

## Tearful goodbyes for departing crew of HMCS Regina



By Victoria News

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Just months before Leading Seaman Angelo Aires and Petty Officer 1st class Lindsay Stohl planned to say 'I do' at their wedding, they found themselves making do with hugs and kisses Tuesday morning before Stohl's warship went to sea.

The Sooke couple planned to marry October, until word came that HMCS *Regina* was needed in the Arabian Sea to conduct patrols, as part of an American-led naval counterterrorism mission underway in the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean.

"The navy doesn't help with (wedding) planning," Stohl quipped as she stood on the flight deck of the frigate, her arms wrapped tightly around her fiancé.

The tears in Stohl's eyes were mirrored in the eyes of more than a hundred military members struggling through their final goodbyes to partners, parents, children, teens and a few tiny babies.

Many clutched packages of tissues handed out by Military Family Resource Centre staff members, standing on the nearby jetty.

"It's hard," said Aires, who only returned to CFB Esquimalt in February after a seven-month voyage to the Mediterranean Sea aboard HMCS *Vancouver*. "We'd like to get married. We'll just make it happen when she gets back."

While in the Arabian Sea, Stohl and about 250 army, navy, air force and civilian personnel will be on the lookout for vessels that may be running drugs, weapons or people, as well as monitor traffic patterns, and deter trouble in the unstable region.

To maximize patrol capabilities, seven unmanned aerial vehicles and a three-member civilian team from ING Engineering are going with *Regina*.

It marks the first time a West Coast naval warship will use the small rocket-fuel powered airplanes, which can fly more 15 hours non-stop as they record and relay data and images back to the ship.

"It's exciting. It brings a whole new capability to the navy," said Ottawa-based ING team leader Brian Williams, who operated the same ScanEagle remote-controlled technology in Afghanistan. "It's another tool in their tool box."

The voyage will be as difficult as it is rewarding for crew members over the next eight months, said navy Lt. Nigel Tully.

"These people get to go through and experience things that the average Canadian doesn't get to do," the Esquimalt resident said.

As the padre on board *Regina*, it will be his job to provide crew members with the spiritual guidance and mental and emotional support they need to do their jobs.

"I just get to know them as people and you have a different appreciation for what they are going through," Tully said, watching a sailor snap one last family photo of a military member standing with his wife and two young boys.

Cmdr. Jason Boyd, commanding officer of *Regina*, said his goodbyes to his wife, his eight-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son at their Esquimalt home before heading to the ship.

"It's a day of mixed emotions – mixed because it's hard to leave any family behind for eight months," Boyd said, adding that the mission also holds a lot of excitement.

"We've been working very hard for the last several months to get the ship and the people ready to do this. The day has come and we just want to get going."

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