

From Commander A J Canale MVO Royal Navy



Navy Command

Commanding Officer  
HMS SUTHERLAND  
BFPO 398

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*Dear Families and friends,*

HMS SUTHERLAND has now been deployed for one month and I thought this would be a useful moment to share some of our experiences so far. To put things into perspective and to illustrate just how far the Ship has travelled in such a short period of time, at the time of writing, SUTHERLAND has passed through six time zones already. Having steamed over 8,000 nautical miles, SUTHERLAND is about to travel the greatest distance over one month in the entire life of the Ship.

The consequence of such a speedy transit is that port visits have been by necessity, that is to say the Ship conducted two short stops in Gibraltar and Souda Bay to embark fuel and stores before eventually arriving at the British Indian Ocean Territory and island paradise of Diego Garcia recently. Suddenly all that effort to prepare the Ship for deployment, the mountainous seas in the Bay of Biscay and the ensuing sea time during January seemed worthwhile.

Operationally, SUTHERLAND has made significant contributions already from the Mediterranean, to the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and in the protected waters around Diego Garcia. A transit through one of the most strategically important choke points, the Bab-Al-Mandeb Strait, is not quite as routine as it once was. The conflict in Yemen shows no signs of resolution and SUTHERLAND put herself at a suitable state of readiness, as one might expect, in order to pass safely through an area so blighted by civil war. The Ship integrated quickly into the counter piracy task force off Somalia and established new acquaintances with our US allies with a timely replenishment of fuel at sea with USNS PACOS and a reciprocal visit of respective Ship's Companies with USNS LEWIS B PULLER.

Having already completed a sovereignty patrol of British Gibraltar Territorial Waters, SUTHERLAND was called upon again to conduct a patrol around the waters of Diego Garcia. Some of the richest marine wildlife lives in the 640,000km<sup>2</sup> waters around the territory and a strict enforcement against commercial fishing exists for good reason. A patrol in support of the territory's fishery protection policy, Force Protection exercise with the Royal Marine detachment and manoeuvres with USNS LOPEZ and MV GRAMPIAN FRONTIER capped a successful visit to the territory. The Ship's Company even managed a thoroughly well-deserved break.

Despite the significant periods at sea there have been moments of recreation. The visit to Gibraltar was long enough to indoctrinate fifty members of the Ship's Company into a Royal Navy tradition, namely "The Rock Run", which takes participants from the Ship to the summit of the Rock in a gruelling ascent. The Warrant Officers and Chief Petty Officers' Mess hosted a memorable 'crossing the line' ceremony, a first for most, including the Commanding Officer who had waited over twenty years to cross the Equator. The Ship's football team may have wilted in the heat of Diego Garcia and many, if not most, enjoyed the hospitality of the island's resident UK and US forces.

The Ship now looks forward to strengthening its ties with one of our oldest allies, the Royal Australian Navy. HMS SUTHERLAND will support Defence Industry and conduct exercises with

our Australian partners. Four port visits await and with it the opportunity to experience another part of the world one might never visit again!

Finally, every deployment is accompanied with a sense of anxiety and trepidation. May I therefore thank you again for your support and loyalty, for your forbearance on a programme that is still developing, and might I offer every assurance that I will keep you informed as best I can, whenever I can. Every one of my sailors is serving his Ship and the Royal Navy with distinction and I am extremely proud of how they are responding to the many challenges we face.

*With my best wishes,*

*Andrew Canale*