

PORTLAND WORK UP

By Sam185

Each Royal Navy ship, shortly after commissioning, was required to be put through their paces by the staff of Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) at Portland.

Each department was exercised in its knowledge and ability in adhering to International Maritime and Royal Naval processes and procedures, and its agility in responding to any emergency. At the same time, each department had to work with all the other departments to form a cohesive unit to preserve and fight the ship at any given time for any given task.

This was an intensive 6 week, no-holds-barred shakedown of the ship to test their readiness for ANY action that the ship may be called on to participate in during the course of the commission. As a minimum, it comprised

- Gunnery firing exercises at towed air targets, sea-targets and shore bombardment
- Searching, tracking, chasing and firing at submarines using sonar, radar and helicopter assets
- any anti-submarine warfare exercise
- Disaster Relief, landing parties and counter insurgency exercises to help communities ravaged by hurricanes, fires, storms or civil unrest
- General sea exercises for manoeuvring, anchoring, refuelling, storing, boarding parties, steering gear and engine breakdowns, and the launching and recovery of boats
- Damage control exercises to test the integrity of the ship, the Nuclear, Biological and Chemical defence (NBCD) of the ship

Work Up started with Divisions - all the ship's company on parade - followed by an inspection of the ship by FOST himself and some 6-weeks later, it finished with the ship 'passing out'

Apart from the odd weekend off, each day of the Work Up was carefully mapped out and a Weekly Plan was produced by FOST staff and each exercise was given a Serial number. At any one time there were at least 6 ships undergoing the same process, sometimes aided and abetted by FOST's Portland Squadron of ships. Every Thursday there was a 'War', aptly called The Thursday War and you could guarantee that if any RN ship had experienced a 'situation' anywhere in the world in the last 100-years or so, then you WOULD be tested on your response to it - whatever IT was.

There are lots of Work Up stories and they are often about the seagoing members of FOST's staff, the Sea Riders, who are generally senior Chiefs who've been around the block....

Typically, a sea rider would walk into an office or compartment, ask who the senior person was and when identified, tell them they were dead. The idea being, of course, to see if you could still carry out assigned tasks without help. They would for instance, give you an urgent signal to send but just before you sent it, they'd tell you all your main transmitters and receivers were out of action. What do you do then?

Other times they would throw a 'thunderflash' (an industrial 'banger') into a compartment to test the ability of the damage control crew in fire fighting and damage limitation. In one story, a Sea Rider had drawn a jagged circle in chalk on the deck and written in it 'HOLE'. When he returned some ten-minutes later to see how the Damage Control crew were responding, there was no one around. Puzzled, he looked down at the 'hole' to find someone had drawn two lines across it and written between them 'PLANK'.

The following 'typical day' has been created from mixed memories of the Weekly Practice Plan (WPP), Daily Orders and rumour, sometimes testified by the Ship's Log

PORTLAND WORK UP - Day 1

0720 Away seaboat crew
0730 Anchor aweigh, slip K3 berth and leave harbour
0800 Exercise Action Stations
0805 Embark FOST sea-riders, seaboat inboard
0820-0830 Exercise Emergency Stations
0830 Serial 2517 AATX/AAFX (*Anti-Aircraft Tracking Exercise/ Anti-Aircraft Firing Exercise*)
0845 'Attacked' by aircraft
0900 Jackstay transfer HMS DARING
0930 RAS(L) RFA GOLD RANGERM (*RAS(L) Replenishment At Sea (Liquids)*)
0935 Emergency breakaway, detached to Serial 2522A with HMS GRENVILLE
0950 Fire green grenades
1015 Stand down from Acton Stations
1030-1055 Serial 2527 RAS(L) GOLD RANGER
1100 Serial 29 TOWEX HMS GRENVILLE (*TOWEX – Towing Exercise*)
1145-1245 Serial 2531 CASEX A2 HM S/M OCELOT (*CASEX – Co-ordinated Anti-Submarine Exercise*)
1230-1315 Action messing
1300 Exercise man Overboard, away seaboat's crew
1310 Vertrep (*Vertical Replenishment*)
1400 RV DARING away seaboat with Boarding Party
1430 Wasp to OSPREY with FOST sea riders
1440 Exercise Defence Stations
1445-1530 Serial 2538 CASEX B3 HM S/M RORQUAL
1520 Secure from Defence Stations
1550 Anchor Portland K3 berth
1600-1620 Divers down
1610 Land IS Platoon
1700 Recover IS Platoon, weigh and proceed
1800-1840 Serial 2542 NGFX Lyme Bay (*Naval Gunfire Firing Exercise*)
1910 Exercise steering gear breakdown
1930 Exercise Action Stations
2000 'Attacked' by FPBs
2020 Secure from Action Stations
2100 Anchor Portland harbour K7 berth

PORTLAND WORK UP - Days 2 - 42

Same as Day 1 but generally with different ships, in a different order and with variances in awkwardness, intensity, aggression and bloody-mindedness