U.K. and U.S. Conduct SINKEX during Atlantic Thunder 22



The U.K. and U.S. navies conducted a sinking exercise Sept. 7 in the North Atlantic. *U.S. NAVY*

ATLANTIC OCEAN – Ships and aircraft from the United Kingdom and the United States conducted a long-planned multi-domain sinking exercise (SINKEX) called Atlantic Thunder 22 in the North Atlantic, Sept. 7, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa Public Affairs said Sept. 23.

Atlantic Thunder 22 participants, assigned to U.S. Naval Forces Europe, U.S. Air Forces Europe, the U.K. Royal Navy and U.K. Royal Air Force sank the decommissioned guided missile frigate ex-USS Boone, during the live-fire SINKEX to develop combined proficiency in tactics, targeting and live-firing against a surface target at sea.

“Sinking exercises not only provide excellent opportunities to gain real world operational experience in long range maritime strikes but also demonstrate the collective power of our combined forces,” said Rear Adm. Oliver “Ollie” Lewis, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa’s (NAVEUR-NAVAF) Director of Maritime Operations. “Most importantly, gaining real world proficiency in the tactics, techniques and procedures we have developed and tested alongside our British Allies not only validate our weapons systems but ultimately contribute to NATO alliance readiness.”

The exercise was not only a unique and valuable opportunity for sharpening and proving partner capabilities, but also an exercise of multiple firsts.

The ex-Boone was struck by Martlet air-to-surface missiles from Wildcat helicopters assigned to the Type 23 frigate HMS Westminster. The helicopters provided inaugural laser targeting for fixed-wing U.K Royal Air Force Typhoons using Paveway IV precision guided munitions.

A U.S. Navy P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft assigned to Patrol Squadron 46 shot a long range anti-ship missile. U.S. Air Force F-15E Eagles, assigned to 494th Fighter Squadron, dropped maritime strike joint direct attack munitions.

Finally at sea, the U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke guided-missile destroyer USS Arleigh Burke (DDG 51) struck the ex-Boone with a Standard Missile 6 (SM-6), the first anti-ship SM-6 engagement in the U.S. European Command area of responsibility, while HMS Westminster fired the first live

RGM-84D Harpoon missile salvo from the U.K. since 2004.

Also aboard Arleigh Burke, Marines assigned to the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit provided vital imagery and battle damage assessment by deploying a V-BAT 128 vertical take-off and landing unmanned aerial vehicle, marking the first launch of a V-BAT 128 from an Arleigh Burke guided-missile destroyer.

“Ex Atlantic Thunder has demonstrated that U.K. and U.S. naval and air forces can integrate to deliver an end-to-end kill chain against a maritime target at long range,” said Cmdr. Ed Moss-Ward, commanding officer of HMS Westminster. “The integration of high end weapons, sensors and communications with our NATO allies is key to the collective war fighting capability of the Alliance demonstrated by the sinking exercise. The firings have supported the development of the Royal Navy’s targeting and weapon capabilities, and afforded opportunity to conduct realistic training to validate tactics and operating procedures.”

Former U.S. Navy vessels used in SINKEXs, referred to as hulks, are prepared in strict compliance with regulations prescribed and enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency under a general permit the Navy holds pursuant to the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act.

Prior to being transported for participation in a sinking exercise, each vessel undergoes a rigorous cleaning process for environmental safety. Aligned with U.K. Ministry of Defense environmental policy, robust monitoring was conducted above and below the sea’s surface with trained personnel using specialized equipment to reduce the overall risk of inadvertently impacting the marine environment and marine mammals during the SINKEX.

Ex-Boone is a decommissioned guided missile frigate, which entered United States Naval service, May 15, 1982. It was decommissioned on Feb. 23, 2012. The 20th ship of the Oliver

Hazard Perry class, it was the first ship named for Vice Adm. Joel Thompson Boone, a Medal of Honor recipient and the most highly decorated medical officer during World War I.