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ORGANIZED CHAOS, as Protecteur ramps up for departure

ACTIVITY INCREASES, SPACE DECREASES AS DEPARTURE DAY DRAWS NEAR.

Penny Rogers
Staff writer

HMCS *Protecteur's* Commanding Officer, Cdr Sean Cantelon calls it organized chaos – the dance of a ship getting ready for departure. With one sweeping glance as he jets across the jetty, he takes in the swell of activity surrounding his ship.

The chaos of preparation touches everyone at Maritime Forces Pacific, including him. He's on his way to one of many meetings concerning the supply ship's 195-day Persian Gulf deployment this month with HMCS *Calgary* for Roto 4 of Operation Altair.

Two decks below, the lineup outside sickbay is growing. Six sailors stand in line holding a mountain of paperwork. Until their DAGs are complete, they won't be cleared to make this 'round-the-world' trip. This sometimes aggravating, but necessary process will prove them medically, dentally, psychologically and administratively fit to sail.

On the jetty, yet another pallet is making its way on board, hanging from the end of the 200-foot yellow crane. More than 118 pallets have been hoisted up and onto the deck, snuggled in with all the rest until crewmembers can unpack and disperse the supplies throughout the ship.

In the Chiefs and Petty Officers' lounge 12 men and women wait for the weekly head of departments meeting to begin. The Executive Officer, Cdr Yves Germain, has been delayed at a Friends of *Protecteur* get-together two decks up in the Captain's cabin. The sailors take advantage of the comfortable chairs and extra time to make phone calls and continue planning for their departure.

The meeting gets underway with the arrival of Cdr Germain, and department by department they discuss unfinished preparations.

Even the PA system isn't getting a break today, with pipe after pipe bellowing through the flats. Cdr Germain orders a call to the brow to stop all but emergency pipes until after the meeting is finished. There's simply too much noise.

Back on the deck, blue hard hats atop ship repair workers can be seen on the jetty and ship's deck. Lugging cables and boxes of equipment, they're doing last minute maintenance and installations to ensure the supply ship is ready for duty refueling and replenishing ships of Combined Task Force 150, a coalition of allied ships headed up by Canadian Cmdr Bob Davidson.

The buzz of activity grows with the appearance of sailors dressed head to toe in black kit. They muster on the flight deck for another training exercise to hone the skills they'll need to board suspicious vessels in the Gulf. After a few practice moves with their weapons, they disappear over the ship's side, climbing down a ladder into a waiting zodiac.

As the zodiac speeds off, an alarm sounds and crewmembers dash into yellow fire suits that had been, up until now, unobtrusively lined up against the bulkhead. Another drill should an emergency unfold on the ship while at sea. A quick inspection, followed by shouts of instructions and the group disperses into the ship to carry out the exercise.

Finally the day draws to a close. The blue hats walk down the brow to the jetty, the pipes diminish and not one pallet remains visible. And the forklift? It sits still ready to do the dance all over again tomorrow.



Crewmembers of HMCS *Protecteur* juggle training exercises and storing the ship with their regular duties. Fleet Maintenance Facility workers and civilian contractors work extra shifts to ensure the ship is ready for her 195-day trip to the Persian Gulf. On this day, oncoming provisions, a forklift, the naval boarding party, and men and women participating in fire exercises were all competing for deck space. On the decks below, meetings were the order of the day.

All photos by Penny Rogers, Contributor

Left: Executive Officer, Cdr Yves Germain receives updates from a crewmember as the day's activities come to an end.

Right: Heads of departments take notes on last minute departure preparations.

