

In a move which not only highlights how well the UK's Armed Forces work together, but has also cut down on costs, mail bound for ships deployed on Operation ELLAMY is being delivered in a new way.

A small team of British Army postal specialists is working with the Royal Air Force to ensure that the Royal Navy's sailors get their messages from home. Two soldiers from 29 Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, are deployed at Gioia del Colle air base in southern Italy to provide a field post office for RAF personnel deployed to the base.

Previously letters and parcels for the ships deployed on Operation ELLAMY had been sent via civilian airlines and passed through shipping agents, but after the Army spotted a better delivery method, a military supply line was established.

Sergeant 'Smudge' Smith, who is responsible for the post office, contacted the British Forces Post Office in London to suggest that Gioia del Colle could also serve HMS Liverpool and other ships more directly, more easily and more cheaply.

Mail for the ships is now delivered to RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire, where it is loaded onto the C-130 Hercules aircraft that maintain an airbridge between the UK and forces in Italy.

On arrival at Gioia, RAF movements staff unload the aircraft and hand the mail to the posties. RAF mail is quickly sorted by the experienced team, who can usually get through around 100 bags of post by hand in just over half-an-hour. Royal Navy mail arrives in separate bags and is stored until the ships call into port to resupply.

One of 29 Regiment's personnel will then be among the first people to greet the ship as it arrives alongside.

Wing Commander Matt Jones, Chief of Staff (Support) for the UK Air Component, said:

"The British Army postal team at Gioia del Colle do an excellent job. When you link that with the Royal Air Force's rapid global reach, you have an unbeatable delivery partnership."

Mail is always a boost to morale, so everyone involved in the deliveries is conscious of the importance of their work. An example of that came when a large consignment of mail had to be held back so that operationally important supplies could be loaded instead.

With minehunter HMS Brocklesby just about to leave port, Sergeant Smith alerted personnel in the UK, who rooted through 120 bags of post to find the six marked for the minehunter's 40-person crew. Without this, Brocklesby's crew would have had to wait much longer for word from home.

Determined that would not happen, the RAF made sure there was a space for the bags, and the Army made sure they were onboard just a few hours later.

