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Gunline - The First Point of Contact | Published by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service | Winter 2011 | www.rfa.mod.uk

RFA CAPTURES PIRATE MOTHERSHIP

A dhow pirate mother-ship involved in attacks on merchant shipping in the Indian Ocean was stopped and boarded by ships including Fort Victoria operating in the Indian Ocean. This action followed on from the successful rescue by Fort Victoria of the Italian Merchant Ship, Monte Cristo in early October.

It is believed the dhow was hijacked by suspected pirates so that they could use it as a base, or mothership, from which to launch attacks against merchant ships many hundreds of miles from Somalia. Throughout this time, the Pakistani crew of the dhow was held hostage on board.

RFA Fort Victoria and HMS Somerset some 200 miles off the coast were tasked with closing in on the dhow. HMS Somerset's Commanding Officer, Commander Paul Bristowe said, "The mother-ship was located by Somerset's Merlin helicopter at first light and the boarding teams were brought to immediate notice whilst Somerset closed with the dhow".

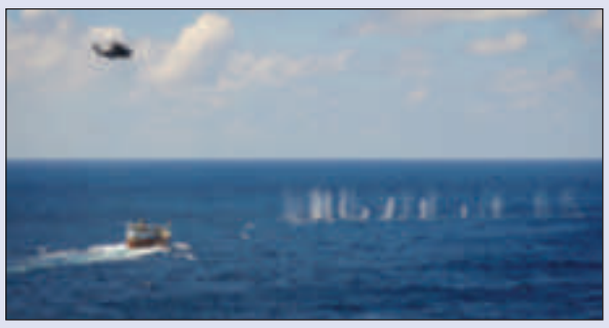
RFA Fort Victoria is deployed as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Ocean Shield counter piracy task force, with HMS Somerset, assigned at the time to the Combined Maritime Forces counter-piracy mission, Combined Task Force (CTF) 151

The dhow was soon surrounded by a Royal Navy and Royal Marine boarding team from RFA Fort Victoria, supported by HMS Somerset's helicopter. RFA Fort Victoria's Commanding Officer, Captain Shaun Jones RFA, said, "This operation demanded high levels of seamanship to ensure that the dhow was kept under close observation as the boarding party moved in."

The suspected pirates capitulated as the boarding team scaled the vessel's side. Captain Rod Yapp, Royal Marines, the commander of the boarding team, said, "Approaching the dhow before boarding was quite tense. Through my weapon sight I could see dark figures moving in the shadows on the bridge. We quickly boarded and secured the dhow then mustered the 24 occupants on her bow."

In the run up to the boarding, the suspect pirates were observed by Somerset's Merlin helicopter which witnessed the suspected pirates ditching equipment and weapons overboard as well as setting one of their skiffs adrift. Despite their desperate attempts to cover their tracks, a large cache of boarding ladders, weapons, a second attack skiff and equipment from a previously pirated ship were found onboard.

Captain Yapp said "There was a clear indication that the suspected pirates found on the dhow were well-practised and knew what they were doing. One of the weapons had recently been fired and was well maintained – as was the RPG rocket. I think that if we hadn't disrupted this group of suspected pirates, it is quite possible that they would have attacked another merchant vessel."



The dhow's crew of 20 were free to go on their way once the evidence gathering had finished. The four suspected pirates that were apprehended, however, have been passed to Italian authorities, on suspicion of their involvement three days earlier in the attack on the MV Monte Cristo.

Surg Cdr Adrian Mellor Royal Navy,

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Commodore Bill Walworth

2011 passed in a blur. The RFA has been immensely busy at sea and ashore and as it draws to a close I believe we are better placed than twelve months ago. We know how to meet the demands placed on us and that they are achievable. Our manpower is reduced to meet the loss of three ships, and sad as we are to see our colleagues leave, it is of some comfort that their departure was voluntary. This Gunline has articles from a number of operational ships as well as some signposts to the future.

RFA Fort Victoria is the ideal ship for counter piracy. Her current deployment is deterring and stopping Somali pirates hi-jacking ships and kidnapping their crews. Wave Ruler is making news in the North Atlantic through diplomatic, counter drugs operations and hurricane and disaster relief work. She returns to the UK in mid December and is sure of a warm welcome after over two years away from home demonstrating UK commitment in those waters and showing all that is good about our small organisation. These two were the headline news, but every ship made a contribution to the Nation's security and vital interests, as you have read throughout the year. In the headquarters we are dealing with a number of challenges, including designing the changes that we will start putting into action in 2012, after a period of consultation and communication with the Flotilla. Other highlights were the Nautilus Award for Counter Piracy efforts, the highly successful visit to Fort Rosalie by Mr Nick Harvey, Minister of State for the Armed Forces in the Ministry of Defence and the Firmin Sword of Peace for Largs Bay (sadly now in Australia).

Key to our future is that the right people know what we bring to Defence. To that end we have worked hard and I hope you have noticed RFA stories in several media sources this year. I tell anyone who will listen (and others who can't hide in time) about the RFA, our seagoing and operational experience, our business model and value for money. We are well supported by the First Sea Lord's strategy team, Navy Command and MOD media, by very positive stories in the wider industry journals, by our maritime trades unions, Nautilus and the RMT, and most of all by the seagoing staff and their exploits, which are the best adverts for our service.

In the midst of the global uncertainty the Ministry of Defence has been busy. A number of major changes in Whitehall, the Army, Navy and Air Force and the DES are underway. The RFA is in the middle, carrying out our own programme, with our staff in Portsmouth and Abbeywood also closely involved in the Navy and DES reviews. Behind much of our answer to the challenges is the immensely hard work of Captain Jonathan Huxley, who has worked for nearly eighteen months on how to manage our ships and people post SDSR. This Autumn Captain Duncan Lamb came into the headquarters to lead in taking forward the RFA changes. You can expect to hear a lot from his Stategy and Development Team.

The core of our community is RFA employees, however our operational success is also down to our STON personnel, Naval parties from MASF at Culdrose, the mainstream civil servants in our headquarters, the RN and RM serving in our ships, and especially our families and children. Thank you all for supporting the RFA in 2011. It's been gruelling, but on balance, a successful year for the RFA. Who knows what the future holds but we are as well prepared as we can be. Good luck everyone, have a great Christmas and prepare for whatever 2012 brings to the RFA.

WAVE RULERS ASSISTANCE TO THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS

Wednesday the 24th August saw the start of a routine day for Wave Ruler whilst undertaking a maintenance period Curacao. With a defect to rectify and general maintenance to be conducted, setting sail seemed miles away. Then the Captain received a call from Fleet requesting assistance to the Turks and Caicos Islands in the wake of Hurricane Irene.

As a result the crew had to prepare the ship to sail that evening. Critically we had to reinstate safe temporary repairs to the ship's defect and curtail the maintenance period to ensure that there would be no delay to our departure. For the Logistics Supply Department this required arranging with the ship's agent; pilots, tugs and line handlers at short notice for that evening and phone calls to the ship's chandler to ascertain whether it was possible to load food stores prior to sailing. Personnel due to join the ship had to be advised via Portsmouth of the change in programme and personnel leaving the ship had to also change their plans!

All the previous well intended plans had to be brought forward. By midday stores were being loaded onboard. It was all available hands to assist with the preparations and stow the stores prior to sailing. This was the RFA at its best with departments all working together as a team in order to make sail and show that changes can be implemented within a short time frame.

For recent new joiners and the RN Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief Team (HADR) of twenty who had only just walked up the gangway less that two hours prior to sailing, what an initiation! Not only did they have to learn their way around the ship but they also had to rapidly acclimatise and prepare to support the established Disaster Relief organisation. However, with a dedicated team onboard, consisting of RFA and RN personnel specifically trained to undertake disaster relief operations and an additional Royal Navy HADR team providing extra manpower Wave Ruler was well placed to assist with the task that lay ahead

Within 24 hours of the hurricane hitting the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) the embarked Lynx from 815 Squadron conducted an aerial survey with the Acting Governor and members of the Islands Disaster Management team on board to assess the damage to outlaying islands and settlements. This proved invaluable in witnessing at first hand the signs of damage and devastation of flooding caused by Hurricane Irene. The overall assessment was that TCI survived remarkably unscathed.

Wave Ruler in conjunction with the Disaster Management Team (DMT) formulated a plan of action. The Commanding Officer and Officer in Charge of the Naval Party briefed the DMT on the ship's capabilities and the make up of shore teams that could be deployed maximising the ship's personnel. The ship's visit to Grand Turk earlier in the year proved invaluable in the planning.

On arrival off Grand Turk, Wave Ruler was positioned close to the shore where a combined RFA and RN Disaster Relief Team went ashore in ship's boats to collect over 1000 tarpaulins from the Disaster Management centre on Grand Turk. These were for distribution in South Caicos and Providenciales. Meanwhile the Chief Officer met John Farrand from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to discuss further tasking.

Mr Farrand from the FCO stated that *"Although RFA WAVE RULER was only available for a short time, the fact that we were again able to show a significant UK presence in the immediate aftermath of a major storm can only reinforce the message that through the Interim Administration the UK takes its commitment to the security and safety of the TCI seriously."*

The following day, Wave Ruler delivered tarpaulins to South Caicos and communities in Providenciales before heading back to Curacao where FOST staff were waiting to put the ship through another DCT and DISTEX !!.

Capt Steve Norris

ARGUS GIVES YOU WINGS

Argus has continued with her very busy programme, including support of Operational Flying Training (OFT) with 824 Naval Air Squadron (NAS). This included a period incorporating elements of both Exercise Joint Warrior and the Submarine Command Course. During the training serials off the west coast of Scotland, the ship's crew frequently battled with the elements, which included dense fog, swell and storm force eleven conditions with waves in excess of five metres.

All this in support of the naval service combined with assistance to the Belfast Coastguard in the Irish Sea in successfully rescuing six fishermen off a sinking fishing boat. The combination of all these factors brought about a variety of sea conditions which enabled trainee pilots and observers the opportunity to practice their flying skills operating in the maritime environment in all its guises.

Commenting on the training, Argus' Commanding Officer Capt. Gerard Patterson said:

"We experienced some turbulence at low level but the aircrew will get used to that. In completing this period of Flying Training my ship's company worked tirelessly in some atrocious sea conditions to provide these new front line aircrews with a platform from which to conduct tactical Anti Submarine exercises and practise every aspect of flying emergencies including reacting to a real time SAR in support of Belfast Coastguard.

This resulted in 824 NAS successfully completing their training serials and on completion and disembarking the aircrew, Argus returned to continue with her direct support to the Royal Navy in support of Wildcat Training serials.

Surg Lt Joel Tanzer
ARGUS PRO

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FORT VICTORIA'S SHOW OF STRENGTH IN COUNTER PIRACY OPERATIONS

A "show of strength" from British and American naval forces in the Indian Ocean ensured 23 sailors were freed from a pirated ship.

Fort Victoria is currently engaged in NATO counter-piracy operations east of Suez and was recently involved in the safe release of two dozen sailors from a hijacked ship, MV Montecristo, in the Indian Ocean when she launched a specialist Royal Navy boarding team from the ship.

The crew of the 56,000-tonne merchantman MV Montecristo spent 24 hours holed up in the engine room where they'd retreated when pirates stormed their ship some 200 miles south-east of the coast of Oman.

Distress signals from the Italian-registered bulk carrier were picked up by Fort Victoria and the American frigate USS De Wert who both made for the Montecristo's position. The De Wert was first on the scene and assessed the situation while a Royal Navy boarding team aboard Fort Victoria prepared to intervene.

The presence of the two ships, the boarding team with their sea boats and Offshore Raiding Craft (ORC), plus a Fleet Air Arm Lynx overhead – what the former Defence Secretary Dr Liam Fox called "a show of strength" – ensured the pirates surrendered, even before the Montecristo had been boarded.

A team from Fort Victoria subsequently boarded the cargo ship and freed the crew, who told their liberators they were all safe and well, while the 11 pirates surrendered without offering any resistance and were all detained.

The combined actions to free the Montecristo's crew were immediately praised by Dr Fox. He said:

"Such was the show of strength displayed by RFA Fort Victoria, alongside a US Navy frigate, that the operation was conducted without a single shot being fired. The suspected pirates put up no resistance.

"Piracy puts lives at risk and costs the maritime industry millions of pounds every year. The Royal Navy is at the forefront of international efforts to battle this menace.

"Operations like this demonstrate the global presence of our armed forces and our commitment to the international co-operation necessary to combat modern-day piracy. I pay tribute to the professionalism of the Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel involved in this incident."

The maritime professionals' union Nautilus International has presented a special award to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary to say thank you for its work to combat the threat of pirate attacks on merchant shipping.

The Nautilus Award - which is made by the union to individuals or groups for particular achievements or work of distinction - was presented to RFA Commodore Bill Walworth at the union's 2011 general meeting in Rotterdam.

Nautilus Council chairman Ulrich Jurgens said members had agreed to make the award to the RFA in recognition of the significance of the fight against the scourge of piracy and for the concerted work of the RFA to support counter-piracy operations to protect seafarers from pirate attacks.

The presentation of the award followed a debate at the meeting in which Dutch and British Nautilus members expressed fears that cuts in defence budgets may reduce the effectiveness of the anti-piracy naval patrols.

RULING THE WAVES

RFA WAVE RULER has just completed one of the busiest and most successful operational deployments to the Caribbean for many years providing the UK Government's presence in the Caribbean in the role as ATP(N) delivering disaster relief and reassurance to the UK Oversees Territories (UKOTs) during the 2011 hurricane season, as she has in previous seasons with a mixed RFA / RN ship's company.

Wave Ruler undertook the role of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Wider Regional Engagement (WRE) and conduct Counter Narcotics and Terrorism (CNT) operations. To offer reassurance and deliver the maritime effect in the region Wave Ruler's crew was enhanced with a 20 man Royal Navy HADR party to form part of a 50 strong joint disaster relief shore party comprising of 30 RFA and 20 RN personnel. A Lynx Mk8, flown out in the back of a C17 aircraft with 13 flight including two Royal Marines, 10 USCG LEDET and a host of additional personnel increased the ship's company from 87 to 122.

On sailing from Mayport, the ship was soon engaged in a two weeks of Damage Continuation Training (DCT) with the US Navy and Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) staff embarked. This was the start of many firsts for Wave Ruler culminating in a 36 hour Disaster Exercise (DISTEX), over Mayport beach, the first outside of the UK.

Buoyed by the success we sailed south to the UK Overseas Territories, including the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI), Montserrat, British Virgin Islands (BVI), Anguilla and the Cayman Islands. Wave Ruler, as in the previous two ship deployments reaffirmed the message that, we have the capacity and capability to deliver HADR and security in the region.

Wave Ruler also provided the UK Governments' presence in Jamaica, Curacao, St Kitts for Independence Day and Martinique. To strengthen these ties with the islands a number of disaster relief exercises were arranged with training for fire and rescue teams, police and local defence forces. In liaison with each island's Disaster Management (DM) team, RFA/RN technical teams went ashore and surveyed the critical infrastructure and assessed areas that would need immediate assistance in the event of after any natural disaster. The exercises proved invaluable in establishing a plan for first response and greatly assisted when the ship was deployed to offer disaster relief to the Turks and Caicos Islands.

A major part of our mission was to ensure our presence was made aware to outlying communities. This was achieved by live TV appearances, radio interviews and regional press coverage. This built on the positive reputation Wave Ruler has received in the last few years during previous hurricane relief operations.

A first for the RFA was a 12 day visit by two MPs, Mark Garnier and Matthew Offord. They visited Cayman Brac and discussed the UK's response to relief operations with disaster management and emergency organisations. They also witnessed Wave Ruler track, interdict, stop and board a 'go fast'that led to the seizure of a significant amount of narcotics. This was raised with the Prime Minister during PMQs at a later date. Mark Garnier described his visit as *'a truly extraordinary and inspirational experience'* with Matthew Offord remarking that he found the visit *'exceptional'*.

After disembarking the MPs, we returned to our primary role of disaster relief. Tropical Storm Irene passed to the north of the Dominican Republic increasing in force to hurricane strength towards the Turks and Caicos Islands. Irene devastated the eastern seaboard of the US and led to the partial evacuation of New York.

Approaching Grand Turk the Lynx launched to make contact with the TCI Disaster Management team to conduct a damage assessment over the islands and bays and provide reassurance to the outlying communities. The Lynx conveyed the Acting Governor to Providenciales for a joint press and TV conference to reassure the islanders of events taking place to manage the disaster. Meanwhile, Wave Ruler's boats transported and distributed about a 1000 tarpaulins from Grand Turk to affected communities in South Caicos and Providenciales. The head of Disaster Management in TCI said *'Wave Ruler's response to TCI after the impact of Hurricane Irene was most appreciated and no monetary value can be placed on its contribution especially from the psychological perspective'*.

The hurricane season ended in November and Wave Ruler returned to the UK handing over the APT(N) role to Fort Rosalie. Wave Ruler was away from the UK for almost two years travelling a considerable distance covering duties as APT(S) off the Falkland Islands and APT(N) in the Caribbean. Whilst in the Caribbean she excelled, as APT(N) projecting maritime power to become a significant presence in the region offering a high level of assurance to the UKOTs and making a major contribution to counter narcotic operations.

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LARGS BAY LOWERS THE RFA ENSIGN FOR THE LAST TIME

Friday 14 October was an unusually warm sunny day for mid October with a brilliant clear blue sky, in stark contrast to the day that the RFA sadly said farewell to RFA Largs Bay at a ceremony in A&P's dockyard in Falmouth. The ceremony saw the RFA ensign, which has flown for the last five years being lowered to be replaced by the Australian Navies ensign.

A host of visitors, including the Australian Navy's Director-General of Capability and Plans, Cdre Steve McDowall attended the event. It proved a sad but memorable occasion with Cdre Walworth representing the RFA. During the ceremony Cdre Steve McDowall praised the "excellent work the RFA had done in preparing the ship to sail to Australia".

The ship currently has a team of seven RFA personnel embarked, led by C/O Shane Wood and they are working with the Royal Australian Navy's crew whilst they undergo sea training before the ship sails for Australia. The ship will sail from Falmouth late October with the seven RFA personnel remaining on board for the trip to assist their Australian colleagues in getting to grip with and understanding the ship's

complex systems as she heads off on an eight week crossing which will see her visit South Africa prior to her expected arrival off mid Western Australia by mid-December 2011.

The RFA is very sad to have lost Largs Bay but at the same time we are immensely proud of the work she has undertaken over the last five years and the high profile engagements she has undertaken, including the humanitarian relief work off Haiti in 2010, Bournemouth Air Festival in the same year and 250th Anniversary for the Seven Years War off Halifax, Nova Scotia. In addition the ship has supported the Royal Navy in a series of exercises around the globe.

These fantastic achievements could not have been realised without the countless number of individuals forming the dedicated ship's company over the years and everybody who has sailed in the ship and supported her throughout her time in the RFA is to be commended for their hard work and commitment.

The ship has been renamed Australian Defence Forces Ship (ADFS) Choules, in honour of Chief Petty Officer Claude Choules, the last combat veteran of the first world war, who passed away in May of this year at the age of aged 110. British born, he began his 41-year military career with the Royal Navy, later relocating to Australia and joining the Royal Australian Navy. On her arrival in Australia the ship will be commissioned as HMAS Choules. The new name was chosen to recognise the strong links that bind Australia and Great Britain. This was a significant moment when Australia lost its last living link with those who had served in World War I and it's fitting that Claude's legacy be remembered in this way.

RFA GOLD ROVER RETURNS TO THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

After an extensive refit and re-generation process, Gold Rover deployed to the South Atlantic late August. On passage she assumed duties as APT(S) from Black Rover and began an 18 month deployment in support of UK forces stationed in the Falkland Islands.

Cub Scouts of the 1st Jamestown Cub Scouts in a liberty boat on their way to RFA Gold Rover whilst anchored off St Helena.

In a welcome break from a long ocean voyage Gold Rover spent a few days at anchor off Saint Helena, a visit which was warmly welcomed by the Governor and people of the isolated island. The outgoing Governor, Andrew Gurr, was welcomed onboard by Captain Nigel Budd to a lunch reception whilst the local radio stations held a competition and offered the prize of a circumnavigation of the island to winners. The lucky 25 winners were delighted to see a different side to their homeland and were very appreciative of the opportunity. Once back at anchor the ship also hosted the 1st Jamestown Cub Scout Group onboard for a tour of the ship. The cub scouts were shown around the ship by the Navigator Richard Llewellyn and deck cadets Philip Roberts and Jamie Hayhurst. There were many wide eyed looks of amazement from the children on the ship's tour, most notably at the sight of the large pile of muffins provided on the bridge on completion of their tour!

The ship also supported the Saint Helenian's whilst in the area with environmental monitoring duties demonstrating another example of the versatility of the RFA before the ship sailed to rendezvous with HMS Edinburgh who was making passage from South Africa heading back to the region.

After a busy passage in company with several operational replenishments and gunnery and flying training for Gold Rover the coastline of the Falklands came into view after travelling 8,000nm. In a busy day alongside, loading stores and embarking relief's the ship was delighted to welcome the Second Sea Lord, Vice Admiral Charles Montgomery onboard. During his visit he met and spoke with the entire ship's company and answered as many questions as he could about the RFA during these challenging times for

On the bridge of Gold Rover as members of the 1st Jamestown Cub Scouts were welcomed aboard the ship by Captain Nigel Budd, Navigator Richard Llewellyn and in the background Deck Cadet Jamie Hayhurst on the 13th Sept at St Helena.

defence. Gold Rover has now settled into the essential support delivered as APT(S) to the region and over the coming months will provide support to British forces in the region and visit some of the isolated settlements and communities both in the Falklands and the more isolated islands in the South Atlantic.

2/O Richard Llewellyn

NAUTILUS GIVES RFA DUE RECOGNITION

The maritime professionals' union Nautilus International has presented a special award to the Royal Fleet Auxiliary to say thank you for all its work to combat the threat of pirate attacks on merchant shipping.

Commodore Walworth was invited to NAUTILUS' 2011 general meeting in Rotterdam. He visited their office to receive the Nautilus Award - which is made by the union to individuals or groups for particular achievements or work of distinction.

Nautilus Council chairman Ulrich Jurgens said members had agreed to make the award to the RFA in recognition of the significance of the fight against the scourge of piracy and for the concerted work of the RFA to support counter-piracy operations to protect seafarers from pirate attacks.

The presentation of the award followed a debate at the meeting in which Dutch and British Nautilus members expressed fears that cuts in defence budgets may reduce the effectiveness of the anti-piracy naval patrols.

Photo left to right: Steve Cotton, of the International Transport Workers' Federation; Nautilus Council chairman Ulrich Jurgens; Commodore Bill Walworth RFA; and Nautilus general secretary Mark Dickinson

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ARGUS HOSTS THE WILDCAT DEBUT AT SEA

The Navy's next-generation helicopter, the Wildcat, has landed on a ship at sea for the first time. The aircraft touched down on the flight deck of the aviation trials ship RFA Argus off the South Coast at the beginning of four weeks of demanding trials for air and ground crew.

THIS is a sight to warm the cockles of any Naval aviator's heart: the first landing of the Fleet Air Arm's next-generation helicopter on a ship, an RFA at sea.

Noon precisely in Lyme Bay on Monday November 7 2011 and a Wildcat from 700W Naval Air Squadron touches down on the vast flight deck of RFA Argus.

The helicopter is the 21st Century variant of the Lynx which has served the Navy so well since the 1970s.

The landing on Argus heralds four weeks of 'operating limit trials' for the Wildcat, which will lay the foundations for flying the new helicopter when it enters front-line service.

Wildcat takes the best bits of the final version of the current Lynx in service, the Mk8, and the general design of the Lynx and, with cutting-edge enhancements, provides the Navy with a souped-up, nimble, helicopter with added punch well into the middle of the century.

A team from Agusta-Westland, the Yeovil firm which builds the Lynx, experts from the Aircraft Test and Evaluation Centre at Boscombe Down, plus RN air engineers and technicians joined Argus for the trials.

It fell to Lt Cdrs Robert Dowdell and Lee Evans to make the historic flight – assisted by a Lynx Mk8 of 815 Naval Air Squadron, which will get its hands on Wildcat in a little over two years' time.

"This marks a significant milestone in the life of Wildcat," said Lt Cdr Rob Taylor, Commanding Officer of 700W Naval Air Squadron – the trials unit set up at RNAS Yeovilton in Somerset specifically to bring the new aircraft into service.

"The deck landing's the first in a series of trials which will see Wildcat cleared to operate on all classes of Royal Navy and RFA ships in all theatres of the world."

Wildcat is bristling with new sensors and kit – improved radar, improved communications suite, more powerful engines, more firepower, and a 'glass' cockpit with four large display screens replacing the older dials and screens.

The cockpit's layout has been heavily

influenced by input from the pilots and observers to allow them to find, collate and report contacts on sea or land rapidly. At the same time, engineers should find the Wildcat easier to maintain – which means the aircraft will have an even higher rate of availability than the already-reliable Lynx.

The first Wildcat arrives at Yeovilton, home of the Navy's entire Lynx force, in January 2013, when the team at 700W will determine how aircrews will operate the helicopter on deployment.

At the same time, a training course will be designed ahead of the first Wildcat crews converting from the existing Lynx joining 702 NAS, the Lynx operational training unit, in January 2014.

From there the qualified fliers will move to the front-line Lynx squadron, 815, which provides frigates, destroyers and the Navy's ice patrol ships with a dedicated Flight – helicopter plus air and ground crew – for their global deployments. The first Wildcat Flight is earmarked to deploy in 2015.

Some 62 Wildcats are being bought by the MOD, 34 for the Army Air Corps, 28 for the Fleet Air Arm. The Army variant is due to begin operations in 2014.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

How time flies … we are now one year on from the start of the Strategic Defence and Security Review and the Treasury driven RFA Value for Money Review. The implementation of the outcomes from these reviews is well underway, Largs Bay has been sold and handed over to the Australians and is currently heading east to her new home and several hundred of our people are moving on to new opportunities and challenges. The Voluntary Early Release scheme has delivered us the required streamlining in personnel to compliment the reduction in the number of ships in the RFA flotilla.

The RFA now operates 13 ships which are being tasked in evermore diverse ways to assist in delivering Naval outputs with fewer hulls. Examples of this are the current support being undertaken by Fort Victoria and the recent tasking of Wave Ruler, both with embarked military personnel and additional equipment to greatly enhance their capability. We can expect more of this in the coming years.

In the past four years we have seen both the RN (Sands Study 2007 LSDA manning) and the Merchant Navy (2009 Treasury inspired VfM Review) put forward a case to take over some or all of the RFA's work. These challenges provided useful benchmarking of the RFA but also remind us that we have to remain competitive in capability and cost.

We have to change and adapt to a new operating environment to take account of a smaller flotilla, the changing role of the ships, the financial pressures and the need to demonstrate value for money Change is nothing new to the RFA – we have been evolving operationally since the start of the service back in 1905 and are good at it.

So, what changes do we propose and how does this affect us?

Focusing on the people in the RFA; our current single scheme of complement for each class of ship no longer suits the increased range of activities required of us. This can prevent us from delivering the higher level of capability required on operations while not being cost effective in low readiness ships.

New higher defence policy has given us the opportunity to re-evaluate the overall Flotilla structure to ensure that manning can be linked directly to a ship's activity and readiness by means of three levels of Tailored Schemes of Complement. Within this work, the SoC can be rebalanced to ensure that departmental structures are sustainable and provide a consistent manning policy across the flotilla thus resolving some of the legacy differences between different classes of ship. These are a reorganisation of seagoing billets, not further changes in overall numbers of people.

By identifying improvements in our appointing system and gradually adopting rota appointing, we can look to ensure individual's skills are put to best effect and deliver better value from training and development. Linked to this is the requirement to ensure appropriate career development, specifically education and training targeted to every person at the right time.

Closely linked to training and development, reward and recognition needs to be reviewed for today's changing RFA. This must meet the multitude of legislative and regulatory requirements and provide the necessary incentives as well as recognising the efforts of our people. This review is currently in the very early stages with discussions scheduled to start with MTUs in the New Year.

We need to be open-minded with regards to looking at ways of improving operational efficiency. Ashore, we will review and where appropriate reduce our shore footprint to compliment the changes on the front line, at sea. As with Schemes of Complement, these will be a reduction in shore posts but not further reductions in people numbers.

So what is in it for us?

The RFA is and will continue to be a great place to work, focused on delivering the highest levels of professionalism. Recent studies have shown that we are a valued service and our reputation for delivering Maritime Operational Support is second to none. A new appointing system will give us the ability to better plan ahead and manage our work life balance. Having a career path which we are individually responsible for, will give us the appropriate training and competency with improved support from the personnel management team. Being appointed on a two to three year cycle will give us the opportunity of ownership, and assist in using our skills and training to improve professional standards and the feeling of being part of a ship's team.

You will hear more details as we embark on a programme of ship visits in the New Year.

Strategy Development Team

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REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY – RFA MEMORIAL - MARCHWOOD

On Sunday 13th November 2011 members of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, led by Captain Rob Dorey RFA, representing the Commodore, remembered our casualties of war, at a ceremony at the RFA Memorial at Marchwood, near Southampton.

The Marchwood RFA Memorial is to those crew members lost in the Falklands Conflict when the two landing ships, RFA SIR GALAHAD and RFA SIR TRISTRAM, were bombed at Fitzroy Cove. Following the main Remembrance Day Service in the St John the Apostle Church (the Marchwood Parish Church), a ceremony was held at the RFA Memorial, where prayers were said, and wreaths laid by Captain Rob Dorey RFA, Major Don Gosling of 17 Port Maritime Regiment, Ms Ali Hoare, the Deputy Chairperson of Marchwood Parish Council, Captain Phil Roberts DSO RFA (Rtd), Commanding Officer of RFA SIR GALAHAD during the Falklands War, on behalf of the Sir Galahad Association, and Captain Brian Waters OBE RFA (Retd), on behalf of the RFA Association, (Solent Branch).

Following the air attack at Fitzroy, on 8 June 1982, the severely damaged RFA SIR GALAHAD was eventually towed out to sea and sunk as a war grave. RFA SIR TRISTRAM was brought back to UK on a heavy lift ship, to be extensively re-built. A new RFA SIR GALAHAD was built to replace the lost vessel. Both ships have since been taken out of service and replaced by the Bay Class LSD(A)s.

Pictured facing the RFA Memorial: Captain Rob Dorey RFA, Major Don Gosling 17 Port Maritime Regiment and the Reverend Roger Edwards, Captain Phil Roberts DSO RFA (Rtd), with wreath bearers and the contingent from RFA MOUNTS BAY in the background.

The Service was conducted by the Reverend Roger Edwards, and as on previous Remembrance Sunday's the church was packed. There was a large contingent from 17 Port Maritime Regiment, Royal Logistics Corps and a contingent from RFA MOUNTS BAY commanded by Captain Kevin Rimell RFA. Cadets Ryan Parrett, Grant Gillies and Alastair Gervaise-Bazier were the wreath bearers.

On completion of the Service, guests where invited to RFA MOUNTS BAY, in Marchwood Military Port, for a buffet lunch which was much appreciated by all who attended.

First Officer Chris Jordan MBE.

FORT ROSALIE RETURNS FROM ELLAMY

Fort Rosalie who was deployed in support of Operation Ellamy, the UK's contribution to international efforts has completed her tasking and returned home prior to her next deployment.

For four months, RFA Fort Rosalie supported helicopter carrier HMS Ocean and other Royal Navy warships by providing stores and ammunition, and undertook a vital shuttle service - known as a 'Del Boy' run - between the Task Group and NATO bases in the Mediterranean.

Before she returned home, RFA Fort Rosalie made a brief stop in Civitavecchia, Rome, which gave her an opportunity to thank Italy for the support they have given to UK forces during Libyan operations and for their own substantial contribution to the international campaign.

RFA Fort Rosalie's Commanding Officer, Captain Phillip T Hanton, said:

"RFA Fort Rosalie has switched from amphibious exercises in the Mediterranean to supporting maritime strike operations off Libya and will shortly deploy to the North Atlantic for anti-narcotics duties.

"This high tempo of front line operations is a vivid demonstration of our integral role in supporting the Royal Navy and our ability to make a direct contribution to UK defence and security."

Libya is the latest in a long line of front line roles for the 23,384-tonne Auxiliary Fleet Support Vessel, which supplies Royal Navy warships with food, stores and ammunition whilst underway.

Twenty-nine years ago, Fort Rosalie provided direct support to the amphibious operations in the Falklands. She later spent much of the 1990s alongside the Croatian port of Split supporting peacekeeping operations in the Balkans.

Fort Rosalie deployed from the UK at the beginning of May 2011 laden with 6,000 cubic metres of stores as part of the Royal Navy's Response Force Task Group (RFTG) - the UK's military quick reaction force - for a series of amphibious exercises in the Mediterranean.

However, the RFTG was redeployed to the North African coast when it was decided to increase pressure on the Gaddafi regime through the use of Apache attack helicopters belonging to the Army Air Corps but based on HMS Ocean.

A key task for Fort Rosalie was to deliver a fifth Apache to HMS Ocean. In a first for the RFA, the attack helicopter was flown onto Fort Rosalie in Souda Bay, Crete.

An equally important role was supplying ammunition to HM Ships Liverpool, Sutherland and Iron Duke to ensure their ability to deliver naval gunfire support when operating in range of the Libyan coast.

General stores to support the Task Group were brought from the UK by road and air via a forward logistic site located in southern Italy. These were then transferred to Fort Rosalie for delivery to the ships in the Task Group.

The transfer of over 200 personnel in and out of theatre, together with regular deliveries of mail, has made a big difference to morale at sea.

Despite a high tempo of operations, Fort Rosalie was able to take part in commemorations of the 69th anniversary of Op PEDESTAL, the Second World War convoy to relieve Malta.

Captain Hanton laid a wreath on behalf of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary at two official ceremonies to mark this historic event.

Since the start of the year a total of 16 Royal Navy warships, submarines and Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels contributed to humanitarian, combat and embargo operations off Libya..

Commodore Bill Walworth, Commodore Royal Fleet Auxiliary, said:

"Four Royal Fleet Auxiliaries have supported UK and coalition activities off the coast of Libya. In doing so they underline our ability to sustain the Royal Navy on station for as long as operations require."

RICHARD JONES AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING CADET MADE TO ENGINEER CADET

Engineering Cadet Alex Cooper was the recipient of this year's Richard Jones Award for an outstanding cadetship. The award is presented on an annual basis in memory of the late Chief Officer Richard Jones, who held the position of cadet training officer from 1983 to 1985 and maintained a keen interest for training of RFA Cadets in his career.

Mrs Jane Jones, the wife of the late Richard Jones, presented the award to Alex outside the entrance to the wardroom at HMS Excellent in Portsmouth in October. Mrs Jones said: "He is without question, a very worthy recipient of the Richard Jones Award."

Third Officer Cooper was selected for the award following consistently high standards throughout his cadetship, both at college and at sea. He repeatedly showed the drive and determination to succeed through hard work and natural ability both as an engineering officer and as a leader and team player in the Engineering department.

In addition, in April, he won a book prize and certificate for the best cadet from the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST).

Picture shows Mrs Jane Jones presenting the award to Alex Cooper

Alex, who has been with the RFA for three years said: "I am delighted to have won this award. It is a great honour to even be considered and I'm pleased my efforts in the RFA have been recognised."

1/O Chris Jordan MBE

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DISTEX FOR TEAM WAVE RULER

The Royal Navy embarked with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary in Wave Ruler to travel over 3400 miles to provide support and reassurance to the six UK Overseas Territories in the Caribbean.

Drawn from all corners of the RN, the 20 strong team have been brought together to enhance the well rehearsed RFA team onboard Wave Ruler to form the Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) organisation, supplemented by a Royal Navy Lynx helicopter from 815 Naval Air Squadron.

The objective of the HADR is to save life, reduce suffering, limit damage and restore essential services to a traumatised population after a natural disaster. To achieve this, the 50 strong team of specialist RN and RFA personnel have been training hard under the watchful eye of Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST), who have been pushing the ship and its personnel to the limit during a two week Directed Continuation Training (DCT).

The culmination of the training was a 36 hours disaster relief exercise (DISTEX) held within the facilities of NS Mayport, Florida. The ship's company where briefed that Hurricane Alison had struck the island of Grand Turk, who were now in desperate need of assistance.

Chief Petty Officer Scott's observations as Reconnaissance Team 1 leader, being the first team to be inserted by helicopter into the disaster area after shore HQ had been established, said:

"We were quickly tasked and deployed to conduct an area search to the north east between the HQ and the intended drop off zone for our supplies on the beach. Within minutes of commencing our task we discovered a number of casualties with multiple traumatic injuries. We carried out immediate life saving first aid, reported the incident to ashore HQ and once relieved by the HADR medical team we carried on with our tasking"

"Once our primary task of saving life was accomplished we were then able to focus our efforts on various missions dictated by the ashore HQ; such as, bridge building, erecting a communication mast, establishing a field hospital and assisting in the landing of essential stores at both the helo landing site and the beach drop off zone".

LT Thomas, LH(STWD) Edmunds and L/MAN Cornlouer carrying stores from the beach to HQ.

With multiple incidents awaiting them, the HADR sent teams ashore for reconnaissance, technical and engineering, search and rescue, First Aid, Command and Control, Forward Logistics Support, boat handling, helicopter landing site commanders as well as media handling teams.

This enabled the ship's company to provide specific skills for different situations including causality handling and treatment, building of bridges, dealing with damaged water treatment plants with flooded rooms and severed electrical cables, chemical decontamination and restoration of communications.

A total of 36 US Navy personnel from the USS Doyle, Wave Ruler's host ship whilst in Mayport, acted as casualties with varying degrees of trauma and severity, challenging the joint RFA/RN medical teams. US Navy Seaman Daniel Wilson and Engineering Technician Jason Delaney who took part in the DISTEX as casualties said:

"It is the first time we have participated in a joint exercise working with and alongside out closest allies. It was a nice break from US naval duties; we have enjoyed every minute and have been looked after very well by the first aid team".

Wave Ruler's boats and Lynx helicopter where used to ferry personnel and essential stores to the stricken DISTEX site. Those arriving by air arrived dry whilst those transferred by boat were required to complete the final part of their journey waist deep in water. With potentially high sea states and unsuitable landing areas, this is just one example of the realities of providing, assistance to the Caribbean Islands.

Chief Petty Officer (Deck) Jordan when asked to comment on the DISTEX exercise, he said: *"It's a useful exercise however it is hot, hot, hot!"* Another example of the climate the crew of Wave Ruler will have to endure when undertaking disaster relief operations.

Meanwhile the ship and remainder of the ship's company had to deal with simulated fires and collisions onboard with reduced manpower. This tested the ship's company's tenacity in being able to support a DISTEX and maintain the capability to deal with incidents onboard.

MM1 Daniels and 2/O(E) Diggins dealing with the flooding incident at a water treatment plant

A highly challenging yet successful serial, it proved all elements of the HADR response. The training provided some valuable lessons and provided an opportunity to learn what was required. Yet most importantly of all it developed relations between the RFA, RN and embarked Flight and established team Wave Ruler as an integrated Ships Company.

The 2 I/C of the HADR team Lieutenant Richard Thomas RN said:

"A hugely valuable training exercise; DISTEX has ensured that the initial separate entities of Wave Ruler, the embarked RN Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR) team and the embarked RN Lynx Flight, have all combined to produce a very capable platform to react to natural disasters which may affect the British Overseas Territories this hurricane season."

One of the teams tackling a fire.

The swift and large scale response required during a disaster suits Wave Ruler well. Capable of carrying a large amount of Emergency Relief Stores, numerous sea boats, fitted with local and worldwide communications as well as the Lynx helicopter the ship provides the perfect platform to launch the aid required.

The Caribbean Hurricane season runs from 1st June until the 30th November, when there is a heightened risk of Tropical Cyclones. The islands of British Virgin Islands, Cayman, Turks and Caicos, Montserrat, Anguilla and Bermuda lie in the path of seasonal hurricanes that have resulted in major devastation in the past.

Captain Norris stated:

"*This exercise provided a unique opportunity to prove RFA WAVE RULERs ability to rapidly deploy and deliver assistance wherever it is needed. It is a demonstration of our continuing commitment to the Overseas Territories and the wider Caribbean in providing Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief*"

3/O Helen Flint
Lt A Rudkin

NAVYSAFE

As you might expect in a military service, members of the Royal Navy, as well as MoD personnel are exposed to risks and hazards.

It has been recognised that a new approach is needed to ensure all our personnel are kept as safe as possible, hence the creation of the Navy Safety Improvement Plan. This initiative will cover the entire Royal Navy, with the First Sea Lord himself spearheading the drive. This will ensure that both service and civilian personnel involved with the Navy are given the best safety equipment possible.

Throughout the service, safety rules have been in place to keep personnel safe. The safety drive, under the title 'NAVYSAFE', will be implemented, ensuring that safety awareness gets ingrained into normal business.

It is expected to take 3 to 4 years for Navy Safe to be fully integrated into the Royal Navy; however we should start to see an immediate reduction in the number of avoidable incidents. The basic message from this is to keep personnel safe, prevent incidents and discover why accidents happened as opposed to just who is responsible for it. There will always be an element of risk in a service lifestyle; the key aim is to manage risks and to only take risks where necessary.

NAVYSAFE will be launched on 13 October 2011, you may already have seen the flyers and posters appearing around ships and establishments. These contain all the key aspects of NAVYSAFE, including points of contact. However, if you can't find any of these, the NAVYSAFE site on the defence intranet has any extra information regarding the programme you may need including Galaxy notices and DINs. Any Base or Ship Safety Officer will also have information you may need, including a copy of the flyer.

ROYAL NAVY

NAVYSAFE
LETHAL TO OUR ENEMIES SAFE TO OURSELVES

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DILIGENCE & FORT VIC CONDUCT A MAJOR TRAINING EXERCISE OFF SUEZ WITH HMS SOMERSET

Take two support ships; the world's fastest helicopter, one sea boat, one Offshore Raiding Craft, a mixed Royal Marines-Royal Navy boarding team and what have you got?

An action-packed day east of Suez!!

RFA Fort Victoria and RFA Diligence recently linked up with HMS Somerset for some hardcore training drills as the Royal Navy's Type 23 knuckled down to her counter-piracy and maritime security mission.

The Royal Marines and Royal Navy team from Somerset conducted numerous board and search drills with the support ships as she knuckles down to her maritime security mission with Fort Victoria and Diligence actively participating in the training.

The serials with Fort Victoria and Diligence, Fort Vic, a one-stop support ship capable of providing stores, food and ammunition to RN vessels, while Diligence is a floating repair shop, offering engineering support to Royal Navy ships in the region – lasted all day as the blue (RN) and green (RM) teams from the Devonport-based frigate were tested to the max.

The thorough work-out for the trio came after Somerset visited the Omani capital of Muscat to maintain multi-national relations.

The new British Ambassador to Oman, His Excellency Jamie Bowden visited the ship while she was alongside to discuss the ongoing efforts to provide maritime security in the region with the frigate's Commanding Officer Cdr Paul Bristowe on the importance of maritime security in the region.

The frigate's stay in Muscat was, said Mr Bowden, "a clear manifestation of the very strong and multi-faceted relationship between Oman and UK, of which defence is a key element".

His words were re-affirmed by Cdr Bristowe: "The visit to Muscat provided an ideal opportunity to further our diplomatic bonds with a country in close proximity to vital trade routes.

"Many nations are working to deliver maritime security within the region and support from such a hospitable nation as Oman is crucial to enable a continued naval presence.

"Free and safe transit of one of the busiest waterways in the world is mutually beneficial to both Oman and the UK; as such it is a worthy undertaking on which to strengthen our countries' good relations."

WAVE RULER JOINS INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS

Wave Ruler conducted a three day visit to St Christopher anchoring in Basseterre Bay in September to celebrate the islands 28th year of Independence.

Whilst there, the ship hosted the Prime Minister Dr Denzil Douglas, the Governor General Sir Cuthbert Sebastian and other dignitaries for an official lunch onboard.

Monday saw the ship's 15 strong RN guard participate in the Independence Day Parade alongside the St Kitts Defence Force, Police and other Uniformed Services. A highlight was the school and youth organisations, which both captured the spirit of the occasion perfectly with their enthusiasm and vibrancy. Despite the impending rain, spirits remained high and after an impressive march past, led by the Defence Force Band, Wave Ruler's Lynx helicopter saluted the assembled dignitaries with a fly past.

The Officer in charge of Wave Ruler's Naval Party, stated that *"Wave Ruler's Royal Naval Party were very proud to have taken part in the 28th Anniversary celebration of St Kitts and Nevis gaining their independence."* He went on to state *"from below, the Helo flypast looked impressive with a big cheer from the watching crowd, as the helo made her fly past."*

On conducting the helo flypast as part of the ceremony the ship's Flight Commander commented; *"It was an impressive sight seeing everyone celebrate St Kitts and Nevis Independence Day, including the ship's guard".*

From the Cricket stadium the parade marched through the town of Basseterre finishing at the Defence Force Headquarters for the Independence Day speech by the Prime Minister with its theme of self respect, tolerance and compassion.

In addition to the many festivities during the day the Captain and Officers of Wave Ruler were privileged to be invited to an evening reception hosted by the Governor General, Sir Cuthbert Sebastian, where they had the opportunity to enjoy the live band and socialise with those who made the parade and celebrations such an outstanding success.

WAVE RULERs Commanding Officer stated "*Wave Ruler and her ship's company were honoured to be invited to celebrate the 28th anniversary of Independence with the people of St Kitts and Nevis. We have been met with warmth and kindness throughout our stay and look forward to future visits*".

2/O Helen Flint

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

MARATHON EVENT FOR A CADET TO ENDURE

During a moment of personal insanity whilst considering numerous options, I decided to run the 2012 London Marathon! To make matters worse, Colin, my ever-considerate brother and veteran of the Berlin marathon, is also running to keep me company and to show me how easy it is and what I've been missing all these years.

Colin, an ex-submariner and me have chosen to raise sponsorship for The *Sailors' Society.* The *Sailors' Society* provides invaluable and vital welfare support for merchant seafarers and their families when in times of need. It is rare for the difficult and often challenging work which merchant mariners undertake to hit the headlines but without doubt they provide a vital service that is fundamental to the fabric of the British way of life. To find out more about this very worthy cause, please visit www.sailors-society.org.

The money we raise for the charity through our marathon endeavour, which relies solely on donations, will help highlight and raise the profile of the great work that the *Sailors' Society* performs on a routine basis for hundreds of sailors and their families. We'll be running the full 26 miles in full tropical naval uniform and consequently the training has already started in earnest as the event takes place on April 22nd 2012.

Whilst completing my final sea phase as a cadet in Orangeleaf, I unfortunately don't have access to similar gym facilities as my brother, Colin. With Orangeleaf not even fitted with a treadmill, during my last appointment there was nothing left but to pound the decks in the Med whilst supporting OP ELLAMY, and during GINGER air raids when back in the UK as FOST Tanker.

En route back to the UK, we were fortunate enough to call into Gibraltar to refuel, where I took on the challenge of the Rock Run. Whilst no records were broken, reaching the summit was a personal moral victory and excellent training for the marathon which lies ahead!

By visiting www.justgiving.com/Ross-Thorburn donating couldn't be simpler and your contribution will be greatly appreciated and go towards making a real difference to the lives of those who spend their careers at sea.

Thank you in advance for your support.

Cadet(X) Ross Thorburn

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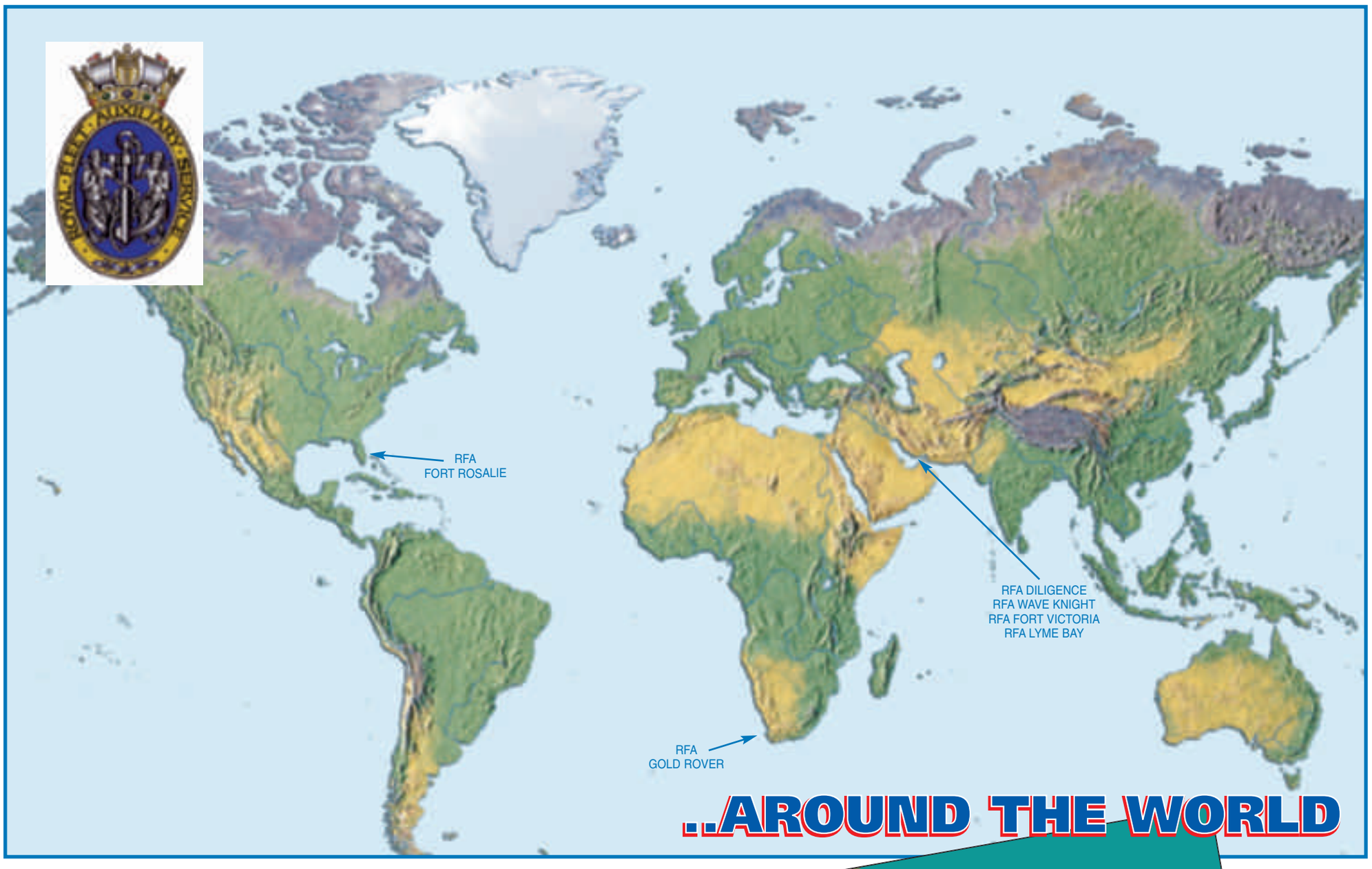

WAVE KNIGHT
Deployed as the Arabian Gulf Ready Tanker (AGRT).

WAVE RULER
Alongside in Birkenhead undergoing routine maintenance and upgrades.

BLACK ROVER
Alongside in Portland waiting tasking in support of operational training.

GOLD ROVER
Conducting APT(S) duties, currently in Simonstown, South Africa

ORANGELEAF
In Devonport having recently completed support to Operational Training.

FORT VICTORIA
Deployed east of Suez in support of NATO tasking

FORT AUSTIN
Alongside in Birkenhead undergoing refit.

FORT ROSALIE
On APT(N) tasking currently alongside in Mayport Florida.

CARDIGAN BAY
In Falmouth undergoing refit.

MOUNTS BAY
In Portland preparing to support Amphibious Exercises

LYME BAY
East of Suez in support of naval assets.

ARGUS
In Falmouth undergoing defect rectification.

DILIGENCE
In the Gulf continuing in support of coalition assets.

Provided courtesy of The U.K. Hydrographic Office

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BLACK ROVER LUNCH - BUT NOT AS YOU KNOW IT

Black Rover having completed a busy and successful deployment in the South Atlantic was returning to home waters to commence a busy AMP and provide FOST tanker duty support, all routine business, when out of the blue at the weekly planning meeting there was mention that Black Rover, on her return, was to have an opportunity to promote herself and the RFA to a host of aspiring young naval officers from around the globe. The ship was assigned to take part in the 'Maritime Combat Power Visit' (MCPV), the former Staff College Sea Days.

The programme of events for the four days gradually began to unfold and it was going to be a great opportunity for the RFA to demonstrate to a varied number of junior and senior officers from a host of different navies, the many capabilities of the RFA.

On reading through the initial information provided on MPCV, the ship was attending in part to…..

"…… provide a broad overview of RN Operational Capabilities, utilising tours of HM Ships SUTHERLAND, ATHERSTONE, BROCKELSBY and RFA BLACK ROVER to deliver this message and a broad understanding and knowledge of joint, single-Service from Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Royal Marines, Foreign Armed Forces and key Civil Services)."

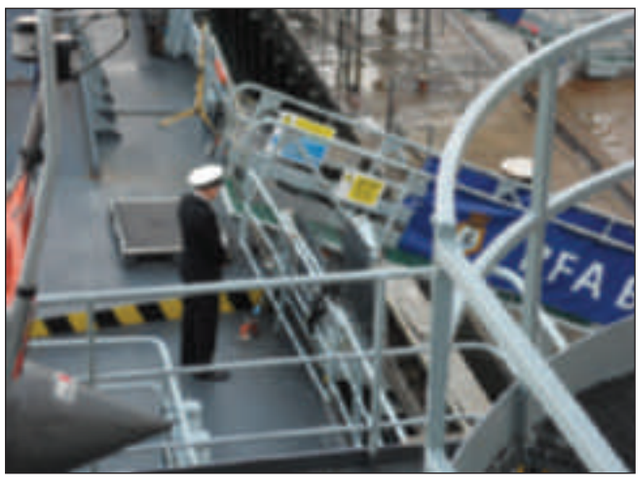
Our late evening arrival back in the UK was, to a damp and foggy Portland, not quite the weather we had recently experienced but nonetheless to be expected in the British winter. The following day we went headlong into our programmed three week AMP. The ship was being spruced up to ensure we would be able to continue to deliver support to the naval service and it was clear to see the maintenance was making a difference to the ship. Whilst undergoing this programmed period of maintenance the more detailed programme of the MPCV and what it entailed became apparent. The ship was undoubtedly about to undertake a significant change to her recent schedule. Something the whole ship was looking forward to.

The successful AMP drew to a close and we began to prepare for the forthcoming MPCV in Portsmouth. The emails started to arrive and it rapidly became apparent that there would be a few visitors, in fact a few hundred!!

'I think it's a bit like Navy days where there are people touring the ship and such'

'How many people are we expecting?'

'There are about 300 in total – oh and there might be a few for lunch…'



3/O(X) Jason Craig awaits the coaches.

At this stage the scale of the visit and the opportunity to host such an international mix of people began to dawn upon us. There were to be 300 in total comprising of five coaches with approx 60 people in each. We would be receiving a coach load or two at a time to provide tours of the ship. It was a long time since Black Rover had hosted over 300 visitors, if in fact that number had ever visited the ship on a single occasion.

After numerous meetings and plans the ship was all prepared for the big day. The weather started to break, the crew had finished thier breakfast and all of the 'stances' had been set for the visitors. After a short delay, heavy traffic in Portsmouth surprisingly the first load of coaches arrived. CO(X) Andy Morle greeted the visitors on the jetty as planned and gave a safety brief. They were offered tea and coffee before being arranged into groups of 20 to tour the ship along a variety of routes around the ship so as to avoid any clashes and keep the whole evolution moving. It was decided that there would be various scenarios set up along the route around the vessel – this was designed to show the full capabilities of the platform and highlight that simply carrying out just the role of 'a traditional tanker' was somewhat desuetude in the modern RFA. The whole ship's Company was involved in some way around the vessel, either acting as tour guides, be part of a stance, give a presentation or in the case of the Logistic Supply

3 tours come together; a medical scenario in the lift and a discussion of Flying capability and Operations on the flight deck.

department preparing food and service for 180 on a ship with a crew of 56. After the first wave of visitors disembarked the ship, we received another two coaches to repeat the event. After their tour it was clear to see that they had built up an appetite and they were all looking forward to a RFA lunch.

On completion of the tours, which the visitors were delighted to receive and asked numerous questions about the support the RFA delivers, came the major logistical challenge of the day – lunch.

Lunch in the ship for 120 of the visitors with limited messing facilities and a galley to match normally caters for up to 40 people each day. No challenge was to prove too great to the ship's company as all 120 guests, in addition to the ship's company, were fed in traditional RFA fashion with many of the visitors commenting favourably about the hospitality from the ship's company throughout the visit and the excellent quality of the food.

As always the galley and stewarding teams were well ahead of the game and awaiting their arrival, the mess room doors opened and the visitors streamed through. Ship's Company plus 120 attendees were fed in 3 sittings of 60 each in an action messing style scenario.

Meanwhile PO(SE) Michael Finland Presenting damage and shoring techniques to a Keen Audience

After lunch the Ship's Company had a final set of visitors and tours to complete; as with the rest of the day this went ahead without a hitch and the full capability and flexibility of the vessel had been displayed to its best.

The ship's company showed a host of international young officers the support which the RFA is capable of delivering and all those in the ship who brought about a successful event are to be congratulated for their professionalism.

After the visitors had all left we set about getting the ship secured and ready for sea again, with only around two hours to get everything back in place and then sail the same day to recommence FOST tanker duties. As always the ship's Company did a sterling job and the vessel departed the now quiet jetty only a short while after disembarking the last visitor.

CPO(D) John Sherwood & SG1A Mark Mathias waiting to give a brief on the RAS Rigs

Heading back out to sea the Ship's Company contemplated the success of the day which had been initially seeded with the casually mentioned words a few months previously "there may be a few for lunch" but was ultimately achieved through planning, enthusiasm and a lot of hard work during what was and remains a very busy tasking for a little tanker of only 56!

Jason Walworth

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FORCES MEDICS PROVIDE LIFE-SAVING SURGERY FOR MERCHANT SEAMAN

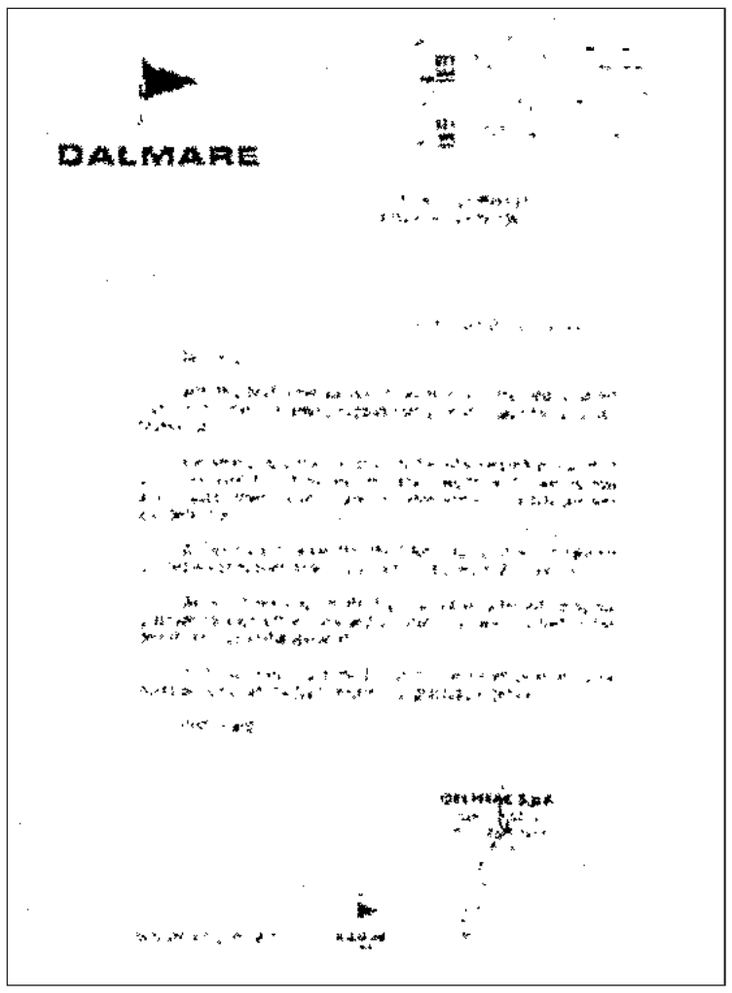
A merchant seaman underwent emergency surgery performed by members of a tri-service medical team after being airlifted to Fort Victoria on the evening of 5th October.

The British registered merchant ship was transiting the Gulf of Aden when one of the crew was struck down by severe abdominal pain. A distress signal was put out and Fort Victoria responded immediately with medical advice before changing course to rendezvous with the merchant vessel. The casualty was then transferred by boat to USS Anzio and then by US helicopter to Fort Victoria where the patient was met by the embarked medical staff.

The multi-disciplinary medical team, consisting of 17 personnel from all five Ministry of Defence Hospital Units, is embarked to provide NHS standard emergency medical support as part of NATO's counter-piracy task group. Fort Victoria was recently put through her paces in a rigorous work up period to prepare her teams for a variety of operations.

For the medical team this was an opportunity to put into practice the routines rehearsed during the recent work up phase. POMA Herbert, the senior operating department practitioner said:

"This is the sort of emergency that we are here for and it has been great to prove the capability of the operating department so early in the deployment."



Surg Capt Midwinter performed the 60 minute operation conducted overnight onboard Fort Victoria. The following morning the patient, relieved and weary after the surgery was reported as saying: "I feel very good now the pain has gone."

Fort Victoria has demonstrated she is a vital component of NATO's efforts as part of the multinational coalition. This task force has conducted counter-piracy operations in and around the Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and the Red Sea with the 25 nation Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), non-coalition warships and aircraft patrolling the region at any given time. RFA Fort Victoria's Commanding Officer, Captain Shaun Jones RFA, said:

"RFA, Royal Naval and US Naval expertise was put to good use in a successful coalition operation to rescue and provide vital medical aid to the merchant seaman involved. The agility, versatility, capability and skill of the Fort Victoria's personnel have been proved to excellent effect in this successful rescue of a fellow seafarer on the high seas".

FORT VICTORIA HELPS THWART AN ATTACK AS PIRATES FIRED ROCKETS AT A MERCHANT SHIP OFF OMAN

Fort Victoria has continued in her counter piracy successes when ten pirates aboard a couple of skiffs made repeated efforts to storm the bulk carrier MV Sagar Ratan with the aid of boarding ladders. The vessel flashed an SOS as it took evasive manoeuvres to defend itself some 150 miles southwest of the Omani capital Muscat.

Fort Victoria was the nearest naval vessel and on receipt of the request turned and made straight for the 61,000-tonne merchant ship's position, punching through heavy seas caused by a monsoon.

At the same time, the American carrier USS Ronald Reagan launched two F18 Hornets, which buzzed over the skiffs, still trying to storm the Singaporean-flagged Sagar Ratan.

The combined effect of Fort Victoria's presence, the US jets and the guile and bravery of the merchant vessel's own crew, who came under attack from five rocket-propelled grenades as they took evasive action, caused the pirates to break off their attack.

"Had it not been for Fort Victoria's swift intervention, another innocent vessel would have fallen into pirate hands and more seamen would have suffered the fate of being held as hostages," said the ship's Commanding Officer, Capt Ian Pilling RFA.

These combined efforts brought an end to the attack on the Sagar Ratan, but not an end to the drama because Fort Victoria – a one-stop support ship which was accompanying the UK's Cougar amphibious task group in the Middle East – helped anti-piracy commanders monitor the scourge.

The ship shadowed the pirates' mother ship – the Taiwanese fishing vessel Shiuh Fu No.1, hijacked off Madagascar on Christmas Day last year and now being used by the marauders to launch attacks throughout the Indian Ocean.

Fort Victoria spent four days stalking the Shiuh Fu No.1 and the five small skiffs it uses to carry out hijackings, warning merchantmen in the area to stay clear. At the same time a helicopter from the cruiser USS Gettysburg carried out surveillance flights of the pirated vessel.

The ship eventually broke off its shadowing mission and re-joined the Cougar force, led by flagship HMS Albion, while another Allied warship in the region continued to track the Shiuh Fu No.1's movements.

Seafarer SUPPORT

0800 121 4765

www.seafarersupport.org

Seafarer Support, a confidential **Freephone** service (operated by the Merchant Navy Welfare Board,) has successfully assisted over 600 Seafarers or their families with welfare enquiries, since its launch in 2009.

The referral service, much like directory enquiries, puts callers in touch with organisation(s) that can provide specialist support and guidance.

With over 100 maritime charities offering assistance, knowing where to start can be challenging, so let Seafarer Support do the hard work for you!

Sally, our Welfare Officer, is on hand to answer your queries, so why not give her a call on: 0800 121 4765 or visit: www.seafarersupport.org to see how Seafarer Support can help you.

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RFA ASSOCIATION

CONTACT INFORMATION

RFA ASSOCIATION
Headquarters
01434 220000
E-mail:
lookout@rfa-association.org

CHAIRMAN
Pat Thompson
01833 640045
07879 254168
Skype Captain.Pat
E-mail:
chairman@rfa-association.org

ADMIN
01434 220000
E-mail: admin@rfa-association.org

MEMBERSHIP
Dawn Reay
01434 220000
07522 551628
E-mail:dawn@rfa-association.org

TREASURER
Peter Fry
02392 524625
E-Mail
treasurer@rfa-association.org

SECRETARY & FINANCIAL SECRETARY
Under consideration

PLYMOUTH BRANCH
John Halford
01752 659942
E-mail:
plymouth@rfa-association.org

SOLENT BRANCH
Brian Waters
01722 320562
E-mail :
solent@rfa-association.org

LONDON BRANCH
Lt Cdr James Wyatt
Richard Fernley
(Vice Chairman)
07778 780872
E-mail
richardfernley@hotmail.com

SCOTTISH & NEWCASTLE BRANCH
John Roddis
01786 821379
E-mail:
sandn@rfa-association.org

MIDLANDS BRANCH
John Sail
01476 594034
mnasail@gmail.com

NORTHWEST
Frank Andrews
01722 685427
E-mail: frabaa@blueyonder.co.uk

Office Address:
3-4 Station House
Bellingham
Hexham NE48 2DG

Mailing Address
PO Box 52
Barnard Castle DL12 2BA

Web Sites:
www.rfa-association.org

Plymouth Branch
www.rfaaplymouth.org

Solent Branch
www.
freewebs.com/rfaasolentbranch/

London Branch
www.rfaa-london.org.uk/

Chairman's Dit

Or in this particular case it is I suppose the present Chairman's Penultimate Dit. By the next AGM in May it will be 4 years since I assumed the mantle from Rex and it will be time for me to move on, see the 'Sits Vac', we do need somebody to step up to the plate and run the show for a while as I will not be seeking re-election.

A few things to talk about in this issue, the foregoing aside. So let's start with the RFA National Memorial at Alrewas. A few weeks ago Franks Andrews, John Sail and I visited the site with the stonemasons to see a full sized mock-up of the memorial. Obviously it was a bit 'Blue Peter, yogurt pots and sticky back paper ish' but if you squinted it was easy to get an idea of the finished article and it should be quite a spectacular structure. The stonemasons have been instructed to its manufacture and it should be completed by the middle of 2012 ready for dedication by our Patron in late

September or early October 2012 depending on his diary. On the donations side the fund currently stands at £15,614 as of 25th November mainly due to a couple of large donations recently from Rolls Royce and Nautilus (the Officer's Union). If you haven't made a donation to this very worthwhile cause think about making one now, and if you already have, think about making another one.

And speaking of our Patron he does hope to attend the 2012 Reunion which will be held at the De Vere Grand Harbour Hotel Southampton on the 19th May as will the 2012 AGM. Further details in due course. If you have a look on their website http://www.devere-hotels.co.uk/hotel-lodges/locations/grand-harbour.html, you will see it is quite a spectacular venue.

Moving swiftly on, member Roger Davies who lives in Malta arranged to have an RFA Ensign hung in Valetta Anglican Cathedral. A couple of phone calls later and an ensign was organised and subsequently dispatched to Roger.The photograph shows the blessing of the ensign which now has a permanent home in the Cathedral with the White and Red Ensigns filling a long empty gap in our history. Well done to Roger who set this all up. He also laid an RFA Association poppy wreath on our behalf on Malta's Remembrance Day.

Talking of Remembrance Day the Association had a good turnout being represented at Whitehall, the MN Memorial Tower Hill, Plymouth and of course Marchwood. There are some photographs in this issue and loads on the various RFA Association websites.

At the recent Trustees meeting held at the Marine Society London Peter Fry was appointed as a Trustee and Treasurer. This is very good news as you will be aware we have had difficulty in finding a Treasurer for some while. Peter, who is in the Solent Branch is a former STO(N) in Fort Boats and is still in harness with MOD in the Ammunition Section. This is a particularly good appointment as we not only have a Treasurer but also a Trustee to represent Solent Branch and also to represent the Stonnery who are a vital and integral part of the RFA and its operations. Also and at the recent Trustees meeting Trustee Frank Andrews was unanimously voted as Deputy Chairman (until the next AGM). This is seen as a good move ensuring continuity in the event of illness etc.

The move of the HQ to Portsmouth has been formally agreed by the Trustees at a recent meeting and should be completed by May 2012. This makes the RFA Association much more accessible to members whilst retaining its complete independence as a charity in its own right.

This edition of Ian Hawkes memoirs brings to an end Ian's memories of his time in the RFA and sadly the end of some very interesting articles. A personal very many thanks to Ian for sharing his memories and photographs with us.

I know you have heard this before but the Year Book/Members Handbook is, since I found new publishers, finally coming along at last. I see it now as more of a small songbird slung around my neck rather that the ruddy great albatross it has been for so long. Watch the website for more developments.

As ever if you have a tale to tell I would love to know about it for these pages - come on chaps and chapesses, I ask in every edition with the same resounding lack of responses, Basildon Bond and all that.

And finally, the chill in the air, chestnuts roasting on an open fire, the distant jingling of sleigh bells as Santa puts Rudolph and Co. through their annual BOST in anticipation of the big day should be telling you that Christmas is upon us once again, less than 20 days by the time you read this. So I will take this opportunity to wish all RFAA members and their families, ex RFAs who are not members and their families also and every serving member of the Service we all love, especially those away from home and their loved ones over the festive season a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy, Prosperous and Safe New Year.

Scottish & Newcastle Branch

Following our popular and well-supported lunch at Riverdale Hall Hotel at Bellingham in April our next event was in August when members met at The Roxburgh Hotel on the Floors Estate near Kelso.

In the brilliant sunshine which somehow has attended all our recent events, for which the organisers claim no credit, made for a perfect day for our members fortunate to be there in such splendid surroundings. The Scottish Borders tend to be where we meet to avoid anyone having to travel great distances, being half-way house between Newcastle and Edinburgh to cater for the wide spread (Co. Durham to the Orkneys!) of our Branch membership.

The next time we met was further north in October at the Dunblane Hydro Hotel where we enjoyed a Nick Nairn inspired lunch in our own private room overlooking the hills and mountains of the Trossachs. Although held in Central Scotland anyone serving or retired from the RFA and their families and friends are very welcome, as indeed to all our events.

Under the auspices of the Clyde Outport of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners, some members joined the party kindly invited on board RFA Fort Rosalie by Captain Hanton, himself a member of the HCMM. Again the weather was brilliant but not quite as warm as the welcome we received from the CO and ship's company. After a demanding deployment the ship was carrying out a well-earned SMP at Crombie.

Following a Safety brief and a presentation on the ship's modern capabilities lunch we were given a muscle-stretching tour of the ship from the Bridge via the Stonnery and MCR to the flight deck. The ship was a revelation to HCMM members who, previously, had never been on board an RFA. To long-retired people from the RFA, like me, it was like returning home and wherever we went on board we were met with warmth, kindness and courtesy in the best tradition of the Service.

Our final event of the year was on the Sunday 20th November when thirty of us foregathered at the Dryburgh Abbey Hotel, near Melrose, in The Borders. An excellent lunch was served in our own room overlooking the Abbey ruins and the greensward sweeping down to the River Tweed. A venue so pleasing to all we have booked to return next year!

Finally, on behalf of the Scottish and Newcastle RFAA members I convey our best wishes to you all for a Happy Christmas and a successful and prosperous New Year with all that you could wish yourselves, wherever you may be.

John Roddis

OBITUARIES

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

Tom Dethridge DD(SF) *Nov 2011 aged 91*
John Barnshaw Elect. *Nov 2011 aged 82*
Joe Nixon CPO(E) *19 Nov 2011 Aged 69*

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FOR SERVICE, SEAFARERS AND FAMILIES

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

IAN HAWKS

After the RFA War Sudra I joined the RFA Airsprite as second officer in the River Medway travelling from home Hadleigh Essex via Southend Pier and naval ferry to

Airsprite fuelling MTB

Gillingham. The Airsprite was duty oiler in the Medway to MTBs, we also ran diesel down to the submarine pens in Dover. One of my best New Years celebrations was in Sheerness on the dance floor above Burtons. It was hosted by a Scottish regiment. It was handy being able to use the ferry via Southend Pier to travel home when possible.

The Airsprite was due for dry-docking

Ian & his sister Erica

and we were ordered to proceed up to Limehouse Basin in London to await dry-docking. By now regulations for visitors had been relaxed so I was able to show my parents and my sister around the Airsprite, a very proud moment for them. Later the Airsprite was transferred to the Clyde stationed off Greenock fuelling aircraft carriers. At anchor nearby was HMS Vanguard also RMS Queen Elizabeth, she was being repainted to her peacetime colours after the grey wartime colour. After I signed

Airsprite in dry dock

off the Airsprite, I decided to leave the Merchant Navy and work ashore. At first I worked for London and Thames Haven Oil Wharves Co: at Coryton Essex and then went into the boat building trade on Canvey Island, G Prout & Sons, and Prout Catamarans as works manager. I retired in 1987. At times I miss the R.F.A and life at sea, but have no regrets swallowing the anchor.

Ian Hawkes

REMEMBRANCE

Solent

The Falklands Memorial Marchwood

Brian Waters lays the RFAA Wreath

Captain Rob Dorey

Phill Roberts

Brian Waters lays the RFAA Wreath

Plymouth

Chief Officer Chris Locke

Charlie Rogers (recently retired).

The season followed its now usual routine starting with a charming RBL service at Torpoint on 20 October. Branch Standard by Richard Walker, he also did the honours on 11 November at the well attended Festival at the Plymouth Pavilions.

On a bright & breezy Sunday morning, Branch members mustered with the Veterans at the Citadel and after some consternation over a change of routine managed to keep up with the recently retired Charlie Rogers who carried our Standard up to the Hoe.

Chris Locke laid the official Merchant Navy wreath and later Peter Lannin added the Association wreath.

On the return to barracks, we found ourselves in the van and had to be urged to slow the pace as the stragglers couldn't keep up.

Thence to the Barbican where after a brief ceremony organised by Jack Evans, Tony Pitt laid an Association wreath at the MN Memorial, meanwhile at our outstations, wreaths were laid by Peter Bryant at Dorchester and in Falmouth by Geoff Wilson.

David Gerrard

P.O. Charlie Rogers

Tony Pitt and Peter Lanin

Did you know that the RFA Association is open to all serving and retired members of the RFA?

Its purpose is to care for the RFA Community ashore by arranging regular social events and giving practical help where necessary.

- **There is an annual dinner held at different venues around UK (in 2012 it will be Southampton).**
- **We help to keep ex seafarers in touch with each other**
- **Maintain an extensive range of RFA artifacts that are available to view and borrow**
- **Run our own website: www.rfa-association.org**
- **Answer questions that particularly arise in retirement**
- **Give advice and loan RFA ensigns in bereavement.**

SITUATION VACANT

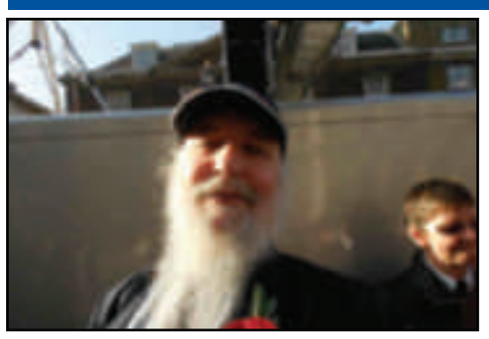
National Chairman

I will be standing down at the next AGM after 4 years in harness and we are looking for someone to take my place. The ideal candidate will be computer literate and have access to broadband and preferably just recently retired from the Service.

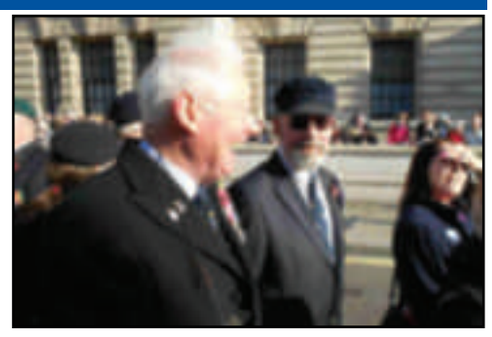
This position is open to any fully paid up member of the Association. If you feel you could do this very rewarding job please get in touch with me at:

chairman@rfa-association.org
or at home on 01833 640045

Whitehall



Dave Bolton



Alan Roach and Martyn Hobbs

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The Marine Society: a one-stop shop for personal and professional development

No organization has more experience of delivering learning at sea.

The Marine Society provides a range of well-managed services exclusively to seafarers to enhance learning and well being, and to facilitate professional development.

The London-based charity has encouraged, enabled and educated many generations of RFA personnel and is a recommended first point of contact for all matters relating to personal and professional progression.

The Society works with a range of mainstream education and training providers to deliver opportunities for personal and professional development that are seafarer-friendly and focused on the needs of the individual in the context of the maritime sector.

It caters for all levels of learning, and accommodates all ages, abilities and aspirations. So whether you simply wish to improve those GCSE grades from school or whether you're a senior officer seeking civilian recognized qualifications in preparation for coming ashore, The Marine Society will have something to offer.

Degrees @ Sea
Enrol now for Feb 2012 start

Need an academic qualification that opens doors ashore?
Can't afford the time or money to come ashore to study?

The Marine Society offers a seafarer-friendly pathway to a degree from a UK university without the need to step ashore.

A pathway that has been especially made for seafarers and shore-based maritime professionals - one that has been mapped to seafarers' professional qualifications and experiential learning and allows academic credit for them.

Marine Society director Brian Thomas told Gunline:

'The Work Based Learning degree courses at Middlesex University represent a cost-effective opportunity for RFA seafarers present and past to gain the academic currency they deserve without having to attend college.'

The Marine Society can look after your enrolment and administration. With the experts taking care of the paperwork, you're free to focus on ramping up your cv with a universally recognised qualification.

The society has worked with Middlesex University to create these pathways. It believes they offer seafarers a great opportunity. That's why they're prepared to offer a scholarship to reduce the cost of the course even further.

The Marine Society's partnership with Middlesex University has already turned over 500 maritime professionals into graduates. They're aiming to enrol a further 100 for the February 2012 intake.

Will you be amongst them?

What's on offer?
No matter what your age or maritime status there's a programme for you.

- Bachelors degree: top-up an HND/FD to an honours degree
- Masters degree: trade on your professional qualifications and experience to get an academic masters degree
- study for a Doctorate in Professional Studies

Find out more?
Take a look at the programmes on offer. For an overview visit: **www.marine-society.org/wbl**

Each programme is described in detail and downloadable as a PDF at **www.mdx.ac.uk/marinesociety**

Alternatively you can contact the Marine Society using education@ms-sc.org or telephone 020 7654 7050 and they'll send you the information.

Either way you put yourself under no obligation. But this could be a life-changing move for you. And the Marine Society will support you every step of the way!

GCSE / A Levels
A reminder to all who need to improve their GCSE and/or A Level grade that the Marine Society ought to be your first choice to provide first class tutor-supported study programmes.

The Society will help you achieve the best possible examination result in the shortest possible time. As you'd expect, there is full support for email and telephone, and all staff are familiar with your commitments with the RFA.

As a registered exam centre for GCSE and A Levels, the Marine Society can enter and register students for their exams and arrange for them to take place at sea if necessary.

And for the first time in 2012 the Marine Society is accepting applications for exam-entry only candidates from non-seafarers. Known as 'private candidates', these may be the wives, husbands or friends of RFA personnel – or anybody at all!

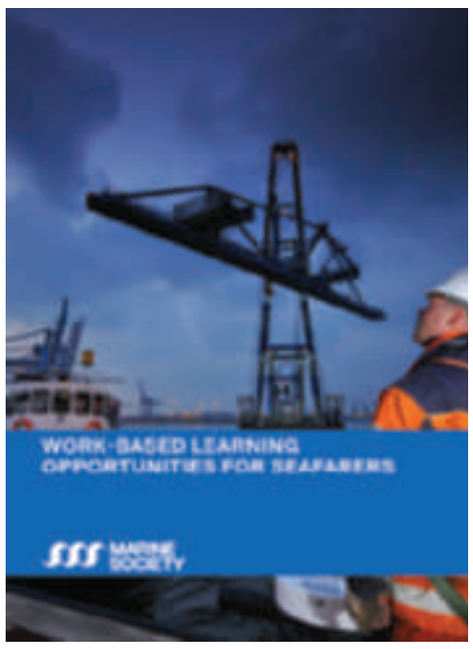
The next available opportunity to sit GCSE and A Level examinations will be next summer and autumn. But you can enrol for tuition at any time.

Contact the Marine Society to find out more or visit marine-society.org/rfa

Open University
The Open University offers a great way for seafarers to develop themselves, whether personally or professionally.
But did you know that the Marine Society can help you?

The Marine Society has an enduring partnership with the OU. It has been looking after the running of OU exams at sea and throughout the world for more than forty years. It also offers a unique package of underpinning logistical support for OU programmes. It can act as a forwarding address for OU course materials, ensuring seafarers get what they need by the fastest means.

There are special discounts available for maritime professionals wishing to



access the OU's excellent suite of continuing professional development courses. Plus there are bespoke packages of courses bolted together that are recommended for seafarers, with discounts that lower the tuition costs.

Find out what you've been missing: **http://www.openuniversity.com/marinesociety**

Advice
Advice on all matters of concern to RFA seafarers is free, independent and confidential.

Last year the Marine Society dealt with 6,500 queries from maritime professionals. 39% of those were about issues related to continuing professional development with a view to coming ashore.

The Marine Society remains the only maritime sector organisation to hold the coveted Matrix Standard - the national quality standard for any organisation that delivers information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work.

Visit www.marine-society.org to find out more or email education@ms-sc.org to request a free information pack.

And don't forget to check out Facebook: facebook.com/marinesociety

THE MARINE SOCIETY PROVIDES SERVICES TO RFA SEAFARERS TO ENHANCE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We've more experience in the field of distance learning than any other maritime sector provider.

Working with education and training providers to deliver seafarer-focused opportunities for quality-assured personal and professional development.

Supporting seafarers is our strength.

Find out more at: **marine-society.org**

MARINE SOCIETY

202 Lambeth Road
London SE1 7JW
Telephone
020 7654 7050
Email
ms@ms-sc.org

A charity registered in England and Wales 313013 and in Scotland SC037808

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RFA SUPPORTS MERCHANT SEAMAN'S WAR MEMORIAL SOCIETY

On Tuesday 11 October a small contingent from the RFA including Andy Clare, the RFA RMT Convenor, headed to the Springbok Estate in Cranleigh, Surrey, the home of The Merchant Seaman's War Memorial Society (MSWMS), a charity the RFA has forged links with over the last few years. The society was founded in 1920 and has been based in Sachel Court and the Springbok Estate since 1947. The charity provides assistance to seafarers and provides both sheltered housing with support and the opportunity to take a holiday in the peaceful setting. Anyone who has served in the Merchant and Royal Navy, plus the fishing fleets may apply for accommodation or a holiday.

The visit was arranged to present the society with a cheque for £1500, a donation from the RFA Central Benevolent Fund. The committee decided to make the donation to the MSWMS in recognition of their support to the wider seafaring community.

The cheque was presented to the Chief Executive of the society, Trevor Goacher by Captain John Hood of the RFA, along with Andy Clare the RMT convenor. On completion of the presentation the visitors were taken on a tour of the estate which included the grounds and the accommodation. Further details on the venue can be found on their website, the details of which can be found below.

The Society was established after Havelock Wilson, the founder and president of the National Union if Seamen (NUS) recognised that there was a need to provide help for merchant seafarers. He campaigned and highlighted awareness throughout the country, successfully raising funds, gaining the support of one main benefactor, Mr Henry Radcliffe, who was a shipping company owner.

The first building they acquired that was deemed suitable as a convalescent home was Limpsfield, Surrey. In 1920 the Henry Radcliffe Convalescent Home was opened by the Duke of York and so the society was born. The Merchant Seamen's War Memorial Society was effectively the fund raising arm of the charity and they worked tirelessly to secure funds to run the home.

Following World War II the people of South Africa collected a large sum of money and gave it to the NUS with the instructions to build a living memorial to those seamen who gave so much to keep the shipping lanes open during the conflict.

Picture show from left to right; Robin Kirkbride (Resident and Ex RF Purser), Capt. John Hood, Trevor Goacher (CEO MSWM Society), Ken Temperton (Trustee MSWM Society).

Sachel Court in Alfold, Surrey had been leased during the war by the NUS and it decided that the building and the surrounding area was an ideal place to set up a memorial. In 1947, Sachel Court became the new home of the Society, now named Springbok. As well as a convalescent home the Society also embarked on a training scheme for seafarers in both horticulture and agriculture. This ran successfully until 1993 and thousands of seafarers were retrained into alternative industries.

Today the Society continues to offer support to seafarers and provides both sheltered housing with support, plus holidays. Anyone who has served in the Merchant and Royal Navies, plus the fishing fleets may apply for accommodation or a holiday. The society can be contacted via the following –

The Merchant Seaman's War Memorial Society
Springbok Estate
Alfold
Cranleigh
Surrey
GU6 8EX
Tel: 01403 752555
Fax: 01403 753404
http://www.mswmsociety.org.uk/

THERE'S NO LET UP IN MOUNTS BAY'S SUPPORT

In August, Mounts Bay returned to the waters off Bournemouth for the air show after a two year absence. She formed part of the naval service presence along with HMS TYNE at the annual three day event. Her presence provided an impressive back drop to the event where she demonstrated her amphibious warfare capability. Mounts Bay was tasked to be the sea mounting base for members of the Reserve Forces and Sea Cadets involved in the capability demonstrations and shore displays over the weekend.

The amphibious displays were part of REFEX 11, a Naval Reserve Forces exercise. This saw members of the Royal Marine Reserve, Royal Naval Reserves, Royal Logistics Corp (TA), University Royal Naval Units (URNU) and local sea cadets units. These displays involved the Royal Naval Reserves and URNU acting as the enemy with members of the RMR from Bristol launching a beach assault from Mount Bay and supported by HMS Tyne. While the local sea cadets were involved in assisting in the tented village and evening events ashore. A total of 800 personnel were accommodated on Mount Bay over the event.

Over 1 million visitors watched the Maritime and Air displays over the weekend. It was however, marred by the tragic loss of the Red Arrow plane 'Red 4' and Flight Lieutenant Jon Egging. On the day when the Red Arrows were making their second performance, the ship's company and embarked forces lined the ship's sides as a mark of respect.

In September, Mounts Bay supported HMS Bulwark's amphibious directed continuation training (DCT) as part of the exercise South West Sword. This is a regular amphibious warfare exercise off the South Coast for training the various amphibious units.

As part of this, Mounts Bay was part of the exercise task group under the command of HMS Bulwark. Training included amphibious beach landings, non

combat evacuation operations and amphibious beach raids by Royal Marines.

Mounts Bay re-affirmed its affiliation with the Cornish town of Falmouth at the beginning of October. She returned to support the town's celebration of the signing of the Royal Charter by King Charles II, 350 years ago on the 5th October 1661.

A series of events were planned for the whole week of celebrations. These included a parade through the streets which was attended by the Commanding Officer, Captain Kevin Rimell and Executive Officer, Martin Jones. There was also a re-enactment by local school children and English civil war historical groups and various other events across the town. Some of the ship's officers represented Mounts Bay at a gala dinner during which there was a link up between Falmouth's around the world to join the celebrations.

Mounts Bay supported the celebrations by holding a reception for members of the local community on the vehicle deck, and a formal lunch attended by Mrs Sarah Newton MP, Commodore J Miller RN and the Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall.

The final event was a ship open to visitors on Saturday 8 October, where members of the general public were able to take a tour of the ship, and see displays by each of the ship's departments and meet members of the ship's company.

Following the events in Falmouth, Mounts Bay returned to her core capability of amphibious warfare. This time she was supporting the training of the Territorial Army during their annual camp where 100 Members of 165 Squadron, Royal Logistics Corp (RLC) embarked for the week-long Maritime phase of their camp in Marchwood with their boats, vehicles and equipment. During this phase they trained in maritime operations which included the use of various types of craft in the ship's dock and craning operations to the container deck area. They also conducted beach operations, setting up a beach head and moving equipment, cargo and personnel to and from the beach.

Following on from EX MULBERRY WADER, Mounts Bay joined HMS Bulwark, HMS Sutherland and RFA Black Rover to take part in the Maritime Combat Power Visit. The task group demonstrated a number of maritime capabilities which included amphibious landings, replenishment at sea, and anti piracy operations. These demonstrations were watched over the three days by Members of Parliament, Senior Officers, the press and the current advanced staff and command course from the Defence Academy, Shrivenham.

Mounts Bay embarked the landing forces, consisting of 'A' Company, 40 Commando, Royal Marines, 539 Assault Squadron, Royal Marines and a small detachment from the RLC. Mounts Bay carried out her role as a landing ship, launching the Royal Marines by LCU, ORC, and helicopter, as well as dispatching support equipment to the beach on the MEXEFLOTES utilising RLC personnel. As well as this, the ship's company exercised their action station drills practicing damage control, fire fighting and close range weapons techniques. On completion of the event Mounts Bay moved to Portland Port for a stand down and maintenance period before the next programmed commitment.

1/O Alex Grant

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THE MARITIME CHARITIES WELFARE GUIDE – SUPPORTING UK SEAFARERS

Managed by the Merchant Navy Welfare Board, Seafarer Support; the single point of contact for the UK Maritime Charity Sector, launched their most interactive online service to date; the online Maritime Charities Welfare Guide, at the Maritime Charities Funding Group (MCFG) conference held in London on 18th and 19th October 2011.

The Maritime Charities Welfare Guide is an online tool available to anyone searching for assistance from a maritime charity and is hosted on www.seafarersupport.org The intuitive web based Guide offers three ways of searching: 'Quick Search', 'Key Words Search' and 'Advanced Search'. Using a weighting system, the Guide differentiates between charities and directs users to the charities best suited to help.

The 2007 Supporting Seafarers research study, commissioned by the MCFG, recommended a single point of contact for the Maritime Charity sector. There are nearly 150 maritime charities providing a wide range of important support services to UK seafarers from the Merchant Navy, Royal Navy & Royal Marines, fishing fleets, and their dependants. In 2009, Seafarer Support was created to act as the referral service for the entire maritime charity sector.

Historically, maritime charity details were published in a book that quickly became obsolete. The online Guide is an organic document that will evolve alongside the Maritime Charities and can be updated at any point.

Captain David Parsons, Chief Executive of the Merchant Navy Welfare Board and Chairman of the

MCFG, emphasised that "The Maritime Charities Welfare Guide provides an outreach service to seafarers and their families who are looking for help and guidance. We have been concerned that too many within the maritime community are slipping through the net. The Guide offers an intuitive way of supporting those seeking assistance."

Seafarer Support funded by the Maritime Charities Funding Group (MCFG), a partnership of seven maritime charities: The Merchant Navy Welfare Board, ITF Seafarers Trust, NUMAST Welfare Funds, Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity, Seafarers UK, Seaman's Hospital Society and Trinity House. The group are working together to deliver a range of efficient welfare projects across the UK maritime sector.

The service has been set up in response to research that found that seafarers are more likely to face poverty, homelessness, bereavement, loneliness, debt and marriage breakdown than other occupational groups and are often unaware that there are charities dedicated to helping them.

The Freephone service is operated by the Merchant Navy Welfare Board and available between 9.30 - 4.30 Monday to Friday on **0800 121 4765** and outside these times a message can be left. The service can also be accessed through the Internet at: www.seafarersupport.org Calls and emails will be responded to within three working days.

From July 2009 until September 2011 – 857 welfare enquiries have been received, 454 of those were aged over 56 years old.

From July 2009 until September 2011 - 134 of the enquiries were referred to maritime charities and 109 to other charities.

The top five reasons for calling Seafarer Support:

1) Financial Assistance
2) General Information
3) Accommodation assistance
4) Pension enquiry
5) Legal assistance

c/o The Merchant Navy Welfare Board
8 Cumberland Place, Southampton SO15 2BH
Telephone: 0800 121 4765 Email:
help@seafarersupport.org Website:
www.seafarersupport.org

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RFA ASSOCIATION (VALETTA) VISITS FORT ROSALIE

Earlier this year on the 30th August the replenishment ship, Fort Rosalie sailed in to Valletta Grand Harbour in Malta for a two week maintenance period. Fort Rosalie is no stranger to Malta this being her second visit to The Grand Harbour this year in quick succession, her first was on the 10th August.

Taken from the Forth Rosalie Bridge while in the Dockyard for repairs.

Our association, through the British High Commission, made a request to the Captain of the ship, for our committee to visit the ship during her visit and we were delighted when our request was granted.

The visit took place on the 8th September, which happens to be a Public Holiday in Malta, the feast of Our Lady of Victories and the commemoration of the Great Siege of Malta. We were given the warmest of welcomes by all on board. We were given a tour of the ship which enabled many of us to recount some of our memories from former years. After the ship's tour we were delighted to be able to meet with the Commodore, Bill Walworth and the ship's Captain, where, over a drink we reminisced about our time on board RFA ships.

On behalf of our association, the president presented the Captain, with a water colour painting of the Malta Grand Harbour for the Officers Mess, to commemorate and remember our visit to a wonderful ship.

Alfred Cassar
Sincerely

Members of the committee with 3rd Officer and the Navigation Officer on the Bridge of the Ship

Names left to right: Pres of the Association Anthony Farrugia, Secretary Vince Grima, Comm Mem Alfred Mangion Vice Pres Alfred Cassar, Comm mem Alfred Lia, Third Officer, Comm mem Saviour Bugeja, Comm mem John Borg, Navigation Officer.

The committee members The Commodore, The Captain, 3rd Officer and the navigation Officer in the Officers mess where the president of the association presented a token to commemorate our visit.

Names left to right are: The Navigation Officer (sorry no name) Saviour Bugeja Comm Member, Alfred Lia Comm Member, RFA Commodore William M Walworth (OBE) , Anthony Farrugia Pres of the Comm, Vincent Grima Secretary of the Comm, Alfred Mangion Comm Member, The commanding Officer Capt Phil Hanton, Joe Davies Third Officer, Front Row Alfred Cassar Vice Pres