

Speech by the State Secretary for Defence of the Netherlands on the occasion of the transfer of HNLMS Van Galen to Portugal

Mr State Secretary, Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen,

We are here today to mark the transfer of Her Majesty's Van Galen to the Portuguese Navy. This follows the transfer nearly a year ago of Her Majesty's Van Nes – recommissioned in Portugal with the name of the well-known Portuguese seafarer Bartolomeu Dias. And again, we transfer with mixed feelings. We are saying farewell to a fantastic ship. But at the same time, we know that she is going to a good home and that our Allies will put her to good use. We also know that the sale of this and five other multi-purpose frigates will greatly boost the deployment capability of the Royal Netherlands Navy.

I recently signed the contract for a new joint logistic support ship and the naming ceremony for our first ocean-going patrol ship will take place a few weeks from now.

So, while this is good news, we part from this beautiful ship with pain in our hearts. The Van Galen was the seventh M-class frigate built by Schelde Naval Shipbuilding. The keel was laid in January 1990.

In the Van Galen's service history we recognize some important historical events.

While the eight multi-purpose frigates were being built, / the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain were torn down. As we now know, that changed the global security picture radically. The threat from the Soviet Union was no more, so new tasks had to be found for the new frigates. The ships would later take part in NATO operations. They would serve as station ships in the Caribbean and act as ambassadors for Dutch business.

In October 1995, the Van Galen was the first M-class frigate to round the Cape of Good Hope, which – appropriately – was discovered by the Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias. The trip from Cape Town to Las Palmas, about four-and-a-half thousand nautical miles, was accomplished without refuelling. As far as we know, that is the greatest distance ever travelled in a single crossing by a Dutch naval ship.

In March and April '97, it joined in the Maritime Interdiction Operations in the Persian Gulf to enforce the UN embargo against Iraq. During that operation, the boarding team went into action on several occasions. The frigate also provided air-defence cover for the American aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt.

In September 1998, the frigate joined NATO's Standing Naval Force Atlantic. The high point was reaching Saint Petersburg in Russia – the first time that a NATO task force had made port in that city. Thousands of local residents turned out to see the ships.

In May 2000, the Van Galen headed for the Caribbean, where it would serve as station ship. The following month a large cocaine seizure was made. Two thousand kilos of cocaine were found on board a fishing boat and the crew was arrested.

Following the 9-11 attacks, the Van Galen set sail for the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf, / as a partner in the coalition with the U.S. armed forces in the war in Afghanistan and against Al-Qaida, The frigate was assigned to the U.S. Fifth Fleet / and deployed to monitor shipping around the Horn of Africa and near the coast of Somalia.

The Van Galen was in service with the Dutch Defence organisation for more than fourteen years. They were years of great change for Western armed forces, and the ship's history reflects that. Initially the emphasis was on so-called blue-water operations and protecting the high seas from the Soviet threat. Over time, the Van Galen was increasingly used for 'brown-water' operations at the lower end of the spectrum of force, such as intercepting illegal immigrants, anti-narcotics operations, and providing emergency assistance during humanitarian disasters. The importance of those types of missions is increasing rapidly. And the Royal Netherlands Navy will continue to make a name for itself by being part of them. That is also why the Defence organisation is investing in ships that can be used effectively for that purpose.

A multi-purpose frigate, however, can be deployed at both the low end and the high end of the spectrum of force. So I am convinced that in acquiring our frigates, the Portuguese have made a good deal. I could not wish the Portuguese Navy a better ship and I could not wish for a better new owner for Her Majesty's Van Galen. I wish the ship good sailing under her new name, the FRANCISCO DE ALMEIDA!