

FLAG HOIST

The Chatham Naval Officers' Association Newsletter

Dear Members

As this is our first hoist of 2026, Happy New Year!

This month we have a virtual lecture, details to follow, it would be interesting to learn if any members would value our monthly lectures being streamed live so you can join at home?

20th February is our AGM (3rd Friday of the month). We always welcome new members to the committee, and ideas you would like considered for CNOA to be of more benefit to members and its causes.

A reminder, this should be my last year as Chair and as yet no one has expressed an interest to supersede me.

The 31st January is our charity lunch please submit your attendance to join us and if possible contribute to the raffle or auction.

In late November, I had the privilege to watch HMS Prince of Wales return to Portsmouth escorted by a 3 helicopter fly past as she passed the Round Tower. It was joyous to see families reunite.

The date for the Trafalgar dinner is set as 23rd October 2026 and I am pleased to pass on Lt Col John Newton, CO of RSME has sent his best wishes to all members of CNOA for the new year.

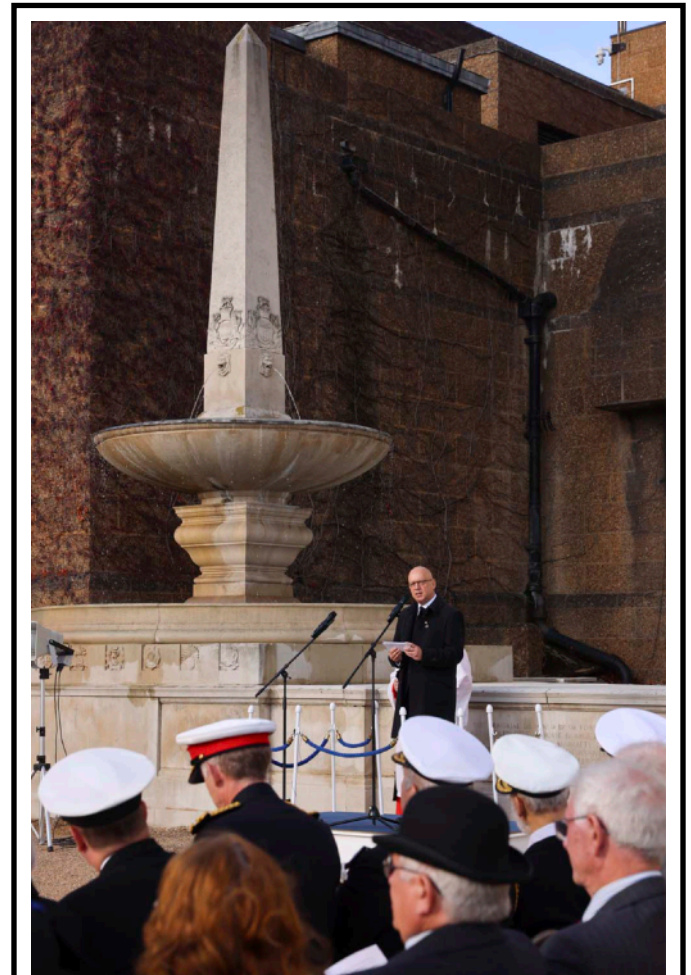
Lastly its SUBS month.

Please pay up, we will be using a three strike process again as chasing subs is both laborious and a waste of time.

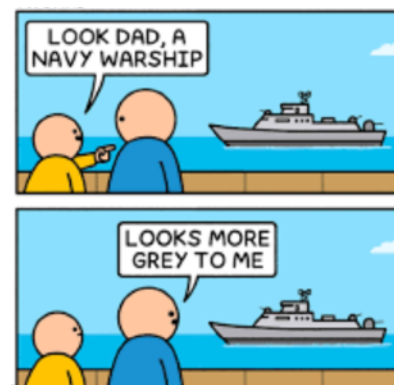
Yours Aye, Jon



Lt Cdr Jon Vanns RNR



The words of Sir Winston Churchill echoed across one of London's most famous sites as an historic monument to sailors who fought as soldiers was rededicated. Discover more on page 9.



The Royal Navy's First Crewless Helicopter

Proteus – the size of a traditional helicopter, but with a pilot tasking the aircraft rather than flying it – has been ‘flashed up’, testing her engines, systems and rotor blades.

Designed and manufactured in less than two-and-a-half years at the home of British helicopters in Yeovil, the Proteus Technology Demonstrator is being developed by Leonardo under a £60m programme, and is believed to be one of the world's first full-sized autonomous helicopters.

This is the first step towards creating a truly autonomous Vertical Take-off and Landing (VTOL) aircraft in this weight class. It will help both the designers and the Royal Navy understand what similar machines will be needed in the future and how they will operate, either individually or more likely working in tandem with crewless and crewed aircraft as part of a ‘hybrid air wing’.

Senior officers and experts from the MOD were invited to Leonardo's Yeovil site to see Proteus ‘ground running’ – as well as learn about the leading-edge technology, programming and Artificial Intelligence which is key to the helicopter's success.



Proteus will be tasked to patrol specific maritime areas, drawing on information provided by other allied ships, helicopters, submarines, and detection systems to calculate the best chance of success in finding an underwater foe.

To detect submarines Proteus will drop sonobuoy listening devices into the ocean to search the depths for the tell-tale acoustic signs that emanate from submarines.

Once found the system has the ability to report its findings back to the mission commander.

By embracing drone helicopters, the Navy aims to search wider stretches of ocean for longer periods without putting strain on aircrew, who could be deployed on other critical sorties.

While Proteus isn't flown by a pilot, the technology demonstrator always has an operator in control of the system, operating within predesignated safe limits and customer defined rules of engagement.

Royal Navy Intercepts Russian Warship



HMS **Severn** intercepted Russian warship RFN Stoikiy and tanker Yelnya off the UK coast in a shadowing operation during November, the Ministry of Defence said.

It comes after Defence Secretary John Healey announced last week that lasers from Russian spy ship the Yantar were directed at RAF pilots tracking it, in an attempt to disrupt the monitoring.

The Russian vessels sailed through the Dover Strait and westward through the English Channel, the MoD said.

HMS **Severn** later handed over monitoring duties to a NATO ally off the coast of Brittany, France, it said, but continued to watch from a distance and remained ready to respond to any unexpected activity.

At a news conference in Downing Street, Mr Healey said the spy ship was on the edge of British waters north of Scotland, having entered wider UK waters over the last few weeks.

He said it was the second time this year the Yantar had been deployed off the UK coast and he claimed it was "designed for gathering intelligence and mapping our undersea cables".

Mr Healey said the ship had "directed lasers" at pilots of a P-8 surveillance aircraft monitoring its activities - a Russian action he deemed "deeply dangerous."

The operations come just weeks after HMS **Duncan** tracked the movements of Russian destroyer Vice Admiral Kulakov, and frigate HMS **Iron Duke** was dispatched to monitor Russian Kilo-class submarine Novorossiysk.

They are conducting surveillance operations as part of NATO's collective defence, patrolling for Russian ships and submarines in the North Atlantic and Arctic.

In a clear message to Russian President Vladimir Putin, the defence secretary said: "We see you. We know what you are doing. And we are ready."

CNOA Forms

The forms for joining and for the CNOA bursaries can now be found on the CNOA website.

Joining forms can be downloaded from <https://www.cnoa.org.uk/Membership/>

CNOA Bursaries can be found at <https://www.cnoa.org.uk/CNOA-Bursaries/>

CNOA Charity Lunch 2026



Venue:

The Cornwallis Suite
Maidstone Masonic Centre
Courtenay Road
Maidstone, Kent
ME15 6LF

Tel: 01622 678336

Date: Saturday, 31st January 2026

Time: 1200 hrs for 1245 hrs

Dress: Lounge suits, Jacket and tie (gentlemen);
cocktail dress (ladies)

Cost: £38 per head

Event Details

The CNOA New Year's Lunch, open to all members, and their guests.

This is our major charity fundraiser of the year.

We would welcome raffle and auction donations,
which can be passed to a committee member before or on the day.

Please support your Association with your attendance.

Please post applications to
Lt Cdr J Vanns
8 Fairfield Ave., Tunbridge Wells, Kent. TN2 3SD

or Email Jonvanns@aol.com

BACS Payment Details:
Sort Code: 23-05-80
Account No: 50484084

Please mark payment with your name and Ref New Year Lunch

CNOA Charity Lunch 2026

Menu Choices

Starter

1. Carrot & Coriander Soup
2. Avocado and Prawn Salad
3. Chicken Liver Pâté with Apple & Walnut Chutney

Main

4. Roast Sirloin of Beef and Yorkshire Pudding
5. Salmon en Croûte
6. Goats' Cheese, Onion & Mushroom Wellington

All served with seasonal vegetables and potatoes

Dessert

7. Apple and Blackberry Crumble with Custard
8. Eton Mess
9. Apricot Crumble Cheesecake

Coffee and mints to follow.

CNOA Charity Lunch - Booking Form

	Name	Starter	Main	Dessert
Member Name				
Guest Name				
Guest Name				
Guest Name				
Example	<i>Mr Brian Example</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>9</i>

Important:

Menu choices and payments must be received by

10th January 2026.

We must confirm numbers and menu selections three weeks in advance.

Would you like acknowledgement of your submission?

Yes No

Home

There's nowhere better.

And getting there a day earlier than planned after nearly eight months away, well that's the icing on the cake.

The curtain came down on the Royal Navy's premier deployment of 2025 over the weekend as the UK Carrier Strike Group in all its many parts returned home.

Sometimes they were intimate affairs. Others were watched by a cast of thousands. Some took place in the rain. Others were blessed with a weak winter sun and raw westerly breeze.

In Norfolk. In Somerset. In Cornwall. In Devon. In Portsmouth.

All came home with a sense of mission accomplished – and delight at being reunited with families.

A forecast of bad weather brought the arrival of the four ships in the strike group at the end of its Operation Highmast mission forward by 24 hours: HMS **Dauntless**, then flagship **Prince of Wales** and finally Norway's HNoMS Roald Amundsen to Portsmouth,

HMS **Richmond** into Plymouth. As is their custom, the aircraft departed ahead of the ships' arrival.

The F-35B Lightning jets were safely back at RAF Marham by Friday lunchtime, the Merlins of 820 Naval Squadron to Culdrose, four Wildcats from 815 NAS (deployed with HMS **Prince of Wales**, **Dauntless** and the Amundsen) to Yeovilton (the Merlins of 845 arrived a week ahead of the rest, their work done).

Commander Nick Smith led 809 Naval Air Squadron, nicknamed The Immortals, on its maiden deployment, bringing them back to Norfolk alongside their RAF sister Lightning squadron 617.

He said "the range and breadth of the activity the squadron have been part of is truly amazing."

He continued: "I am incredibly proud of the Immortal Team who have done such a fantastic job in delivering everything asked of them throughout the year, but most importantly full operating capability of Carrier Strike.

"We have operated day and night, in fair weather and torrential downpours, from HMS **Prince of Wales** as well as the Japanese and Italian ships Kaga and Cavour.

"After being reunited with families, air and ground crew – as in 617 Sqn, drawn from the RAF and Royal Navy in equal measure – now enjoy a month's leave "before regrouping in 2026 for another year of adventures."

Guiding one of the Merlins on to dispersal at Culdrose was Air Engineering Technician Taylor Kiltie.

Aboard, his dad and fellow aviation engineer Petty Officer Andrew Kiltie. "I am absolutely delighted to be back here with my family. It's such a long time to be away, so to come back straight into their arms – it's very emotional," dad said.

Commander Al Woodward, who took command of the anti-submarine/airborne surveillance squadron just before the deployment, said the eight months away would live long in the memory for many reasons.

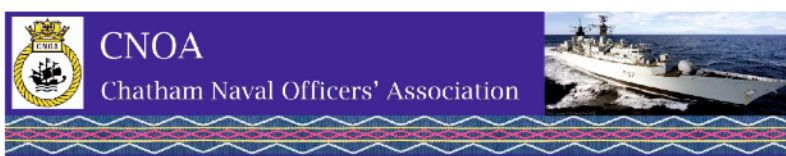
"It's been a superb deployment looking at what we've achieved. The squadron has been incredible.

They've worked so hard at the challenge of keeping the aircraft serviceable and safe so we can fly.

"There have been a lot of exercises and we've been half-way around the world and back. "We've also been to some incredible places.

These are the memories, as well as the successes. I hope people will look back fondly on this deployment.

And it's great to be home."



CHATHAM NAVAL OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS



CHATHAM NAVAL OFFICERS' ASSOCIATION ANNUAL STANDING ORDER FORM

Please complete this form and return it to the Hon Treasurer: Lieutenant Jan Dean RNR, 79A Cherry Avenue, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7OU, or, if you prefer, you can scan a copy and email it to cnoauk@gmail.com. You can arrange a standing order electronically via your bank and, for those using traditional banking methods this form can be used to inform your bank of your instructions as below.

I wish to make my annual subscription payments by standing order to the Chatham Naval Officers' Association.

Your Name: _____

Your Address: _____

Post Code: _____

Name of your Bank: _____

Address of your Bank: _____

Your Bank Sort Code: ____/____/____

Your Account Number: _____

To my bank:

I request you to pay the regular sum of: £20 PA

Metro Bank sort code 23 05 80 account 50484076

Payable to Chatham Naval Officers Association

Address if required 2 Calverly Road, Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 2TB

Joining Fee and Annual Subscription

With effect from 20th March 2023, new members will be required to pay a joining fee of £30 by cheque or transfer to CNOA at the following bank:

Metro Bank Sort code 23 05 80 Account 50484076

Cost £20 PA payable to Chatham Naval Officers Association

Address if required 2 Calverly Road, Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 2TB

On receipt of the joining fee new members will receive an Association tie or scarf and lapel badge. The Annual Subscription of £20 applies from the date of joining if this occurs before 1st July, and then will be renewed by Standing Order from the following 1st January.

New members who join after 1st July will be required to submit a Standing order from the following 1st January.

Annual Subscription – Current members

The annual subscription remains at £20 and, with effect from 1 January 2024, the subscription will be payable annually on that date. In the first instance, and to allow members time to alter their current standing order dates, a transition period of 3 months, to 31st March 2024 will be in place, after which an audit and follow up process will be undertaken.

Sub Sea Craft

SubSea Craft [SSC] is a specialist maritime technology manufacturer with established links to the RN and AUKUS partners.

At their modern base in the former Ben Ainslie Racing HQ in Old Portsmouth, the company operates a fully integrated facility that brings design, prototyping, testing, and production under one roof.

The company is structured to support iterative development cycles of approximately 100 days, allowing user feedback to shape outcomes without the delays inherent in traditional prime contractor programmes.

The approach prioritises modularity, ensuring components evolve independently while maintaining full interoperability across allied forces.

Platforms are conceived not as standalone assets but as elements of a broader ecosystem,

designed to integrate with existing force structures and avoid proprietary constraints that hinder joint operations.

The development philosophy addresses longstanding acquisition pain points: prolonged timelines from concept to fielding often render solutions obsolete by the time they are deployed.

SSC engages end users from the outset, embedding operational urgency into every phase.

This user-centred model has produced systems spanning surface, subsurface, and air domains, with software at the core rather than an afterthought.

Autonomy and artificial intelligence are built in from the foundation, enabling platforms to adapt to evolving threats without requiring complete redesigns.



24 HOURS IN ST HELENA:

TANKER TIDESPRING'S RARE VISIT TO SOUTH ATLANTIC ISLAND

RFA **Tidespring** – second only in size to the Royal Navy's Queen Elizabeth-class carriers in the UK's Fleet – making her way home to the UK having spent the bulk of the year supporting the Carrier Strike Group.

The carrier force returns home in early December, but RFA **Tidespring** broke away in the Indian Ocean, since when she has continued her deployment, visiting Cape Town in South Africa before making her way up the continent's western seaboard.

About the size of Swindon but home to fewer than 4,500 inhabitants, St Helena could only be reached by sea until an airport opened a decade ago (the nearest land – Angola in West Africa is 1,150 miles away.)

It's been four years (HMS **Protector** in 2021) since the Royal Navy last visited the British Territory, and a decade since the Royal Fleet Auxiliary – the navy's crucial support ships – in the form of tanker Gold Rover.

Indeed, so isolated is the island that many of its children had never seen a helicopter – until the Merlin from **Tidespring** appeared.

“A brief but fantastic visit, offering the ship's company a rare opportunity to visit of one the most remote islands in the world, and highlights the UK's commitment to its overseas territories.”

Commanding Officer Captain James Wingrove RFA

The helicopter, normally based with 814 Naval Air Squadron at Cudrose in Cornwall, has been attached to the tanker throughout her mission performing a combination of general duties and its dedicated role of hunting submarines.

It flew ahead of the ship to give some of the RFA crew a rare bird's eye view of St Helena, as well as capture some aerial video and stills of the island.

The next morning, the ship arrived, anchoring at first light in James Bay off the capital Jamestown – the small harbour cannot accommodate a ship of **Tidespring's** size.

Monument To WW1 Warriors Rededicated



Today's Royal Navy reconsecrated the impressive Royal Naval Division memorial in Horse Guards Parade with full ceremony, 22 years to the day it was returned to the heart of the capital.

Serving personnel lined up with retired senior officers, veterans, politicians, and descendants of some of those who served in the famous unit for the service, which featured a mix of remembrance, religious ceremony and history as experts put the deeds and sacrifices of the sailor-soldiers into context.

The Ceremonial Guard from last weekend's Remembrance Parade at the Cenotaph were on parade alongside the Band of His Majesty's Royal Marines, plus marching platoons of sailors and Royal Marines.

His Royal Highness Prince Michael of Kent was Guest of Honour. The Venerable Ralph Barber, Archdeacon for the Royal Navy, performed the formal act of rededication "as a sign and symbol of this nation's remembrance of those whom it commemorates", honouring men of "courage and commitment in the face of great adversity".

Major General Rich Cantrill Royal Marines, the Royal Navy's Commander Operations, read the address given by Churchill when the memorial was

originally dedicated in April 1925, before he laid a wreath in memory of the Great War warriors with Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Steve Moorhouse.

Stew Kilby, a former Royal Navy officer who has studied the division's role between 1914 and 1918 said he hoped the rededication would elevate the sailors back to where they belong.

"The remarkable story of the Royal Naval Division is often overlooked, falling between the Army's Great War history and traditional maritime history. This unique formation, made up of sailors who fought as soldiers, was defined by an extraordinary ethos, camaraderie, and fighting spirit,"

Mr Kilby said. "I hope today's event rekindles interest in their story and honours the more than 47,000 casualties they suffered during the first World War.

Their bravery, resilience, and sacrifices must never be forgotten, and it is vital we preserve their legacy for future generations."

Vice Admiral Moorhouse said the division – whose ranks were filled with sailors and Royal Marines – had been "a unique formation that combined naval traditions with the challenges of land warfare during World War One."

CNOA Events Programme 2026

Date	Speaker / Activity	Subject	Comment
9 January	Martin Watts	Passchendaele 1917	Virtual Meeting
31 January	New Year Lunch		
20 February	AGM		
13 March	Tony Matthews	CWGC and Chatham Naval Memorial	
10 April	Social Evening		
8 May	Commander James Nisbet	TBD	
12 June	Glen Jones	Boxer Rebellion 1911	
10 July	Summer Social Evening		
August	No Meeting. Summer Leave		
11 September	Commander Chris Reynolds	Submariner Reminiscences	
23 October	Trafalgar Dinner		
13 November	Chief Superintendent Simon Alland	Kent Police Marine Unit: its role and equipment	
11 December	President's Christmas Social		

The Association of Royal Navy Officers



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