

HMS NORTHUMBERLAND AFFILIATES' NEWSLETTER – SUMMER 2016

Hello to all of our affiliates from HMS NORTHUMBERLAND, for what will be our last update for a while as the Ship commences her routine refit. Although the months since Christmas have largely been focused on preparing the ship for upkeep, we have continued to pioneer the Adaptive Force Frigate concept, delivering training to new ratings and officers across all branches and specialisations, and ensuring that they head to their next units with the requisite knowledge and ability to fulfil their roles.

The ship has seen another change of command, with Lieutenant Commander Matthew Reynolds departing us to take up the position of Executive Officer in HMS MONMOUTH. Lieutenant Commander James Hyde has taken on the position as the Senior Naval Officer onboard to steer the ship (metaphorically) into dry-dock.

Despite at times a somewhat frantic period alongside, the Ship's Company has taken advantage of a period of stability for other pursuits. The Ship's team made a strong showing at the annual Royal Navy Alpine Championships in January, and individuals have earned representative honours in sports including football and rowing.

It was also during the last few months that the RN Netball Association took the Open Inter-Services trophy. This was a fantastic achievement for all concerned, and a very proud time for the Ship, having two members of the winning team. Sub-Lieutenant Alison Ross brought her own particular brand of Scottish passion to the side, and her teammate, Writer Megan Bailey had the honour of captaining the First team, and leading them to stunning victories over the Army (32-23) and RAF (28-16), seeing the RN victorious in the competition for the first time in 23 years.



HMS NORTHUMBERLAND's Wtr Bailey receives the Inter-Services Netball Trophy

In other, non-sports related news, the Ship's Mechanical Engineering Department was recognised for their hard work in keeping the ship maintained to an exceptionally high standard despite significantly reduced numbers of personnel onboard, and a demanding program over the last 12 months. The team received the Fleet Commander's commendation for their efforts, and were presented in person by Vice Admiral Ben Key CBE on board the Ship.



Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Ben Key CBE presents his commendation to the Marine Engineering Department

As we headed towards refit, the crew took the opportunity to mark the end of this period in the Ship's life with a Ship's Company Ball, organised through the hard work of the Petty Officer (Caterer) Willison. Plans, as ever, changed several times and for a while it appeared that the entire event might have to be cancelled. Thankfully, some strings were pulled, a venue found and many of the Ship's Company took the opportunity to let their hair down prior to departing for Easter Leave. For some it was the last time they would spend time with the men and women of NORTHUMBERLAND and to those we wish all the best in the coming months and years.

The ship was pleased to receive visits from some of her affiliates over the past few months. In a single week we hosted both The Worshipful Company of Carmen and members of the Air Surveillance and Control System Force, based at RAF Boulmer, giving them a small insight into life onboard a Royal Navy warship. We have also received visits from Sea Cadets selected to meet with the Navy Board (the Royal Navy's senior management board) in order to discuss youth issues. We hosted a delegation of Officers from many nations and services, who were undertaking the Advanced Command & Staff Course (ACSC) in order to give them a better understanding of our platform's capabilities and what we can bring to their operations in the future.



Visiting Sea Cadets

The period post-Easter was dominated by de-storing the Ship of all her holdings and moving into accommodation ashore prior to upkeep. Then, early on the 27th May, HMS NORTHUMBERLAND was slowly moved into the Frigate Refit Complex here in Devonport – locally referred to as ‘the sheds’. After 6 hours of careful manoeuvring and checks, the dock was pumped dry and the Ship came to rest on her keel. The ship has steamed 125,000 miles since her last upkeep in 2011. To put that in context that distance is equivalent to more than half way to the moon, or 5 times around the world. She has travelled 633,000 miles since commissioning in 1994.



The Ship enters dry-dock

Over the following 18 months or so the Ship will be overhauled, repaired and upgraded. The principal enhancement will be the installation of the Sea Ceptor Future Local Area Air Defence System (FLAADS), providing the Ship with a step change in her defensive capability over her current Sea Wolf system.



Sea Ceptor Missile System

With the Ship placed into the hands of the refit contractor, the Ship's Company have now largely departed for other drafts. A 'skeleton crew' remains behind to oversee the work, and to plan NORTHUMBERLAND's regeneration. The crew will begin to grow in numbers again from early 2017, before moving back on board at the end of summer next year. A period of sea trials will follow, to test the work done in refit, before the Ship takes her place back in the Fleet in 2018.

Naturally, as the pace of activity on the Ship slows (notwithstanding the considerable ongoing engineering work) this will be our last update for a while. However, we look forward to writing to you again as we emerge from upkeep next year.