

# ESPS 'Cantabria' : deployment Australia 2013

The excellent relationship and mutual trust which has developed over recent years between the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the Spanish Navy (Armada) has allowed development of new initiatives to expand the scope of cooperation between the two Navies.

In this regard, the 'Statement of Intent' signed in July 2012, between the Chiefs of the RAN, Vice Admiral Griggs and Admiral General Rebollo of the Armada set the framework to develop a project to foster the mutual support of each other's capabilities in deployment

and other operational activities. This Statement was not a mere expression of goodwill, but had a practical application almost immediately.

The RAN had showed much interest in the BAC 'Cantabria' and requested the possibility of deploying this ship to Australia during 2013 to support various operational activities.

On 5 November 2012, both Chief's of Navy agreed and signed the 'Project Arrangement', which included information on operations, logistics and personnel and financial support which allowed the *Cantabria* to be deployed

as an integral part of the RAN during 2013.

On 3 January 2013, the Combat Supply Ship *Cantabria* left La Graña Naval Port for a years' deployment to Australia. During the farewell ceremony Admiral Jaime Muñoz-Delgado (Spanish Navy Chief of Staff) and Admiral Santiago, Bolibar (Admiral of the Fleet) attended the ceremony, during which Admiral Muñoz-Delgado stressed significance of the deployment and set the course for its conduct, stressing the importance of safety, security and the welfare of the crew.



*Ships Deployment Patch for ESPS Cantabria in Australia 2013.*



*The SPS Cantabria manoeuvres through Sydney Harbour as she arrives at her temporary home port, Fleet Base East, Sydney. SPS Cantabria is a modern auxiliary oil replenishment ship, which is capable of supplying fuel, food, stores and ammunition to ships underway.*

In preparation for the long deployment, *Cantabria* conducted a work up period, testing her capabilities in the waters around Ferrol. The ship made the voyage to the Rota naval base, situated in Cadiz, where she was subjected to rigorous certification processes to ensure her systems and equipment were functioning optimally.

*Cantabria* arrived at Melbourne in Australia, on 13 February in order to participate in the naming ceremony to commemorate induction of the LHD class flagship, HMAS *Canberra*. On 20 February, *Cantabria* navigated her

way to Garden Island Naval Base where she had been based for the nine months whilst on deployment with the Royal Australian Navy.

In support of such a lengthy deployment, ESPS 'Cantabria' had a crew of 145 men and women with specialist trades to meet the supply and replenishment mission of the ship (21 officers, 24 senior sailors and 99 junior sailors). Apart from the crew, a number of RAN officers and sailors embarked on the ship to get some specific training on *Cantabria's* modern systems, and whilst on board, the RAN contingent participated

in all facets of activity and integrated effortlessly with the Armada crew.

The deployment has been a unique and successful initiative which has imparted important training and capability aspects for both the Armada and RAN. Since her departure from Ferrol, the *Cantabria* has sailed more than 34,200 miles and over 167 days at sea. The ship thereafter contributed to training and support of major fleet units of the RAN and other international warships taking part in multinational exercises including *Talisman Saber 13* and *Triton Centenary 13*.



*Cantabria at port (photo Clyde Dickens)*

In her replenishment role, *Cantabria* completed a total of 61 Replenishment at Sea (RAS) missions. Furthermore, the ship played an important part in *The International Fleet Review* which celebrated 100 years of the Royal Australian Navy. Importantly, as a result of the personnel exchange programme (PIP), there were more than 340 RAN personnel which were onboard, conducting training

and familiarisation with the platform and engineering systems.

During the deployment, *Cantabria* had the opportunity to visit the Australian ports of Melbourne, Adelaide, Darwin and Cairns, during the last port visit, *Cantabria* having had the “immense privilege” to participate alongside other Australian Defence units during the ANZAC Day celebrations.



Other noteworthy events included the SHOL testing for 808 Squadron’s MRH-90 and 723 Squadron’s AS350B helicopters. The embarkation of 723 Squadron was the first time that an RAN squadron had embarked on a foreign vessel.

### History & Traditions

This Combat Replenishment Ship is the first vessel in the Spanish Navy to be named after this region, whose history and sea tradition are closely linked with the Armada. Earlier, there were two other ships carrying the same name during the 19th century, a schooner and a corvette. Both ships, although not officially part of the Spanish Navy, served to connect Spain with its last colonies in South America.

*Cantabria’s* keel was laid on 18 July 2007, two years after being ordered and was launched on 21 July 2008 in Navantia’s Shipyards in Cádiz. The wife of *Cantabria’s* President, Aurora Díaz, was the Ship’s ‘Godmother’ during the launching ceremony.

The *Cantabria* was delivered to the Spanish Navy on 29 July 2010 at Rota Naval Base, in a ceremony honoured by the Admiral Chief of Staff of the Navy, Admiral General Manuel Rebollo.



*Spanish Navy’s Cantabria in Port Phillip Bay sailing past NUSHIP Canberra.*



*Profile view shows off the immense size of replenishment vessel 'Cantabria' (photo Clyde Dickens)*

Then on 25 March 2011, at a ceremony at Santander Harbour presided by the former Minister for Defence, Mrs Carmen Chacón, the ship's Godmother, Mrs Aurora Fernandez presented *Cantabria's* Commanding Officer, Captain Ramon de Leste Contreras, with a special Combat Flag.

On 3 January the Combat Supply Ship *Cantabria* left La Graña Naval Port for a years' deployment to Australia, arriving in Melbourne on 13 February soon participating in the induction of the LHD class flagship, HMAS *Canberra* on 20 February. *Cantabria* had navigated her way to Garden Island Naval Base where she was based whilst on deployment with the RAN.

### **Mission and capabilities**

The *Cantabria's* mission has been to provide operational logistic support to any Naval Task Group (Amphibious Task Group, Transport Group or Landing Force) for sustainability of the naval force over time. Such logistic support allows the Navy to operate in any part of the world where its presence is required. It can also provide its logistic support capabilities for non-combat operations such as environmental protection activities or for delivering humanitarian aid.

For the latter, *Cantabria* has a fully equipped hospital with eight beds, a state-of-the-art operating room rigged with video conference (VTC) assisted medicine, an x-ray room, a dentist consultation room, a sterilisation lab and gas treatment centre. Concerning environmental protection, the ship is equipped to receive liquid fuel from ships specialising in environmental hazard protection, transport and disseminate dispersing anti-contamination agents, as well to transport and deploy a quick deployment inflatable oceanic protection barrier (up to 200m in length, in under 15 minutes).

The design of the ship responds to the concept of a High Value Unit (HVU), counting on the protection of frigates and other escort ships to ensure its own survivability and safety while sailing in high threat environment.

The *Cantabria's* modern combat system, SCOMBA, fully developed and tested in Spain, allows its smooth integration in a Naval Task Force, while its Integrated Platform Control System (SICP), also a product of Spain's R&D, provides a high degree of automation making the crew required to operate the ship more reduced.

The *Cantabria* is equipped with five replenishment stations, (two on each

side and one astern), fuel and liquids transferred with any of the five stations. Solids can however only be transferred using the stations on both sides. The ship is stable and can carry out replenishments at up to and including sea state 5. It also has a large flight deck and a hangar which allows operation of medium and heavy helicopters. The flight deck is equipped with visual landing aids for day and night flight operations including operations with night vision goggles.

The *Cantabria* is designed to operate anywhere in the world, with the exception of Arctic waters. Its principal areas of operation are Spain's sovereign waters in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans, the Mediterranean Sea, Latin America, the Sub-Sahara African coast and the Middle East.

The SPS *Cantabria* manoeuvres through Sydney Harbour as she arrives at her temporary home port, Fleet Base East, Sydney. Mid Caption; the Spanish Armada Ship *Cantabria* arrived at her adopted Australian home, Fleet Base East, Sydney. SPS *Cantabria* is a modern auxiliary oil replenishment ship, which is capable of supplying fuel, food, stores and ammunition to ships underway.