

**Speech by the Netherlands Minister of Defence, J.S.J. Hillen, on the occasion of the Medal Parade of the crew of HNLMS Dolfijn in Portsmouth on May 29 2012.**

Note To Editors: Please Check Against Delivery

Distinguished guests, crew members of Her Netherlands Majesty's Ship Dolfijn,

Welcome to Portsmouth!

I am proud to be able to welcome you here.

Over the past months, you have proved the great value of Dutch submarines.

Their value for the Netherlands.

For NATO.

Their value for combating piracy which is doing so much damage to our shipping and our trade.

And, not least, their value for the victims of piracy.

For three months you searched in and around the Somali Basin.

Unseen.

Undetected.

The pirates had no idea that you were following their every move.

Under a veil of secrecy, you were able to locate and monitor several pirates' nests.

You were able to find out how many pirates there were, what plans and weapons they had and how they operated.

Crucial information for anyone wanting to beef up our fight against the international crime at sea...

...our fight against the violent capture of unfortunate crew members that fall into the hands of these pirates.

The intelligence you gathered was sent directly to NATO's surface vessels, which were then able to foil or stop the pirates' plans.

The intelligence you gather is unique and highly valuable.

NATO may have surface vessels, patrol aircraft, helicopters and satellites, but they each have their limitations.

A frigate or a helicopter cannot move silently.

Satellites are hampered by weather conditions.

These limitations leave a large gap in the picture of what the pirates are up to.

You provided the missing pieces of this jigsaw puzzle.

The Commander of the NATO mission made more than full use of the opportunity to incorporate your intelligence into his operational plans.

Your intelligence directly led to the rescue of twelve innocent hostages.

These twelve victims were taken hostage by pirates and, as we can all imagine, their situation was looking dire.

The seas off the coast of Somalia stretch for thousands of miles, covering an area twice the size of Europe.

The dhows, on the other hand, are tiny, just a few meters long.

Seen from the air or on radar, they are nothing more than a speck...  
...and through binoculars they just look like one of the many innocent fishing boats out there which have nothing to do with piracy.

Without precise information, it is like looking for a needle in a haystack.

Without your intervention, these hostages might have been at the mercy of the pirates for many more weeks or months.  
They might even have suffered a worse fate.

You had the vessel under surveillance; you saw suspicious activity; you saw preparations for a new hijacking.

You swung into action.

The pirates were oblivious to what was happening in the waters below them and started their engines to begin their next criminal operation.

You were positioned just below and behind them and alerted the Danish naval vessel Absalon.

The Danes set course for the dhow immediately.

The hostages were rescued and the pirates apprehended.  
A proud moment for all of us...

With your efforts, the Netherlands is making a unique contribution to the principle of the freedom of the sea.

A principle that stood at the basis of our economic prosperity and on which a great many economic interests still depend.

Many of your successes and results cannot be recounted here.  
We do not want to reveal our operating methods to our opponents and jeopardise future operations.

It is a pity, because we all know that airing our military successes plays an important role in gaining support... and financial resources.

It is not bragging, no, it pays off!

I'm sure you must feel forgotten sometimes.  
After you have contributed to successes that you cannot talk about.

It is all part of working on board a submarine, but sometimes you wish there was more you could show to the world.

Because the pieces that you add to the jigsaw puzzle are so very important.  
For the security and interests of the Netherlands.  
And for the security of our other servicemen and women.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Budget cutbacks are leaving deep wounds in the Netherlands Defence organisation. In the navy, army and air force.

We had to sell our maritime patrol aircraft years ago.  
And our surface fleet has also been drastically reduced.

That means we are having to make do with much less.  
As the Netherlands Armed Forces, but also NATO-wide.

That makes you, our hidden observers below the surface, all the more valuable.

Being able to operate in relatively shallow waters for long periods of time, the Netherlands submarines are regarded as crucial within NATO's capabilities.

Our submarine training standards are regarded as very high.

That is why our Dutch Navy trains submarine commanders from all over the world.

Yet more reasons to take good care of you.

And yes, we do so.

And so do your families.

They have been without you for a long time.

I am sure you will be glad to be back on shore and to be reunited soon with your family and friends, especially after such a long tour in dangerous waters.

In a few moments, you will receive the Dutch Peace Operations Commemorative Medal.

To honour you for your efforts in the interests of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

You have more than earned it!

Ik wens u een mooie tijd aan wal en nog een behouden vaart naar Den Helder.

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