



CNOA

Chatham Naval Officers' Association



The CNOA Newsletter for February 2021

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HMS Spey © Crown Copyright MoD Navy 2020

WHITE ENSIGN RAISED AS HMS SPEY JOINS THE ROYAL NAVY

The final of five new offshore patrol vessels has formally joined the Royal Navy in a short ceremony to raise the White Ensign for the first time on HMS Spey.

Spey's first Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Commander Ben Evans, said: "It is such a privilege to lead Spey's complement through the coming trials and training programme and bring her to operational status.

"In spite of the considerable disruption caused by the pandemic, the Royal Navy has received the fifth and final offshore patrol vessel and our job now is to prepare ourselves and Spey for whatever operations we are assigned."

Chairman's Flag Hoist



Dear Fellow members,

I hope you are all keeping safe and well and managed to enjoy Christmas under the current restrictions. The committee and I wish you and your families a happy and healthy New Year; please let any of us know if you need help.

Whilst we were preparing for Christmas, the armed forces continued their support for our country and communities.

I was delighted to learn that one of the former instructors from my leadership ILM courses, CPO Andy Cooper, a serving RN nurse, has been made Associate of the Red Cross in the New Year's Honours for his nursing work in battling Covid-19.

43 Commando have been on exercise refining their skills in guarding the UK nuclear deterrent. The Royal Navy has responded to calls of assistance in Honduras after storms hit central America, with RFA Argus helping with relief operations. In the press I have read that smoking on RN ships will be banned from 2021 and vaping from 2022, and that American officials working at Embassies in China and Cuba believe that they have been attacked with microwave radiation.

Closer to home, we are now preparing for our AGM, which will be held virtually on Friday 12 February. The calling notice has been sent by the Hon Secretary, Lt Cdr Derek Ireland.

I am delighted to say our virtual Christmas social was well attended and it raised a few more pounds, which will enable us to donate to our selected charities despite us not having any face-to-face social events. Thank YOU all for your generosity.

As an organisation we are still not able to meet face-to-face and are adapting our lectures to be delivered online.

Yours Aye,

Jon

Jon Vanns
Lt Cdr (SCC) RNR
CNOA Chairman

Future Speakers & Events

Subject to revision

12 February:	AGM
12 March:	Martin Watts – Operation Market Garden
9 April:	Glen Jones – Third Afghan War
14 May:	Derek Goodwin – The development of marine propulsion systems; its effect and influence on the Ocean liner and Cruise ship
11 June:	TBC
9 July:	TBC
13 August:	No meeting – summer leave
10 September:	Tony Holding – CCF officer
8 October:	David Brown – Wrecks of the Kent coast
12 November:	Reflections of a marine engineer sales manager
10 December:	Christmas Social with the President

Additional events will be included as details become available.

As always, we are most grateful to those who send items for this Newsletter. Please email contact@cnoa.org.uk with articles, news items and photographs.

Derek Ireland (Hon. Secretary) and *Suzanne Wood* (Newsletter Editor)

Could other CNOA members also provide short presentations based on their own service-related experiences for the CNOA meetings? **Yes, of course they could!** Please let Jon Vanns know or email contact@cnoa.org.uk

UK and Russia remember the Arctic Convoys’ “true brotherhood in arms” From MOD Navy

Wreaths have been laid at memorials around the UK to honour the men who sailed in the Arctic Convoys to Russia.

Royal Navy and Russian military representatives have taken part in 75th anniversary commemorations of the end of a bitter four-year struggle to deliver vital aid to the Soviet Union and defeat Nazism.

The global pandemic scuppered plans for a major commemoration of the end of the convoys, which ran from the summer of 1941 until the defeat of the Third Reich in the spring of 1945.

Instead, a ‘virtual commemoration’ was held in November, when veterans joined senior political and diplomatic figures from Britain and Russia for an online discussion to underline the importance of the convoys – and to thank the dwindling number of men who endured what Churchill called ‘the worst journey in the world’.

That event sparked the idea of low-key physical commemorations at some of the key monuments to the convoys.

Commander James Buck, Harbour Master in Orkney, saluted the fallen commemorated by the monument on Hoy; adjacent Scapa Flow was home to many of the warships that escorted the convoys.

Liverpool was a key staging post for both Atlantic and Arctic Convoys. The Royal Navy's Deputy Regional Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Guy Balmer Royal Marines, joined the Rector of Liverpool, Canon Dr Crispin Pailing, for a service at the Arctic Campaign memorial in Liverpool Parish Church of Our Lady and St Nicholas.

And onboard HMS Belfast, Rear Admiral Iain Lower, the Royal Navy's Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Policy), and Colonel Maxim Elovik, the Russian Defence Attaché to the UK, met on the quarterdeck for a 15-minute service of remembrance and thanksgiving.



Rear Admiral Iain Lower salutes the fallen of the Arctic Convoy on HMS Belfast's Quarterdeck

Since 2014, the Russian Federation has presented around 3,500 Ushakov Medals to Arctic Convoy veterans, honouring their “contribution to our common victory over Fascism”, Col Elovik said.

And it will resume presenting them to those eligible once the pandemic passes to ensure “that each award finds its hero”.

“Today we not only celebrate the shared history and joint achievements of Russia and the United Kingdom in World War 2, but also the true brotherhood in arms of our people, a bright example of which were the Arctic Convoys.

“The Allied seamen showed true heroism in their long and perilous sea passages, constantly attacked by enemy forces in the appalling weather conditions of the Arctic.

“The memory of these and other heroic examples of joint combat and mutual support continues to live in our hearts.”

Col Elovik placed a wreath on behalf of his nation alongside Admiral Lower's beneath Belfast's battle honours board.

“It was an absolute honour to have the opportunity to properly commemorate the service of all the courageous mariners who served in the Arctic convoys; on and under the sea, as well as in the air,” said Admiral Lower.

“In doing so, I am glad we could also celebrate our shared history of solidarity with Russia and its people. Having the ceremony on HMS Belfast is particularly poignant too as it has so many deep connections with this shared past.”

The wartime cruiser serves as a living memorial to the 3,000-plus sailors – Royal Navy and merchant seamen – who sacrificed their lives delivering more than four million tonnes of supplies: tanks, fighters, trucks, fuel, ammunition and food.

Around 1,400 merchant ships made the perilous journey to ports in northern Russia during 78 convoys.

Some 85 merchant ships never made it – nor 16 Royal Navy warships which provided escort for them in the face of attacks from the German surface fleet, U-boats and Luftwaffe.



Sailors remove snow from HMS Belfast's forecastle during a convoy to Russia

Despite these losses and the grim weather conditions which meant sailors had little chance of survival if they went in the water.

HMS Belfast spent 18 months on Arctic Convoy duties between Christmas 1942 through to the spring of 1944, participating in the last battleship duel of World War 2 in Europe, the sinking of the Scharnhorst off the North Cape on Boxing Day 1943.

Plans for a belated 75th anniversary commemoration on the shores of Loch Ewe in north-west Scotland, where many convoys mustered before sailing, is planned for May 2021.

Seafarers UK has launched The UK Maritime Anchor Fund From Seafarers UK



Seafarers UK has launched the UK Maritime Anchor Fund to support working age UK National merchant seafarers, impacted by Covid-19.

The charity Seafarers UK has created the UK Maritime Anchor Fund with key delivery partner charities to provide an end-to-end package of support for seafarers experiencing financial hardship due to Covid-19 related loss of work or disruption of employment opportunities. Up to £200K has been allocated from Seafarers UK's Covid-19 Emergency Fund, to support UK merchant seafarers, of working age, through the new UK focused fund, which can be accessed via Seafarers' Advice and Information Line (SAIL).

The UK Maritime Anchor Fund addresses financial difficulties and their impact which can include strained personal relationships and impact mental health. Merchant seafarers can apply to the Fund if experiencing hardship caused by Covid-19. This may arise from redundancy, difficulties renewing contracts, problems joining a ship due to travel restrictions, reduced earnings or Covid-19 related illness. Grants are available to cover a significant reduction in income, top-up of Universal Credit and payment of priority debts relating to mortgage or rent, council tax and arrears, etc. The grant is just one part of a wide range of support which will enable a return to stability and financial resilience. It includes:



- Confidential personal advice on financial matters such as budgeting, income maximisation and access to eligible welfare benefits – provided by SAIL.
- Advice and help to tackle other related problems such as debt, tax and housing issues – provided by SAIL.
- Up to six sessions of free relationship counselling (referrals will be made by SAIL to Relate).
- Mental health and wellbeing support and counselling – provided by TogetherAll and funded by Seafarers' Hospital Society.

UK merchant seafarers needing help should contact SAIL. SAIL is a Citizens Advice service for seafarers and their families. SAIL supports seafarers by phone, email and face-to-face appointments via Skype and Zoom. SAIL can be contacted by phone on 0800 160 1842 or email advice@sailine.org.uk.

SAIL will assess entitlement for welfare benefits, and other needs. Where appropriate, SAIL will make a grant application to Seafarers' Hospital Society for financial support. The process has been refined to be as straightforward as possible to reduce admin and stress to applicants.

The Fund is open to any working age, UK national seafarer experiencing hardship because of financial problems caused by Covid-19 regardless of rank or length of service. Anyone in this category facing challenges because of Covid-19 is encouraged to contact SAIL to discuss their situation confidentially, whether the challenge is relationship difficulties or problems paying priority debts, the Fund will address a wide range of problems.

Seafarers UK's Chief Executive Officer, Catherine Spencer said: "Seafarers UK works in the UK and world-wide to support seafarers. We're pleased to offer help to UK seafarers through the UK Maritime Anchor Fund and encourage UK seafarers to call SAIL to discuss how the Fund can help. This new Fund is a great illustration of how our new strategy will get to the heart of issues to provide meaningful help for seafarers."

Seafarers UK has collaborated widely to set up the Fund, working with Maritime Welfare Charities – SAIL, Seafarers Hospital Society and Shipwrecked Mariners' Society as well as Relate and employed a wide range of methods to reach out to merchant seafarers, including, Nautilus International, the RMT Union, Maritime UK and UK Chamber of Shipping and their members and Seafarers' Support (the maritime charities online welfare guide) to ensure that the Fund is well publicised. Sandra Welch, CEO at Seafarers Hospital Society said: 'We're delighted to be involved in this important initiative. We want merchant seafarers to know that support is out there for them and their families. It's not just about money, this is a holistic approach that addresses their wellbeing as well as their welfare needs.'

Seafarers UK announced the £2MIL COVID-19 Emergency Fund earlier this year. The UK Maritime Anchor Fund has been developed from this Fund to specifically assist UK nationals employed as professional seafarers. Seafarers UK also fund the International Seafarers' Welfare Assistance Network (ISWAN) to provide an Emergency Fund for international seafarers as well Seafarer Help, a free 24-hour multilingual helpline.

Seafarers UK will launch a new strategy in early 2021, The UK Maritime Anchor Fund aligns with Seafarers UK's new strategic outcome to enhance the financial resilience of seafarers, which forms part of the new strategy.

International investors call on UN for actions to protect seafarers

By The Maritime Executive

A group of 85 institutional investors representing over US\$2 trillion in assets, joined forces calling on the United Nations to take further action to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis for seafarers brought on by the global restrictions enacted to control the coronavirus. In an open letter to the UN Secretary-General, the investors, in consultation with key marine organizations such as the International Labor Organisation and the International Transport Workers' Federation, added their voice to the call to recognise seafarers as key workers and specific actions to ensure crews' health and safety while maintaining global trade.

"As investors, it is clear that this is no longer solely a shipping industry problem nor a crisis that the shipping industry can resolve on their own," said Jenn-Hui Tan, Global Head of Stewardship and Sustainable Investing at London-based Fidelity International, which is leading this latest effort. "Shipping is responsible for 90 percent of global trade and holds the key not just to a global economic recovery from the devastation of Covid-19, but to maintaining our current way of life."

In the letter to Secretary-General Guterres, the investors write, "We recognize that any solution here has to be premised on a multi-lateral approach aimed at facilitating seafarers' movement while protecting local communities from re-infection risk. As investors, we acknowledge our responsibility with regard to the companies of which we are lenders or owners to raise our concerns and seek constructive responses."

The signatories to the letter, which include leading global investment firms Achmea Investment Management, ACTIAM, Ethos Foundation, Lombard Odier Investment Management, and MFS Investment Management, identify what they call the clear need for action. They support the ongoing call to designate seafarers as key workers and the establishment of systematic processes to enable safe crew changes such as safe corridors and testing regimes.

As Covid-19 vaccines are being rolled out, the group also says that it is looking to the leadership of the UN to ensure key workers including seafarers are included in the priority groups by their respective governments and that a complementary arrangement can be made by the UN or the IMO to secure a reasonable supply of vaccines for seafarers to effect immediate crew change where it is (over)due.

“We believe vaccinating a critical mass of the seafarer population is the most effective way of resolving the crisis,” the group writes in its letter, while also calling for other actions. They call for a publicity campaign to raise awareness as well as sharing the IMO’s 12-step protocol with relevant entities to facilitate universal implementation.

They conclude by highlighting the role that they believe seafarers will play in maintaining global supply lines and economic recovery. “We believe that the sustainability of the maritime industry and the humane treatment of seafarers affects all investors as well as our portfolio companies that depend on these workers.”

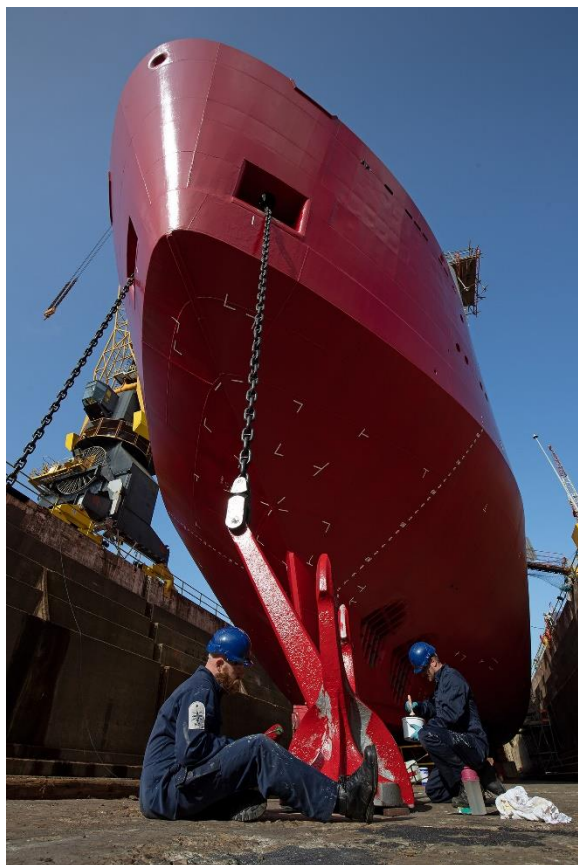
Ice ship HMS Protector back at sea after £14m revamp From MOD Navy

The Royal Navy’s only ice patrol ship is back at sea after a £14m ten-month revamp to enhance her ability to work in Antarctica.

HMS Protector left Teesside after the biggest and longest overhaul during her ten-year career under the White Ensign.



The work carried out by UK Docks and the ship’s company since last March will mean the ship – unique in the Royal Navy’s Fleet – is better at breaking ice, can carry more equipment and supplies to support British and international scientists researching the frozen continent, and has improved facilities for the crew.



HMS Protector’s gleaming refurbished propeller and shaft

The ship spent five months out of the water and was originally due to emerge from refit in the autumn, before heading south to update maritime charts of Antarctic waters using her hi-tech suite of sensors, as well as conducting scientific research alongside civilian experts.

The revamp proved to be more comprehensive and demanding than originally anticipated – particularly as it’s been carried out entirely during the pandemic – which means the ship sailed three months later than planned.

But Protector which finally departed Teesside at the end of last week is a ship far better suited to serving on the edge of the frozen wasteland of the Antarctic.

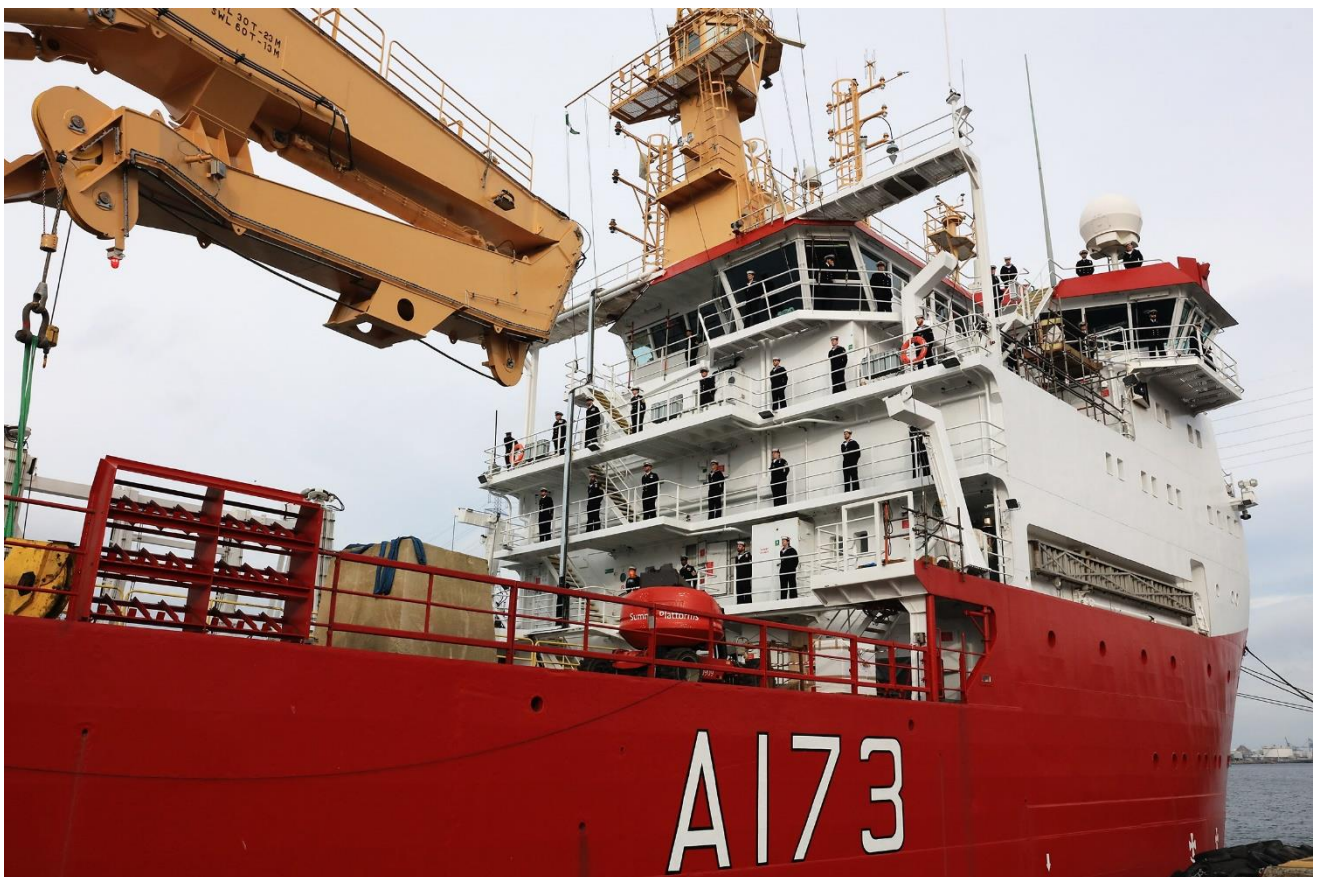
In 21 years in the Royal Navy, the Plymouth-based survey vessel’s 1st Lieutenant, Lieutenant Commander Robin Nash, said the work carried out on Protector had been “the most complex, demanding, and hopefully transformative project I have been a part of”.

The pandemic – and the rules and limitations it prompted – “added layers of complication that could not possibly have been anticipated” from working routines and habits, to enforced medical protection for everyone involved plus “a level of ingenuity and pragmatism from the ship’s company that has been truly humbling.”

Engineering Technician Craig Armstrong, aged 25, from Brixham added: “I’ve been impressed by the scale, technical nature and improvements to the engineering systems and I’m looking forward to working with them and enhancing our skills.”

As well as the usual refit work overhauling engines, generators, re-covering the distinctive red/white hull with specialised paint by hand and removing the propeller shaft for inspection in Denmark before reinstalling it – the revamp has created better cargo space, a new quarter deck structure with a naval stores complex, workshop to maintain the upgraded small boats and launches Protector carries, and there’s a new gym packed with £50,000 of the latest fitness gear for the sailors and Royal Marines.

The extra weight improves the ship’s trim which makes her better able to break ice when she needs to.



The Ship's Company line the upper decks

“The past ten months on Teesside have transformed HMS Protector into a Polar Class vessel, ready for operations in the ice,” said Commanding Officer Captain Michael Wood.

“The ship has undergone wholesale modernisation, exceptional amounts of structural rework, and significant capability enhancement as part of this mid-life update, and all in challenging circumstances for our industry partners.

“And while we were unable to deploy to Antarctica this season, we will return stronger at the end of 2021.”

IMB: Gulf of Guinea attacks drive increase in global piracy numbers

By The Maritime Executive

The rising number of pirate attacks in the Gulf of Guinea drove an increase in worldwide piracy numbers in 2020, according to the International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau (IMB).



In 2020, IMB's Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC) reported 195 instances of piracy and armed robbery worldwide, up from 162 in 2019. The rise was attributable to an increase of piracy and armed robbery reported within the Gulf of Guinea, as well as increased armed robbery activity in the Singapore Straits.

The trend is particularly concerning because the Gulf of Guinea is known as the global epicentre of the most damaging form of piracy – the kidnapping of crewmembers for ransom. 95 percent of all maritime kidnapping incidents occurred in the region last year, affecting 130 crewmembers in 22 separate attacks. One record-setting kidnapping attack occurred almost 200 nautical miles from land, and the average kidnapping occurred within about 60 nm offshore, according to IMB.

Only five crewmembers were kidnapped in all other parts of the world combined last year.

The Gulf of Guinea incidents also come with heightened risk because about 80 percent of the attackers are equipped with firearms, according to IMB. All three of the vessel hijackings and nine out of the 11 incidents in which vessels came under fire occurred in this region.

Given the hazard to crewmembers, IMB recommends that vessels keep at least 250 nm away from the coast at all times in this region, at least until a vessel can transit directly to a safe berth or anchorage.

“The latest statistics confirm the increased capabilities of pirates in the Gulf of Guinea with more and more attacks taking place further from the coast. This is a worrying trend that can only be resolved through increased information exchange and coordination between vessels, reporting and response agencies in the Gulf of Guinea Region. Despite prompt action by navies in the region, there remains an urgent need to address this crime, which continues to have a direct impact on the safety and security of innocent seafarers,” said Michael Howlett, Director of the ICC International Maritime Bureau.

Light shines for HMS Magpie as Prince Philip endorses new rallying cry

From MOD Navy

One of the Royal Navy's smallest ships returns to action this month with a new motto – words given the seal of approval by the Duke of Edinburgh.

Hi-tech survey launch HMS Magpie will 'shine light into darkness' – *lux in tenebris lucet* – apt as she hoovers up unprecedented data and information about the waters and coastline of the nation's key harbours.



The 18-metre-long catamaran traces her history back more than two centuries and has several battle honours under her belt but has never had a rallying cry, unlike many ships and submarines in the Fleet.

"The motto is aimed at complementing the ship's crest with the black annulet symbolising the darkness and the light within," explained Lieutenant Commander Mark White, Magpie's Commanding Officer. "I hope that adopting a motto will further embellish the already splendid ship's crest and act to inspire those who serve in her."

His ship is the ninth Magpie and has been specifically named after the wartime sloop/post-war frigate, which was commanded by Prince Philip between 1950 and 1952. That ship added battle honours in the Atlantic, Normandy and Arctic to Benin in 1897 and Baltic in 1855 by her predecessors.

The Duke of Edinburgh has endorsed the new motto – which is unique across the Fleet and has been selected to be non-specific to the survey vessel, so future Magpies can rise to it, whatever their mission or role – and receives regular updates on the small craft's deeds.



A burst of speed from HMS Magpie as she leaves Portsmouth Harbour

The ship is currently undergoing her annual maintenance period/overhaul in the hands of Mashfords, across the water from her home base of Devonport in Cremyll. She's due back in the water at the end of the month.

Japan's first female container terminal CEO to guide APM's growth

By The Maritime Executive

APM Terminals Japan announced the appointment of Sakura Kuma as the first female CEO of a container terminal operation in Japan. Joining APM from NYK, Kuma will lead the expansion of the company's business in Japan.



Yokohama container terminal - APM Yokohama photo

"I am pleased to welcome Sakura Kuma to APM Terminals Japan, where she will play a key role in the acceleration of our strategic transformation and lead the development of our business at the recently expanded Minami Honmoku terminals (MC1-4) in Yokohama", says Tim Smith, Head of Terminals, Asia at APM Terminals.

In 2020, APM Terminals Japan won a tender for a 10-year agreement with the Yokohama-Kawasaki International Port Corporation to increase the existing berth capacity at its Yokohama terminal. The Yokohama terminal is adding two additional large berths (MC3 and MC4), making APM the only terminal operator in the Greater Tokyo area capable of handling vessels up to 20,000 TEU.



Sakura Kuma - APM Terminals photo

The expansion to a 4-berth facility is projected to double volumes from 1.1 million TEU to 2.1 million TEU. APM plans to develop further landside products and also hopes to attract additional liner customers to the facility.

"With nearly two decades spent in the port, shipping, and logistics industries, Sakura brings extensive experience, strong management skills, and a proven record of business development. We are very pleased to have Sakura strengthen our leadership team and drive the exciting growth of our business in Japan," said Smith.

Before joining APM Terminals, Kuma held several leadership positions within marketing and sales, new business development, and corporate management at NYK. She had additional responsibilities with NYK Bulk & Projects Carrier Ltd, Yusen Terminal, and Yokohama-Kawasaki International Port Corporation.

"I am excited to join APM Terminals - a great company with a significant international portfolio. There is so much that ports can do to deliver synergies and contribute to A.P. Moller - Maersk's core strategy of integrated container logistics. I am looking forward to joining the team and it will be absolutely thrilling to become the first female CEO in a Japanese port."

Sakura Kuma will join APM Terminals Japan effective February 1, 2021.

Looking back – Looking forward

By Brian Bissell

Looking back just two days from my time of writing we had our January virtual lecture from Tracy Bryant on The Association of ex-Service Drop-In Centres (ASDIC) and what a revelation it was as well as an inspiration regarding the valuable work Tracy, her husband Barry and many special colleagues are doing for those of our ex-service personnel most in need at this very difficult time throughout the United Kingdom.



Two months prior to 8th January was Remembrance Sunday and last year it was different from practically any other that we have experienced. I personally have attended Remembrance Sunday Parades on behalf of the Merchant Navy for the past 15 years and more in Tunbridge Wells.

Last November 8th, there was a short symbolic service with strictly limited guests by invitation only, no procession, singing, live music, march past or reception; and members of the public were being asked not to attend. I received a personal invitation to attend and was advised only our Mayor and the President of the British Legion would lay wreaths at the War Memorial. Some days later I ordered a wreath from the British Legion and once having received it went and laid the wreath on behalf of the Merchant Navy at the War Memorial, having written the following words: "In Remembrance of all those brave men and women of the Merchant Navy who gave their lives in the service of their country".

Shortly before Remembrance Sunday we went into the second national lockdown and that week I was asked by the local press, the Kent and Sussex Courier, to submit my five top tips for surviving lockdown! And here they are:

1. First I recommend we commit to acquiring a positive attitude. Best way I found to do that is to appreciate what we have already; 'count our blessings', and be grateful for whatever we have, even if it doesn't seem much - I believe there's always people worse off than ourselves.
2. Focus our mind afresh every morning - attempt to 'seize the day', grab a baton to run today's lap of this lockdown race and do something kind for ourselves and anyone else we can. We can always phone someone to enquire of their welfare and wish them well. A few words of support and encouragement could make the difference.
3. Set a goal for the day, the week even, and start doing something we haven't got round to doing before, which we wanted to do. Lockdown can mean less diversions and distractions. With our positive attitude and focus, just for today, we have a better chance of succeeding. Reward ourselves in some small way for our achievement of the day. Have an incentive.
4. Vision, Positivity and Goodwill lead to Well-Being. Go for a walk each day, if we can, and appreciate what beauty there is around us outside locally.
5. Good luck and endeavour to see the light at the end of the tunnel – I believe there always is one. Well, nothing ventured nothing gained!

This piece appeared in the Friday 6th November editions of the K&S Courier headlined and on pages 6 and 8. I was joined by five leading figures from the area including Davina McCall. So I was in good company!



6 COURIER FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2020

News

How to cope through lockdown with a little help from our friends

TOP TIPS FROM LEADING LOCAL FIGURES

By MARY HARRIS
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@maryharristw

THE country was plunged into lockdown again yesterday. The four-week requirement is scheduled to end on December 3, but many are wondering if we will now have a 'lockdown Christmas'. Once more people have been told to stay at home and non-essential shops, pubs and gyms have had to close. Our famous resident, television presenter and mother Davina McCall, who lives in Tunbridge Wells, has shared her top tips for surviving lockdown as have a handful of our leading local figures from across the Kent and Sussex Courier patch.



Brian Bissell

66 ■ Brian Bissell

From charity fundraiser to actor, entertainer to positivity powerhouse, Brian was delighted to share his tips.

First I recommend we commit to acquiring a positive attitude. Best way I found to do that is to appreciate what we have already; 'count our blessings', and be grateful for whatever we have, even if it doesn't seem much. I believe there's always people worse off than ourselves.

Focus your mind afresh every morning - attempt to 'seize the day', grab a baton to run today's lap of this lockdown race and do something kind for yourselves and anyone else you can. You can always phone someone to enquire of their welfare and wish them well. A few words of support and encouragement could make the difference.

Set a goal for the day, the week even, and start doing something you haven't got round to doing before. Have an incentive. Lockdown can mean less diversions and distractions. With our positive attitude and focus, just for today, we have a better chance of succeeding. Reward ourselves in some small way for our achievement of the day.

Vision, positivity and goodwill can lead to well-being. Go for a walk each day, if you can, and appreciate what beauty there is around us outside locally.

Good luck and endeavour to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I believe there always is one. Well, nothing ventured, nothing gained!

I hope you will find something of value in what I was able to contribute to the readership of my local press last November and which remains relevant now and into the foreseeable future as we are in our third national lockdown with no early end in sight.

I would like to commend and thank our Chairman, Jon Vanns, and our President, Barry Bryant, and all those officers and committee members for their valuable initiatives and leadership in providing us with virtual lectures these past months and even virtual socials, which included the Trafalgar Night.

Now I look forward to the programme scheduled for us this year, especially our AGM on Friday 12th February when we will have the opportunity to vote for our officers and committee.

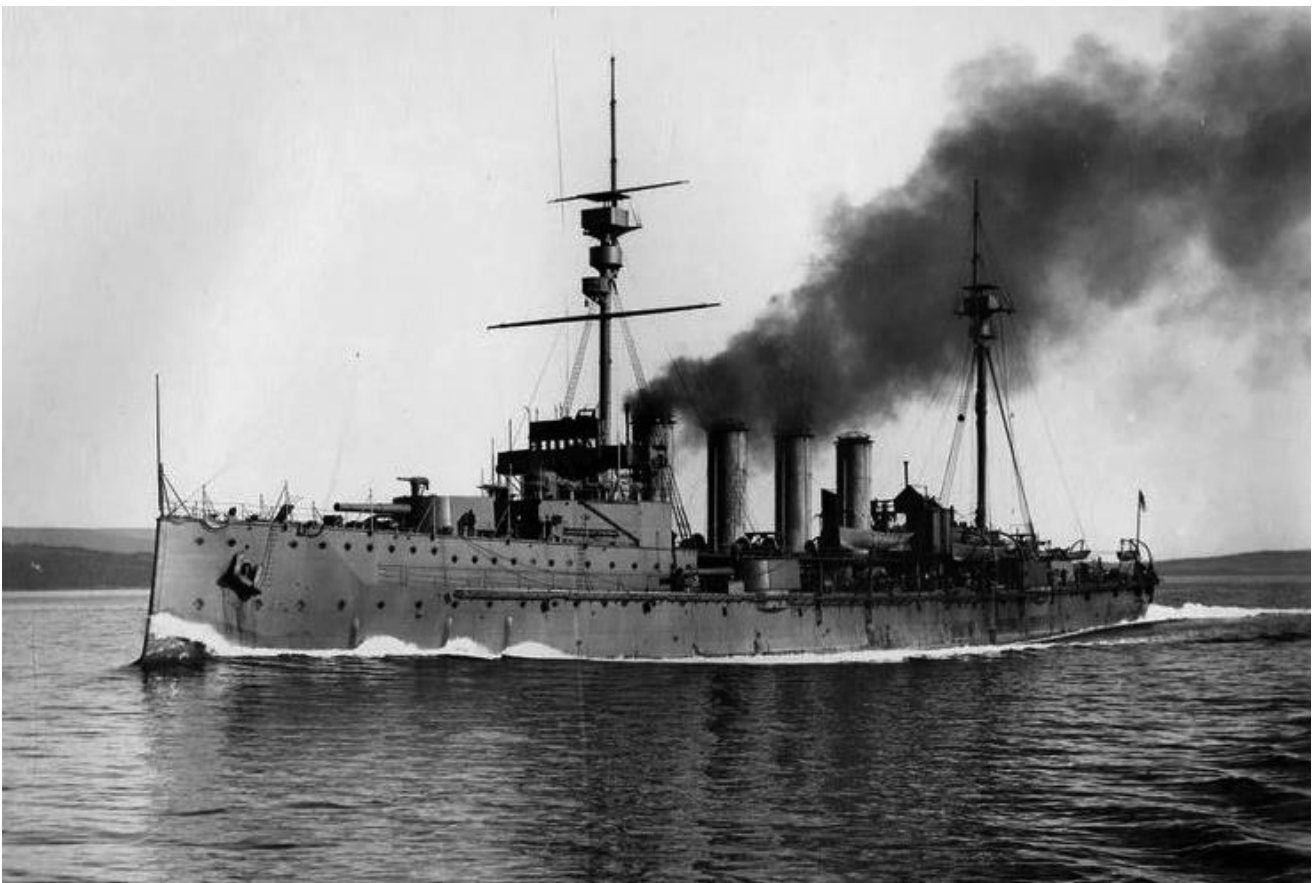
I would also mention that it is Prince Philip's 100th birthday on 10th June and I am sure we are all aware of his naval background and his support for our naval associations and all the Armed Forces. What a record of service and achievement that is and of course his invaluable support to Her Majesty the Queen for over 70 years.

When reflecting on the difficult times we are experiencing now I realise that they do not compare to the hardships and sacrifices made by our forebears during two World Wars and other conflicts long ago. I believe it is all a matter of perspective and I for one am grateful for the friendship and fellowship I enjoy as a member of the CNOA for over ten years and I know our monthly newsletter is a lifeline to many. Let's look forward to the future with as much optimism, positivity and courage as we can muster.

Anniversary of wartime tragedy in Cromarty Firth when HMS Natal blew up From MOD Navy

The sun had almost set on the Cromarty Firth on the penultimate day of 1915.

The natural harbour proved a key anchorage for the Grand Fleet in its bitter struggle with its foe across the North Sea, an important base between the Navy's wartime home in Scapa Flow and Rosyth, from where the fast battlecruisers of Admiral Beatty patrolled.



Armoured cruiser HMS Natal at sea

This festive period, the second of the Great War, the firth was filled with ships at anchor, ships such as the finest battleships, like HMS Benbow, through armoured cruisers Achilles and Natal to destroyers Oak and Mindful.

Crews of the anchored ships had, for a few days, put the war to the back of their minds. Aboard Natal, some of the officers were enjoying a film show; the cruiser's commanding officer, Captain Eric Back, had invited wives and children aboard for the occasion. Most of the crew were either tending to harbour duties or resting in messes. Some had gone ashore to watch – or take part in – a football match against local soldiers.

The ten-year-old warship had led a mostly uneventful life so far, save for escorting George V to India so he could attend the Delhi Durbar and be crowned Emperor. Her wartime service with the 2nd Cruiser Squadron had helped to throttle Germany's supply lines, but it was monotonous work.

But shortly before 3.30pm this Thursday, the ship flashed a terse signal, out of the blue: Ship on fire.

The response around the Firth was almost immediate: Send fire engines to Natal immediately.

They never had a chance. Just one minute later, the cruiser Shannon reported: Natal has turned over and has bilge keel showing.

The fire had detonated either her main or secondary aft magazines – the ship's rear section was torn apart in an instant and the cruiser heeled to port and sank within five minutes.

AB Michael Fogarty was next to a ventilator by the funnels. "The next I heard was a rumbling noise and I saw a flame coming up the after hatchway which caught me, threw me in the air and rolled along the upper deck," he recalled.

A jet of flame shot up – higher than Natal's masthead – before successive explosions doomed the cruiser.

Amazingly, given the cataclysmic explosion, Fogarty was one of more than 300 men who survived, almost all of them ratings, rapidly plucked out of the water by crews of tugs and warships which gathered around the wreck.

Capt Back and his guests were all killed; among the victims were the entire Dods family, including patriarch John Henry, a former Scottish rugby international. They were just about to depart Natal by launch when disaster struck.



The buoy marking the wreck of HMS Natal in the Cromarty Firth

The death toll is estimated between 390 and 421, including more than 60 Royal Marines plus the ship's cat Rudolph, with the recovered bodies interred in the churchyard at Rosskeen.

After initial fears of a U-boat attack were ruled out, the Admiralty concluded that Natal was probably the victim of a cordite fire which spread to the magazine. A near identical explosion had ripped apart HMS Bulwark at Sheerness in 1914 and would vaporise battleship HMS Vanguard at Scapa Flow in 1917.

Natal's upturned hull was left for the remainder of the war before half a century of salvage and recovery attempts were made until the late 1970s. Today the wreck site is marked by a buoy.



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