

1 Warsash Maritime Academy News

1.1 Officer Cadet's 2017 Life-Raft Challenge – Officer Cadet Elizabeth Stanley ([StanleyE18](#))

As I sit down to write, reflecting back two weeks, on what was one of the most rewarding things I personally have ever completed, I have been asked numerous times by friends and family “how was it?”. Without hesitation the answer every time was “absolutely freezing”. Nevertheless, for all the world, I wouldn't change the fact that I completed this challenge. I am beyond proud to have supported [Sail4Cancer](#). Twenty-four hours in a life raft to give someone memories that can last a life-time is definitely worth it.

So let's start from the beginning. We all headed down to the boat house to put on our all-weather gear which, as in previous years, was kindly loaned to us by [Sunsail](#). Once a series of TV and radio interviews were completed, it was time for the safety brief: “don't kill each other and good luck”. At this point I thought to myself what could we possibly need luck for, we've just got to sit and do nothing for 24 hours? Oh how wrong I was! A group photo was taken tactfully before-hand so we are all smiling and coherent. I like the thinking. We headed down the pier feeling like extras from an Armageddon remake, but there wasn't an asteroid, just 3 life rafts secured to buoys waiting for us.



2017 Liferaft Challenge crews



Officer Cadet Elizabeth Stanley

We bundled into our liferaft, with a crew consisting of two Mexicans in sombreros, the world's most annoying maracas and Captain Jack Sparrow. Immediately I knew I was in for an interesting 24 hours. Surely morale couldn't stay this high all day and all night, or could it? We'd barely sat down when the puddles began forming. At this point the story from previous years about “the leaky raft” all of a sudden became a reality. My master plan of arriving early, helping set things up so I could select the non-leaky raft, clearly had back-fired. I felt very much like a puppy with its tail between its legs. All that I could think was: “this will be the longest 24 hours of my life”. The crew of Lima 3 had very soggy bottoms and Mary Berry would not have been impressed. Thankfully, after some fantastic work by the guys working on the shore, a replacement life raft was launched. Needless to say the dry liferaft was hugely appreciated by the crew of Lima 3.



A last-minute decision to pack a tennis ball turned into a method of passing a bit of time and a game of catch began between the three rafts. Despite some close calls the ball managed to survive the ordeal and more surprisingly nobody ended up in the water either. Whilst one of the other rafts set up a game of Uno, Lima 3 decided to get to know each other a little better. As this was some hours into the challenge we decided that exchanging names should have been done much earlier. But better later than never and we took our turns telling the others in our raft a little bit about ourselves including names.

Later that evening our sausage and chips arrived and I've never been happier to see food. I wasn't even hungry but it was just something to do. Watching us scoff it down you would honestly have thought we had never seen food before. Within minutes we were done. Once the rubbish had been collected we attempted to get ourselves comfortable for what was going to be a very long night. By around 8pm it was getting really cold. The temperature seemed to have taken a really drastic drop from being just a bit chilly to unbearable cold. At this point we decided to batten down the hatches for the evening in an attempt to retain some heat, which I can tell you, failed miserably. However, between going live on Facebook and telling each other our best jokes, morale still seemed high.

The other rafts seemed to be very silent whereas there was a lot of chatter and laughing in ours. Around 10.30pm we all decided that it was time to try and get some sleep. I had brought a sleeping bag with me which I slept on top of as the floor of the raft was so cold we were losing a great deal of heat through it. Others had blankets underneath them whilst some had nothing. Then there was a knock on our life raft. It was the shore crew delivering pizzas which we demolished as if we had never eaten pizzas before. Instead of throwing the rubbish away, the guys decided that the empty pizza boxes were going to make the perfect layer for them to sleep in an effort to keep warmer. I'm not sure how effective the method was, but we all tried to get some sleep.



I have a watch that tracks my sleep and my "night's sleep" consisted of 1 hour and 19 minutes. I'm not sure I would even class that as a good afternoon nap. The weather conditions overnight were calm in terms of sea state and wind. There was a lot of fog, which unfortunately meant fog horns. Thankfully it didn't seem to be a massively busy shipping night with only a few vessels sounding whistles. However one went past which sounded as though it were right outside the liferaft. Convincing myself we had come off the buoy and were now in the middle of the Solent, I was too scared to look out so closed my eyes and hoped for the best. I lived to tell the story so can confirm we stayed attached to the buoy. The changing tides throughout the evening were strong, at around 2am the sound of gushing water was all I could hear. Once again not knowing where we were I convinced myself the tide was moving us out to sea. The lack of sleep was making me paranoid. Most people were surviving with limited sleep, which was when I really thought morale would take a turn. However the good character of those involved in the challenge this year ensured morale stayed high and each and every one of us played a part at keeping everyone going.

The morning and afternoon consisted of mainly waving at the locals passing by. Some concerned individuals came over to see if we were okay but returned to their passage once they realized we were in fact taking part in a charity event and not stranded. The Hamble Lifeboat paid us a visit, as did the coastguard. The afternoon felt like it went really slowly.

After being aboard for 20 hours the final four hours dragged and the novelty was wearing off. People were tired and still hadn't thawed out but nevertheless kept going. "Wilson" (remember the ball in the film Castaway?) was bought along by Captain Jack Sparrow and became another source of entertainment. Another game of catch began, this time with a volleyball and the tennis ball. It was always going to end badly. Thankfully the resulting 'man' overboard was only the ball, not a cadet. The safety boat quickly rescued the ball and the games continued.



Finally, at long last there was less than an hour to go.

The shore crew decided that they would tie us alongside the jetty where we spent the final 45 minutes. This enabled us to pose for some photographs and after almost 24 long hours it all came down to the last minute....

The countdown began - 10, 9, 8, well you know the rest. I had decided to go live on Facebook as it seemed to highlight what I was doing and got me a few more donations.

I felt that every person who has donated deserved to see us finish. The 24 hours in a liferaft was complete; it hadn't all been plain sailing but we had done it. Champagne covered the crews and cheers rang out from the participants. I think this was more for the fact that it was all over and they could go home and thaw out!

The crews of Lima 1, 2 & 3 all raced to get back onto dry land. How nice it was to stand on the pier, but everything was still moving. What a bizarre feeling. After a quick shower and watching the first half of the rugby international, the intrepid challenge survivors headed to the Silver Fern where we had a lovely buffet and were presented with our certificates and t-shirts. Everybody involved in the liferaft challenge this year did a fantastic job. That included the organisers and planners especially Ian Arnold, Snr. Lecturer, Engineering, those coming down to the pier to support us, those manning the safety boat and of course all the liferaft 'survivors'.



I am unsure of the final figure raised but at the last total it was over £5,600 which is amazing. Every single person should be very proud of what they did.

Additionally, a special mention must go to Zachary Carlton-Green who completed the challenge for the second year running. Could we possibly see the first ever triple-crown for the liferaft challenge? Watch this space ladies and gentlemen.