

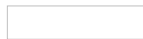


(U//FOUO) Finding Our Sea Legs: The Story of MUSKETEER ELEANOR

FROM: (C) [REDACTED]
Technical ELINT Analyst, MUSKETEER (S3161)
Run Date: 05/05/2006

(S//SI) Ever wondered what life aboard a British destroyer might be like? Maybe not, but that's exactly what the MUSKETEER ELEANOR team experienced between June and September 2005.

(S//SI) The MUSKETEER ELEANOR project was a collaborative US/UK SIGINT survey effort, piggy-backing off the operational deployment of the HMS YORK destroyer. The project included personnel from NSA, GCHQ*, and the Royal Navy. NSA personnel from the Office of Target Reconnaissance and Survey (MUSKETEER/S3161) installed a unique and/or complementary suite of collection equipment aboard the HMS YORK in Portsmouth, England, prior to the deployment.



(U) HMS York

(S//SI) On 15 June, 2005 the initial team departed from Faslane, Scotland, and transited along the coastlines of France, Spain, and Portugal, before completing "leg-1" of the mission at the port call at a Mediterranean Island. Among the interesting experiences had by the team during this leg was a true once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, the "Rock Run." The first and only port call stop during leg-1 was at Gibraltar, a British colony, where team members participated in a race to the top of the Rock of Gibraltar, along with shipmates from the HMS YORK. Gibraltar is strategically located and links the Mediterranean Sea to the North Atlantic Ocean. During the Rock Run, the participants were nearly accosted by monkeys looking to get a free meal. Now there's some SIGINT fun.



*(U) The Rock of Gibraltar (U) Monkey surveys view from atop the Rock***

(S//SI) Due to the necessary personnel cover arrangements in place, the second NSA team (leg-2) was forced to board the HMS YORK while in transit and prior to arriving at the Mediterranean Island. In a display reminiscent of a Tom Clancy novel, the new team members climbed a rope ladder from the small British port vessel and onto the much bigger HMS YORK to begin their leg-2 journey. After three days of cross-over training, the leg-1 team departed the HMS YORK via helicopter.

(S//SI) The leg-2 phase began on July 4th, 2005. A typical July 4th this was not, as all the normal hoopla and fireworks associated with the day were not celebrated. Shortly after transiting through the Suez Canal and Gulf of Suez and into the Red Sea, the HMS YORK began the Combined Task Force (CTF)-150 operational phase of its deployment schedule, which lasted for approximately one month.

(S//SI) During this period of the ELEANOR deployment, team members were exposed to a number of experiences that would be new and unusual to the average NSA employee. These experiences included witnessing a number of suspicious-vessel interdictions by on-board and armed British Marines, as well providing armed escort for a U.S. nuclear submarine. Upon completion of the CTF-150 operational tasking, the HMS YORK transited to Colombo, Sri Lanka, for a long-awaited port call.

(S//SI) The effects of the January, 2005 tsunami on the region were not apparent during this visit, but conversations with locals revealed that the issue was very close and dear to their thoughts.

(S//SI) Team members were able to take advantage to some time off and explore. Because of

the traffic congestion, a very popular mode of travel in this region is the "tuk-tuk." These three-wheeled contraptions are not very comfortable, but can be rented for a very reasonable price. As the team found out, however, the fee is always "negotiable." After four days, the HMS YORK was again underway and this time headed directly to Singapore, where the next NSA personnel transfer would take place.

(S//SI) During leg-3, the HMS YORK had port calls in Brunei, Ghang Zhou and Hong Kong, China and participated in the Exercise of Singapore before returning to Singapore and ending this leg and the ELEANOR project. Once again, because of cover/security concerns, team members were unable to depart the vessel while in the ports of China; however, leg-3 was far from uneventful. Of specific note was the "Crossing-the-Line Ceremony," in which all ELEANOR team members took part. The crossing-the-line ceremony is an age-old Navy tradition, one celebrated by naval forces around the world, commemorating the ship's crossing of the equator. Sailors (or NSA'ers, in this case) who have never crossed the line before while at sea go through a series of events to prove that they are worthy of becoming "shellbacks," or those who have "crossed the line."

(U//FOUO) In addition to the unique experiences of each leg of the ELEANOR effort, all NSA team members were exposed to the day-to-day reality of life at sea... and training, training, and more training... As quick as a flip of a switch or snap of a finger, the team would find itself in the middle of a significant ship roll, as the YORK was in the middle of a "Man Overboard Drill." This does make sitting at rack and performing collection operations a tad difficult. The threat of onboard fire at sea is very real and the crew continuously trains to be prepared to combat this unfortunate event. Nuclear, biological, and chemical attack training, boarding exercises, and live fire target practice of ships weaponry are all regular occurrences.

(U//FOUO) For those uninitiated to the Navy lifestyle, the biggest personal impact by far of life at sea is the sacrifice of ones privacy. Bunk spaces are nominally 2 x 2 x 7 feet and stacked three high. Storage space is limited. Berthing and personal hygiene areas are not private. Mess hall hours are limited and very controlled. There are no mini-malls or convenience stores while at sea. Sleep can be difficult with ship maneuvers, crew movement in and out of berthing areas, inability to control individual thermostats, etc....

(U//FOUO) On the flip sided of things, the memories that can be gained are incredible and truly once-in-a-lifetime. Our British partners are wonderful to work with and motivated by the same priorities. Although privacy is sacrificed, an experience like this is definitely one to remember. Where else can you peer off the deck at a temple in the distance, phalanx and a lighthouse in your peripheral view, and watch waves smashing into and over a jetty.


(U) Ship entering Port Colombo, Sri Lanka

(U//FOUO) Oh yeah, we did a SIGINT survey mission, too...

(U) Notes:

* (U) GCHQ = the UK's SIGINT organization, Government Communications HQ.

** (U) Gibraltar is home to Europe's only colony of wild monkeys.

"(U//FOUO) SIDtoday articles may not be republished or reposted outside NSANet without the consent of S0121 ([DL sid comms](#))."