

In addition to being Head of Membership at the Society, I am also a proud Maritime Reservist, having rejoined after I left Regular Service in 2019.

As a signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant and a Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Silver Award holder (hopefully Gold by the end of 2024), the Society has pledged to support military personnel.

That pledge was put to the test last year when I approached Chief Executive Neil Marshall to discuss a Reservist opportunity I was keen to do. It would involve eight months away – with pre-deployment training, six months deployed in theatre, and post-deployment stand-down.

With the Society's membership steadily growing, a big change happening in the pensions world with the implementation of the AFPS 15 remedy, and the Society's own drive for internal development to improve our membership offer, I appreciated it was a big ask of Neil, the membership team and the Society.

I need not have worried: my request to deploy was approved and at the start of November 2023 I was officially mobilised.

As a media operations specialist in the Maritime Reserves, I am currently deployed in Bahrain as one of two media officers in the UK Maritime Component Command (UKMCC) and assistant public affairs officer at Combined Maritime Forces (CMF).

UKMCC is the command element of Operation Kipion, the Royal Navy's commitment to promoting peace and stability in the Gulf and Indian Ocean, ensuring the safe flow of oil and trade.

There is typically a Type 23 frigate on maritime security patrols, supported by a Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker, as well as a three-strong squadron of minehunters with a standing presence. We also have 150+ Service personnel living and working out here to support the ships.

As media officer for UKMCC, it is my job to monitor open-source media to advise the Command of current

# To Bahrain and back



**Charlotte Cooper, the Society's Head of Membership, reports from Bahrain on her operational deployment with the UK Maritime Component Command and the Combined Maritime Forces headquarters.**

sentiments and key stories, liaise with organisations to co-ordinate media requests, and produce and publish social media content and press releases for each of the units deployed within our area of operations.

With a standing presence of at least five Royal Navy ships assigned to UKMCC, the work is, as you'd expect, dynamic with plenty of variety.

## What is CMF?

CMF is a multinational maritime partnership of 42 nations to promote security, stability and prosperity across 3.2 million square miles of international waters. It aims to uphold the rules-based international order by countering illicit non-state actors on the high seas.

Within CMF are five Combined Task Forces (CTFs), 150, 151, 152, 153 and 154, each with their own missions

and areas of responsibility. One of the most recent involves operations in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden in response to the Houthis attacks against commercial shipping.

During my time as a Regular in the Royal Navy several years ago, I served aboard HMS Dragon on Operation Kipion, assigned to CTF 150, whose mission is maritime security outside the Arabian Gulf.

We had a busy time, with eight substantial narcotics seizures causing disruption to the funding of terrorist networks and criminal activities.

Now working within CMF, I see the mission from a new perspective, understand how the ships are co-ordinated as part of the bigger picture – and see where the photos we took of our drug busts went!

As assistant public affairs officer for CMF, I co-ordinate media

opportunities with each of the task force's public affairs officers, collating and publishing media content for each task force and acting as a public affairs adviser to CMF.

CMF is a melting pot of people from all nationalities, cultures and personalities. With so many differences among us, you might think it would be hard to work effectively and efficiently. But I've seen how nations can come together, work cohesively and learn from each other to achieve our shared goal.

## Trip to Jordan

A highlight for me so far has been a trip to Jordan. CTF 154, the task force dedicated to maritime security enhancement training, is currently led by the Royal Jordanian Navy, which hosted Operation Northern Readiness II at their naval base in Aqaba.

Without a dedicated public affairs officer in the task force, I was able to attend to take photos and create the press and social media content that would be released on CMF channels.

I witnessed 11 nations working and training together, sharing their skills



**“I've seen how nations can come together and learn to achieve our shared goal**



in core areas of maritime security. I particularly enjoyed going to the Gulf of Aqaba, the northern tip of the Red Sea, on Royal Jordanian Navy patrol boats, capturing photos as the Jordanians showed off their ship driving skills and drills.

In our downtime, we visited some famous Jordan sites, including Petra and Wadi Rum, and swam in the Dead Sea – an amazing experience.

We enjoyed a wonderful meal at the Royal Jordanian Naval Base, hosted by CTF 154 Commander, Captain Alnaimat. I even ticked off one of my bucket list experiences in learning to scuba dive.

As well as these opportunities, I feel my deployment will also benefit my work at the Society. In Bahrain, I have worked closely with all ranks and rates from all Services and backgrounds. I have heard their perspectives on military life and pension schemes and what more we at the Society can do to further educate and assist.

When I first arrived in Bahrain, I saw plenty of ears prick up when people asked about my job at the

Society. I'm happy to report that despite the fast-paced tempo and busy days, we found time to hold some Roadshow presentations, which have been very well received.

I have also thoroughly enjoyed meeting members of the Society who are deployed, and I hope they have found our conversations beneficial.

With my renewed appreciation for the plate-spinning of our Armed Forces staff, I hope to return with ideas on how we can make just a little part of life admin easier for members.

I feel extremely grateful to the Forces Pension Society for supporting me on this mobilisation and I hope to bring back plenty of valuable insight of the currently serving Armed Forces community to support our continuous improvement.

And if any of our readers would like some tips on a visit to Jordan, I would be more than happy to spin some dits for you! [👉](#)

ABOVE L-R: Royal Jordanian Navy in Aqaba; Charlotte capturing a moment; Charlotte (second from right) with fellow officers from Canada, Norway and New Zealand