



HMS LANCASTER NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 11 | JUNE 2025

A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMANDING OFFICER

**Commander Sam Stephens,
Royal Navy**

Port Crew had an eventful 4 months in theatre, some of which I am sure you will have heard about, some of which you might not but all of it was delivering effect for Defence in one of the most politically complex and tumultuous regions in the world. From drugs busts in the Gulf of Oman; to working with CTF 150, the coalition task force providing maritime security in the Middle East; to training partner nations and hosting dignitaries, strengthening ties and building relations.

This was achieved due to the hard work, ingenuity and drive of the crew to deliver on operations, which is a testament to their professionalism and character and for which we should all be rightly proud. This rotation saw the crew spend Christmas away from loved ones, which is never easy, in particular for those left at home, so we were grateful our regeneration period in the UK was over the Easter holidays and for the opportunity to spend it with family and friends.

Starboard crew currently 'have the ship' and we're looking forward to rejoining LANCASTER at the end of next month, where we will be taking over from them and have the honour of sailing her home. At this point the dual-crewed model will come to an end, at least temporarily. However, LANCASTER has proven it to be a success, the model providing harmony and stability for our sailors, whilst also delivering constant operational effect, with the ship working hard in support of Defence and wider Government strategic effect 365 days of the year.

None of this could be done without the support of our wider networks, including our affiliations and I thank you all for your continued engagement and support, it really does make a difference.

Best wishes

Sam Stephens

**Commanding Officer, HMS Lancaster
June 2025**



Homecoming and Decommissioning

Lieutenant Commander Adam Ridgeway, Executive Officer

While most of this newsletter will provide you with a flavour of what LANCASTER Port Crew has been doing during our last rotation from November 2024 to March 2025, I would like to take the opportunity to look forward to the future and keep you informed about what LANCASTER will be up to between now and the end of the year. This will be a busy rotation where we take over from Starboard crew in July, who will no doubt be keen to inform you of their activity in their own newsletter, before embarking on the long voyage home and returning to the UK in the autumn.

This promises to be an eventful voyage with LANCASTER planning to sail 'the long way round' to the UK, crossing the Indian Ocean down the coast of East Africa, round the Cape of Good Hope, past West Africa and the Iberian Peninsula before returning to the UK around October. This means LANCASTER will cross the equator twice on the pendulum swing round Africa with a traditional 'Crossing the Line' ceremony on the southbound leg through the Indian Ocean. The ceremony is a traditional naval rite of passage performed when a ship crosses the equator, involving costume and pantomime and presided over by 'King Neptune' God of the Sea, it symbolises the transformation from a novice to a seasoned mariner. Given our likely encounter with Monsoon season and the notorious conditions around the Cape of Good Hope, all our sailors will likely be much more seasoned by the time they return to Blighty!

While Defence Engagement will be a priority with LANCASTER supporting UK Government objectives in the Broader Middle East and Africa, the Ship will conduct maritime security operations en route and be ready for counter piracy, counter narcotics and counter weapons smuggling interdictions on the journey home, helping ensure the sea lanes of communication and trade remain safe and open, all the while maintaining readiness for contingent warfighting operations.

Once back in the UK there will be a Homecoming event for friends and family in Plymouth, followed by port visits around the UK in October (number and location to be confirmed). These will be opportunities for the ship to engage with our affiliates and members of the public prior to a formal decommissioning ceremony in November, again in His Majesty's Naval Base Devonport, Plymouth.

We will be in touch in due course as details for these events firm up, so please do look out for correspondence from us.

We are always grateful for the support that you, our affiliates, give to the Ship and our sailors and we would be delighted for you to be involved as we mark this momentous occasion.



Deployment Overview

Lieutenant Henry Stevens, Deputy Weapon Engineering Officer

HMS Lancaster's drumbeat of counter narcotics boarding operations, engineering support periods to sustain operations, extensive training and trials to maximise readiness, and defence engagement events continued in our latest deployment. In November, our triannual and penultimate crew change took place in Muscat, Oman, handing over the Ship from Cdr Chew and Starboard crew to Cdr Stephens and Port Crew.

Deployment kicked off with significant engineering works alongside extensive training and assurance assessments from the Fleet to enable us to get to sea and deliver on our tasking. Complexity of training serials was steadily built up, culminating in the ship's company being assessed on their handling of numerous simultaneous external threats and internal incidents such as attacking fighter jets and onboard fires and floods. Training period complete, Lancaster and her crew were ready to proceed on operations.

Christmas was spent at sea last year. An intensive period of boarding operations kept morale high whilst the newly installed Starlink system enabled video calling to loved ones at home, a Christmas first for the fleet! This is something the services have been pushing towards for a while and was a great boost for both our shipmates and their families.

The start of the new year took us alongside in Bahrain for a period of maintenance to build the ship back up to its peak operating performance. This time alongside facilitated numerous other activities such as the hosting of our Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Andrew Burns and then Commander Operations, Rear Admiral Edward Ahlgren, as well as seeing a good turnout of the ships company attend the Bahrain Half Marathon. A blisteringly strong performance by our Sea Ceptor missile maintainer, LET Joe Mitchell, finishing the race in 1 hr 16mins, before going onto represent the Royal Navy at this year's London Marathon.

Engineering works complete and freshly topped up with munitions, Lancaster sailed in February to get back to what we do best, interdiction boardings disrupting the international flow of narcotics and arms. Multiple successes and the confiscation of hundreds of kilos of methamphetamine and heroin gave the ship's company the bump in morale we were looking for to push us through to the end of our deployment.

Arriving back in Muscat in March, heads were high from a successful period and preparations began for handover to starboard crew and Cdr Chew for the final time who have continued on operations since then. We'll be back out to see them and take the ship in July.



Top: Ships' Company muster on the Flight Deck for post the successful narcotics interdiction on 14 March 2025.

Left: Idyllic views at the start of the Wadi Shab river walk, an AT activity the Ship was able to make the most of whilst alongside in Muscat.

Above: Christmas at sea meant mass was held on the Focsl (forecastle), with readings from Captain and members of the Ships Company.

Boarding & CTF 150 Ops

Lieutenant Harry Stanton, Officer of the Watch and Royal Navy Boarding Officer

Over the past six months, HMS Lancaster has continued her crucial role in promoting maritime security and stability in the Arabian Gulf and surrounding waters. As the Royal Navy's forward-deployed frigate in the region, the ship has carried out a string of successful boarding operations, working tirelessly to disrupt criminal networks and illegal trafficking. A standout success came on 14 March 2025, when the ship executed a high-stakes interdiction that resulted in the seizure of over 420kg of illegal narcotics, dealing a serious blow to regional smuggling operations.

Operating under the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) and specifically Combined Task Force 150, HMS Lancaster was patrolling the northern Arabian Sea when advanced surveillance assets, including the new Peregrine UAV, detected suspicious nighttime activity between two vessels. A fast boat was seen transferring packages to a larger dhow—behaviour consistent with illicit trafficking.

As HMS Lancaster closed in, the smugglers attempted to discard packages overboard, and the sea boat was rapidly deployed to recover the illicit floating cargo. In total, the boarding team's successfully secured 340kg of heroin and 83kg of methamphetamine.

with a street value exceeding £5.4 million

This marked the Royal Navy's first major drug bust of 2025, and a major operational success for HMS Lancaster and the CMF effort to sever funding streams that enable terrorism and regional instability.

"I am extremely proud of my whole team for their professionalism and dedication in achieving this success."

– Cdr Sam Stephens

This interdiction is one of several recent operations that highlight the ship's growing capability in maritime security. With advanced aerial surveillance, well-drilled boarding teams, and close coordination with coalition partners, HMS Lancaster continues to play a vital role in defending international waters from illicit exploitation.



Royal marines of 42 Commando boarding the suspect Dhow



Seaboat crew recovering jettisoned cargo

DSP Bahrain

Sub Lieutenant Madelaine Norey, Deputy Marine Engineering Officer (Ships)

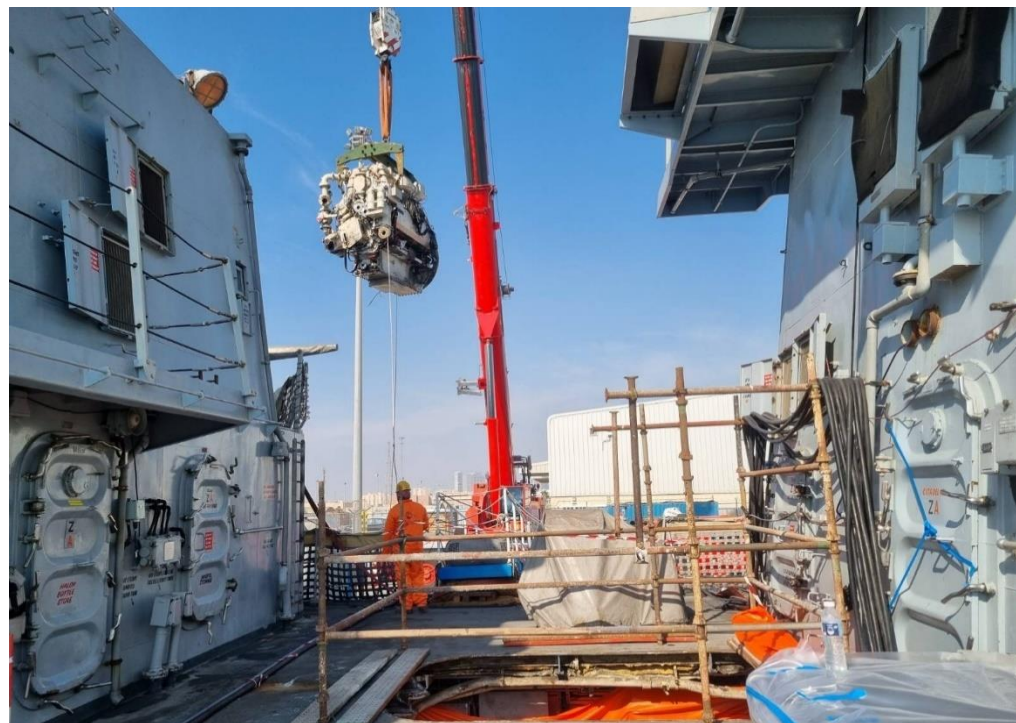
In January, HMS Lancaster commenced an extensive Deployed Support Period (DSP) alongside Bahrain Naval Base, marking a critical milestone in her ongoing operational maintenance cycle. This comprehensive maintenance period was meticulously planned and executed to ensure the continued readiness and capability of the ship whilst deployed in the region.

One of the most technically challenging and logistically complex tasks carried out during the DSP was the removal and replacement of a Forward Diesel Generator. This significant engineering evolution required precise coordination between ship's staff, engineering teams, and Lancaster's Class Output Manager (COM).

The generator replacement formed part of a wider program of work that encompassed essential upkeep across multiple domains of the ship's infrastructure. This included detailed hull maintenance, targeted deck repairs, and the inspection and servicing of critical systems such as the Chilled Water system—vital for onboard cooling and habitability in the region's extreme temperatures—and the High-Pressure Sea Water system, crucial for fire-fighting and other essential ship functions.

Additionally, weapons and sensors systems received significant upgrades. Learning from recent and ongoing conflicts in the region and around the world, upgrades to the defensive missile system, counter drone capabilities and secure communications sharpened the teeth of Lancaster to be prepared for any roles it might be asked to perform.

These critical maintenance tasks and capability enhancements have ensured that HMS Lancaster is well-prepared to meet current and future operational demands. As she continues her forward-deployed role, Lancaster stands ready to respond to regional challenges and contribute to maritime security efforts. With the DSP now complete, the ship is well-positioned for her upcoming taskings and her eventual return to the United Kingdom later this year.



TAG Operations

Lieutenant Commander Robert Guest,
TAG Commander

Typically a small Ship (frigate or destroyer) such as HMS LANCASTER would be complemented by a single Flight, consisting of either the Wildcat HMA2 or Merlin Mk2. They offer a significant capability upgrade from the Ship alone; effectively extending the Ship's sensors which in turn improves situational awareness, carry weapons and also conduct more routine activity, such as transferring stores and food, or on a bad day taking personnel ashore in the event of a casualty or compassionate case. HMS LANCASTER has been deployed on Operations since 2023 in the Gulf region, supported continuously by a Wildcat HMA2 from 815 Naval Air Squadron (NAS).

HMS LANCASTER however, has recently had an uplift of two air systems, in addition to her usual Wildcat, which you may remember from the previous Newsletter. These air systems are called Peregrine; a small rotary drone that can be equipped with a radar (providing beyond visual sight tactical information) and camera of their own. Combined with the additional workforce required to operate and maintain them, the Aviation Department, or, Tailored Air Group (TAG) has grown to twice its size and can offer the Ship a round-the-clock capability.



Whilst many believed that drones may swiftly replace crewed aviation, the value of cooperative employment is becoming ever more apparent. By working together simultaneously, (both the Wildcat and a Peregrine airborne together) or sharing the flying load over a prolonged period of time (in order to conduct surveillance whilst still maintaining the capability to conduct boarding activity), LANCASTER and her aircraft are shaping the future of the RN's crewed – uncrewed capabilities and ways of working.

Notably, during the previous rotation LANCASTER successfully operated both air systems simultaneously, a huge milestone in the Peregrine's integration. In the final days of the rotation, the Wildcat and Peregrine then worked around the clock, achieving almost 80 hours airborne in just 8 days enabling multiple counter narcotic boardings.

LANCASTER is now continuing to improve how it employs and integrates the three aircraft such that the lessons we identify and learn can influence the future of RN aviation.



Ambassador's Dinner

Petty Officer (Catering Services) Paul "Pablo" Williams

During the FTSP HMS Lancaster's Catering Services team was presented with a prestigious opportunity: to deliver a high-end dining experience for the Commanding Officer and distinguished guests, including His Excellency Ambassador Bondy the US Ambassador to Bahrain, Vice Admiral Wikoff, Commander US Navy Central Command, US Fifth Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces as well as other senior US Navy personnel, with Commodore Aldous, the UK's Maritime Component Commander in the Middle East the senior member of the Royal Navy present.

Under normal circumstances, such an event demands meticulous planning, time, and professionalism. However, the team faced an extraordinary challenge – our galley was completely out of action due to planned maintenance activity (see Previous Page).

With refrigeration systems also offline, endurance holdings were significantly reduced, adding to the challenge. Initially, the task seemed impossible. How could a fine dining experience be delivered without any cooking or preparation facilities?

Despite the daunting situation, the team's ingenuity prevailed. Determined to showcase their skills to such high-ranking officials, they devised a bold solution: to execute a fine dining experience using the ship's BBQs.

The idea was met with a mix of awe and apprehension. Could a dinner of this calibre really be pulled off under such constraints?

With limited space, the team transformed the Wardroom pantry into a prep area and set up the BBQs in the midships cross passage. A sense of camaraderie and determination filled the air as preparations began.

As the guests arrived – escorted in true U.S. fashion by armoured police vehicles with lights blazing – the scene was set. The Commanding Officer led them past our BBQ kitchen, so they saw first-hand our chefs at work, with hot coals and meat sizzling. Far from being discouraged, the team were inspired to rise to the occasion.

Each course was cooked to perfection, plated with the finesse of a five-star restaurant, and presented in the Captain's Cabin. Upon completion, the team were invited in and received high praise from all guests. Admiral Wikoff remarked that, had he not seen the BBQs himself, he would never have believed such a meal was prepared under those conditions and it was the finest meal he had ever had on any warship – high praise indeed from such a senior officer.

The dinner served as a means of strengthening ties between our countries and reinforcing our cooperation and commitment to both our individual and mutual endeavours in the region, and stands as a testament to the resilience, creativity, and unwavering commitment of HMS Lancaster's Catering Services team.



Top left: Piping party conducting ceremonial for the guests as they arrive.

Centre: CS Edge preparing canapes of bruschetta, coronation chicken, beef carpaccio with horseradish, and smoked salmon with cream cheese and chive.

Bottom left: Pablo and LCS Torrance fire up the BBQ's on midships!

Top right: The Captain gives the guests a tour of the flight deck with the Peregrine UAV's on display.

Centre right: The main event! Chateaubriand with charred asparagus spears, battered root vegetables, and BBQ potato skins filled with bacon, cream cheese and chive, finished with a rich wine jus.

Bottom right: The starter featuring sweet chilli king prawns skewered on rosemary, served with salad and a firecracker dressing.

Lancaster Sport

Leading Physical Trainer Ben Povey

HMS Lancaster remains one of the most active ships both physically and operationally. During a busy deployment, the Ships company still managed to maintain great levels of sport and fitness.

Rugby – In a thrilling and hard-fought contest, Bahrain RFC emerged victorious with a 28-19 win over HMS Lancaster in what was a fantastic game from start to finish. The match was competitive throughout, with both sides showing great skill, determination, and sportsmanship. The scoreline reflected just how close the game was, with HMS Lancaster pushing Bahrain all the way. It was especially heartening to see such strong performances from players who hadn't taken to the field in some time – a real testament to the spirit and camaraderie within both teams. Everyone gave their all, and the effort from every player on the pitch was outstanding.

– **ET(ME) Parry.**

Golf – Whilst Lancaster was alongside in Muscat, some of the crew went to a local golf course and received a lesson which was covered by grassroots funding – funding that provides sailors the opportunity to learn new sports and experience new challenges. After the lesson we all completed a very tricky 18 holes of golf, helping develop our interest in a new sport. Activities like this really help break up a long deployment.

– **LS(UWW) Weller.**

Football – During the deployment HMS LANCASTER played in multiple fixtures against Bahrain FC and Muscat Storm. Each game was closely contested. It was great to see various members of the ships company get involved and represent the ship.

– **LPT Povey.**

Hyrox – HMS LANCASTER held a Hyrox simulation event at NSF Bahrain — a first for many of us, including myself. Although Hyrox was new to me, it was easy to see how accessible it was for people of all fitness levels. It was genuinely refreshing to witness such strong participation, not just from HMS LANCASTER but also from other units within NSF Bahrain. It was a great morale booster and served as a reminder of the importance of community and camaraderie on deployment.

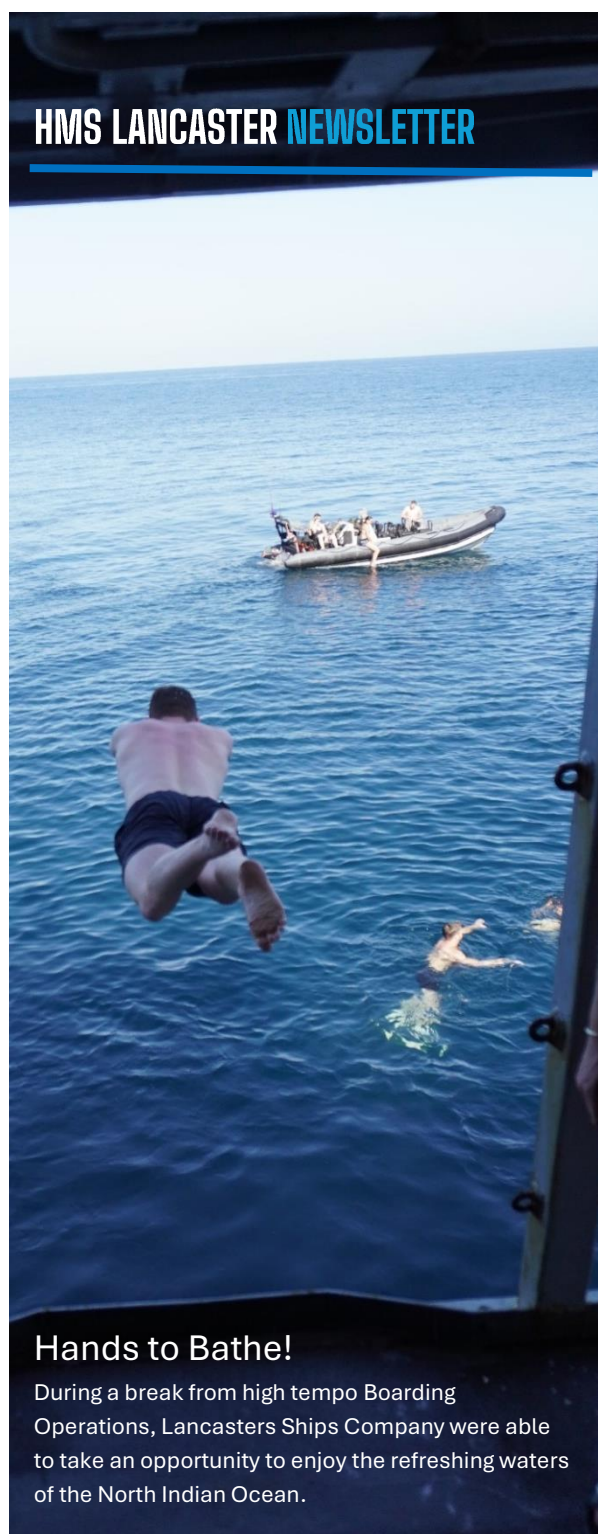
– **LS(AWW) Theolipolis.**

Wadi Shab – An iconic walk located in one of the most beautiful wadis in Oman. The Ships company undertook this challenging walk, up the vast canyon with the opportunity to cool off from the heat by jumping in and swimming in the various pools. An ideal way to make the most of our time alongside.

– **LPT Povey.**

Marathon – Five of our top athletes took part in the Bahrain Beyon Full Marathon on a course that travels through the Al Areen Wildlife Park. LET(WE) Mitchell finished with an impressive time of 2:56, making him the 1st in his age group and 5th overall.

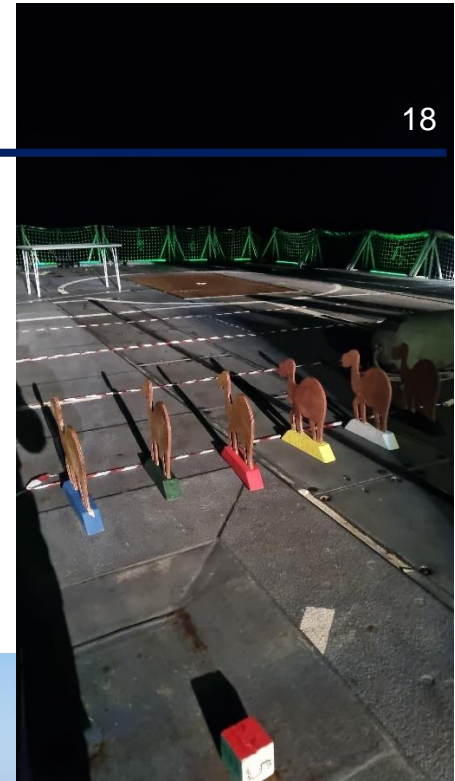
– **LET(WE) Mitchell.**



Hands to Bathe!

During a break from high tempo Boarding Operations, Lancasters Ships Company were able to take an opportunity to enjoy the refreshing waters of the North Indian Ocean.







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