

Mediterranean, dinghies and mines – Fully Combat Ready!

After some 48 days in the Mediterranean, Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group passes out to the west through the Strait of Gibraltar on the 7th of April enroute to its more traditional operations area in the English Channel.

Although the weather was not at its best during the time SNMCMG1 operated there, the scheduled exercises lead to further Group integration and combat enhancement amongst the Groups six units representing six nations.

In the Med SNMCMG1 took part in two exercises – LOYAL MARINER 09 and ITALIAN MINEX 09, and one PASSEX in company with the sister group, SNMCMG2. The high point of the Med deployment came when SNMCMG1 Staff was informed of COMITMAR-FOR NRF13 accreditation result: Fully Combat Ready.

Parallel to the exercises mentioned above SNMCMG1 has contributed to Maritime Situational Awareness in the Med, the Group has continuously compiled the local maritime picture that has been relayed to NATO Maritime Headquarters ashore.

The central and western Mediterranean with its relative short distances between North Africa and Southern Italy and Spain is often used as human traffic routes by people seeking another future in Europe. SNMCMG1 got proof of this fact as they observed two dinghies adrift some 100 nautical miles east of the Strait of Gibraltar.

The dinghies were examined, and on closer inspection, it became obvious that the abandoned dinghies had been used for human trafficking, as clothes, food and other personal items were left behind in the abandoned craft. The Spanish authorities ashore confirmed that a group of illegal immigrants were recovered from the dinghies the night before and taken into custody by the Spanish coast guard. It was not possible to recover the dinghies and they were left adrift. SNMCMG1 units recovered the dinghies and placed them on Flag Ship HDMS THETIS helicopter deck. A few days later in the port of Vigo, the two craft were handed over to the Spanish navy for further action.

The port of Vigo – the most important Spanish fishery port on the Atlantic coast – was the venue for SNMCMG1 Easter port visit. This short visit was ended on Easter Monday, when SNMCMG1 set to sea in order to cross the Bay of Biscay enroute to the World War II invasion beaches off France. There are still many mines are left unaccounted for in this area and they pose a constant threat to fishing vessels and companies working with undersea pipelines and communications cables etc.

Clearing the sea of old World War II mines and other historical ordnance remain a primary task for SNMCMG1. By locating and identifying this ordnance SNMCMG1 mine counter vehicles will ensure that the mines and ordnance is safely disposed and no longer pose any threat to anybody using the sea. Hereby SNMCMG1 make the sea a safer place for everyone.