



Somerset News

Early autumn training and Mediterranean Operations.



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What have we been doing?

Good question. Going to sea is a very broad term covering the wide variety of activity a Royal Navy warship actually does. This Autumn saw Somerset sail many times for various tasks, these included; dropping hundreds of Kg of 4.5" shells on North west Scotland to enable Naval Gunfire Support 'spotter' training and concurrently evaluate the performance of a new type of munition recently introduced to service, playing the enemy for our own Submarine Command Course 'Perisher', providing a training platform for foreign navies' warfare officers and spending days in close proximity to the South Coast and becoming all too familiar with the landmarks of the Isle of Wight training and assessing the RN's future navigators.

On top of all this deployment planning and preparation was a busy period for the whole ship but in particular the engineers and logisticians who had only a week alongside to prepare the ship materially and mechanically and ensure we were supplied for the six weeks in the Mediterranean. After some choice language and no small amount of determination, the ship was ready to go and we sailed on 2nd November.....

Mediterranean deployment 2015

After a very busy year Somerset went south at the start of November for a six week deployment to the Mediterranean. The main focus was to carry out maritime security operations around the Maltese coast during two high profile meetings; the EU migrant conference and the Commonwealth Heads Of Government Meeting (CHOGM). With the backdrop of the Paris attacks, security was a real factor to consider and Somerset was tasked to protect Maltese Sovereignty at sea working alongside our Maltese counterparts. Somerset passed through the straits of Gibraltar on 6th November in the hot Mediterranean sunshine, as the weather warmed up so did the atmosphere on board and the Ships Company enjoyed an afternoon of 'Flight Deck sports' enroute to Malta.

A very brief 24 hour working stop in Valletta to refuel and receive briefings on the forthcoming conferences from both Maltese Police and armed Forces and the local RN Liaison Officer. Being Remembrance Sunday the Ship also marked the occasion with a Service of remembrance (more below). We then sailed to spend a couple of days exercising, practicing communications and procedures with the Maltese forces at sea, HMS BULWARK alongside in Valletta and the RAF team based ashore. Having established our ability to work effectively with these varied other assets SMST spent two days stationed South West of Malta providing a maritime picture of air and surface activity so that any potential threats could be intercepted before they reached Maltese shores.



Thankfully the weather remained fine and calm and the first period of support to Malta was uneventful. From Maltese waters SMST headed west during which the very fine weather was put to good use as the Seamanship department hosted a team sports challenge the 'Tough Upperdecker'. The first proper port visit of the trip, Valencia, followed, more on this later. From Valencia a high speed dash to Sicily allowed the Ship to top up on aviation fuel during a five hour stop in Augusta before heading south back to Maltese waters once again. Another short period of preparatory training with Maltese and UK forces ensured that we were ready for the task of ensuring the safety of the CHOGM delegates this time including HM the Queen and Prince Charles. A five day period of intense concentration from Bridge and Operations room teams and heightened readiness for weapon crews saw a number of potentially suspect vessels investigated though thankfully no real threats were identified. In fact the greatest challenge to the main effort of SMST's Mediterranean trip was the weather. Stationed, as before to the south west of Malta the Ship endured several days of forty knot plus winds with accompanying high seas. This weather did reduce the chances of a seaward threat from a small boat but also greatly increased the difficulty of spotting one if it was there. To help with this problem the Ship disembarked its aircraft to operate from Luqa airport in Malta along with BULWARK's two Merlin helicopters to provide airborne surveillance. By the end of CHOGM SMST's helo (504) had flown just over 27 hours in support of both conferences and the associated training phases. Finally after a demanding week the Ship was able to enter port in Valletta in the knowledge of a job well done to enjoy the many delights of Malta. The Ship is now at sea for the passage home and due to return Fri 11th Dec.



Malta 2015 Remembering the Fallen

The first foreign visit on a deployment is always filled with excitement for the Ship's Company, however Somerset's first visit to Malta on Remembrance Sunday, had a distinctly solemn tone. Shortly after arriving alongside Valletta, the whole of the Ship's Company gathered on the Flight Deck to pay their respects during a service of Remembrance.

Led by Rev'd Stephen Morgan, prayers for the day and a reading from Micah were read. The Captain, Cdr Mike Wood, recited the Ode of Remembrance and the whole Ship fell silent for two minutes to both honour and remember. LET Liam Sharples concluded with the Kohima Epitaph before the Ships Company sang the Naval Hymn together. The Grand Harbour made a fitting location as we remembered especially the 3000 inhabitants, Servicemen and women who gave their lives to lift the siege on the island of Malta in 1942.

"When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today."



Marine Engineers waste no time

As a team building evolution the Marine Engineering department of HMS SOMERSET took to the flight deck for sundowners in the middle of the Mediterranean sea. With some tins of beer in some makeshift ice buckets the engineers welcomed new members of the department and those that have them told stories of past runs ashore (stand fast AMEO), all with the backdrop of a warm Mediterranean sunset!



Valencia

The second run ashore for SOMERSET was to Valencia, the third largest city in Spain. Whilst alongside HMS Somerset hosted a delegation led by Juan Carlos Valderrama Zurián, the Central Government Representative for the Valencia region, which also included key representatives from the Civil Guard and the port authorities.

During the visit and tour of the Ship's facilities discussions included the recent successes in counter narcotics operations that have been achieved through cross border co-operation, resulting in over half a billion pounds of drugs being seized in a single boarding.

As well as the government delegates, the Ship hosted a thank you lunch for representatives of the Armed Forces charities that do so much to help not only ex-military but also the wider ex-pat community who have chosen to make Spain their home.



Most members of the Ship's company also got a chance to explore the historic architecture and stunning scenery of the city and its surrounding area during some very welcome downtime. Two more adventurous groups also ventured further afield with the assistance of a local adventure sports company and each spent a day gorge walking near Venta Del Morro to the west of Valencia.

Valletta

The second and final full visit of the trip was Valletta. Having completed our operational tasking the Ship conducted a 'steam past' (pic page 2) of BULWARK as she sailed from Valletta before entering port ourselves for a short period of rest ahead of the passage home. As a low key visit official engagement was limited to ship visits and tours for groups from the Royal British Legion and the Royal Naval Officer's Association and a CO's lunch for a delegation from the US Defence Attaché's Office. The majority of the Ship's Company enjoyed the relatively



uninterrupted opportunity to visit some of the local sights and simply to enjoy the good food and entertainment of a major tourist destination albeit out of season. This was however also the busiest sporting period of the deployment with something for everyone. Two groups of personnel spent a day each sub-aqua diving in stunning locations on the coast including, for some, the chance to explore the wreck of HMS Maori. On the Tuesday the Ship's Hockey team got a run out for the first time in a while against Selima Hotsticks. They unfortunately lost 7-1 but with some great saves from keeper LET Joseph Pugh and an

amazing goal scored by ET Lucy Baker they left the field justifiably proud of their achievements. The next day saw seven of the Ship's Company playing a round of golf with the Royal Malta Golf Club. There was a very friendly and relaxed atmosphere during the round, which was enjoyed by all. Unfortunately on count back the locals were victorious but the score was rapidly forgotten over a beer in the club house.

Finally SMST RFC played against Malta Gladiators, SMST scored early and continued to score with the final score of 74 - 23. Man of the match went to ET Chris Swanson for his performance in defence keeping the Gladiators at bay. Another successful game for SMST RFC looking smart in their new kit.

A sporting 'deployment'



As soon as SMST left the wall in November the Ship's Company were challenged to cover a distance of 100 miles. Individuals could choose to run or row the distance or do a mixture of both but were to be complete before the Ship returned to the UK. 35 people took up the challenge and have subsequently completed the distance or are on target to do so before the 11 Dec. This, along with circuits being held at least twice daily, has enthused a training mentality onboard that has been taken up by many. As a result SMST has also

competed in one of the many fleet competitions, 50 people conducted a 50 x 1 mile relay finishing in a final time of 5 hours and 31 minutes. The fastest runner on board was LCH 'Topsy' Turner in a time of 5 minutes 19 seconds, which for the conditions is an incredibly fast time around the upper deck.

On the way east through the Med a Saturday at sea in the Nov sunshine saw the opportunity for SMST to conduct some flight deck sports. With aviators donned the mess decks competed against each other in the Inter mess Volleyball tournament. After a close competition the WO & CPO mess become victorious claiming the prestigious trophy.



After leaving Valencia another Saturday at sea saw an opportunity for an inter department competition in the form of an obstacle course (AKA Tough Upperdecker). This involved a team of four people (mostly in fancy dress) negotiating a series of obstacles around the upper deck including a net crawl, fender dodge, duck and dive pool, fender hurdle, gangway carry and spiders web (with inflated lifejacket). All complicated by the addition of extra water from strategically placed fire hoses enroute. The team with the fastest time was the Executive

department lead by the ever competitive EWO.

Finally SMST had a chance to contribute to charity in the form of a Press Up challenge. The aim was to complete 12000 press ups between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. on a single day. The target was smashed and 21730 press ups were completed by a small core team helped out by the Ship's Company working out at forty five press ups per minute over the eight hours. ET Philip Howarth completed 2000 on his own.

GQ magazine and “that” Aston

Prior to the release of “SPECTRE”, the new James Bond movie. GQ magazine asked themselves “what would make a suitable backdrop for the new Aston Martin DB10 and Jaguar C-X75 featured in the movie?” Typhoon fighter? Challenger II main battle tank? Both pretty good, but with Ian Flemming’s naval history and 007 being a Commander himself, there was no contest. Also it was a weekend and the RAF was resting. A bit of creative lighting and airbrushing out of Torpoint in the background helped SOMERSET achieve the desired effect and the results are pretty impressive.



Calling all racing fanatics

Have you ever thought of getting involved in team motor racing? Well now you can, Chief Petty Officer MEM Hutchings is a member of the RNRM Armed Forces Race Challenge team and spends several weeks of the year representing the Royal Navy against the Army and RAF in charity and challenge race events. The team relies heavily on the donations from sports charities and this means that CMEM Hutchings has to borrow safety equipment and park the car in the Commodore's garage, Naturally the Commodore gets a fair amount of grief about this from Mrs Commodore and the team is looking for sponsors so if you want or know someone who might want to get involved then contact us for information. Your company logo could be here.....

