



HMS ECHO

SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER



What's new?

Hello and welcome to the latest edition of our periodic newsletter.

You will not be surprised to hear that HMS ECHO has been kept busy. So busy in fact that it is over 6 months since the last edition. This time has seen a return to UK waters for the first time in 2 years, a period of Operational Sea Training, our first maintenance period up in Middlesbrough and a trip into Arctic waters for Exercise COLD RESPONSE.



Behind every good sailor is their family...

ECHO sailed from Lisbon for the final part of the journey home. This relatively short transit provided an opportunity to host some lucky family members, allowing them to see first hand how we live at sea. From weapons practice and learning how the Ship's Company deal with fires and floods to enduring a slightly lumpy sea state, this really was the full experience.

The captain, Cdr Matthew Warren, said of the event "I'm delighted to have had this opportunity to thank members of the extended ECHO family for their enduring support".



ECHO arrived back in her home port of HMNB Devonport on the 15th August 2019 to a jetty full of friends and family. With the gangway quickly in place the crew were reunited with loved ones. For many of the Ship's Company this was their first experience of a homecoming, seeing families waving madly and an occasion that they will always remember. The next day the ship held a families day. Unfortunately the weather prented us sailing but families were invited onboard for a day of fun alongside. This allowed those that were not able to sail from Lisbon to explore the ship and meet other members of our team. With the ship having been deployed throughout the last 2 years this was the first opportunity for many to invite loved ones on board.



A day not training is a day wasted...

Every ship when they regenerate (or get themselves ready for the next deployment) will conduct a period of Operational Sea Training (OST). This tests the Ship's Company's ability to deal with any situation that could occur whilst on operations. These serials include; damage control and firefighting, humanitarian disaster relief and practising actions for if the ship came under attack. For ECHO this training lasted 5 weeks and with



a lot of hard work, we passed with flying colours. Arguably one of the most important areas of training for the ship is damage control. It is vital that the Ship's company are equipped with the knowledge to quickly deal with an incident whilst at sea where there is no one else to rely on. Training started off with the basics of extinguishing a simple fire and dealing with a small flood, quickly ramping up to complex scenarios with multiple incidents. If you ask any sailor for the most iconic part of OST you are guaranteed to get the same answer... the Thursday War. This is, as the name suggests, an outbreak of hostilities

that occurs every Thursday off the South West coast. Combining with other ships and aircraft, it aims to put



teams under pressure to achieve tasks in an environment where priorities change quickly and the internal battle (damage control) meets the external battle (fighting the war). For a lot of the crew it was the first time they had conducted training of this nature for an extended period of time. Many of them surprised themselves with how much they learned in the process, as well as the fact they also managed to have some fun along the way.

Another essential part of training is the Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation. As a versatile ship with excellent endurance, an important capability ECHO can provide is the ability to remove people from deteriorating situations overseas and transport them to safety. This requires a lot of careful planning by the ship in which every department has a role to play; from maintaining safety and security, through to looking after basic needs, providing medical care and keeping the ship underway. Exercising this serial was one of the most rewarding aspects of training – and with Actors Guild members enthusiastically playing the role of evacuated persons, occasionally it was also the most entertaining as FOST staff battled to keep everyone 'on-script'.

Exercise Cold Response

Every year Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel participate in EXERCISE COLD RESPONSE. This year saw ECHO sent out into the cold with ALBION and SUTHERLAND firstly in Stavanger, Norway before sailing with other nations to form part of the task force. Over the next two weeks this task force would conduct a variety of exercises, manoeuvres and procedures in the extreme environment of the Arctic Circle. On sailing from Bodo the ship headed towards the Lofoten Islands where it conducted some basic Officer of the Watch manoeuvres and task group integration with Dutch and Norwegian personnel – a valuable opportunity for a ship more used to operating alone. Another capability that ECHO has but is rarely able to be exercise is becoming warfare countermeasure (MCM) tasking authority platform which essentially

involves providing command and control facilities for an embarked staff as well as logistical support (fuel, water, supplies and engineering facilities) to a group of MCM ships, which are generally much smaller than ECHO with correspondingly less capacity to sustain long periods at sea without support. Some of this was practiced with both Dutch and Norwegian MCMs. Whilst at sea some of the Ship's Company were lucky enough to watch a pod of killer whales swimming alongside the ship as well as witness one of the natural wonders of the world... the Northern Lights.

And in true ECHO fashion there was time for fun with most of the Ship's Company attending a local ice hockey match - our thanks to the Royal Navy and Royal Marines Welfare (RNRMW) charity for supporting this event which was enjoyed by our many new 'Stavanger Oilers' fans.



COVID-19

Of course the majority of this activity pre-dates the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Like everyone else we have had to adapt quickly to the current circumstances but it is essential for the Navy to ensure that we have the ships and capabilities to meet the next event in an uncertain world. We're maintaining our operations through careful risk assessment and mitigation that includes self-isolation of personnel prior to crew changes and rigorous hygiene measures. We're grateful for the support we continue to receive and assure you that we're doing everything we can to keep ourselves – and everyone else – as safe as we possibly can.

So... What's next?

ECHO is now undertaking UK based survey and maritime security tasking before a short but intensive maintenance period that will ensure we're at peak readiness to operate anywhere we might be required. Until the next edition – we wish all our families and affiliates good health and a safe and expeditious journey through these unsettling times.

