Brazilian Navy Participates in Operation Obangame Express 2017

One hundred fifty-two Brazilian service members participated in Obangame Express 2017, together with U.S., South American, African, and European service members.

Taciana Moury/Diálogo | 19 May 2017

Brazilian Navy Oceanic Patrol Ship Apa (NPaOc Apa, per its Portuguese acronym) moored at Rio de Janeiro Naval Base at the beginning of May, after taking part in Operation Obangame Express 2017. The exercise, held in the Gulf of Guinea from March 20th to 31st, brought together U.S., South American, African, and European service members for the purpose of promoting maritime security against piracy, drug and arms trafficking, kidnapping, and illegal fishing in the region.

NPaOc Apa was not selected by accident. It has two motorboats that conduct boardings and rescues for injured people and makes aircraft landings and take-offs possible with a resupply system for operating with
Aircraft on board. According to Brazilian Navy Major Jonathas Moscoso de Campos, commander of NPaOc Apa, another highlight is the weapons system, equipped with state-of-the-art optronics using night vision (infrared), with built-in search radar, a 30mm cannon, various machine guns (25mm, 12.7mm, and 7.62mm), and an autonomous range of up to 5,500 nautical miles. "Within the Brazilian Navy, these features make the NPaOc Apa ideal for this kind of operation," he said.

This is the fourth time that the Brazilian Navy takes part in this exercise, which has taken place annually since 2010 and is organized by the U.S. Navy. The Brazilian Navy took 122 service members aboard for the training. For Maj. Moscoso, the operation was a success. "For us, the mission started back on February 22nd when we left for the gulf, and it ended only on May 15th, when we arrived home," he said.

While in transit to the area of operations, teams were trained on methods for carrying out boardings. "We never know the exact moment when we will need to act, and for that reason, we must always be ready. The ship, when underway at sea, creates an excellent training opportunity," Maj. Moscoso explained. "Lowering a motorboat with a crew inside, and with the ship rocking back and forth is not as simple a task as it seems. It's a very good thing when we can train our crew for this," he said.

Aboard the Brazilian ship, according to Maj. Moscoso, were service members from Admiral Marques de Leão Training Center who are in charge of courses on naval patrolling, and from the Combat Divers Group, who are specialists on boardings. "The presence of these service members allowed for a singular training opportunity for our crew during the mission’s 83 days," he stressed.

**Service members conduct drills during exercise**

The military exercise was held over 11 days in the waters of the Gulf of Guinea, which covers nearly 3,400 miles of coastline, divided among 12 countries (Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Annobón, and São Tomé and Príncipe). NPaOc Apa took part in 13 missions.
during Obangame Express 2017. Maj. Moscoso said that it was possible to observe the techniques used by partner nations. “Brazilian teams were able to be aboard the ships of other nations to observe the procedures being carried out.”

Lieutenant Junior Grade Danilo Silveira Miranda, who is in charge of systems onboard the NPaOc Apa, participated in Obangame Express for the first time. “I was able to witness how much our Navy contributes to providing security in the area of the Gulf of Guinea, as well as having been the first time that I had the opportunity to visit some of the African countries that we passed through, such as Namibia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Cameroon, Ghana, and Senegal,” he said.

During the exercise, service members from participating nations simulated real-world problems faced in the region in order to test their response capabilities, said 1st Lt. Silveira. “Our ship simulated being a fishing vessel under suspicion of carrying drugs. A Congolese Navy patrol ship carried out an interrogation procedure by radio with NPaOc Apa, and then initiated a mock boarding,” he said.

Congolese service members boarded the suspect ship to seize illicit items without the offending vessel being able to get out of the situation. “After finding the alleged illegal materials, the vessel would have been seized, if that had been a real situation,” explained 1st Lt. j.g. Silveira. But in that phase of the operation, the simulation is paused so that the executed procedures can be evaluated and the actual training can occur with the goal of improving operations.

According to Maj. Moscoso, in addition to these technical and professional improvements in combating piracy, drug trafficking, human trafficking, illegal fishing, and arms trafficking, Obangame allows for the strengthening of ties between nations. “It even makes it possible to increase Brazil’s visibility on the African continent, as well as other countries such as the United States, Canada, and France,” he stressed.

During the exercise, service members interact with each other. “Participating as foreign observers aboard
the NPaOc Apa were two service members from Namibia, one from the United States, one from Cape
Verde, five from Portugal, and one from São Tomé and Príncipe," said Maj. Moscoso. And in the training
area allocated to the Brazilian Navy, the Angolan and Congolese navies were also present.

Training importance

The Brazilian Navy vessel covered a total of 3,255 nautical miles during the 11 days of the exercise, and
12,611 nautical miles when considering the entire mission, including deployment. For Maj. Moscoso, this
type of training generates a learning process for everyone involved in the maritime interdiction operations,
as well as contributing to the training of the African navies, so they can be effective in their fight against the
ongoing threats in the Gulf of Guinea region.

The gulf exercise trains service members on how to act in patrol operations in Brazil as well. “Here we don’t
have issues of piracy, human trafficking, or the hijacking of vessels. But activities such as illegal fishing, drug
trafficking, and smuggling can happen in our Exclusive Economic Zone, and this exercise contributes to
training our force to fight those illicit activities,” Maj. Moscoso stressed. One of the main challenges in this
type of mission is the logistics aspect because of the time away from the base. “In getting the ship ready, for
example, we had to bring a refrigeration container on board to expand our food storage capacity,” he
concluded.

For Lt. j.g. Silveira, being away from his family was the hardest part. “It’s great to be at sea, in operations,
but there is nothing better than coming back home with the feeling of having done your duty,” he concluded.