch whilst passing through Devon, my address and details are on my blog, http://john-chadwick.com. My warmest and fondest regards, John Chadwick, ex First Officer (SE) RFA

THE COMMODORE IN CHIEF TAKES THE SALUTE AT BRNC

His Royal Highness The Earl of Wessex KG KCVO, Commodore in Chief of The Royal Fleet Auxiliary, took the salute at the Passing Out Parade at Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth on the 10 December 2009. There were a total of 377 on parade, which included the 168 passing out.

The Earl of Wessex took particular interest in the 14 RFA Officers of Wave Ruler Division, who had completed a seven week training course at BRNC designed to introduce them to various aspects of leadership and provide a comprehensive understanding of the Royal Navy before they move forward with their careers in the RFA. The Earl met families on the Quarterdeck afterwards and congratulated Cadet (X) Jodie Meades on her achievement in being the 'Most Outstanding RFA Course Student'. HRH was accompanied by Colonel Alastair Bruce and the RFA Equerry was First Officer Chris Jordan MBE. After seven weeks of rain every day, there was a break in the weather for the Royal Visit. Commodore Bill Walworth OBE RFA was present for the Parade, and also attended the informal Royal Dinner hosted by the Commodore of BRNC Jake and his wife Julie Moores, the previous evening.

WAVE KNIGHT SHOWCASES RFA

As we are all well aware the Government are taking measures to reduce levels of public spending. To this end, the Treasury are scrutinising all Governmental Departments with a view to ensuring they are returning value for money to the taxpayer. As a civilian part of the Royal Navy, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary must also stand in the spotlight and demonstrate its ability to deliver a high standard of service at a cost acceptable to the Government and the UK taxpayer.

The chance to prove ourselves came on the 11 February, when RFA WAVE KNIGHT was given the opportunity to host the RFA Value for Money Review

From Left; Brigadier Jaques (CAP ELS), Simon routh, DCS Capt Rob Dorey and Emma Davies observing a re-entry following a fire in the AVCAT pumproom.

Group (VFM RG). The purpose of the visit was to increase the VFM RG understanding of the task of delivering maritime operational support within a high threat environment. To achieve this, the Group joined us for a FOST 'Thursday War'. Captain Pilling called a meeting and announce the news of the upcoming review, the entire ship's company were energised into bringing their respective areas up to an even higher level than usual to show they themselves, RFA WAVE KNIGHT and the wider Royal Fleet Auxiliary, in the best possible light.

Whilst embarking the Staff, the ship was brought to Emergency Stations - State One. The various teams were closed up, weapons manned and with FOST staff on standby; the ship's company were ready to fight the good fight and show off their skills. Our war-cry rang true - 'Value for Money; or Bust!'

Having safely embarked our staff and VIPs, WAVE KNIGHT was traversing the swept channel as the first raid began to build from the west. Commodore Walworth and Captain Dorey explained to their individual groups, the complexities of traversing a swept channel including the precise navigation required and the dangers involved. The second Group on the bridge also watched as a Fighter/Bomber raid took place. The Action Officer of the Watch demonstrated his skill at manoeuvring the vessel to keep weapon arcs open whilst denying the Enemy's targeting ability.

A simulated Anti-Ship Missile raid took place in which WAVE KNIGHT was hit. At this stage the Group were shown around the vessel to observe the way in which the ship deals with Fire Fighting and Damage Control. In HQ1, the Group were shown the intricacies involved in overseeing the efforts of the whole ship in dealing with any emergency event both in peace and war. They were amazed by the rate at which information flooded in to HQ1 and by the Command Huddle process of prioritising incidents and allocating manpower.

The feedback the ship received afterwards was very positive, including a "BZ" from Commodore Walworth. We did our bit; indeed the whole of the RFA, by its continued high performance around the world both in support and increasingly in the front line, of RN and multi-national operations, is continuing to do its bit to provide VFM.

In my 12 years of service there have been many changes and there are likely to be many more. I have no doubt that we will continue to evolve and adapt but the point is, we're still here. Change is the enemy of complacency and complacent- we ain't!

From Left. Commodore Keble explaining the finer points of shipboard firefighting techniques to Naomi Fieldus of the BSG.

Steve P McMenemy
Second Officer (X)

The Thursday War participants return to port after another top day out !!

FIRST OFFICER (SE) PHIL BARBER RETIRES

After a career of 24 years I am being medically retired in April 2010. I would like to say farewell to all my RFA friends & colleagues, afloat and ashore. I am retiring on medical grounds after being diagnosed with Angina, a complaint affecting the heart. My condition is being controlled by medication, diet & regular exercise.

I initially served an indentured electrical apprenticeship with the National Coal Board in the Barnsley area and went on to work as an underground coal-face electrician. After a few years, I decided the pits weren't for me and in 1979 I made the change to a career at sea. The Miners Strike was in 1984/5 - people always ask. I joined my first ship, a BP tanker, MV British Willow in Sharjah, in the gulf in May 1979 and spent the summer gulf trading. As a lad from a Yorkshire mining area who had never been out of the UK before, believe me, it was all a bit of a shock to the system.

I was the owner Electrical Officer of BP's British Tamar, at the time of the Falklands Conflict. I moved to the RFA in 1986 when BP flagged out and introduced agency manning. My first RFA was Olmeda and I did the first half of the Global '86 deployment where I paid off in Hong Kong. It was all very different to my time in the commercial world and for that reason it was probably my most memorable RFA trip.

I live in north Derbyshire with my wife Janet. I am hoping for a good few years of retirement. I will try to take as much exercise as possible on the golf course. Farewell many thanks & Good Luck to you all.

Phil Barber

31 YEARS AT SEA

So that's it then, it's over, my time is done
My part has been played. My race has been run
No more duty watch musters, no more duty days
No more Naval Stores, Liberty Boats or 48's to raise
No more rounds reports pick-ups, no more PLR checks
No more alternative routes to find when they are polishing the decks
No more Standing by Main Engines, no Fire Alarms to test
No need to check the direction of my epaulettes before I go in the mess
No more cabin numbers in my collars, no more going for a 72
No more counting the days on the calendar 'til my relief is due

*

But, after a few months, will I think "it's time to join a ship"?
Will I still think its Friday after I've eaten Fish & Chips?
When I go to put a cup down, how long will it be,
Before I realise that the house is not going to roll in the sea?
I know there won't be any FOSTies to give me an Un-Sat
My wife will do that job now, she's pretty good at that.
There might not be defect books or pick-up lists, but one thing is for sure
She will have a jobs list waiting for me when I walk through that door
I'll still get daily orders and have to fix things that are broke
But there will be no-one there to work with, to have a laugh & a joke

*

There's been O-Boats, & R-Boats, Fort Boats, Rovers, Sirs & Leafs
All the old characters, the stories, the Old Men and the Chiefs
All the places that I've been to, all the things I've seen & done
All those memories bound up in that little book titled UK052431
Who am I going to talk to now, about the "good-old bad-old days"
They won't understand any of it, especially the TLA's
I kept saying I wouldn't miss it. I said I'd be glad when I've gone
Somehow it feels different now, now the time has come
Oh well, wish me luck. For the last time, I've signed on Line B
Where did all that time go? 31 Years at sea

Phil Barber
BP 1979 – 1986
RFA 1986 - 2010

RFA CARDIGAN BAY IN THE NORTHERN ARABIAN GULF

Somewhere around 29°N and 049°E at 0340Z a spectacular but not unfamiliar sunrise signalled the first day of the decade, destined to be known as the 'teenies'. Such things as Hogmanay passed with a quiet celebration on board Cardigan Bay, whilst operating in support of Combined Task Force (Iraqi Maritime).

Cardigan Bay began another day on station at the sharp end of operations in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG). A well rehearsed ship's company prepared for another day of working a busy flight deck, launching numerous varieties of small boats, and being constantly vigilant in its task operating this far north in the Arabian Gulf.

RFA Cardigan Bay accompanied by Fast Patrol Boats

The ship regularly remains on station for a four or five week period providing a platform for the Iraqi Transition and Maritime-Navy team (ITAM-N), a UK/US led training team based in Umm Qasar. Cardigan Bay provides a base for the Iraqi Navy and Marine Defender crews to conduct training in tactical operations and basic seafaring instruction in the environment which they will assume responsibility. Additionally she acts as a forward base for USN Maritime Expeditionary Security Force (MESF) with their Cougar Patrol Craft, whose task is to provide Close Support Vessel to craft involved in patrols and boarding operations within the area of operations.

Having a large flight deck the ship acts as the Afloat Forward Support Base for all stores, mail, and personnel transiting in and out of theatre. With three days a week scheduled for the Desert Hawk flight, it sees anything up to 40 personnel in transition over a seven day period, sometimes more. The accommodation is of a standard which allows visitors brief respite from more arduous conditions in the area and is the venue of choice for visiting VIP's who regularly visit the area, earning the nickname the 'NAG Hilton'.

In order to achieve all of this in addition to the 73 RFA personnel who man the ship, there are embarked a mix of disciplines and nationalities which include a Royal Marine Force Protection Team; Royal Navy augmentees enhancing medical, communications and flight-deck manning; USN personnel manning the MESF Cougars; RN/USN trainers from ITAM-N and 20 – 50 Iraqi Navy/Marines under training.

On completion of a five week period on station, Cardigan Bay welcomes a little "TLC" by way of an Assisted Maintenance Period (AMP) in Bahrain. The AMP allows routine maintenance to the ship to be completed and also a period of R&R or handovers for those personnel who have completed their appointments.

On completion of her maintenance period Cardigan Bay will go back on station in the NAG and continue the provision of support to the operations in the region.

On duty in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG)

ROYAL FLEET AUXILIARY EFFECTIVENESS TROPHY - 2009

RFA WAVE KNIGHT CITATION

WAVE KNIGHT left the UK for the Indian Ocean and Arabian Gulf region during February 2008, initially as part of the Task Group conducting Exercise ORION 08, a carrier-strike re-generation deployment. She took over as the Arabian Gulf Ready Tanker (AGRT) from BAYLEAF at the beginning of May that year forming part of the pool of tanker assets under the control of the Commander in the Gulf region.

Building on the reputation for flexibility left by her predecessor the Commanding Officers and Crew of Wave Knight utilised the capability uplift brought to the region to operate with most forms of coalition aircraft and using the greater speed of the platform, spread the AGRTs operational impact over a wider geographical area. This was especially useful in the North Indian Ocean, where, with the capacity to carry significant extra personnel, the ability to embark aviation assets and presenting a robust Force Protection (FP) stance enabled her to be used as a pro-active asset against craft intent on piracy, ever-present in the Horn of Africa especially in the inter-monsoon period. On several occasions, Wave Knight actively intervened to help ward off pirate craft that were intent on attacking commercial shipping.

The significant impact of the ship's presence was apparent to the very end of her deployment when after being on station for seventeen months and just before handing back AGRT duties to Bayleaf in November 2009, Wave Knight took part in a counter-piracy surge scheduled just as the South-West Monsoon of 2009 ended. With a Merlin helicopter and boarding teams embarked, Wave Knight played a full part in the operation bringing much needed flexibility and demonstrating the RFAs ability to bring 'force-multiplication'.

RFA LARGS BAY EXERCISES WITH THE ROYAL MARINE COMMANDOS

A company of Royal Marine Commandos from the United Kingdom's Fleet Protection Group and from the Royal Marine Reserve Units of Scotland, Merseyside, Bristol and the City of London has taken part in a joint training exercise with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Marine Battalion during Exercise Sea Khanjar IV.

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) Lyme Bay, which has been supporting multi-national operations in the Gulf region for over a year, was the platform from which the exercise beach assault was launched. The time onboard RFA Lyme Bay was spent conducting amphibious planning and also in boat embarking and dis-embarking drills in preparation for the exercise beach assault.

During Exercise Sea Khanjar the British Marines conducted cross training with their UAE counterparts which allowed both groups of Marines to gain a better understanding of each other's equipment and tactics. The cross training included boat capsize drills, which were in preparation for the amphibious training to be conducted.

Photo showing Cpl Tom Smith from FPGRM working alongside a UAE Coxswain from the UAE Marine Battalion during Ex Sea Khanjar IV.

The Officer Commanding the British Royal Marines detachment, Major Tom Tarnowski RM, said: "This is a great opportunity for my Marines to train and work along side the UAE Marines. We have already learnt a great deal from each other, both from the military and the cultural aspects."

The Commander of the UK Amphibious Task Force, Commander Mike Paterson, Royal Navy, said: "This exercise is one of many planned during the coming year. The UK is committed in its support of the UAE and exercises such as Sea Khanjar will only serve to strengthen that support,"

"The opportunity for both groups of Marines to work on a ship like RFA Lyme Bay is second to none. Purely from the fact of living onboard a different nation's ship, the working methodology to the different ways and means of embarking and dis-embarking troops provided a fantastic way of building on the cross training already conducted," Paterson added.

RFA ARGUS COMPLETES MULTI MILLION POUND REFIT

ARGUS will be handed back to fleet following an extensive and successful £37 million refit by A&P. The refit has taken almost a year and was the first major refit under a RFA support contract awarded to A&P in 2008. The work took place at their facility in Falmouth Dockyard.

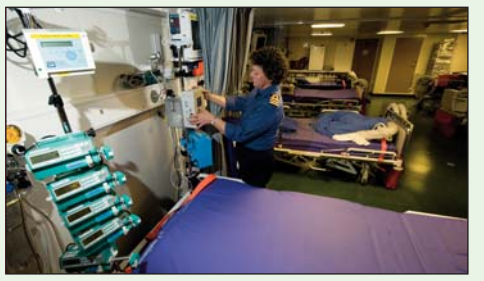
The refit, which redefines the primary role of ARGUS from Aviation Training

Facility to Primary Casualty Receiving Facility (PCRF), saw the onboard medical unit upgraded with the latest medical equipment. This includes the latest advances in CT scanning used to assess casualties by 3D X-ray imagery. There is also a brand new mobile digital X-ray unit which has the ability to display the X-ray as the patient is being treated. To accompany all this high tech equipment there has also been the installation of brand new sterilising kit.

The PCRF Complex within ARGUS is now a fully equipped 100 hundred bed hospital facility offering services including a three bay Operating theatre and Intensive Care unit through to Physiotherapy and a Pathology laboratory. It has all the resources required to provide care to troops in war zones and therefore has the capability to ensure wounded service personnel can quickly receive secondary medical care.

MOD Defence Equipment & Support (DE&S) Director of afloat support, Commodore Dave Preston, said: "The medical support ARGUS can provide to troops on operations is a crucial capability that can make all the difference when time is of the essence in the treatment of causalities."

Also included in the refit was the installation of a new ramp that allows the safe transportation of casualties to and from the hospital to the flight deck. This removes reliance on the existing elevator system and also allows quicker evacuation of the hospital in an emergency. A new marine evacuation system (MES) has also been installed which enables the rapid and safe



evacuation of up to 600 personnel in less than 30 minutes, as well as the evacuation of stretcher casualties quickly and safely.

Out with the medical facilities, the refit has also seen extensive modernisation of the accommodation and mess facilities on board, improving

living standards for both crew and patients. In addition to this, ARGUS has had her environmental credentials boosted with a state of the art bioreactor for the processing of sewage and installation of more environmentally friendly refrigeration and air conditioning.

Since leaving refit in Falmouth in November, the crew have been working hard to regenerate their departments in preparation for ARGUS to be officially handed back to the Fleet after its fleet date evaluation.

CATERING EXTRAVAGANZA - HOTELYMPIA 2010

Hotelympia is the premier event on the British culinary calendar attracting entrants from around the world. It is held every two years over a period of five days. This year's event was held between the 28th February and the 4th March. Companies within the catering world show their latest products, innovations along with award wining displays and competitions with teams coming from all over the world to compete in.

I was selected for the "Combined Services Culinary Art's Team", which consists of chefs from the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Army, Royal Air Force and now Royal Fleet Auxiliary. I joined the 15 man team led by team manager WO1 Dale Hegarty (RAF) at RAF Halton to make the necessary preparations for the event.

Before the break of dawn after working through the day and night of the previous day, we gathered up our pots, pans, knives and victuals. These along with the completed display plates and cans of Red Bull were safely stored in two transits and off we set to the event at the Excel centre in London's docklands.

On our arrival we set up the buffet table and finalised the finishing touches to the plates whilst under the scrutiny of the judges. We were keen to make sure that nobody apart from those competing touched any part of the exhibit. The buffet was prepared for six people and consisted of a wide variety of canopies followed by six starters, a show platter as the main course, selection of sweets, petit fours, and a centre piece which were all to be displayed cold and completed by 0900 for judging.

The judges looked at appearance, glazing and flow of menu. They considered the ingredients which were used, cooking techniques applied, craft skills implemented and the feasibility of cooking the dishes in a busy working kitchen.

Over the next four days we took part in 10 more events either on our own or in teams culminating in the Parade de Chefs live kitchen on the last day. This consisted of a team of six chefs preparing and cooking a three course meal, which was increased to five courses for the chefs table, for 100 covers in six hours to the highest standard under the close scrutiny of the judges and in full view of the public. The only "walls" were the Perspex divides in the kitchen.

The pressure increases as the judges start to walk around asking technical questions to test your knowledge. They check on the practical skills you are demonstrating and look to see that you are all working together well as a team. Throughout you are judged on a range of working practices including whether you work efficiently and display good health and hygiene management. Timings throughout the day are critical to ensure that the dishes are produced to show them at their best and being mindful that there are paying customers and they will also expect the best.

Considering this was the first competition for the newly formed team, the results were very impressive in 10 of the 11 events. We won three silver medals, one of which was best in class and nine bronze medals as well as four certificates of merit. We were also awarded two gold medals best in class for hygiene. In total 49 medals and six certificates were awarded. My personal successes were two bronze medals and a certificate of merit. I was also awarded with two gold best in class for hygiene management.

To help raise the profile of the excellent standards of culinary expertise demonstrated every day in the RFA chefs or stewards who would like to be considered to represent the RFA in the naval services team at the Combined Services Culinary Challenge at Sandown park in September this year please contact me at DES NBCP-BLC RFA POCK (MATT.ROWBERRY) OR MATT.ROWBERRY377@mod.uk

LADY STANHOPE VISITS RFA CARDIGAN BAY

Lady Jan Stanhope, the official sponsor of RFA Cardigan Bay, accompanied by her husband, Admiral Sir Mark Stanhope KCB OBE ADC, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, took time out from their busy schedule to visit the new Commanding Officer of Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) Cardigan Bay on 5 February.

This was the first visit that Lady Stanhope has made to RFA Cardigan Bay since March 2007, when she attended the ship's formal welcome into the Fleet at the Service of Dedication ceremony.

The guests were welcomed aboard Cardigan Bay for an informal reception and tour of the ship by the Commanding Officer, Captain David Buck. "It was a great pleasure to host Lady Stanhope onboard Cardigan Bay and to have the opportunity to show her what the ship has been doing whilst out here on operations in the North Arabian Gulf.

RFA Cardigan Bay is continuing her enduring task of supporting Operation Telic, spending most of her time

patrolling the waters of the Northern Arabian Gulf. The ships primary role is to support the training of the Iraqi Navy, which will ultimately enable the Iraqis to assume complete responsibility for the protection of their oil industry. The ship is now in her third year on this tasking and has provided vital support to the mission.

He added: "It has already been most rewarding to note the progress that has been made during the ship's long term deployment in the region."

RFA GOLD ROVER VISIT TO SOUTH GEORGIA NOVEMBER 2009

PART 4 – RETURN TO KING EDWARD POINT AND DEPARTURE

As Gold Rover weighed anchor from Husvik, it became clear that there was a problem recovering the anchor with the windlass. As the ship manoeuvred around inside the confines of the anchorage, it became clear that the windlass was working well under its normal capability. Further investigation of the problem identified a pump motor working at less than 50%, and the ship was required to recover the anchor back on board using alternative means.

An hour of seamanship with wires and strops finally saw the anchor recovered and the ship was eventually able to leave the confines of Husvik and proceed back to Grytviken.

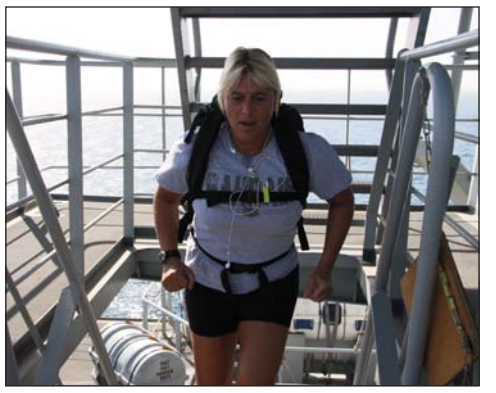
The remainder of the day and overnight saw Gold Rover once more anchored off Ling Edward Point (KEP), with many members of the ships company once again getting ashore to visit the Museum, Post Office and Whaling station.

After a succession of snow storms, it made a very welcome change for this final visit, to have clear and bright, even if cold weather, with the opportunity to walk all around Grytviken and obtain some excellent views as well as visiting Shackleton's Grave, and the cross erected in his memory. Needless to say, the local wildlife also proved as photogenic as ever.

All too soon, and with a plethora of photos having been taken, more of which can be viewed online, postcards written and posted, and souvenirs purchased; it was time to bid a final farewell to South Georgia and head back once again to the Falklands.

FABULOUS AT FORTY-SOMETHING... DARING DEBS HAS SET HER SIGHT ON RAISING MONEY FOR FORCES CHARITY

SG1A Deborah Oliver is living proof that you can achieve your goals with a little focus, hard work and dedication. Deborah comes from a family dedicated to the Armed Forces – her father, brothers, eldest son and nephew all serve or have served in the Royal Navy or Army – and she previously worked at the Royal Naval Air Station at Culdrose.



Now that Deborah's family have all flown the nest, her focus, which had been on raising her three children; needed a change. Debs realised she had to find something else to replace her attentions on and she decided to join the RFA in 2003.

Now, after having completed several trips that has so far seen her sent to countries far and wide, South Africa, Canada and the Gulf States among others, she has set herself another personal challenge to round off her new-found zest for life... by completing the gruelling 'Walk Across Scotland' inside two weeks to raise money for BLESMA (British Limbless Ex-Servicemen Association).

In between Debs' watchkeeping and during time off watch, she has been training hard for her Scottish venture, working out regularly in the ship's gym in preparation for her marathon slog up hill and down dale.

Debs said: "With my three kids grown up, I was left with a large gap in my life. I took a good look at myself and my life and saw I was unfit, overweight and a smoker. Looking through an old photo album gave me a wake-up call and I decided to do something about it.

"I gave up smoking over a year ago and have lost three stone and now live a healthy lifestyle and love every minute of my career in the RFA.

"I have a new outlook on life and enjoy the new experiences and challenge that working with the RFA offers. The crossing of Scotland – from Lochailort to St Cyrus – is solo and unsupported and totals 172 miles and I intend to do it between May 14 and 27.

"All these challenges I can now tie in with helping others and I can't think of a more worthy cause than BLESMA. That gap I had in my life is now filled with helping those who really have had their lives changed."

We wish Deborah the best of luck in her fund raising and look forward to her keeping us informed of how the training is progressing and a full resume of her big day.

ONLINE DISCOUNTS FOR SERVING AND EX-SERVING ROYAL FLEET AUXILLARY PERSONNEL

It's free, easy to use and can save you lots of money!

The Official Discount/Benefit Scheme for all serving and ex-serving RFA personnel can be found at – www.forcesdiscounts-mod.co.uk

This is an ideal first port of call for any service families looking for discounts, savings and special offers on a range of purchases!

THERE ARE OVER 1400 COMPANIES OFFERING THOUSANDS of DISCOUNTS ONLINE NOW!

A further bonus of this scheme is that immediate family members of serving personnel are also entitled to sign up and start taking advantage of the discounts in their own right.

Once you have registered on the website you will be given the option of receiving a free newsletter. This will enable you to enter competitions which are run regularly, giving you the chance to win fantastic prizes. You will also receive advance news of new discounts and any free offers available on a 'first come first served basis'.

If you have any suggestions about ways in which the scheme could be improved, or if you know of companies either nationally or locally that offer discounts but don't appear on the website, please use the feedback facility available on the homepage of the website.

Currently the website has over 144,000 members so there are lots of you out there who have not yet accessed the benefits you are entitled to!

So why not join up now (there's no time like the present) and see how much money you can save?

RFA CAPTAIN TAKES THE HELM FOR THE LAST TIME

Manama Bahrain: Captain Nigel Jones, the Commanding Officer of RFA Cardigan Bay took the helm yesterday for the final time as he sailed his ship into Bahrain after a career encompassing 41 years in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. Coincidently this final appointment was onboard a vessel named after the area from which he originated – Cardigan in Wales.

Commodore Tim Lowe the Deputy Commander Combined Maritime Forces and UK Maritime Component Commander joined Captain Jones on the bridge for the last few miles of his final voyage.

Captain Nigel Jones joined the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service in 1969 as a Deck Officer Cadet serving as Cadet and Junior Officer on various ships primarily on the Beira and Far East Stations. During

his career he has spent time on a cross section of RFA vessels - deployed world-wide in all theatres - building on experience in all replenishment platforms and managerial techniques.

Captain Nigel Jones, on disembarking Cardigan Bay for the last time, said: "1969 to 2010 with one organisation inevitably leads to many passing acquaintances and 'Board of Trade friends'. During these 40 odd years I have experienced numerous highs and lows whilst serving in all of the worlds theatres. Lows generally have been associated with the inanimate, whilst the highs have always been driven by people, the time, and the place."

"The RFA is an organisation full of wonderful people with vastly different endearing characters and natures who for so many years have entertained me and kept a smile on my face. Without this wonderfully loyal band of people the RFA would not be what it is today and I would not be leaving with such fond memories."

Nigel was promoted to Chief Officer in 1986 which brought the opportunity to undertake various staff appointments as well as the normal Executive Officer positions at sea. The last Staff appointment in this rank was 'Staff RFA Officer to Flag Officer Sea Training' in Portland.

Promoted to Captain in 1995, Nigel has commanded all classes of RFA vessel. As a special project in 1996 he procured the first Strategic Ship RFA Sea Crusader. Further time in command preceded appointment as Chief Staff Officer (Operations and Warfare) to COMRFA in February 2000 and subsequently as Chief Staff Officer (Maritime) RFA to ACOS(Sust) and Deputy Commodore RFA. Since returning to sea in 2002 he has commanded RFAs Diligence, Brambleleaf, Sir Percival and Sir Bedivere. He joined RFA Cardigan Bay in January 2006 for the final build and fitting out stages prior to taking up command of the ship for sea trials and acceptance from build. He has been in Command of Cardigan Bay for the greater majority of North Arabian Gulf operations since late 2007.

"In the middle seventies and early eighties the RFA's advertising slogan was 'Join the Club', the pictures depicted people enjoying themselves either climbing palm trees or socialising in a local hostelry. That is the vision I wish to carry into my retirement,"

Nigel is married to Susan. His interests which he will pursue more diligently on retirement include canoeing, British Waterways, DIY and motor sport, which will now be possible after years of acceding to the passing whims of his two grown up children.

RFA Cardigan Bay is currently serving in the Arabian Gulf in support of Combined Task Force (Iraqi Maritime) and for the Combined Maritime Forces.

The Cdre is Tim Lowe, Deputy Commander Combined Maritime Forces/Commander United Kingdom Maritime Component Command. He is duel hatted.

RFA LYME BAY HOSTS INTERNATIONAL NAVAL REPRESENTATIVES WHILST ALONGSIDE IN BAHRAIN

Senior Naval Representatives (SNRs) from ten international navies working at the Combined Maritime Forces in Bahrain were welcomed on board Lyme Bay by Captain Peter Farmer and his crew.

The ship's tour gave a practical insight into RFA Lyme Bay's roles and capabilities. These roles range from transporting machinery and equipment, to supporting amphibious operations and acting as a command centre for embarked forces.

Lyme Bay was alongside in Bahrain to conduct a crew change and to store the ship in preparation for her mission in the Arabian Gulf, where the ship is working in support of the Mine Counter Measure Vessels (MCMV's) on route surveying.

The tour offered to the SNRs, included viewing a small ship rafting up and the working up of the new Ship's Company. It also demonstrated the ship's readiness to replenish stores or fuel at sea.

The SNR from the Netherlands, Commander Arian Bol Raap, said of the visit: "The tour of the ship was fascinating, and I especially enjoyed the enthusiasm of the Captain and the young officers and the hospitality encountered by all the crew during the tour." Before adding, "When can I join Lyme Bay?"

The SNRs enjoyed seeing another side to life on board the RFA with a full tour of all aspects of the ship, including the galley and the embarked military forces domestic and working spaces. Finally, the piece-de-la-resistance was the vast open bridge and incredible control system for navigation and propulsion.

(U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class David Simmons/Released)

RFA Lyme Bay is currently tasked to support Com bined Task Force 152 operations in the Gulf; where she provides logistical support, replenishment at sea opportunities, diver safety equipment and training facilities for the MCMV's from both the UK and US navies.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

So far there have been 24 Workshops for the new RFA 18 Appraisal, including MOUNTS BAY, FORT GEORGE, WAVE KNIGHT, FORT ROSALIE and in Navy Command HQ for shore staff.

A number of questions have been raised and the workshops have given us the chance to air concerns or clarify specific parts of the e-learning CDROM. Everyone should have received a copy at home but if yours has gone astray please contact me on the contact details below.

The biggest surprise so far has been the understanding that objectives are made up of the things you do during your daily tasks, i.e. the key areas taken from your Terms of Reference and agreed with your line manager at your joining interview.

Taking this opportunity to break down the 2 acronyms that will make completing the new RFA 18 form a little easier;

An example of a **SMART** Objective:

Complete a stock take of all PPE within the engineering department IAW ships risk assessments by the first 2 weeks of being onboard. Within the first month onboard raise paperwork and forward to the central store to replace any missing/damaged items through the Naval Stores system. Upon receipt of items, check off inventory and stow securely within 1 day.

S – Specific
M – Measurable
A – Achievable
R – Relevant
T – Time Bounded

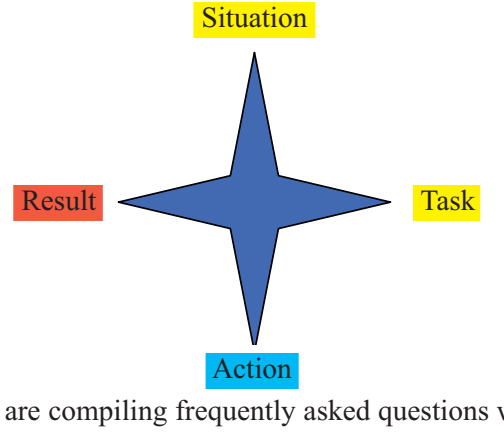
STAR

Here is an example of evidence written for the core competence Working Together:

I have worked well with the EOOW gaining his trust and respect, my observations about the plant and equipment have been noted and acted on as required.

I have also assisted the EOOW in the testing of gear prior to going to sea, a task that requires good team work to complete in good time and satisfactorily. I have also been a member of the duty watch in port were I am normally one of the attack BA men, during a recent emergency in port I dealt with a small fire swiftly with he rest of the duty watch getting things under contol

thus preventing a more serious incident occuring. I respect other opinions and look to build good working relationships with all.



We are compiling frequently asked questions which will be released shortly. If anyone has any issues or problems relating to the E-Learning CDROM please contact myself either by email on Lisa.Barrett676@mod.uk or telephone 02392 628632.

EXERCISE COLD RESPONSE

(CDT (X) A HALLIWELL)

Exercise Cold Response 2010. The clue is in the title and believe me, there was no secret connotation with this one. Cold was what we expected and cold was what we got!

WAVE KNIGHT, happily conducting FOST Tasking on the South Coast was called upon on the 11th hour to

replace FORT GEORGE due to fast changing tanker programming issues. After completing a week's tasking including the Value for Money VIP day we proceeded to Loch Striven to load cargo fuel and store up prior to joining the exercise on the 22nd February.

Despite being the trusty tanker we know and love, WAVE KNIGHT was designed to withstand temperatures of minus ten degrees only, whereas temperatures in the exercise area were forecast to drop as low as minus thirty. With reports coming in from various ships already on-scene that they were suffering some sort of cold weather related problem the shipboard departments each did their bit to ensure the safety and comfort of the ship's company prior to our arrival off the Norwegian Coast. With what little time we had-the preparations began!

The Choff's shopping list included rock salt, shovels, de-icer and anti-freeze but neglected baseball bats-yes, baseball bats, a commodity that would have been useful for knocking ice off deck equipment prior to RASing!

The Engineering department were kept busy isolating external fresh water systems, increasing the temperature of the chilled water systems, isolating the High Pressure Sea Water System forward of the pump room amongst other safety precautions.

Despite delivery problems, the Supply department worked hard to secure the issue of arctic weather clothing which was gratefully received by all, not to be removed until an affirmative sign that we were in fact heading south again.

A whole ship brief gave us the low down on the operation followed by a brief from the Med-Tech on the dangers of frost nip and more seriously frost bite. He advised all on keeping flesh covered, extremities moving (fingers and toes) and to avoid touching metal surfaces, advice well adhered to.

The conditions experienced were initially worse than expected; we knew that the wind chill would factor the temperature down, however, not as much as minus 30! The first week saw us shrouded in a perpetual fog with seemingly endless snowstorms reducing visibility to less than half a mile. This keeping the Captain firmly anchored to the bridge, such was its relentlessness a support watch system was set up between the Captain, Choff and Ops!

We were required to keep station on a RAS with JOHAN DE WHITT as she only had her port azimuth operating. This particularly cruel morning had horizontal snow whipping unforgiving across our deck, the sea providing a beam on three metre swell making the approach and station keeping extremely challenging, coupled with being torpedoed, it made for a difficult morning! However, this did not grind us down and the tenacity of WAVE KNIGHT overruled Mother Nature and a successful RAS was completed earning us, quite rightly, a BZ from the Major General.

Then, as if by some magical force the shroud lifted overnight and as a bright moon sank below the horizon the sun rose commanding a deluge of light spilling over the saw toothed mountains encapsulating them with a pink hue. We could have been sailing into Mordor to fight the evil powers of Sauron with the view we had, however, reality was brought sharply back by a rendezvous with HMS OCEAN getting ever closer.

Cold Response was a multinational NATO exercise hosted by the Norwegian military. Its aim was to exercise reinforcement of a friendly nation, and implementation of the United Nation Security Council Resolution (UNSCR). Without going into the weeds, it was an amphibious exercise involving over 2,000 personnel of varying nationalities including, UK, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish and French. They were testing conditions for all involved in a multi-threat environment.

In terms of our own advancement we had the benefit of a change to normal training and operating with UK Naval Ships in that we approached and station kept on OCEAN and ALBION as well as the JOHAN DE WHITT. This was a great opportunity for the bridge team to build up experience as all OOW's were given the opportunity to take the con on the bridge wing for the station keeping.

We have heard on authority that it was an undeniable success and that naturally in good old British tradition, the war was won!

RFA CARDIGAN BAY OPERATION TELIC 2008/2009

RFA Cardigan Bay has been deployed in the Northern Arabian Gulf since January 2008. Throughout her time here Cardigan Bay has provided stability in presence, capability and professionalism in supporting all aspects of Op Telic. Within this challenging environment the ship is now viewed as the keeper of the operation's jewels and the ideal venue from which multi-national efforts to ensure harmonious relations and the peaceful transition of the defence of Iraqi waters are conducted.

The primary role inherited from RFA Sir Bedivere was to support the Naval Transition Team (NATT) in training Iraqi Naval personnel and Iraqi Marines (IQN/IQM) in their defence of the oil exporting infrastructure and surrounding territorial water space. As experience was gained in this role additional training courses for Iraqi personnel were arranged upon the recommendations of ship's staff. Latterly ship's staff have taken on the direct training of IQN/IQM in Fire Fighting, Damage Control and First Aid in addition to their normal duties. Equally the ship has taken on the role of the theatre primary casualty reception and triage unit. To date, medical emergencies from American and Iraqi platforms have regularly been recovered, assessed, stabilised, and evacuated to medical facilities ashore.

Cardigan Bay has continuously been exploring and exploiting opportunities which further bond and integrate not only the nations of the region but also within the multi-national coalition force. In 2008, the coalition members included members of the Australian and Singapore Forces all working to the common aim of advancing the Iraqi capability within their water space and prepare them for manning their new ships. To achieve this, the ships company maintains a flexible and committed approach to the demands of culture and also the cuisine of many nations.

Daily, the ship logistically supports all units in theatre. Cardigan Bay is the hub for stores, mail and personnel movements and is regularly praised for its flexible hospitality in accommodating all transit personnel into and out of theatre. The ship regularly hosts senior visitors providing a platform from which an overview of the theatre operations is gained. This included the ship hosting a high level diplomatic meeting which resulted in a working agreement between Kuwait and Iraq over disputed territorial waters in the Khaur Abd Allah waterway.

To facilitate training operations, the ship plays host to a variety of international assets. Initially the Fast Attack Craft of the Iraqi Navy provided the medium for the Navy and Marines to conduct their Visitation Board and Search training (VBSS). Whilst these boarding operations were taking place Cardigan Bay acted as the 'Close In support vessel' should anything untoward take place. As time moved on the requirement for VBSS operations was superseded by the need to take on the defence of the sectors of the Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal. To undertake this role new Defender craft were acquired which in themselves raised a large training requirement for competence in both operability and strategic defence.

In support of both defence of the oil platforms and Iraqi strategic defence training, the ship has elements of the US Maritime Expeditionary Forces with their very capable and well defended Cougar boats. These personnel and their boats remain with the ship throughout the period on station. Weather permitting; Cardigan Bay remains docked down for periods of up to a month providing a safe haven for up to six resident boats and many other visiting units.

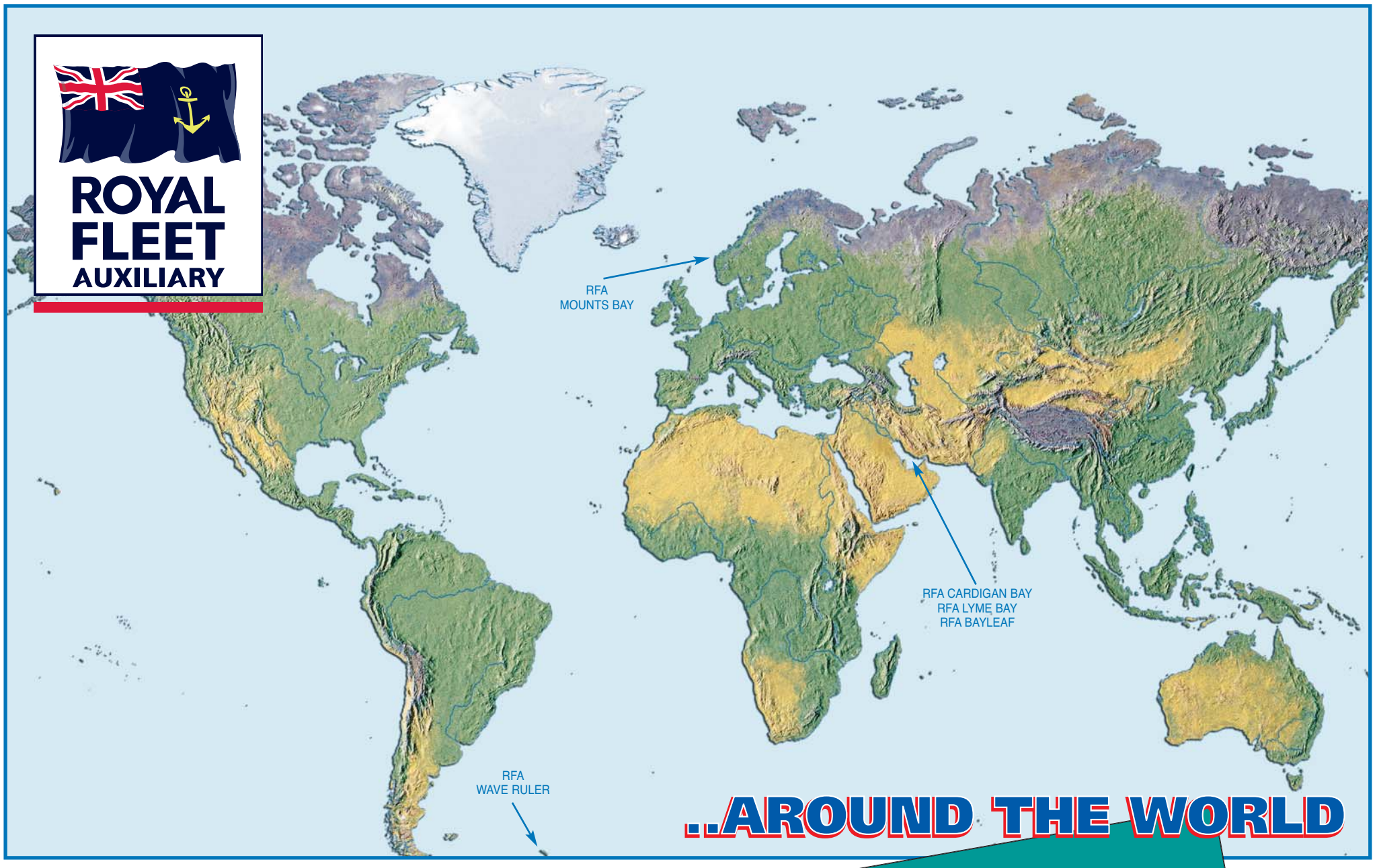
During the early part of 2009, training emphasis turned to preparing the Iraqi crews for delivery of their new patrol craft from Italy. Basic teaching in all Maritime disciplines was undertaken with Fire Fighting, Damage Control, First Aid and Medical training being taught by the ships staff. Regularly running in tandem with these practical courses are 'English Language' and Senior Officer Staff courses. Whilst these could be undertaken ashore in the Iraqi Naval Base, the advantage of utilising Cardigan Bay is the net effect gained by being in an English speaking Maritime environment.

Cardigan Bay has been looked upon as both the TNT and Accommodation Hub for the Northern Arabian Gulf. Flights with personnel and stores arrive from Bahrain on a programmed thrice weekly basis however these flights are regularly more frequent due to the sheer numbers of personnel who need to pass through the area. Most transiting personnel who are aware of their destinations tend to find a reason to remain on Cardigan Bay for at least a night to enjoy the sheer pleasure of a decent meal, plentiful water and a comfortable bed.

Finally, the ship facilitates regular day and night flyex's, which are undertaken by American aircraft in theatre to maintain the currency of both the ships and aircrews Flight Deck operations.

In summary Cardigan Bay is now recognised as the backbone of the Op Telic theatre. Her flexibility is well recognised and respected as the conduit for training, uniting and supporting multinational forces.

ROYAL FLEET AUXILIARY



WAVE KNIGHT
FOST Tanker until mid April then undergoing maintenance in Portland.

WAVE RULER
Conducting duties as APT(S) in support of fleet assets in the South Atlantic.

GOLD ROVER
In Birkenhead due to go into refit early April.

BLACK ROVER
Completing regeneration at FOST prior to undertaking APT(S) taskings.

BAYLEAF
In the Middle East working as the Arabian Gulf Ready Tanker.

ORANGELEAF
Completing refit in Birkenhead then sailing to Devonport.

FORT VICTORIA
Undergoing a maintenance period in Portsmouth before taking up FOST tanker tasking mid April.

FORT GEORGE
Alongside in Crombie undertaking routine operations before sailing mid April for Joint Warrior.

FORT AUSTIN
Alongside in Portsmouth.

FORT ROSALIE
Conducting training in the South West Exercise areas.

CARDIGAN BAY
Continues her work undertaking with ITAM in Northern Arabian Gulf region.

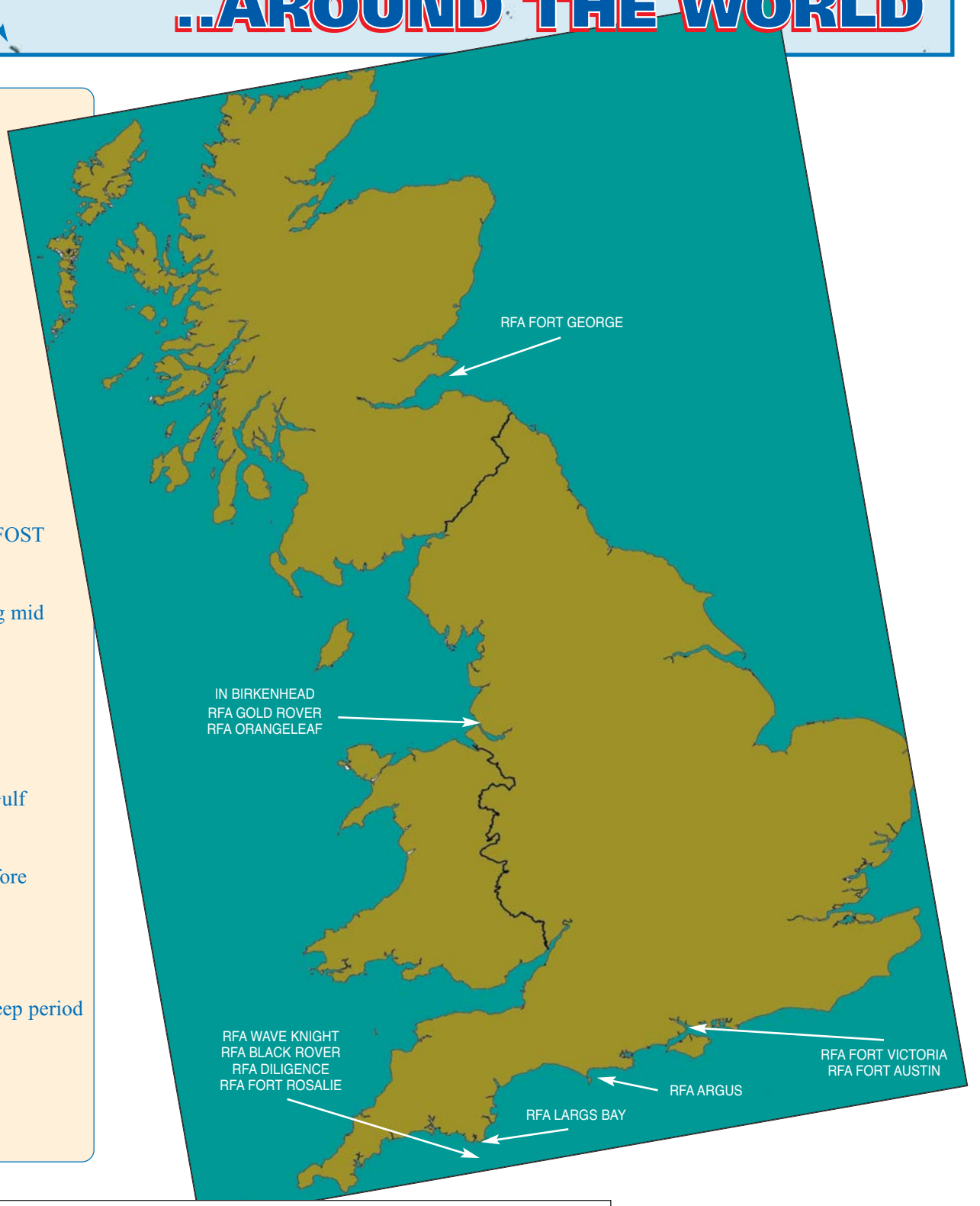
MOUNTS BAY
Off Norway as part of Exercise Cold Response and Chameleon before arriving in Portland mid April.

LYME BAY
Op Calash areas in support of MCMV's.

LARGS BAY
Returned to the U.K. after Op Panlake off Haiti to undergo an upkeep period in Falmouth.

ARGUS
Conducting trials post refit in the South Coast areas.

DILIGENCE
Working up at FOST prior to deployment.



Provided courtesy of The U.K. Hydrographic Office

THE SE LONG COURSE AT HMS COLLINGWOOD

The days were still long, and the memories of summer sunshine were still fresh, what little we had, when four Systems Engineer Officers arrived at the portals of that great Naval establishment HMS Collingwood. They arrived ready to begin the trials and tribulations of the annual SE's Long Course. Three of us were already acquainted with each other, 3/O(SE)s Dave Blacklock, Mark Horrocks and Timothy James. We had

all joined the RFA at BRNC Dartmouth three years previously. The fourth member was 2/O(SE) Alistair Knight, who was in his eighth year in the RFA.

The objects of the Long Course are to provide a sound background in Weapons Engineering and Communications equipment. To enhance knowledge of management skills, defence writing, and drafting official signals such as OPDEFs and Standard Format messages. Students undertake a project of research to produce a 5,000 word submission and give a 40 minute presentation on the allocated topic. The latter formed the major part of our work, as it had to be conducted in our own time. It called for self discipline, planning and team work, and was designed to put us under pressure as we had to progress it while continuing to study our courses during the day.

The project we were given was to investigate ways of making internet access available from all cabins on board RFA vessels. The actual question posed to us was in three parts, and was very specific. The amount of work was vast. This covered in depth research, planning and keeping a full set of records of the project. A great deal of correspondence was carried out with various companies. From our findings we compiled our report and the presentation. Daytime instruction was very much secondary to it. Our instruction included Radar, IFF, Navaids, Gyros, Electronic Warfare, Sonar, ICS25 Communications system, and Crypto. We concluded with two brief skill courses on fibre optic cable terminations and repairs, and "advanced soldering", which we all agreed was an interesting and very useful part of the course.

During the course we went on a number of official visits. We visited

Abbey Wood to meet all the people we'd spoken to over the telephone or emailed. We were shown how the organisations in Abbey Wood worked together. In October we visited Naval Command and the Personnel department on Whale Island. A week later we went to London to visit MOD Main Building. For most of us it was our first visit to all the

venues so it was interesting to see what it was like. Finally we went to Northwood. It proved to be a fascinating visit, even though most of Northwood is currently a building site. We were given a good insight into what goes on there, and how operations are controlled.

During our research, we also visited the factory of Atlas Elektronik in Newport, South Wales. Here we gleaned some useful information on the proposed BRUCE and Hybrid Data Highway systems which provided the answer to the main question of our project. A subcontractor from Thales also visited us at HMS Collingwood and provided vital information on data highway systems.

It was a very busy time for all of us, and there wasn't a great deal of time for relaxation. The main aim of the course was to have us working under pressure. However we did find time to join in some of the formal functions at the wardroom. We all attended the course dinner arranged by the SEMC officers, and two of us, 3/O(SE)s Dave Blacklock and Tim James, attended Trafalgar Night wearing full Mess Blues, together with our course officer, 1/O(SE) Bob Kemp. We all agreed it was a most worthwhile and enlightening experience.

As the months went by, so the tempo of work increased to fever pitch. There were some long evenings where we were often working up to midnight and later. The end result was that all went well. The report was produced and published. There were a lot of fractured nerves – but the presentation was ready on time and was given in December in front of invited guests and VIPs, including Captain (SE) Gil Parsley, Capt (E) Dave Smith, Capt (X) Nigel Budd and Cdr R. Kissane (RN). Then suddenly, it was all

over. It was now December, the days were dark and the Wardroom festooned with Christmas decorations. Some of us had leave to enjoy. Some of us had already had our leave and were going straight back to sea.

Overall the Long Course was definitely worthwhile. We cannot pretend that it was easy. It certainly stretched the intellect, and was very challenging, but we got a lot out of it. It leaves us better prepared to face the problems and pressures that are all part of being a Systems Engineer in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

System Engineering Long Course 049

MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

A free confidential telephone referral service that supports seafarers and their families was recently launched in July, by the South West & Liverpool Port Welfare Committees. Remarkably there are nearly 150 maritime charities providing a variety of important services to UK seafarers from the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy, fishing fleets including their dependants. The confidential referral service, set up in response to a recent study in to the welfare of seafarers and their families recommended quality information on all aspects of welfare provision and support should be easily accessible and relevant to seafarers and their families who may not be aware that help is only a phone call away.

Seafarer Support (0800 121 4765) directs callers to the seafaring charity that is best placed to assist them, offers a follow up service and tracks the progress of each case to ensure the highest quality of service is offered. For more details visit www.seafarersupport.org.uk or call 0800 121 4765 (open 09:30-1630 Mon – Fri).

David Parsons, of the Merchant Navy Welfare Board and Chairman of the Maritime Charities Funding Group, emphasised that "this provides an outreach service to seafarers and their families who are looking for financial or non financial help and guidance. We have been concerned that too many within the maritime community, whether of working age or retired, are slipping through the net. This service is a means by which we can place those people in touch with the organisation best suited to help."

MAILING LIST

With GUNLINE now available in electronic format on the RFA page on the www.royalnavy.mod.uk website and the RFA Community website www.rncom.mod.uk there is now the opportunity to reduce the amount of unwanted mail. If you would like to read GUNLINE on line and stop receiving it in the post please e.mail me at mark.mundy307@mod.uk

RFA COMMUNITY WEBSITE

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary Community website www.rfacom.mod.uk is for RFA Personnel, our families and friends, and offers a wide range of information on RFA matters.

Connecting and supporting the RFA Community worldwide 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, this internet based Community Support facility is for all of us in the RFA community. If you are, or were, a member of the RFA, a family member or friend, this site is for you.

This service is not intended to replace or duplicate the Deployment News that units currently publish on their official pages of the RFA website www.rfa.mod.uk, which is aimed at a much wider audience, including the general public, potential recruits and journalists.

The RFA Community website now has 1315 registered users (up to and including March 2010).

The members area is only open to personnel and their families who have registered to use this facility. This is a protected area, however, only information of a classified nature can be published and this strictly forbids the inclusion of information such as forthcoming port visits and other aspects of a ships programme.

Current topics being discussed on the website include:

- Value For Money Review
- RFA Partners
- LARGS BAY diary
- Review of RFA Community Website
- Expensive Paradigm
- New RFA 18
- RFA in the news

The following features are available only to those who have registered for an RFA Community Website account:

- Crew Lists (updated every fortnight)
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Emergency Contact Details
- BFPO and UIN numbers
- Liberty Boat routines
- Appointers contact details
- MOD Form 305 and 306 (Expense Claim and Cash Advance Forms)
- Promotion Notices
- Gunline
- Cascade Briefs

The site continues to expand rapidly as more and more individuals register for an account. To register for an account, follow the on-screen instructions at www.rfacom.mo.uk and ensure that you keep up to date!

RFA WAVE KNIGHT: COME IN - YOUR TIME IS UP

After a busy twenty months as Arabian Gulf Ready Tanker (AGRT) Wave Knight is now preparing for her final voyage home to Blighty. She has been supporting Coalition and European forces in the Middle East theatre, from the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and around the Internationally Recommended Transit Corridor (IRTC) to as far a-field as the Seychelles and Maldives. Her role included providing fuel (pumping over more than 100,000 cubes of fuel whilst underway) and

afloat support to ships of sixteen countries from across the globe.

Following months of a hectic Replenishment At Sea (RAS) program over the summer of 2009, Wave Knight found herself in Bahrain with a change of crew and a slight change in tasking. Embarking a party of Royal Marines and their gear for transfer to HMS Cumberland was just the beginning of a busy period in Bahrain. This included disembarking the AGRT stores for RFA Bayleaf to pick up on her taking the reins in November, and loading stores and equipment for 814's Merlin 'Sabretooth' which was to join us upon sailing. This left just enough

time for some well deserved R&R – well, an afternoon at least!

After what seemed like an eternity of painstakingly chipping and painting each lashing point on the flight deck and undertaking sometimes seemingly extreme lengths to secure any possible FOD hazard (remember – either pick it up or lash it down!) Wave Knight was ready to fly on the remainder of 814 squadron and her Merlin.

The Royal Marines wasted no time in taking the opportunity to practice their boarding techniques on a low freeboard tanker. After several days of training, HMS Cumberland joined the show and, with their assistance and that of her own Lynx (Judge – Dealing out Justice!) proceeded to put on an impressive display of naval force projection in a full-on counter-piracy boarding exercise – leaping up ladders from boats, with helicopters airborne and much to the amusement of many, taking no chances with 'securing and detaining' a certain Cadet!

Due to the area in which she would be operating, Wave Knight's crew also undertook thorough gunnery training, and not just on stationary targets. The crash boat was used in both day and night serials to simulate an attacking skiff whilst defence tactics such as ship manoeuvring, flashing lights, firing flares, and VHF procedures were practised and refined with feedback on their effectiveness being reported back by Coxswain Andy Fordy:

"We found it extremely difficult to see the ship's profile when all the lights were extinguished" he said, describing the boat crew's night 'attack'. "And when the ship started to turn at high speed you would start on one side and finish on the other, which meant if you had marked a place on the ship where you were going to board, it would go right out the window. When the aldis lamp hit us we were instantly blinded and disorientated; the only option was to turn away".

Now fully worked up and having completed her rigorous training schedule, the combined forces on Wave Knight proceeded to continue her busy RAS schedule whilst providing support for other forces in the area making good use of 'Sabretooth' to deter any piracy activity in the area.

After a productive month of hard graft (and a few very late nights for everyone on board) it was time to say farewell to Sabretooth and her supporting cast and return them to land in Salalah. This was the last stop for Wave Knight in her AGRT role leaving only a few RAS's en-route to the Red Sea and a pump-over with RFA Bayleaf to prepare for. Wave Knight has had an incredibly successful and productive 20 months on station as attested to by the combined forces of all nationalities and commands that she leaves behind. So while she will miss her RAS custom, good coalition humour, life as the AGRT is just beginning for RFA Bayleaf…

By Cadet(X) Joe Davies

Sudoku by Chris White

Answers on page 16

6								7
8	2							9
			3	5	6	1		
		4	2				3	
	7	3					9	
	5		6	3				1
					1			
	1	6						
					5	8		4

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Chairman's Dit.

I have a few things to talk about in this issue, not least of course my thanks to all the contributors.

The RFA Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. It had been hoped to visit the Arboretum in January the visit to coincide with a visit by Commodore Bill. Unfortunately rain, or more correctly, snow stopped play and the visit had to be deferred. Given the Commodore's busy schedule the next opportunity to make the co-ordinated visit will be in late April.

The Year Book. Although the new "Members Handbook", formerly known as the "Year Book" is still delayed things are looking up. I visited the Publishers/Printers in Birkenhead on 22 February and we have moved from "frenzied inactivity" to "frenzied activity", a quantum leap forward. Back to reality, the copy is now "in Studio" which allows the designers to produce the first cut. Once done it will be sent to me for proofing and late amendments. I am informed that this process normally takes 3 proofs to achieve the final product. Basically what I am saying is that the Members Handbook is very close now. Watch the Association website for the latest information.

Talking about the Association Website, it continues to develop, with an e-shopping facility recently added on. The addition of a branch bulletin board remains an aspiration which will be activated as soon as I can get my head around how it works. It's actually there but still needs some tweaking before it can be published. What has been added is a Branch News section with each branch having it's own section.

Pam Axworthy is still looking for anecdotes for her book, "S*d Off it's Smoko", come on chaps there must be something out there. Which reminds me I had better put pen to paper.

Remember your schooldays and the maths questions, "If it takes10 men 5 days to....", well ponder this, if it takes 100 men 2 years to build a Rover Boat how long will it take 12 men to demolish it? Answer 3 months, scary init. The pictures show Grey and Percivale languishing in the old drydock in Gladstone Docks Liverpool. Previous occupants include the Lusitania.

And finally, the AGM and the Reunion will soon be upon us, as you know the Plymouth Branch is hosting it this year and it will be held at the New Continental Hotel, Plymouth on Saturday 22nd May 2010. There are details on our website, but you will receive a mailing with the application form for the reunion and also for the AGM which will be held on the same day. I look forward to meeting you there.

RFA Sprucol

On the 10 July 1918, and only 4 months and 1 day before the November 11th Armistice, UB110 commanded by Kapitänleutnant Werner Furbringer, (b: 2/10/1888, d: 8/2/1982) torpedoed RFA Sprucol off the East Coast of England.

Thankfully there were no casualties. Badly damaged, Sprucol managed to make the Humber for repairs and the pictures show her in drydock there. Kapitänleutnant Werner Furbringer who held the Iron Cross 1st and 2nd Class is credited with 101 ships sunk for a total of 97,881 GRT and 4 ships damaged for a total of 8,181 GRT (This information, and more, is available from http://www.uboat.net).

One of our new members, Maurice Cocker author of "West Coast Support Group: Task Group 96.8, Korea 1950-1953" (available in our shop) sent the pictures to me. His uncle James Maddocks was an apprentice electrician (aged 18) in her ship's company at the time of the attack.

RFA Sprucol was built in 1918 by Short Brothers of Sunderland in their Pallion yard for the Admiralty and sold on, in 1920 to Anglo American Oil, which so far as I can figure out became part of the Standard Oil Company which eventually became ESSO. She was renamed Juanita and gave many years of service. She was eventually scuttled in Water Sound, Scapa Flow 17.4.40 as part of the Churchill Barrier following the attack on HMS Royal Oak on the 14th Oct 1939.

Sprucol/Juanita lies today in the shallows of Scapa Flow.

Plymouth Branch News

Two Plymouth Branch members, Peter Waters and Terry Vincent were among the 160 South-West Veterans, presented with this medal at a ceremony in Plymouth on February 12th.

The event, at the Holiday Inn, was organised by Mike Warren of the National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association (NMBVA). Before making the presentation, Brigadier-General Dato Tajri Alwi, the Malaysian Military Attache, recounted that he had now made some 12,000 awards and now that new supplies were available would continue until all the applications were fulfilled.

Peter served in RFA Eddyrock which operated in Tawau, Sabah in 1964 and later in RFA Orangeleaf. Terry served in RFA Tidereach in 1964-5.

The PJM is a commemorative medal which the Government of Malaysia would like to award to eligible British citizens, for their service in Malaya or Malaysia between 31August 1957 and 12 August 1966. Further details may be obtained from the Veterans Agency:-

www.veterans-uk.info/medals/pingat.html
or from the RFA Association.

OBITUARIES

Since the last edition of Gunline the following members and ex-RFA non members have sadly "Crossed the Bar"

CPO(Yeo) Derek Reid
on 9th December 2009 aged 61
Third Officer(E) Nigel Jonathon James
3rd January 2010
Captain(E) Thomas Leslie (Les) Morton
17th January 2010 aged 84
SG1A Paul Baker 27 January 2010
aged 59

FOR SERVICE, SEAFARERS AND FAMILIES

REG CHARITY NO. 1093950. PATRON: HRH THE EARL OF WESSEX, KG KCVO ADC REGISTERED IN SCOTLAND No. SC039054

MUSES FROM THE FAR FLUNG

MORE MEMORIES OF SINGAPORE

You know, I'm often heard to opine that you should never return years later, to a place where you have enjoyed a great time, and from which you have many fond memories, and I still believe this to be true. However, if and when you do - (I did of course) one should always try and anticipate a certain degree of change, for change there will almost certainly be. Bin those rose-tinted spectacles, Jan, and get a large bite of reality. I have not been in Singapore in a sea-going capacity since the notorious Defence Sales Tour of 1976 (Lyness). I have, however, been there a number of times as a private citizen, and I have to say that you find yourself taking a slightly different view of this Berg. For example, I once drove down to Singapore from the Malaysian island of Penang, all the way to Singapore, in a somewhat pointless attempt to "take in" the scenery en route. No motorways in those days of course, and we found ourselves for the greater part of the journey, stuck behind a dirty great articulated Veehickle carrying enormous logs of timber, and emitting great clouds of blackers! We overnighted in Ipoh and KL, and on the afternoon of the trid day found ourselves entering Johore Bahru, where we could see the Causeway across to Singapore, and the towers of the Woodlands housing estate - but of course, actually getting across was a very different proposition. Armed with memories of sunny Sunday afternoon expeditions from the Naval Base, across to JB to partake of numerous GTs and the excellent curry lunch offered at Filthy Fulford's fine establishment, crossing over to JB from Singers was a breeze, just a quick flash of the old yellow RFA ID card and you're in like Flynn, the world is your lobster, Amy's Bar, the Sky Bar, Tokyo Nights Massage all at your beck and call. Nowadays the reality is that of an International Frontier (Which is actually what it is, of course) and the formalities go the whole nine yards, numerous forms, loads of bumph, passports, visa stamps, customs - old Uncle Tom Cobley and all! And often a very long queue before you get started.

So, here we are, back in the Lion City, and recognising nothing. The Woodlands Housing Estate looks like something from another planet, the road through the what used to be the Naval Base is a public highway. We decide to stop for lunch in Sembawang, and find that the old Admiral's residence by Canberra Gate has been turned into a restaurant - Oh Goody! Essentially it hasn't changed a lot. In fact they are still using the old Admiral's mess traps - Plates, dinner, white fluted, Gold Badge, Flag Officers for the use of! But as for the cooking, I doubt that had changed since the days of empire. The Thompson Road is now a great wide dual carriageway. Gone are the pirate taxis that ran you into town for 50 cents, and always let you off very close to a monsoon drain which the driver hoped you would tip into. There is now an underground railway, and extremely efficient it is too, like everything else in modern Singapore. Even the prices don't seem to have gone up very much until you realize that you are only getting about 2.5 Sing dollars to the pound instead of the 8 of the Forces Fixed Rate!

Orchard Road

Most RFA pilgrims spend a certain amount of time trying to turn back the clock. Trying to find some of the places they frequented years ago - what's happened to Fosters Steak House, where you always got a free glass of red wine with your steak. That quaint little bar in Orchard Road that had portraits of many British Prime Ministers displayed on the staircase (Actually, I think it was called the Churchill!!!). Remember the Tangle Inn, presided over by that formidable elderly Geordie Lady. Then of course, not to forget the Pebbel Bar in the Singapura Hotel where many an evening was spent gathered around the grand piano singing dubious ditties. I well remember the very last night in the Pebble Bar, they were going to demolish the hotel the next day. There had always been a rather smart wrought iron pub sign hanging outside in the corridor which disappeared that night. Like a good few other people I have a pretty good idea where that sign can be found, to this day!

There were of course diverse activities to indulge in, both in the Village, and in Singapore itself. Remember the "Cultural Shows" in the middle of a timber yard, reached by a succession of pirate taxis, all driven by furtive little men in black tee-shirts. Of course, the next day everybody knew who had indulged, as they were without fail, covered in mosquito bites this was always a good topic for conversation over the breakfast sausages and train smash! These days Singapore has no mosquitoes - not allowed! Same as chewing gum, cigarettes and long haired gentlemen! Rumour has it (although I must admit I have never seen it for myself) that Bugis Street was demolished, but after a while some

Above & below: Bugis Street

jobsworth realised that they had lost a serious tourist attraction, so they rebuilt it. Alas, no noughts and crosses, no genuine imitation Dunhill lighters and no genuine imitation show-girls this time!!! Not even any rats I'm told, the whole place is quite wholesome and boring!

In the bad old days when a vessel arrived in Singers (Or any other port in the world for that matter) it was customary to land the Articles of Agreement to the custody of the Shipping Master at the local Mercantile Marine Office. Natch, in Singapore the MMO was way down town, at Collier Quay. This meant sometimes daily expeditions to Collier Quay, whenever any crew member joined or paid off. Cue the ubiquitous pussers tilley, or perhaps if you were really lucky (And had the foresight to take the Old Man along) we'd get a nice black Vauxhall Velox with the smart white cotton seat covers, and a driver with a shirt on! This would normally occupy the greater part of the day, as it was necessary to have lunch somewhere along the line - I invariably favoured the Cellar Bar on Collier Quay and adjacent to Change Alley for a spot of shopping. You could get back on board to find that Mr Peanuts (remember him?) had just delivered your dry cleaning to your cabin - in time for a refreshing shower, change into clean, crisp clothes, and report to the Officers Lounge for Orders - Oh NO! Not another ten dollar run down the village - perleeeze, life is Ard Milord.

Today, when you arrive in the ordered coolth of Singapore's International Airport at Changi, which in my opinion is the best airport in the world, saunter down the thick carpets, browse the designer Duty Free shops (Buy your cigarettes now, Jan, you won't get another opportunity!) hear the muted muzak and the calm, articulated announcements, even if they are distinctly Singlish, Lah! You are carried out to the sweeping urban expressway, with immaculate medians, see the glittering towers of the city in the distance, then you know that you have returned. Enjoy!

John Littlechild
Bangkok, 11th September 2009

The Marine Society & Sea Cadets

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The Marine Society provides RFA personnel with a range of services to enhance their learning, well-being and to facilitate their professional development.

www.mscos.ac.uk

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Advice. The society has long been a respected source of independent, confidential and free advice to seafarers on any matter of concern to them. Alone in the sector, it holds the Matrix Standard quality kitemark for dispensing advice and guidance.

The Marine Society's strength is built on the relationship it enjoys with seafarers. A relationship that goes back 254 years.

Libraries

For decades the Marine Society has worked with the RFA to ensure that those away at sea have access to the books they want.

The Marine Society is the only organisation in the UK which provides an exchange library service direct to ships, delivered via home ports or overseas depots.

These libraries are usually replenished three times a year and range in size from 50 to 500 books which are drawn from a large and up to date base collection of both fiction and non-fiction or which can be compiled to suit each ships special requirements.

Every RFA ship has an onboard library supplied and serviced by The Marine Society. If you have any comments on the books supplied in it, please let them know. They may be general comments about the books supplied or they may be requests for specific titles.

For more information on library services please contact Mark Jackson, Book Services Manager (books@ms-sc.org / 020 7654 7008)

GCSE / A Levels

The Society offers an extensive range of tutor-supported subjects, all offered with professionally prepared learning materials. As you might expect, the provision is seafarer-friendly, meaning it's ideally suited whether you're at sea or ashore.

And because The Marine Society is an examination centre, it can also enter you for examinations and make arrangements for you to sit them either ashore or at sea in your RFA ship.

For those returning to learning after a period of perhaps years away, the Society offers courses in functional kills that are designed to gently brush up on the basics. Such programmes are ideal also for those seeking promotion who require a grounding in modern maths as part of their knowledge base.

Email education@ms-sc.org for more information.

Personal/Professional Development

There are courses covering basic skills in information and communication technology, report writing, editing, creative writing, and even web design.

The suite of business skills is always kept up to date. The offer includes skills for those who are thinking of running their own business such as marketing, bookkeeping, business start-ups, and accountancy. The Marine Society even offers a bespoke degree in business, leadership and management in association with The Open University.

Financial Support

The Marine Society continues to provide financial support for the professional development of seafarers. The support is provided through a range of scholarship schemes for both officers and ratings. Interest-free loans are also available.

There's also the John William Slater Scholarship Scheme for the advancement of ratings in association with Nautilus International.

Awards are offered of up to £15,000 to support ratings who wish to study for their first certificate of competency.

The award can be used towards the costs of any necessary full or part-time education, and to provide some financial support during college phases.

And when you've achieved your approved OOW certificate you could be awarded a further £1000 as a bonus payment.

If you are a rating serving with the RFA and want to better yourself, why not email slater@ms-sc.org to find out more.

"I was surprised at the length of time the Slater Scholarship has been around considering very few at sea know about it. I'd like to take the opportunity to help publicise the fact that the funding and support is available through The Marine Society which is second to none in the support it offers to seafarers - certainly its been the backbone of my career at sea so far".

ms@ms-sc.org / www.mscos.ac.uk / 020 7654 7050
The Marine Society, 202 Lambeth Road, London SE1 7JW

WAVE RULER..... THE AMP CONTINUES

WAVE RULER left the chilly winter waters off the south coast of England on 4 February heading south to warmer climes. After sustaining the usual buffeting in the "Bay", the weather started to improve after we were past Finnesterre. Anticipating blue skies and calmer seas, the preparatory tools and the stocks of paint obtained in Liverpool at the end of the AMP were soon put to full use. A quiet passage, interrupted briefly by the attendance onboard of King Neptune and his illustrious court and some fine weather has enabled a significant amount of work to be carried out. The team on deck have made a supreme effort and a number of tired looking areas on the upper decks have been spruced up, turning rusting and flaky areas into smooth and uniformly painted areas once again.

PO(D) Larry Dwyer. Larry, happy as… with 'his' cherry picker. Picture courtesy of Captain S P Jones.

Progress south via the coasts of West Africa and South America brought us to a brief visit to Santos in Brazil, where the AMP continued. With the aid of a 'usefully' sized cherry picker, one that reached the parts other cherry pickers couldn't reach, more tired and flaky looking areas of the ship were addressed with enthusiasm. Despite hot and humid temperatures well in the thirties, the team continued to improve the cosmetic and material state of the ship.

Of course it would not be an AMP without lots of sterling work having gone on in other areas around the Ship, and in particular 'down below', I will let others tell that tale. On departing Santos a couple of days later, the waters soon became chilly and the weather inclement once again. There is still plenty left to do in underdeck areas, which the team are keen to get to grips with. More paint please!

Chief Officer A J Ford

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RFA GOLD ROVER RETURNS TO DEVONPORT AFTER 10 MONTH DEPLOYMENT TO THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

RFA Gold Rover returned back to Devonport on Friday 26 Feb after a busy ten-month operational deployment patrolling the South Atlantic conducting Maritime Security Operations in the region.

The Small Fleet Tanker provided a maritime presence for the UK's interests in the South Atlantic, including the Falkland Islands, Saint Helena, Ascension Islands, Tristan da Cuhna, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.

Highlights of the trip included visits to South Georgia where the crew enjoyed the wildlife and scenery in what is one of the remotest regions of the world. After having spent some time with the whales, the ship made her way into anchor at Husvik. The approach was made in a snow storm, and the ship anchored off the old whaling station unable to see anything through the snow. The weather cleared after about an hour and everything became visible, in all it's splendour particularly the old whaling station.

We were also able to make out four scientists partaking in a snowball fight ashore. The ship being aware that they were expecting us, we called them up on VHF and invited them onboard for afternoon tea and to warm themselves up. After chatting with them we discovered that they were a research team conducting investigations into Elephant Seals – counting the numbers of adults and pups and also fitting some of them with GPS tracking devices.

They were nearing the end of a five week period at Husvik, living in very basic conditions, the worst of which was being without hot water. Consequently they were all offered the chance of a hot shower. Initially the two men declined, but when the two girls were asked they welcomed the idea with open arms!

An hour later, having showered and with some essential supplies, they went ashore and welcomed some of the ship's company to visit their accommodation for a coffee and look around before it was time to return back to the ship. They were not exaggerating the basic nature of their quarters!!

Throughout the afternoon, the ship's boat conducted trips to view the wildlife which included Elephant Seals, Fur Seals, Penguins and Reindeer as well as the old whaling station. It was a shame that the later was out of bounds due to the precarious nature of some of the buildings and a 200m exclusion zone was in place.

As the sun set, the ship remained at anchor overnight and prepared to depart the following morning to return back to anchor off Grytvyken.

After South Georgia a trip was made to Rio de Janeiro where the ship spent maintenance periods; the Island of Saint Helena, where the crew enjoyed some unbelievable hospitality from the locals. Operationally the ship undertook a major role in the rescue of the Yacht 'Sea Jade'. The ship was also able to provide the Islanders with a rare opportunity to see their native Island from the sea during a number of Round the Island Tours.

During the deployment Gold Rover covered more than 50,000 miles, crossing the equator no less than 6 times. Gold Rover has issued around 9000 Tonnes of diesel fuel in support of the five warships that have been on station at various times throughout her deployment in the South Atlantic.

The Ship's Commanding Officer, Captain Paul Minter, said: "Gold Rover and her crew have once again performed consistently well in the wide range of operations and support they have been asked to conduct over the last ten months, demonstrating the verstility the RFA can provide worldwide. The ship and her company remain a credit to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the Royal Navy."

BERGSVAGEN BAY - NORTH OF HARSTSAD

RFA MOUNTS BAY left Sors Stagnes laden with Royal Marines and the Army contingent of the Royal Marines ready to begin beach landings. On Wednesday 17th February 2010 the ship anchored in Bergsvagen Bay, North of Harstad. The beautiful sunny conditions belied a treacherous cold which can easily cause frostbite to exposed skin. The Royal Logistic Corps (RLC) took full advantage of a lull in proceedings to enjoy a spot of fishing off their Mexeflote. It was great when the Captain spotted me with my camera and asked if I wanted to go for a "jolly" around the ship and see whether I could get some good shots of the ship at the same time. Luckily the RLC were only too willing to give up their fishing and show off their brand new work boat, which has all the mod cons, a walk in shower room, a cooker and four bench type bunks. What more could you ask for? After a while my hands started to freeze so I was quite relieved to get back on the ship.

I was hopeful that a fish supper may have been in the offing at some point whilst we were there, though asking the Chief Cook could have been tricky while his team were catering for 400 hungry mouths for breakfast, lunch and dinner! I decided to choose my time to ask him very carefully, especially since my aversion to travelling to other ships, led me to invite seven other Naval Logistics Officers on board for a "Loggies convention" and this included lunch.

Unfortunately when they arrived on the ship they were two hours late and seven had miraculously increased to 18, with no warning because the e-mail system had been down.

Thankfully the Chief Cook had adopted his proactive approach of taking whatever numbers I advised him and then doubling them, which saved my bacon yet again!

Suffice to say that the Logistics Officers went away contented and replete on full stomachs, ready to take on whatever questions or tasks would be coming their way when they got back on board their respective ships.

Interestingly enough the Dutch Logistics Officer could not believe the number of crew we have in the RFA to man the same ship he was on (The LSDAs were based on the De Witt class).

They are manned at 151, a bit different to our 69! And always the same question – How do you keep it so clean? Hard work and pride in our ship being the answer.

GOLD ROVER CROSSING THE EQUATOR ONCE AGAIN – DECEMBER 2009

After having met up with HMS York in the Northern Hemisphere, Gold Rover headed back South, and in doing so, it was inevitable that we would be once more crossing the equator, and in so doing would be destined to have a further visit from King Neptune and his Court.

And so on the morning of Saturday 12th December, the ship received warning that King Neptune and his wife, Aphrodite, along with the full court of Neptune would be joining the ship at some time later that day.

A trawl through the crew highlighted that there were fully13 members of the ships company who had to date not had the 'pleasure' of meeting king Neptune to pay their respects. Indeed, amongst these 13, it transpired that 2 had not only failed to appear before the Court, but had previously cheated the King by having already crossed the Equator without paying the necessary respects – a crime that Neptune was hardly likely to look upon favourably….

It was at two O'clock exactly that afternoon, that King Neptune, Queen Aphrodite and the Kings court emerged from out of the depths and presented themselves on board to initiate the 13 members of the Ships' Company Neptune had not yet met and welcome to his realm. After being welcomed on board by Captain Minter, the Court proceeded to the vicinity of the ships swimming pool, and court was declared in session.

And so it was that SG2 Brogan, SG2 Joscelyne, Cadet (X) Southall, MM1A Miller, 3/O(X) Ellis, SG1B Firth Clark, SG1A Loughran, SG1B Baird, SG1A Taylor, CA(Ck) Gouldson, LH(HC) Kay, 3/O(X) Doyle and 3/O(E) Russell were required to present themselves to the court to account for their actions.

As was only to be expected, once the initiates had eventually been hauled before the court, King Neptune (aka LH(D) Mark Richardson) and Queen Aphrodite (aka PO(SE) Seth Randall) took no time at all to find them all guilty of their crimes and they were thus suitably covered in 'gunk', fed the evil courts sweets, and dunked in the pool before finally being presented with the coveted Crossing the Line Certificate.

After a good clean-up, the ships company then retired to the Poop deck for a Bar-B-Q expertly cooked once again by CPO(E) Kevin Stephenson.

Well done to all those involved in the planning of the event, and for those who have now finally endured the welcome of Neptune, keep those certificates safe if you don't wish to have a repeat performance!

RFA SG2 TRAINEES IN FORT ROSALIE - NVQ LEVEL 2 IN MARINE VESSEL SUPPORT

After nine months of tests, interviews, 'stalking' the postman for acceptance letters and seven weeks of Phase One training at HMS RALEIGH we finally walked up the Gangway of RFA FORT ROSALIE. Eleven trainees all with the similar thoughts running through our heads that morning – 'I cannot believe I am finally here' 'I hope I do not mess up' 'What if after all I went through I am not good enough to do the job?'. Fortunately our fears were totally unfounded.

SG2 Bradley J Hart - 'an unlikely seamstress!?'

As an SG2 there are lots of new skills to learn. Some of us had never used power tools or seen a mooring rope let alone tied up a ship, especially one the size of FORT ROSALIE. Each time we have been set a new task we have discovered new talents it never occurred to us we had.

Every morning when we 'turn to' for duty we are each given a task. Our jobs are designed so that piece by piece we learn the job of a Seaman. We will work

FTRO Workboats and Lifeboats

SG2 Bradley J Hart, SG2 Lucy Moores, SG2 M Hough and SG2 R King

with the deck maintainer learning to look after the external decks. On another day we will be helping to service the ship's life jackets. We have also helped with maintaining and setting up the Replenishment At Sea (RAS) rigs along with assisting to maintain on board fire fighting equipment and the Breathing Apparatus. Time is also spent cleaning the accommodation to make sure cleanliness is maintained – the ship is our home as well as our place of work. At the weekends the trainees under supervision lower and check the lifeboats to make sure the lifeboats are in good repair and can be launched properly.

In the last Four months we have got cold, dirty, covered in paint and grease and had more cuts and bruises than we can possibly count – all in all though it has been an enjoyable trip for all of us. We have learned a lot about the job and grasped the basics which will allow us to develop these skills on our next ship as we enjoy working towards becoming qualified Seamen.

Dressing ship Sat 6 Feb HM Queen Accession to the Throne.

Article by SG2 Julie A Banyard

RFA GOLD ROVER MEETS UP WITH HMS YORK

After heading north in company with HMS Gloucester following on from our visit to Brazil, it was time to meet up with the incoming APT(S) Guard Ship – HMS York.

With a final Replenishment of HMS Gloucester on 10 December, all three ships met up off Cape Verde Islands on 11 December when the handover of duties was conducted. With all the formalities completed, and a PHOTEX conducted to record the event for posterity, it was time to bid farewell to HMS Gloucester.

As HMS Gloucester headed back North and home to the UK, it was back to business for Gold Rover as HMS York positioned herself ready for what was to be her first Replenishment on task.

The RAS successfully completed, York and Gold Rover headed back south and towards Rio De Janerio where York conducted a Port Visit, and Gold Rover underwent a maintenance period.

As the ships approached Rio, we were advised that the original plan to have both ships berthed alongside was not possible – where had we heard that one before…. This time, however, an alternative solution to different ports was proposed, and so it was that Gold Rover berthed alongside, and once secured, HMS York made her approach to secure alongside, outboard of Gold Rover.

RFA WAVE RULER CROSSES THE LINE

Wave Ruler was recently visited by King Neptune and his Court as the ship crossed the line officially known as the Equator.

As is usual on these special occasions, several members of the ship's company hadn't previously met King Neptune and his beautiful wife Aphrodite. The afternoon began with Captain Shaun Jones requesting safe passage for his ship.

The victims, 19 in total were summoned to hear the charges filed against them and to duly take their punishment. After a good deal of searching, 16 lucky participants had been identified. The remaining three, managed despite the best intentions of Neptune's police and some really creative hiding, to evade capture for the remainder of the ceremony.

The ship's company had put a great deal of time and effort into producing excellent costumes, setting up a make shift pool and baking some truly mind blowing cookies. Our lucky victims found themselves subjected to gastronomic delights, dunked by three very enthusiastic bears, whilst their hair was gently manicured by a grotesque and blood stained barber.

In a strange and possibly quite original twist at the end of the ceremony, King Neptune was unmasked, exposed and dealt with as a usurper and pollywog after the real King Neptune made a late appearance much to the amusement of many.

The whole occasion was very good natured with no permanent physical damage to any of the victims.

A successful flight deck BBQ followed, with a Horse Race meeting in the hangar rounding off an enjoyable and fun packed day which raised £74 for charity.

SUDOKU ANSWERS

6	3	1	9	8	2	4	5	7
8	2	5	1	7	4	3	6	9
7	4	9	3	5	6	1	8	2
9	6	4	2	1	7	5	3	8
1	7	3	5	4	8	2	9	6
2	5	8	6	3	9	7	4	1
5	8	7	4	9	1	6	2	3
4	1	6	8	2	3	9	7	5
3	9	2	7	6	5	8	1	4

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