

From Commander Andrew Brown Royal Navy MBE



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When I wrote to you all at Christmas last year I reflected on the relentless nature of the engineering project that brought HMS KENT from shed to sea. Looking into 2019 our programme had a far more stable and familiar feel; Basic Operational Sea Training, a multinational exercise in the Baltic (staring down the Russian threat) and lengthy periods as the Duty Towed Array Patrol Ship in the North Atlantic. By contrast to expectation, at the time of writing, we have been away from our base port for over 9 months of the calendar year. HMS KENT has sailed in the Atlantic Ocean, the Irish Sea, the North Sea, the Baltic, the Mediterranean, Kiel and Suez Canals, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Oman, the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Gulf, your ship and sailors have been busy and travelled far from home.

The year started, as expected, with seven weeks of Basic Operational Sea Training in our exercise areas off the Plymouth coast. Gruelling and rewarding in (almost) equal measure for the Ship's sailors. Under the eye of Flag Officer Sea Training we were run through the full spectrum of expected future tasking. Simulated wars, damage control exercises, disaster relief, task group operations, submarine hunting, live firing, helicopter manoeuvres, boarding practice and fast jet overflight! The list is infinite (or certainly feels that way) and debriefs provide a brutal reminder of how much we have to learn. The pressure is unremitting, but over the course of seven weeks of energy sapping drills a crew becomes a company, a tight band of brothers and sisters, unified, together, of single purpose and ready to fight and win.

The culmination of training is a final inspection, a war game and subsequent damage control scenario where everything that could go wrong does and only a united team can fight to save the ship and each other. We passed! A mix of relief, pleasure and pride for all and the prospect of a run ashore to celebrate. Ours was with you, our friends and supporters, in Dover.

The Joint Warrior training exercise in April took us to Scotland, working in conjunction with HMS ALBION, with whom we would be spending the summer in the Baltic. A quick stop in Portsmouth for supplies, repairs and recovery and we were soon steaming towards the Jutland peninsular on our summer deployment. Gothenburg, Kiel and Tallinn were all enjoyed, absorbed into a high tempo few months before we received the call.

Significant and unforeseen events in the Persian Gulf presented a very real threat to trade and shipping through the strategic choke-point that is the Strait of Hormuz. Culminating in the seizure of the tanker Stena Impero by Iran. The UK's response was immediate and we were recalled from the Baltic and sent East of Suez to protect UK shipping off the coast of Iran.

After 4 months, 6 port visits, 44 transits of the strait accompanying 29 tankers representing 1.7million tonnes of shipping and millions of pounds worth of UK trade we find ourselves heading West. Home for Christmas, for family and for respite so that we are ready to do it all again.

I look forward to hearing from you, and seeing you, throughout the year. Please use your affiliations officer to keep in touch,

Thank you and Merry Christmas,



**Invicta**