

AUGUSTA BAY, ITALY 29 DEC 2014 - 12 JAN 2015

Augusta Bay was the longest port visit of VICKSBURG's deployment, lasting almost two full weeks. The SNMG-2 staff which was serving a year long deployment was taking holiday stand-down leave at the time, as such, VICKSBURG used to time to host a maintenance availability while pier side. This availability was crucial for VICKSBURG's subsequent deployment operations which occurred with no major casualties or equipment failures.

Augusta Bay is located on the Eastern side of the island of Sicily just south of the major city of Catania. The crew spent most of their liberty time split between roaming the streets of Catania or Palermo, enjoying the liberty centers at Naval Air Station Sigonella, or enjoying the different MWR tours that were offered which included things like wine tastings and tours up Mount Etna, the largest active volcano in Europe.

Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea and is an autonomous region of Italy. Due to its separation from the Italian mainland, the island of Sicily enjoys a unique culture that is often a melting pot of different peoples extending from North Africa to Turkey and Hellenic countries. Of special significance, Sicily was the first important foothold in Europe of the allies during 1943 at one of the bleakest points in World War II. The allied forces were welcomed by the Sicilians who had been severely oppressed by the Italian dictator Mussolini, and Sicily served as a perfect base of operations for the Allied campaign through Italy.

Augusta Bay was also the location of one of the more significant events of VICKSBURG's deployment. On New Year's morning, at approximately 0300, a gale bombarded the port of Augusta Bay with winds that exceeded 60kts. While in a protected harbor, the winds actually funnelled and applied a massive force upon every ship within the harbor. The actions of VICKSBURG's crew that night were instrumental in keeping the ship safe in an incredibly harrowing situation. For their actions in going above and beyond and ultimately saving the ship, BMC Rodriguez was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal and BM2 Smith and BM2 James were awarded Navy Achievement Medals. As day broke on 01 January 2014 - due to the exemplary actions of the crew - VICKSBURG remained one of the only ships in the entire bay that remained pier side. Almost every other ship in a 30 mile radius had been forced to light off their engines and anchor out in the bay.

