

OPERATIONS IN SUPPORT OF BENEFICIAL COOPERATION. THE FIRST PERIOD OF MINE HUNTING FOR SNMCMG1 ENDS

February was an exciting month for Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 1, the force having just finished their first operation in 2010 – “BENEFICIAL COOPERATION”. The period was both busy and extremely productive with the Minehunters of the Group locating and disposing of 14 individual pieces of underwater explosive ordnance (UXOs) remaining from WWII, whilst making this area of the North Sea safer for mariners working and transiting the area.

The purpose of Beneficial Cooperation 2010 is to reduce the risk of live ordnance to shipping and fishery in the North Sea. To that end, the Group commenced operations on Thursday 18th February in accordance with Commander SNMCMG1 tasking – locate and dispose of mines and ordnance in assigned areas. The weather conditions made countermining difficult on occasions with winds reaching 33 knots. Additionally, divers were limited by the tidal windows, which in some instances only presented a 2 hour period, 3 times per day, when conditions were within the acceptable and safe limits for diving operations.

The unfavourable conditions not only affected MCM Operations but Logistic operations too, with Replenishment at Sea (Fuelling) unachievable due to excessive deck movement on the Command Platform. Due to this some of the MCMV's used local harbour facilities for Logistic Consolidation, whilst others managed their logistic situation; remaining self sustainable until returning to port on completion of operations.

Despite all SNMCMG1 countermined 8 UXO's and confirmed 14 contact as not found after four days on task. Units worked continuously in order to maximise their opportunities to dispose of ordnance thereby making the North Sea safer for all.

Weather conditions steadily deteriorated in our area of operations, resulting in COMSNMCMG1 taking the decision to end the Groups Operation in support of Beneficial Cooperation one day early and head to Den Helder Naval Base, where they arrived Thursday 25th February.

In summary, a total of 31 UXO's were investigated by three SNMCMG1 minehunters over the period. Of these, 14 UXO's were destroyed (3 sea mines and 11 aircraft bombs), a total of almost 4000 kilograms of TNT, and 17 contacts were confirmed as not found. COMSNMCMG1, in addressing the crews all SNMCMG1 units, said: *'Thank you very much for the safe and productive MCM operation. Our contribution to reducing the risk to fishermen and merchantmen from WWII ordnance has been significant and extremely valid'*.

Looking ahead, there are new challenges for the Group in the form of operations and exercises, however, Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 1 will return to this area in to continue the task of reducing the risk from live ordnance to shipping and fishery in the North Sea.

Photos description:

*A – HMS WALNEY during preparation to countermining sea mine using MCM divers – 24 FEB 10.
2,3 – Photos from sonar - aircraft bombs which were located and disposed by HNLMS – 18 FEB 10.*