

# Cold Weather, Rough Seas Were No-Sweat

By Ens. Andrew R. Harris,  
USS Samuel B. Roberts (FFG 58)

**E**arly last year, USS *Samuel B. Roberts* left the Mayport, Fla., sun and crossed the Atlantic to join NATO's Standing Naval Force, Atlantic. After rendezvousing in Lisbon, Portugal, the multi-national armada headed north into the infamous Norwegian winter.

During the four weeks the frigate operated in Norwegian coastal waters, average daily temperatures were in the 20s and 30s, and in the teens at night. Combined with almost-constant 25-knot winds, the weather decks usually felt like it was well below 0°F. Seas typically were rough, with 9-12-foot swells, diminishing to 5-7 feet closer to land. Precipitation included several inches of snow most days; of course, these were average conditions. The ship

also faced 60-knot winds, blizzard conditions, wind-chills nearing minus 50° F, and there were some 30-degree rolls.

Preparing for such conditions is a daunting task, especially for a crew from Florida. Months before deploying, the command stressed preparation; only by addressing the upcoming challenges early could the ship and crew expect to emerge whole.

The crew began preparing by examining NWP 3-59.4, *U.S. Navy Cold Weather Procedures for Surface Ships*. It addressed the necessary actions for keeping personnel safe and equipment functioning.



With the publication in hand, the command turned to the Supply Department.

“We conducted a thorough inventory of all foul- and cold-weather gear on-hand and replenished the inventory as needed,” said supply officer, Lt. Brad Vetting. The ship purchased extra Mustang jackets, coveralls, and submersion suits to fend off the cold. Through ComNavSurfLant, *Samuel B. Roberts* received a supplemental 30 sets of foul weather

gear from the Atlantic Fleet Integrated Logistics Overhaul Facility in Portsmouth, Va., saving the ship valuable OPTAR dollars.

After acquiring cold weather gear, the crew had to learn its proper use and the general health dangers of cold weather exposure. During the weeks before the deployment, HM1 Terry Thomas repeatedly ran a Navy instructional video, “Cold Weather Briefing for Surface Ships,” which highlighted the material dangers a ship faces in cold weather, including such issues as preventing hypothermia.

“We ran the movie during meals on a number of days before we left. We showed it a lot so I think we really got it through how serious this weather



was going to be, and it seemed to work since no one was hurt,” he said.

The ship’s first lieutenant, Ens. Jeff Greeson, was concerned not only with keeping the boatswain’s mates warm, but also with keeping snow and ice off the deck.

“I’m not sure how much snow we had over that month, but it was definitely several feet,” he said of the weather the ships experienced during the North Atlantic deployment. In heavy seas, Deck Department had to keep weather decks clear of snow and ice because they could have caused dangerous stability issues for the frigate. Although the first lieutenant did purchase snow shovels and many bags of salt before the ship deployed, and his crew never once allowed any significant accumulation on deck, he reflects back and admits two more shovels would have helped deck even more.

“Our guys had to strain pretty hard with those two shovels, but we made it through,” he said, adding, “The salt was a must, as well. We used a bit too much at the beginning, but we got the hang

of using it purposefully, rather than just throwing it on the deck, and we ended up with just enough.”

Ice accumulation was a bit trickier on the sensitive combat-systems gear. By being ever vigilant and with careful hands, fire controlmen and gunner’s mates were able to protect their gear. During one incident, a *Samuel B. Roberts*’ chief petty officer borrowed special antifreeze from the British ship HMS *Norfolk*; the antifreeze was needed for Roberts’ Mk-13 guided missile launching system, where internal cooling lines had frozen because of exposure to the cold weather. The ship also lost its Mk-32 surface vessel torpedo tube covers because they were improperly tied down.

These minor problems aside, Combat Systems Department, and the ship as a whole, faced few problems, despite the severe weather. By preparing and following established procedures, USS *Samuel B. Roberts* emerged from the frozen north virtually unscathed. The combat systems officer, Lt. Paul Piatt, summed it up with, “The lesson learned here is that if you follow the guidance, you’re ship will typically end up just fine.” 🇺🇸

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