

FLEET FOCUS

O'Kane Sailors put on ESWS pins

By Ens. Jacquelyn K. Duquette
USS O'Kane

USS O'Kane returned to the islands June 21 after successfully completing Joint Task Force Exercise (JTFEX), her final round of pre-deployment training. Reunited with the warships of the Carl Vinson Battle Group (with whom O'Kane will deploy in August), the crew participated in two weeks of pre-planned exercises followed by two weeks of war-game free play.

The battle group commander developed scenarios that would prepare O'Kane for her various Arabian Gulf missions, ranging from visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS) to screening the carrier as she transits the Straits of Hormuz. The variety of events and the surprises associated with the final free-play made JTFEX a challenging and incredibly busy time for all hands. What was especially impressive about this four-week training period, however, was not how adroitly O'Kane's Sailors completed their missions. Rather, it is what they achieved above and beyond the normal operations.

Of particular note was the extremely high number of enlisted surface warfare specialty (ESWS) pins earned and awarded. During JTFEX, 17 O'Kane Sailors earned their pins for the first time and two completed their requalification. On even the busiest days, ESWS hopefuls could be seen walking the spaces during their off-duty hours, asking watchstanders to explain and re-explain their jobs and equipment.

"I've been down to sonar five times so I better know it," said Information Technician Second Class Karolyn A. Bailey. Bailey could also often be found in

radio central reviewing a six-inch high stack of flash cards and asking other ITs to quiz her in-between watches and downloading message traffic.

Boatswain Mate Third Class Troy M. Pepito surmised that his ESWS board would focus on areas other than deck seamanship because, according to Pepito, "There is nothing they can ask me about deck that I won't know." To prepare, he maximized his study time by asking questions of other watchstanders during slow moments on the bridge.

With a senior operations specialist manning the bright bridge console, the navigator standing Officer of the Deck (OOD) and a conning officer from combat systems, BM3 Pepito had a team ready and available to help him review a broad range of topics. He also made it a point to closely observe the fast-paced evolutions of JTFEX as they unfolded on the bridge and to involve himself when the OOD conducted junior officer training with the conning officer and junior OOD.

As a result of the dedicated efforts of O'Kane's newly-qualified enlisted surface warfare specialists, the ship will fly her ESWS banner once more. More importantly, however, is the lasting impression that these Sailors' hard work made on O'Kane's new arrivals.

"What is ESWS, what do I have to do to get my pin and can I start now?" asked IT-SN Michael G. Mitchell during his initial interview with his chief and division officer.

Just a day and a half after observing the ESWS efforts of fellow ITs - IT2 Bailey, IT2 Keith Phapakdy and IT1 Rodney Chambers (requalification) - piqued the curiosity of this young Sailor and motivated him to undertake the ESWS challenge.



IS1 William Sohocki photo

USS O'Kane JTFEX ESWS awardees: GM2 (SW) Matthew R. Lozowy, GM2 (SW) Jeremy R. Codling, GM2 (SW) Brion L. Green, GM2 (SW) David L. Brown, BM3 (SW) Troy M. Pepito, YN2 (SW) Michelle M. Deleon, STG2 (SW) Aaron J. Ramberg, STG2 (SW) Danielle L. Gary, STG2 (SW) Kevin J. Drenni, CT02 (SW) Robert M. Gehan, SK2 (SW) Keith A. Unfried, CTM2 (SW) Michaela A. Lemen, FC3 (SW) Jamie J. Ramberg, FC2 (SW) Mark A. Christman, EW2 (SW) Alyssa J. Childers, IT2 (SW) Karolyn A. Bailey, IT2 Keith Phapakdy. Requalifications: IT1 (SW) Rodney Chambers, FC1 (SW) Ranft J. Thomas.

Reuben James flies SWO pennant



OS2 Chris O'Donnell photo

Commodore Buzby (left, in whites) and USS Reuben James' wardroom with the Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) pennant signifying the ship's officers are all SWO-qualified.

By Lt. j.g. Scott Kozink
USS Reuben James

A new pennant flies on the mast of USS Reuben James. On June 21, Lt. j.g. Ryan Perry was qualified as a Surface Warfare Officer (SWO). His qualification brought the Reuben James to 100 percent SWO qualified officers. To be able to fly the SWO pennant, a gold SWO pin on a blue background, all first tour unrestricted-line officers must qualify within 18 months of reporting aboard.

The road to becoming a SWO is long, and requires the individual to become experts on their own ship in all areas and an expert on the Navy in general. The first step to becoming a SWO is to graduate from the Surface Warfare Officers School (SWOS) in Newport, Rhode Island.

This school teaches newly-commissioned officers from all commissioning sources the fundamentals about the Navy, navigation and ship handling, watch standing, ship specific engineering and about their job as division officers. After completing the six-month course, the junior officers report to their first ship where their SWOS

knowledge is put to the test and farther honed.

Once aboard ship, the first things the a junior officer must qualify as are small boat officer, helm safety officer, and officer of the deck in port. The next step is to pass an oral board to qualify as combat information center watch officer. This qualification allows the junior officer to be in charge of the entire combat watch team while underway. It involves a mastery of the ships self defense systems, communications systems and RADAR systems. During this time the junior officer is also working on getting qualified in Basic Shipboard engineering and as a chaff launching system operator. The final challenge that must be tackled before becoming a SWO is to pass another oral board and be qualified as officer of the deck underway.

To be qualified, the junior officer must memorize the 'rules of the road' and captain's standing orders on how he wants the ship to be run. He must also know how to conduct all evolutions that the ship may be required to do while underway to include getting underway, anchoring, small-boat operations, underway replenishments, and

helicopter operations. A high level of proficiency on how to handle the ship must be obtained. This qualification places the responsibility of all shipboard evolutions on the junior officer while he is on watch. He reports directly to the commanding officer.

Once this milestone is reached, the junior officer is ready to become a SWO. He has become an expert on the ship, but must now master the entire Navy. The SWO board usually takes at least two hours. The commanding officer, executive officer, and department heads all attend the board and ask the junior officer questions rating his knowledge. The questions can cover just about anything. The questions can vary from the Marine Corps, Navy SEALs, amphibious operations, naval doctrine, weapon systems on any ship in the Navy, battle group operations, to anything that was required for earlier qualifications.

"I spent months talking to other junior officers, and the department heads trying to learn all the information I needed to know. I could not believe how much there was out there that was important to me as SWO. Even after all of the preparation that I did, the board members still asked me things that I had never heard of before. I feel honored to be SWO. There is no way I could have done it without the help of everyone on the ship," said Perry.

Following Perry's qualification as a SWO, Capt. Buz Buzby, Commodore of DESRON Three One came aboard the Reuben James to tour the ship. During the tour he presented several Good Conduct Medals, several Navy Achievement Medals, and congratulated Electronics Warfare Technician 1st Class (SW) Eric Miller as the Senior Sailor of the Quarter and Boatswain's Mate 2nd Class Sal Saldana as the Junior Sailor of the Quarter.

After the tour, he spoke to the wardroom briefly. At this time he learned of the most recent SWO qualified officer and that Reuben James qualified to fly the SWO Pennant. He immediately authorized flying of the pennant and congratulated USS Reuben James on her accomplishment.

Port Royal delivers ordnance on target

Lt. j.g. Sarah A. O'Hare
USS Port Royal Public Affairs

USS Port Royal conducted a Naval Surface Fire Support (NSFS) FIREX I exercise off the southeast coast of San Clemente Island on the morning of May 9. Led by the gunnery liaison officer, Lt. j.g. Kenneth Athans, the NSFS team began its preparations while anxiously waiting for the southern California marine layer to burn off.

At approximately 1 p.m., the skies cleared and Port Royal commenced her practice run which consisted of firing eight rounds from each gun to allow the gun barrels to warm up.

The first series of missions were spotter service exercises which were primarily conducted to train new Marine Corps spotters. Upon completion of the spotter services, the FIREX I began. The forward gun mount (MT51) fired 72 rounds before a gun-loading casualty rendered it inoperative.

Gunner's Mate Second Class Andrew Bell, MT51 mount captain, commented, "I have never seen so many rounds expended in such a short amount of time from one gun mount."

The following day, Port Royal's NSFS team displayed true grit and re-

sourcefulness. On day two, the aft gun mount (MT52) suffered a minor casualty to the lower hoist assembly. Under the leadership of GM1(SW) Bradley Greenwalt, the forward and aft magazine crews together with 30 additional personnel hand-carried 169 70-pound projectiles up one deck to MT52's loader room.

Despite MT51 being inoperative and MT52 being degraded, Port Royal flawlessly executed the remaining five missions of the FIREX I which included a coordinated illumination mission (a challenging mission which isn't required on ships with only one gun mount).

OSSN(SW) Ryan Vattes commented, "The coordination and professionalism of the teams in CIC and the gun mounts were evident; this task which seemed insurmountable couldn't have been accomplished without a total team effort."

Upon the successful completion of the FIREX I, Port Royal continued to provide spotter services until dusk. Due to the unsurpassed battle efficiency of the crew, Port Royal scored an amazing and near perfect score of 98.95 percent, culminating weeks of training and preparation by the entire Port Royal team.

ROTC Midshipmen spend summer training aboard USS Hopper

By MIDN 2/c Britta Bengtson
USNR Auburn University

As a junior in college, a typical summer would include vacation, a summer job and possibly some summer courses. So, what am I doing in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on a Navy destroyer? I am a second-class midshipman in the Auburn University Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) unit. This program requires, in addition to standard college classes and activities, naval science classes, weekly physical training, drill, inspections and a summer training cruise.

Each year midshipmen from NROTC units throughout the nation and the U.S. Naval Academy are sent to ships, submarines or squadrons all over the world for a month during the summer. My orders sent me to the USS Hopper (DDG 70).

Second class midshipmen are assigned an enlisted "running mate" to shadow for the month. My running mate, a second class gunners mate, allowed and encouraged me to get involved. I have done everything from painting bulkheads and polishing brass to making the 12 o'clock report to the commanding officer. I even coned the ship during a man-overboard drill and an underway replenishment. These opportunities are truly valuable experiences and I hope that by taking advantage of them, I will be a better officer.

As future officers, it is important to understand and develop a sincere appreciation for the enlisted personnel of the Navy. This experience has done that and more for me. I have a true admiration for the crew of the USS Hopper. After a month of working closely with them, I have seen and experienced their hard work.

I have found that another valuable aspect of this cruise was interacting with the crew. Whether I was listening to the tribulations of boot camp, sea stories from far away ports or simply discussing the events of days past, I was able to develop an understanding of what Navy life entails.

This past month has helped me to acquire skills that are not taught in the classroom. Naval science books teach the technical features, while this cruise has made the Navy more about the Sailors in it. Success in today's Navy is not only being a proficient mariner, but it demands the human interaction that can only be learned through experience.

As I say good-bye to the Hopper and her personnel, I have a new and exciting outlook on the Navy and my career choice. I will return to classes in the fall and wear

my uniform with a little more pride knowing that there are ships like the Hopper that make our Navy great.



Lt. j.g. Kelly A Twiggs photo

USS Hopper Sailors with the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps midshipmen who are spending their summer in training aboard the ship.