HISTORIC VISIT TO CHILE

Leaving Panama City and the equator behind, HMS DRAGON headed south to make a historic stop in Valparaiso, Chile. In full dress uniform, with gun salutes and a band waiting on the jetty, it was a fantastic and heart warming occasion for both DRAGON and the Chilean Navy. The Ship and her company were there for two very important reasons; the first was to join the Chilean, German and Canadian Navy to remember those that died 100 years ago at The Battle of Coronel and the second was to support the largest defence exhibition in South America – EXPO NAVAL.

This battle took place on 1st November 1914 in the South Pacific and was the first at sea engagement between the Royal Navy and German Navy of WW1. The Royal Navy warships HMS MONMOUTH, GLASGOW and GOOD HOPE, joined the Royal Canadian Navy's OTRANTO and CANOPOUS to engage the German warships, under the Command of Admiral Von Spee. Sadly the
To commemorate the centenary of the battle DRAGON sailed from Valparaiso with the Chilean Navy (in the form of CNS ALMIRANTE BLANCO ENCALADA and ALMIRANTE COCHRANE) to lay wreaths at the spot of the battle. Fighting the ferocious high seas DRAGON closed up her Ship’s Company and uncovered her weapons for an act of remembrance for the lost sailors and marines from both sides of the conflict. United with the head of the German, Chilean and Canadian Navy, our very own First Sea Lord (Admiral Sir George Zambellas) joined the British Ambassador in Chile (Fiona Clouder) and laid wreaths in honour of the lives lost.

On completion of the ceremony DRAGON headed north again back to Valparaiso, this time to be the centre piece of EXPO NAVAL – the largest defence exhibition in South America. This was a great chance for team-Dragon to show the wider world what we could do. We did everything: ceremonial guards, tours, opening the ship to local people, hosting the media and even the largest capability demonstration DRAGON has seen. It was a challenging and fun week for everyone.
Continuing her voyage south, DRAGON jumped at the chance to traverse the Patagonian Canals; an interesting and beautiful area of the world and HMS DRAGON was the first ever T45 to complete such a transit.

The Ship glided gently through the quiet and tranquil waters, surrounded by astounding scenery and rainbows formed by the Mountain dew.

On completion DRAGON moved out once again into the waters of the Magellan Strait and edged cautiously around Cape Horn. Another first for DRAGON, T45 and most of the Ship's Company. Of course, there is always a good bit of Royal Navy tradition attached to such an event and all those onboard now have the right to place an elbow on the dinner table! We are hoping to round the Cape of Good Hope later in the deployment so that we can show even ruder table manners with both elbows on the table!

The Navigator and Heads of Department join the Captain for a glass of port to mark the occasion of HMS DRAGON rounding Cape Horn.

“We yield but to Saint George”
Now over 8000 miles from home the next stop for DRAGON was The Falkland Islands – as many of you will know it is a collection of small Islands dotted around the South Atlantic. Like all visiting Royal Navy warships DRAGON is operating in the region to help re-assure the population and to maintain security around the islands. The fun part of this time is the chance to get ‘Dragons’ ashore to meet the people that make the Falklands their home and see some amazing wildlife. There is always a cup of tea and piece of cake on offer so we are never short of volunteers!

ET(WE) Thomas Short is joined by some of the DRAGON team to meet his relatives on New Island. Born in Stanley he is the ships only Falkland Islander and he took the rare opportunity to visit some of his family.

Visiting the various settlements spread across the 700+ islands around the Falklands is an important part of DRAGON’s job when operating in the area.
But that’s not all……

Whilst the South Atlantic is very remote both HMS DRAGON and RFA GOLD ROVER were very was pleased to discover that they were not alone and who did we see but some Royal Navy friends! All the Ship’s Company enjoyed the chance to complete some manoeuvres with both HMS CLYDE (the Falkland Island’s Patrol Vessel) and HMS PROTECTOR (the Royal Navy’s Ice Patrol Ship), who was in the area for her austral summer duties in the Antarctic. Never has such a ‘unique’ collection of Royal Navy warships and auxiliaries been photographed with each other and from the Ship’s Lynx helicopter it was quite a sight!

“Fancy seeing you here”. The odd-quad of Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships rendezvous for this unique photograph.
SOUTH GEORGIA: THE DEEP SOUTH

Nestled in the deep currents of the South Atlantic, hundreds of miles from anywhere is the remote island of South Georgia, a British dependency.

As part of DRAGON’s series of routine visits, the Ship’s Company were privileged enough to visit the settlement of Grytviken and King Edward Point for Christmas (more on this later)! Most famous for its role in the illustrious journey of Sir Earnest Shakleton, the old whaling station it is now home to thousands of seals, penguins and birds - a truly breathtaking place.

The thirty strong staff from the South Georgian Government and British Antarctic Survey, who live on the island, were very pleased to see DRAGON. Everyone got the chance to step ashore to experience the beauty of the scenery as well as witness the wildlife close up (those seals are fast)!

The hard working Seamen Specialists acted as taxi drivers for the Ship’s Company, dodging the many seals frolicking around the bay whilst the Ship remained at anchor.
CHRISTMAS ON THE DRAGON

How does a Dragon spend Christmas? Well imagine a snowy mountain setting, icebergs and glaciers; then add a Ships Company with plenty of Christmas cheer (and enthusiasm) and you soon get the idea. Led by the Ship’s Chief Elf (Lt Amy Gilmore) there was a full and fun packed programme for everyone to enjoy.

It all started on the 1st Dec with the much anticipated whole ship advent calendar with every department receiving a surprise during the days leading up to Christmas. But that wasn’t all and in the days running up to the big event DRAGON played host to a German Christmas market in the hangar. With games like Topfshlagen (hit the pot) Schokoladenessen, Slackilining and plenty of Bratwurst and cups of Glühwein (German mulled wine) there was plenty to keep the cold Atlantic chill at bay.

As we approached the 25th, decorations appeared in many compartments throughout the ship. Some departments being more creative then others, notably the ME Dept, in the SCC and the Writers in the Ships office, who made it their mission to compete against each other in a contest closely judged by the CO. It was a close call in the end but the MEs just clinched it. With choirs, presents, home made Christmas Trees and fireplaces it was an amazing sight to see.

Christmas Eve was a full programme with ‘leg stretchers’ for some ashore into Grytviken and then an evening of ‘self made’ entertainment for all.

It started with possibly the best rendition of many popular Christmas carols to be heard this side of the equator. Led by the Wardroom Choir I think everyone was surprised by

“We yield but to Saint George”
their heavenly tones and an encore was called for – astonishing! However, this was not all and the highlight had to be the first full-length production from the ‘Dragon Dramatic Society’ of ‘The Christmas Nativity – a Dragon is born in Valparaiso’. Loosely based on the birth of Jesus, PO Fish (as the visionary) led a spectacular show of comedy, wit and matelot humour to recount this important story with a slightly risqué edge and some locally produced banter. No pictures, but that is probably best!

Even this far from home Dragon also had a visitor during the night. Initially not much was known about him other than he entered through the Ship’s funnel and was seen wearing red trousers, jacket and a red hat with a white bobble. He was also slightly plump!

On the day itself the Ship’s Company had the chance to open their presents, sent by their loved ones, and then complete the day with a traditional lunch. The Ship also had a new Captain for the day when ET(WE) Leon Armstrong, the youngest member of the Ship’s Company swapped roles with the CO – his first task was to replace all of the Heads of Department! Fortunately, good order and Naval discipline was restored, but not before ‘The Captain’ had hosted a dinner party, had a bath and gelled up in the bathroom mirror – probably a first (and last) for DRAGON!

As ever all the Ship’s Company thank the hard working Chefs who pulled off a simply brilliant meal for over 240 hungry sailors and marines! All onboard would also like to thank the team from International Greetings Plc for the donation of all the Christmas crackers. A Welsh listed company their former chairman (John Elfed) and company founder (Anders Hedlund) very kindly organised them and we all enjoyed the chance to share in this Christmas tradition.

As you can see this wasn’t just any Christmas this was a DRAGON Christmas!
The Royal Navy will never forget the events of 1982 in the South Atlantic and the lives lost in the Falklands conflict. As HMS DRAGON made her way back from South Georgia the ship sailed over a particularly sensitive patch of waters for one visitor.

Mr Paul Engeham was the Staff Communications Officer onboard HMS GLAMORGAN when she was hit by an Argentine Exocet missile causing a number of large fires and floods onboard as well as leaving fourteen of her Ship’s Company dead.

Through many acts of bravery, courage and professionalism, the Ship was saved that fateful day in June and GLAMORGAN remained operational throughout the war.

At the cutting edge in her time, GLAMORGAN like DRAGON today, also sported a ground breaking new missile system. A strong bond now exists between the “Welsh Warships” – who proudly display a dragon on their crest.

Together HMS DRAGON and Mr Engeham remembered the fallen:

- Petty Officer Michael J. Adcock
- Cook Brian Easton
- Air Engineering Mechanic Mark Henderson
- Air Engineering Mechanic Brian P. Hinge
- Acting Chief Air Engineering Mechanic David Lee
- Cook Brian J. Malcolm
- Air Engineering Artificer Kelvin I. McCallum
- Able Seaman David McCann
- Marine Engineering Mechanic Terence W. Perkins
- Leading Cook Mark A. Sambles
- Leading Cook Anthony E. Sillence
- Steward John D. Stroud
- Lieutenant David H. R. Tinker
- Petty Officer Colin P. Vickers

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM
Taking a Warship away for 7 months into gruelling climates (from the icy winds of Cape Horn to the heat of Africa) the kit onboard can sometimes break. This may keep the Marine and Weapon Engineers busy, but the real people behind keeping HMS DRAGON operationally capable are the Logisticians.

LSC Christopher, from Saint Vincent in the Caribbean, had always wanted to join the Royal Navy: six years later she is now serving as part of the stores department onboard HMS DRAGON.

In one of the smallest departments on board, working in the depths of the Ship, LSC Christopher is responsible for ordering and tracking vital spares and other stores needed for operational defects. All other departments within the Ship depend on her to liaise with shore-side and get stores on time so that the Ship can perform anywhere in the world.

After passing out of training LSC Christopher embarked on her Navy career at Culdrose Air station before moving on to HMS CORNWALL, a Type 22 Frigate. She then took advantage of the diversity the Navy offers by deploying to support the Navy in the Persian Gulf, operating out of the Navy’s base in Bahrain.

When LEM DRAIG caught up with Amanda in her office she said: “I am very proud to be a DRAGON; being in the Royal Navy has taught me a lot. Not many jobs offer me the luxury of travelling the world whilst getting paid. Being a mother in the Royal Navy can be very difficult but my son and family members are understanding and very proud of me.”
Now settled into his routine Del has been having a great time around the ship – with so much going on there have been plenty of chances for him to be cheeky around the place!

Del thought the visit to Chile was really exciting – he’d never been before and thought the colourful houses were funny, I suppose they are a bit. He also gave the ship a scare as he took the chance to fly around the place when the ship went down the Patagonia Canal – he loved flying in and around the mountains and under the rainbow, did you see it?

Del was especially bouncy when it came to Christmas – he had never met Father Christmas before so it was so cool to see him on the funnel. Del really liked all the decorations around the place and enjoyed going around to see what all the sailors had made out of cardboard and sticky tape. I think Del likes arts and crafts time as well.

With a fair amount of time at sea Del has also now started to explore the ship a little more and see what all the sailors and marines onboard do. As you can see silly Del has decided to go into the ship’s kitchen (or galley) to see what is being cooked up. It was his favourite – curry!!

There will be more from Del next time, but remember to write to Del if you would like to send a special message to anyone onboard and he will deliver it in person.

Del the Dragon
C/O The Ship’s Office
HMS DRAGON
BFPO 268

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Royal Welsh Regiment: www.army.mod.uk/infantry/regiments/royalwelsh
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The Welsh Livery Guild: www.welshliveryguild.org
The British Warships Association: www.auxiliary-crew-association.co.uk

Cardiff United Services Mess: www.usmcardiff.co.uk
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Naomi House: www.naomihouse.org.uk
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Royal Naval Association / Royal British Legion Cardiff: www.royal-naval-association.co.uk
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6 Squadron RAF, Leuchars: www.raf.mod.uk/organisation/6squadron.cfm
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PHOTO CREDITS

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"We yield but to Saint George"