

Royal Navy and Japanese naval forces train together



Richard Gardner reports from London

(Photo: Crown copyright RN22)

A recent joint exercise in UK waters had a historic significance as it involved the Royal Navy and Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force working together in a European environment for the first time. The patrol ships HMS Mersey and HMS Enterprise linked up with JMSDF ships Kashima, which trains officer cadets, and the general-purpose destroyer Shimakaze off Portland Bill in the South of England.

The two Japanese warships were on Overseas Training Cruise 2022 exercising with allied navies along the way. This included working with the new UK aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales, which was leading a NATO exercise off the Spanish coast. After the two Japanese warships arrived off the UK's Dorset coast they undertook various exercises, concentrating on communication activities and orchestrating coordinated manoeuvring of the ships operating in close proximity. It had been intended to allow for an exchange of crews to experience life aboard each other's vessels while underway but deteriorating weather ruled out boat transfers.

Commenting on the joint activity Lt Cdr Nicholas Radue, Executive Officer of

HMS Mersey, stated, "It was a pleasure being able to train with the JSDF in UK waters. Exercises like this not only provide excellent training opportunities for our respected fleets but also strengthen the bond between our two countries. We wish them fair winds and following seas in the rest of their deployment."

After the initial training period the two Japanese ships split up, with the Shimakaze docking at Portsmouth for a five day visit, while the Kashima continued into the Thames Estuary before sailing up the River Thames into the heart of the City of London, passing Tower Bridge to enjoy a high-profile berth alongside HMS Belfast and opposite the Tower of London. HMS Belfast, the last big-gun RN cruiser, is now a tourist attraction and served in Japanese waters in 1945 as a major asset in the British Pacific Fleet. After its visit to London the Kashima and Shimakaze continued further exercises with the RN, including with the dedicated specialist navigation training ship, HMS Severn.

A spokesman for the Japanese Self Defence Force said that the training cruise visit to the UK was a direct result of last

year's deployment of the UK Carrier Strike Group to the Asia Pacific, which saw the flagship HMS Queen Elizabeth call on Yokosuka, near Tokyo. He said, "Defence cooperation between Japan and the UK, which has a long history and tradition, evolved to a new level last year with the CSG visiting Japan. Japan-UK defence cooperation contributes not only to the security of Japan but to ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region and the international community, as well as addressing global challenges."

The Royal Navy has increased its presence in the Pacific, most visibly in 2021 with the carrier group deployment, but also with the commitment of the patrol ships HMS Tamar and HMS Spey to the region for the next five years. It is intended to hold more RN joint exercises with other regional navies as part of an enhanced Western effort to counter ever-expanding Chinese influence and military activity in the wider Indo-Pacific area. The UK's cooperation with Japan is also expanding into new defence and industrial developments, including new air combat systems. 🦋