

**Presence,  
Power Projection  
and Sea Control**

**The RAN in the Gulf  
1990-2009**

Edited by John Mortimer and  
David Stevens



SEA POWER CENTRE - AUSTRALIA



PRESENCE,  
POWER PROJECTION  
AND SEA CONTROL  
THE RAN IN THE GULF  
1990-2009

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# PRESENCE, POWER PROJECTION AND SEA CONTROL THE RAN IN THE GULF 1990-2009

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Edited by  
John Mortimer and David Stevens  
Sea Power Centre – Australia

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- to manage the development of RAN doctrine and facilitate its incorporation into ADF joint doctrine
- to contribute to regional engagement
- within the higher Defence organisation, contribute to the development of maritime strategic concepts and strategic and operational level doctrine, and facilitate informed force structure decisions
- to preserve, develop, and promote Australian naval history.

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## Acknowledgements

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This book properly began with a seminar held by the Sea Power Centre - Australia (SPC-A) at Williams Hall, RAAF Base Fairbairn, in November 2003. All those who contributed to the success of that event are particularly thanked for their efforts. At the time it seemed that Australian naval operations directly connected with Iraq might soon be coming to a close, but with the situation remaining unstable they were instead to continue for another five years. As the publication of the seminar proceedings was thereafter unavoidably delayed, it was decided to include in Part IX of this version some additional material that rounds out the narrative and brings the story up to date. The Australian Naval Institute is gratefully acknowledged for granting permission to reproduce Chapters 5, 16, 28 and 29 from articles originally published in its journal. Likewise, Chapters 30 and 31 first appeared in the 2005 and 2006 editions of *Australia's Navy*.

Throughout this book, rank and other details of individuals mentioned reflect those in effect at the time the papers were written or presented.

## Glossary

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**Operation BASTILLE** - The pre-deployment of Australian Defence Force assets to the Middle East area of operations in support of potential future operations (2003).

**Operation CATALYST** - The Australian Defence Force contribution to the United States-led coalition for stabilisation and recovery operations in Iraq (2003-2009).

**Operation DAMASK** - The Australian Defence Force contribution to United Nations sanctions against Iraq, including the United States-led Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM (the First Gulf War) (1990-2001).

**Operation FALCONER** - The Australian Defence Force contribution to the United States-led operation against Iraq (2003).

**Operation RELEX** - The conduct of air and surface ship patrols across Australia's northern approaches to deter unauthorised boat arrivals (2001).

**Operation SLIPPER** - The Australian Defence Force contribution to the United States-led operation against international terrorism and the multinational Maritime Interception Force in the Persian Gulf (2001-ongoing).

## Abbreviations

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AAP	Australian Associated Press
AAW	Anti-Air Warfare
AAWC	Anti-Air Warfare Commander
ABOT	Al Basrah Oil Terminal
ACOPS	Assistant Chief of Defence Force Operations
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AEW&C	Airborne Early Warning and Control
AO	Area of Operations
ASJIC	Australian Joint Intelligence Centre
ASMD	Anti-Ship Missile Defence
ASNHQ	Australian National Headquarters
AST	Australian Theatre
ASW	Anti-Submarine Warfare
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BF	Battle Force
CAG	Central Arabian Gulf
CAP	Combat Air Patrol
CBR	Chemical, Biological and Radiological
CDF	Chief of the Defence Force
CDSC	Combat Data System Centre
CDT 3	Clearance Diving Team 3
CENTCOM	US Central Command
CINCPAC	Commander-in-Chief US Pacific Command
CIWS	Close-In-Weapons Systems
CO	Commanding Officer
COI	Contact of Interest
COMAST	Commander Australian Theatre
COMFLOT	Commodore Flotillas

COMAUSNAVAIRGRP	Commander Australian Naval Air Group
COMUSNAVCENT	Commander US Navy Central Command
CONOPS	Concept of Operations
COWAN	Coalition Wide Area Network
CPOCD	Chief Petty Officer Clearance Diver
CSAR	Combat Search and Rescue
CTF	Commander Task Force
CTG	Commander Task Group
CVBG	Carrier Battle Group
CVOA	Carrier Operating Area
C2	Command and Control
DC	Damage Control
DCO	Defence Community Organisation
DESRON 50	Destroyer Squadron 50
DDG	Guided Missile Destroyer
DIO	Defence Intelligence Organisation
DNOP	Director of Naval Officers' Postings
DRN	Defence Restricted Network
DSTO	Defence Science and Technology Organisation
EAXA	East Australia Exercise Area
EECD	Exercise Engineering Casualty Drill
EMCAP	Electromagnetic Capability
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
EOSS	Electro Optical Surveillance System
ESM	Electronic Support Measures
EU	European Union
EW	Electronic Warfare
FFG	Guided Missile Frigate
FFH	Helicopter Capable Frigate
FIMA	Fleet Intermediate Maintenance Activity
FLIR	Forward Looking Infra-Red

FOST	Flag Officer Sea Training
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GCCS-M	Global Command and Control System - Maritime
GPS	Global Positioning System
GOO	Gulf of Oman
GOPLATS	Gas and Oil Platforms
HCS	Helicopter Control Station
HF	High Frequency
HMAS	Her Majesty's Australian Ship
HQADF	Headquarters Australian Defence Force
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IAF	Iraqi Air Force
IFF	Identification Friend or Foe
INMARSAT	International Maritime Satellite
IRGCN	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy
JCSS	Joint Command Support System
JMG	Joint Movement Group
JOTS	Joint Operational Tactical System
KAA	Khawr Abd Allah waterway
KAAOT	Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal
LAAWC	Local Anti-Air Warfare Coordinator
LE DET	Law Enforcement Detachment
LPA	Large Amphibious Transport
LPD	Amphibious Transport Dock
LPH	Amphibious Transport Helicopter
LSE	Logistic Support Element
MABOT	Mina Al Bakr Oil Terminal
MCAUST	Maritime Commander Australia
MCE	Military Correctional Establishment
MCM	Mine Countermeasures
MDA	Mine Danger Area



MEAO	Middle East Area of Operations
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
METOC	Meteorological Officer
MFU	Maritime Fleet Unit
MHQ	Maritime Headquarters
MIF	Maritime Interception Force
MIO	Maritime Interception Operations
MNNF	Multinational Naval Force
MOPP	Mission Orientated Protective Posture
MSO	Maritime Security Operations
NAG	Northern Arabian Gulf
NAPS	Nerve Agent Pre-action Tablets
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NAVCENT	US Naval Forces Central Command
NBC	Nuclear, Biological and Chemical
NCB	Non-Compliant Boarding
NCDS	Naval Combat Data System
NCW	Network Centric Warfare
NGS	Naval Gunfire Support
OIC	Officer in Charge
OLOC	Operational Level of Capability
OPCON	Operational Control
OPORDER	Operational Order
OPSO	Operations Officer
OPSUMS	Operational Summaries
ORE	Operational Readiness Evaluation
PAC	Pre-Action Calibration
PASSEX	Passage Exercise
PCRf	Primary Casualty Receiving Facility
PO	Petty Officer
PSI	Proliferation Security Initiative

POW	Prisoner of War
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAM	Radar Absorbent Material
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RAS	Replenishment at Sea
RFA	Royal Fleet Auxillary
RHIB	Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat
RIMPAC	Rim of the Pacific (Exercise)
RN	Royal Navy
RNLN	Royal Netherlands Navy
ROE	Rules of Engagement
SAA	Shatt Al Arab
SAG	Southern Arabian Gulf
SASR	Special Air Service Regiment
SATCOM	Satellite Communications
SIPRNET	Secret Internet Protocol Network
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
SM1	Standard Missile 1
SN	Stores Naval
SOP	Standing Operating Procedures
SSA	Stevedore Services of America
TACCO	Flight Tactical Coordinator
TAOC	Tactical Air Operations Centre
TGMSE	Task Group Medical Support Element
TLAM	Tomahawk Land Attack Missile
TMSS	Total Mine Simulation System
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAV	Uninhabited Aerial Vehicle
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

UNMOVIC	United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
URDEF	Urgent Defect
USA	United States of America
USAF	United States Air Force
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USN	United States Navy
USS	United States Ship
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction
XO	Executive Officer

# INTRODUCTION

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# INTRODUCTION

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From 1990 until 2009 the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) operated almost continually in the Middle East region. This commitment, involving a wide range of tasks, became one of the longest and most complex ongoing operations ever undertaken by the Australian Defence Force (ADF). At the time of writing it had involved two conventional wars (three if counting the 'war' on terrorism), a wide variety of threats, thousands of personnel and a large portion of the Navy's major fleet units. Despite the scale and importance of the operations conducted, recognition of this extended campaign has received relatively scant media coverage and even less academic analysis.

The text for Parts I-VIII of this volume has been largely developed from papers presented at a seminar organised by the Sea Power Centre - Australia at RAAF Base Fairbairn in November 2003. Part IX has been assembled from subsequent publications. The authors represent a broad spectrum of experience of the policy, planning and operational processes. They include officers who were task group commanders, commanding officers of ships and other units, as well as representatives from the major sectoral interests, such as aviation, clearance diving, legal, logistic, medical and pastoral. As such, this collection represents a wealth of first hand knowledge and highlights a considerable range of lessons learned. Comments are offered on a diverse range of subjects and include both the positive and negative aspects of the experience. Yet throughout, one of the clearest issues to emerge is the overall professionalism of our people and their superb operational performance.

Beginning in August 1990, when a United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) first imposed trade sanctions on Iraq in response to its armed invasion of Kuwait, a multinational naval force conducted one of the most complex maritime enforcement operations in history. The maritime embargo could not force Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, to comply with the directions of the UN Security Council, but it served as a continuing demonstration of international resolve and a highly visible deterrent to any Iraqi attempt to widen the crisis. Equally important in the context of building up what was the first post-Cold War military coalition, the use of warships in the operation allowed individual nations to make a finely tuned contribution. A contribution moreover, that could be matched to changing objectives and varying national interests without involving the inherent complications of a ground force commitment.

The United States (US) Navy ran the overall campaign, but throughout the embargo's evolution, the Australian Navy played a major partnership role. Under the codename Operation DAMASK, Australia initially provided a three-ship task group. The despatch of the two guided missile frigates (FFGs), HMAS *Adelaide* and HMAS *Darwin*, and replenishment ship HMAS *Success* with just 72 hours notice was a perfect demonstration of the readiness, flexibility, reach and responsiveness of maritime forces.

Despite an initial degree of uncertainty over employment, the Australian task group commander (CTG), Commodore Don Chalmers, RAN, was able to build on a common doctrine and many years of combined exercises, and consequently the task group found it relatively easy to operate within an ad hoc coalition. The embargo was effective, but sanctions alone were insufficient to bring about an acceptable diplomatic solution, and Australian warships later provided escort and logistics support during Operation DESERT STORM, the successful combat operations to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Notwithstanding Kuwait's liberation in late February 1991, maritime patrols aimed at ensuring Iraq's compliance with UN sanctions continued, and for the next decade Australia maintained a regular, though not uninterrupted, single-ship presence with the multinational Maritime Interception Force (MIF) in either the Persian (Arabian) Gulf or the Red Sea.<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, the manner in which the MIF conducted interceptions and boardings changed markedly, but Australian sailors proved highly adaptable and ever ready to innovate. The frigate HMAS *Anzac*, for example, began the tenth and last DAMASK deployment in mid-2001 and was instrumental in bringing about a more aggressive approach to coalition interception operations. Her skilled boarding parties demonstrated the advantages of a close blockade in Iraqi coastal waters and, over the course of *Anzac's* deployment, the MIF's success rate against illegal traders increased from just 20 per cent to more than 80 per cent.

Changes in the international security situation following the dramatic events of 11 September 2001 resulted in Australia again increasing its contribution in the Middle East. As part of Operation SLIPPER, another multi-ship task group arrived in the Gulf in December 2001 and thereafter two or three ships were maintained by regular rotation until mid-2003. With US Navy forces also needing to perform new tasks related to operations in Afghanistan, command of the MIF passed routinely to the Australian naval task group commander. It was a unique combined operational responsibility, and the successful results achieved in dealing with a very dynamic situation while facing a range of asymmetric and conventional threats did much to enhance Australia's international standing.

Despite innovative tactics by the smugglers, including the use of ever more elaborate means to obstruct boarding parties, the MIF maintained the initiative and ensured that the illegal trade out of Iraq remained unprofitable. Taking place at a distance and out of sight, these activities seldom appeared in Australian news reports but, by denying Saddam Hussein the ability to re-equip or effectively train his military, were nonetheless essential to the military campaign which eventually followed. Moreover, by maintaining a sustained presence within Iraqi territorial waters successive Australian commanders built up valuable skills within the force and a detailed picture of local military and civil activities. Effective exploitation of this knowledge advantage was the most significant feature of the Australian Navy's contribution throughout this period.

By early 2003 the Australian task group had again grown to three ships and on 18 March it transitioned to Operation FALCONER and the conduct of combat operations to remove the Hussein regime. The CTG at this stage was Captain Peter Jones, AM, RAN and also under his tactical command were ships from the US Navy, US Coast Guard, Royal Navy and Poland. The Hussein regime rather than the Iraqi people was the coalition's target, and the primary naval task in the northern Gulf was to reopen the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr to allow the entry of humanitarian aid as quickly as possible. This task also meant supporting the British Royal Marines in their air and land assault on the Al Faw peninsula and ensuring that the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) waterway remained clear of enemy forces. Each Australian ship in the force had an essential part to play: the amphibious transport HMAS *Kanimbla* acted as a command platform and mother ship for coalition patrol craft and boarding parties; *Anzac* provided highly responsive naval gunfire support; and *Darwin* first acted as scene of action commander during the dhow exodus from the KAA, then offered surface and anti-air protection to high value units. The capture of three Iraqi minelaying tugs, a suicide boat and a variety of hidden weapons caches clearly illustrated the potential threat, but their rapid discovery and neutralisation also demonstrated just how completely the coalition had established sea control. Merely ten days into the campaign, the first humanitarian assistance cargo arrived at Umm Qasr, a testament to the quality of the pre-war planning and the professionalism of the forces involved.

Despite their rapid and unquestioned success, coalition naval operations in the Gulf were far from over. Upon completion of hostilities Australia's warships transitioned seamlessly to working with the new Iraqi regime and on 16 July 2003 switched to Operation CATALYST - Australia's commitment to multinational force efforts to develop a secure and stable environment in postwar Iraq. Over the next six years the RAN separately rotated another 15 frigates through the region for periods of up to six months. Still heavily involved in interception operations, the crews of the deployed ships continued to conduct routine boarding operations, resulting in several discoveries of cash, weapons, hidden tanks of oil and other contraband goods. Together with the more general need to keep watch on all maritime traffic entering and leaving the country, these tasks required a ship's company to remain at a high state of alert, maintaining constant visual and electronic surveillance in conditions ranging from extreme heat in summer through to extreme winter cold.

The most important task, however, was to provide around-the-clock protection for the infrastructure vital to Iraq's economic recovery, and in particular the two oil terminals, Khawr Al Amaya (KAAOT) and Al Basrah (ABOT), located about 15 kilometres south of Al Faw. These are fed via an underwater pipeline from a pumping station on the peninsula's tip. Although the strategic importance of keeping the oil flowing was clear to the international community, representing as it does some 85 percent of Iraq's gross domestic product, it was just as well understood by those opposed to the new order. Even though unsuccessful, a coordinated sea-borne attack by insurgents on 24



April 2004 led to a two-day shut down of the facilities and a direct cost to Iraq of some US\$28 million. Even more significant to world markets, the attack caused the price of oil to spike, resulting in a further US\$6 billion loss to the global economy. During the attack the frigate HMAS *Stuart* acted as the maritime security operations commander. Her command team coordinated the response and managed the subsequent rescue and evacuation operations.

In addition to the deployment of major fleet units to the Gulf, Australian naval personnel have also contributed to the events surrounding Iraq in other ways. Clearance Diving Team 3 was instrumental in securing port facilities in 1991 and again in March 2003. Team members also performed a variety of ordnance disposal tasks in the surrounding region, while other clearance divers routinely deployed on individual ships. In late 2004 the RAN members of the Iraqi Coastal Defence Training Team returned to Australia following a lengthy deployment in which they were engaged in training personnel of the new Iraqi Navy. Other personnel have fulfilled administrative and command roles within the wider ADF presence. Most significant, have been the Australian naval officers appointed on rotation to command all coalition maritime operations in the northern part of the Gulf. The first of these officers, Commodore Steve Gilmore, CSC, RAN, became Commander of Combined Task Force (CTF) 158 in April 2005. In addition to his responsibilities for Maritime Security Operations (MSO), Commodore Gilmore became responsible for the integration of Iraqi maritime forces into the task force mission, and his staff developed and promulgated the Iraqi Transition Roadmap; a comprehensive plan for the preparation, training and certification of the Iraqi Navy.

Subsequent rotations of ships and commanders built on this foundation, with the result that on 30 April 2009 the Iraqi Navy assumed control of KAAOT at a ceremony held aboard the terminal. Although American and British forces continued to provide training and assistance in support of future security transfers, the Australian maritime contribution in Iraqi waters had already ended. With the expiration of UNSCR 1790, which legally facilitated the continued presence of multinational forces in Iraq, HMAS *Parramatta*, departed the KAAOT sectors at 0900 on 31 December 2008. She thereafter joined CTF 152, operating throughout the length of the Gulf's international waters. Established in 2004, CTF 152 has responsibility for MSO – with an emphasis on disrupting the smuggling of narcotics, weapons, oil, alcohol and people – Theatre Security Cooperation (TSC) activities with regional partners, and crisis response development. Following *Parramatta* went the last Australian CTF 158 Command Group, headed by Commodore Bruce Kafer, AM, CSC, RAN, which moved from accommodation on KAAOT to Bahrain, and there took up command duties with CTF 152.

The lessons of almost two decades of maritime operations in the Gulf are many and varied. Perhaps the most important for Australian defence planners is the utility and flexibility of naval forces, and in particular the surface combatant force. These ships, which were acquired essentially for the defence of Australia, have demonstrated their

ability to project power and influence some six to eight thousand miles from base, without requiring a significant personnel presence or logistics footprint on foreign soil. They have performed a range of tasks extending from peacetime surveillance, patrol and boarding operations, to combat operations involving air, surface, mine and asymmetric threats. Throughout their deployments, Australian officers and sailors have routinely demonstrated their ability to adapt to shifting roles and tactics to comply with the evolving strategic situation. Critical to the RAN's success and confidence has been the possession of effective self-defence measures.

The maritime operational environment remains constantly changing, and many of the activities that were foreign to the RAN twenty years ago have since become common practice. Operation CATALYST ended on 31 July 2009, but the Gulf remains a dangerous and unpredictable area. International boundaries are disputed, threats from extremists continue and there is an ever-present requirement for diplomacy and good judgement. Historically, the Middle East has been of great strategic interest to Australia and should the Australian Government still desire a naval presence, then the experience contained with these pages indicates that the men, women and ships of the RAN will continue to meet the highest of professional expectations.

## Notes

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- 1 The terms 'Arabian' and 'Persian' Gulf are used interchangeably throughout this publication, without implied 'ownership' of Gulf waters.



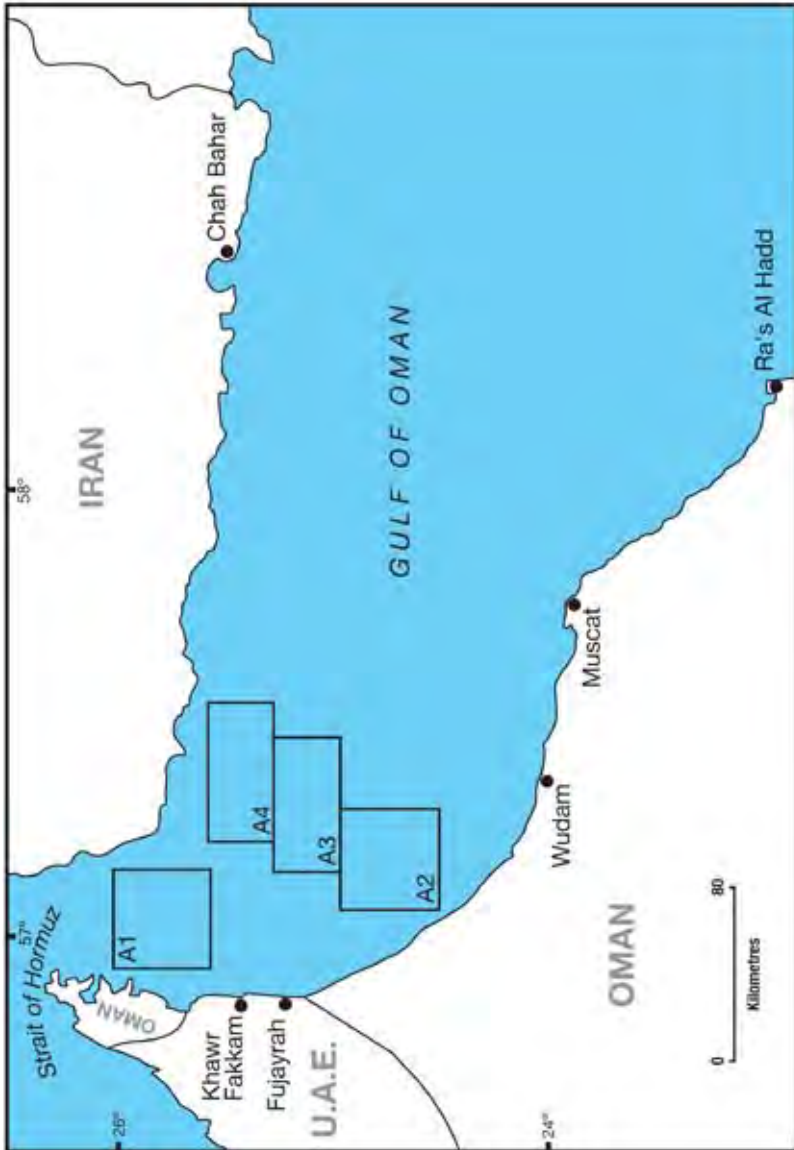
*Participants at the SPC-A's Gulf Seminar, November 2003*

# MAPS

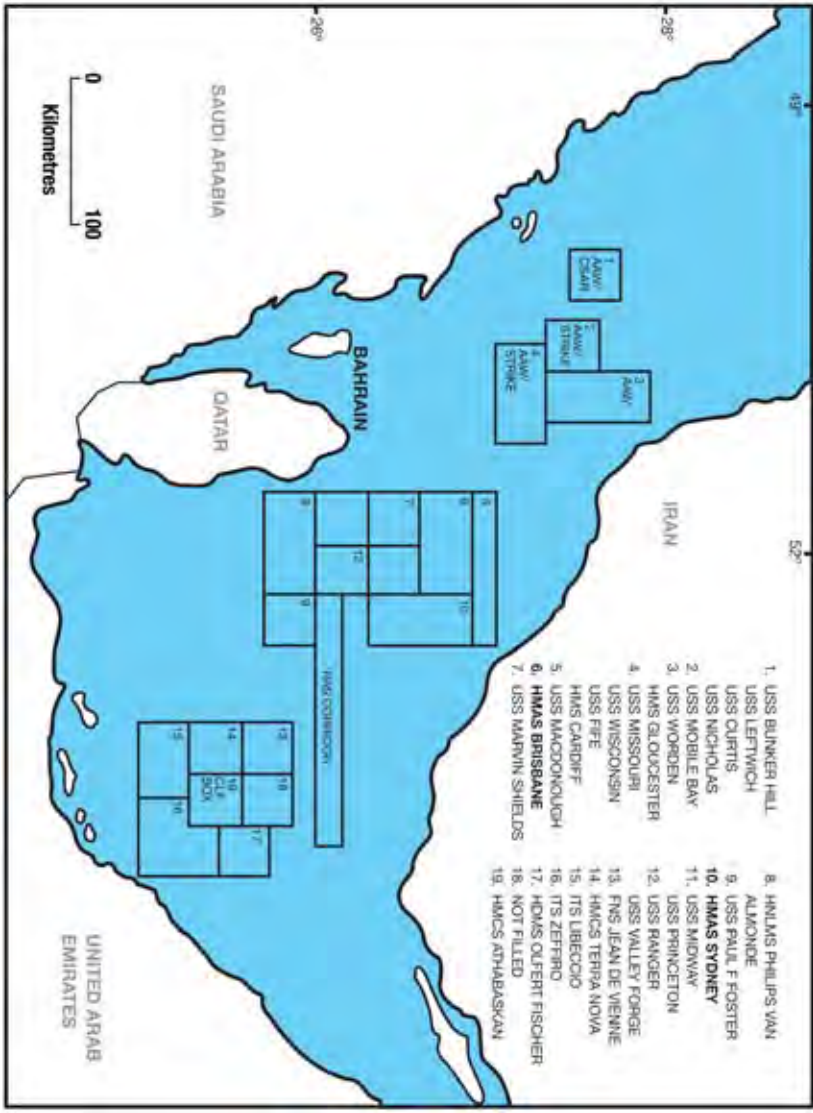
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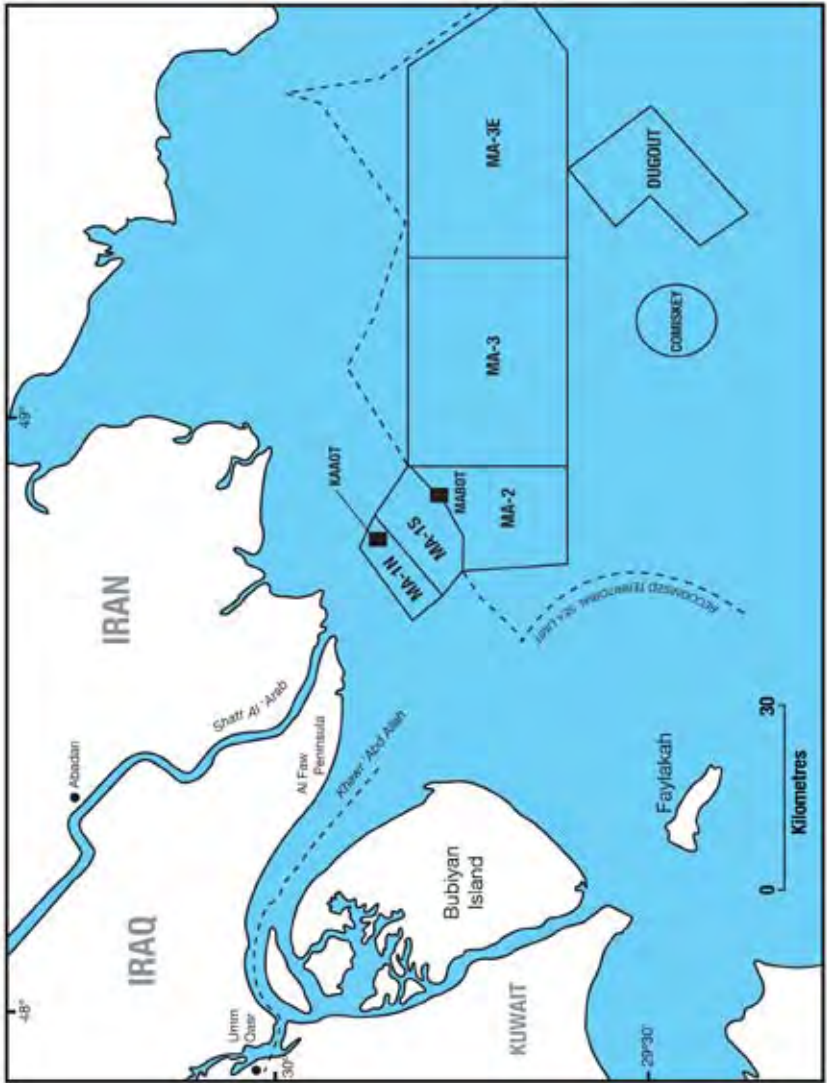
Map 1 - The Middle East



Map 2 - Operational areas in the Gulf of Oman, 1990

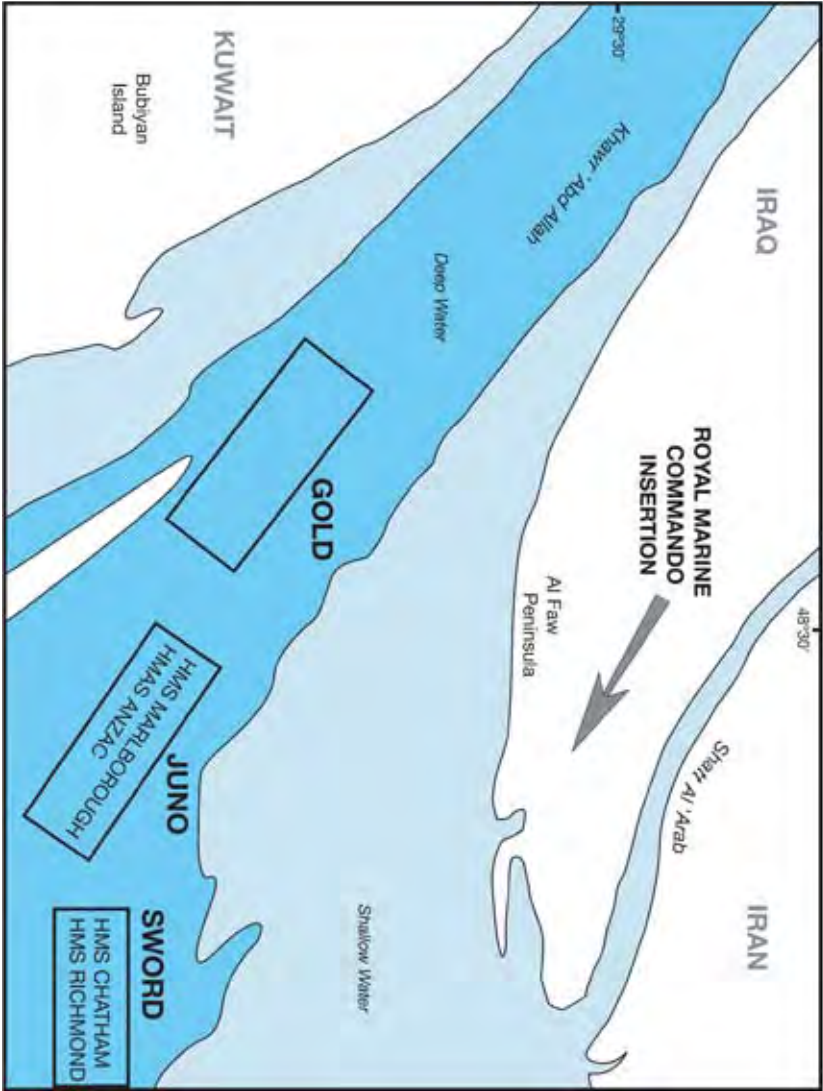


Map 3 - Gulf Dispositions, 17 January 1991



Map 4 - North Arabian Gulf operating areas, 2002-03





Map 5 - Five Support during the Al Faw operation, March 2003

**PART I:  
STRATEGIC  
AND OPERATIONAL  
PLANNING  
1990-2003**

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## Rear Admiral Ken Doolan, AO, RAN (Rtd)

### *Maritime Commander DAMASK I & II*

This paper deals with strategic and operational planning in 1990 and 1991 by the Australian Defence Force (ADF), Navy Office and Maritime Command, from the perspective of the Maritime Commander Australia.<sup>1</sup> Much of the coverage concerns the 11-day period in 1990 during which strategic and operational planning started from blank sheets of paper and ended with the deployment of three warships to a distant area of combat. It was a unique and enormously challenging planning task, probably without precedent in the annals of the RAN.

At the time Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Australian strategic planning for the defence of the nation was based on a concept which was evolving as a consequence of various world events, not the least of which was the end of the Cold War. The gradual but inexorable diminution of the economic and military power of the Soviet Union removed a cornerstone of Australia's strategic outlook which had stood for decades. By 1990, Australian strategic thinking had moved away from its earlier support for the Western Alliance and its opposition to the Soviet Bloc towards an Australian-centric view of the nation's defence. Though this new defence outlook acknowledged the need for elements of the ADF to maintain an ability to participate in combined operations with major allies, it placed greater emphasis on the defence of the nation and its near surrounds. An area deemed to be of direct strategic and military interest to the nation was propounded. This encompassed the archipelagic areas to the north and north-west of the continent and approximate areas of the Pacific Ocean, the island nations therein to the east and north-east.

Of greater significance was the assessment underpinning this new strategic outlook. It postulated that, for the foreseeable future, there would be no credible threat to Australia and that the most likely form of defence emergencies would be 'low-level contingencies'. It was a view of the nation's future defence needs significantly influenced by defence theorists, academics and bureaucrats with no military or combat experience. The impact of this newly evolving strategic doctrine on the ADF differed between the force-in-being and the force being developed. Though it had a deleterious impact on the development of such war fighting equipment as the *Anzac* class frigates, it was sufficiently short-lived to have minimal impact on the Navy's force-in-being. This force had been equipped and trained for the highest levels of conflict. Amongst those in uniform, healthy scepticism about the low-level contingency-based strategic outlook abounded and, because of this, Navy continued to maintain the highest level of operational preparedness commensurate with its war fighting equipment. As a

consequence, when the Gulf crisis erupted onto the world's stage in 1990, Australian warships and their ships' companies were ready to be deployed in harm's way. Most were operationally compatible with American and British warships and the standard of Australian naval personnel and their training was of a high calibre and respected by allies.

It is worth recalling that in 1990, at the height of the low-level contingency mania, the guided missile frigate HMAS *Sydney* was deployed to the United Kingdom (UK), there to undergo an operational effectiveness evaluation by Britain's Flag Office of Sea Training. This and other measures, such as Navy's regular deployment of front-line fleet units to the United States (US) Navy's Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) series of exercises, ensured that the basis for operational planning for the Australian fleet was not compromised. Put simply, it was to be immediately ready to be deployed to an area of conflict, there to perform with full effectiveness to the limit of its capabilities.

This was the strategic and operational environment in which the ADF, the RAN and Australia's Maritime Command commenced strategic and operational planning very soon after Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990. After initial indications that Australia would not become involved, guidance was provided to the ADF that, if an Australian contribution was to be made to the multinational force then being cobbled together, it would most likely be naval. By then contingency planning was well under way, both at a strategic level in Headquarters ADF (HQADF) and the Service offices, and at the operational level at Maritime, Air and Land Headquarters.

The challenges were significant. There was scant knowledge of the potential threat posed by Iraq; the defence force had no experience of operating in the Persian Gulf area; Australia had not planned for full-scale combat operations since the Vietnam War nearly two decades earlier; the tasks any Australian units would have to undertake were speculative; and the logistics and communications aspects of mounting a deployment so far from Australia were, to say the least, daunting.

Strategic planning between the week of the invasion of Kuwait and the Australian Government's decision to deploy a naval task group to the Persian Gulf area was an iterative process involving operational planners at Maritime Headquarters (MHQ), particularly after it became clear that the preference was for a naval contribution to the multinational effort. The strategic planners had to take account of the domestic political dimension of the plan they were developing and its international, diplomatic and resource dimensions. They also had no alternative but to recognise that there was a powerful constituency within the community whose disparate members' only common cause was to prevent any Australian military involvement in removing Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Another of the challenges to be overcome by planners was to meld the increasingly detailed intelligence input into the plan, particularly when it was revised and the assessment of the potential threat posed by Iraqi forces was changed. Moreover, the strategic planners had to consult regularly with Australia's

three environmental operational commanders and ensure that they took account of the views of the Service Chiefs of Staff.

From the perspective of Maritime Command, the political dimension of the strategic plan provided all planners with the most difficulty. This was understandable. Given that the most profound decision that any government can make is to commit the nation to war, it was not surprising that the Australian Government took time to come to a final decision about its reaction to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. It was ironic that it was not the Federal Opposition that argued against Australian involvement. Rather, it was a loose coalition of disparate elements within the Australian community that came together to oppose Australian involvement in support of the multinational effort to remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait. This temporary coalition was both powerful and determined. Defence theorists, convinced of the rectitude of Australian-centric defence doctrine, were not in the least loath to argue for non-involvement. But others were equally vociferous. It was a healthy demonstration of democracy at work. However, central to the support of the views that these people enjoy within the Australian community was the fact that some within Government were either uneasy about Australian military involvement in the developing Gulf crisis or were fundamentally opposed to it.



*Vice Admiral Michael Hudson, Captain Russ Shalders and Rear Admiral Ken Doolan prior to HMA Ships Darwin and Adelaide's departure, 13 August 1990*

The strategic and operational planners had no alternative but to wait for the nation's political processes to work through this conundrum while continuing to prepare for the worst, in the event that the Government finally decided to deploy elements of the ADF to the Gulf crisis. Thanks to sensible cooperation between the strategic and operational planners, particularly between staff officers of the rank of commander and lieutenant commander and their Army and Air Force equivalents, this early strategic and operational planning was undertaken in a very short time and with optimal results. At MHQ, staff officers were given broad guidance and left to get on with the job, seeking advice as required. It proved a successful planning management formula. The operational plan they produced included options for deployment which could be put to Government and addressed the major issues which needed to be canvassed at the time. This early operational plan complemented the evolving strategic plan and was a credit to the professionalism of the staff officers of the ADF. Thus, by 7 August, just five days after the invasion, all that could be done by the operational planners was to continue to refine their work as new information came to hand, and wait for a decision from the Australian Government.

In a telephone call to MHQ early on the morning of Thursday 9 August, the Assistant Chief of Defence Force Operations, Rear Admiral Rod Taylor, advised that there would be no Australian combatant contribution to the maritime force then assembling in the Persian Gulf area. When asked why, the suggestion was that Australian domestic forces opposed to any involvement had sufficient strength to dissuade the Australian Government from becoming involved. Just two hours later, Taylor called back and reversed his earlier advice. Australia was to be involved in the Gulf crisis and its contribution was to be two surface combatants and a support ship. The reasons cited for this apparent change were said to have stemmed from a telephone call between the President of the United States and the Australian Prime Minister. It now seems more likely that the Australian Government had not made a final decision until some time during the forenoon of 9 August. While it appears unlikely, it is not known whether discussions between the Prime Minister and the President were the ultimate determinant of the Australian Government's final stance on this matter.<sup>2</sup>

The impact of the decision on operational planning had two immediate and separate consequences. The first was to remove many of the uncertainties from the planning process and enable confirmation to be forwarded from HQADF that two guided missile frigates could commence deploying to the Persian Gulf area just four days later (on Monday 13 August), with a support ship departing the following day. The second consequence was to restrict any overt preparatory activity in support of the deployment until the forenoon of 10 August, after the Prime Minister had announced the Government's decision. This was an unwanted and stupid constraint, but one which Maritime Command took in its stride.

A formal warning order of the deployment was sent by the Chief of the Defence Force to MHQ late on the evening of Thursday 9 August and an operation order (OPORDER) for Operation DAMASK was received the following day. That there were no surprises in either document was testimony to the effective cooperation between the strategic and operation planners.

From 10 August, just eight days after the invasion of Kuwait, the focus of operational planning divided into three parts. The first was to ensure that plans for the departure of deploying units early the following week took account of all relevant factors. The second was to further develop the rigorous operational workup plan to which the deploying fleet units were to be subjected as they transited towards the Persian Gulf. The third, and most difficult, was to resolve the tasks that the deploying warships were to undertake, the area in which they were to operate, and the framework for operational cooperation with the units of the other nations deployed in the multinational force then assembling.

Though there were some problems associated with the departure of the warships and the in-transit workup, the overall success of these events was testament to the thoroughness and professionalism of the operational planning staff. They had been given the task of getting on with the job and with knowing their decisions carried the imprimatur of the Maritime Commander. Command by negotiation has its risks, but in these circumstances it was absolutely essential to a successful outcome.

As the deploying fleet units crossed the Indian Ocean, strategic planners from HQADF and Navy Office continued to tease out the answers to questions about the employment of Australian warships on their arrival in the Persian Gulf area. It was from this time onwards that cooperation between strategic planners and operational planners came under stress. The reason was entirely predictable. Its source was the difficulty which arises when strategic leaders and planners intrude into matters which operational leaders and planners regard as being their province. Put bluntly, strategic and operational plans must be complementary, and this inevitably leads to overlapping areas and involvement of interest. The theory that strategic leaders and planners will authorise certain actions and then leave it to operational planners and leaders to get on with what was authorised is just that – a theory. The reality is the strategic leaders and planners will seldom, if ever, feel constrained in meddling in operational matters. They, in turn, are driven by the insatiable demands of politicians and bureaucrats, few, if any, of whom have the slightest conception of the complications of fighting a war or of the rationale for the planning and execution of any military campaign to be compartmentalised into strategic and operational components.

During the latter parts of the Gulf crisis and the early days of the 1991 Gulf War, the relationship between the operational level of command and some elements of the strategic level of command were strained. This may have resulted from demands from the political and bureaucratic establishments, or it may have had its roots in



the desire of senior leadership to be more closely involved in the prosecution of the war. At Maritime Command the frustration caused by what was most often perceived as unwarranted interference in the conduct of operations was exacerbated by the unnecessarily complex command and control arrangements which were implemented to support the deployed Australian force.<sup>3</sup>

In summary, strategic and operational planning for the 1990-91 Gulf crisis and Gulf War was undertaken professionally and expeditiously by the ADF. The translation of the resultant strategic and operational plans into effective operations as part of a multinational coalition charged with forcing Iraq to retreat from Kuwait was equally successful. In all of this, the fundamental principles of planning taught at the various Australian defence staff colleges were of immense importance and were not found wanting.

From a strategic and operational planning point of view, the crux of the matter is that Australia was able to provide naval combatants for the Gulf crisis and Gulf War only because fleet units were capable of being deployed to prospective high intensity conflict with confidence in their ability to take the fight to the enemy and to defend themselves and win. It would be the most abject folly for the ADF to ever again flirt with the ideas of those who contend that a force equipped and trained primarily for low-level contingencies could be effective.

## Notes

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- 1 For additional comments by Rear Admiral Doolan on the Gulf War, especially on command and control, see 'The Gulf Challenge', in D Stevens (ed), *Maritime Power in the 20th Century - The Australian Experience*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1998, chap. 13.
- 2 The political circumstances are discussed in Murray Goot and Rodney Tiffen, *Australia's Gulf War*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1992.
- 3 In August 1990, strategic command of the ADF was directly under the Chief of the Defence Force through the ADFHQ (Canberra), although the Chief of Naval Staff also exercised certain aspects of the Navy's strategic level command through Navy Office (Canberra) operational command was exercised by MHQ (Potts Point Sydney).

### Vice Admiral Rob Walls, AO, RAN (Rtd)

*Director General Naval Strategic Policy and Plans  
DAMASK I & II*

I would like to briefly outline some of the early planning that occurred in the lead-up to the 1990-91 Gulf War, and some of the background from the Canberra level. I will concentrate on two areas: command and control and the adoption of 'loose association', and 'rules of engagement' (ROE). The essential nature of these, of course, I support, and I would like to offer you some explanation of how they came about.

In August 1990 I was the Director General Naval Policy and Plans, a commodore working for Vice Admiral Hudson as the Chief of Naval Staff, when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. I thought the strategic-level liaison staff work and liaison that went on in and from Canberra at the time was excellent. We all knew one another, and Vice Admiral Hudson provided strong and direct leadership and was robust in the way that he participated in the committee discussions. The strategic planning and coordination machine that is now in place in government departments – in Defence in the executive levels – was non-existent then. The process was very much driven and depended upon individuals' personalities, their perceptions, and the strength of these. Vice Admiral Hudson made it clear to General Gration, the Chief of Defence Force, and Senator Robert Ray, the Minister for Defence, that he thought it essential that a forward liaison officer was sent to the Gulf region to gather information and report.

I was put in charge of a liaison group of 10 people, with Captain Tim Cox as chief of staff. After an intensive briefing period we arrived at RAAF Fairbairn on a Saturday morning at 0530 to board a Falcon 500 to fly to the Gulf. The aircraft took off at 0600, and both of us promptly went to sleep. Four hours later we landed in Port Hedland, four flying hours later on we landed on Cocos Island then, after a further four hours, we landed in the Maldivian Islands. At that stage I had no idea where we were going, apart from the obvious general area of the Gulf, as it was a confused time and very difficult to obtain diplomatic clearances. The marvellous squadron leader captaining the flight crew said to me: 'I don't know where we are going either but we will negotiate it on the way in!'

The following day we arrived at Muscat in Oman, and landed at a huge airfield, Seeb International. I recall being surprised that there were something like 50 United States Air Force KC 135 tankers there. I called on the British Ambassador and explained the purpose of our mission. At this stage the Australian Embassy in Riyadh had been trying to arrange an appointment with the Sultan ever since the staff heard of our mission

and intentions, but could not get in the front door. The British Ambassador and I were there 10 minutes later. In discussion, the Sultan decided that, given 200 years of British cooperation and since the Australians were actually here – the ‘first foreigners on the scene’ – he would order that doors be opened to us.

You might recall that the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states were very uncertain about access at this stage as refugees were flooding down the Gulf. You could not get a hotel bed unless the Sultan said ‘let him sleep’. I was fortunate because I was given the apartment on top of that huge hotel, the El Bustan. When General Norman Schwarzkopf later took up residence in that penthouse suite he had the nameplate, ‘The Walls Suite’ taken off and put his own on. Fame is fleeting.

From Muscat our liaison team headed up the Gulf to Bahrain, where I met Admiral Hank Mauz, USN, the American Seventh Fleet Commander. He was bringing in what became the Fifth Fleet, Central Command (CENTCOM), and all sorts of other staff. He remarked that a variety of people were arriving in an uncoordinated fashion, but that there was to be a multinational naval conference in Bahrain on about the 8th or 9th of September 1990. There were about 30 states participating and this presented many difficulties: the GCC states were not agreeing amongst themselves; some of the major Arab countries were being difficult; the British wanted to play their traditional role; and the French wanted a major part because of their presidency of the European Union (EU). Sorting out roles, tasks, operating areas, rules of engagement (ROE), command and control, communication and coordination arrangements, and who was to be in charge of what was more than difficult.

At this point I had been given firm and clear direction by Vice Admiral Hudson, General Gratton and the Strategic Command Division in Headquarters Australian Defence Force (HQADF). I also had been given a very clear understanding of the executive level of Government approach by Senator Ray. I have the utmost respect for Senator Ray, because given that information and his very clear direction, it was easy to run a feed-back loop with Canberra. The problem, of course, was that we were communicating with Australia out of a hotel room using a phone system called STU-2: it was illegal and if we were found out, we had no other way of communicating nationally except through a third party/nation. We had a lot of trouble getting the damn thing to work. Normally connections happened about 2.00 am in the morning so that we could talk to Australia and receive almost instant feedback.

Hank Mauz, the US Commander, was very concerned about this conference and rightly so, as the first day was a dogfight. There were Arabs going here, EU going there, British doing this, and the French were ‘in charge’. The ROE that were being put forward by the various groups and factions were obviously going to be quite useless. Most of the foreign visitors wanted to operate in the Gulf. They anticipated that they would be conducting interception operations, but were also conscious that war was coming. Admiral Mauz asked me where Australia wanted to operate; I made the assessment

that the real action was going to be in the North Arabian Sea, because of difficulties attempting interceptions and conducting boardings in the Gulf itself. It is interesting to see the way things have developed in the years since. The North Arabian Sea was agreed as our operating area.

Then we got to the ROE. This was where our arrangement with Canberra excelled – we were able to have interactive discussions frequently. I also took advice from the Americans. I did not have any lawyers, but the US had some very good legal people who were quite proper in the way they conducted themselves in discussing the nature of international law when giving advice to me (one wonders where they are now). I was able to propose to people back in Australia what were ROE. Of course I had seen what the Americans were using, what the British were using, what the French were using and so on, and after discussion with the senior commanders (primarily American), it was evident that we needed to have something that was more robust than any of the others. Fortunately, the Australian High Command, I think I would call it, agreed.

I went to see Admiral Mauz on the evening of the first day of the Bahrain conference and showed him the Australian ROE. He was both amazed and delighted. After lengthy consideration of the US and other nations' ROE and various combinations of them, he broke off for consultation with rear link authorities. On reconvening, the issue essentially was how to engineer discussion in the conference so that the Australian rules were tabled first, and then taken as the benchmark against which all others would be considered. Admiral Mauz's staff cast around for an answer until eventually I said to him: 'The answer is quite simple; you just get me to speak first.' He responded: 'How do you do that?' I replied that speakers could be invited to contribute in alphabetical order: A for Australia.

So I was on first the next morning to put the Australian ROE on the table. There was a hush for a minute or so and then they all called for an adjournment; people rushed out to caucus and huddle and whatever. The conference resumed and after what seemed an incredibly long debate, a way ahead was agreed using the Australian ROE as a baseline against which other nations were able to promulgate theirs.

Now that we had these robust ROE, we had our operating areas, roles, tasks and whatever, the next problem involved how to run the command and control. Clearly there was a mismatch among the different forces and their groupings—the coordination problem was incredibly difficult. One of the things that had been made clear to me in my discussions with people in Canberra was that they did not actually want to go under the operational command of the Americans. We kicked the problem around in our team and with Admiral Mauz and his staff, and then in conjunction with Vice Admiral Hudson. We came up with this idea of a 'loose association' where essentially, in practical terms, the RAN ships would be under the operational command (OPCOM) of the Multinational Intercept Force commander (whoever that was). Thus, our approach ended up as 'give us a task and we will get on with it and make it happen.'

I think we have much for which to thank our high command people. In particular, we have much for which to be grateful to the politicians of the day. I know that Senator Robert Ray worked in conjunction with Senator Gareth Evans and Prime Minister Bob Hawke. That is how the robust ROE were established – and are still apparently in place – and that is where loose association came from. As time progressed, of course, it was no longer necessary to be operating in loose association and different arrangements could be made.

After the multinational naval conference, Commodore Don Chalmers arrived with the task group, HMA Ships *Darwin*, *Adelaide* and *Success*. After I had briefed them and we had been through the operational and tactical side, life in the region and a multitude of other details, my team left them to get on with their task. The interception operations began and, needless to say, they happened at the top end of the North Arabian Gulf.

Ashore was where the logistics support team came into place. Commander Boyd Robinson had been sent up – the logistician on my team was Commander Syd Lemon. The combination of Captain Tim Cox, Commander Lemon, Commander Robinson and others, and with the approval of the Sultan of Oman, ensured that things clicked into place.



*HMA Ships Darwin, Success and Adelaide deploy to the Gulf, August 1990*

I would like to conclude by making some observations on the way things have evolved since my initial trip to the Persian Gulf. I have been particularly impressed by the steadily increasing complexity of change and the difficulties of implementing this, that Navy has lived with in the years between 1990 and 2003. Performance has obviously been increasingly more effective and more efficient. It seems that the learning curve and the demand curve have kept going up!

Further, the diversity of concurrent operations seems to be placing increasing stresses and strains on personnel. If I cast my mind back (I left the defence force in 1997), it seems that the major improvements, and yet at the same time the major stresses, have occurred since. I am suggesting there are marvellous ongoing achievements evident today, but I also detect warning signs. The intellectual and professional development of the Navy today is extremely impressive. It is obviously a better one than it was when the wind blew for me.



*Vice Admiral Chris Ritchie speaks at the SPC-A Gulf Seminar, November 2003*

## Three

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### Vice Admiral Chris Ritchie, AO, RAN

*Commanding Officer HMAS Brisbane DAMASK II;  
Commander Australian Theatre SLIPPER One & Two*

In early August 2001 I assumed command of the Australian Theatre (COMAST) from Air Vice Marshal Bob Treloar and, shortly after, became involved in planning for what became known as Operation SLIPPER.

An essential difference between 1990 and where we started in 2001 had been the establishment of Headquarters Australian Theatre (HQASt). This command was set up in 1996 and was headed by a two-star, supported by a joint staff with a mandate to conduct operational planning for all ADF operations. We had just been through the experience of Timor, and largely, the perception was that we did not use the Australian Theatre in the way in which we had set it up. As soon as something happened we reverted to what we knew best and that was control at the strategic level.

The short honeymoon period at HQAST was shattered at the end of August when MV *Tampa* sailed into Australian history – life was never the same after that. When 11 September 2001 occurred, HQAST and indeed the Navy, was almost totally consumed by what was to become Operation RELEX. Operation RELEX had been put into effect on about the 6th or 7th of September. We had recalled a deployment that was in South-East Asia and sent it, in the first place, to Christmas Island. HMAS *Manoora*, the Amphibious Transport (LPA), was there and it took on board all of those people on MV *Tampa* seeking to immigrate to Australia and set off on a lengthy voyage which finally ended in Nauru. Operation RELEX started out with Commodore Flotillas (COMFLOT), Commodore Jim Stapleton, running RELEX afloat from the LPA. This situation continued for about a month, after which it was decided to run the operation from Darwin.

After 11 September it took a few days for the American machine to get into gear. The only thing that Australia knew about American intentions came from the J5 at Central Command (CENTCOM) in Tampa, Florida. Our contact with the J5 in Florida was initiated through the Pacific Command, the traditional means of maintaining our relationships. Pacific Command facilitated the establishment of an Australian presence in the J5 organisation in Florida and all of the strategic information that flowed came via this route. Initially, very little information came from Washington or down to the operational level from Canberra. There was no other contact, other than contact initiated at the operational level. That was to be an enduring theme over the next three months of planning and the deployment of forces. This was not the traditional American way of doing business.



Control was very much exercised between Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and General Tommy Franks in Florida. The normal machinery in the Pentagon did not actually play a great part in planning the American campaign.

The ADF had a liaison officer in Kuwait, an Army officer, who gave us some further insight into American planning and intentions. In addition, the ADF had the Logistic Support Element (LSE) in Bahrain which had been there, off and on, for the previous ten years, and a liaison officer in the Fifth Fleet who was the CENTCOM Maritime Component Commander, resident in Bahrain.

We sought, and obtained, permission for a liaison officer from COMAST at the O6 level – the first one was an Army colonel – to be placed into CENTCOM, together with a small staff. This contingent was accommodated in a trailer park out in the car park. Gradually the trailer park built up and there were British, Canadians, New Zealanders and everybody you could think of in the same place. We also sought to have a CDF representative – a representative from the strategic level – in the Pentagon, but this was not agreed.

The initial indications that were coming from the United States were that, as far as the Navy was concerned, escort or Maritime Interception Force (MIF) participants were required. There was also some suggestion at the start that we may be required to undertake this task in the Malacca Strait – a requirement that did not eventuate.

There was also a demand for special forces, for air-to-air refuelling, and then for something that we actually thought was not serious at the start – for F/A-18s to go to Diego Garcia. That, in fact, did eventuate and there was a good reason for this. It is interesting when you look at the sorts of things that were asked for: frigates, air-to-air refuelling, special forces, and you ask: ‘where did that come from?’ It is not clear that the request originated from a specific United States need. It appears to have been generated from a perception that, whenever the United States asked for anything, we have always said we can provide frigates, special forces and air-to-air refuelling, and this has created an expectation in the Pentagon that it is these types of forces that Australia can provide. We do not seem to have been able to impress in the minds of the Americans the sorts of forces that we have that can be employed for particular tasks.

By this time in Canberra the Strategic Command Group had been established. It comprised the CDF, the Service chiefs and senior civilian advisers, including the Secretary, Deputy Secretary Strategy and the Director of the Defence Intelligence Organisation. The Strategic Command Group was called upon to advise CDF on what he might offer to the Federal Government as potential Australian contributions. The initial discussion was about replacing HMAS *Anzac* which was already in the Persian Gulf. She was conducting a MIF rotation and her crew had established something of a reputation as anti-oil smugglers supreme.

Another important factor in our force composition for Operation SLIPPER, was that the CDF was quite convinced we ought to start to exercise the LPAs in a command role. The CDF raised the notion of using an LPA as a floating Australian command base for Operation SLIPPER for all of our deployed forces. He recognised that it would provide a form of independence as a base for Australian forces. This included the notion that if the whole situation became difficult ashore, the LPA would provide a venue for independent respite.

In relation to committing naval forces, we knew that we had to consider replacing *Anzac* as we had made this undertaking to the Americans. In discussing the deployment of an LPA as a command and control platform, the Chief of Navy considered that it needed to be escorted, and hence another frigate would have to be deployed for this task. Consequently, ships were deployed for two distinctly different purposes. The first frigate was to replace *Anzac* on MIF operations. The LPA was to provide an Australian command and control platform and it could perform other lift tasks, if requested, and the second frigate would escort the LPA. We only offered one frigate to the coalition, as the LPA and the second frigate were to remain under national control. That was the idea that came from the strategic level. It was quite strongly opposed at the operational level because we did not see it as practical, nor did we see that the role being proposed was, in fact, a real role.

This was the sort of thinking in both Canberra and Sydney that was being passed to CENTCOM. At this time the process of actually committing Australian forces became quite tortuous. At the operational level, planning could only progress so far, and eventually the Americans were advised that an approach to request a commitment of Australian forces needed to be made at the political level.

A call was made from President Bush to Prime Minister Howard and, after that, everything was fine. The Prime Minister said he knew what the Americans wanted and he felt able to announce to the Australian people what it was that we would do. Things then started to happen in terms of committing forces.

At the same time the Maritime Commander, Rear Admiral Geoff Smith, visited the Fifth Fleet.<sup>1</sup> The Commander Fifth Fleet (also Commander US Naval Forces Central Command) at this time was Vice Admiral Charles Moore Jr, USN. Admiral Moore had been a one-star battle group commander a couple of years previously in the Pacific and he was quite well known to many of us in Australia, and we regarded him as a friend in court. Geoff Smith saw Admiral Moore and came away with a request for Australia to commit the whole of its naval force, two frigates and an LPA, to the MIF with a promise of some input to the tactical command of that force. This did not actually fit the original role that was envisaged by CDF and there was initially considerable resistance to it. But eventually the realisation grew in the Australian Theatre, Maritime Command, and at the strategic level, that, unless we placed our troops under the operational control of the United States, sustainability, force protection, integration and port availability would be very difficult.

The strategic level initially had the notion that we would have an independent force running around in the Middle East. At the operational level we doubted that this would be possible. Of interest, back in 1991 the British did that: they had ships that were there and at times offered to the coalition, at other times taken away. They still do it, and did so during the period we refer to as Operation SLIPPER.

The ships sailed and arrived in the area of operations (AO) before we finally accepted their task. By the time the ships' task was finally agreed, it was clear to us that the command and control of Australian forces had to be based ashore. It could not have been based on an LPA, as it had to be proximate to where the American command was being exercised.

We accepted Bahrain as the most suitable port for logistic support because of its proximity to the command of Fifth Fleet, and the base from which the United States ran their logistics support. We had had many years of familiarising and sustaining ourselves from Bahrain. The basing for the non-naval elements of the Australian force was much more problematic. The Chief of the Air Force was despatched to find a place to base those forces and it took some considerable time before that was sorted out.



*HMAS Kanimbla intercepts a merchant vessel, February 2002 (RAN)*

Another important issue was the role of the Australian National Commander in the Middle East. He was Brigadier Ken Gillespie, an Army one-star, personally selected by the CDF, but he worked to the COMAST. We initially sent him with a staff to Tampa, and then moved him forward to Kuwait when CENTCOM moved most of its operational staff to Kuwait. The Australian National Commander had no operational command authority. He was there to keep Australia informed of planning at the operational level and he was there to play the Red Card when somebody wanted to commit an Australian force to do something that he thought the Australian Government was likely to refuse. That was his primary role.

Operational command was exercised by COMAST back in Sydney, utilising the component commanders. Operational control was given to United States forces—in the Navy's case to the Fifth Fleet. In order to play the Red Card when he needed to, the commander of the Australian contingent needed a parallel flow of information from the naval forces – from all the forces – to that which we received from home. Initially this caused considerable conflict, but it settled down as all of the people in the theatre better understood what each was responsible for. Initially some difficulty was experienced with reporting to two people. The COMAST always sought greater operational influence. On the other hand, the component commanders wanted to have operational control. The Maritime Commander of the day always resented COMAST's greater operational influence, because he was the component commander. The job of the COMAST was to keep both the component commanders and the National Commander on the rails, and I think it worked.

In terms of public affairs the concurrency of Operations RELEX and SLIPPER posed considerable strain on our finite public affairs resources. Operation RELEX was under very, very tight ministerial control in terms of public affairs. The same thing happened with Operation SLIPPER and public affairs was one of the weaker points at a strategic and operational level.

A major influence during Operation SLIPPER was the added emphasis, especially during port visits, on force protection. After the incidents involving the USS *Cole* and the French supertanker *Limberg*, new force protection techniques were developed for dealing with a range of diverse threats. For decades Navy had practised Operation AWKWARD as a means of providing protection against underwater attack. In September 2001 many more options for attack were available to an adversary, including employment of non-conventional forms of attack. These included: rocket attacks from ashore, from boats, or from low-flying civilian aircraft, and traditional mining. We consulted with the British and the Americans to develop our force protection techniques. Measures adopted included placing water booms around ships, placement of shipping containers on wharves to provide a protective barrier to berthed ships, stationing armed sentries on upper decks, and developing relevant rules of engagement to be able to use those armed sentries. We have not yet been placed in a position of having to test these techniques and there are still some interesting points to be covered if we have to do so.

In summary, in 2001 we were primarily called on to perform an extended MIF role and it was not too difficult to put the force together. The work of those people who had contributed over the previous ten years to Operation DAMASK set the basic planning and logistic basis in place. We had local knowledge, we had the confidence of the people who were running the organisation in-theatre as well as Commander Fifth Fleet, and we had no significant problems. The only friction caused, albeit of relatively minor consequence, was in relation to how we would command and control this particular organisation. Of all the three services I had the honour to command as COMAST, the easiest to get into the theatre and to employ effectively was the Navy.

## Notes

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- 1 Fifth Fleet's area of responsibility includes the Arabian Gulf, Red Sea, Gulf of Oman and parts of the Indian Ocean.

## Rear Admiral Marc Bonser, AO, CSC, CDS, RAN

*Task Group Commander Chief of Staff DAMASK II;  
Commanding Officer HMAS Sydney DAMASK VII;  
Commander Australian Theatre SLIPPER Three & Four,  
BASTILLE & FALCONER*

I became involved in the planning for the 2003 Gulf conflict not long after assuming responsibility as Commander Australian Theatre (COMAST) in mid-2002. Like Operation DAMASK in 1990, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) planned Operations BASTILLE and FALCONER as potential combat operations. The big difference between them was that in 1990 it was mainly a Navy operation, while in 2002-03 it was a tri-service contribution planned through joint command arrangements. These arrangements had not been in place a decade earlier. I will concentrate on operational-level planning functions and the issues that we encountered in 2002-03.

Operation SLIPPER directly preceded BASTILLE and FALCONER, and this experience greatly helped our planning. In particular, when planning began in earnest, this previous experience gave us a more intimate knowledge of the capabilities of our coalition partners, the operating environment, our relative capabilities, and our interoperability strengths and weaknesses. From the Navy's perspective, the opportunity for coalition command during SLIPPER became fundamental to successful preparations.

The ADF contribution to the 2003 Iraq War included a national headquarters, the RAN task group, a clearance diving team (CDT), a P3C Orion task group, a special operations (SAS) task group, an air task group with F-18s and C-130s, and several liaison officers embedded in the various combatant and component command headquarters. Our new joint planning capabilities made planning for the use of highly technical forces more rigorous and efficient than it may have been in the past.

Unlike 1990, the force had to be deployed and employed while there were simultaneous operations being supported in East Timor, the northern approaches to Australia and elsewhere. In 1990 the primary planning considerations related to the need for an initial operating base and arrangements for sourcing fuel, food, water and some ammunition. BASTILLE and FALCONER required the coordination of a much broader range of issues. The RAN was already in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) and well prepared. The SAS and the Air Force had recently been operating in and over Afghanistan, but this time planning needed to range across some eight different types of force elements. Moreover, we needed to coordinate and prepare our forces prior to and indeed over the Christmas break.

Air and land-based forces tend to be transport intensive. Deploying and redeploying and defining the employment for these forces in the light of government tasking, was definitely more complex for the Army and Air Force than for the already present Navy. Nevertheless, naval tasks were reviewed extensively and, in particular, we revisited naval gunfire support (NGS), which had been authorised in 1991 but not employed. This later proved quite fortuitous.

Further complicating planning was the need to sustain the force, including rotations and replacements, while accounting for concurrent operations elsewhere. For example, HMAS *Manoora* later transitioned from sea transport tasks out of the Gulf directly into amphibious support operations in the Solomon Islands. Because of the assessed threat, force protection of the units and formations became an ongoing consideration, and now included a strong anti-terrorist posture when ships were in port. To coordinate all of these functions we needed command arrangements at all levels, from unit through to task group, and from the deployed national command back to Australia.

Planning confirmed that no one answer would fit every circumstance. Each of the deployed forces needed individual consideration with respect to the arrangements for preparation, employment and sustainment. Much work was required on basing and access, for example, and the Chief of Air Force had to go overseas to secure basing rights for some deployed forces. One advantage of Navy's long presence in the Gulf and the nature of ships was that there was no impediment caused by the need for basing or access rights. These arrangements had been in place since 1990 and were now well established. They had evolved along the way, but generally followed our standard diplomatic clearance processes. Familiarity with US Navy Fifth Fleet operations also meant that acclimatisation and integration was not an obstacle to final battle preparations.

Navy's preparations, like those of the SAS, had the benefit of previous and current experience in the MEAO, and ensured the force was capable of meeting directed preparedness requirements. Conducting the assigned tasks was readily met despite some complicating factors, the main one concerning operations in a potential nuclear, biological and chemical environment. While the need to inoculate personnel against anthrax received some public notoriety, the issue was resolved well before operations began.

Projecting a force into an area of operations and extracting it at the conclusion of its deployment are critical to any operation. The combination of intra- and inter-theatre movements, final training while en route, the initial sustainment requirements, and apportioning finite lift assets needed close coordination. Fortunately warships self-deploy, and some, notably the Amphibious Transport (LPA), embarked the support requirements for some other force elements. The CDT could not, of course, self-deploy, and this is where the new joint arrangements at Headquarters Australian Theatre (HQAST), including a movements group, improved the deployment planning view.

The benefits not only included efficiencies in moving elements of all three services, but also allowed the priority flow of people and materiel in and out of the MEAO. This ensured the respective groups arrived in a timely and orderly manner to meet both coalition and national requirements.

For BASTILLE and FALCONER the main ADF task groups were dispersed and therefore managed their own staging and reception. We kept staging to a minimum by deploying force elements directly to their basing areas wherever possible. Onward movement in the MEAO was only required for the special forces task group and those people working in the coalition Air Operations Centre where third nation clearance and access processes for basing made this necessary.

Each of the task groups directly managed the integration of their separate force elements into the relevant components of US Central Command. This meant that there was little requirement to provide central management and, in turn, a large ADF footprint in the MEAO. All that was needed was a small joint movements coordination centre to support the task groups with the movements of individual replacements. Recent operations in East Timor and the Solomons, on the other hand, were of a different nature and in quite different geography. With single points of disembarkation they needed centralised arrangements for reception staging, onward movement and integration of forces.

The likely employment of the force elements was agreed early in the planning process and refined by later planning conducted both in Australia and overseas. Planning did not imply commitment, which was subject to separate national approvals. Involving an ADF team with US Central Command planners helped, but did not cover the detailed plans for the components with which our forces would later operate. This detailed planning needed inputs from the Australian Theatre (AST) component commanders and each of the task groups. Comprehensive involvement provided assurance at all levels of ADF command and informed the development of agreed concepts of operations. The level of detail varied based on the maturity of the United States component-level plans at any one time and the degree of coordinated planning with individual ADF task groups.

In Navy's case, our task group was fully integrated into existing UN sanction operations and the Fifth Fleet planning process. Importantly, the RAN task group commander was also a coalition commander in the Fifth Fleet chain of command. This structure had developed from the time of HMAS *Anzac* in Operation SLIPPER, and placed our commander and his staff in a robust and well-respected position with the Fifth Fleet planners. In the end, the coalition operation in the North Arabian Gulf was largely Australian planned and commanded.

As the United States component plans matured, the deployed task group commanders refined their plans. These received parallel review by our Australian National Commander in the Middle East, and the component commanders within AST. The National Commander had to endorse the plans as being consistent with the coalition



intentions and meeting local force protection requirements, while AST component commanders had to agree that their forces would be safely and effectively employed. Having been agreed, I was able to recommend the plans to the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF) and to the Strategic Command Group for approval. Deliberate changes to the plans were managed in the same way.

In sustaining the operational rate of effort, there was a range of administrative and logistic replenishment activities to ensure we maintained our force commitment, including the provision of some rotation forces. The sustainment methodology employed in the Gulf involved retaining as much of the support back in Australia as possible and hence reducing the burden on the operating forces and deployed headquarters. This had two benefits: first it harnessed scarce resources by minimising the footprint forward; and second it allowed the Australian National Commander and the task group commanders to concentrate on their primary responsibilities, respectively: safeguarding Australian national interests and war fighting. Given that the ADF elements in the Middle East were deployed and employed separately and not as an Australian joint task force, this arrangement worked well.

Our task groups were integrated into, and partly supported by, separate United States components. The same principle applied even when separate task groups, such as the ships and the P3 aircraft, were operating within the same United States component, but different task forces. As each task group had its own unique organic support capability, and since some of the American task force components were larger than the ADF, there was little efficacy in the ADF operationally commanding its task groups as a joint force in the MEAO.

Integration of ADF task groups into broader international forces worked very well in Operations DAMASK, SLIPPER, BASTILLE and FALCONER and required little modification for Operation CATALYST which succeeded them. Once again, Navy's experience in the Gulf paved the way for sustainable operations within clearly defined task boundaries.

Reconstitution of those forces that have returned from operations is an ongoing task. In the past this may only have been done in the context of the next exercise or training activity and generally involved a single service approach. However, at a joint level the ADF needs to understand what forces are available at any given time and the impact on current and future operations of committing them to an activity. As such, future preparedness, operational availability, and concurrency requirements must be integrated into the overall operational plan. The Navy has a good regime to establish availability and this is now integrated into our joint planning processes. The practical advantages of this process include the ability to move ships like *Manoora* directly between operations in the Gulf and the Solomon Islands, with minimal time required to integrate that ship with the other services and begin operations. It is a good example of the inherent strategic flexibility of ships, enhanced by joint training and planning.

Through standard procedures such as Operation AWKWARD, the Navy has a lot of experience with the physical aspects of force protection. However, we are now faced with more specific counter-terrorist procedures, and force protection is very much reliant on intelligence and warning systems. Navy has good plans and capabilities for the latter, but my observation of planning for FALCONER would be that we still have some way to go in maturing our afloat intelligence capability, particularly when exercising command and control from platforms such as *Manoora* and *Kanimbla*. There are also analytical and communications capacity shortfalls where, to be fully effective, we need to digest large amounts of coalition information and provide a national perspective. This area of afloat command needs more attention in terms of command and control resources.

Next to the allocation of car parking spaces, command and control is probably the most emotive subject experienced in planning and operations. Operations in the Middle East were no different in this regard. During BASTILLE and FALCONER there were a number of key planning factors which drove command and control. Most of these factors are related to decision-making. In other words, which decisions need to be made where and by whom.

The key to successful operational planning derived from the clear direction provided by the Government and CDF in determining or changing the mission or broad tasks. These decisions generally remained at a very high level. Crucial to the process was the ability to exercise national influence in the prime US headquarters, a task performed by our National Commander. Equally vital to the safeguarding of our national interests was the relationship between our task group commanders and the United States commanders to whom they were assigned. The necessity to be responsible to separate foreign commanders for agreed aspects of operations required considerable flexibility. In this case it meant that our own force elements or groups did not operate as a national joint force, but were dispersed within coalition components or subordinate task forces.

AST also had to look at a range of Australian support functions that required central coordination in the MEAO, relative to those that might have been coordinated by a coalition commander on our behalf or back in Australia. Importantly, there was a real need for AST component commanders, such as the Maritime Commander, to provide operational and technical advice on the safe and effective use of their forces. Although this was one of first operations where they were not directly in the command and control chain, the arrangements worked very well and did not become a point of friction.

I have already mentioned the need to synchronise and coordinate operations in the Gulf with other ADF operations and supporting activities. AST had to establish relative priorities for the apportionment of resources, and this was a matter of constant attention, particularly given the requirement for simultaneous ship and P3 commitments off northern Australia. Our small and finite capacity in command and control resources, especially staff officers, was particularly critical. They needed to be placed where they

could contribute effectively to as many operations as possible. Deploying officers to fill every staff function may not always be the best answer, especially if the function can be performed back in Australia and across more than one operation. Fortunately, Navy travels very light in this regard.

Overall, the success of FALCONER would indicate that we got most of the planning right. From a naval perspective, contributing factors to this success included long experience in the theatre, a well-respected operational reputation built up during previous DAMASK and SLIPPER deployments, and an established command role in the US Fifth Fleet. I have no doubt that this latter relationship was the catalyst for coalition commanders accepting NGS as a viable part of the maritime plan. Naturally, there were some points of friction, but these were not present in the forces that went into combat. In the end, good people ensured a good result.



*Rear Admiral Marc Bonser speaking at the SPC-A's Gulf Seminar, November 2003*

## PART I – OPEN FORUM

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**Commander David McCourt:** Admiral Ritchie mentioned in relation to Operation SLIPPER that there was a disconnect, when we first established the national command element. My observation from *Kanimbla* would be that part of the problem was that we were reporting in parallel. Communications from *Kanimbla* back to Australia were excellent and we received message delivery in a timely fashion. The national command element ashore was relying on US communications systems for message traffic, and signals that would be received in Maritime Headquarters, for example, would not arrive at the national command element until some 24 hours or more, later. That caused friction because the National Commander was getting information from Australia that he should have got from us in advance. Had we provided the National Commander with a robust communications capability and not forced him through a line in the US then perhaps some of those problems would have been resolved. By the time we got to FALCONER those problems had probably pretty much gone away.

With respect to Operation FALCONER, as the CO [Commanding Officer] of *Kanimbla*, I was not given access to the planning compartment until five days prior to the deployment. From the perspective of being the CO of a ship that is supposed to go off to war, dealing with hints rather than actual solid information for planning is pretty pathetic. If we are going to plan properly we should at least allow the COs of ships to be briefed so that their ships can be properly prepared.

**Vice Admiral Chris Ritchie:** This is an interesting point. We were in a position with FALCONER where the government had not made the commitment until a certain point in time. The point that Commander McCourt makes is valid, but you need a government commitment before you can go anywhere near the public.

**Rear Admiral Marc Bonser:** That is correct. It was the lack of a government commitment that constrained access to information about planning. It is not a good way to do business, but the end result would indicate that, by the time the task group was required to conduct operations, it was well prepared and well informed about what needed to be done. Even some five days before sailing, it was still, I think, about four weeks before you were assigned under theatre command for the operation. It does make it difficult to keep information flowing in those sorts of environments.

**Vice Admiral Chris Ritchie:** It would be fair to say that one of the lessons that has been learned is how we compartmentalise information. It is understood in Canberra that the way we compartmentalise information for each of these operations has caused difficulties in some places.

**Rear Admiral Ken Doolan:** Harking back to 1990-91 and the first deployment, I was not in a position to be able to tell any of the ship COs about the nature of their operations. The CO of *Success*, Graham Sloper, in fact, did have a bit of a benefit insofar as I was at sea with him on the Monday, four days, I think it was, after the invasion, and was able to give him some sort of warning on a private basis which he was then instructed to keep to himself, while the planning went on. Bill Dovers was out at sea in HMAS *Adelaide*, and I was flying over the top of him in a Sea King helicopter and I still could not tell him. This was the day before I was to summon him to my office to advise him that he was going to war the following Monday.

**Dr Anthony Bergin:** A question to Admiral Ritchie: I guess we have fought three wars in the Middle East over the last dozen years. I heard you say in your talk that from the Navy's perspective you have built up longstanding relations with these Gulf states and you are in better shape than the other services with these recent deployments. Could I ask you to reflect on whether the sort of knowledge, expertise, and the interactions that we have with these Gulf states and Middle East states – in your view – is adequate?

**Vice Admiral Chris Ritchie:** I think between the First Gulf War and Operation SLIPPER there was not adequate interaction. We had a bit of a scare in 1998 during Operation POLLARD, when we deployed. We deployed air-to-air and special forces into the Gulf but we had not really maintained any military relationship with those Gulf states. That became clear to us when the Chief of the Air Force went back in 2001 to try to negotiate where we could send people. Since then we have established two assistant Defence Attachés in the area and I think they will remain there into the future. The relationships with those states are much closer than they were. I personally have relationships with the Chiefs of Navies of Kuwait, Bahrain – places like that – things which I think we did not have before. So we have learned the lesson and we will stay there until the whole thing is resolved.

**Admiral Michael Hudson:** I want to comment on some things that Ken Doolan said. In his eyes, I was probably one of the principal strategic leaders meddling in operational matters. At the time, the mid to late 80s, there was an enormous turmoil of change in the command and control arrangements for the ADF [Australian Defence Force]. In the period from 1986 onwards, we were examining, at the Chiefs of Staff level, ideas for where the ADF should go in terms of command and control that included the position of Chiefs of Staff, Chief of Army, Navy and Air Force, where they stood, what responsibilities they had. I think the three service chiefs at the time felt that there was a degree of threat, but there was a questioning throughout the ADF as to how we would, in fact, command the ADF in future conflict.

I do not think the reality is that there will ever be a time when senior commanders assure: 'We will stop meddling in operational matters.' You see it today. I hear reports about CDF [Chief of Defence Force] getting on the telephone to COs of ships at sea and telling them what to do. So there is not going to be any change there. It is important that

commanders at every level understand that there is no clear-cut demarcation between the responsibility of an operational commander and the more senior commanders as you go up the chain. The bottom line is that everybody keeps everybody else informed, rather than one element in the chain feeling that he has been left out of it and therefore compelled to enter into some debate.

I remember distinctly one or two occasions when I clearly intruded into Ken Doolan's area of responsibility. I do not think I ever apologised at the time, and I am not going to apologise now. I am impressed with where we have arrived at today. We probably have not found the perfect solution yet, but the ADF today and certainly the Navy of today is a much more efficient organisation than it was in 1990. I get enormous pleasure and pride out of seeing today what our young people, men and women, do at sea. I congratulate you all for where we stand today.

**Rear Admiral Ken Doolan:** That there is strategic planning on one side and operational planning on the other is a theory. We all have to get along together. My only plea to the people of today is when you are doing your planning, keep it simple and have the straightest possible direct lines of command that you can achieve. I am not sure that that lesson has ever been learned, but when you have to get things done in a great hurry and if you have to go through the labyrinthine systems of a command chain which is unnecessarily complicated, then the end result is not going to be as militarily successful as it might otherwise have been.

**Rear Admiral Bill Dovers:** We are about to embark on another reasonably major naval construction program and I would like to think that we are making provision in some of those ships for the ability to have a commander at sea. I recall from the first operations that we had Admiral Chalmers up there as COMFLOT [Commodore Flotillas], who trained us up, then continued to exercise a degree of command in the area of operations. We thought that was a very good arrangement. I wonder with the current arrangements whether there is still a requirement, and whether we should make provision for it in these new ships? Or have things changed to the degree where command should be exercised from further back?

**Vice Admiral Chris Ritchie:** The ability to command at sea is still required, and we are probably talking about two different types of command. This is probably where we got a little bit confused in Operation SLIPPER. There is commander of amphibious operations which *Kanimbla* and *Manoora* had been fitted for. We recently found that we still did not have the ships sufficiently equipped to perform this task. That task is quite different to the command of task groups at sea and *Kanimbla* and *Manoora* are less well fitted to do that than for the command of amphibious operations. What the two amphibious ships have is significantly more bandwidth than anybody else, and that is particularly useful to us.

In terms of new ships, in the Air Warfare Destroyer, clearly we would be looking at command of naval forces at sea and to have that capability in the ships. For the new amphibious ship we would be looking for a different sort of command and that is a joint force command which is perhaps more directed towards the amphibious operations, but which would have the flexibility to be directed towards anything which is of a joint nature.

There was some misinterpretation of what *Kanimbla* could do in the Gulf in a command and control sense. There also was a great degree of uncertainty as to how command would be exercised and there was this notion that if things did not come together, and if we could not get ashore into the places we needed to, then national command might be exercised from *Kanimbla*. In the end, that really did not turn out to be practical, and nor did it turn out to be necessary because we found that we could go into Kuwait and set ourselves up in the same place as Central Command. We will still need the ability to exercise command at that level from the sea. Similarly, we will need to move on and create the ability to exercise the operational level of command from ashore.

**Rear Admiral Marc Bonser:** There is definitely a requirement to exercise command in the field forward. The real issue for us is that we cannot predict where we will be next, where the next operation will occur. Will we have the ability, or the basing and access rights, to put command ashore in all or part of an operation wherever it may be? If we do not give ourselves the option of being able to exercise either a naval-specific or joint command from close offshore, then we are denying ourselves the ability to participate in operations in the future.

**Commander Chris Percival:** I want to address the point about the relationship we had with the host nations in the Middle East. My perspective is from the lower level, on the ground, both in 1992 with the LSE [Logistic Support Element], and also later as commander of the LSE. I saw not so much change, but a move away from the open door policy we had back in 1992, compared to what we actually had when I was over there in 2002 and 2003. I certainly had a great relationship with the current Chief of the Bahraini Naval Force. It was very much a courtesy issue, as opposed to a productive operational interface. The interface we had was exercised through the US Navy. Talking with the locals was great, but they deferred, in most cases, to the Americans to provide us with any support that we required.

**Professor David Horner:** Could each commander comment on whether there was any interference or comment from the political level down to the operational level? I know of one occasion I think Admiral Doolan told me about, and also another one. Senator Ray also told me about the occasion when his staff heard on the ABC that a ship had been sunk by a mine and, taking this as gospel of course, because it came from the ABC, and upset about it, his staff phoned Maritime Headquarters to find out if it was true. Were there any other occasions in which the political level has delved down to the operational level during the operations we have been discussing?

**Vice Admiral Chris Ritchie:** In my experience, during the operations we have discussed, no. Certainly during Operation SLIPPER there was no interference to the operational level from the political level.

**Rear Admiral Ken Doolan:** My comments relate to Operation DAMASK from the operational level. Did I have comments direct from the minister? Yes, I did. He came to the headquarters and visited. Was it interference? No, because he came with the CDF and we had a round table discussion – if I can call it that – three people discussing the threat posed by mines. I would certainly not class it as interference and, in fact, I give great credit to Senator Ray because I think he was particularly alert to making sure that the operational commander was protected from that.

**Vice Admiral Rob Walls:** I want to reinforce the point that Ken Doolan just made. I was involved at the strategic level in 1990 and I was then sent off with a team of folks to Oman, Bahrain and Riyadh and various other places. I was dealing on a continuing basis every night talking back to Canberra. We were using very antiquated communications systems. But in every case I was speaking indirectly to Senator Ray. I was speaking directly with naval people, for example, Admiral Hudson, and, of course, I was speaking with the CDF at the time, General Graton. But I think the essence of the point is that the politicians kept themselves extremely well aware. They were very closely informed of what was going on. I could get feedback in about two minutes through the military chain of command, but the politicians never interfered. They were extraordinarily well informed, and Senator Ray was excellent.

**Rear Admiral Marc Bonser:** In my experience, there was none of that sort of interaction or interference at all, and it probably serves to demonstrate that our current level of separation is about right.

**Dr John Reeve:** I have a question of Admiral Ritchie: would you care to comment or elaborate on the various factors, if any, behind or leading to Australian command of the Maritime Interception Force (MIF) and any wider international or diplomatic significance you think was attached to this?

**Vice Admiral Chris Ritchie:** I referred in my address to the then Maritime Commander, Geoff Smith's, visit to the Middle East. He engaged Vice Admiral Moore and Vice Admiral Moore made this offer: that if we were to commit the total force, that is, the three ships as opposed to the one that we had intended to commit, that they would make a counter-offer of tactical command. They wanted to do that because they had other operations that they wanted to engage in, and the destroyer squadron commander who was then commanding the MIF, was planned to be moved elsewhere. As to whether or not there was any higher order or intent behind that which said 'well, let us engage another member of the coalition in this in order to widen the, perhaps, acceptance of what we are doing', I could only guess at. Part of the consideration was that over 10 years we had certainly gained US Navy confidence. Captain Nigel Coates



at the time was doing a brilliant job in *Anzac* and was probably the most effective ship that was there. We did have and still have, better ships for doing MIF tasks than the US Navy. Ships that can get closer inshore; ships like *Kanimbla* and *Manoora* that can take all sorts of equipment and people and put them on board because there is plenty of room, relatively shallow draught again. The first Australian MIF Commander was Captain Allan Du Toit.

**Captain Allan Du Toit:** I think the key issue was that the US Navy wanted to give the Australian ships in-theatre a meaningful role and hence the offer to use them in the MIF role. Because we had three ships committed, what I think went with it was the command. There was an element of trying to be able to put CDS 50 [Commander Destroyer Squadron 50] aside to possibly command operations in the Horn of Africa. That was the intent at the time and they felt that, by having three Australian ships there and also giving us the tactical command of the MIF operations, that would free up CDS 50. As it turns out he did not end up going down to the Horn of Africa – that was finally given to another coalition partner – the Germans. We did start off by doing a month-by-month command rotation with CDS 50 and by the time my relief arrived, Captain James Goldrick, we had picked this up as an ongoing concern.

**Vice Admiral Chris Ritchie:** It is worth saying that, in recent years, there have been three operations: one off the Horn of Africa, one in the North Arabian Sea, one in the Gulf, and at various times they have all been commanded by people other than Americans.

**Captain Allan Du Toit:** At the time I was up there I was the only coalition warfare commander with a true tactical warfare command role. The Canadians subsequently picked up a role and then, indeed, the Germans subsequently as well.

**PART II:  
TASK GROUP  
COMMAND  
1990-2003**

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## Commodore Chris Oxenbould, AO, RAN

### *Task Group Commander DAMASK II*

As the Gulf crisis deepened in late 1990 and conflict became more likely, the role of the RAN task group expanded to include direct involvement in military operations to remove Iraq from Kuwait.<sup>1</sup> Operation DAMASK eventually resulted in Australian participation in the largest grouping of warships since the Second World War and arguably the most powerful and complex naval force ever assembled. At the height of the conflict, the allied maritime forces in the area comprised 6 aircraft carriers, 2 battleships, 15 cruisers, 67 destroyers and frigates, and over 100 logistics, amphibious and smaller craft.

These ships together deployed more than 800 fixed and rotary winged aircraft. The fleet was assembled from 15 nations and participated in coordinated air and sea operations in a most complex environment with a remarkably high degree of integration. Together the force's firepower was awesome and its main role was to establish sea and air control of the Arabian Gulf and Red Sea area, while providing strike support for the allied effort ashore. Pitted against this massive multinational force were the Iraqi Air Force, with about 1300 aircraft and a comprehensive array of anti-ship missiles and a small missile-armed navy. The clever use of mines by the Iraqis, the possible use of chemical weapons and Silkworm missile shore batteries also added to the threat.

By any measure of effectiveness, maritime operations in the 1990-91 Gulf War were highly successful. All military objectives were achieved for a remarkably small loss of life among the coalition forces. For those involved, the war provided the most significant operational experience in their careers.

In this paper I will provide a brief narrative, highlighting the Australian task group's involvement, and will conclude with a few personal observations.

The guided missile destroyer *Brisbane* and the guided missile frigate *Sydney* formed as a task unit and commenced workup in mid-October 1990. The additional warning time that was available before the deployment was used to complete a series of important enhancements, primarily in the areas of communications, anti-ship missile defence and surveillance sensors. On 12 November the ships sailed from Sydney and continued an intense workup period during the three-week passage to the Gulf, which incorporated the many valuable lessons learned from the first deployment of *Adelaide* and *Darwin*. *Brisbane* and *Sydney* met *Darwin*, *Adelaide* and *Success* on the outer edge of the area of operations (AO) early on the morning of 3 December. On completion of a handover, the new arrivals and the underway replenishment ship, *Success*, continued into the

Gulf of Oman (GOO). Entry into the AO was marked by an extension of the Australian operating limit to include the Arabian Gulf. It coincided with an announcement by the Prime Minister that Australian units would be used to support United Nations Security Council Resolution 678, which authorised the use of all available means against Iraq, unless it withdrew from Kuwait by January 15.

Maritime interception operations against Iraq- and Kuwait-bound merchant traffic had all but halted by this time and the first few days in the area were taken up with operational briefs and exercises with United States (US) Navy ships and a short visit to Muscat. Calls were also conducted on senior US officers. From these calls and the other briefs it was obvious that the coalition's blockade was very successful, that no goods were able to enter Iraq by sea, and that only limited amounts were smuggled over land or by air. Although the sanctions seriously weakened Iraq and may have eventually destroyed its economy, they were not forcing Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait and estimates were that this could take about 12 months.

Of significant note during this period, and often overlooked, is the fact that the level of sea control established by the multinational forces permitted the unhindered reinforcement and resupply of Saudi Arabia in preparation for the allied air and ground offensives.

Another conclusion drawn from the early intelligence briefs was that Saddam Hussein was not going to withdraw. He was simply too well dug-in and prepared, to be posturing. At this stage the only two possible outcomes appeared to be war or a backdown by the coalition forces. This conclusion added significant impetus to the need for change from interception operations to preparations for hostilities.

To achieve early assimilation into the Arabian Gulf anti-air warfare (AAW) operations, the task group entered the Arabian Gulf on 16 December. After a day in the southern Gulf, *Brisbane* and *Sydney* moved to the central Gulf where continuous AAW surveillance and interception patrols were being conducted by the multinational forces. To add to the tension, Iraqi drifting mines were being discovered in the area, including one as far south as the entrance channel to Bahrain. Further command briefs for *Brisbane* and *Sydney* were conducted on board USS *Bunker Hill*, an Aegis cruiser which was the anti-air warfare commander, stationed as a picket closest to the threat. A quickly established rapport with the *Bunker Hill* and other US Navy ships greatly assisted in the smooth and rapid integration of the Australian units into a very active and complicated AAW picture.

To complete area familiarisation, *Brisbane* and *Sydney* arrived at Bahrain on 21 December where further briefings took place on board USS *Blue Ridge*, the flagship of the US Navy Central Commander, Vice Admiral Arthur, USN, and in USS *La Salle*, the flagship of Commander Middle East Forces, Rear Admiral Fogarty. During the visit to Bahrain, tight security precautions for ships and individuals ashore were enforced in

response to the assessed terrorist threat and made the visit somewhat uncomfortable. *Success* meanwhile had departed the Gulf on 17 December for passage to the Seychelles for a well-earned Christmas break.

Recommencing operations, *Sydney* sailed from Bahrain on 23 December for patrol duties in the central Gulf, guarding against the possibility of an Iraqi pre-emptive strike at Christmas. While the area was outwardly quiet, the increased level of coalition air activity during this period highlighted the evolving change in emphasis from interception to AAW operations.

However, the requirement to support the UN sanctions was still present and for some time a close watch was being maintained on the Iraqi 'peace ship' *Ibn Khaldoon*—a Libyan - sponsored attempt to discredit the coalition. This vessel had been loaded with food and medicine and stated its intention to break the UN trade sanctions. Aiming to maximise propaganda value, over 240 women, children and journalists had also been embarked in the vessel. To maintain an international flavour, Rear Admiral Fogarty requested assistance from other nations in the interception of *Ibn Khaldoon*. *Sydney* was given this task and made a high speed passage out of the Gulf and down the coast of Oman to meet US Ships *Oldendorf*, *Fife*, *Curts*, *Trenton* and *Shreveport* on Christmas morning. A rehearsal was held later that day and the actual interception occurred on Boxing Day in the vicinity of Al Masirah Island. HMS *Brazen* also joined the team and *Sydney* acted as the lead intercept and challenge unit.

Evolving boarding techniques had now reached a very refined stage with the particularly impressive and effective insertion of Marines by helicopter. The boarding was difficult and struggles occurred with passengers trying to seize the weapons of the boarding party. Shots were fired in the air and stun grenades were also used as part of a noise charge to regain control of the situation. Iraq later claimed that excessive force was used and several passengers reported miscarriages and heart attacks. Examination by US Navy doctors determined that the injuries were either feigned or unrelated to the actions of the boarding party, who had, in fact, shown admirable restraint.

As a result of the search, *Ibn Khaldoon* was confirmed to be carrying prohibited goods and was held in custody pending the identification of a diversion port and offloading of this cargo.

While the *Ibn Khaldoon* incident was continuing, another Iraqi vessel, their tanker *Ain Zalah* was reported underway and returning to Iraq from Aden with crew members from Iraqi ships lying idle at Aden. I was embarked in *Sydney* and given the duty of on-scene commander for the *Ain Zalah* boarding as well as tactical control of US Ships *Guam*, *Trenton*, *Fife* and three US Marine and SEAL units. HMS *London* also participated. On 29 December *Sydney* detached from *Ibn Khaldoon* to act as the primary interception ship and an 18-hour surveillance operation with the Seahawk commenced soon after. The following morning the visit and search took place at sunrise with the US SEALs

seizing control and stopping the ship in fewer than 12 minutes, and within 30 minutes of the initial challenge. After a three-hour incident-free operation, *Ain Zalah* was cleared and allowed to proceed to Basrah and *Sydney* detached for passage to Dubai to see in the New Year.

Meanwhile *Brisbane* had sailed from Bahrain on 27 December to continue operations with the USS *Midway* battle group in the central Gulf. The deadline for an Iraqi withdrawal was running out and the need to be fully prepared for our most likely employment in hostilities was now very pressing. At the time *Midway* had only two escorts and the RAN presence was thus particularly welcome. Tensions were continuing to rise and on 30 December two Iraqi Mirage F1 aircraft entered the Gulf and approached within visual range of the on-station combat air patrol (CAP) before turning away.

At this stage *Midway* was conducting familiarisation in the Gulf, operating within its confines for short periods then returning to the relative safety of the GOO. *Brisbane* remained with the battle group during its passage back out to the GOO on 4 January 1991 and stayed with the carrier for two days before detaching and making an eventful passage to Dubai, which included the rescue of both a Pakistani fishing boat and an Iranian goat trader.

*Success* returned to the area from the Seychelles on 2 January and immediately assumed the role of duty tanker in the southern and central Gulf before entering Dubai on 7 January and acting as the host ship for the multinational naval force (MNNF) task group commanders' (CTGs) meeting. This important meeting took place on 9 January and was also attended by the staff of Rear Admiral March, USN, who had been designated as the US Navy Battle Force Commander. The continuation of MNNF operations was a key issue in light of the increasing possibility that hostilities would commence shortly. The multinational force CTGs were asked to indicate their ability to assign units to the battle force and those who agreed were requested to have their ships take up stations by 12 January in the lead-up to the impending deadline.

After the conference *Brisbane* and *Success* sailed from Dubai and rejoined *Sydney* to conduct patrol and replenishment duties in the central Gulf. At the time an Iraqi pre-emptive strike was considered probable and, as if to reinforce this, on 11 January, about nine Iraqi fighters went 'feet wet' in the North Arabian Gulf. The aircraft approached to within weapons release range of the coalition units in the most northerly picket stations before turning back and before the CAP could intercept. Several of these feints occurred in the following days.

In the increasing tension the Australian task group set about ensuring everything was in readiness. Orders were given for all personnel to be clean shaven for the fitting of nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) protective masks and to commence taking tablets for protection against chemical nerve agents. Later, as protection against biological warfare, all personnel were inoculated against plague. On 11 January the

*Midway* battle group, now retitled Battle Force Zulu, re-entered the Gulf and *Brisbane* and *Sydney* took up assigned sectors around the carrier the next morning as part of the carrier's AAW/anti-surface warfare (ASUW) screen. Besides the US Navy ships, the only other allied units in this screen were the Dutch. The Royal Navy had two Type 42 destroyers further north with the US Navy AAW cruisers and Tomahawk strike force, and the Canadian CTG was in charge of the combat logistic force holding the area in the southern Gulf. The other MNNF ships were assigned as logistic force escorts and had some form of operational limitations imposed. On 13 January tactical control of all Australian units was formally passed to CTF 154, Rear Admiral March, who was embarked in *Midway*.

In the last Australian pre-hostilities task, *Sydney* escorted *Success* on a delivery run into the North Arabian Gulf, a 'NAG Swing', to replenish those US Navy and RN units on patrol in the northern Gulf. The swing commenced on 14 January and was particularly tense, with hostilities expected to commence shortly and an increasing threat from drifting mines.

In the final naval force expansion prior to hostilities, the USS *Ranger* battle group entered the Gulf on 15 January, becoming part of Battle Force Zulu and taking up station in the carrier operating area. Later in the day information was received that an Iraqi pre-emptive strike could be expected overnight. This possibility, though always anticipated, added to the tension and apprehension in the ships.

Fortunately the strike did not eventuate. The UN deadline for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait expired at 0800 local time on 16 January with no apparent reaction from either side. However, later that day, information was received that coalition action would commence shortly and, early the next morning, hostilities were initiated. Task Force 154 commenced Tomahawk missile and carrier-borne aircraft strikes in the early hours of the morning. Iraqi reaction to the coalition offensive was not immediately evident and the expected retaliatory strike did not occur. However, later in the day, the first Scud missiles were launched against Saudi Arabia and the following day, Iraq launched Scud missiles against Israel in an unsuccessful bid to drag that country into the war and fragment the coalition. Though not a direct threat to the TF, the potential for escalating inherent in the use of Scuds, either against Israel or armed with chemical warheads, was always a serious concern.

*Brisbane* and *Sydney* remained in the north-western portion of the screen around the carriers throughout the first few days of the war, closely observing the awesome display of strike power being unleashed. At times, Tomahawk navigational way points were positioned within a mile or two of the Australian ships, causing some interesting moments and providing useful tracking practice if the launches were not promulgated in advance. *Success*, meanwhile, operated with the logistic forces fulfilling the vital replenishment tasks.





*Commodore Chris Oxenbould and staff, October 1990*

Apart from the carrier air and missile offensive, the first naval action in the Gulf was conducted by USS *Nicholas* and the Free Kuwaiti patrol boats. Clearance of Iraqi observation troops from the Dorra oil platforms commenced on the night of 18 January. These actions were very successful, preventing the oil platforms being used as bases for anti-aircraft activity and resulting in the first capture of Iraqi prisoners of war.

On 19 January the third carrier to join Battle Force Zulu, USS *Theodore Roosevelt* and her escorts, arrived in the Arabian Gulf after a fast transit from the Red Sea. On the same day *Sydney* broke free from the screen for two days to escort USS *Niagara Falls* to the North Arabian Gulf. In addition, *Success*'s valuable period in the Gulf was drawing to a close. With the commencement of hostilities, the tanker's time on-station was extended by five days, and she finally departed the Straits of Hormuz on 22 January.

On 24 January, USS *Curts* and the Free Kuwaiti forces were involved in the recapture of Qaruh Island. The capture of the island had great symbolic significance, as it was the first portion of Kuwaiti territory to be retaken. In addition, useful intelligence on minefield positions was gained from captured documents and Iraqi prisoners, including the first confirmation that mines were being deliberately set adrift.

The Iraqi Air Force (IAF) had remained fairly quiet in the first days of hostilities, riding out the initial air offensive, and seemingly failing to press home attacks on coalition aircraft. However, on 24 January, the IAF did venture into the Gulf when at least two Mirage F1 maritime strike and three MiG-23 escorts were detected flying down the Kuwaiti coast apparently approaching the battle force. The air warning was raised to red and ships assumed higher states of readiness in anticipation of an attack. Coalition air superiority was soon evident as the two F1 aircraft were splashed by Saudi Arabian F-15s and the other Iraqi aircraft turned away soon after.

That evening the air warning was again raised to red after intercepts of F1 radar and reports of F1 tanking over Iraq were received. The F1 is Exocet-capable and was a primary concern. Thankfully no further activity was identified that night and, after an anxious period, the air raid warning reverted to yellow.

During the afternoon of 25 January, various indications of a large air strike being prepared in Iraq resulted in swift reinforcement of the battle force CAP and tanker stations. Although nothing eventuated from this incident, the rapid reaction of coalition anti-air defences was most impressive. It seems likely that the initial unsuccessful encounters with a well-defended and prepared force dissuaded further Iraqi air attacks. On subsequent occasions minor activity was reported over land. However, the Iraqi Air Force did not attempt further incursions into the Gulf.

Further hampering of Iraqi air activity was the start of the coalition air offensive against hardened bunkers. Perhaps in response, reports were received on 26 January that large numbers of Iraqi aircraft had flown into Iran and throughout the remainder of the conflict the number of aircraft seeking sanctuary continued to increase. By the end of hostilities 138, mostly front-line, combat aircraft were reported to be in Iran. Despite Iranian assurances that the aircraft would be impounded until the end of the war, the threat of a minimal-warning air attack originating from Iran was a significant planning consideration throughout the conflict and was increased with Iraqi aircraft in Iran.

The oiler HMAS *Westralia* entered the AO on Australia Day 1991 and proceeded to Muscat to embark stores landed there by *Success* and complete some radio installation work. Three days later, the last Tomahawk firings originating from TF 154 were conducted when USS *Princeton* fired two salvos of three missiles. A change of coalition strike targets was now evident. As the initial objectives of destroying enemy command and control and air defence structure were achieved, strikes widened to include the attrition of all military targets in Kuwait.

During the earlier days of the war, Iraqi naval vessels had made only tentative forays and were usually subjected to timely air attack. On 30 January however, movement by a large number of combatants was detected from Iraqi ports in an apparent attempt to reach sanctuary in Iran. These units were quickly engaged by a combination of carrier-based aircraft and RN Lynx helicopters operating in tandem and under the

control of US Navy SH60Bs. One damaged Osa class patrol boat was later reported to have reached Bandar E Khomoeini, but at least ten other combatants were reported destroyed or badly damaged. Attrition of the Iraqi Navy continued for the remainder of the war and a total of some 138 vessels of all types were assessed to have either been sunk or rendered non-mission-capable.

RAN Clearance Diving Team 3 (CDT 3) was deployed from Australia at the end of January to assist with the disposal of the very real mine threat. The team had valuable expertise in very shallow water operations, which was not shared by the US Navy forces and would be very important in the event of an amphibious landing. The diving team deployed to Bahrain on 31 January for training, US Navy equipment familiarisation briefings and to await specific tasking.

By this stage the Iraqi threat had been reduced to the extent that the carrier operating area could be moved some 60 miles closer to Kuwait. This had the dual effect of reducing tanking requirements and increasing the sortie rate for carrier aircraft.

As the carriers moved north, *Brisbane* and *Sydney* relocated into the northerly sectors of the screen immediately south of the Zagros Mountains gap and within sight of the Iranian coast. The Australian units thus became the first line of defence for both air and surface threats coming from Iran, all CAP aircraft being concentrated on the main threat axis in the direction of Iraq. This tasking demonstrated considerable trust by the US Navy in RAN capabilities as the threat of short or no-warning attack from aircraft in or over Iran was, at the time, considered very real. By this stage of the war, *Brisbane* and *Sydney* were also being allocated duties as CAP and tanker control units, thus providing a further sense of involvement and purpose. On 6 February, *Westralia* entered the Gulf for the first time under escort of the Danish frigate *Olfert Fischer* and the Norwegian Coast Guard vessel *Andenes* and proceeded to the central Gulf for a stores transfer with *Brisbane* and *Sydney*.

The fourth and last carrier battle group, USS *America*, entered the Arabian Gulf from the Red Sea on 13 February to add its firepower to that already present. At this point, strike targets were again shifting: from attacks on fuel storage, ammunition dumps, communications facilities and the like, to battlefield preparation and the attrition of Iraqi front-line armour and artillery. At the same time, preparations for the commencement of mine countermeasure (MCM) operations were continuing and a combined RN/US Navy MCM force commenced passage up the Gulf to positions in the NAG. Sweeping operations commenced several days later with the aim of clearing a fire support area to the south of Faylaka Island in support of future amphibious operations.

On 14 February the carrier operating area moved again, this time a further 50 miles north-west. *Brisbane* and *Sydney* moved concurrently to sectors on the north-western edge of the screen, closest to Kuwait and the Iraqi threat. The logistic forces also

moved from the southern Gulf to a box which was to the south and adjacent to the carriers' area.

The amphibious task force, TF 156, was, at this stage, making an overt transit up the Gulf deliberately advertising its presence to Iraqi intelligence. In pre-war planning, target dates of early and then mid-February had been set for a landing on the Kuwaiti coast, but the concept had by now been rejected. A landing seemed likely to result in very heavy casualties and unacceptable damage to Kuwait City, particularly during initial bombardments. However, an amphibious raid on Faylaka Island was still planned and the elimination of threats to MCM and the amphibious force remained a top priority. The overt presence of the amphibious units was designed to focus Iraqi attention on the continuing threat from this direction. From post-war analysis, this ploy succeeded and Iraq completely failed to appreciate the direction of the final coalition ground offensive.

*Sydney* had a break from screening duties from 17 to 21 February when the ship was assigned to the combat search and rescue role with USS *Oldendorf* in an area just south of the Dorra oilfields and some 40 miles off the Kuwaiti coast, well within Silkworm missile range. The requirement was to rescue any aircrew that may be forced to eject over the Gulf and the Seahawk helicopter proved well suited to this task. In addition, the Seahawk was required to conduct daily reconnaissance of Jaz Kubbar Island, only 17 miles off the enemy-held coast.

While on patrol overnight 19/20 February, *Sydney* experienced three very loud explosions in her vicinity. Two were correlated with allied activity, but a third, which occurred in the early morning, was later linked to debris with Chinese markings which was found in the vicinity. Though unconfirmed, it seems possible that the explosion may have originated from a Silkworm missile or artillery rocket striking one of the many oil well heads in the area.

On 18 February, first USS *Tripoli* then USS *Princeton* struck mines in the NAG causing only minor personnel injuries, but significant structural damage to both units. *Sydney* was some 18 miles to the south of *Tripoli* at the time of the initial strike, while in the latter incident, *Sydney's* Seahawk was the first helicopter on the scene, ready to provide medivac support to *Princeton* if required.

The discovery of these minefields and reports of Silkworm missile targeting delayed mine-clearance operations and they were not completed in time to allow the Faylaka Island raid to occur before the end of hostilities. However, adequate levels of mine clearance were achieved to allow battleship naval gunfire support to commence on 23 February.

On completion of duties in the NAG, *Sydney* proceeded down the Gulf to Dubai, arriving there on 22 February, after 47 consecutive days at sea. *Westralia* joined *Sydney* in Dubai on the 23rd to allow the transfer of stores brought from Australia and unable to be

transferred at sea in an operational environment. The 23rd of February also marked the expiry of the latest US ultimatum for Iraq to commence the withdrawal of forces from Kuwait. G-Day, the start of the ground offensive, was initiated the following day. At the start of the offensive, all four carriers were brought on-line, providing round-the-clock flying while shifting strike tasking from battlefield interdiction to close air support. *Brisbane* experienced its busiest air control activity during this final stage and, on the day of the offensive, had control of four tankers on two tanker lines and six CAP aircraft.

Coalition ground forces made rapid advances into Iraq and Kuwait, but other threats remained. In particular, the threat from Silkworm missiles along the coast was very real and a great deal of effort had gone into eliminating these sites with air strikes. The portable nature and the relatively small size of the launchers, along with the presence of decoys, made certain destruction difficult, and on 25 February, several Silkworm missiles were fired at a naval gunfire support group consisting of US Ships *Missouri* and *Jarret* and HMS *Gloucester*. Most fell into the sea shortly after launch, but one Silkworm posed a threat and *Gloucester* fired two Sea Dart missiles and destroyed it.

*Sydney* sailed from Dubai for AAW duties in the north-western sector of the carrier screen on 25 February and remained there until the cease-fire. *Brisbane*, after also completing 47 days at sea, arrived in Dubai on 27 February in time to hear that the coalition forces had entered Kuwait City and to witness the jubilation of the many Kuwaitis exiled in Dubai. That night President Bush announced that Iraq had been beaten and that a cease-fire would commence at 0800 local the following morning. Just after the start of the cease-fire, *Westralia* sailed from Dubai to continue replenishment duties.

With the requirement for the carriers to be so close to the Kuwaiti coast removed, and to reduce the mine threat, the carrier operating area was shifted about 60 miles south-east back towards the central Gulf. The battle force now assumed a defensive posture. However, naval operations in the Gulf had not yet ceased and *Brisbane* sailed from Dubai on 2 March for escort duties with the replenishment ships *Passumpsic* and *Niagara Falls*, operating in the NAG until 4 March. During this swing, the threat from free floating mines was still very high. Three mines were discovered along the replenishment track, including one that passed some 50 yards from *Niagara Falls*. This mine was kept in sight by *Brisbane* until a US Navy helicopter-borne EOD team arrived to destroy it.

Meanwhile CDT 3 was tasked to assist in the clearance of Kuwaiti ports. During a reconnaissance for this task on 2 March, the officer in charge (OIC) of CDT 3, Lieutenant Commander John Griffiths, made the only direct contact by an Australian with the enemy when he captured an Iraqi soldier who was hiding in a warehouse in Ash Shuwaykh (the port for Kuwait City). CDT 3 commenced deploying to Ash Shuaybah the next day and began diving and ordnance disposal operations soon after. Combined

operations by US Navy/RN and RAN teams, in the most difficult conditions, allowed the official opening of Ash Shuaybah on 12 March and RAN efforts were then moved to the Kuwaiti naval base at Ras Al Qulay'ah before moving on to Ash Shuwaykh. The team performed extremely well and received much praise for its work.

The wind down of US Navy forces in the Gulf began almost immediately with the USS *America* being the first to depart the Gulf on 4 March to relieve the *John F Kennedy* and *Saratoga* battle groups in the Red Sea. The *Midway* battle group departed the Gulf on 10 March for the GOO and then continued passage to Japan three days later. *Sydney* acted as *Midway's* shotgun from 5-9 March, returning to the carrier screen on completion.

CTF 154 relinquished tactical control of all MNNF on 9 March and Commander Middle East Forces assumed coordination duties for all units continuing to enforce UN resolutions. Also on 9 March, *Brisbane* commenced her final escort role for replenishment units USS *Platte* and USS *Niagara Falls* on another NAG swing. After recent heavy weather, the threat of drifting mines was thought to have increased; fortunately none were found. The escort duty continued until 14 March.

On the afternoon of 14 March the three Australian ships left the carrier operating area for the last time and made passage to Dubai awaiting a government decision on future Australian operations in the Middle East. Six days later, it was announced that *Brisbane* and *Sydney* were to depart the Arabian Gulf on 22 March. *Westralia* and CDT 3 were to remain in the Gulf on MNNF duties awaiting a further government decision.

There are many lessons to be learned from committing ships to combat for the first time in 20 years. Some are far-reaching and expensive and will require close consideration in the overall defence program, while others are relatively minor and only require a little bit of fine tuning. From the overall experience of Operation DAMASK, I think the Australian Defence Force and the RAN in particular, can be heartened.

All RAN ships and units drew considerable and genuine praise from the allied commanders for their performance. In some very tense and demanding circumstances, the performance of all personnel was professional and purposeful and, for my part, it was a pleasure to serve with such an expert team. The quick reaction in deploying *Darwin*, *Adelaide* and *Success* was also most impressive.

The Australian task group was supported by an excellent logistic chain which, with support from RAAF transport aircraft, kept us well supplied. When the ships entered harbour after 47 days at sea, they were without any defects which affected their operational ability and possibly in the best material state of their lives.

Together these indicators reflect well on the Navy's personnel and its standards of training, recruiting and readiness. The package of enhancements which was put together and installed in a commendably quick time also worked well and allowed full integration with the American battle groups. However, the extent of enhancements

required in Tier 1 surface combatants raises some questions with regard to the 'fitted for' but not 'with' policy. In addition, and as found by other navies (such as the US Navy), the inner layers of anti-ship missile defence still require strengthening and helicopters need to be equipped more comprehensively for the surface surveillance and strike role.

On the broader operational side, there were many strong points. The most noteworthy was the success of the overall allied strike warfare plan and the very valuable contribution made by the carrier-based air wings, Tomahawk missiles and precision guided munitions. By the cease-fire, approximately 14,000 of the overall coalition total of 110,000 sorties had been flown by the four Gulf carriers and one dropped over 300,000 lbs of ordnance in a single day and averaged over 200,000 lbs a day. The integration of the allied forces was also impressive as was the control of such a massive force with very few real problems and it reflected the considerable benefit of large multinational exercises such as Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC).

Overall there were far more positives than negatives. Operation DAMASK and the First Gulf War offered a unique experience in which the RAN provided a very visible and active participation that allowed Australia to demonstrate its clear resolve to support the United Nations Security Council and Kuwait.

The challenge is now to heed the lessons of this experience.

## Notes

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- 1 This article first appeared in the *Journal of the Australian Naval Institute*, May 1991, pp. 33-9.

## Commodore Lee Cordner, AM, RANR

*Commanding Officer HMAS Sydney DAMASK II & IV*

I am going to address a range of issues, mainly from a commanding officer (CO) or a commander task group (CTG) perspective although I was only a CTG with the second deployment.<sup>1</sup> I was just reflecting as I looked around at the number of relatively young officers with plenty of fruit salad on their chests. Had we been at this same sort of event 12 years ago, it would have been quite a different picture, with only a small number of the more senior people with Vietnam medals and Vietnam experience. One thing we might reflect upon is the fact that there is a tremendously different Navy and operational experience today than probably it was in 1990, when we first embarked on Operation DAMASK.

Overall preparations were generally excellent, and the role of the Sea Training Group was vital. To me, how well we prepared became very evident when we started meeting up with our United States (US) Navy and Royal Navy (RN) counterparts inside the Gulf. It is a subjective statement, but I felt that our ships were as well prepared or better prepared than anyone else at that time.

However, preparations for the nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) environment were most difficult. I had real concerns with an FFG (Guided Missile Frigate) should it become contaminated. The lack of a citadel raised concerns of survivability and that is an issue that will not go away. Indeed, it will become more important as the likelihood of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) being used by a rogue state, a terrorist organisation, or indeed the United States increases in this day and age.

Royal Australian Navy (RAN) personnel were generally very well trained. HMAS *Sydney* had just returned from a world deployment when I took over, although we had about a one-third crew change since the Portland Sea Check. There was a requirement during the operational level of capability (OLOC) workup to change about three people altogether, so that generally reflected well on the overall quality of people and their readiness for that sort of workup.

Embarking the S-70B-2 Seahawk helicopter and preparing it was indeed a considerable challenge. The Seahawk was very new to the fleet and really was not fully operational. It was a great credit to the professionalism of the aviators and their teams that they were able to integrate and get up to speed so quickly. The need to do an aviation workup from scratch while undergoing an anti-air warfare (AAW) OLOC workup with a westerly passage and often unfavourable winds, and with an unsympathetic guided missile destroyer (DDG) in charge proved particularly demanding. It actually helped rapidly



develop bridge, operations room, flight deck and flight liaison to operate in a tactical environment. The need for slick operations and flexibility was quickly embraced.

The operations order (OPORDER) and the rules of engagement (ROE), from my perspective, were expansive and appropriate. They gave a lot of discretion to the CTG, which I believe caused him some concerns. The perception that I had at the time was that Commodore Oxenbould felt that he had too much delegation. However, I felt the strategic level in Canberra, led by the Chief of Naval Staff (CNS) of the day, and Rear Admiral Taylor was Assistant Chief of Defence Force – Operations (ACOPS) at the time, plus involvement from Maritime Command, got this very right. We were given the scope to be fully employed and to do the job without unnecessary reference to higher command, and that is what a good OPORDER and ROE are all about, from a tactical war fighter level.

I doubt whether it was really necessary to have a commodore-rank CTG. In the event he only commanded, as a tactical commander, one boarding operation, the MV *Ain Zalah*. Clearly the international liaison role was important, but perhaps the captain-level CTG, separate from the CO of *Brisbane* or *Success*, might have been more appropriate and employable. I note that in the more recent deployments we tend to have the one-star officer ashore somewhere for that liaison role and, of course, the war-fighting captain-level CTG at sea, which is probably more sensible.

There was quite a consideration early on, or immediately prior to, the shooting war, about the RAN task group's assignment. The reality was that a number of American admirals were very keen to have capable destroyers and frigates in support. The options primarily were to go for aircraft carrier battle group (CVBG) protection or to participate under Commander Middle East Force in an inshore role. Our CTG decided to go with the CVBG protection role and we were under the tactical command of Rear Admiral March, USN, in USS *Midway* for most of the conflict. However, there was a false belief in the RAN then of the value of the DDG. Certainly we had a great ship with a cruiser configuration and all that went with that, but we lacked the long-range AAW weaponry to be really effective in that AAW role.

The FFG was not as well employed as it could have been. We noted that the US Navy FFGs were used specifically in close operations, close inshore operations, and at the time that there was much to learn there. They were doing a lot of special operations support, particularly USS *Curts*, *Nicholas*, and *Jarrett*. Some of them were carrying three helicopters at a time. They had two OH-58D attack helicopters in one hangar – very small helicopters that carried an anti-tank weapon, plus a Seahawk in the other hangar. They were using the OH-58Ds plus Seahawk in turn with British Lynx and Sea Skua anti-surface missiles to take out the Iraqi Navy and to engage Iraqi forces on the oil platforms. The thing that came across to me very clearly was that the FFG offers a great deal of flexibility if employed imaginatively and I do not think we did employ it imaginatively, certainly in the early stages of that conflict.

The other major lesson is that the ability to carry two or more helicopters offers considerable flexibility, particularly in our strategic circumstances. I say that with no apologies to the *Anzac* drivers, but I think it is something we ought not lose sight of.

I wonder whether we were overly risk averse? Did we elicit the maximum strategic advantage as intended by the Australian Government and as the ROE and OPORDER really gave us from our commitment? Our ships were well prepared but we really were somewhat reluctant to put them in harm's way. Not that I really wanted them to get shot at, but I think there was a strategic issue there.



*Watched by Rear Admiral Rob Walls, Commander Lee Cordner passes the Operation DAMASK weight to Commander Martyn Bell, February 1992*

At that time, the perception that I had coming to me from higher levels was that we had a fear of the media. To me it was a lack of exploitation of opportunity. This came home very clearly to me during the *Ibn Khaldoon* boarding where HMS *London*, as part of the combined task group, had a BBC film crew on board. There were great pictures being beamed all round the world of the British doing this great operation which *Sydney* had a leading role in and the US Navy commanded, but everyone else in the world would have thought it was a British operation. There was a very great lack of awareness by people back in Australia and by our families of what we were doing there—of our role. I do not understand why we were so nervous about the media and certainly to me it was an object lesson, particularly how the British handled it quite differently. There are pros and cons, there are things to gain and lose in terms of media management. I do not know how much we have learned, but it is a critical issue.

The lack of an effective anti-ship missile defence (ASMD) capability due to shortcomings in the Sperry Mk 92 Fire Control system with Standard Missile 1 (SM1) capability remains today as it was then. We were probably able to handle Silkworm missile type attacks, but certainly we would have had great difficulty, other than with close-in-weapons systems (CIWS) dealing with an Exocet, which was part of the Iraqi arsenal at that time. The problem is well known, yet we still send ships around the world in the same inadequate configuration. Do we have to wait for a national tragedy before this is addressed?

USS *Bunker Hill* handled what was called ‘Gulf Whisky’, running the air battle over and around the Persian Gulf and they did a superb job. We had some Link 11 problems initially, but generally the picture was very good in what was an incredibly crowded environment. With respect to surface warfare, the electro-optical device that we had fitted was an excellent asset for checking dhows and other surface craft at night and also for mine search. It would have been great if it was slaved to a weapon, which of course it was not at that time. These things are moving on, but the value of those sorts of devices cannot be understated for self-protection, survival and identification, complying with ROE and everything else, but you need to be able to see it and if necessary shoot it as well, otherwise you are wasting your time.

The RAN helicopters were very good at surface search. However we had problems with the Seahawk’s MEL Super Searcher radar in various modes because it was very similar to a missile head and therefore had to be restricted in its operation. Then, as now, we had a lack of helicopter-based air-to-surface weapons, which remains a major limitation, not only for the Gulf-type operation, but for any sort of operation in our region. We have the Super Seasprites coming along with a weapon, but it was a long time ago that we were going through all this.

We must not forget that mine warfare generated the major allied naval casualties of the war. I watched in amazement as the US Navy Task Group sailed into a known minefield when the USS *Tripoli* and *Princeton* incidents occurred. They were entirely avoidable in

my view. We had, in *Sydney*, classified British minefield charts which showed precisely where these areas were, all indications were they were still live, and yet we watched the Americans sail in there. The thing that is interesting was whether this was a failure of intelligence. There has been very little publicly written about that.

The Seahawk's MEL Super Searcher high definition radar was good for picking things up on the sea surface and therefore excellent for mine search for floating mines. However we were reduced in how we could employ that radar to avoid fratricide. I would like to acknowledge that the RAN Clearance Diving Team (CDT) detachment in Ash Shuaybah, Kuwait, did an absolutely superb job of port clearance after hostilities ceased.

The RAN emphasis on seamanship and ship handling paid huge dividends. We were able to conduct our normal highly professional replenishment at sea (RAS) and boarding operations. The US Navy lack of preparation in this regard was exemplified by a night RAS in the North Arabian Gulf between *Success* and *Bunker Hill*. This was during the period of very high tension and it was an unnecessarily protracted evolution at night with an air threat where the Aegis cruiser had to keep its SPY-1 arcs open to the north, and there was a high floating mine threat.

The decision to conduct a training validation on the return passage was an excellent one. Although it was not particularly popular at the time, it was very important. It is unfortunate that no similar efforts were made to capture and analyse the impact on people. We operated in whole ship defence watches for 47 days continuously. There was considerable stress of operating in a high threat mine and air environment for extensive periods. There was much to learn and capture immediately about that experience and its effect on people. We did not do it then and I do not know whether we are doing it now – these things need to be understood.

Overall, our people were first class and there was good leadership at all levels and significant emphasis on internal communications. The defence watch concept was proven, and we had not done this before for that length of time, although managing interruptions of sleep was a vital factor. *Sydney*, as a minimum-manned ship, tried to arrange major logistics activities around defence watch timings whenever possible, because of the impact it would have on the sleep cycles of people. But overall, certainly in *Sydney*, there was a downward spiral in alertness, rising fatigue levels, as we got towards the end of our main period of 47 days continuously on operations. It is difficult to assess, however *Sydney* was probably approaching a hazardous situation by that time.

The principal warfare officer (PWO) concept worked well and in *Sydney* we had an additional non-watchkeeping PWO-trained officer as a navigator and an operations officer (OPSO), which proved to be quite a bonus.

The lessons learned were carefully documented in the CTG post-war report and posted to Maritime Headquarters (MHQ). I had some concerns at the time that they would

not receive the attention they deserved. This was confirmed a few years later when I became Director of Naval Warfare and had difficulty locating the post-operation reports. We finally tracked some down, but we must place greater emphasis on war and peacetime exercise and operational analysis, so that the lessons can be applied to force structure and training.

DAMASK IV – my second deployment. HMAS *Sydney* was the first RAN ship deployed to the North Red Sea for Maritime Interception Force (MIF) operations. The port of Aqaba, Jordan, was considered to be the main option for Iraqi attempts to work around United Nations (UN) embargoes at the time.

Australia enhanced its position with the United States and the US Navy by committing to the ongoing MIF and through *Sydney's* playing a full and extended role. It was interesting to observe the RN approach. They spent only about three to five days per month at sea, all within the Gulf, and the rest of the time they were in harbour supporting British marketing efforts. The RN ships simply sailed from Gulf port to Gulf port maintaining a very visible presence ashore. This was not well received at the tactical level by the US Navy; however the UK was busy eliciting maximum strategic advantage from its commitment to the Gulf War. The only real Australian attempt to take similar advantage was when I was flown up to Riyadh during a port visit to Jeddah to support the embassy there – something to reflect on.

I was allowed to assign tactical command of *Sydney* to another commander if I chose, but in the end we decided not to do that. There was a US destroyer squadron (DESRON) commander running the show in the North Red Sea. As we had much more expansive ROE and better capabilities in some respects, he and I agreed it gave us much better flexibility for me to do things rather than his having to go through several layers of US command to get approval to do things I was able to do without going to higher authority. Day-to-day cooperation and coordination worked very well and the RAN proved to be a major catalyst between the US Navy and the French Navy. *Sydney*, overall, I thought was well prepared. We benefited from US Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) training. The small rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIBs) we had, although they were not particularly effective by modern standards, were much more effective than the US Navy whale boats at the time. The RAN sailors performed very well compared with US Coast Guard and the French Commandos.

The boarding tempo was slow at times and we were fully prepared with two teams who were generally under-employed.

The RAN focus in our training on ship-handling and seamanship proved to be highly advantageous. We were able to safely and expeditiously conduct close manoeuvring and boarding operations against large, dissimilar merchant ships much more confidently and efficiently than the US Navy, for example. Maintaining warfare readiness and alertness however proved to be quite challenging and the lack of US Navy readiness in

this regard was highlighted when an Israeli Air Force sea and air probe went through the force on the day before the first Arab-Israeli peace talks. *Sydney* was the only ship that responded.

Operational summaries (OPSUMS) are a great concept, except they are only good if someone reads them. It took me about six weeks to realise that no-one in MHQ was reading our OPSUMS.

One point I would like to reinforce is that the Australian embassies in Cairo and Riyadh provided excellent support. Neither of those embassies had a Defence Attaché at the time and yet they went to extraordinary lengths to support us. Indeed, that has been my experience with Foreign Affairs professionals in most of my naval career.

Our officers and sailors performed exceptionally well. Again, a comprehensive post-operation report was presented to MHQ, but I do not think it was really taken anywhere afterwards. Again, I think that is an important lesson.

## Notes

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- 1 For additional comments by Commodore Cordner on the Gulf War, especially on command, see 'Command at sea in war and peace: An Australian experience during the Gulf War and after', in D Stevens & J Reeve (eds), *The Face of Naval Battle*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 2003, chap. 14.



*HMAS Manoora receiving supplies, 2002*

# Seven

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## Commodore James Goldrick, AM, CSC, RAN

### *Task Group Commander SLIPPER Two*

My comments cover my time in the Gulf in early 2002.<sup>1</sup> My team arrived in-theatre in February and left at the end of June. Having taken over from Captain Allan Du Toit at the beginning of March, I exercised command of the maritime interception operations (MIO) from then, until our departure, with the exception of one week at the end of March.

I started out with certain advantages. First, there were proven command arrangements, including a National Commander in the area of operations. This meant that I could focus on operations and had a clear tactical operational job to do.

That brings me to my next advantage. The ground had been prepared. Over the longer term, the efforts of previous deployments for DAMASK had created both a high level of corporate expertise and, equally important, a high level of credibility with our coalition partners. Of particular significance were the achievement of *Anzac's* DAMASK-SLIPPER deployment under Captain Nigel Coates in 2001 and the very successful initial term of Allan Du Toit as Commander MIO.

I viewed my mission as being to build on what had already been achieved and further reduce the incidence of oil-smuggling from Iraq. Here, too, I had advantages. A key one was that I had, although this only became clear to me as my understanding of the situation developed, sufficient – but only just sufficient – forces to maintain a continuous cordon around the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) waterway.

The second advantage was that after a month in the job, I received a request from the Americans that I should resume and maintain command of MIO indefinitely. The US Navy officer normally in command went to fulfil the role of sea combat commander for Commander Task Force (CTF) 50. This happened with about a week's notice. Basically the Americans made a decision at the highest level in Washington that they would draw down by one carrier battle group in the Arabian Sea. This came as a complete shock to everybody and, to react to that situation, the Commander Destroyer Squadron Fifty (COMDESRON 50) went out as sea combat commander to the Arabian Sea to fill a gap, and we were asked to fill the gap in our turn. It was quite important to convince everybody outside the Gulf that there were no ulterior motives to that request. Although we were obviously still working within an American construct, I now inevitably had more room to manoeuvre, to change how things were done.



The next advantage was that I was operating at a rank level appropriate to the situation in the command structure. I was particularly struck by the fact that, for the Americans, star rank is flag rank. They find it difficult to accommodate star officers within their operational command chain unless they bring substantial, and by that I mean battle group, capabilities to the game. Canada did deploy a commodore to the Arabian Sea. It was apparent to me that there was some discomfort with that because the Americans felt they really could not treat the commodore in the same relaxed way they could an O6 like myself. For the Americans that O6 rank can go back and forth between having an enormous amount of responsibility and very little. It is something I think we need to bear in mind—when we are contributing personnel, we have to ensure that the rank level is appropriate. Had I been a commodore I think it would have been much more difficult. However, I did not have in-theatre overall national command responsibilities and did not have to worry too much about liaising or red-carding at those levels.

The relationship with Maritime Headquarters (MHQ) was interesting. It was quite clear to me that MHQ was not used to a CTG who was not in command of a ship. That was particularly apparent when I was sea riding on board American ships. I had an excellent relationship with the Maritime Commander (MC) and Chief Staff Officer Operations, Captain Vin Thompson. Vin, in particular, did an enormous amount of work in making this all run smoothly. However, MHQ as a whole tended to forget to put the CTG on signals, tended to forget to tell the CTG things and occasionally junior people in MHQ decided to raise issues with ships without telling me. I waited about two months before sending a two-and-a-half page summary of incidents to the MC by private email. That solved the problem.

As CTG I had the time and ability to focus on higher level issues. I want to dwell on this point because I think the RAN has still to resolve when we should have a separate CTG, and when we should have a CTG also in command of a ship. The thing about being a separate CTG is you do have more time to focus on the higher level problems. I will freely admit it took me time, new as I was to the Gulf, to understand the sanctions question in all its dimensions, particularly the fact that the US Navy had additional items on its agenda and what the real implications of that agenda were. For example, US Navy priority was to have an appropriate presence in the Northern Gulf to support Operation SOUTHERN WATCH, the air defence and air movement problem. They also had to have a sufficient presence to be ready to strike Iraq if the situation required. Although we had no visibility of this, it was quite clear they were also spending a lot of time thinking about the issues of any campaign that might be ordered against Iraq.

*Anzac's* extraordinary efforts had cut the flow of oil by sea by something like half, and this reduction had been maintained during the following deployment. However, a substantial outflow continued, effectively the equivalent of a medium-sized oil tanker leaving the KAA every other day. We knew that some had to be going out in the motor dhows, but only a proportion. Although we were watching for breakouts, the number

we detected or had direct evidence of simply did not match the outflow. I formed the view that we were not catching all the smugglers because we simply were not aware of all the smuggler movements. In my judgement we were all relying too much upon electronic detection methods, both passive and active, and failing to appreciate that the smuggling organisation was capable of exploiting a gap of only a couple of hours in our coverage.

The point made earlier about defence watches proving themselves and the fatigue issue is an important one. My assessment is we have not proven defence watches. I think the jury is still out. My personal view is that defence watches do not work. I think that they dull the intelligence, curiosity and the ability to be looking coherently at a problem. While defence watches man ships, for people who we need to be looking out, thinking out and reacting, I do not think it works. I do not know what the solution is, but I note that three watches were implemented in 1914 and again in 1939.

Things were coming together to allow us to change the pattern of our operations, and I was feeling that I ought to be doing it, but the ships in the task group, the Australian ships, were beating me to it. The point was, we had the number of ships, the combinations of rules of engagement and the physical capabilities to actually maintain a 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week, 12-months-a-year close-up surveillance of the KAA. That was the only thing that was actually going to stop the tanker traffic outright, and we implemented that change.

It was clear to me that as the CTG I had a lot of work to do, not so much within the force, but outside it. Such issues as disposition planning, rotations of ships, replenishments and weapons firings all required consideration. Timings had to be carefully worked to make sure that somebody was always close up to the KAA. It was not just an internal problem. Replenishments were an interesting example of the need for the task group commander to work outside the force to change customary mindsets. It was not unknown for a replenishment ship to embark on a replenishment course headed directly away from the MIO areas into clearer water and to refuse, no matter how lengthy the replenishment, to reverse course to minimise the time the MIF ship was off-station. This sort of thing meant it was not only a matter of a CTG changing his scheme of manoeuvre, but of liaising, discussing, briefing external authorities and new joiners – particularly the latter. I spent a lot of time visiting new ships joining.

The game changed and it kept changing. What *Anzac* did in 2001 was very different to what Allan Du Toit's group did a few months later, their approach was different to what we did, and this in turn was different to what Captain Peter Sinclair's group implemented. The point I am getting to is that our group, because we ended up sitting well inshore, were in close blockade mode. We had fewer boardings than before and fewer boardings than after, when the dhows became the target.

We must beware the body count. The only time I have nearly used physical violence on somebody senior to me was when a senior officer, inappropriately, to the ship's company in the Australian ship I was in, mentioned *Anzac's* record. We had been saying very firmly to everybody, it is a different game. We are sorry, the opportunities are no longer there, but you are doing a really great job stopping it happening. When you get people going on about how we did X numbers of this, and X numbers of that, and X numbers of the other, you can quickly get into the American situation in Vietnam with the body count being viewed as a measure of success, as opposed to the effect you are trying to achieve. Interestingly enough, it was only when intelligence came through that the amount of loading actually happening inside Iraq had dropped from about 50 per cent to about 10 per cent of pre-*Anzac* totals, that people were able to see that the blockade, where nothing seemed to be happening, was achieving the desired effect. We were then able to see the major and direct effect on morale from the success of our operations and our understanding of the appropriate measures of effectiveness of our work.



*Captain James Goldrick and his staff, April 2002*

As CTG I had to work carefully with other navies whose operational procedures or rules of engagement did not completely match the requirements of the situation, in order to get them changed. My record was mixed, although I had some successes. We had one issue with the British where I hammered the chest of the Deputy Coalition Commander who was a one-star. He did not quite take offence, but he was a bit miffed until he went on board the British ship. He came back to me 24 hours later and said: 'Thank God you had given me a hard time because the Royal Marines hollowed my chest out and I was able to say to them that the Australian CTG had already done the job.' The point is that it is best to be absolutely straight on such matters within a framework of extreme tact and politeness. The point has got to be that you are seeking to get the job done better, not to score national points. Every pressure point has got to be exploited. Bring me a VIP and I will brief him to death.

Remote headquarters staff are always suspicious of the motives of those on the spot, particularly from other countries. The more remote the headquarters, the greater the likely level of suspicion, and the more they will reckon that the national forces operating with you have succumbed to hostage syndrome. That is where using a direct line to a visiting four-star VIP can be very useful. Particularly when the message is the same from the MIO commander as it is from the national unit concerned.

Let me dwell a little on task group operations within a multinational environment. If I have a primary regret, it is that I did not give more priority to getting Australian ships' warfare officers and senior warfare sailors onto my command ships for sufficient periods to get them across both the realities of the system within which we were operating and the pressures under which we were operating. Commanding officers have the necessary breadth of understanding and experience, but I was not convinced that the experience levels of more junior Australian personnel were sufficient to allow them to comprehend the big picture, particularly operating in a multi-ship Australian task group in the multinational environment, rather than a single-ship task group. The progressive reduction in exchange postings and foreign training may have contributed to our junior officers' being less worldly in these matters than they once were. Interestingly, while Australian ships sometimes, probably justly, complained about being micro-managed, the US Navy ships frequently remarked how much they appreciated the less rigid levels of control which prevailed in the MIF by comparison with their usual experience. I had some evidence that some of the remote headquarters thought US Navy ships had succumbed to hostage syndrome and were getting off with the Australians.

A particular problem came in chat. From what I have heard of Captain Peter Jones's time in the Gulf, the corporate levels of understanding of chat rooms has increased markedly. Certainly in early 2002 it was very much new technology, poorly implemented, with no proper procedures or control and a great deal of scope for micro-management and misunderstanding. One of my big challenges as CTG was to battle against the level of risk averseness which was apparent in theatre at every point in MIF operations. Some

of this risk averseness may have been inevitable. There had been events in late 2001 which had included the death of some US sailors in the sinking of an apprehended smuggler and these had magnified the tendency to risk averseness and, indeed, a new operational guidance was issued just as Allan left theatre and I came in, which really made life quite difficult in some respects. I had a fine line to tread, because I agreed with the basic proposition that the operation was not worth the death or serious injury of any of our people. However, I also believe that there were constraints which went beyond this, which needed to be managed. I will give you an instance. The British frigate, HMS *Portland*, had conducted a highly successful boarding at about one o'clock in the morning. The rule was that you were not allowed, because of the danger, once the ship had been secured, to retain a boarding party on board unless you received permission from Fifth Fleet himself, via CTF 50. My rule was to just let the commanding officers get on with it without asking me, while I did the formal asking of the flags. We had a conversation on chat at about two in the morning where it was clear that whoever it was on the other end did not want to wake the Admiral. Whoever was on the staff on chat was saying: 'But why do you need to keep a boarding party on board?' I was saying: 'Well, if *Portland* is escorting the smuggler south he is only a couple of miles from Iranian territorial waters and he could nip back in really easily.' 'Well, take away the passports and travel documents and everything else.' We said: 'No', that he would still go into Iranian waters. Then there was: 'Well, what about if you steam them to the following point, by which stage you will have enough time to reboard?' It was at this point I entered the chat conversation and said: 'The commanding officer of HMS *Portland* is conducting this boarding in an extremely professional manner. You are interfering with command responsibilities. Please ask the Admiral.' Whoever it was at the other end of the chat at that point realised the sense of humour had disappeared. Those were the sort of things associated with chat, in terms of the problems that you get. I was not always successful and sometimes when I had been successful it was not at all obvious, and not worth trying to make it so to the ship concerned.

In general, *Manoora* and *Kanimbla* are well equipped for things like MIO command. What they are not good at, and are not yet equipped for properly, is command and control of high-level maritime tactical warfare operations. That became apparent with a dispute with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy, which was very well handled by my Chief of Staff. It is about the only time I was actually off the ship, but it was quite clear from reconstruction that the picture had been somewhat time late in terms of the flag plot.

The other point is your staff has to be the right size. My staff was too small, particularly when we took on MIO command on a continuous basis, as this created considerable stresses and tensions for those concerned. I was very pleased when MHQ adopted wholesale my recommendations for an expanded team for the next rotation, although it seemed incredibly big and Rolls Royce when they actually turned up.

Above all, the CTG has to have a good Chief of Staff who can act effectively in his absence. You also need to have a good relationship with a ship's CO. When you are embarked and otherwise occupied, the ship's CO can act for you, because you may need to have the Chief of Staff act for you somewhere else. One of our successes was achieving the fit of SIPRNET (Secret Internet Protocol Network) on board *Manoora*, basically by giving the Americans a secure compartment, putting a cardboard cut-out marine in front and giving them one of the two INMARSAT Bravo terminals in order that there was neither an electronic, nor a physical connection with any Australian system.<sup>2</sup> That met all the requirements, but for the Chief of Staff to be able to deal with the SIPRNET fit in the very short time it happened on board *Manoora*, required somebody who had the authority and the experience and understanding. He did a really important job. The SIPRNET fit on board *Manoora* was one of the successes of our deployment, because it did show us what you can really achieve when you have got the connectivity with your own team and with your coalition partners. I think that the task group command worked best when it was on board *Manoora*.<sup>1</sup>

Equally important is a first class operations officer. You have got to have somebody who has lots of experience as well as lots of energy. Again I was very lucky.

In conclusion, we proved the value of a CTG in the right context.

## Notes

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- 1 For a wider discussion, see J Goldrick, 'Maritime Sanctions Enforcement against Iraq', in BA Elleman and SCM Paine (eds), *Naval Blockades and Seapower: Strategies and Counter-strategies, 1805-2005*, Routledge, London, 2006, chap. 18.
- 2 For background on SIPRNET and coalition communications see Paul T Mitchell, *Network Centric Warfare: Coalition Operations in the Age of US Military Primacy*, Adelphi Paper 385, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 2006.



*The RAN Task Group during Operation FALCONER, April 2003*

## Captain Peter Jones, DSC, AM, RAN

*Executive Officer HMAS Sydney DAMASK VII;  
Commanding Officer HMAS Melbourne DAMASK IX;  
Task Group Commander SLIPPER Four, BASTILLE & FALCONER*

I will initially discuss task group command issues that related to my rotation into the Gulf, known as Rotation Four. This will be followed by a task group commander's view of the RAN task group's involvement in the war and some observations from the operation.

It was thought that, due to the strategic situation and seasonal considerations, if there were to be a war with Iraq, then it would likely occur during Rotation Four's watch. As such, during the pre-deployment phase, there were discussions with the Maritime Commander, Rear Admiral Raydon Gates, whether the rank of the RAN CTG would remain at the rank of captain. Amongst other considerations, it was felt best to retain the rank of captain, rather than replacing him with a commodore as the CTG, as he would stand a better chance of being assigned a coalition command position.

The looming war also influenced the composition of the Rotation Four CTG staff which resulted in the formation of a slightly expanded staff compared to that of my predecessor, Captain Peter Sinclair. Another factor in this expansion was the appreciation that Commander Destroyer Squadron Fifty (COMDESRON 50) who, in the normal course of events, would be in command of the maritime interception operations (MIO), was in Bahrain at Fifth Fleet Headquarters planning for the war. As such, Rotation Four would be at sea most of the time. Indeed from the end of October 2002 until early April 2003, Rotation Four was at sea for all but about 14 days. The operating tempo had implications for task group staff, and it was important that they had sufficient depth of experience to perform a number of tasks. For example, Lieutenant Commander Penny Campbell, the staff legal officer, undertook watch-keeping duties. In hindsight, it was a period of intense activity, but I suspect people probably quite enjoyed the broader roles they performed.

One of the advantages of being from a small navy is that it can develop and share its corporate memory. I had a number of people from previous CTG rotations in my team. In addition, there was a build-up of corporate knowledge through regular dialogue with previous CTGs, including Captain Allan Du Toit, Captain James Goldrick and Captain Peter Sinclair. Rotation Four therefore understood the broad MIO campaign plan and how it was being effectively executed as a close blockade.

The tempo of MIO operations varied greatly during our tenure. We arrived in-theatre by IL-76 transport aircraft ahead of our two frigates HMAS *Anzac* (Captain Peter



Lockwood) and HMAS *Darwin* (Commander Aaron Ingram). It was just before Ramadan commenced, and was therefore extremely busy with as many as 80 dhows attempting to break out each night carrying dates for this religious festival. Fortunately, HMA Ships *Arunta* and *Melbourne* were seasoned MIO units and proved very competent in foiling these attempted mass break-outs. After Ramadan the tempo of activity fell away dramatically and this gave us much-needed breathing space.

During the entire five-month-period that Rotation Four was on-station, we only had two merchant ships (known in MIO jargon as 'steel hulls') try to get out of the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) waterway. That highlighted the success of MIO and showed how, since the end of 2001, the Maritime Interception Force (MIF) had tightened the cordon on the smugglers. In the case of our pair of steel hulls, *Anzac* did really well to respond to these two ships (*Australe* and *Petrobus*). *Anzac's* boarding teams were configured for dhows – a different sort of boarding team arrangement. In the end, one was apprehended and the other got into Iranian territorial waters. This was another example of the benefits of corporate memory. Personnel on the staff said: 'Right, this is the drill. You get the Fifth Fleet to get onto the Iranians through the UN MEMAC [Maritime Emergency Mutual Centre] agency. The Iranians should come out and board the ship.' Sure enough, that is what happened. The Americans thought that we had such great understanding of what goes on, but in reality, it was the corporate experience at work.

My predecessor, Peter Sinclair, ran a very tight organisation with a more disciplined battle rhythm than Rotation Four. At the end of Peter's time, the Iraqi Navy PB-90 patrol boats commenced patrols in the MIO area. The US Navy was particularly concerned about this development because Iraq's intentions were unclear and they passed close to the MIF. As time passed we became convinced that the Iraqi focus was on exercising their sovereignty. Our approach was to be watchful, but not let their actions deter our MIO mission. The use of HAWKLINK video streaming from US Navy Seahawk helicopters to our US Navy command ship proved invaluable in these rules of engagement situations for the MIO commander to assess the Iraqi intent.

In the December/January time-frame, Iraqi naval units, Saddam Hussein's yacht and various government ships that were holed up in Umm Qasr came down the river. They then went up the Shatt Al Arab (SAA) waterway to Al Basrah. Once again the proximity of Iraqi naval units to the MIF posed a potential surface warfare threat. The fallout was that the MIO commander became a local surface warfare commander. Related to this was the creation of a local air warfare commander. Because the MIF was so far north, the Aegis ships were not going to deal with any air or missile attack directed at the MIF. It was problematic whether they would pick up a missile being fired from the Al Faw peninsula with a one-minute time of flight to a ship in the northern area. These sorts of issues had to be addressed at the local level and coordinated within the MIF. These developments prepared the way for the MIO commander to transition to be the MIO screen commander during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

Most of Rotation Four's tenure was in American ships, before finally joining HMAS *Kanimbla*. The American vessels were US Ships *Paul Hamilton*, *Fletcher*, *Milius*, and *Valley Forge*. In terms of command and control (C2) systems, most of our time was spent using the US SIPRNET. MIO had a dedicated chat room for the conduct of operations and this was augmented with the extensive use of email. In December 2002 there was a change of rules and MIO switched to COWAN (the coalition wide area network). This was particularly beneficial as it allowed the US Navy, RAN and RN all to communicate on the same C2 medium.



*Rotation Four CTG staff, US Navy, Royal Navy and Royal Marine officers at a planning meeting in HMAS Kanimbla, March 2003*

Also during December there was a change of national command arrangements. When Rotation Four left Australia, my immediate superior was the Maritime Commander and, in December, as part of this reorganisation for Operation FALCONER, my immediate superior became Commander Australian Theatre (COMAST). At the same time, the RAN Logistic Element (Commander Chris Percival) and the Fifth Fleet RAN liaison officer all came within my task group for the first time. This greatly simplified C2 arrangements and provided a much better focus in preparing the RAN task group for the looming conflict.

In the lead-up to the war there was also a change in the Fifth Fleet organisation. COMDESRON 50 came to sea in early February and, consequently, there was an extra link in the chain of command. Instead of reporting direct to the admiral in the carrier (CTF 50), there were now two carrier admirals at sea: CTF 50 dealing with strike, and CTF 55 responsible for sea superiority. In addition, I now had COMDESRON 50 as the North Arabian Gulf (NAG) Commander in the USS *Valley Forge* CTG 55.1, one of the ships from which we had exercised command. Potentially that could have been a diabolical nightmare of command and control. It certainly had its moments, but personal relationships and goodwill will overcome any organisational shortfalls. I found there was nothing like having a walk around the deck with COMDESRON 50 – Commodore Peterson, USN, and discussing issues. Staffs under stress can get irritated with one another and so on, and people get cross-threaded, as Commodore Peterson used to say. The key was that we had a long history of good relationships of RAN commanding officers and CTGs with successive COMDESRON 50.

For Rotation Four, our contribution to war planning started in the last week of December 2002. The purpose was twofold: first to develop a clear concept of operations for the RAN TG, and second to supplement the work already well underway by COMDESRON 50 staff for naval operations in the NAG.

The planned naval operations in and around the KAA involved securing offshore oil terminals, supporting the assault on the Al Faw peninsula, clearing the KAA of merchant shipping and controlling the waterway for the unimpeded access of humanitarian aid to the port of Umm Qasr. The MIF would play a major and supporting role in these operations.

From a mission perspective, Rotation Four was well aware of the tactical advantage the MIF enjoyed in exercising sea control over much of the NAG. Key to that was the continuous presence of relatively shallow draught RAN and RN frigates in the mouth of the KAA. In any conflict it would be highly desirable to use the hard-won local knowledge and maintain this presence. If this sea control were lost, the Iraqis could undertake mining operations similar to those they undertook in the 1991 Gulf War. This would have implications for the entire maritime campaign.

In reviewing projected operations, the other concern was the Royal Marines' assault on the Al Faw peninsula. It was clear they would be taking on a big task and that they really needed naval gunfire support (NGS) to guarantee indirect fire on the southern end of Al Faw.

In considering the best employment for the RAN task group in any conflict, four guiding principles were promoted by Rotation Four to higher coalition and national commands. These were:

- surface combatants, including the soon-to-join *Kanimbla* should be employed in the NAG rather than in operations further south;
- the NGS capabilities of *Anzac* and the RN frigates could play a telling role in the assault on the Al Faw peninsula;
- by virtue of its excellent C2, communications, space and shallow draught, the *Kanimbla* should be used as a command ship in the NAG; and
- the RAN CTG staff should use their operational experience as a command staff at sea rather than monitoring national operations from Bahrain as had been suggested.

Once the role of the RAN task group in the NAG was confirmed, detailed planning of the MIF's support to the KAA clearance operations accelerated. *Kanimbla* was ideally suited to host the numerous planning meetings that attend the lead-up to large coalition operations.

An aspect of coalition operations frequently overlooked is the role of liaison officers. In the lead-up to the conflict, Royal Australian Navy liaison officers (RANLOs) were established with CTF 55, CTG 55.1 (the Kuwaiti/Emirate/Bahraini Defence of Kuwait task group), the Royal Marines ashore, and the Polish support ship ORP *Czernicki*, in addition to those already in place in Bahrain. They were the glue that held the coalition C2 arrangements together. Amongst other things, the RANLOs could be relied upon to tell you: 'This is not playing too well' or 'You have a problem' or 'What you are doing looks pretty crook'. This is what you wanted. Our senior RANLO was Commander Mark McIntosh, my former Chief of Staff, who was sent to CTF 55 in the carrier USS *Constellation* as it was very important to have a commander there who had the experience and the requisite MIO expertise.

At the end of the KAA clearance planning, CTF 55, Rear Admiral Barry Costello, USN, visited *Kanimbla* to be briefed by the CTG and commanding officers (COs). The involvement of the COs was vitally important in giving the admiral confidence in the plan. A key aspect of the plan was the comprehensive suite of anti-fratricide measures that were developed to ensure the MIF, special forces, Royal Marines and Defence of Kuwait task group could operate safely in close proximity. During the briefing it was

clear that the admiral really enjoyed coming up to *Kanimbla* and getting the chart out and talking to the COs. A related aspect is that, in large campaigns there can be a divergent outlook between large staffs, and those destined to be involved in action. The interplay between staff and warfighting mentalities was noticeable in the lead-up to and during combat operations.

Another important factor was the RAN relationship with the local navies. Our relationship with the Kuwaitis was vitally important. General Ahmed Al Mulla, Chief of the Kuwaiti Navy, and his staff officers, had established a very good rapport with successive RAN CTGs and COs. The Defence of Kuwait task group operated to the west of the MIF in the lead-up to and during the war. As such, the two task groups exchanged liaison officers. Our Kuwaiti liaison officer was the brilliant Major Majeed Al Shameri who was awarded a Maritime Commander Australia Commendation for his work in unravelling the Iraqi mining operations.

The arrival of the Australian Clearance Diving Team 3 (AUSCDT 3) in-theatre brought another dimension to the RAN CTG duties. Led by Lieutenant Commander Scott Craig, they had come fresh from an exercise with the US Navy. Initially they faced a complicated reconstitution through Bahrain and Kuwait. They would enter Iraq via road convoy. The diving team was a mix of Gulf War veterans and young sailors straight out of the box. They impressed me straight away with their enthusiasm and operational focus. I saw that my responsibility was both to ensure they were employed in accordance with higher level guidance and also to help them maximise their contribution to the operation.

In the week or so preceding the war there was one event after another to attract our attention. Most important to me was that the Iraqis were on the move in our operating area. The last of the Iraqi large naval or government ships had sailed down the KAA and round into the SAA and Al Basrah. Our contacts among the merchant shipping were telling us of Iraqi military on tugs and that explosives were to be laid on the Mina Al Bakr Oil Terminal (MABOT), Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT) and on navigation marks. Rumours of mines abounded among local mariners. We strongly doubted mines had been laid, but we closely shadowed all Iraqi vessels. Equally important was maintaining our overt presence to deter any mine-laying.

In preparation for the conflict, nearly 130 coalition boarding party and support element sailors were embarked in *Kanimbla*. They came mainly from US Navy ships that had been involved in boardings but were destined to be further down the Gulf in the conflict. The willingness of ships to provide sailors and their boats was heartening. The smooth integration of these teams and their refinement of boat recognition procedures to prevent fratricide reflected highly on all involved.

Another task that *Kanimbla* absorbed in the lead-up to the war was to support RN AEW (Air Early Warning) Sea King flights over successive nights. The Sea Kings would be

double-crewed and drop one crew onboard and then undertake a synthetic aperture radar sweep of the Al Faw peninsula. This was designed to build up the intelligence picture prior to the amphibious assault. Each aircraft would then return to *Kanimbla* for a crew swap, refuel and undertake another sortie before sunrise. *Kanimbla*, by virtue of its location, possessing its own Sea King flight and two flight-deck spots down aft, was ideal to support the mission. Tragically, two of these aircraft collided six miles from the ship a couple of days later.

Two days before the war a mass breakout of dhows occurred. The crews had heard of the impending start of the war on an erroneous news report. In their desperation they started to jettison cargo. The last thing we needed was flotsam and jetsam floating down the Gulf. After a hasty series of conference calls, Commander Fifth Fleet approved our recommendation to clear the KAA rather than turn the dhows around in accordance with the UN sanctions. It was an historic moment, because it was the effective end of the 12-year embargo. Our well-developed plan was activated, but because it was happening two days early, the force disposition was different. After a few minutes of assigning units to task on a whiteboard, my Operations Officer executed the revised plan on a voice circuit. *Darwin* was made scene of action commander and took on the detailed execution. It worked amazingly well. For their part, once the dhow crews understood what was happening, they were very compliant. For some boarding teams and dhow crews it was a poignant moment. After months of being boarded and turned back up the KAA this was to be their last meeting. Among those vessels cleared was an Indian dhow that had tried to break the embargo two nights earlier and had tragically lost a crew member shot dead by a stray warning shot from a Kuwaiti patrol boat.

As expected, the word of the clearance quickly spread up the KAA and the following day the large steel hulls made their outbound passage. In all, 56 dhows and 47 merchant ships were inspected and cleared in about three days. This early clearance was a bonus for us because it emptied the waterway in preparation for combat operations.

On the early morning of 19 March, the patrol boat USS *Chinook*, with my forward liaison team embarked, was ordered by Commodore Peterson to intercept an Iraqi tug heading from an offshore oil terminal to Al Basrah. On board was a handful of UN workers potentially destined to be held hostage. In some minor brinkmanship, the UN workers were removed and the tug was allowed to proceed on its way. As feared, the UN workers reported Iraqi military were present on the two offshore oil terminals with some suspicious equipment.

That afternoon, on the eve of the war, another dust storm blew up. In *Kanimbla*, and I suspect the other MIF ships, an eerie calm had descended. The ship's company went down to the tank deck to draw the last of the individual chemical and biological protection equipment. The suits were removed from protective bags. People quietly went about their spaces and sorted their personal affairs. Beards were shaved off and close haircuts were *de rigueur*; both produced some horrendous sights that served

to relieve some of the tension. That evening our friends in the US and Polish Special Forces, who we saw a couple of nights a week in the MIO days, landed on MABOT and KAAOT. *Anzac* was ordered close in for support. Within the hour all was secured and, fortunately, the Iraqi explosives had not been set.

At the same time as the oil terminal operation, SEALs were securing the two related shore oil installations. Within two hours the artillery and air bombardment of the Al Faw peninsula would commence, as would the Royal Marines' assault. Most of the MIF units were close inshore and so, although visibility was poor, the sound and shock waves of the artillery and air strikes were strongly felt. At the same time, US Navy cruisers and destroyers were announcing one by one that their Tomahawk firing zones were activated. Although some of the ships were just a couple of miles distant, no missiles were seen through the gloom. At around 0300, HM Ships *Marlborough*, *Chatham* and *Richmond* and *Anzac*, were detached for their bombardment. At approximately 0600, *Anzac* commenced the first fire mission. We monitored the progress in a chat room and on the NGS coordination circuit. I noted the calmness in the voice of an *Anzac* sailor as she repeated back the fire mission coordinates to the spotter. From the results coming in, it became clear they were conducting probably the most accurate NGS engagement in naval history.

During the night another aspect of the operation was executed. This was the protection of an amphibious transit lane for the fast LCAC hovercraft to take equipment from Bubiyan Island across the KAA to the Al Faw peninsula. US patrol craft *Chinook*, *Firebolt*, *Adak* and *Aquidneck* reported three Iraqi tugs and a barge coming down the KAA. They boarded the vessels, which proved suspicious only for their large crews. I ordered the tugs to be held north of the assault lane and had *Kanimbla* dispatch a boarding party with US Navy explosive experts so as to board the tugs at first light for a closer inspection. So while the four frigates were just starting their bombardment, *Kanimbla's* boarding team was clambering over the tugs and barge. In the light of day, disguised mines were soon discovered. A petty officer in the boarding party noted an electrical cable running from a hut on the barge into the barge pontoon itself. After a short inspection, a trap door was found, as were 68 mines.

In another development, the patrol craft *Adak* picked up three hypothermic Iraqi sailors floating down the KAA. *Adak* brought them straight to *Kanimbla* where the Army detachment and medical team swung into action. Another person who swung into action was Major Majed Al Shamari. The Kuwaiti Navy Chief, Major General Al Mulla, had loaned Majed to us for liaison between the MIF and the Defence of Kuwait task group which the general commanded. Majed explained to the scared Iraqis that they were not going to be shot as the Iraqi hierarchy had warned. In the process he also gained their confidence and they told their tale. They were survivors from an Iraqi patrol boat hastily manned by Revolutionary Guards and ordered to sail and attack the MIF. En-route she unwisely engaged a C-130 gunship and was promptly sunk.

With the mouth of the KAA well guarded by our patrol craft, and *Marlborough* smoothly running the very active bombardment group, my main focus was the Iraqi tugs and barge. Reports came in bit by bit on the size of the find. I needed to know if any mines had been laid and there was a report of five empty slots on the mine rails. As could be appreciated, our first reports of events up the command chain led to much pressing for answers to a myriad of questions. Potentially, this was the turning-point in the maritime campaign. My initial assessment was that, based on our longstanding sea control of the area, if any mines had been laid they would lie further up the KAA. To help clarify matters I sent *Kanimbla's* executive officer, a specialist clearance diver, Lieutenant Commander Mick Edwards, up to the tugs to take charge of the scene and give me an accurate assessment of the situation. This he did admirably and, when combined with more information volunteered from more captured Iraqis, I was sure no mines had been laid. The Iraqis, in fact, had intended to lay a field further south 48 hours later. They were surprised to find the MIF in its current position. With the mining operation foiled, the NGS and the entire KAA clearance operation could continue unimpeded.

The possibility still existed of additional Iraqi mine barges further up the KAA and a sweep by SEALs from the *Joint Venture* (which had come up the channel west of Bubiyan Island) did much to reassure that this had not occurred.

At this point it is worth mentioning the sterling service provided by *Kanimbla's* two Australian Army LCM-8s. Their tasking included pre-positioning AUSCDT 3 and the Royal Marines equipment into Kuwait, laying danbuoys to provide shipping transit lanes, and logistically supporting the RHIBs (rigid hull inflatable boats). They also proved ideal platforms to relocate Iraqi prisoners away from the action. Indeed the arrival of a prisoner-laden LCM-8 alongside *Kanimbla* provided a rare glimpse of the enemy for our sailors.

By midnight on day one events were pretty well under control. The frigates were doing a tremendous NGS job for the Royal Marines, and would remain on-station for a further two days. For me it was time to finish off reports to go up the Coalition and Australian command chains. By this stage I was making daily telephone calls to my Australian immediate superior, Rear Admiral Bonser. I found these calls tremendously valuable as mind-clearing exercises. The admiral was a good sounding-board and, at times, a source of valuable advice without wanting to intrude into the coalition chain of command. The other opportunity the lull provided was to discuss with my team our next task. This was to support the mine clearance operations up the KAA.

During the next couple of days events moved quickly. Once the Al Faw Peninsula was secured, five coalition mine countermeasures (MCM) vessels, and two Sea Stallion helicopters towing mine-sweeping sleds commenced operations. My lead unit to protect the MCM group was *Chinook*, commanded by the very level headed and brave Lieutenant Colin Hayes, USN, who received a Bronze Star for his outstanding service. I will always remember his face when I told him I was removing the embarked US



Coast Guard boarding party and wanted any unnecessary personnel off *Chinook* because she was the first non-MCM vessel proceeding up the channel behind the hunters. He thought for a moment and said it seemed a reasonable call; we moved on to the next subject.

The Iraqi asymmetric threat initially materialised through a foray of four small suicide boats which emerged from the SAA waterway. Fortunately they were chased by Iranian naval forces and beached themselves. In response to this threat I detached *Chatham* and *Darwin* as a surface action group under the command of Captain the Hon. Michael Cochrane, RN. The ships were a good combination of weapon systems to deal with small inshore contacts. The ships remained off the mouth of the SAA until the danger of these boats had passed.

The progress of the MCM force up the KAA was difficult, with a large amount of mine-like objects littering the bottom. This was hardly surprising with the waterway being a battle zone on several occasions in the 20th century. As the mine-hunters made their way up the SAA, our patrol craft and RHIBs commenced ever-lengthening patrols. *Kanimbla* for her part provided fuel, water and other support for the craft.

Our plan called for sustained riverine patrols. The necessity for such patrols had been a source of debate during the planning phase. But the Al Faw peninsula was a sparsely populated area and the Royal Marines were thin on the ground. The prospect of a re-sown minefield would have further delayed humanitarian aid shipping. In short, it was a vulnerable flank for the coalition.

One of the biggest difficulties in executing any plan is to know when to deviate from it. This is particularly the case when the plan has required considerable staffing and extensive involvement at all levels. An example of this point for us was the RHIB patrols. It became clear early in the war that after the initial mass break-out of shipping, the once-congested KAA was now devoid of shipping. All vessels that had not made a break had gone further up the river to remain until hostilities were over. Many of the crews had gone home. This meant the need to board ships along the river had vanished with only the riverine patrol requirement remaining. Two days into the boat patrols, four crews got into difficulties when a stronger than expected south-westerly change came through with winds exceeding 65 knots. Fortunately all crews found refuge in either our versatile LCM-8s or in two mine-hunters. The following day, I flew up to Umm Qasr to see for myself the state of the KAA and to visit the divers. During that flight I looked down in the dusty conditions on a lone RHIB near Warbah Island. They could see nothing and no-one but us could see them. The risks I was putting the boarding parties under versus the negligible operational gain came home to me. So after only two days, with Commodore Peterson's endorsement, the RHIB riverine patrols were halted on the entry of the first humanitarian aid ship, RFA *Sir Galahad*. It was not a universally popular decision but the pendulum had swung in the maritime campaign.

My priority was now to get those boarding parties safely home. The riverine patrol could be adequately done by the larger patrol craft.

*Sir Galahad's* arrival was effectively the end of our mission. We retained command of the riverine patrols because we felt strongly about not taking our eye off the ball. As if to underline this point, the ever-vigilant *Chinook* found a cache of mines, small arms, anti-tank missiles and a partly inflated suicide boat on the shore. The boat was an ingenious modification of a zodiac with the mine charge located in the centre of the boat while the mine-horns were on poles protruding ahead.

By the beginning of April, the US Navy and RN were rapidly drawing down their fleets. Some of the frigates were already assigned to escorting the large number of amphibious ships poised further south. This did not mean there was inactivity. Even at this late stage the USS *Hopper* fired a clutch of Tomahawks at a distant target and one of the missiles flew 500 feet over *Kanimbla's* flight deck. As part of the drawdown, *Darwin* was sent for a well-earned port visit and it was decided *Kanimbla* would go into port on 6 April. As such, I would hand over the MIF to Commodore Peterson in *Valley Forge*. The time was right to go and we were a spent force by this stage. After a round of farewells to the divers and our British, US and Kuwaiti comrades, *Kanimbla* shaped course for Jebel Ali. On arrival, I handed over the duties of Commander, RAN Task Group 633.1 to Captain Mark Kellam. I was very proud of the MIF and it was a great honour to serve with such a dedicated and talented team.

To conclude, it is useful to consider the key factors contributing to the operational success of the RAN task group. They were:

- Excellent professional relationship with the US Navy – this was based on long-term engagement and mutual respect.
- Sound strategic understanding – this understanding stretched from the effective use of sea control in sanction enforcement to its use in littoral warfare. MIF control of the sea denied the Iraqis the ability to lay defensive minefields even in their own waters.
- Comprehensive unit and individual training – the role and operational impact of the RAN Sea Training Group was of great significance. They are in many respects the RAN's secret weapon. A key to their impressive success is their policy of providing ships with tailored, focused workups which changed in step with the shifting tactical environment.
- Task Group Materiel Preparedness – the two frigates, *Kanimbla* and AUSCDT 3 were all well prepared and compared very favourably with other coalition units. *Anzac* proved to be an exceptional littoral frigate. *Darwin* did exactly what she was designed to do – escort amphibious ships. *Darwin* also provided an invaluable weapon to counter suicide

boats coming out of the SAA with her SM1 system. The achievement of the small RAN logistic support element in supporting the RAN task group was a product of their corporate knowledge and professionalism. It will come to be regarded as one of the great logistical achievements in RAN history.



*Captain Peter Jones briefs staff on board HMAS Kanimbla, March 2003*

## PART II - OPEN FORUM

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**Captain Nigel Coates:** In 2001 the IRGCN [Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy] were part of the problem in that they were taking bribes and guaranteeing safe passage across the top of the NAG and we did not deal with them a lot. I know that subsequent to that we got a lot of help from the Iranian Navy. What was your relationship with the IRGCN, and did they impede our operations through 2002 and into 2003?

**Commodore James Goldrick:** The IRGCN did not take too kindly to the fact that we effectively called on the Iranian Navy. The way we did it, and there was a lot of sensitivity particularly as the 'Axis of Evil' speech had just been made, but we got the Americans' consent not to ask the Iranians to help. We managed in a roundabout way to involve the Iranians. One of our frigates was chasing *Seawind*, a 20,000-tonne tanker which was going down Iranian territorial waters, so we broadcast on Channel 16 the presence of the Iraqi oil-smuggler illegally in Iranian waters. I will invite Captain Boyce to complete the story.

**Captain Roger Boyce:** Iranian P3 aircraft undertake reasonably regular patrols down the Gulf. We managed to call him up and mention that the Iraqi was inside Iranian territorial waters and, with a lot of help from CTG staff, shortly thereafter an Iranian patrol boat turned up and ordered *Seawind* out of Iranian territorial waters. *Seawind* refused to go, so the Iranian patrol boat opened fire on it with machine guns. He stayed inside Iranian territorial waters, which was a pretty gutsy effort. A day or so later, the Iranian frigate *Alvand* turned up and engaged it with her 4.5-inch gun, which then made *Seawind* go out into international waters, where we boarded him. This was great work by the Iranian Navy, and I think the Iranian professional Navy was as annoyed as anyone else that the Iraqis were using Iranian waters with impunity. The first chance they got to establish or assert their sovereignty over what they saw as their waters they reacted very effectively.

**Commodore James Goldrick:** We always tried to involve an Australian or British ship, to make it easier for the Iranians. We had confirmation about 10 days later when there was another break-out. HMS *Portland* was chasing a smuggler down the coast, and again broadcasting every 15 minutes, and it had a conversation with the Iranian P3. Shortly thereafter, we believe *Alvand* crash-sailed from Bandar Abbas and headed north. Within a couple of hours the smuggler suddenly came straight out into international waters. That gave us the evidence that the Iranian Navy was prepared to adopt a systematic approach. If they knew of the presence of smugglers in their waters, they would react.

This cooperation with the Iranian Navy undermined the IRGCN's protection racket, which caused all sorts of interesting tensions as the smugglers then refused to pay the IRGCN the US\$50,000 per tanker, which made life difficult for them. It placed the smugglers in the position that, if they could not get out covertly, they were going to get caught. The cooperation with the Iranian Navy had a very important effect on reducing the eagerness of the smugglers to leave.

It was quite clear that the IRGCN were not pleased with this situation and they staged a major exercise on the 6th of May.

**Captain Bob Morrison:** Preceding the IRGCN exercise, *Manoora* had been operating in the North Arabian Gulf, between MABOT and KAAOT for about two weeks. We decided we would do a circumnavigation of KAAOT, however, on the horizon was the IRGCN doing what was understood to be a routine exercise. All of a sudden they did not appreciate *Manoora's* presence, and there was a chat over Channel 16 in which threatening actions were made towards *Manoora*. I quickly moved out of the area at the same time *Canberra* and *Newcastle* moved up to assess the situation. My major concern at that stage was a boarding party. I had two groups deployed and I did not know whether the IRGCN had tabs on one of my boarding parties, and they were my primary concern. I believed I had enough self-defence on board *Manoora* to confront any action the IRGCN was threatening at that stage.

I was a bit unsure of the direction that was coming from Maritime Headquarters asking why we had not taken more aggressive action at that time. But you had to be there on the spot. I was listening to what was happening on all the circuits with the IRGCN. You could hear their chatter, and had to make a command judgement at that time about the level of threat and how much angst was actually portrayed against *Manoora*, and the task group at that stage.

**Commodore James Goldrick:** One of the problems we then had to face for the next month was whether the smugglers picked up on the IRGCN problem and on the fact that we really were not willing to risk our people for substantive gain. The smugglers then started to stage what we realised was the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Simulation Service. They got fast boats and proceeded to simulate coming across to the Khawr Abd Allah to escort the tankers out. *Canberra* broke that particular ring.

**Captain Roger Boyce:** From memory, a tanker came out with several fast boats in company, purporting to be an IRGCN escort, and the tanker wound up going aground on the mud flats.

**Captain Peter Jones:** Things quietened down with the IRGCN during Peter Sinclair's time as task group commander. They would come down and monster fishing boats and other vessels. Merchant ship captains and crew would talk to us and complain bitterly about them. But to be honest, they are on our Christmas card list, because

they took out four suicide boats coming out of Shatt Al Arab, so we think the IRGCN are good blokes.

**Captain Martyn Bell:** I just wanted to go back to where Lee Cordner had left off and his comments about those performing the boarding task. Back in DAMASK III and IV, one of the points that has got to be made about the Australian boarding teams, especially in terms of equipment and training, was that what we did with what we had was quite phenomenal. The reason that the Australians were held in such high regard was because the Americans never had their own organic boarding teams – they had law enforcement detachments [LEDET]. These LEDET people used to arrive and had elements which were very procedural. Whereas the slick operations and the training that we had as Australians allowed us to conduct boarding operations in a much more effective – and certainly in my view – controlled manner. Whenever there was any incident which required a significantly higher level of operations, my experience was that whoever was in charge used to call for the Australians. So it is a good reflection on us doing that, and we have certainly gone from strength to strength.

**Captain Peter Jones:** I think the US Navy has also improved a fair bit. When the new battle group came in December [2002], Admiral Costello really pushed to try to address the restrictions placed following the *Peterson* incident – we actually got to the point where the US Navy could board dhows. They had to hail them or beep a horn or something and if they waved, then it was a compliant boarding and they could do it. But that was good in terms of trying to ease the load. Some of the guys went over to *Anzac* for a while and that worked well in terms of hosting the Americans, just to align procedures. That gave us an important increased surge capability and the US Navy was quite good.

**Captain Peter Lockwood:** The US teams knew what to do, and all the procedures and all the rules of engagement that they were working under. They were just raring to go. All we were doing was providing someone next to them who could take the hit if something went wrong with the boarding.

**Commodore James Goldrick:** I would like to add just one point about the US Navy. We do make a point about the better ability of our ships to operate in the close-in environment, partly due to procedures and partly due to draught. What was quite apparent to me was the number of US Navy ships which, when they really understood what was trying to be achieved, were operating to the limits of their envelope to get up as close as possible. When you consider one of the *Spruances* had a 12-metre draught because of some bit of kit underneath the sonar dome, and the *Burkes* were 10.5 or 10.75 metres draught and how they were handling themselves, I was thinking most Australian captains would be thinking that this is the edge for how they were going. They really did get into that spirit of pushing up and staying up to try to maintain the close presence. I do not think we should make too much of the differences.

**Captain Peter Jones:** We actually got one of the US Navy FFGs, *Kauffman*, into [area] MA2 for a short time. We had this experiment where we wanted to get her to become a full playing member but she got called away before we were able to really see that through. The other thing that has not really come out is that Americans are very good at staying at sea for long periods of time. They can just tick along in 1:3 [watches] and then they can ramp up very quickly. From the CTG side, just being on their ship and seeing, for example, if one of the 'missile sites now full' came up—within two minutes they had extra people closed up. It was quite impressive to see how they go from ticking along to high intensity

**Commodore Davyd Thomas:** I think the American Navy are defined as long distance runners. I am not convinced the Australian Navy has decided yet whether it is sprint or middle distance. This issue of defence watches and how we run things is a question we really have to look at very closely. I am not convinced that it works as well as it could. On the other hand, we do have some strengths. The American port visits are so rare that once they are in, that is it. One of the signal successes, in a coalition credibility sense, in my time was crash-sailing *Newcastle* from a signal request for her to sail from Dubai. I think it reached us at about 0730 and *Newcastle* was under way before 1030 and had taken over the pursuit of a smuggling vessel before 1230 that day. The clear response of the Americans was that they were astounded – *Newcastle* also sailed with everybody on board.

**Lieutenant Commander Simon Bateman:** I would just like to say that the IRGCN interaction is still occurring, as of August 2003. *Sutherland*, which is the RN ship up there at the moment, was having quite a lot of interaction with the IRGCN, much to the Americans' annoyance. They get very sensitive about the interaction.

**Captain Alan Du Toit:** The first point I would make is that in each deployment there were subtle differences and changes. We were able to build on those changes as we moved into the next phase. Certainly in the time we were up there, interaction with both the Iranian Navy and also the IRGCN was very much as Commodore Goldrick has mentioned. We had some minor interactions with the IRGCN and moved our positions up there just to ease the tensions. We certainly found the cooperation from the Iranian Navy much the same. Certainly on a number of occasions they helped us flush out the smugglers on their way down through Iranian territorial waters. The Americans did not have that same interaction with the Iranian Navy as the Australians and the RN. On one occasion when *Sydney* had done one pursuit down through the Straits of Hormuz, on her way back in, the Iranian frigate fell in and started doing officer of the watch manoeuvres with *Sydney*.

PART III:  
THREATS AND  
WARFARE  
CONSIDERATIONS  
1990-2003

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## Captain Richard Menhinick, CSC, CDS, RAN

*Direction Officer HMAS Brisbane DAMASK II*

I am going to talk on the 1990-91 Gulf War, threats and warfare considerations. I am very conscious that it is almost ancient history now, especially with the focus on the last few years.

HMA Ships *Brisbane* and *Sydney* commenced deployment on 12 November 1990. The Sea Training Group (STG) was again in evidence as we sailed around south of Australia and up to Diego Garcia. In fact *Brisbane* was having problems with its gunnery system the whole way to Diego Garcia and we actually flew a Lear Jet to Diego Garcia to provide support to system proving before we went further afield.

We then relieved HMA Ships *Darwin* and *Adelaide* and, together with HMAS *Success*, went through the Gulf of Oman and into the Persian Gulf on 16 December, being the first ones to actually go into the Persian Gulf itself. We conducted operations with what was known as Battle Force Zulu – the Arabian Gulf battle force under the tactical command of Commander Task Force (CTF) 154. Battle Force Zulu concentrated very heavily on counter-air and there was a maritime interception aspect as well. We were conducting sea superiority, predominantly sea control, and offensive strike operations.

We also provided protection for amphibious operations and maritime support operations including countermining, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) and logistics. I will concentrate on air warfare because I was, after all, the direction officer of *Brisbane* and that is what I spent most of my time doing. That is not meant to ignore the work that *Sydney* did in intercepting the peace ship *Ibn Khaldoon* and the tanker *Ain Zalah*, or the superb work of HMA Ships *Success* and *Westralia*.

These were the considerations and objectives of the Battle Force Zulu standing Operational Task Air Warfare:

- provide a layered defence of the carrier task force;
- maintain continuous 24-hour combat air patrol (CAP) in the North Arabian Gulf (NAG). In the days immediately after the invasion of Kuwait, it was US Navy air power that provided air defence to Saudi Arabia;
- provide a NAG link picture to the carrier battle group;
- provide air warfare protection for amphibious groups; and
- provide defence in depth.

The potential threat from Iran was treated very seriously. The threat was exacerbated by the Zagros Mountains, which come down near the coast on the eastern side of the Gulf, casting extensive radar shadow zones. This was a particular concern throughout operations. Extensive use was made of airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft, predominantly carrier-borne but also land-based. These aircraft were tasked to patrol the eastern edge of the NAG constantly. US Air Force and Saudi Air Force E3 AEW&C aircraft also conducted 24 - hour operations.

There was a diversity of threat direction because of the Iranian issue, and the anti-air warfare threat axis was based on 310 degrees for northern and western units and 340 degrees for the carriers – much more northerly based, because we were very conscious of Iran.

The first thing that struck you in the Gulf was the number of civilian airlines traversing it. To aid in picture compilation, the Gulf was divided into a number of reporting areas responsible for picture compilation. This division of responsibility worked, and the picture worked: this is demonstrated by the fact that in 14,000 sorties flown from the various aircraft carriers and helicopter-capable ships, there was not a single blue-on-blue engagement. Now to do this, the division of responsibility was stipulated geographically. The US Air Force and US Marine Corps had responsibility for what was known as the western sector – this was basically Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States out to about 12 nautical miles from the shore. The rest of the air space above the Arabian Gulf eastwards over Iran was known as the eastern sector and was the responsibility of Battle Force Zulu. Coordination of each sector occurred on an air warfare command and reporting circuit which was coordinated by the air warfare commander USS *Bunker Hill*. *Bunker Hill* did an outstanding job and also coordinated the geographic picture with the tactical air operations centre that was ashore in Saudi Arabia.

Potential aircraft for engagement would be handed off between the sectors, with the missile engagement zone from the shore based on the range of the improved Hawk missile system, which was 25 miles.

What was the threat? We need to remember that Iraq actually had a pretty massive air force back in 1990. Throughout the six weeks of hostilities it was attrited quite quickly, but certainly in the period of tension leading up to the actual commencement of hostilities on 17 January, this was of particular concern. There were 1315 aircraft in the Iraqi Air Force at the time of the invasion of Kuwait and, of these, some 817 were fighters and fighter bombers and 14 were dedicated bombers. I think that is one of the reasons we actually went into the carrier battle group protection screen. That was seen to be our strength. That is why we did it, certainly from a guided missile destroyer (DDG) perspective.

Many of these aircraft were obsolete, but importantly, there were 83 Mirage F1 EQ5/EQ6 variants with Exocet; there were 41 MiG-29 Fulcrums; 33 MiG-25 Foxbats; and 23 Su-24 Fencers. There was also a Dassault Falcon 50 aircraft that could carry Exocet and Super Puma helicopters that could as well. This, when coupled with the uncertainty of the Iranian reaction to what was going on, formed the basis of the air warfare organisation.

One of the impressive aspects of Operation DAMASK was the fitting and sourcing of equipment for the ships involved, at very short notice. Indeed, for the DDG it was the fulfilment of the modernisation project, where equipment cut out of that project seemed to be installed in about six weeks.

Interesting additions were the radar-absorbent material (RAM) panels to the DDGs and FFGs. You might remember in those years that the FFGs looked something like a tent, in many ways, with all that panelling hanging off them and the DDG was not much better. The RAM panels worked well because we were operating in calm sea states up in the Gulf. If we had tried to fit that sort of material in an open ocean sea state, you would have had interesting times, especially on the DDG with the level of freeboard.

The electro optical surveillance system (EOSS) was fitted. Phalanx was already fitted in *Sydney*, but two Phalanxes were fitted to *Brisbane*. The old whalers and P-boat disappeared, much to our joy, and two rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIBs) were fitted at the same time.

In *Brisbane* we took a novel approach to infra-red cooling by laying fire hoses along one deck, putting holes in them and spraying salt water down over the side of the ship, thereby removing the boiler rooms from the infra-red picture. We confirmed this through the infra-red that we were using to and from *Sydney* to identify each other's hot spots. If you turn the fire hoses on, within about three or four minutes the fire rooms disappeared on a DDG in the infra-red picture and you only had the stacks, and that was seen as a better place to take a hit than in the fire rooms.

We included extra 50-calibre machine guns and ballistic protection to counter the threat from boghammer attack craft.

Mine detection was predominantly man visual with a backup from the EOSS. We had the joint operational tactical system (JOTS) fitted – the forerunner of the global command and control system-maritime (GCCS-M). None of us had ever seen that before and it was a major advance.

Satellite communications were fitted in all ships. When we sailed we were known as *Brisbart* because poor old *Hobart* was in modernisation. We sailed with every bit of *Hobart* that was not bolted down and they waved goodbye to us with the old Chux as we left, calling us *Brisbart*. When I was Executive Officer (XO) of *Hobart* later, we still had a lot of our ship aboard *Brisbane*.

In early December 1990, the coalition forces had a huge technological, numerical and proficiency advantage over Iraq. However, what we lacked was in-theatre air power. Prior to 11 January 1991, the aircraft carrier USS *Midway* had conducted operations primarily in the Gulf of Oman, though she had come in during the November/December period to do some familiarisation operations in the Persian Gulf itself – certainly in the southern Gulf. Distance and communications is always the achilles heel of any air power support to maritime forces and it was no different there. Response time would have been excessive to any Iraqi incursion or pre-emptive attack. Basically what happened in the next few weeks from the air warfare side was that *Midway* ‘in chopped’ with her battle group on 11 January, so we had one carrier there with us. Then on 16 January USS *Ranger* ‘in chopped’ and we had two carriers. On 17 January we had the US pre-emptive strike obviously to commence DESERT STORM and we established carrier operating areas. That was with two carriers. On 20 January a third one, USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, turned up. It was quite interesting to watch the American reaction to this brand new nuclear carrier turning up. Of course it tried to take charge of the other two conventionally powered carriers which had been there for quite a while, and there was a degree of friction between the nuclear carrier and certainly *Midway*, but they worked it out pretty quickly. Then on 15 February the USS *America* arrived as well. So that is when we really had four carrier operations going. Three carriers worked for 24 hours with one doing a 24-hour down-time and they rotated through 12-hour watches each. So there were always two carriers operating. It was a pretty impressive effort when you consider there were no blue-on-blue or communication transmission issues.

Now the carrier battle groups comprise a carrier, Aegis Cruiser, and other supporting escorts and auxiliaries. However, in the 1990 Gulf War there was a mix of Aegis-equipped ships and older *Belknap* and *Leahy* class cruisers, which were referred to as the new threat update cruisers. Such has been the pace of reduction in ship numbers in the US Navy since the demise of the Soviet Union that we tend to forget about the latter quite quickly, but they actually formed the backbone of the US Navy cruiser force at the time. Aegis cruisers were still very new and in fewer numbers. They also had *Spruance* class destroyers, FFGs, oilers, ammunition ships, and logistics supply ships. Obviously there were a lot of nations – some 15 nations involved in the whole thing.

When there was only a single carrier on-station and in the Gulf of Oman before actual hostilities, the *Bunker Hill* patrolled the NAG as the anti-air warfare commander (AAWC). There was a separate Link 11 and command structure between those ships in the Gulf of Oman and those that were in the Persian Gulf itself. When the carrier entered the Gulf it came under the air warfare direction of *Bunker Hill*. The Aegis cruiser, *Mobile Bay*, that was escorting *Midway*, for instance, was designated as the local air warfare commander. From the commencement of hostilities, only the AAWC and the local anti-air warfare commander (LAAWC) were active on link.

Air warfare sectors were superimposed on sectors we already had in the NAG and three were activated. These were supported by naval units from Australia, Britain, the US and Canada. Naval forces from Western Europe predominantly patrolled the Southern Arabian Gulf and virtually had no input into the air warfare picture. A lot of that had to do with language. One of the fantastic things about listening to *Bunker Hill* over that extensive period was their patience when non-English speakers were talking excitedly about contacts on an HF circuit. I will never forget that and *Bunker Hill* deserves the greatest of credit for the most professional way she conducted every aspect of the mission.

The carrier operating areas themselves were about 60 nautical miles long and 20 nautical miles wide and were based on an axis of 320 degrees, which was the prevailing wind direction. Within each carrier operating area, each carrier was assigned a shotgun, normally an Aegis cruiser, but *Brisbane* certainly did this job every now and then.

As the pre-eminent threat was seen to be airborne, three permanent CAP stations were established in December 1990 and this number was expanded over time to 11. These were supported by four tanker stations. The tanker stations were vital and supported the strike missions being flown from the carriers. I think the US Navy is missing their carrier-borne tankers now because they were vital to these operations. At the height of this, at the offensive, five tankers were airborne to support major strike periods. Our identification friend or foe (IFF) was the basis of all identification procedures and this worked well in conjunction with a strict return to force procedure. As a general rule, aircraft used IFF Mode 4 when in a holding pattern over the carrier during launch and recovery operations.

The identification (ID) of civilian aircraft was given a very high priority with strict procedures in force to determine commercial aircraft identification. If there was any doubt, a challenge was issued and a visual ID conducted by the CAP. Warning procedures were controlled by the AAWC, who would detail a unit to conduct the tornado procedures. We also had a positive identification radar advisory zone (or PIRA zone) in force over all the waters of the Persian Gulf and this duty was held by the AAWC throughout. All aircraft checked in with the AAWC when they came feet wet, so it was a huge job just identifying it all.

*Brisbane* and *Sydney* were employed for the majority of the period as escorts for the carriers and were assigned four whisky grid sectors, usually a 20 x 20 or 20 x 10-mile sector. Based on commonality of equipment and ease of RAN/US Navy integration, both RAN units maintained responsibility for the more crucial north/north-westerly screening sectors of the carrier operating area in the weeks leading up to and throughout the six weeks of hostilities. Assignment also included the sector known as the 'Zagros Mountains Gate Guard', which saw ships specifically tasked to guard the radar shadow zone on the Iranian coast. Both ships patrolled to within about 15 nautical miles of Iran while carrying out this duty, which ensured a high degree of

alertness, especially when so many Iraqi aircraft started disappearing to Iran soon after hostilities. We were unsure why they went there and whether they were just going to escape or whether they were going to be used to attack us from that direction.

Other duties which were not specifically tasked in carrier protection were shotgun, combat search and rescue (CSAR) duties in the Northern Arabian Gulf for *Sydney* about 40 miles from Kuwait, and NAG escort for replenishment vessels. We also did CAP control duties quite extensively, tanker control duties, surface search and P3 control unit jobs. *Brisbane's* AN/SPS 52 Charlie radar, with its many modes and three dimensional (3-D) capability, performed well and, in some cases, was superior to the US SPY-1B radar. That was one of the reasons we did a lot of work around the Iranian coast. 52-Charlie was absolutely superb, especially compared to the FFGs AN/SPS 49 radar in the ducting conditions of the Gulf. That is certainly a capability that we have since lost.

Iraq made several attempts to attack the force. There were some significant ships in the Gulf and I remain totally bemused at Saddam's inability to work out in advance that he was definitely going to be hit. When there were no carriers in the Gulf before the war, *Sydney*, *Brisbane* and *Bunker Hill* were quite a long way forward in the Gulf, watching these F1 Mirages come down feet wet to do flying profiles. For us it would have been a pretty normal thing for him to try something in advance because he must have known that he would be taken out sooner or later. So these were certainly very tense moments watching those Exocet-fitted Mirages flying around.

Iraq made a number of attacks but every time they attacked after hostilities, they attacked with small numbers of aircraft – three to five at a time – and that was easy pickings for the coalition forces. If they had done a mass raid of 40 aircraft very early on in the war, I have no doubt some would have got through because at the best we might have had four aircraft up there in CAP, as most of the aircraft were doing strike missions. It became apparent quite quickly that Iraqi command and control was ineffective.

We tracked some Scud missiles on the 52-Charlie radar, which is interesting. We did not achieve an NCDS track on them, but we certainly picked up the video. There was the Silkworm incident with *Gloucester*, when she shot one down. There were also a number of explosions around *Sydney* when she was doing CSAR work in the north of the Gulf. There was also some debris with Chinese markings picked up at one stage and we think perhaps it might have been something that the Iraqis had fired and it had impacted one of the oil wells in the region.

I will not go into detail on the surface side of life, but the Iraqi Navy had about 138 vessels, most quite small and ineffective, and they were taken out quite professionally, a lot of them by Royal Navy Lynx helicopters fitted with air-to-surface missiles.

An important issue for us was interoperability. In 1991 Link 11 interoperability was a significant issue. *Brisbane* and *Sydney* were configured to the US Navy operational specification (OPSPEC). However the Royal Navy and some US Navy ships were configured to the NATO STANAG series for Link 11. On one afternoon, due to a fault in HMS *Gloucester's* Type 42 combat system, *Brisbane* crashed her combat system 18 times. Now, we were seen by some, certainly *Gloucester*, as being at fault in that. But it was due mainly to the different OPSPEC to which the forces were certified. Our system was working exactly in accordance with the OPSPEC but the situation was untenable so we took immediate action. It was only due to the excellent and timely work from the RAN's Combat Data Systems Centre in Canberra, over New Year's Eve, in providing a patch to the combat system, that we were allowed back on the link and they fixed it in 18 hours. I hope that we could do that today. Certainly the Royal Navy could not do it as all their combat system support had been outsourced already by then.

The link structure that was used in the Gulf at the time could be a seminar in itself, so I will leave it there. But the Gulf War certainly provided an impetus for a new link system. Iraq never attempted to jam the HF link, for which we were very thankful. If they had jammed the link, the RTF procedures would have fallen apart. Only the AAWC and the local air warfare commander were active on the link, because there were so many tracks. Even with only two vessels active on the link the net cycle time was often up to 20 seconds, so just maintaining a picture was a big challenge.



*Battle Force Zulu carriers in formation, March 1991*



Another issue I recall was communications delays. It used to take 16 hours to receive the Immediate Air Task Order to find out what was happening with the aircraft the next day from the carriers. I used to say that the photocopier was the single point of failure in the ship.

Additionally the electromagnetic capability (EMCAP), in particular, the mutual interference issue in a modern task force of that size, is just massive. In a two-month period, five revisions of the EMCAP policy signal were issued, each was 14 pages in length and covered some 87 ships from eight nations in its final form. So that was a massive task that the Americans handled brilliantly, just in itself.

In summary, we spent 47 or 48 days at sea non-stop during the war itself, plus what we did before and after at defence watches. The DDG used to work full defence watches, so everyone was split in two and the DDG worked six hours on and six hours off. *Sydney*, I believe, worked the seven and five routine, which might have contributed to some of the confusion between when we were tasking them to do many things because we were probably doing them around our watch breaks and not theirs. But it is great to be in the senior ship.

Modern war is such that if you see the enemy it may be too late, so stress and tension is there even when the enemy is out of sight. The operations room was very busy just maintaining an accurate picture, as well as internal communications in one ear and HF circuits in another. Fatigue and stress were certainly an issue, with personnel in stations deep in the ship and away from the knowledge base of the operations room appearing to have fared the worst. The threat from floating mines was significant and was an issue that we thought about all the time. Indeed, during the period in the Gulf, *Brisbane* sighted three floating mines, the closest within 1000 yards of the ship. You may remember that two US ships, *Tripoli* and *Princeton*, were damaged by mines.

Strategically it was a very successful campaign. Naval forces established sea control and facilitated an immediate diplomatic and political response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait by economic blockade. The navies transported the vast majority of land forces and equipment there. Naval gunfire support was achieved by the Americans with the battleships and offensive strikes from carrier-borne aircraft and cruise missile attacks. At the height of the conflict, 6 aircraft carriers, if you count the ones in the Red Sea, 2 battleships, 15 cruisers, 67 destroyers and frigates and over 100 logistics and amphibious and smaller craft were involved, as well as 15 nations and 800 aircraft. So despite the threat of mines, allied control of the sea was absolute and that was what contributed in a large way to the successful land invasion. Also significant in that, obviously, were the feints conducted by the US Marine Corps Amphibious Ready Group in the Gulf that led the Iraqis to leave a large proportion of the Revolutionary Guard in Kuwait, as they thought they might be attacked from the sea.

## Captain Mark Campbell, RAN

*TACCO HMAS Sydney DAMASK II;  
Flight Commander HMAS Darwin DAMASK V*

I am going to discuss the aviation aspects and lessons learned from the Royal Australian Navy's experience in the Persian Gulf from 1990 through to 2003. By way of background, I was a flight tactical coordinator (TACCO) during what was known as DAMASK II with Commodore Corder in HMAS *Sydney*, and a flight commander for DAMASK V with Captain Bell in HMAS *Darwin*. I was also involved with DAMASK support in 816 Squadron for a few years after, including as commanding officer of 816 Squadron a couple of years ago.

The major aviation tasking during DAMASK I and II was surface search, especially for mines. In the early DAMASK operations, about 80 per cent of our flying was in mine-search sorties. We found 25 mines all up from the two aircraft in *Sydney*. We were pretty happy to see the mines, as we preferred to see them rather than have a ship run into one, but it was a very boring activity. We also did a lot of top cover and fast roping, particularly in the later deployments in the Red Sea. In *Darwin* we did a lot of fast roping insertions and boardings during DAMASK V. There were not so many in the earlier stages of Operation DESERT SHIELD, but certainly *Adelaide* and *Darwin* (DAMASK I), and then *Sydney* (DAMASK II), did quite a few boardings in the months leading up to the first war.

The *Sydney* warfare team was quite worried about some of the air threats, particularly the air-to-surface missile threat, and anti-ship missile defence (ASMD) was very topical. We developed tactics and procedures to assist ship ASMD procedures, including deploying the helicopter chaff and flares, to assist with deception. We regularly practised the technique whereby we could try to decoy or seduce missiles on various ZIPPO [pre-planned response to missile attack] calls.

Collecting mail was another important role. The lift in morale around the task group as a mail run approached was obvious. We also undertook about half a dozen combat search and rescue (CSAR) sorties and even went up the Shatt Al Arab (SAA) waterway a couple of times looking for downed American aviators. Most of them turned out to be hoaxes, but it involved some exciting flying.

There were several firsts with the aviation deployments:

- the first operational naval aviation deployment into a war zone since Vietnam;
- the first time we had two aviation types at sea since the carrier;
- the first time we had wartime maintenance procedures for the aircraft; and
- the first operational Seahawk deployment.

Both the Squirrel and Seahawk were put into wartime maintenance procedures, which proved to be a hugely successful trial of hitherto untried procedures.

The Seahawk had not been accepted into service prior to this deployment, which made it a very interesting time. In today's tightly regulated environment, such a deployment would not occur. To ensure that the Super Seasprite aircraft is not operationally employed prior to its being fully assessed and evaluated by the RAN, extensive air-worthiness restrictions have been placed on the aircraft to ensure safe operations.

The Squirrel had not been previously tasked with many operational roles and the type had to be dragged from the training world into an operational environment, which was no bad thing. The Squirrel provided excellent service in surface search and mine searching throughout Gulf operations.

One of the major issues for aviation generally during the period was aircraft self-defence. The Seahawk costs about 40 or 45 million dollars, and it flew around in a war zone with the crew having absolutely no idea whether it was being targeted or not. This is still the case today. It has taken too long to implement the lessons of this important period of operations.

Since the demise of the aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne*, naval aviation had languished. We were dragged out of that peacetime lethargy well and truly by these few early deployments, and that was a good thing. We learned a lot and came up to speed very quickly. It did show us that we did not have an aviation policy organisation and it dragged Commander Australian Naval Air Group (COMAUSNAVAIRGRP), the first force element group into being, in about 1995.

Another major issue was that we had no nuclear, biological and chemical defence (NBCD) protection equipment for aircrew or aircraft, and this is still the case. This is a major capability and occupational health and safety (OH&S) shortfall that should be rectified with some urgency. There were some other equipment issues with the Seahawk – it was not fitted with either electronic support measures (ESM) or forward looking infra-red (FLIR), and it still [as of November 2003] does not yet have self-protection equipment. Another major capability shortfall was the Seahawk's lack of air-to-surface missile capability. We stood by and watched the RN Lynx helicopter with

its ageing missile armament wreak havoc with Iraqi gunboats and patrol boats that were encountered. The RAN still does not have a capable anti-patrol boat missile for its helicopter fleet, and will not have until the Super Seasprite and its Penguin missile system is introduced into service.

The Seahawk high frequency communications were pretty awful during DAMASK, and are still pretty awful. The Squirrel was also fairly deficient in this area, and procedures had to be developed to alleviate this deficiency. A third radio should be fitted to the Seahawk. This will be fitted in a future program. Night vision is still an issue, however, as neither FLIR nor night vision goggles are yet fitted. Once again, these are lessons learned that have yet to be implemented.

One of the outcomes of the period was that we destroyed Seahawk logistic support for about five years. We used up the first three years' worth of spares and support in about the first year during DAMASK and then suffered as a result for about five years. Many lessons were learned during this early period, and as a result, reliability and availability at sea is now greater than 90 per cent. It is one of the good things that came out of the early deployments.

Whole-ship aviation performance is now much better. We previously only had Squirrels at sea and we could have been accused of running a non-operational 'flying circus'. Operation DAMASK led to a lot more operationally-focused aviators at sea flying very good operational aircraft, working very well together with ships' operations and bridge teams. Back in the early 1990s it was very much an 'us and them' routine and a lot of good work has gone in to improve that situation.

The need for a sound aviation policy organisation drove the requirement for the formation of COMAUSNAVAIR, now known as COMAUSNAVAIRGRP; it has managed and overseen naval aviation very successfully, since its inception. We also learned much about flight crewing and personnel. We still do not have double crewing for Seahawks at sea, as was planned in the mid-1980s, but we are working quite effectively with single crews and minimum-manned Seahawk and Squirrel flights at sea.

Our experience in the Middle East strengthened the case for aircraft self-defence, which is being addressed through Project AIR 1405 and the Echidna programs. The Squirrel's major role was surface search and top cover aircraft during boarding operations. *Brisbane*, with its excellent AAW capability, had great difficulty maintaining track on the Squirrel. Other than some metal in a couple of boxes in the back of the aircraft, there were very few radar reflectors in the aircraft, making it extremely difficult to detect by radar. We developed procedures to employ the Squirrel as a surface search probe in low visibility, because it was so difficult to detect (and is a lot cheaper than a Seahawk!).

We learned a lot about CSAR after practice with the Americans in USS *Oldendorf*, and spent some time 'cross-decking' with their Seahawks. Basically, we have not taken CSAR on as a specific role for any of the aircraft, but we have the procedures written whereby we can easily fit in with such operations if required.

While much of our flying was in mine-search operations, for which we developed a useful set of procedures, we also flew a couple of tactical reconnaissance flights of islands just off the Kuwaiti coast. The target was residual Iraqi troops and installations during the First Gulf War that had to be neutralised prior to the invasion. The primary lesson during these reconnaissance sorties was that you need ESM to do tactical reconnaissance, but we still managed to collect some valuable data to support later operations, as well as the development of some procedures for achieving a successful tactical reconnaissance.

To ensure a good surface picture, we had a gateway arranged between Link 11 and the Seahawk data link. The RAN has since decided that it would be smarter to have Link 11 in Super Seasprite and will probably add Link to the following Seahawk upgrade program. By that stage, the surface combatant force will be in the process of moving on to Link 16 or 22, but at least we will have a more compatible data link in the helicopter than is currently the case. I personally think the ON/OFF switch in the Seasprite will be at the OFF position a lot of the time because Link 11 will be too much for one person to try to operate, but at least we have the link available and plenty of procedures in place.



*HMAS Sydney's 'Stealth One' on board HMAS Success, January 1991*

Identification friend or foe (IFF) Mode 4 is another major lesson learned. We fitted the hardware to the aircraft at the very last minute pre-deployment and learned the basics on the run. If you did not have IFF Mode 4 you did not get airborne. For US aircraft carrier operations, aircraft were held above the carrier until they were given the instruction to either 'get back on board' or 'go off and attack and if you come back and you are not identified you will be shot down'. We learned very quickly that you checked your IFF Mode 4 response was working before you departed the ship, otherwise you took your life in your hands.

Some final points: We had difficulty retaining our anti-submarine warfare (ASW) skills in 1990 and it is still a problem today. However, the surface warfare experience gained during DAMASK was excellent. We learned a lot from our experience with the American task force and even working closely with *Brisbane* taught us a lot about airborne early warning and surface warfare tactics. It was an excellent learning experience and has been instrumental in bringing a useful aviation capability back to the Fleet.

The US Navy units that we experienced were hopeless at boarding evolutions and the RAN showed them how it could be done. I gather we are still showing them how it can be done if my reading of recent signals is correct. We certainly boarded far more ships. The Americans would frequently board one ship to our three. We were far more effective and quick at boardings, using a combination of rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIB) and fast roping insertions.

We learned that the Squirrel could maintain over 200 hours per month and single crew Seahawk flights were capable of over 150 hours per month. We are not doing those hours now but we have demonstrated that such rates are achievable in time of conflict.

We have certainly learned a lot from our experience in operations in the Persian Gulf over the last 14 years, but we have not picked up quickly enough on some of the lessons. I certainly think the major aviation experience coming out of the war was the need for capable missiles on helicopters at sea – something that we will have to work on.



*Tomahawk launch, March 2003*

# Eleven

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## Captain Peter Lockwood, DSC, CSC, RAN

*Commanding Officer HMAS Anzac SLIPPER Four,  
FALCONER & BASTILLE*

I am going to talk about threats and warfare considerations for the latter part of operations in the Gulf.

I went to the Gulf as commanding officer (CO) of HMAS *Anzac* during Operation SLIPPER, enforcing United Nations sanctions. By the end of my deployment we had gone through most of Operation FALCONER and were looking at sea control. I will set the scene so others can explain how we actually operated. I will address some common themes through both SLIPPER and FALCONER, then discuss some warfare considerations, focusing at the tactical level, and explain what I think was going through the other COs' minds, as well as my own.

The asymmetric threat was common throughout SLIPPER and FALCONER. The Iranians posed a potential threat, as we were not quite sure what they were going to do most of the time.

The heat in summer was knocking out systems and people, causing a lot of trouble to force protection on the upper deck. The winter nights were bitterly cold for boarding parties, who were almost in Antarctic gear for the periods in December out there at midnight. The Shamals blew dust and grit all through our weapons systems and sensors and there were days when the whole forecabin was covered in yellow grit. It was a very difficult environment for both the people and the equipment to work in.

The operating environment was typified by its littoral nature: shallow waters, sand bars, wrecks, floating debris, and not much space for ships to manoeuvre. Indeed, somewhere *Anzac* hit something. I am still not quite sure what it was. It did some damage to our sonar dome. *Arunta* also bumped something up there and did some damage to her propellers. I remember the task group commander's (CTG) staff calling me up one day saying: 'Look out, there is half a floating dhow' that *Kanimbla* had just passed. So there were lots of threats just dealing with the environment, operating in the littoral.

The radar environment was complex, even with the modern systems near land and the short warning times we had to deal with. Of course there is all the legal traffic that was out there. On some mornings you just could not manoeuvre to maintain your station because of the fishing vessels that were around, as well as ferries, tugs and your own forces.



We were on constant alert against the asymmetric threat – that was really the terrorist attack we have heard so much about. The possibility of a small light aircraft attacking the ships was our main concern in the port visits, in Dubai and Jebel Ali. A number of coalition ships in the latter part of SLIPPER sailed because they heard rumours that there might be an air attack from a small light aircraft. High speed small craft, especially the ones that were operating in Iraqi waters ferrying stuff to and from the fishing vessels, remained a constant thought in our mind. I remember seeing one of these high speed boats with two people in them with masks over their faces just to keep the grit and salt water away from them. They looked exactly how I considered a terrorist boat would look.

We were also concerned about biological threats, for example, anthrax coming in through unconventional delivery methods. It was a constant concern up there, especially after September 11 and all the anthrax incidents in the United States. I was not expecting aircraft to come over and dump a load of anthrax, but of course it could come in through the mail, the food, and the stores system. A lot of procedures and processes were put in place to take care of that.

The Iranian Navy was generally pretty helpful to us. However, a lot of the time, it was difficult to work out exactly where the IRGCN (Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy) was coming from.

Our main focus during Operation SLIPPER was the enforcement of the UN sanctions. That threat was continually changing, starting off with large tankers (20,000 tonne ships) and merchant ships, the smaller tankers, and finally the dhows. The Americans became very proficient at finding false bottoms in tanks, while ships were searched in the COMISKEY holding area. Later in the campaign we opened up dhows, finding very expensive purpose-built fuel tanks. The dhows would take small amounts of fuel down to the southern part of the Gulf where they consolidated their little loads of fuel into big tankers, to go off and be sold. Right at the end we were starting to deal with the tugs. The tugs were up to all sorts of things, and I am not sure we know even half of what they were doing, but they were involved in smuggling operations. Throughout this we needed to develop some new tactics and procedures.

During Operation FALCONER the UN sanction-busters were still a threat, but now threats extended to include air, surface, sub-surface threats (including mines) as well as the chemical and biological threats.

Our predecessors had done such a successful job in bottling up all of these dhows and tankers that their presence became a complicating factor for us during the war. There was a possibility of a mass breakout when the war started, and this was something that had to be dealt with. There was also the possibility of a large number of unserviceable or abandoned ships throughout the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA), which was going to be a potential threat to doing the riverine operations and letting humanitarian aid vessels through.



*Keeping watch during HMAS Anzac's fire support mission, March 2003*

What we were worried about with all these dhows, tankers and everything else was that every exiting ship, once the war started, was a potential mine-layer. Everything that came out of the KAA, or indeed possibly the Shatt Al Arab (SAA), could be laying mines. We were getting reports that there were Iraqi military on board these ships. Once they did come out, as indeed when the mass breakout did occur, a lot of the ships said: 'OK, let us go. We are going to ditch all our cargo. Do not worry about it. We will throw all of our hay, feed and everything else that we have got on board the ships into the water, so please let us go because we will not have anything on board.' Of course, having all that in the ocean would complicate mine detection and a lot of other operations.

Another issue was how to handle all the post-breakout dhows and merchant ships in terms of naval control of shipping. We were going to have all these dhows and ships transiting down past the carriers, down through the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG) and the Central Arabian Gulf (CAG). That was going to be a big concern to everybody as well.

The air threat was not anywhere near as significant during the early part of this period. The Iraqi Air Force was never really considered a substantial threat. They were well bottled up in the north of Iraq. The coastal missile batteries existed and were moved around a bit. They had a number of dummy sites around, but the intelligence network had those sorted out pretty well and indeed, even after the war, the dummy missile sites were still sitting at the end of the Al Faw peninsula untouched. In relation to the Iraqi Osa patrol boats, there was some confusion about the state of their surface-to-surface missile system.

The surface threat was also very limited by this time. The Osa and Bogomal patrol boats were not seen at sea. They were present in the SAA, which we did not get too much information on, and the information we did receive was conflicting. It was very difficult to monitor what was happening up there because of the boundary with Iran. Two PB-90 patrol boats were in constant use in the KAA and their movements were monitored. The PB-90s made one unsuccessful sortie in the KAA during the war.

My biggest concern as the CO was mines. In my view, this was a significant threat. There was a mining capability and the area was suitable for laying minefields.

The asymmetric threat was still significant throughout Operation FALCONER. Four Iraqi suicide boats full of explosives with some horns on the front of them ventured out of the SAA. The IRGCN wrapped up one of them – it went aground – and the other three disappeared back up the SAA. One of these ran aground and was captured, another one was found in pieces abandoned, up in the KAA. That was a significant threat that never got out to us, but could have been a major concern.

I never considered that the chemical weapons were going to be a direct threat to the ships. There are probably better ways of doing damage to a ship than going out and trying to spray it with chemical weapons. However it was a significant concern to us from an indirect side if chemical weapons were used against the land forces on the Al Faw peninsula. A lot of work went into prediction systems, but we did not have much at all and again we went off to the British who provided us with a lot of support. Once ships went up into the KAA, any chemical weapons used ashore, with the wind blowing from the wrong way, could have resulted in a difficult situation.

Now I will move briefly into some warfare considerations. From the common side, countering the changing nature of the sanction-busters kept the CTG's staff and the ship's staff quite busy throughout, trying to work out new tactics and new procedures as the sanction-busters changed from large ships, to small ships, to dhows, to tugs. Countering the asymmetric threat, as well as the biological threat posed by anthrax, kept us very occupied.

Several issues influenced our ability to remain on task. For example, the next load of fuel – where it was coming from and whether it was going to come up and be delivered for us or whether we were going to have to go down to the bottom of the NAG and get

it. Sustainability was a warfare consideration throughout. We spent a long period up there – *Darwin*, *Anzac* and *Kanimbla*. Other issues such as planned maintenance on radars and guns had to be factored in, and it was often a case of finding the nearest *Arleigh Burke* class destroyer and hiding under its shadow while you did your planned maintenance.

One of the dilemmas posed by the nature of operations was how to keep a ship at an operational level of capability (OLOC) for warfighting roles during a prolonged period when you are continually doing boarding operations. That was a consideration that kept the CTG staff quite busy in trying to cycle the ships through operations and a training cycle. As the CTG, Commodore Goldrick, pointed out, defence watches really wear people down after a prolonged period of time. Maybe defence watches are not the best way to go. Certainly by the end of three to four weeks the ship's company needed to go off and recharge.

Another warfare consideration for the CTG staff, and for the ships, during UN sanction enforcement operations was the divergent abilities that we had to counter the dhows and perform the UN sanctions. Our abilities ranged from: the Polish GROM (the Polish special forces); the US SEALs (the US Navy special forces), who needed to be monitored with cameras at all times; the US Coast Guard and their limitations with their law enforcement detachments; the Royal Navy (RN) which was quite good with its Royal Marines; our own capability; to the US Navy which could only really do some sort of unopposed boardings at the latter end. The Polish GROM was quite spectacular. Towards the end the dhows would come out, we would herd them up, send them all back up, and they would come out the next day. The ones that the Polish GROM went on board did not return.

In terms of ship capabilities, the RN and RAN were generally happy to operate in shallow waters close to Iraq; however the US ships, with their deeper draught, were perhaps less inclined to manoeuvre in shallow waters.

Boarding party communications during Operation SLIPPER were a real nightmare. Virtually all the ships' boarding parties had a different set of boarding party communications. So you had lots of ships running around operating on different communication systems and not talking to one another.

The RAN *Anzac* class had a good picture at all times because of its modern sensors. Something that had to be considered by the warfare staff were the differing rules of engagement (ROE) for all those differing organisations. I sometimes wonder how the CTG staff coped with having, for example, the Polish GROM, and all the other different organisations with different ROE. As an example, the RAN did not recognise the Iranian-claimed territorial waters, which meant we could go into those areas much more easily than the US Navy could.

Finally on Operation SLIPPER, a major warfare consideration was command and control. It could sometimes take a long time to get approval to do some of the boarding operations and some of the activities that needed to be done.

The following paragraphs all relate to Operation FALCONER. Our central mission was to achieve sea control: we needed to control the air, surface, sub-surface, and the electromagnetic environment; neutralise the conventional Iraqi threat; monitor what the Iranians were doing; and coordinate the US, British, ADF and the Gulf state forces.

Other missions included dealing with the neutrals, and possibly countering a mass smuggler breakout. One hundred and fifty merchant ships and 300 dhows at one point were assessed to be up in the KAA. It was obvious that the sooner we could get a clear picture up, the better. Clearing out the fishing vessels proved to be not so much a problem as we thought. As soon as the BBC announced the war was about to start, the fishing vessels disappeared. Then there was the other issue of managing what was happening in the SAA and what was coming out of there, being a shared border with Iran.

Other mission considerations included countering environmental sabotage and operating in harsh environmental conditions. Our main concern was the Mina Al Bakr Oil Terminal (MABOT). We were concerned about the possibility of those platforms either being set alight or pumping the oil out into the water. I was concerned whether our ships could operate in oil-covered water, which had my engineer scratching his head for some time. We were also concerned that if the oilfields were burning and the smoke was blown in our direction, whether this would mean we would have to run away or we could continue to operate there. So it became fairly obvious in the mission issues that there was a need to capture MABOT, the Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT), and the shore pumping stations early. Even after FALCONER had started, we were still chasing around for extra smoke masks.

Iraq had a mine warfare capability – the question was: when were they going to use it, how would they lay mines, and would they use tugs, dhows, merchant ships or barges? The question of when they were going to lay was easy for us in some respects because there was still a lot of traffic going up and down the KAA until a couple of days before the war. So there were all these potential minesweepers doing our job for us. It was very important that we get our coalition ships up into the KAA as soon as possible to prevent Iraqi mining operations. Finally, there was a need to clear the KAA of mines as soon as possible at the end of the conflict for the passage of humanitarian aid, and another mission issue would be protecting the mine countermeasures (MCM) assets.

Other mission issues were: providing the Royal Marine assault on the Al Faw peninsula with naval gunfire support to protect the landing craft as they moved ashore, and escorting the humanitarian aid vessels through at the end of the conflict and providing any necessary protection.

There was a bit of a question at some point about command and control, in particular who was running the show and how everybody fitted in. I have often wondered whether, if we had a clean sheet of paper, we would have done it differently now. There was some confusion about some of the directions that we were getting, including the operational directions through the coalition commander coming through the CTG and also from Australia through the Australian National Headquarters (ASNHQ). It was helped though by the fact that having an Australian as both our CTG and as our immediate boss in both chains sorted a lot of things out. Indeed, I will mention now that, as a CO, life was pretty easy. At the operational level it never bothered me at all. I think the CTG staff did a wonderful job at intercepting all that before it got down and really made life difficult for us up there.

Our communications facilities were inadequate and we had insufficient bandwidth. I have heard that many times before. We only had one INMARSAT system in *Darwin* and *Anzac*. When we had to bring up the coalition wide area network (COWAN) 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it meant no Defence Restricted Network email, or access to personnel or pay systems. Everything else shut down while we sat on chat warfare. The loss of Joint Command Support System (JCSS) connectivity was critical. A lot of the information that ASNHQ were developing and also was being developed by the Commander Australian Theatre (COMAST) was coming down JCSS and of course we had to turn it off to go onto COWAN. So we started to lose a lot of that, which was perhaps a blessing. Chat warfare was both a help and a distraction.

Conversely, on the information side, there was too much. The operations room of *Anzac* was laptop central. You walked to the back of *Anzac* where there was the JCSS laptop computer. Next to that was the COWAN laptop computer. Next to that was the battle force email laptop computer. Next to that was the ship's restricted network, which the signal traffic was coming on. Next to that was the SI [Special Intelligence] computer when it was brought down for me to have a look at. We had information pouring into the ship from all of these different systems and it all needed to be manually brought together on board. I heard somewhere on the radio the other day someone talking about 'infostress'—that was what I was feeling down there. There was just too much information. It was not getting sorted enough for me by the time it got to me.

There was a major mission issue with the large number of blue RHIBs (rigid hull inflatable boats) operating. There were issues with identifying them, different communications and the overall situation awareness. Would a blue RHIB be mistaken for a terrorist boat? In fact it was on a number of occasions, despite the best procedures that were put in place.



*RAN boarding party searching a captured Iraqi tug, March 2003*

## Commander Peter Leavy, RAN

*Chief of Staff to Task Group Commander BASTILLE & FALCONER*

The day I arrived in my new job in Navy Headquarters back in January 2003, I received a message that my poster wanted a chat. That commenced a dialogue that a month later saw me in Bahrain and about to assume the duty as Chief of Staff to then Captain Peter Jones, AM, RAN who was running the maritime interception operations (MIO) in support of UN sanctions against Iraq.

I will provide an overview of the command and control arrangements under which we operated and my views on the emerging network centric warfare (NCW) concepts that have been around for some years, but which really gained momentum during this operation.

I will first provide an overview of what we were tasked to do – and actually did – during Operation FALCONER (or IRAQI FREEDOM as it was known by the Americans and in the media). I will then cover the command arrangements, the NCW aspects and then the issues that I personally took away.

Although personally in the Gulf for just over two months, I saw the month leading up to the commencement of Operation FALCONER and then the period of the war up to the fall of Baghdad. By this time the maritime component of the conflict had essentially finished, and we were in transition and stabilisation operations.

The RAN has been involved in operations in the Persian Gulf periodically for over 12 years now. This involvement increased in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States to include a command element in charge of the UN effort to enforce sanctions against Iraq. Our rotation was the fourth command staff to fill this role, and our time was extended to avoid a changeover just as the conflict was about to commence.

Planning for possible combat operations was already underway when I joined the task group command team onboard USS *Milius*, so the team was involved in conducting the ongoing maritime interception operations – as had been going on for 12 years – that were turning around vessels carrying contraband, as well as planning for possible combat operations.

In the early planning stages the coalition had agreed that Captain Jones would be given responsibility for what became known as the ‘Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) clearance’ operation. Command of this operation was a feather in the RAN’s cap, as we were the only non-US country to have a coalition command responsibility. In my view, it was



the reputation of 12 years' experience in Gulf operations, coupled with the personal contacts that Captain Jones and his staff had made in the preceding four months that helped convince the US that the RAN was ideally suited to this job.

The KAA is the major waterway separating Kuwait and Iraq and leads from the North Arabian Gulf (NAG) up to the major Iraqi deep water port of Umm Qasr. On one bank of the KAA is Bubiyan Island (Kuwait) and on the other is the Al Faw peninsula (Iraq). If you cross the Al Faw peninsula, there is another waterway, known as the Shatt Al Arab (SAA) that separates Iraq from Iran. Both the KAA and SAA have been used by smugglers trying to breach the UN Security Council Resolutions, over the past 12 years. Also of note are the gas and oil terminals, known as KAAOT (Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal) and MABOT (Mina Al Bakr Oil Terminal), just off the coast. These were of concern as we had fears Saddam Hussein would blow them up to create an environmental disaster – a tactic he employed in the First Gulf War.

Our major task was to deal with the expected exodus of shipping from the KAA once combat commenced. At any one time there could be over 300 vessels in the KAA, ranging from small fishing and cargo dhows to substantial merchant ships—most of which we expected to clear out once combat started. This presented a major threat from mines or of the Iraqi leadership trying to escape by sea, so all the vessels needed to be searched, cleared and monitored as they transited down the Gulf. We also had to support the Royal Marines who were conducting an assault onto the Al Faw from Bubiyan Island, support the mine countermeasures (MCM) forces that cleared a passage up the KAA, and maintain a patrol of the KAA until the port of Umm Qasr was cleared and humanitarian aid shipping was flowing. We also provided logistic support for the Australian clearance divers who moved into Umm Qasr to physically clear the harbour of mines. This was not a minor undertaking by any stretch.

The RAN units in the Gulf were essentially operating under two separate command and control (C2) arrangements: a national arrangement and a coalition one. The coalition command and control arrangements in the North Arabian Gulf (NAG) were determined quite early on. Rear Admiral Costello, USN, was Commander Task Force 55 (CTF 55) embarked in USS *Constellation* and held responsibility for all maritime activities in the Persian Gulf except aviation and air defence. Under him was Commander Destroyer Squadron 50 (COMDESRON 50), Commodore Peterson, USN, who is normally based in Bahrain but, due to the operational tempo, was afloat in USS *Valley Forge*. Commodore Peterson was CTG 55.1, known as the 'NAG Commander', and then under him was Captain Jones who was the MIO screen commander as Commander Task Unit (CTU) 55.1.1.

While the maritime forces from Australia were operating under the coalition C2 arrangements as part of TU 55.1.1, we were also under a national command construct. The senior ADF officer in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) was Brigadier McNairn, who was based at the Australian National Headquarters (ASNHQ) in Qatar,

but did not command the RAN units. Our national command chain went from Captain Jones direct to Commander Australian Theatre (COMAST), Rear Admiral Bonser, and then to the Chief of Defence Force (CDF). This is not to downplay ASNHQ—they played a crucial role in maintaining Australian input into US Central Command Headquarters (CENTCOM HQ) and held the Red Card, meaning they could veto any action that the Australian Government had not authorised, but they actually had no formal command over the RAN ships.

In practice, the key command arrangement for us was the coalition construct. While this framework was clear, there were constant changes as to exactly what vessels belonged to what commander. Many of the US and coalition ships assigned to Commodore Peterson were allocated to other task units, but their RHIBs and boarding parties were available to assist our work in the KAA. In fact, a significant part of the plan called for up to ten coalition RHIBs and associated crews and boarding parties to embark in *Kanimbla* and two to embark in the Polish logistic ship ORV *Czenicki*. We expected this pool to provide a significant surge capacity in boarding operations when needed. We also had two US Navy patrol craft, USS *Firebolt* and USS *Chinook* (very heavily armed) and four similar-sized, but less potent US Coast Guard patrol boats that were ideally suited to operations in the KAA.

The broad concept of operations for the KAA clearance was developed in December 2002 with input from the command teams of the ships involved, DESRON 50 staff, HQAST and Maritime Headquarters (MHQ). The plan evolved as circumstances changed, and I have to say that, by the time I arrived, a lot of the hard work had already been done and the team was in the process of turning the concept into specific orders. Of note, when our staff embarked in *Kanimbla* in late February – we were in American ships prior to that – we were joined by six Royal Navy members who were integrated into the operations, planning and watchkeeping functions of the staff. This influx of fresh personnel, all of whom were experienced in Gulf operations, proved extremely beneficial.

Coupled with this, the lead-up to hostilities saw RAN Clearance Diving Team 3 establish themselves in Kuwait awaiting instructions to move into Umm Qasr once the port was secured. *Kanimbla's* LCM-8s were also working hard in the days prior to the dhow exodus, conducting administrative moves of British Royal Marines from their UK ships to their own staging areas ashore. We had a wide range of different and dispersed assets of which we needed to retain control.

The plan called for all vessels departing the KAA to be escorted to one of two designated holding areas. Once there, they would be anchored to await a search by a boarding party. Dealing with a large number of dhows attempting to depart the KAA simultaneously was something all the ships operating in the NAG were used to, as it was a regular feature of MIO. However, under the MIO construct, they were usually turned around and sent back up the KAA. This new procedure called for the KAA to

be cleared, so those departing would be encouraged to leave, and we expected them to do so simultaneously. Hence we needed a large number of RHIBs and other patrol assets with boarding parties embarked, to escort departing vessels to their holding areas, ensure they remained there and then process them for subsequent passage down pre-determined routes to exit the Gulf.

We had expected the commencement of air strikes to provide the impetus for vessels in the KAA to depart. However, before that happened, the power of the media became evident when, on 18 March, about 40 dhows attempted to exit *en masse*. We later found out that the exodus was prompted by media reports on BBC and CNN that the war was going to start 'in six hours'. Rather than turn around and save their cargo, this time some opted to ditch their cargoes, knowing that they then would not fall under the UN regime, and would be free to go. A quick consultation with our commanders resulted in the decision that we would enact our plan to clear the KAA. *Darwin* was closest and was nominated as the on-scene commander.

Naturally, the vessels were nowhere near the planned anchorages we were going to use as holding areas. However, the value of a good plan and flexibility became clearly evident as new holding areas were promulgated, while the concept we had planned was still enacted. The result was well over 100 vessels searched and cleared in the first couple of days of hostilities. It was a very busy period for all concerned, but with delegation to local commanders to coordinate the various holding and transit areas, everybody knew what was required and simply got on with the task.

Of course, this makes it sound so easy, but I do not want to create the wrong impression. The inevitable 'fog of war' was certainly present and there were times when the tactical picture was very confused and took some direct 'commander's guidance' to sort out; but the collaborative planning approach in the lead-up to hostilities meant these problems were not insurmountable. Everyone knew the commander's intent, and could act on their own initiative when things became confused, confident that they were heading in the right direction.

On 20 March the major assault on Iraq commenced. Special Forces (SF) conducted a very successful assault on the gas/oil platforms and maritime forces in the NAG commenced Tomahawk land attack missile (TLAM) strikes against key targets ashore.

*Anzac* was a key contributor in providing security for this SF operation, before she moved up to the gun line to provide NGS to the Royal Marines conducting their assault on the Al Faw peninsula.

Most Western nations now have some form of concept based around what we call NCW. In essence, NCW seeks to capitalise on the boom in information technology to link electronically or network all the entities in the battlefield. This enables information sharing between all these nodes to be quick, so, for instance, information about a detection by one sensor on one platform is immediately available to all those who are

connected to the 'net'. For those familiar with Link 11, which the RAN and RAAF have used for years to transfer exactly that type of information, this electronic networking is not new. What is new is the amount of information that can be shared and the way in which it is presented. Link 11 is also primarily used for transferring surveillance information around. It is used mainly for developing a common tactical picture. The concept of NCW takes this further by not only integrating the sensor grid, but also an engagement and a command and control grid. The amalgamation of the sensor, weapon and C2 grids would mean that any weapon on any platform within range could be fired on targeting information from any sensor on any platform that is part of the network.

This is obviously the ideal world and we are a long way from that. However, the sensor connectivity is quite well established and we have a number of C2 networks that are also maturing. Engagement grids are the least mature, but we are making progress. I will take a couple of minutes to spell out the various networks that we were using:

JCSS - joint command support system - a classified computer network that links a range of databases, collaborative planning tools, web pages and email/chat capabilities across the ADF. It was our primary C2 tool back to Australia, but was not available to coalition partners.

SIPRNET - secret internet protocol network - US eyes only, secret level command and control network - this could be loosely described as the US version of JCSS. The US has very strict controls on SIPRNET and only US nationals can have access to it.

COWAN - coalition wide area network - now called CENTRIX Four Eyes (CFE). Coalition network between US, UK, Canada and Australia.

DRN - Defence Restricted Network - the Australian Defence Organisation (ADO) general administration network, but also includes personal email connectivity.

The level of interaction with different agencies varied depending on what ship we were on. When embarked in US ships, we had COWAN and access to SIPRNET, and so very good access to US information sources, but not to JCSS or the DRN. When we moved across to *Kanimbla*, that was almost reversed, with a complete loss of SIPRNET, but we gained JCSS and DRN. All four of those systems were stand alone systems, but there has been progress on linking COWAN, or CENTRIX, as it is now known, and JCSS via gateways. Some of the key ADF commands back in Australia also picked up on COWAN and that eased our double-handling problems to an extent.

The ability to link ships of the force together provided some huge advantages. There was far greater situational awareness through chat rooms and other collaborative planning tools which enabled ships to quickly pick up tasks that they were not originally planning on doing as they knew all about them. Having the network on satellite communications also meant ships could join the planning process and be in tune with operations well

before physically arriving. As an example, a number of RN ships joined the network from the English Channel as they sailed out to the Gulf, and hence were immediately ready for work when they arrived.

One of the major new tools used in a C2 role in a big way was 'chat'. It is essentially a software application that enables anyone to come up in a text conversation on a computer connected to the net. It is basically typing replacing voice – although voice certainly still has its place and was used extensively. Chat quickly became the tool of choice amongst all maritime units in the Gulf as it is very quick and flexible. While it sounds great, and is a very valuable tool, I found it had a number of limitations when used in a command and control environment. Most people can talk quicker than you can type, so there was a lot of dead time waiting for someone else to type. The lesson here is to learn to type if you cannot already. In addition, as the number of participants increased there could be threads of differing topics being run through the same dialogue as the question and answer between two operators was interspersed with input from other participants. The other big drawback is that it tended to draw operators away from their primary job and seduce them onto the chat terminal. That is why I say it has a place in planning, administrative coordination and the like, but for the primary tool for fighting the battle, I am yet to be convinced that chat is it.

Operation FALCONER saw the first operational foray into the world of engagement grids, and it worked very well. The destroyer USS *Higgins* was specifically tasked to detect possible Scud missile launches from Iraq, and was directly linked to the Patriot missile batteries operated by the US Army ashore. *Higgins* has very good surveillance systems – the Aegis combat system is optimised for air targets – and was positioned at the northern end of the Gulf to maximise the chances of her detecting any Iraqi missile launches. She did this very well and on a number of occasions was able to queue the Patriot sites, with direct targeting information being passed into the Patriot combat system and used to fire the missiles. The system was also able to provide a fairly accurate estimate of the landing point of the Iraqi missiles, so the Patriot commanders were able to choose which ones to engage and which ones to allow to fall harmlessly in the desert. There was some extra equipment fitted to *Higgins* to allow her to perform this role, but it was a good indication of the potential to transfer data around between nodes to build and maintain the picture, make decisions based on that common picture and to engage those contacts that need engaging.

As another example, a Royal Navy Sea King which was optimised for AEW&C (Air Early Warning & Control) detected a convoy of moving vehicles ashore. This was passed to a Predator unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) unit, which then used the Predator to identify them as Iraqi military, and coordinated US Army forces to close and engage. The Sea King was not dedicated to this role, but it was an incidental detection which was able to be capitalised upon by electronic networking.

I will now move to some of the issues that I think we need to take away from the operation. I must highlight that some of these are areas where we can do better, but I certainly do not want to sound negative. The operation was an outstanding success, and there will always be areas for improvement – we will only improve if we bring them out.

One key command factor is unity of command, and I have to say having essentially two masters was less than ideal. This was compounded by the main command tools being different for the coalition elements and the ADF command back home. Within theatre we conducted most operations on either SIPRNET when we were in a US ship or COWAN when in *Kanimbla*. The US was initially reluctant to do too much on COWAN as they much prefer SIPRNET, probably through familiarity more than anything else, but those US elements that were working with us quickly realised the value of being on the same system as their coalition partners once we embarked in *Kanimbla* and migrated across to COWAN. JCSS was the primary tool for ADF use back home and so we did spend quite a lot of time transferring information from COWAN across to JCSS to get it back to Australia. A single system or at least gateways to enable the two to talk to each other are much needed, and there has been significant progress on that even in the last year.

While that issue was bad enough for us in *Kanimbla*, at least we were blessed with a fairly substantial communications suite, so that we could be up on JCSS, COWAN and DRN at the same time. For the technically minded, *Kanimbla* had a dedicated satellite communications capability called PARAKEET which is a 512K channel, as well as two INMARSAT terminals of 64K each. *Anzac* and *Darwin* had only one INMARSAT each, and therefore had to time share – they could only have one network up at a time – and were consequently very stretched. Commonality of communications equipment was also an issue, with the RAN having to fly up 40 WAGTAIL radio sets to give to all the coalition RHIBs to ensure they were all operating on the same communications system.

One of the criticisms of NCW is that it will facilitate direction by the 3000-mile screwdriver. For those unfamiliar with the 3000-mile screwdriver, that is when senior commanders, usually back home or at least well removed from the action, can see exactly what is going on tactically and have the ability to jump in to direct the on-scene tactical commander. This is usually quite inappropriate, as the person on the scene is almost always best placed to make tactical decisions. Hence the ability for the boss to wield the 3000-mile screwdriver is usually seen as a negative. However I would argue that the mere ability to do so is not the issue. In fact, the very technology that allows a senior commander in Canberra or Washington to watch a tactical battle in real time is exactly the same technology that allows pictures of that action to be broadcast around the world in real time, and so what seems like a minor, localised tactical action to those doing it can have a major strategic consequence. Who could forget the Marine

draping the US flag over the statue of Saddam Hussein as it was being toppled? This seemingly minor action had an immediate and adverse strategic affect as it was beamed across the world. In times gone by, it would not have had the same effect – it may have only maddened those local Iraqis who were nearby to actually see it. But now that Marine’s actions can be – and were – sent around the globe and replayed. I am sure that if President Bush were watching that Marine start his escapade, could see what he was about to do, and had the ability to immediately say ‘stop’, he would have, and it would have been quite right for him to do so. I think the connectivity aspect of the 3000-mile screwdriver is misunderstood. The real issue is to educate the senior officers (and politicians) about when it is right to jump in and when it is not.

Command and control was further compounded by the myriad of different coalition groups planning operations in the same or adjacent areas as those in which we were operating. While the UN sanctions were continuing to be enforced, as conflict drew close, a range of other operatives planned operations within that same waterspace. SF were involved in the gas and oil platforms (GOPLATs) and then in operations ashore, the Royal Marines were planning an assault from Bubiyan Island across the KAA which involved the movement of considerable quantities of personnel and equipment across the KAA – right at the same time as we were expecting to be dealing with a mass exodus of shipping *down* the KAA, and a significant mine warfare effort was being established in Umm Qasr. All these groups had different commanders, which kept life interesting as we tried to coordinate activities.

One of the major potential problems we faced, and one which was acknowledged by all levels of command right from the start was that of blue-on-blue. For those unfamiliar with the term, that is where the inevitable confusion that will always exist in war leads to the inadvertent killing of members of your own side, either through misidentification or accident. As in every conflict that has ever occurred, blue-on-blue engagements happened during FALCONER. One early estimate indicated that 6.5 per cent of coalition deaths were blue-on-blue compared to 25.6 per cent in the 1990-91 Gulf War. One big advantage that comes with a mature NCW system is that all those who are on your side, and hence are nodes of the network, will be known about. For ships and aircraft this is fairly simple, but how far does this extend to land forces? Does every soldier become an individual node, or are sections, platoon, companies or regiments the base level? There are also those elements that do not want to advertise their presence to anyone such as SF.

Those conducting MIO had developed quite a robust yet simple system for keeping track of the coalition RHIBs operating in the NAG. As you can imagine, after the attacks on the USS *Cole* in 2000, any small contacts closing warships at speed come in for special treatment, so the MIO units developed a range of procedural and visual options for confirming the identity of small boats. The key was a 12-line boat number that was allocated to every boat mission. In essence, this treated the small boats just like aircraft

filing a flight plan. It detailed what boat it was, how many onboard, what it was doing, its planned track and times at various points and the like. A 12-line boat number was allocated for every mission – planned or immediate – and promulgated to everyone on the force. In addition, we had a range of procedural evolutions, such as codewords, passed to the boats which meant to do certain manoeuvres, and visual recognition aids, such as flashing blue lights and large national ensigns flying. Collectively these provided a range of identification options, and worked very well.

The major problem we encountered was with SF boats working in the KAA. Naturally SF do not want to steam around with flashing blue lights when doing covert operations, but we still needed some form of coordination to ensure that our security boat patrols did not mistake SF boats for hostiles, or vice versa. This would have to be one area that was never fully resolved, and fortunately no casualties occurred.



*HMAS Kanimbla's Sea King and HMAS Anzac, March 2003*



Coupled with a lot of coalition action taking place in a very limited waterspace, there is also the issue of rules of engagement (ROE). Each country involved will have specific ROE allocated by their government, aimed at furthering that country's national interests. Luckily here, the major countries all had very similar, but not exactly the same, ROE. I will not go into specifics here, but you can easily see the potential for problems with an Australian commander sending a British boarding team in a UK RHIB, deployed from a Polish ship, to support a US boarding operation that is already underway. Good working relationships, common sense, and fairly closely aligned ROE meant that this issue did not surface during FALCONER, but the potential is always there in any coalition operation.

It is still early days for NCW and, in my view, we are progressing with the technology, but have yet to develop the right mindset, doctrine, procedures and processes to actually manage the vastly increased information flow and to really determine what information needs to flow. It is not the case that more information, faster, is better. We now quickly reach information overload if we are not careful, and simply building bigger pipes is not the answer. A good example of this is the information flows around the battlespace in the land campaign. Of the 11 major tactical battles land forces were involved in during the 'formal' hostilities phase, all 11 came as a tactical surprise for those land forces on the ground, yet information on all 11 was well known to the headquarters staff. The right information did not get to the right people in time. Some formalised procedures for the use of email and chat in particular are necessary to make sure we can improve our effectiveness with these tools without being seduced by the technology.

It was not just boats that were an issue for deconfliction. A lot of effort went into deconflicting a range of activities right through the planning, but even so there were still some disconnects. Many of these were best sorted by the exchange of liaison officers. Even with all this new communications technology, we found that nothing beats a face-to-face discussion, and the permanent exchange of liaison officers was critical. Captain Jones's staff had a liaison officer onboard USS *Constellation* and USS *Valley Forge*, as well as one back in Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, so our three direct coalition superiors were covered. We also had a representative from 3 Commando Royal Marines—the ones doing the assault across the KAA onto the Al Faw peninsula—attached to us, and we sent a counterpart across to the headquarters of 3 Commando. In addition, we had a Kuwaiti Naval officer onboard *Kanimbla* who proved invaluable in dealing with local issues, facilitating interaction between us and the local Gulf countries. He was fantastic.

One key person was our liaison officer in the planning staff at CENTCOM. He had been in place since September the year before, and did an outstanding job.

None of this should be construed as my suggesting we should not be heading down this path. NCW is most definitely the way to go, as most Western nations and, in particular, the ADF, cannot afford to become involved in an attrition battle where we go head-to-head. We simply do not have the numbers to do that, and even if we did it is

not something we would find acceptable. We must gain, analyse and act on information quicker than an adversary and use that to avoid battles that are unfavourable to us, yet be able to strike when and where the situation is favourable to us. I only point out the difficulties above to highlight that technology alone is not the answer.

The value of NCW was clearly demonstrated in the Iraq campaign which was, by coalition and Australian standards, very successful – in the military context. Work in engagement grids is progressing well, and with the addition of AEW&C aircraft to the RAAF, the ADF will be taking huge leaps in the ability to network sensor, weapon and command information.

The lessons from Iraq are being hoisted onboard, and the groundwork for our future networked force is being laid now.



*Coalition RHIBs embarked in HMAS Kanimbla*

## PART III – OPEN FORUM

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**Captain Nigel Coates:** I was very privileged as Chief of Staff to the CDF [Chief of Defence Force] to watch how C2 [command and control] arrangements evolved. I learned that C2 is more than just the military organising itself, it has to reflect the realities of the political-military interface. There are considerations that I saw our senior leaders grappling with that would never have occurred to me. If they had to do it again they would probably come up with a very similar arrangement. Our ability and need to manage in complex environments like this is not going to go away. In some ways it might get more complex, but in another sense, I suppose with improved connectivity, given our strategic and political leaders and the ability to reach down, it might actually make it simpler. So then you can talk to them directly. In some ways all these influences are going to get more and more pervasive.

**Captain Andrew Gough:** What should we do to better manage the information volume and flows into the future?

**Captain Peter Lockwood:** There are two things that need to happen regarding the ships. At the operational level, more sorting needs to be done of the information coming in. I was reading the same thing three or four times per day—well, my staff were actually pulling it out so I did not have to read it three or four times per day, but it was coming in. Intelligence summaries came out of Fifth Fleet, out of Australian National Headquarters, out of the Australian Joint Intelligence, and out of the US Naval Forces Central Command. We were getting the same thing over and over again. The other problem is bringing all that information together from about seven or eight separate systems. It was coming into the ship and was being shuffled around by floppy disk between the systems to try to bring the information together. I had a lieutenant commander PWO [Principal Warfare Officer] and a staff of three junior sailors working full-time just on this information management job. Once the ships move on and get a discrete network on board you can start to bring all of this into one management system that is less manual and will solve some of our problems.

**Lieutenant Steve Walls:** Captain Lockwood, were the briefings and data provided on environmental conditions adequate to prepare you for the conditions that were met in the Gulf, and is there a case for meteorological officers at sea to forecast and gather data to brief on environmental conditions?

**Captain Peter Lockwood:** As we were not operating close inshore we did not experience the full range of environmental extremes. We only experienced light amounts of smoke, but the big issue was ducting and trying to work out what was the best mode for radar. Not so important with a radar like SPS 40 because you cannot do anything about it, but a radar like SPS 52, with its computerised digital system, had five

modes from memory and depending on the duct you changed mode—we were actually using modes that we had never used before. Having better meteorological information would allow us to plan a little bit in advance, but it was really a case of playing with the radar in different modes to optimise its performance.

**Speaker unidentified:** We were well prepared based on the previous experience of the other ships up there. We knew the temperatures to expect, and about the Shamals. We were less well prepared in terms of meteorological support for predicting the impact on ships if the wind was blowing at certain strengths and in certain directions. Even looking out the window and validating what you are being told is important, particularly when it comes to trying to work out the possibility and impact of potential chemical attacks launched from land sites.

**Lieutenant Commander Paul Moggach:** I was flight commander in *Kanimbla* for the most recent conflict. The employment of the aircraft was pretty much along the lines of the designated roles. Surface search for the Seahawk flight, logistics support for the Sea King, which worked pretty well right up to the point of the conflict itself when the whole game changed a little bit as the forces moved forward into Iraq. From then on, we had a naval force ashore on the ground in Iraq – the clearance divers. From the flight logistics support force, we then had to supply that unit appropriately. There was a bit of an issue initially in gaining approval for that aircraft to go over land as the aircraft was going ashore over the beach – the issue concerned the preparation of the aircraft and the nature of the threat. Subsequently, the aircraft went over the beach and we operated over there for some weeks providing support. I feel there is a restriction within RAN thinking on taking those aircraft over the beach. We do not equip them accordingly; we do not dress our aviators for the ground as much as we should. Indeed it took our flight some weeks to try and get appropriate flying clothing to go over the ground. We were only able to achieve this change after we quoted a fratricide signal from the United States Navy, because the only people on the ground in Iraq wearing green were Iraqis and RAN aircrew. Eventually the suits came through and it was appropriate that we did change. I am interested in thoughts from past experience in the Gulf and most recently on employment of RAN aircraft over the beach and the combat zone, because I feel there is still a wall at the high water mark where we should not go any further.

**Captain Mark Campbell:** The way RAN aviation is set up these days is as an autonomous part of the ship's warfare system. As such, we are not set up to operate over land. Sea Kings are slightly different in that they are a bit more flexible, but we are designed, and there has been a fair bit of thought put into it, to have the aircraft as part of the ship's weapon system. I think there is a mindset against detaching people away because we have been set up to operate from a ship. I think that is appropriate, and we do not want to change that right now.

From my earlier experience, the first thing received was a whole bunch of light arms in case we had to put down in a nasty environment or a place. We were also issued with flack jackets and other equipment. The green overalls were a very small part of what we were worried about at the time, but certainly we were issued with everything we thought we were going to need if we had to put down on land, and obviously that is an option at all times. Maybe it is something that you need to put into the FEG [Force Element Group] to think about in terms of aircrew equipment.

**Captain Peter Jones:** Not having naval aircraft equipped with ESM, chaff and flares for self-defence and missiles for strike is a very critical issue. It is not just about being over land, it is a matter of being able to operate safely and effectively in a hostile environment. Because of these considerations we made an assessment that RAN helicopters would operate south of the KAA waterway until the conflict was at a stage where we were happy for the aircraft to go over or near land. You have to look at it in the context of having quite a number of Lynx and suitably armed American helicopters with significant tasking for them. Basically, the plan was to have two helicopters, a Lynx and a Seahawk, one on top of the other working continuously in tandem. With their Hellfire missiles, the US Navy Seahawks were used to provide coverage both onshore and for small boats and the Lynx would operate underneath them. We had the assets to do that job and there was an important job that the Sea King helicopters had to do in terms of logistics, medivac and all that sort of stuff.

When it became clear that it was safe enough to send the Sea King up to Umm Qasr, they were employed in support of the clearance divers. Although the clearance divers were not in the coalition chain of command, we were the only people who had a vested interest in making sure they were properly supported and the Sea King did a great job in supporting them. There was an awful lot of interest back home in what the divers were doing, naturally enough, because of the hazardous nature of their job. We raised the issue very much that ESM, chaff and flares are an important deficiency in RAN helicopters.

**Captain Andrew Gough:** There is a serious issue here as we go forward. The situation we have at the moment is that the somewhat arbitrary divide line specified by the high water mark between land aviation and maritime aviation is not actually meaningful. At the moment, the sort of dilemma that confronts me is that I have somebody who is either unsure or lacks experience in the maritime environment, or a pilot who is not in an aircraft that has sufficient survivability in the land environment. If I am doing a long-range over the horizon insertion from seaward, you have the prospect of a pilot who is going to get lost coming to and from the ship, but can do the job over the land. Alternatively, we could have someone who can quite capably get to and from the ship, but is not in an aircraft that can do anything over the land. That is not a palatable situation for the ADF. In terms of maritime aircraft it does beg the question, if we are going to do littoral warfare, how are we going to equip the helicopters to operate

proximate to land where they are subject to things like a surface-to-air threat. Until we start to grapple with some of these issues across the ADF, rather than within specific Service stovepipes, we are going to be confronted with an ongoing littoral warfare dilemma. I think that the FEG should grab that, but it needs to be grabbed in an ADF sense, not just in a single Service stovepipe.

**Captain Mark Campbell:** I agree with you, Andy, but there is a cross-FEG discussion happening right now, between your team, the aviation and surface combatant FEGs. It may not be talking about the high water mark. What I was talking about earlier was operations from a ship and the need to keep the ship as your logistics base. I do not have any drama with RAN aircraft moving away from that and going over land. The high water mark is not the problem; the problem is one of self-defence. The Army has got this pretty well worked out, and you might be well aware of AIR 9000 Phase Two which is the additional troop lift helicopter, which is going to be a fairly heavily armed well-defended aircraft that the Army is planning to operate from the LPA. Hopefully we can get enough equipment or enough thoughts into the Army to convince them that they need to have 'marinised' aircraft and that they need to be able to operate detached and autonomously from a ship. That is a discussion that is still going on. I certainly hope that you are involved in that discussion. Certainly COMAUSNAVAIR are. But Army is not necessarily listening very well.

**Captain Andrew Gough:** There is progress on that front, but there is still a mindset that Navy will look after the wet space and the Army will look after the dry space. There is no corporate solution as to how we develop skill-sets for personnel, or how we need to cross-pollinate equipment fits to make sure there is a degree of commonality between those issues. The FEGs are in discussion but it is not being operationally biased, it is being delivery-of-capability biased – that is, largely driven by money and efficiency.

**Captain Mark Campbell:** Yes, I would agree with that. Certainly the ADF Warfare Centre is looking at all those sorts of things.

**Commander Aaron Ingram:** Just seizing on the high water mark, the environment and littoral warfare – certainly one of the biggest pluses for me up there as war became a matter of when, not if, was manoeuvrability, particularly up in areas MA-1 South and the bottom of MA-1 North. The rapid environmental survey that HMS *Roebuck* provided for us at a pretty critical time was one of the key things for me. As the war got closer, I had to consider my own manoeuvrability for avoiding asymmetric threats, as well as trying to launch boats, helicopters and so forth. From a littoral warfare perspective the provision of rapid environmental surveys can be quite critical to a successful operational outcome. The RAN's hydrographic FEG is currently addressing this issue.

**Vice Admiral Rob Walls:** I do not know whether I am striking the right note here or not, but let's have a lighter note towards the end of the day. I was very much reminded of something by Richard Menhinick's remark about Battle Force Zulu. In late 1992 I

was the Maritime Commander and I was designated as commander of a multinational force. My opposite number was Admiral Joe Prueher, later Commander-in-Chief US Pacific Command and then the US Ambassador to China. I was designated Commander Battle Force Uniform. And I went home, told Susan about this and she looked at me in stunned amazement. She said: 'Uniforms! Surely you are dealing with better things than that by now!' My staff officer at the time was the rather droll fellow, Robin Glanville, sometimes known as the Basil Fawlty of Maritime Towers, and he said: 'Oh, yes, he is. He has got car parks.'





*Explosive Ordnance Disposal, April 2003*

**PART IV:  
MINE  
COUNTERMEASURES  
AND EXPLOSIVE  
ORDNANCE DISPOSAL  
1990-2003**

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# Thirteen

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## Commodore Russ Baker, RAN

*Director General Navy Strategic Policy and Futures,  
2004-05*

I will explain how we got to the point where the clearance diving team was a viable operational tool which could be used and was used in both of the Gulf wars.

In terms of developing the very shallow water mine countermeasures capability, the traditional clearance diving team (CDT) in the 1970s and 1980s tended to focus on underwater explosive ordnance disposal (EOD). In other words, they were just getting rid of something as opposed to looking at why they were getting rid of it, and what operational results the clearance that resulted would achieve.

Since the Ton class coastal mine-hunters and minesweepers were paid off in the mid to late 1980s, the art of mine countermeasures (MCM) was starting to wane in the Royal Australian Navy. The Tons were having severe problems with their mechanical and hull reliability. The sonar systems were very difficult to maintain and we were starting to lose people. In addition, the first Bay class mine-hunter inshore was delivered in 1986 – it came down from Newcastle to Sydney – but basically failed to meet its operational performance expectations, primarily in the sonar, but also in some other areas of acoustic signature, and in its sea-keeping performance.

In the opinion of a few divers at the time, it appeared that the mine warfare and clearance diving officers' warfare skills were reverting to what I would regrettably call the 'traditional image of the diver', something that a fair few of us had worked quite hard to get rid of in the early 1980s. We decided to start emphasising the mine countermeasure roles of the CDTs and the way we did this was to start treating them as a mine countermeasures element in a task force. In mid-1987 we started a series of operational readiness evaluations. The first one was done in about the middle of the year in Team 1 and a bit later on in the year on Team 4, and essentially those activities have continued until today.

Those operational readiness evaluations (OREs) concentrated on the following areas:

- We looked at shallow water mine countermeasures performance – the area where ship-borne mine countermeasures traditionally have a lot of difficulty – in the surf zone where there is a lot of suspended material in the water and the ship's sonar just does not want to work. In general you are talking from about the 10-metre contour in.

- We started looking at clandestine beach reconnaissance. The maritime tactical operations element within CDTs took up this role. At this stage, in the mid to late 1980s, the CDTs were fairly flush with people who had extensive Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) experience in the counter-terrorist roles. A lot of basic land tactical knowledge plus weapon-handling skills were being brought into the branch, probably to the consternation of a few people, both in Navy and Army.
- Underwater battle damage repair was focused on the ability of a CDT to go to an area of operations and deal with damage to a ship, either damage by accident or damage by battle, such as unexploded warheads from missiles.
- The traditional EOD roles and, above all, the ability of a diving team to go somewhere, be self-sustaining and do its mission for a prolonged period.

In late 1987 the involvement of the ADF in support of sea lines of communication in the Gulf was raised. I went over to the Gulf around Christmas of that year with the task of determining the likely roles and support arrangements for a CDT were the Australian Government to agree to deploy one. This was basically Operation SANDGLASS. CDT 4, which was the most recent team to have undertaken an ORE, and I guess certainly had had the most successful outcome in one, was placed on standby. That team was deployed to Sydney and basically did a mine countermeasures workup over Christmas. There were a couple of minor hiccups in there when I think most of the jackstay equipment got pinched by a fisherman and ended up around west of the Harbour Bridge and we had to go and talk very nicely and strongly to him to get it back.

The aftermath of that was that the team did not deploy. The reasons behind that, I guess from the overseas side, was some difficulty, almost from an embarrassment perspective, of integrating with the Royal Navy at that stage. The Royal Navy's diving equipment used for working on mines under water at that stage was magnetically unsafe. The gear we had was safe. If we had put our divers into the area, the British would have been quite severely embarrassed because our guys would have been able to work under the MCM directives in force at the time, but their guys would not have been. So I suspect there was a bit of face-saving there.

Because of the workups we had done, we now had a tested and deployable shallow water mine countermeasures capability. That capability was certainly tested and worked on a lot over the subsequent years with many of the diving teams deploying to ports around Australia for protracted periods, operating unsupported, and conducting large clearances of ports. The OREs went on and on, including the period in between Gulf wars to the extent that, in recent years, my personal opinion would be that the CDTs became

what I would loosely call the Maritime Commander's 'personal shotgun'. That is, he would generally throw one of those at a problem if there was nothing else around.

Leading up to the First Gulf War in early 1991, the US Navy requested that we provide a CDT element to the Gulf with the mission to clear, in one night, a whole amphibious landing channel. This would have required a very large number of clearance divers, which we had. Unfortunately, at the time, the government, in between the Americans asking for this team and us responding, had said that they were not going to increase the personnel commitment to the Gulf and so we ended up sending 23 people. We did not deploy the numbers we wanted for the tasks that the Americans required. You might also want to consider that the tasks the Americans had asked for would have been somewhat risky, and perhaps that also weighed on the minds of the leaders of the day. Team 4 took the lead in preparing for this mission and basically a mix of people from Team 1 and Team 4 formed what would be known as Team 3 for the war in the Gulf.



*The tanker Surf City, a casualty of the Iran-Iraq war  
and still a derelict in 1991*

# Fourteen

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## Commander Steve O'Brien, RAN

### *Clearance Diving Team 3 DAMASK II*

This paper deals with Clearance Diving Team (CDT) 3 preparations and operations in 1991. I will provide a snapshot of relevant points that can be compared with the 2003 operation and therefore help display the development of the Clearance Diving Branch in successfully adapting to modern large-scale conflicts.

On 25 January 1991, a 23-man clearance diving team, including one medic, was rapidly raised from the three existing clearance diving teams and deployed within 48 hours to the area of operations (AO). Ostensibly, the divers were to support the proposed amphibious assault operation of the US Marine Corps (USMC). However, this action was later discarded and the team engaged in Operation DESERT CACTUS, the recovery of Kuwaiti ports post-liberation. During the operation, US Navy, Royal Navy (RN) and French diving and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) units were engaged alongside the Royal Australian Navy (RAN).

The following figures will give you some idea of the scope of the DESERT CACTUS operation in Kuwait:

Ports opened	4
Seabed area searched	2,157,200 sq. m
Jackstay laid	155km
Jackstay laid for other nations' use	51km
Total number of sea mines dealt with	60
Total pieces of ordnance cleared	234,986
Demolition charges rendered safe	30
Wrecks surveyed	32
Ships clearances	7
Buildings, port and oil refinery facilities cleared	numerous

The team proved its versatility and the efficacy of its harbour clearance techniques in Kuwait by accounting for 70 per cent of all seabed area searched and the majority of installations cleared by coalition divers.



The structure of the team allowed for concurrent surface EOD and mine countermeasures (MCM) diving tasks throughout the period. Half the team would dive in the morning while the other half would conduct surface EOD. In the afternoon, the roles were reversed to avoid fatigue and decompression illness difficulties arising. Upon returning to Australia on 11 May 1991, the team had been deployed for 104 days, including 51 days in Kuwait.

In the preparatory phase of Operation DESERT STORM, the role to be played by the CDT was in support of the proposed amphibious operation by the USMC. Specifically, the CDT was to provide very shallow water (VSW) mine clearance of the target beaches as a prelude to the waterborne assault. VSW, in this instance, was defined as the water column from the 10-metre contour leading into the one-metre contour at the beachfront. As this would be against a defended target, such an operation would be of a clandestine nature to ensure success under the guns of the enemy and to avoid disclosure of the amphibious target to the enemy prior to the assault itself.

The RAN clearance divers were chosen for this mission as they were recognised as the only coalition unit capable of such a task. The Diving Branch had for many years perfected the art of clandestine beach surveys utilising oxygen re-breather sets, which of course exhaust no bubbles, leaving the divers' presence invisible to surface observation. Essentially, these same procedures were used successfully by CDT 4 in the East Timor operation of 1999.

The newly formed CDT 3, under the command of Lieutenant Commander John Griffiths (OIC CDT 4), arrived in Bahrain on 31 January and immediately began preparations for amphibious tasking. This tasking was changed on 18 February, when the team was advised that the amphibious assault plan was no longer viable for operations. Several hours later the USS *Tripoli* struck what was believed to be an Iraqi LUGM 145 buoyant mine.

The team was now re-tasked in support of port recovery operations in Kuwait and all energies were redirected away from the clandestine towards the traditional overt MCM harbour-clearance role. The following days till the land war commenced on 24 February were spent in reorganising and training for the new role and with reconnaissance runs to the front lines at Ras Al Risa'ad and Mershaab, just south of the border town of Kharfji. Here direct liaison with the US Navy SEALs and SEABEES, as well as the First Marine Expeditionary Force (1MEF) was undertaken in order to gain intelligence on the target ports (the SEALs were raiding the coast at the time), and to secure transport into Kuwait.

In Bahrain itself, the need to arm the team was of the first order as weapons and ammunition had still not arrived in-theatre. M16 rifles were borrowed from the Canadians for each team member. Zeroing of the weapons and range practice was conducted with the support of the USMC in Bahrain as the extraordinary wait for

our own weapons continued. In this event, weapons and ammunition were not the only concern; explosive stores were also critically required, to counter unexploded ordnance.

Throughout this period Lieutenant Commander Griffiths worked tirelessly to consolidate tasking objectives, the chain of command and lines of communication. Meanwhile, the team continued training, particularly in EOD on known ordnance in theatre.

On the afternoon of 23 February, up at Mershaab, Colonel Hancock, USMC, 1MEF promised CDT 3 staff Marine transportation into Kuwait from the staging area when and if the need arose. Thirty minutes later, his division moved out into the desert to a jumping-off position 90 miles inland for the assault on the Iraqi lines. The next morning at 0400 this ground assault commenced and, within three days, the Marines had taken Kuwait City. The following day, Thursday 28 February, the cease-fire was enacted and formal hostilities ceased.

On Friday 01 March, Lieutenant Commander Griffiths and CPOCD Eugene Maxwell flew into Kuwait on a reconnaissance mission with US Navy EOD counterparts. They were to rejoin the team at the staging area in Mershaab two days later, following a period in Kuwait that was not altogether without incident. It was in the main port complex in Kuwait City that an Iraqi soldier surrendered to Lieutenant Commander Griffiths while he was inspecting a wharfside bunker.

Meanwhile, the team had moved forward through Saudi Arabia to the SEABEE camp at Mershaab. Thirteen 5-tonne trucks of the 14/61 Michigan National Guard, based out of Damman, were used in this move. Later that day the team's weapons finally arrived in Bahrain, the ammunition having arrived separately some days earlier.

As with many operations, most often the hardest part can just be getting into the action with all your 'ducks in a row'. Late in the evening of 2 March, on the Saudi border with Kuwait, the team and all its equipment and weapons were finally brought together for the operation ahead. The obvious dilemma here was that the newly arrived weapons from Australia had not been checked or zeroed in. Team members therefore retained the Canadian M16 as their primary personal weapon throughout.

On the evening of 4 March, the promised Marine transport, being three semi-trailers and two personnel trucks, arrived at the SEABEE camp and the loading began. The team finally passed into Kuwait in the early hours of Tuesday 5 March.

The situation faced by the team in Kuwait is outlined in the following excerpts from the team's war diary. While these excerpts are concerned only with the first few days in Kuwait, they give a good insight into the general tempo and variety of the work conducted, as well as the conditions experienced, which are indicative throughout the entire operation:

## Mon 4 March

Departed NMCB 74 Camp. 1st Marine Expeditionary Force armour and personnel still passing south—happy faces and victory flags abundant! Numerous road blocks and delays!

## Tue 5 March

**0115** Passed into Kuwait at last! Road a mess, as was Kharfji and border posts. Abandoned and destroyed armour and vehicles littered roadside, lit from behind by oilfield fires.

**0330** Arrived port of Mina Ash Shuaiba. Bunked down in abandoned warehouse.

Later that morning RN work team commenced helo lift into port. US Army EOD conducting (bunker) clearance of southern port wharves. HMS *Ledbury* (Hunt Class mine countermeasure vessel—MCMV) hunting port entrance.

Port conditions: nil power and water. Ordnance not cleared yet from southern wharves. Bunkers plentiful, destruction (vandalism) and looting of port facilities extensive.

**1526** Attempted to lay jackstay—conditions too rough and oil covers port and surrounds rendering equipment unserviceable.

## Wed 6 Mar

**1000** Commenced clearance of Shuaibah oil refinery, refinery pier and the tanker Al Mutanebbi (which had been previously boarded by POCD Herbst, when he was a member of HMAS *Darwin*'s boarding party in 1990).

Clearance ops completed pier and ship— NTR

**1730** Refinery ops completed. Buildings cleared as follows: (a list of eight buildings). Nil devices found.

Points of interest: pollution very bad – no sun today. Very dark – ‘nuclear winter’. Army transport driver fragged hand when playing with grenade det.

## Thu 7 Mar

**0800** Diving delayed due to oil slick.

**0935** Detachment to Al Ahmadi Sth Pier to RSP LUGM-145 mine on beach.

**0940** ...completed IED search of Iraqi tugs at berth 15.

Commenced diving ops piers 6,7,8 north arm Shuaibah Port.

Diving ops completed for day ... area cleared ... 54,000 sq m.

Other unit activities: RN ... wharves 9,10.

US Navy ... Det 12 conducting wall clearances berths  
16-20.

Det 51 operating harbour mouth.

Det 33 returning Bahrain.

It would take a further five days to clear the port of Ash Shuaibah, with no mines being found in the water. During this time concurrent surface EOD, ship and refinery clearance operations were undertaken.

Team members commenced surface operations in the Ras Al Qualaya Naval Base on 10 March. The port of Ash Shuaibah was officially opened on Tuesday 12 March and the team continued surface EOD operations along the coastal strip.

The team uplifted and moved into the naval base itself on Saturday 16 March, when the surface EOD problem was sufficiently advanced to allow diving operations to commence there. The minimum-magnetic Dräger FGT semi-closed sets were required for these operations. The Kuwaiti Marines now provided perimeter security. This was to be a RAN operation only, with the port clearance completed on 20 March.

On 23 March the team rejoined the other coalition units in the main Kuwait City port of Ash Shuwaik. This clearance operation was to last until 8 April. CDT 3 was given the final coalition task of clearing the oil refinery port of Al Ahmadi from 11 to 17 April. The team passed back through Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to return to Bahrain on the evening 22 April, 51 days after departure.

The period 23 April to 10 May was spent preparing the back-load of equipment, including captured munitions and armaments. The team arrived back on Australian soil via RAAF 707, after 104 days deployed, on 11 May 1991.

That the 1991 team was able to be formed from three existing CDTs and successfully deploy fully equipped and self-contained for roles as diverse as clandestine VSW MCM, overt MCM and surface EOD within 48 hours of being tasked, was perhaps the most significant achievement of the deployment. This extraordinary aspect, which allowed for no workup training, had its foundation in CDT 4 still being on notice for Operation SANDGLASS.

However, much of the success can also be traced to John Griffiths' organisation and management of the training of CDT 4 to conduct exactly this type of operation, as envisaged under SANDGLASS. In particular, CDT 4 practised full harbour clearances in such ports as Geraldton and Bunbury twice a year between 1988 and 1990. Weapons training and field movement, in order to provide self-protection in an unsecured

environment, was given significant priority by Lieutenant Commander Griffiths. His vision for likely operations in the Gulf and the need for a team to be self-supporting for at least 14 days in the field were the guide to his preparations.

At this time, the RAN was the only diving force to practise large-scale harbour clearances, including concurrent EOD operations. These aspects go a long way towards explaining the success achieved in Kuwait, particularly as equipment, techniques and skill sets engaged the operating environment perfectly.

Lieutenant Commander Griffiths had also worked hard on validating the manpower requirements needed to conduct simultaneous diving and EOD operations. He was cognisant of the skill-sets required and so he chose what could only be considered a very top heavy team in normal circumstances, as it included nine officers and senior sailors. This, however, gave the team nine EOD and diving supervisors. As each supervisor was, in fact, a working diver foremost, the seeming disproportion between workers and supervisors was actually a balanced end-product providing extraordinary flexibility. On many occasions it was not uncommon to have three separate EOD tasks in progress as well as a diving task, while the headquarters cell still monitored events and allocated tasks appropriately.



*Clearance divers prepare to conduct a seabed search in a Kuwaiti port, March 1991*

In 1991 the team did not deploy with weapons. In most instances we were without dog tags as well. As the Marine sergeant who made up our dog tags in Diego Garcia noted: 'Who sends people to war without tags?' You can imagine his counterpart's response in Bahrain when we arrived without guns!

Whatever the reasons behind the decision not to have us deploy with weapons in 1991, it is reassuring to see that such misconceptions no longer apply in recent years. Once in Bahrain Lieutenant Commander Griffiths had set about rectifying this situation with all the energy he could muster. His wish list back to Australia included the Parker-Hale sniper rifle, a number of LWS rocket launchers and M203 grenade launchers. Although to the casual naval observer this may seem excessive, Lieutenant Commander Griffiths' thoughts on the matter were, in fact, quite practical. The widespread proliferation of cluster bomblets and land-mines supports his views on weapons requirements.

In order to provide every means available to deal with unforeseen circumstances Lieutenant Commander Griffiths insisted on such weapons in the inventory as could be used as demolition tools if necessary. The sniper rifle could detonate small bomblets at a safe range and the M203 and rocket launchers could be used from an acceptable distance to render building and bunker entrances safe from booby traps. Bearing in mind that Lieutenant Commander Griffiths and ten of his men had served with the Special Air Service Regiment counter-terrorist unit, there was certainly enough expertise within the group to handle such weapons competently if required.

Modern diving teams are far better equipped and trained in small arms and movement techniques than we were in 1991. Thus they are far more capable of operating in a high threat level environment than before and are more employable with less risk in such situations in the future.

In 1991, once ensconced in Kuwait City, the team was issued with two suitcases that constituted an umbrella aerial and satellite telephone. There were no secure communications and we simply set it up if we wanted to call back to Australia. This system was great for its day, but obviously of no real practical use with regard to command and control. In the field we relied on the tried and true means of thorough briefings and visual signalling to control our day-to-day operations. This worked well for us, as we knew no differently.

One negative of being without instant communications in Bahrain was being called out in the silent hours to report to the Canadian communications centre to receive 12-hour old FLASH messages stating that a Scud missile was headed our way. Sometimes ignorance can be reassuring.

However, as you will see, mobile field satellite communications have come a long way. Whether this is necessarily a good thing in the field depends upon the discipline at both ends of the line, as the temptation to flood the open channels with too much

information, or attempt to control the field from the office can be debilitating for a small tactical unit.

In summary, the Clearance Diving Branch showed its flexibility and skill diversity when it was deployed within 48 hours to the Persian Gulf. Early preparations for seaborne clandestine amphibious pre-cursor operations gave way to large-scale overt land-based MCM operations. CDT 3 accounted for over 70 per cent of the port clearance operations in the Gulf while working alongside predominantly US Navy and RN units. Sixty sea mines were rendered safe or destroyed; all of these had washed up on the beach defences.

## Lieutenant Commander Scott Craig, DSM, RAN

### *Commanding Officer Clearance Diving Team 3 BASTILLE & FALCONER*

I was commanding officer of Australian Clearance Diving Team 3 (AUSCDT 3) in support of operations BASTILLE and FALCONER. I will discuss the experiences and lessons learned by the clearance diving force from its operations in the Persian Gulf from 1991 to 2003. Our interaction with coalition partners remained at a high level during the entire period. As part of our workup training for BASTILLE and FALCONER we were deployed to the US and worked in the command structure that we would eventually join in Iraq. That gave us insights and allowed us to test communications, ensure that standing operating procedures (SOPs) were developed properly and that the SOPs could be adhered to. It also meant that the lessons we had learned in equipment preparations were tested to the full. We loaded our equipment in San Diego and I did not see it again until it arrived in the Middle East.

On our return to Australia we were given our plan and then we moved to chemical training, which was one of the issues that the RAN dropped in about 1995. After this training we deployed to Bahrain.

Commander Percival, who was managing the RAN's logistic support element (LSE) in Bahrain, realised the scope of what he had got himself into when 60 tonnes of equipment arrived. At that stage we had to sort our equipment into what we could carry on our backs, what would go into USS *Gunston Hall*, and what would remain in *Kanimbla*. We learned from our experience in 1991 and had our own vehicles, weapons and ammunition on arrival in Bahrain. We were self-sustainable for six weeks in food when we arrived in Bahrain – not very nice food – it was ration packs, but it was self-sustainable. At this stage we had to break our kit into flyaway loads to be flown off USS *Gunston Hall* into Umm Qasr.

The plan at this stage was for us to drive from Kuwait through to Umm Qasr to do the first part of our task, which was to be explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) and securing the port for the mine countermeasures (MCM) forces to arrive and conduct operations.

As we arrived in Camp Patriot, the first question was: 'What is the real plan? How are we supposed to be getting there?' Command and control became an issue when we had our Australian hat on; we had Commander Task Group (CTG) 56 and CTG 55 both trying to tell us where we were going, how we were getting there and who was in charge. Our domestic command and control at this stage was excellent, as we had secure satellite communications which put us on the Joint Command Support System (JCSS) the whole time we were in Kuwait.



In Kuwait, we consolidated our training and prepared our equipment. The equipment we carried was such that each person could self-sustain in a contact, break contact, or advance to contact, whichever the case may be. Each clearance diver carried his personal weapons and we had the 203 grenade launchers, but not the 50-calibre anti-material weapon; however these are in the process of being purchased. We also had chemical protective equipment, which enabled us to perform operations in a potential chemical warfare environment. We had worked towards developing an ability to undertake operations in a chemical environment in Australia. So the focus now was to make sure we could conduct all of our tasks in a chemical environment.

Continuation training continued in earnest with the Camp Patriot chemical drills and the new skills that we had introduced into the teams in the last five years – capabilities such as diver medical technicians. These technicians enabled the provision of medical support in the field, for both diving and EOD operations, with the medic remaining in the headquarters. This is an important capability and enables intravenous drips and other medical procedures to be undertaken in the field.

When we deployed forward, our four Land Rovers became part of a 32-vehicle convoy heading from Kuwait up to the Bullrush tactical assembly area. The benefits of our previous experience became most evident at this time as we were better equipped than some of our US counterparts. For example, some US forces in the road convoy did not have communications equipment for their vehicles. As we had secure communications that could be spread between the vehicles, we took on a leading role in the provision of communications in the convoy.

At Bullrush the scale of what we were about to embark on became clearer. The weapons training and force protection skills of the troops were put straight to the test. One evening some Japanese journalists decided they would rush up to the sentry post to see what was happening as we were having Scud missiles fired over the top of us. This posed a challenging situation for the sentries who, in the end, managed it without incident.

As we prepared to depart from Bullrush to Viking and then to Umm Qasr, it became apparent that our navigation and land skills would be important. We were given a series of maps to get us some 26 miles across the desert from Bullrush to Viking, but some of the directions were a bit obscure. This situation emphasised the importance of our global positioning system (GPS) equipment. We knew where we were, but the same was not the case for some others in the convoy. We eventually got to Viking where we stayed overnight before driving on to Umm Qasr.

In Umm Qasr we were told we would have a couple of days to prepare the area to do EOD searches of the berths to make sure that the rest of the MCM force could come in safely. We had developed our port clearance SOPs in early 1991 and continued practising those through to 2003. As such we were the only nation with a validated

wharf and harbour clearance SOP and it became the model for what we were going to do. One hour after our arrival the first mine-sweeping helicopters were inbound. We quickly prepared a safe zone so that the US Navy and RN mine countermeasures forces could berth.

We were given 72 hours to clear a berth to enable coalition forces to disembark humanitarian relief supplies. During these operations it became apparent that the US Navy MCM forces had arrived without ammunition or explosives. We helped sustain the US Navy effort through the provision of equipment until theirs arrived.

As we continued to search the port, the first barge found contained mines and another went missing containing four mines. How you lose a vessel with four mines on it when you have captured it is a bit of a concern, but they did.

We took our full chemical capability with us and took on the lion's share of the chemical roles, as only we and the British had chemical protection equipment.

As we continued, the priority became to clear the port of Umm Qasr. In total, some one and a half million square metres of seabed were searched in Umm Qasr.



*Clearance Diving Team 3, March 2003*

Subsequently, command and control became important to ensure that shipping using Umm Qasr remained in safe waters. RFA *Sir Galahad* actually arrived on 28 March, alongside Berth 5 in Umm Qasr. She berthed outside the cleared area because it was a better part of the wharf, however she was relatively safe compared to USS *Firebolt* which berthed behind her, in an area that was definitely not cleared. It was an interesting experience standing on the wharf watching ships berth outside cleared areas.

The main focus of AUSCDT 3 was MCM. We identified mines, rendered them safe, pulled them apart for examination for intelligence purposes, and found four in the water that we had to deal with. We were also given other tasks doing explosive ordnance disposal, and disposing of weapons caches – mines in this instance.

Force protection was an issue in Umm Qasr and our previous experience alerted us to the need to be equipped with night vision goggles, secure communications, and ammunition. We were the only ones in the underwater MCM task group that had these capabilities.

Next stop was Khawr Az Zubayr (KAZ), and this was where the command and control side of our operation was fully tested. The change in concept of operations (CONOPS) to have us moved from Umm Qasr to KAZ became a significant event for Commander Peter Leavy [CTG Chief of Staff], who kept on sending me emails saying: ‘What are you doing?’ We eventually moved up to KAZ to start the next port clearance. This was essentially the same job, however in a British-secured port.

Our next little foray was up into Basrah, doing the traditional EOD roles. Basrah became one of those places where the British asked us to assist. When they saw the capability we had and the equipment we were taking, we took on a fair share of EOD tasks in Basrah. Coming across the Seersucker missile was particularly interesting. The CONOPS was tested when the US asked us to get back to CONOPS1 as opposed to CONOPS2 and clear the Al Faw peninsula in accordance with CONOPS1. As we had already migrated, we had to go back and revisit and get CONOPS1 reapproval to do the task. The task involved standard EOD clearance from the main supply route down to the low water mark. This clearance was undertaken in a declared minefield, where our personnel were required to crawl out to ordnance, or use metal detectors to avoid any hazards. We had recently received satellite communications, another thing we had been trying to get for a few years, which enabled us to exercise good control of troops in the field.

We were then moved on to KAZ helicopter port. I think it was only called a helicopter port because a helicopter flew over it once. It was basically an ordnance site, and again we were sent there because we had the equipment to deal with the naval ordnance side of it. The things that turned up at the helicopter port again tested everyone’s mettle in working out what they were and what they were doing there. The training that we had done with the US Navy and the processes established in the RAN ensured

that we had good safety procedures in place, even if we had not seen the item being inspected before.

The tactical lodgement distances are significant for the fact that we learned to take vehicles with us, so we could move around unencumbered. Mobility assets were in short supply for US troops on the ground. The RN did not have any vehicles on the ground from the diving side, so they had to beg, borrow and steal.

In summary, the AUSCDT 3 performance in 2003 was the culmination of some 12 years of learning and development of tactics and procedures. The team's broad range of skills, equipment fit and self-sufficiency, resulted in a capability which offered greater flexibility and utility than its counterparts in the US Navy and RN.



*A CDT 3 member on the firing range, March 2003*

## PART IV – OPEN FORUM

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**Commodore Russ Baker:** The signal Lieutenant Commander John Griffiths sent back asking for the sniper rifles and other equipment is of interest, in terms of a lesson learned regarding perspective. I was asked why the divers were asking for all this stuff as the signal did not explain why this equipment was required. John Griffiths did not want sniper rifles so he could act as a sniper and shoot people, he wanted sniper rifles to do EOD on cluster munitions. There was a lack of understanding on how clearance diving teams worked in the rest of Navy, and to realise that if they asked for equipment, they probably needed it and the purpose was probably reasonable.

You would have seen through these two presentations how MCM is conducted slightly differently in a war compared to a peace environment. In war MCM forces tend to go looking for where the mines are not. When the threat or the conflict dies down, then we go looking for where they are, to get rid of them. In time of conflict navies want to know where they can go without running into mines. If we find mines, we might leave them there as long as we can get around them or find a safe way through them.

The last point I would like to make concerns recovered items brought back to Australia for intelligence. At the end of the First Gulf War, the Defence Intelligence Organisation [DIO] sent a signal saying: 'Any Australian units out there, if you happen to have any bits and pieces that you think might interest us, let us know and we will see what we can do about getting them back.' DIO had obviously forgotten it was an Australian diving team of the best scroungers in the world on the ground in Kuwait. The signal that came back was the longest one I have ever seen from a diving team, starting off with a Rolls Royce, a couple of tanks, an armoured personnel carrier and going down from there. Not all of it quite made it back, but again the team basically, when they were in the Gulf, took the opportunity to get whatever they could, which is part of the role of a deployed unit.

**Commander David McCourt:** In the truncated workup that *Kanimbla* undertook prior to deploying, we did not do any MCM. We did our own preparation on the way across the Indian Ocean. While we were aware that there was a mine threat, the focus did not actually materialise in any of the training that we had done as part of that workup process. Having said that though, we discovered that the doctrine in *Australian Fleet Tactical Instructions* was still relevant. Certainly the degaussing ranging that we did prior to deploying was applied to the TMSS [Target Mine Simulation System] to help reduce the threat from mines.

**Captain Peter Jones:** I would just like to make just a couple of points. I think one of Scott Craig's problems in the US chain of command was having two one-stars present. One was doing MCM and the other, I guess, was EOD commander – the titles sort of changed a little bit. You had a one-star who was actually involved with the MCM vessels and the other one-star responsible for EOD, diving and port area.

Another complexity was caused by the different ways of operating the various diving teams. The RAN has developed quite a well-rounded diving capability, drawing upon years of experience in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf. Consequently our diving capability is fairly robust and there can be problems when operating with, in particular, the US diving teams, which are narrower in their capabilities. You may get a risk-averse one-star boss who will not want you to use all your talents because he has his narrow mission and provided he does that narrow mission and people do not get hurt, he is happy. So I think that was the source of some considerable frustration for Scott Craig and his team – there was a battle for them to try to do all the tasks they were capable of performing and that their predecessors had done before them.

In terms of the MCM force going up the KAA [Khawr Abd Allah] waterway, it is regrettable that we did not send a *Huon* class coastal mine-hunter to the Gulf. The coalition forces had five different sorts of MCM vessels, some of them being used for the first time operationally, and they learned a huge amount. We missed out on this experience and could have learned a considerable amount.

The thing that Scott talked about, the Presidential decree at a press conference that the KAA waterway would be cleared in three days, put immense pressure on the US one-star in command, and his carefully orchestrated plan went out the window. Instead of detecting, classifying and destroying, they went to detect-destroy, so every contact they would put an explosive charge on, just to try to speed things up.

The other thing that was touched on was knowledge base, which is a really important point. I found that I was unprepared, professionally, in terms of my experience base, to be a national commander of a clearance diving team. In short, as a PWO [Principal Warfare Officer] gunnery officer, I did not know very much about diving, what they could do, and it was a big learning experience for me. Generally across the Navy, our level of corporate understanding of what clearance diver talents are is not very good and we need to improve that.

**Lieutenant Commander Scott Craig:** We ended up with 32 people as the diving team at the end. We deployed from Australia with 26. We did not have any inherent logistics support. The actual number that we wanted was 40 – that would have given us a robust organisation with operators, and then, on top of that, we needed things like mechanics, communicators – all of those sort of things. At the end of the day, although we had 32 people, another five people would have given people to fix my Land Rovers when they broke down. So 32 was our final number, which included six support staff.

**Commodore Russ Baker:** I want to respond to two things. One is the issue of the *Huon*. Yes, from both a personal and a professional perspective, I would have loved to see a couple of *Huons* up there. Early in the year I collared one of our incredibly senior defence starred officers at a conference and asked him basically why the five best mine-hunters in the world were sitting alongside a wharf at *Waterhen* in a war where there was a mine threat. I did not get a verbal answer, but the look I got, I think I accurately interpreted – ‘because we forgot about them’ would be the best description.

In terms of the CTG’s knowledge of how to run a force including an MCM element, I agree with you that our training is not sufficiently broad. From my background, when I was amphibious CTG I was very conscious that I was responsible for a littoral environment which included all sorts of things. I am sure that people would equally look at me and say: ‘yes, you know how to command the MCM side of it in a littoral or an amphibious operation’, but I am light-on regarding how to drive the surface and air warfare aspects. Perhaps we need a comprehensive education package for the CTGs.

**Lieutenant Commander Paul Moggach:** Scott, you have detailed a really good picture of the lessons learned between 1991 and 2003. Significant progress has been achieved in terms of equipment, skills and interoperability. Would you care to elaborate on any lessons that have come out of this particular deployment that you can see advancing for, perhaps in ten years’ time, as an equivalent further jump in technology and skill levels?

**Lieutenant Commander Scott Craig:** There are a significant number of lessons we have captured and learned from this. A lot of that was based on the technology aspect and who is employing technology and where the technology did and did not work. We had instances of the US Navy employing high technology. A computer underwater is really good in Hawaii but put that in zero visibility and it does not work. So there are a lot of those little lessons learned that will roll into big lessons later on.

**Dr David Stevens:** Can you comment on the marine mammals and their MCM role?

**Lieutenant Commander Scott Craig:** The mammals are a system that has an application; however, they also have their limitations. The mammals are very good at finding objects, but they cannot classify the object. It still comes down to a diver physically going in there and classifying the object. The SOPs that were developed for the use of mammals in the US were not employed in Iraq because it was too time-consuming. I think with the mammals being so labour-intensive, you will see the US move away from mammals into unmanned underwater vehicles.

**Commodore Russ Baker:** The issue of detection versus classification of mines is a fairly significant one. Especially in the amount of time it takes to move from one process to the other. If you are going up the KAA and your policy is: ‘if we detect it and we blow it up, who cares?’, well that is a much faster process than identifying everything. We need, as a Navy, to be careful of some of the terminology we are starting to use. In



the early stages of the FFG upgrade, people started talking about a mine-avoidance sonar. It is not a mine-avoidance sonar; it is an obstacle-avoidance sonar. It is telling you there is something out there; it is not telling you what it is. So we are starting to mix up your detection and classification terms.

**Lieutenant Commander Paul Moggach:** We have a good comparison between the two logistics systems adopted between 1990 and 2003. In 1990 we arrived without equipment, but by contrast in 2003, the system did seem to work. Was there anything in 2003 where logistics could be improved, particularly in terms of integration with the Australian force as opposed to the coalition force itself, and the support provided from each?

**Lieutenant Commander Scott Craig:** One issue was in the definite helicopter lift of our equipment. We need to look at whether we can take equipment from an RAN ship and bring it to us on the ground. I would have felt much more comfortable having my equipment in *Kanimbla*, being delivered by Moggs and knowing that it was safe there and that there were people who spoke Australian who knew that when I asked for a spanner that I actually wanted a spanner.

**Admiral Michael Hudson:** If at some future date, Army were to put a claim on the clearance diving skills that you have, what arguments would you provide to the Chief of Navy to oppose that suggestion?

**Commodore Russ Baker:** My response would be that we see ourselves as being part of the amphibious force to provide a littoral operations environment capability. From my experience working with 3 Brigade, there is a good understanding between Army and Navy of who is doing what in what area. I do not think Army really has any desire to have us from the clearance diving perspective. In terms of special forces, they see us a useful source of manpower from time to time, but my personal opinion is that the ADF is not a big enough organisation to start running different special forces outfits. So, despite what some of my Young Turk brethren might say from time to time, the way they are currently running the two forces is a much more efficient way to run things.

**Lieutenant Commander Scott Craig:** The clearance diving branch is the naval asset. We support the ships, and that is our major role – to support the fleet, be it with MCM, be it at port or at harbour – and conduct underwater maintenance. We are sailors first and foremost.

**Dr David Stevens:** You mentioned quite a few times your relationship with the other nations. Can you tell us how it worked in practice? How did you go about liaising with the other nations and deciding who was going to do what based on the different capabilities?

**Commander Steve O'Brien:** In 1991 we came under the US Navy auspices. In fact, they had the equipment for us and we scavenged off them day and night to get everything from trucks to whatever we needed to food. When we turned up, the Royal Navy was probably some 30 years behind us, at this stage. So our main workings were with the US Navy.

The interesting thing, and it has been alluded to beforehand, is the US Navy was highly specialised in the small detachments, and one detachment of eight men would perhaps just do surface EOD. Another detachment would just do hand-held sonar searches underwater, or just deal with mines. What they lacked in 1991 was the flexibility to conduct all tasking across the skill-sets. That is what we had – what the Australians had compared to both the British and the US, were the multi-skilling aspects. But really the development through the 90s was extraordinary and I will hand over to Scott for that.

**Lieutenant Commander Scott Craig:** From 1991 through to 2003 the US threw an awful lot of money at developing a very shallow water mine countermeasures capability. They did not develop a port clearance or a berth clearance capability, and that was essentially what this current task was. So their very shallow water mine countermeasures capability had a limitation on it. When we arrived in Umm Qasr, things like their swim boards did not work, because there was no visibility and the water was too deep for them to dive in. So Naval Special Clearance Team 1 could not physically dive in the waters there because it was too deep. I think the liaison between the three countries really became who is best for the job; who has the equipment to do that task and who has the capability. The British had a pure war search capability so they were purely employed in a war search capability. We had the full gambit, so we could be employed in any of the tasks and the US Navy took on the unmanned underwater vehicle, the mammals and a couple of spot diving tasks.

**Chaplain Barry Yesberg:** Just a little story on the resourcefulness of divers. I had the opportunity to fly from *Anzac* up to the KAA just before we left on Easter Monday 2003, having also visited the divers at Umm Qasr. Having seen the divers at Umm Qasr and the spartan accommodation and everything else that they had, I thought just before I jumped on the helicopter to fly up that I might try to get some hot cross buns – *Anzac* had been making hot cross buns. So I raced down and got a stack of hot cross buns and they were so warm you could still feel them through the bags. I took them up and we did a couple of things and came back to have the hot cross buns. There were a small group of us still there, because the others had gone to Basrah, and they had gone ... disappeared. The buns were finally tracked down and one of the fellows had actually taken these hot cross buns, and decided he was going to trade them for something else. Someone managed to race out and rescue a few – but I appreciated the conditions that they were under.

**James Eggleston:** How does everyone in the room feel about sending a big chunk of metal to the Gulf without a DG [degaussing] system?

**Commander David McCourt:** As captain of that big chunk of metal, it was a little bit disturbing when I discovered that one of the first things that had been ripped out of *Kanimbla* was indeed the degaussing system. As I alluded to in my first comment, I think that, in the surface force up until now, we have perhaps paid a bit of lip service to the mine problem. In light of the Gulf experience, the future amphibious ship will have a degaussing system fitted in it. But as we discussed yesterday, we were certainly aware of the fact that we did not have a DG system. We were aware that *Kanimbla* had a very large acoustic and magnetic signature. Having done the DG ranging and got the data from the TMSS, when we did our operational risk assessment we were very aware of what the threat was and we took that into account before we even contemplated proceeding up the KAA into a known mine threat area.

**Commodore Russ Baker:** In a lot of these cases it is a matter of exposure of the current or future defence decision-makers to that sort of threat. You are conscious of it now, but if you go back to the First Gulf War, when we were trying to push the *Huon* class through, the major decision-makers in Navy Headquarters at the captain-level were people who had been in FFGs in the Gulf War and had seen these horn-things floating down the side and realised they could not do anything about them. I am personally convinced that, if we had not had the Gulf War, we would not have got the *Huon* through in the form that it is now. We would not have had the recognition of the potential threat amongst the people who are in the decision-making stream within Navy.

**Captain Richard Menhinick:** That can also be tied to, of course, the decision to take citadels out of *Anzacs* and so on, and that chemical weapons are used by nasty people and perhaps every now and then we fight them. So I am sure if we had our time again we might actually have a citadel on an *Anzac* ship today.

**PART V:  
MULTINATIONAL  
INTERCEPTION FORCE  
OPERATIONS  
1990-2001**

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## Captain Russ Shalders, CSC, RAN

*Commanding Officer HMAS Darwin DAMASK I*

I intend to give an RAN perspective of the sanction enforcement process.<sup>1</sup> The detailed analysis of our involvement in Gulf operations is a major and ongoing process. The lessons learned will be some time in being fully assembled and what I will offer today is a purely personal view based on my involvement as captain of one of the ships deployed to the Gulf.

I will confine myself to the position of the first RAN deployment – essentially the period from mid-August 1990 when *Darwin*, *Adelaide* and *Success* departed Sydney, to 3 December 1990 when the FFGs were relieved by *Brisbane* and *Sydney*. My focus will be purely on the Maritime Interception Force (MIF) operations.

The structure of my talk will be loosely chronological. By way of background, I will address deployment preparations, workup activities and then lead into the concept of operations which developed. I will conclude with a summary of how boarding activities were conducted. The major themes which I hope to draw out are:

- Firstly, that the enforcement of sanctions was successful – trade to and from Kuwait was effectively halted. After 28 October, the occasion of the boarding of the Iraqi tanker *Amuriyah*, Iraqi merchant traffic was laid up in various ports. After that date, with the exception of two incidents, no further shipping ever attempted to transit to or from Iraq.
- The second theme I would like to address relates to interoperability. The uncertainties evident at the start of the operation were quickly resolved. The multinational naval force (MNNF) was able to overcome initial interoperability difficulties and the concept of ‘loose association’ became effective and workable. Considering the diversity of forces and differing national interests involved, this was a remarkable feat.
- The third and perhaps most telling factor I will try to draw out is that the RAN can be very satisfied with the way our units operated. Our men responded magnificently and rose to every challenge offered. Our ships performed reliably over prolonged periods of intense activity. As a test of the RAN’s operational readiness, the Gulf was a most successful operation.

It is fair to say that the first Gulf task group was not fully prepared to go in harm's way when the decision was first announced that the RAN would contribute forces in support of Kuwait. All three ships had recently participated in RIMPAC but, in our current parlance, all three were, at best, at the minimum level of operational capability or MLOC. In fact, on that Friday morning, *Darwin* was in the midst of a major maintenance period and had just started an engine changeout. *Success* was on passage to Melbourne and looking forward to a weekend in the southern city. *Adelaide* was at sea conducting routine exercises in the East Australian Exercise Area (EAXA).

The frantic activity which ensued between the announcement on Friday morning and the FFGs' departure on Monday is testament to the remarkable efforts of many to get the ships ready. We all have special memories of that 72 hours and I do not wish to dwell on it other than to say that everyone involved worked with a will and resolve that I had never experienced before. From my perspective as a commanding officer, it was a very positive start to what turned out to be a very successful logistic enterprise.

When we left Australia our role and mission were by no means well defined. Our Foreign Minister spoke of our ships as 'steaming around bristling'. In those early days our stated mission was a very constrained 'identification, contact, interrogation and warning'. No-one had time to think beyond the warning stage. What might we do if our warnings were to be disregarded? Fortunately we had a long three-week transit to the area of operations before those sorts of difficult decisions had to be confronted.

In the absence of clear guidance, and in the best traditions of the military, we in the task group prepared for the worst case scenario – one of all-out conflict. The transit to Western Australia and beyond as far as Cocos Island, was a masterpiece of operational intensity. In my experience it was the most demanding and professionally stimulating period of naval activity I am ever likely to be involved in. The focus was very clearly on anti-air warfare and on damage control. The RAAF provided the loyal opposition at a level of intensity I would not have thought possible. With the exception of an 18-hour period in the middle of the Great Australian Bight, the task group was hounded relentlessly and our procedures for dealing with the resulting damage were rigorously evaluated and honed by the wreckers, also known as the 'Sea Training Group'. Many of these skills were being re-learned and teamwork was being sharpened. The one area we were all rusty in was chemical defence. All ships brushed off the cobwebs and developed appropriate routines to deal with the expected chemical threat.

By the time we arrived at Diego Garcia, all ships were assessed to be at the operational level of capability (OLOC). In my assessment we were ready to go into harm's way, I believed then and still believe now that we were as well prepared as any task group ever to leave Australia's shores.

With hindsight, and in particular with the knowledge of what was to happen during the ensuing three months, we were probably too well prepared. We were brilliant at maintaining an accurate air picture and in challenging any unidentified air contact within our surveillance range. We were good at dealing with all forms of engineering casualty, personnel casualty and action damage. In fact we could do all those things in chemical and biological suits and with our protective masks on. The things we did not have time to practice and develop were routine surface surveillance and boarding activity. Both of these endeavours were to occupy our time almost exclusively for the next three months.

On arrival in the area of operations on 3 September, the RAN task group was still constrained to only 'identify, contact, interrogate and warn' relevant vessels. Our mission was clearly stated as being to 'prevent the import or export of all commodities and products to or from Iraq or Kuwait'. At that stage there was no clear multinational organisation or concept of operations in force. The first meeting of the MNNF was held on 5/6 September with the result that a number of patrol areas were agreed.

The RAN task group was allocated the Alpha areas in the Gulf of Oman, astride the major shipping routes leading to Khawr Fakkan in the United Arab Emirates and to the Straits of Hormuz. As events were to show, these patrol areas were to become the scene of the most action in terms of enforcing the UN sanctions in the area. At that time, a United States (US) Navy carrier battle group (CVBG) was working in the outer Gulf of Oman with the US amphibious group in the Masirah area. The Western European Union nations were allocated the Bravo areas and the US Navy and, subsequently, the Canadians, were given the Persian Gulf Charlie areas. The Royal Navy (RN) tended to try to locate themselves wherever the action was likely to be most interesting.

It was agreed at the MNNF conference that all units would work in 'loose association' which is a command and control doctrine not clearly elucidated in the textbooks. What it means is that all ships would remain under national control and that tactical and operational control would be retained by on-scene task group commanders (CTGs). As events would subsequently show, it was a remarkably effective form of command and control. Communications links were quickly established, including a very complex Link 11 architecture. This allowed the CTGs to consult and advise one another and we all got on with the business of ensuring that all maritime trade was identified, contacted, interrogated and warned.

It is worthwhile at this point to illustrate the density of traffic in the area. Remembering that it was a period of tension and, consequently, all air tracks were potentially hostile, it was necessary that everything that flew was correctly detected, tracked, interrogated and identified. The Link 11 facility worked beautifully, with up to 16 participating units allowing for this task to be completed very effectively. It was not uncommon for the two to three members of an FFG air picture compilation team to be confidently keeping tabs on up to 100 tracks. These included the international carriers (who appeared to



be very keen to keep to designated air lanes and squawk the correct IFF codes), the intensive carrier traffic (initially from *Independence* and subsequently from *Midway*) and other local civil traffic. The air teams also had to contend with the daily Iranian P3 maritime patrol that generally flew to within metres of the designated five-mile 'clear zone' established by the MNNF units. The air situation certainly was never dull and, while it became routine, the danger of an Iraqi 'leaker' such as an Exocet-fitted Falcon 50 flying in civil air routes, was never far from our minds.

In the early part of September, whilst the French carrier *Clemenceau* was on-station in the Gulf of Oman, our resolve was often sorely tested and we were privy to some interesting calls and challenges on international distress frequencies. One French pilot was invited to 'break left immediately sir, my Standard [missile] is en route to your cockpit in five seconds'. The Frenchman quickly executed a hard left turn!

The surface picture was no less complex. At any one time, within a surveillance range of 100 miles, the ships were tracking up to 200 contacts. In addition, computerised tactical systems embarked specifically for the operation were keeping near real-time tabs on many more surface contacts. In our three months on-station, *Darwin* processed over 76,000 surface tracks through this system. To put that in some sort of context, off the east coast of Australia on a busy day, the average FFG surface operator may have responsibility for perhaps 10-15 tracks. While in the Gulf of Oman (GOO), two such operators maintained real-time track of 60+ vessels and the JOTS (Joint Operational Tactical System) operator handled up to 300 more 'interest tracks' outside the range of organic sensors.

Having agreed the areas of responsibility, ships of the MNNF then had to actually start enforcing the sanctions. For the RAN task group this evolved into a patrol pattern of roughly three weeks at sea followed by a three-day port visit for rest, maintenance and resupply. The FFGs operated together for the first two such cycles, which allowed for a comprehensive training program to be maintained – the PEEP or 'Persian Excursion Exercise Program' provided the framework for daily activities.

Subsequently, *Darwin* and *Adelaide* worked less closely together and generally rotated through the busy Straits of Hormuz patrol box every 24 hours. The 'off-watch' FFG would be responsible for intercepting merchant traffic further east.

While the FFGs were deployed in the Alpha areas, *Success* maintained a patrol line well clear of potential attack in the vicinity of Ras Al Hadd. The US Navy CVBG and the attendant fleet supply train were also working in these outer areas. *Success* initially made forays into the inner GOO every two to three days to keep the FFGs topped up using the 'delivery boy' mode of replenishment. This subsequently became less frequent and *Success* combined fuelling runs with a resupply visit to Fujairah where fresh fruit and vegetables were embarked at anchor for subsequent delivery to the FFGs.

With FFG and *Success* port visits staggered over a three-week cycle and a regular weekly helicopter pickup at Seeb airfield near Muscat, logistic supply was good. Mail and urgent stores were able to be delivered in reasonable time (14-20 days ex-Sydney).

Throughout this period, the FFGs remained in the second degree of readiness with all weapons and sensors manned. The crews worked a defence watch routine of four hours on and four hours off. For those not actively involved in the surveillance activity, routine damage control exercises were conducted and all weapons were regularly cycled and proven. Opportunity was also taken to work with other units of the MNNF transiting through our areas. A number of passage exercises were completed with US Navy, RN, Royal Netherlands Navy (RNLN) and Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) ships.

While hindsight reveals that the maritime interception phase of the Gulf War was conducted in a benign environment, to those of us on-station at the time, the threat was very real. The uncertainties of the area of operations were uppermost in our minds and therefore ship readiness was maintained at the highest possible level at all times.

I should note at this point that we found individual performance began to degrade after about 20-25 days of a defence watch routine. The crews remained alert and interested while on patrol, but it became obvious that they had their limits. The second task group had considerably more 'pucker factor' to contend with after war broke out on 17 January. This may have assisted in maintaining their edge – particularly during the lengthy period following the outbreak of hostilities during which, I understand, *Sydney* and *Brisbane* had in excess of 35 days at sea.

As a final point on patrol cycles, the RAN was second only to the US Navy in operational tempo. The first task group achieved a ratio approaching 90 per cent of time at sea. Other MNNF forces aimed for a much reduced tempo of around 50 per cent.

I have discussed the density of shipping traffic and the difficulty of maintaining an accurate plot. Amidst all this traffic of course, the vast majority were innocent vessels going about their normal business. While all had to be challenged and their innocence verified, this quickly became a routine task and arrangements were made to share the information gained. This sharing of data for innocent traffic was never fully resolved and it became apparent that many of the vessels became very used to responding to MIF challenges. VHF Channel 16 was the source of much intelligence and it became quite a game for officers of the watch (OOWs) to piece together the puzzle of which ship of the 30 or 40 on the bridge PPI was responding to which VHF challenge. Surface plot/OOW liaison was never better effected.

We generally had very good intelligence on high interest tracks or contacts of interest (COI). By about late September all Iraqi merchant vessels had been positively located and we had good information on their potential movements. Sitting astride the only route to and from Iraq, the RAN ships were in a position to respond to both inbound and outbound Iraqi traffic.

As events unfolded there was never any attempt by Iraqi ships to break out of the Persian Gulf. That is not to say it was never a possibility and there were several speculative assessments of a supposed breakout. Whenever rumours occurred there was a flurry of activity on both sides of the Straits of Hormuz as units relocated to be in position. These regular occurrences became known as '*Hittin* breakouts' in reference to an Iraqi supertanker which was assessed to be leading a trio of rampant tankers.

Inbound traffic was a very different matter and our major interception involvements centred on ships attempting to transit to the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr or to Kuwait. Most of these ships came from either the anchorage at Aden or from other Red Sea ports. As ships left the anchorage, their movement would be reported and surveillance aircraft would be tasked to relocate and track the COIs. US Navy P3Cs and Royal Air Force Nimrods performed the long-range surveillance and alerted the waiting MNNF forces of traffic or 'trade' as the ships became known. Organic air, represented in our case by Seahawk or Squirrel, then took over the hunt.

It is appropriate at this point to diverge just a little to discuss the roles and capabilities of the aircraft embarked in the first task group. In my estimation, aviation was one of the success stories of the first deployment – certainly we could not have achieved the results we did without the sterling contributions of the embarked helicopters.

Each of the FFGs had one Seahawk and one Squirrel, while *Success* had a lone Squirrel. The rate of effort available from this asset base was never fully utilised because it soon became apparent that the surveillance capability of the S70B2 was far in excess of what was required. For an aircraft that was literally rushed into service, the Seahawk soon became our major surveillance sensor. In the constrained waters of the inner GOO, the Seahawk proved its worth. In general terms, while on patrol we were able to effectively cover our allotted areas with two three-hour S70B2 sorties a day – usually conducted at dawn to refine the surface picture generated overnight and then again at dusk to identify contacts before night closed in. The subsequent acquisition of FLIR (forward looking infra-red) for the Seahawk, in advance of projected installation later in the life of the project, will of course mean that the natural phenomenon of darkness will become somewhat immaterial.

Both FFGs carried two crews for each S70B2, and the aircraft were therefore capable of flying for many more hours than was necessary in the surface surveillance role. In fact, each ship was capable of supporting up to 16 hours per day airborne, if required. The aircraft proved up to the task, and their reliability and maintainability were excellent. Major servicings were conducted onboard over very short time-frames when, in more routine circumstances, the aircraft would have been taken down for maintenance for some days. In many ways, having the Seahawk was like having your own P3C parked 'down the back'.

While I have extolled the virtues of Seahawk, we should not forget or underestimate the contribution of the ‘flying budgie’ or AS350B Squirrel. I am a great fan of the ‘stealth helicopter’ as the US Navy came to name our intrepid trio. Because of the aircraft’s low radar signature (many knew it as the ‘plastic fantastic’) and in view of the itchy trigger fingers evident during the early days on patrol, it was essential that IFF transponders were functioning correctly before the Squirrel set off on such tasks. There were many occasions when low and (relatively) fast radar contacts appeared at close range on consorts’ radars only to be subsequently identified as errant Squirrels. I do the aircrew an injustice there as they were thoroughly professional in everything they did – including their right of self-preservation – which involved ensuring IFF systems were operational and an absolute refusal to close any military contact within five nautical miles unless positive approval was obtained to enter ‘the zone’.

Both Squirrel and Seahawk were fundamental to our surveillance activity. When the situation dictated a more active role such as when ‘mother’ was tasked to locate and track a COI, both aircraft contributed greatly to our success. On one occasion I recall despatching the Seahawk to the limit of endurance (in fact halfway to Karachi) to relocate a COI heading our way. With *Darwin* following at 30 knots, the intrepid aviators headed east to maximum endurance, detected our COI at maximum radar range, closed to investigate, identify and interrogate and were able to return to ‘mother’ to guide the ship to the intercept. On another occasion, when our Seahawk was temporarily incapacitated, the Squirrel took great delight in achieving the same result, but at night. Both aircraft were absolutely invaluable.



*An F-14 flies over Amuriyah, October 1990*

To return to our primary mission, I would like to discuss one of the more interesting and certainly more exciting aspects of the interdiction mission.

As the situation unfolded, it became apparent that there was a need to develop a capability to board suspect vessels to verify the presence or otherwise of prohibited cargo. In the lexicon of the period, these operations were termed 'visit and search' rather than 'boarding'. I will use the latter term for convenience.

*Darwin* was directly involved in five separate boardings. To illustrate the process, I will describe the last and most complicated of these operations – the boarding of the tanker *Amuriyah*. This ship was boarded on 28 October, subsequently cleared and allowed to return to Kuwait. She was in ballast when boarded, but was loaded with fuel oil on return to Iraq and subsequently became a casualty of war when bombed and sunk by US Navy A6 aircraft in the opening stages of Operation DESERT STORM.

Each of the boardings in which we were involved was a multinational and cooperative effort. In this particular example, the *Amuriyah* was detected on departure from Aden, located by a US Navy P3C and subsequently lost. She was relocated late one evening by *Darwin*'s Squirrel and the ship closed in to take up a covert trail, having previously developed a plan of attack in consultation with the designated scene of action commander in USS *Reasoner*. USS *Ogden*, an LPD (landing platform dock), had been detailed to support the operation and had on board a specialist SEAL/Marine unit. *Darwin* assumed a covert trail about midnight, the Squirrel having positively identified the tanker. The unsuspecting Iraqi had displaced himself some 50 miles to seaward of the normal shipping lanes and was apparently anticipating an uneventful transit. Overnight, the two American ships and a British frigate converged to allow all ships to intercept *Amuriyah* at first light.

The technique involved in all boardings began with a routine challenge on Channel 16. In this instance, the USS *Reasoner* called *Amuriyah* and requested she stop to permit 'visit and search' under the authority given to MNNF forces by UNSCR 661. Not unexpectedly, the Iraqi tanker failed to respond, despite the presence of an FFG 100 yards on his port beam and a *Knox* class frigate the same distance to starboard.

At this point it is worthwhile explaining that the progress of boarding operations was dictated to a very great extent by the rules of engagement (ROE) in force. As already noted, the vast majority of boardings were multinational, cooperative affairs and the pace and development of the incident was governed by compatible national ROE. It was essential that the initiative was gained early and retained throughout. It was necessary to generate a degree of momentum and to keep the opposition on the defensive. In one early operation where the scene of action coordinator had less flexible ROE than the assisting forces, it took 37 hours to gain effective control of the Iraqi vessel – despite the fact that we had a combined US Navy/RAN boarding party embarked for over 24 hours. On that occasion, the scene commander had limited authority and almost every

step of the process had to be cleared through higher command. I am happy to say that this was never a problem for the RAN task group where considerable authority had been delegated to the embarked CTG.

The rules under which we operated required a graduated and escalating response. In the case of *Amuriyah*, her master had obviously learned from the previous Iraqi boardings and he ensured every step of the process had to be used.

Having failed to respond to our challenge, both escorts then hoisted signal groups, attempted loud-hailer communications and used sirens to attract attention. One hundred and forty thousand tonnes of tanker sailed serenely towards the Gulf of Oman.

Throughout all this, VHF calls continued and naturally these were recorded. At each step of the escalating process, the target was given a specified time period within which to react or respond. It was essential that the target not be allowed to seize the initiative, for example, by being allowed to seek instruction from his higher authority.

*Darwin*'s helicopter had been airborne throughout the incident and the next step was to buzz the tanker and hover adjacent to the bridge with a written warning. Studied ignorance was the inevitable result.

Up to this point in the process, all ships and helicopter weapon systems had not been used. On board the frigates, guns were trained fore and aft, small arms were concealed and upper deck crews relaxed but ready at their stations. Naturally, being close aboard a potential threat, ammunition was provided, exposed personnel were dressed in flak jackets and steel helmets and special sea duty men were closed up.

On authority given by the scene of action commander (and in our case by the embarked CTG), the next step was aggressive manoeuvre. On all occasions when this had been required, the Iraqi vessels had maintained a steady course and speed. While probably looking very spectacular, manoeuvres across the bow at speed were relatively straightforward and, up to this point, had been effective in forcing the vessel to stop. On this occasion the Iraqi master chose not only to decline to stop, but also to manoeuvre aggressively himself. As the intended target of his manoeuvring, it was comforting to have the responsiveness of two LM2500 gas turbines instantly available.

By this phase of the operation, it was quite obvious that sterner measures were required. Weapon systems were trained on *Amuriyah* and the intention to fire warning shots was advised. *Darwin* fired 50-calibre rounds, initially at 300 metres and then 100 metres ahead of the tanker. Apart from an assertion that our second series of warning shots had struck the tanker, notable because this was the first radio response, the *Amuriyah* continued at speed. *Reasoner* then opened out and, after appropriate VHF radio warnings, two rounds of five-inch were accurately laid across the bows. By this stage, two-way communications had been established and all on the net were treated to some Iraqi accented invective.

The alert SUCAP (surface action combat air patrol) consisting of one F/A-18 and one F-14 aircraft had meantime been launched. While both frigates took station close abeam, the aircraft made a series of very low passes overhead. It became obvious that the master had no intention of responding to anything less than direct action. Had it been required, ROE were available to take the ship under direct fire or to foul his screw. Neither course of action was necessary as it had been agreed earlier that, on reaching this sort of impasse, a boarding party would be inserted by helicopter. Accordingly two UH-1 Iroquois took station as 'top cover' while two CH46 Sea Stallions inserted over 30 troops onto the foredeck using a fast roping technique. Even at this point, *Amuriyah* was not going to succumb easily. The Master had ordered water cannon to be activated and the decks were awash in an effort to frustrate the embarking Marines.

Having taken control of the ship, the search which followed was essentially similar to all previous boardings. While the crew of *Amuriyah* attempted to frustrate search parties, there was limited overt aggression once all on board had been mustered and documentation examined.

For members of the boarding party on this and other occasions, there were a number of new techniques and methods to be learned. While the RAN had developed some expertise in investigative boardings of FFVs (foreign fishing vessels), it has been many years since we had been involved in searching and verifying the cargo of such large vessels. We came to learn that good portable communications were vital, as was teamwork and maintaining the initiative. To effectively search a large vessel takes a minimum of three to four hours with up to three separate teams. Backup support and technical assistance should be available if needed. For example, shipwright expertise was necessary on one occasion to examine tank welds. Arrangements need to be in place to provide a steaming crew if diversion is required. These and many other aspects of the visit and search role were learned through experience and by drawing upon the expertise of the USCG LEDET teams who had a vast amount of experience in enforcing anti-drug smuggling operations.

To put our task into perspective, during Operation DESERT SHIELD there were: 26,300 recorded challenges; 996 MNNF boardings (the vast majority in the vicinity of the Jordanian port of Aqaba); the RAN boarded four supertankers, one small tanker, one fishing factory vessel and the so-called 'peace ship' *Ibn Khaldoun*; we assisted in boarding operations on two other Iraqi vessels; and warning shots were fired on three occasions.

At the start of my presentation I indicated that I would be attempting to draw out three major themes. Firstly, I hope I have convinced you that the enforcement of sanctions was successful. To the extent that maritime trade was effectively halted, I believe we were very successful. Secondly, while the political situation remained unchanged throughout the period, no such uncertainty was evident in the way MNNF units were able to operate together. Interoperability was as much a hallmark of the first

deployment as was the constant uncertainty of what might happen next. Finally, and most importantly in my view, the performance of both man and machine throughout the period was nothing short of outstanding. The calibre and professionalism of our sailors was second to none. The readiness and reliability of our ships and men over prolonged periods of intense operational activity give cause for considerable pride and satisfaction in a job well done

## Notes

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- 1 This article first appeared in the *Journal of the Australian Naval Institute*, May 1991, pp. 15-21.





*A Seahawk transfers stores to HMAS Darwin*

# Seventeen

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Rear Admiral Bill Dovers, CSC, RAN (Rtd)

*Commanding Officer HMAS Adelaide DAMASK I*

It is clear from the preceding presentations that interception operations have progressed a long way since our first foray into the Gulf following the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. I would therefore ask that you put my remarks in that context.

In August 1990 things were uncertain and we were deployed at very short notice. We were told on the Friday we were deploying to what was, at that time, viewed to be a theatre of war on the Monday. I say that because, although, as we now know, we enforced the sanctions and the conflict happened later; at the time we deployed, no-one really knew what Saddam Hussein was up to. Would he go further than Kuwait into Saudi Arabia? We were deployed on the basis that conflict might actually happen. Certainly from the ships' point of view that was our assessment.

I do not really know what all the considerations were in the selection of the ships. We were, in fact, not entirely taken by surprise, because we were operating in the exercise areas off Jervis Bay and were listening to the local news broadcasts. So from that point of view we were hearing what was going on, at least in the general media. It seemed to us that, having recently come back from RIMPAC, if there were a naval option then *Adelaide*, *Darwin* and *Success* would be a logical choice of ships to go. The command teams knew one another, the ships knew one another, and they operated well together.

I heard later that a guided missile destroyer was considered, but as none of them was fitted with Phalanx, they were ruled out for the first deployment. At the time people were very concerned about the Exocet threat. The USS *Stark* had been severely damaged by an Exocet missile and the USS *Vincennes* had shot down a civilian airliner that it mis-identified as an Iranian F-14.

That was part of the backdrop to the operations we were heading into. People were very concerned about the anti-ship missile threat and they were very concerned about operating in a hostile air environment.

As it turned out, the selection of those three ships was, in fact, spot on. At that stage, we needed a capability to perform maritime interception operations, and the aviation capability of the FFGs was absolutely crucial.

Our deployment was almost without notice and the support we received from the Defence organisation was nothing short of fantastic. It was assisted by the fact that there was only a naval contribution.

As an aside, I had a lot of sympathy for the F-111 crews; they desperately wanted to be deployed, but I gather the crucial factor was the lack of electronic warfare (EW) self-defence. In my view, the whole area of soft kill and EW is still being given far too low a priority. While some ships are fitted with Nulka and some with other EW capability, to my mind it is being thought of at the end of the warfare chain. EW capability needs to be considered as an integral part of a ship's overall war-fighting capability. The fact that our fast jet aircraft still do not have up-to-date EW self-protection 13 years after Gulf War I is nothing short of scandalous.

The options for the government to deploy aircraft over the last decade, when they have wanted those things, have run into the same consideration as in 1990. The fact the Defence organisation has not responded, and the F-18s that went over for the last effort were restricted in their employment until the air environment was safer and they could be moved further in, again reflected that situation.

In the early 1990s, for posting ship's companies we had moved to a point where having come out of a long refit you were pretty much guaranteed, as a captain, that your ship's company would stay together through your first deployment. After that you could expect a very large change. Now, *Adelaide*, having come out of refit and helicopter modernisation, done trials, worked up and undertaken the 1990 RIMPAC deployment, we were ready to have more than half our ship's company posted out. On the morning we were told to deploy, the first thing I asked for was a posting freeze and it was given without any questions. We asked individuals who really had pressing needs whether they would remain in the ship's company. I think only about two, or maybe three people, were put off. One of them was getting married a week after we were deploying and we thought that was reasonable.

We were inundated with volunteers, but one of the real secrets to that deployment was that those three ships, with the exception of *Darwin*, who had to have a change out of the commanding officer and executive officer after a grounding incident, retained their existing ships' companies. There were courts-martial pending and, again, I think the correct decision was made. So, apart from that change, we sailed with teams that were very familiar with one another, both between the ships and within the ships. *Adelaide* had absolute stability over that year with only about 10 people changing over, and that really showed in our performance.

When I took over *Hobart* some years later, they had just won the Gloucester Cup for the most efficient ship in the Navy and over the Christmas period we had a 53 per cent change out of personnel. The first thing that we did in the New Year was a Fleet Concentration Period – nothing as demanding as what we went through in preparation for Operation DAMASK, and I will not say it was a shambles, but the ship performed well below where you would have expected the recent Gloucester Cup winner to be. Now there might have been other things at play, but if you are going into operations

you really want your team stable and known to one another, and I think that was a crucial factor in the success of Operation DAMASK in 1990.

Fitted-for-but-not-with is an old chestnut. We were given a lot of new kit, especially in the EW area. In my view, this is feasible if the equipment is in service in other areas or ships, and you have people who are trained in it. I have not been able to work out what percentage of effectiveness we were able to achieve with this new equipment, but if we reached 40 per cent I think we did very well. I am still not convinced of the value of the equipment that we were given prior to deploying.

An example of this was the Joint Operational Tactical System (JOTS). It was the first automated system we had been given and was fitted by a contractor in the area of operations (I saw no problem with having contractors in the area of operations providing support directly to ships). This fellow was with us for about three or four days, did his job, and off he went. We were left with this bit of kit and only very basic instructions from the person who fitted it. In our first port call there was a US cruiser alongside, the USS *Leahy*, and the Chief RP (radar plotter) went on board and said: 'We have got this new bit of kit and have worked out we can do this, this, and this with it, but what else does it do?' Apparently, the American operations person looked at him and said: 'Gee, can it do all that?' So, you have to worry.

One other thing that became clear in those days, and I think this has not changed too much, was that stockholdings were very low. There is a tendency to dip into the logistics 'bucket', and I mean 'logistics' in its wider sense of refit money and so forth, to pay for other things, and we do it at our cost. It became very clear to me when I actually got to be, albeit briefly, Support Commander - Navy, just how much we had attrited that area, and it is not something you can turn around with a quick injection of money. It has a long-lasting impact upon your ability to not only operate ships, but for levels of expertise. We almost emptied the shelves, I gather, of nuclear, biological and chemical defence (NBCD) equipment, which had to be restocked when we left.

While in refit I brushed shoulders with a certain commanding officer who introduced me to his wife with a broad smile on his face and said: 'Darling, meet the captain of HMAS *K-Mart*'. It showed that we were making the fleet survive on cannibalisation. When we handed over with *Sydney*, *Adelaide* had no priority 1 URDEFs (urgent defects) and I think we only had two priority 2s. When we departed the operational area, I raised five priority 1 URDEFs on weapon systems and I cannot remember the number of priority 2s. *Sydney* appeared to have been deployed on the basis she would be made up to scratch by cannibalising one of the ships she was relieving.

I would be interested to see where we would be right now, and I suspect it is not that different. One of the points that was reinforced later by my personal experience is that we would be better off with a slightly smaller properly equipped force that has

a full complement, than necessarily have a force structure of 14 surface combatants that has a hollow capability.

All three ships deployed, I thought, in very good shape. Interesting though, when you look back at the pictures of our departure you will not see any boot topplings showing on *Darwin*. Over the weekend, as we prepared to depart, the ships went lower, and lower in the water. We got very close to having the limiting draft marks submerged – I have never seen a ship with those two marks so close to the waterline. I rang Navy Office and asked for an opinion from the engineering design people what that meant for us. The following day, on the Sunday, they came back with their advice: ‘Do not go more than 15 knots into a head sea, you might break the ship’s back’. A salutary thought as we headed off across the Indian Ocean.

We then went into a very intensive workup. I had been through flag officer sea training (FOST) assessments three times at Portland when I was on exchange service with the Royal Navy. This was the most intensive workup I had experienced – much more intense than FOST, and it was first-class. But it was in only three areas: anti-air warfare (AAW), damage control and chemical defence. It makes me wonder whether, had there been a submarine threat, we could have deployed those ships as quickly or as safely. It is something worth considering.

We went all the way around to Perth then up to Diego Garcia, where Commodore Flotillas (COMFLOT) was going to disembark, his training role having finished. In the end a very sensible decision was made and Commodore Don Chalmers stayed on as task group commander (CTG) because initially, the senior captain was to be the CTG.

We ended up going to a command arrangement that I had never heard of called ‘loose association’. I recall that part of Vice Admiral Walls’ journey to the Middle East was to sort out these issues, including how we would operate, what the level of command and control would be, and where we might be in relation to the US forces. We had a Labor Government and, while the executive part of that government was, I thought, quite decisive, the left faction was really creating some difficulties in the party. Anyway, that was my reading of the situation.

In the end, we were given the role of supporting interception operations and had some very robust rules of engagement (ROE). In fact, it turned out that the Australian ships had the most robust ROE of anyone in the Gulf. The authority to execute all of the ROE up to, but not including, direct fire, lay with the CTG, Don Chalmers.

We had an incident where we took part in the boarding of a very small cargo ship, the *Tadmur*, where there were three ships (we had begun doing them in multinational groups); a British ship was in charge, with a US ship and *Adelaide*. It took 24 hours to get the *Tadmur* to stop, because the British commanding officer had to go back to Whitehall for every escalation. He had to go back and say, I have now used international signal so and so, they are still not stopping and I would like to do this. When it got

back to Whitehall, from the delays, it appeared to us that Whitehall was consulting Washington and Canberra. So 24 hours later, this very small merchant ship steamed on with three warships around him, all of which were bigger than he was, potentially making the interception operation look impotent and cumbersome.

As a contrast, we crash sailed from Muscat one day with Don Chalmers on board to go and stop a ship, which we managed to do in two hours. Don stood at the back of the bridge with his warrant officer yeoman and every time we did something I just had to turn around to him and ask if he was happy to go to the next step. He would nod, we would record it in the transcript, and we would go to the next step. He could authorise us to board, and all the steps necessary up to that point, we did not even have to go back to Canberra to fire a shot across the bows.



*Prime Minister Bob Hawke farewells Captain Bill Dovers, 13 August 1990*

Our coalition partners soon realised that if we had a combined operation the Australian ships should be put in charge as we had the ability to carry out the operation more efficiently, at least from a ROE point of view.

Whatever criticism we might have, or whatever we might think about Australian politicians, when they are put on the spot, they are not wishy-washy. Those in the executive part of government can be extremely decisive. Just give them the facts, make sure you have good communications and, when they understand what the situation is, in my limited experience of this one operation, they backed us up very well.

I have to admire the level of professionalism and knowledge about the operational environment evident in recent Gulf operations. At the time we went up there, the whole idea of 'defence of Australia', 'credible contingencies', the so-called 'three men and a thong' scenarios, were the go. The amount of current intelligence on the Gulf was appalling. However, that was not surprising: the Gulf was not in our area of 'primary strategic interest', as it was called.

Notwithstanding this strategic dichotomy, the lack of intelligence was a particular concern. Some of the information was based upon reports that were decades old; in some cases we were using reports that came out at the time the British were running the Gulf. We were getting more current intelligence monitoring the news services on our transit up than we were through Australian intelligence sources.

Once we got into the area of operations, of course, intelligence started to build up fairly quickly. One of the things that became clear was the need to know the patterns of activity to be effective. We knew nothing about that when we first arrived, and we were like cats on a hot tin roof when we first got there. We were in full defence watches and the crews were right on their toes. We got a hell of a fright the first night the smugglers shot across from Iraq to Iran in high-speed boats, and then, a few hours later, shot back again. Once we started to understand the patterns of operations, and what some of the signs were about those sorts of activities, things started to settle down.

It did not take long for us to reduce from full defence watches. It became apparent very quickly to us that full defence watches was not going to be sustainable if you wanted people at a level where they made correct judgments about ambiguous information. So we walked back to a modified form of defence watches and, I cannot remember all the details, but we were better off having fewer people, but having them operating at a mentally sharper pitch than sticking to a strict six hours on, six hours off routine.

I watch some of the clips of recent boarding operations with admiration. We really have come a long way since we arrived in the Gulf in September 1990. The experience of the RAN in boarding at that time was largely limited to fishery and countering illegal immigration operations. In the larger surface combatants we had not done anything like that for years, and our expertise was way down. In fact we received instruction from US Coast Guard legal detachments that were there, and it was a revelation at

that stage. They recommended we order shotguns, which we did, as their technique in those days was to fire them into the deck at an angle so the pellets spread out at ankle level. They assured us this would stop people doing things that might be harmful. RAN practice at that time was to arm boarding parties with high-powered rifles that could penetrate through two bulkheads. The policy was shoot to kill if someone made an aggressive move so we had no graduated force for boardings.

If we stop doing these boarding operations we will lose that expertise quickly if we do not work on it. Right now we have an amazing level of experience from commanders up through commodores, and I dare say probably some of the two-stars, and you may take that experience for granted. It was anything but the case in 1990. The last combatant operation I think we had taken part in was Vietnam and there were precious few people who had Vietnam experience still in the Navy.

Flying operations were absolutely critical to the success of the mission and, although we were performing maritime surveillance operations, the conditions were very difficult. At the time we arrived up there, which was September, it was not uncommon to have almost complete whiteout, where there was no horizon. The levels of dust and humidity made the sea merge with the sky. We had some of the RAN's most experienced pilots flying Seahawks, even though the aircraft had not been accepted into service. Commander Leigh Costain, who was the senior pilot in *Adelaide*, came up to the bridge after one sortie and said they were about 20 feet off the water when they realised they were actually nose down and diving in and not flat and level.

However, those aircraft really were the difference and if we had a DDG, with or without Phalanx, it would have been the wrong ship for those initial, maritime interception operations. On the other hand, the next task group which came in for the combat operations included a DDG and I do not think you could have managed the task group from an FFG in those circumstances. So the right choices were made at the strategic and operational levels on the make-up of the first two task groups.

The last thing I would like to comment on is people. Bear in mind at that stage we had no Defence Attaché up there, we had no knowledge of the Gulf, and no-one had visited there for a long time. Commodore Boyd Robinson was sent up there as a new commander to be our liaison officer and organise logistic support. We could only get into one port and that was Muscat in Oman. If we had lost our rights to go in there we would have had no other port that we could visit; none of the other Gulf states would take ships of the multinational force. The Omanis were worried about being swamped by sailors so there were strict restrictions about how many people could be in port at any one time; I think it was a total of 1200 sailors, maximum.

It was a country in which the British had a very strong presence and the most natural thing for Boyd Robinson would have been to go to the expat community and do it the easy way. He chose to go to the Omanis, which made it longer, but he was the only one



who did and within three weeks the restrictions on Australian ships were just about lifted. Our support out of Muscat was nothing short of outstanding and I put it down to that initiative of Boyd's. He treated the Omanis as they should have been treated, as a sovereign nation. If you cast your mind back into that area where the British have had a large presence, the easiest thing in the world would have been to go to those British, who could have made things happen. I thought it was an outstanding performance by Boyd in setting up support for the Australian ships.

The sailors were outstanding. The thing that really impressed me was that we made it clear as we got into the area of operations that we only had one port we could go to, that it was strictly Islamic, and that if we offended the local sensitivities there was a good chance that it would be closed to us. There was not one incident of people being drunk and disorderly. We were out there for three weeks on, three days in, and if you think how sailors normally let their hair down, over three months with not one incident was, I thought, just simply outstanding. There was one incident, but it had nothing to do with alcohol. Two midshipmen from *Success* took a car and ran over a camel that instantly became a top racing camel valued at \$80,000. I still do not know how Graham Sloper managed to get them out of gaol. I cannot speak highly enough about the way those guys, stokers, bosuns, the whole lot, performed as diplomats in the Gulf when they understood what the issues were.

We were withdrawn from the area of operations in December, after just three months on-station. We had put a case to extend, as we did not want to miss the actual action; we wanted to be part of it. We also felt that it did not make sense when you looked at the cycle of workup: a three-week transit, operations, three-week transit, and turn around – a three-month deployment was just too short. However, the Prime Minister had said when we left that we were going for three months. Now there were issues such as crew rotations and things, but our feeling was that the three-month tour of duty was not the most efficient way to do things.

The experience and expertise gained through these operations, particularly from commander to commodore levels, is going to stand us in good stead. However, looking from the outside, I do not believe we have fully grasped the strategic or bureaucratic lessons:

- The saying that 'people are the most important asset' must not be just rhetoric. This does not mean we should soft peddle them or give them cushy numbers, you just have to provide them with the right leadership and show them that what they are doing has a purpose and they respond magnificently.
- Electronic warfare, not just in terms of soft kill, must feature more highly in our thinking.

- Logistics in its broadest sense is really important and must not be allowed to run down. If we do not look after our assets, levels of training, levels of refit and repair, and we do not fit our ships out properly, then the impact on morale and operational effectiveness should not be underestimated.
- To my mind, having a slightly smaller force that is properly manned, armed and supported is better than necessarily having a particular number of ships.



*HMAS Darwin with RAM panels, March 1991 (J Mortimer)*

# Eighteen

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## Captain Martyn Bell, CSC, RANR

### *Commanding Officer HMAS Darwin DAMASK III & V*

I am going to address my impressions from Operations DAMASK III and V. Prior to joining HMAS *Darwin* I had been one of the watch keeping commanders in Maritime Headquarters. My underlying memory of DAMASK was the great level of experience my executive officer (XO) Lieutenant Commander Gerry Christian contributed to the overall success of our mission.

The issue of electronic warfare (EW) was always foremost in our minds. Once we entered the Persian Gulf it was close-in weapon system (CIWS) and anti-air warfare (AAW) water; we were inside the range of shore-based missile sites the whole time. Our EW systems would be critical to our timely detection and response to any missile threat that might emerge.

In early February 1991 we started a four-week operational level of capability (OLOC) workup which was very intensive. We did a number of operational readiness evaluations, final battle problems and those things throughout the weeks. I had seen nothing like the intensity of doing a four-week workup where the comment often heard was that the sky was black with airplanes and you were up 24 hours a day seven days a week doing something.

Unfortunately, at that point there came a political hiatus and *Darwin's* deployment was deferred and we spent from March until May essentially in limbo. We went up north and did not do very much at all. Having just done that magnificent four weeks, your skills are very quickly perishable, unless you put them to good use and consolidate quickly afterwards. I was concerned about both that period and the transit of three weeks, unless we were able to keep the tempo up and the pressure on.

We had an interesting time and I went away with Ian Whitehouse, Jim Langsford and Mark Proctor. We deployed up through Surabaya and the Philippines and a few other places before the decision finally came through. We had all thought by this time that *Adelaide* was going to go and we did not have the right mindset. Then, Rear Admiral Doolan, who was embarked in *Swan* called me in, in early May, and directed me to sail to Surabaya, get the helicopter and bits and pieces from *Adelaide*, do all the stores transfer and so on, and sail into an OLOC workup. Commodore Chalmers arrived and met me alongside in Subic Bay to lay out the plan. The Sea Training Group was with him, so we experienced lots of fires, damage control exercises and warfighting serials to improve our operational readiness and performance. We spent the next ten days getting ourselves back up to speed, really quickly.

We sailed from Subic Bay straight to Singapore where we had some work done before sailing direct to the area of operations (AO). We were in the AO from June through to August and did not return to Sydney until October – the total deployment lasting some eight months.

I think the skill level of our sailors in those days was absolutely fabulous, but I am even more impressed by what I see today. My only previous experience was as XO of a patrol boat doing Taiwanese fisheries boardings and I had not been really exposed to what was required in terms of boarding different kinds of ships. So we spent a lot of time bringing ourselves up to speed and I read everything I could get my hands on from reports of previous deployments to understand what we were going to do.

Logistics was top of my mind as well. I was very pleased to see the cross-servicing arrangements with the US Navy, the loan/borrow agreements that were in place with the RN and others, and the logistic support element (LSE). I was never sure whether Ward Hack was there as a passenger or just having a great time, but he was a bit like one of those advance liaison officers we used to send in the old days. He would turn up with everything but the mail and the fresh vegetables. The support we got from ashore you did not have to worry about, it was just terrific.



*HMAS Darwin prepares to board Mansoura 1  
in the Red Sea during DAMASK V*

Our warfare considerations were focused on the threat posed by the Silkworm and Exocet missiles, and mines. We also had some interesting times dealing with the fast boats – the boghammers – and we were never really sure how we were going to cope. The gunnery officer's view (he was a Royal Navy fellow by the name of Steven Smith), was a bit American. He worked on the philosophy of 'lots is good, more is better', so everyone had to be competent in 50-cal, and the 76mm gun was always loaded. We were ready to deal with anything that might arise, but thank goodness we did not have to.

I was never, ever comfortable in our ability to operate in a nuclear, biological or chemical (NBC) environment, as we did not have a citadel in the FFG. Nor was it clear to me how we would go about attempting to deal with a major WMD (weapon of mass destruction) incident. Our ships had not been configured to operate in such an environment and our training in handling such situations was rudimentary.

In terms of command and control, the loose association arrangements worked very well. When I arrived, Rear Admiral Phil Quast, USN, was embarked in USS *Nimitz*, Rear Admiral RAK Taylor, USN, was the Commander US Navy Central Command (COMUSNAVCENT), and we exchanged views on the rules of engagement (ROE), what loose association meant, and how we were going to operate. Very simply I sailed, did what I was told, went where I was told, and kept Rear Admiral Doolan in the picture.

I have great respect for the way the Maritime Command dealt with *Darwin* in those days. I was not interfered with, I was never given any direction, I was never told to go and do something, and I kept them informed. I thought the daily OPSUM (operational summary) was a good way to keep people informed. I recall a couple of issues as we were coming home and people were saying, 'you are out of the Gulf now Martyn, you better slow down – confirm speed' on one of my PIMs (position, intended movement message), and I went back: '28 confirmed'. That got a bit of a reaction.

There was a multinational mine countermeasures (MCM) capability remaining after the war and I found from discussions with the MCM commander, DESRON 25, Bob Danberg, and a lot of the 06s ashore who were running the business, that they had their hands full. There was still a lot of activity going on up in the mine danger areas. We spent three days in the northern frigate patrol box where, for much of the time, we only had a few metres of water under the keel. Our primary task was to provide close forward support for the mine warfare units. Some 48 hours after we had left I learned that the MCM forces had detonated a ground mine in the northern frigate patrol box. This was extraordinarily sobering.

There were a lot of sunken containers in the northern part of the Persian Gulf; we were forever reporting sunken containers. I thought that the control by some of the ships in ditching of gash was not particularly thoughtful. While this may sound like a very mundane comment, a black plastic bag detected on the electro-optical surveillance system (EOSS) looks very much like a mine. Nothing gets you to mine threat warning

Red faster than to see that sort of thing. I do not think the discipline on gash was very good at all for an area which was known to contain mines.

Several other navies were operating in the area. The French were there – they bake great pastries. The RN Senior Naval Officer Middle East was ashore in Bahrain. I called on him and noted that they seemed to operate in isolation from other forces, whether that was their ROE or otherwise, I do not know. I was very disappointed to see that their total focus during the call centred upon their upcoming visit to Mombasa, even though they had been in the Gulf for about three months. Much of the RN's focus seemed to be on defence exports and showing the flag. The Kuwaiti Navy was very impressive. Although their boats *Istiqlal* and *Al Jambu* were out of action, they offered liaison personnel and information on a range of issues. The commander of the Kuwaiti Navy at the time was Nassar Al Hussein, a very good individual, who had received much of his initial training with the RAN. Relations with the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states by this stage were also positive. It was a good and sobering lesson to listen to the people who were involved in the GCC and those who talked regularly with the staff in COMUSNAVCENT and with our staff as well. When we had done escort roles for a while, we used to say the Gulf was 'open for business'.

I think Steve O'Brien said as he left that he lit most of the 700 oil fires, but I don't know whether that was true or not. Certainly we were faced with the problem of reduced visibility and pollution during our escort operations. I recall one incident when we had the big red wave off lights on the flight deck on and *Ocean City*, a 90,000 tonne tanker, called to say he could hardly see me. He was very concerned as we went up QCS 305 – we escorted these fellows all the way up to the top of the Gulf. We did about 25 escorts of ships, one in pitch black at 9.30 in the morning. We coined a term called a SMOID (smoke, oil and dirt); it was not a pleasant place to be.

We did the escort role and I like the fact that the divers always told me, 'don't worry, it's 80 per cent blue'. I never worked out what 80 per cent blue was; my concern was what was in the other 20 per cent.

We had a good time until One Bravo gas turbine had a catastrophic failure and we had to go to Bahrain to get that fixed up. I have to say the logistic support was perfect.

I came back from DAMASK III, and Lee Corder deployed for DAMASK IV. When I returned, Commander Operations, Phil Purnell-Webb, said 'no worries, you are off to South-East Asia – there are lots of parties and bits and pieces'. Just before Christmas, Rear Admiral Doolan told me that DAMASK V was on the cards.

We had only been alongside since 22 November and had enough time to get both watches out for about three weeks' leave each. We re-stored, had a 42 per cent crew changeover which frightened me, and sailed on 13 January 1992 to do an OLOC workup. We then deployed and were away until August, just a shade under eight months.

We found that sailing in defence watches tended to reduce concentration and our ability to be analytical and apply lots of intellectual rigour to complex problems. After a short period in the northern Red Sea, we decided that we would do things at 0700 and generally go, bankers' hours, until sunset. If we started a boarding before sunset, then we would finish that boarding. I think the latest we ever went was about 2130/2200. We had 90 boarding days while we were in the AO. We boarded an average of three ships a day and the main skill-sets that we had to maintain were mariner and boarding skills and helicopter operations. I was amazed at the high levels of proficiency achieved in boarding operations, which were still well below what I see today. We used the Seahawk and the Squirrel embarked in tandem. During about a quarter of our boardings we did a fast rope insertion to maintain that capability and we worked extraordinarily hard at keeping those skills.

The other thing which I think was interesting was that we looked very carefully at how we could rotate our people and keep them amused. We had a boarding party we called the 'augmentees', but as the sailors had their way, they soon became known as the 'assorted minties'. They were led by the Supply Officer who was the boarding officer, then Lieutenant Commander, now Commodore Thomas. It was very interesting to watch them disappear over the horizon in the rigid hull inflatable boat (RHIB) to go and do their job.

USS *Leroy Grumman* was up there on the logistics side of the house. Unfortunately the commanding officer of the *Leroy Grumman*, who proved such a great support to us and did so many things for us, was killed in Puerto Rico some 18 months after he left the Gulf.

During the deployment we received a request to provide the Government of Jordan with a briefing on the sanction operations. I recall being rather perplexed at this task and discussed the briefing with Rear Admiral Walls and a host of others. I was accompanied by the legal 06 for NAVCENT staff, the head of the Coast Guard detachment, and an international law expert who was a lieutenant commander. The four of us went up and, for five days I was ashore in Amman, Jordan, while the XO, now Lieutenant Commander Nigel Coates, took the ship and had a great time.

We could not do anything much about keeping our warfare skills up in my view. We had the odd killer tomato [inflatable target], which I thought was a distraction. In relation to rest and recreation, I was forever grateful to an old friend who was commander of the communications station at Siganella, who suggested we rotate people through Sigonella. This seemed to work pretty well once it was set up. It provided people with time to get away from it all and to relax. Otherwise every four weeks it was a three-day visit to Hurghada, Safaga, or Jeddah. On one occasion the RAN Liaison Officer, with a sense of humour, said we should visit Yanbu Al Bahr. If you do not know where it is I suggest you get a chart and have a look, there is nothing, I repeat nothing there. So this little fence was put around the ship and they said 'that is Australian national



territory, do what you like', and much to my consternation, I think it was a bit like Singapore – we just let them get on with it and then we gently brought them back on board and sailed after three days.

During that particular time there was another piece of humour. There was a signal announcing the promotion of Michael Murray, Pat Majewski, the XO and myself. Leading Signalman Wood came in and said: 'Sir, you need to read this signal'. I said: 'Wood, it is 4.30 in the morning, don't be stupid, go away.' He said: 'No sir, you will really want to read this.' By 0600 you can imagine what was happening and we had in-the-field promotions.

This business of escorting ships, putting pressure on the team to maintain navigational accuracy and safety, and to make sure that we did the right thing, was an enormous responsibility. On reflection we did it well, but I do not really think I understood completely at the time, the significance of something going wrong. The ships that were following up this swept channel were solely reliant on us getting it right. One night in complete darkness, we did not have anything to navigate on and the satellite navigation had just said 'We are not playing, we do not have enough satellites'; it was very interesting. I go back to my days when Mick Stock and people like that used to hammer in to me. 'Where is your DR (dead reckoning), where is your DR, where is your DR?' I have to tell you I was forever grateful for that training as a junior officer.

I recall an issue when I was Chief Staff Officer (Operations) in Maritime Headquarters, DAMASK was still running and Commander Raydon Gates was up in the Gulf. He was in *Canberra* and the Maritime Commander (MC) and I had been following the build-up to a strike. The MC and I were discussing this over the course of time, and I think it was at about 2.33 in the morning when MC said: 'Where is Raydon Gates?' I replied that he was in the Gulf and he had taken station on whichever ship it was, which was full of Tomahawks. He said: 'Find out his station pal', and I remember that when Admiral Walls called me 'pal' that I did not argue. So I rang Raydon, from my backyard at three in the morning in a pair of shorts. Raydon said 'What is the matter?' I said: 'Where are you?' He said: 'Well, you know where I am.' 'No, no, no,' I said: 'Give me the tactical where are you.' So he told me and I ran back and told the Rear Admiral and he gave him a station. I passed the order to Raydon Gates to change station and I think it still gets up his nose even today.

In conclusion, there is a business analogy which applies to the RAN's DAMASK operations and that is that the Navy plays to its strengths. We have some wonderful strengths that I have seen developed from 1990 to now. If you use your strengths in business and you know what your competitors' weaknesses are, then in the same way, we should in the Navy make sure the right people do the jobs they are strongest at. I think this has worked well for the RAN and its contribution to operations in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea.

Joseph Conrad once wrote that 'a ship at sea is a distant world upon herself'. We sometimes felt like that when we were doing a single ship deployment; you had that responsibility, it did make you think, it did make you grow up, but we still had a bit of fun.



*HMAS Anzac's boarding party investigates a vessel*

# Nineteen

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## Captain Nigel Coates, AM, RAN

*Executive Officer HMAS Darwin DAMASK V;  
Commanding Officer HMAS Anzac DAMASK X*

Between DAMASK V and 2001 the focus of our involvement in the sanction enforcement operation shifted from the Red Sea back again to the Gulf. We had four more DAMASK rotations after DAMASK V, culminating in Peter Jones taking *Melbourne* up into the Gulf in DAMASK IX. Throughout that period our involvement continued with the pattern of compliant boarding operations in support of the US-led interception force.

I will discuss the RAN's involvement in 2001 and in what some have described as a paradigm shift, or the first of a series of paradigm shifts, in the Maritime Interception Force (MIF) operations.

In late 2000 - early 2001 we were informed in *Anzac* that, should the government decide on a 10th DAMASK deployment, we would go around the middle of 2001. Our mission was two-fold: firstly to conduct compliant boarding operations in support of the Security Council resolutions; and secondly, and more significantly, to interdict the illegal or smuggling trade that was coming out of Iraq, out of Umm Qasr.

In looking back on the last couple of deployments it became apparent to me there were a couple of new issues and implied tasks that we were going to have to cope with. These included defence of the ship against asymmetric attack in harbour, now known as force protection, and the requirement to conduct non-compliant boardings. We were now faced with getting on board a ship that was actively trying to avoid us. This required getting the boarding parties on board through all those passive defences, the barbed wire, the spikes, the welded doors, the smoke-filled interior passageways from burning tyres, etc, and taking control of the ship before it reached Iranian territorial waters. This was a different style of boarding to what we had seen before. In addition, we were now involved in long-range boardings. To my knowledge most of the boardings up to this date were done at transfer distance, and we did that very well. Close range, get the rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIBs), get the helicopter over there, maximise the number of boardings you can do in a given time.

Here, because of the nature of the adversary, 10 miles or 15 miles away, positioning hours in advance, you might not see the target you are boarding until after your boarding party has captured it. This was quite a different environment to our earlier experience with MIF operations.

Finally, there was the issue of the management of significant numbers of detained smuggler ships. Once you have caught them, you then own them, and you are responsible for them for a period of anywhere between one and two months. The ship would sit anchored in the COMISKEY holding area with a very unhappy crew on board while their fate was determined and you can imagine the sorts of tricks that they would employ to try to get out of that the holding area.

I will focus predominantly on the non-compliant boarding aspects, because that is where the RAN in this rotation had greatest effect.

In early 2001, the Navy started paying significant attention to force protection issues, as the lessons out of the USS *Cole* incident became apparent. We were quite focused on our forthcoming operation, particularly the rules of engagement (ROE), and force protection. These are two sides to the same coin and you cannot have effective force protection without adequate ROE. It was not until after September 11th, when *Anzac* had been in the Persian Gulf for a couple of months, that Operation SLIPPER was authorised with more robust force protection ROE, and the RAN really became serious about this issue. I felt quite exposed before that time.

The utility of those force protection procedures for use, not just in harbour, but even when underway in the congested and navigationally restricted environment of the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) waterway, quickly became obvious when we started operating up there on a regular basis. Those tactics and techniques we used for in-harbour force protection were also employed while underway.

The government decided to commit to DAMASK X, and we worked up in June 2001. We were joined in Darwin by our US Navy partners, US Ships *O'Brien*, *Spruance* and *John Paul Jones* and worked up with them in transit. I assumed command of that task group in Darwin for the transit across to the area of operations. I had the advantage of going in company with a couple of ships that we were going to work with and, as a result, we arrived in the Gulf well prepared as individual ships and well integrated as a small force on 30 July 2001.

It was soon clear to me that the MIF had fallen into a comfortable routine. Long periods of relatively inactive patrolling were interspersed with monthly five to eight-day surge operations where US Special Forces and the Kuwaiti Navy would operate in the mouth of the KAA at night to catch the smugglers as they attempted to leave that waterway.

Outside the surge operations the only smugglers that were caught were those brazen or stupid enough, or perhaps too cheap to pay the established bribe to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and thus get the use of the Iranian territorial waters in the north of the Gulf.

Non-compliant boardings were the sole preserve of Special Forces or Marines. Even then these were always conducted at short range with the parent ship never far away. In short, the interception force was only capturing a very small fraction, between three and ten per cent depending on whose figures you use, of the total amount of oil being smuggled out of the Iraq through to the Gulf.

The operation had been in progress for almost a decade, and it seemed to me that all sides, including the smugglers, would have been quite happy with the status quo. Routine had overcome initiative in my view. Most of the smugglers were coming out of Iraq in oil tankers or small converted bulk cargo ships. These ships gave us the most trouble once we had apprehended them because inevitably they would overload these converted cargo ships, bulkheads would give away, or they would cause them to give away, and you would have a damage control issue down in the anchorage at some stage. My junior officers and sailors learnt a lot about stopping leaks and stability in merchant ships during this time.

So this was the main threat, or the main adversary. Dhows were also used in the smuggling business, but the larger steel-hulled ships, at that time, carried over 90 per cent of the trade and obviously, by their bulk, were far more profitable.

The month of August saw the ship busy with compliant boardings in the holding and processing area of COMISKEY. We also got involved with plane-guard duties for the US carrier in the Gulf at that time participating in Operation SOUTHERN WATCH. Of course we also started hunting for oil smugglers as they broke out of the KAA and headed south.

It was here that the reality of how much oil was slipping past the MIF became obvious to me. It was also apparent that *Anzac* possessed the capability, the training and the ROE to do something about it. For the first time, to my knowledge, a single ship, using boarding teams, not of Special Forces, but made up from her own ship's company, had the capability to take on the smugglers almost anywhere, day or night. What was new was a non-compliant boarding capability using our own sailors. There were a few who thought sailors could not do non-compliant boardings, but our sailors are very good at it.

The boarding teams could insert via a fast rope from the helicopter, or small boats, as we know. The RHIBS had been much modified for the role with radar, extra seating, GPS navigation and extra communications equipment, to allow them to operate semi-independently at long ranges from *Anzac* for hours on end. The combined team, *Anzac*, the boats, the helicopter, represented a new and much improved capability for the MIF. We decided to up the ante and hunt the smugglers more aggressively. *Anzac* conducted her first non-compliant boarding in the Gulf on 11 August of MV *Catrina*, with 5000-8000 tonnes of oil on board.

Our ability to stalk the smugglers covertly and board them almost at will was a notable change to the status quo. As the MIF capture rate began to rise, the smugglers became much more cautious. They exited the KAA and ran for Iranian territorial waters north of Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT), and were not cutting the corners up in the Diamond Head and the 'Hat' area where we had often caught them in the past.

In the third week of August we commenced operating on occasions by night in the mouth of the KAA around the oil terminals, as this was the one area in the whole Gulf that every smuggler had to transit. It was much easier to catch them there than to continue this business of chasing them the length and breadth of the Gulf. The interception force success rate continued to rise, and for the first time we saw some smugglers turn around and return to their anchorage in the waterway once they realised that a MIF ship was in the entrance waiting for them. But they did not give up very easily. There was a lot of money at stake. It was a case of tactic and counter-tactic. When the MIF started to gain the initiative the smugglers tried some innovative tactics, such as tattle tail ships, beacon ships, and the occasional large convoy. On one memorable occasion 19 steel-hulled vessels departed the KAA in company late one afternoon to be hunted down and forced back by the MIF. I think three of those nineteen got through. We continued to improve and develop our tactics, employing a range of new techniques such as quick draw boardings, covert pursuit and pre-positioning, decoys and, on one memorable occasion, a Trojan horse.



*Captain Nigel Coates on the bridge of HMAS Anzac during DAMASK X*

The way to stop the oil smugglers was to intercept them at their departure point; however *Anzac* was the only ship with the ROE and the capability to operate and board in the KAA on a continuous basis. *Anzac* became a one-ship close blockade force. That was a bit tricky to maintain when we had to depart our station for any reason. The answer was by no means perfect for us. It involved some fairly imaginative tricks with recorded Australian voices and VHF radios.

Then came 11 September 2001. We were due to depart the Gulf on completion of our deployment on 12 September, but at this point it seemed like the rest of the world quite frankly woke up to the realities of large-scale terrorism which had been an ever-present threat to us in the Gulf.

When *Anzac* was extended on-station and chopped over to Operation SLIPPER, it effectively marked the end of the DAMASK operation. The force protection ROE were significantly more enhanced and I felt, at that point, comfortable that I could reasonably defend my ship while in harbour.

Crash sailing after the terrorist attacks, we were in an uncertain environment where no-one was really sure what might happen next. Admiral Moore, COMUSNAVCENT, was keen for the MIF to continue normal operations as a show of strength and resolve in the region. *Anzac* was to be the sole MIF ship remaining in the northern Gulf for a period of about a week to 10 days as the carrier battle group and all other ships departed the Gulf.

We were fully occupied through that time with the compliant UNSCR boardings because the legal traffic still had to come through. We continued to do that for the initial period of time after 11 September and we also had to keep control of detained smugglers in COMISKEY, about twelve at that stage, who attempted to escape once or twice in the uncertain post-11 September environment.

When more ships arrived I was appointed as the on-scene commander for the MIF, 'X-ray Mike' (XM), and commander of the non-compliant boarding (NCB) surface action group (SAG). I reported to COMDESRON 50 who was now ashore in Fifth Fleet Headquarters, Bahrain, planning for operations against Afghanistan. Units were assigned to the NCB SAG as they were capable and included: *Anzac*; HMS *Kent* with marines and whenever they had SEALs embarked, which was about once a month; the *Ticonderoga* class cruiser USS *Antietam* and the *Arleigh Burke* class destroyer USS *O'Kane*. As the NCB SAG commander, I attempted to station an NCB unit in the mouth of the KAA whenever I could. While the US Navy ships were only capable when they had SEALs embarked, they were further constrained by their draught; however, this did not prevent the ships being taken into shallow waters and demonstrated the ships' commanding officers' professionalism as ship drivers in shallow water.

The RN had marines embarked for NCB operations, however they were neither there for any great period of time, nor did they have the ROE to maintain an effective close



blockade. Thus *Anzac* was once again the principal NCB unit in the Gulf and we were successful in significantly reducing the flow of the oil from Umm Qasr. It was quite tense at times with the Iraqi Government objecting to our presence through their media, accusing us of piracy within their waters and reserving the right to respond. This they did, using speedboats with large and serious-looking gentlemen on board to escort the tankers down the KAA and into Iranian territorial waters. We dealt with them through superior brinkmanship.

This is also where the in-harbour force protection capabilities became useful. On a number of occasions I had US Navy RHIBS around me as a force protection patrol, while I was patrolling between Mina Al Bakr Oil Terminal (MABOT) and KAAOT, because I could not manoeuvre too much while my boarding parties were further up the KAA catching smugglers.

The number of non-compliant boarding assets was slowly increasing over this time. In a significant collaborative coalition effort we managed to obtain a Royal Marine boarding party capable of non-compliant boardings and established it on board USS *O'Kane* on a rotation basis with the SEALs. HMS *Kent*, while not permitted to operate in the KAA, remained capable of boarding any leakers. So we stationed her further to the east in the Diamond Head and the Hat.

In terms of the numbers of vessels apprehended and the amount of oil confiscated, the months of August and September were reported by Commander Fifth Fleet to be the most successful in the history of the MIF. This pattern continued into October and intelligence reports confirmed that the smugglers were becoming quite frustrated and desperate to get their cargoes through. On one memorable occasion, a 'known associate' of a company long suspected of operating in the trade rang the Fifth Fleet MIO cell in Bahrain to enquire as to when *Anzac* might be going home. 'No time soon' was the reply.

Once again the smugglers' tactics changed. Small convoys of between three and ten ships – steel hulls – regularly attempted to slip out of the KAA. These convoys were usually screened by picket lines of four to six dhows as they dashed down the inner KAA and then cut east towards Iranian territorial waters. The dhows were stationed to provide the smugglers with early warning of approaching interception force assets – ships, boats or helicopters. This was where our stealth procedures and tactics were seriously tested. Throughout the deployment I came to regard those dust storms and hazy days of reduced visibility as providing the best days for hunting smugglers. Nights, of course, were even better and *Anzac* routinely operated completely darkened with no lights for boat operations and only a minimum for helicopter operations.

I knew this was effective because the boat coxswains told me that, without their night vision goggles, they could seldom see *Anzac* until they were within a couple of

hundred yards of the ship. They soon came to love their radar and GPS capabilities to get home.

By now just being invisible was not enough. We also had to be silent. On one occasion the smugglers were alerted to our presence when I made a mistake and allowed the helicopter to recover to the ship when the ship was within a mile or two of a couple of dhows. One of the dhows obviously heard the helicopter, as we heard the alarm raised over VHF, and the smugglers we were stalking retreated back into the KAA. Mission accomplished in that they did not get out, but nevertheless we never liked losing a prize that we were hunting. From then on silence was absolute. Upper deck fans were muffled or shut down wherever possible, and the officer of the watch had another consideration when selecting a flying course. *Anzac's* position had to be such as to screen the bulk of the helicopter noise from any of the nearby surface contacts. Finally, the RHIBS and the helicopters also became very clever at manoeuvring so as not to be seen or heard.

In conclusion, *Anzac's* deployment generated a number of new initiatives for the RAN in the MIF and continued the steady improvement in intercepting smugglers. While the vital work of compliant boardings continued unabated, it was by directly and aggressively challenging the illegal oil trade from August 2001 that the RAN was able to significantly increase the success rate of the MIF. September to November 2001 saw approximately eight out of every ten smugglers' ships either apprehended or forced to retreat back into Iraq, up from a pre-July average of not more than one in ten. The oil being smuggled out of Umm Qasr was down by between 50 and 80 per cent, again depending on which figures you used, as the larger steel hulls found it harder and harder to break out.

The MIF was now winning this contest of wills and the stage was set for the next significant escalation of MIF capability. After 107 days on station, *Anzac* was to be relieved by *Sydney* in November and shortly after that by *Kanimbla* and *Adelaide* with Allan Du Toit as the task group commander.

With multiple ships all capable of non-compliant boardings almost anywhere and any time, the future for the smugglers was bleak indeed.



*Fast rope insertion into a merchant vessel*

## PART V – OPEN FORUM

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**Commodore James Goldrick:** I would like to comment on the vital work of the COMISKEY boardings—the compliant boardings. This is in relation to the US Navy as some comments have failed to establish the proper context of what the Americans were doing. The COMISKEY guardship and people supporting them were required to conduct the boardings of all vessels going into Iraq and all vessels coming out of Iraq, in addition to maintaining the substantial pound of apprehended smugglers. That job was highly demanding and extremely intense and the American ships, although they did not have a non-compliant capability, continued to do the complaint boardings. They were extremely demanding; they did require a lot of support from the other ships that had the non-compliant capability. But they were also vital in getting stuff coming out of Iraq that appeared legal. The expertise the Americans developed in finding oil in places that you would not expect was really quite impressive. That job got bigger and bigger. Basically the number of legal boardings was doubling year by year, from about 2000 onwards. The job was getting to the point where you were needing to do something like, at the maximum point in the week, ten or eleven ships a day, and certainly an average four or five a day. I want to make the point that there was a big job going on as well and the difference was the non-compliant capability rather than the credible boarding capability that the Americans had to demonstrate.

**Dr David Stevens:** I'd like to hear about the Trojan horse.

**Captain Nigel Coates:** I mentioned tactic and counter-tactic. There were those small groups of smugglers that would pop out three and five at a time and at that stage in the game we were not in a position to block them in the KAA waterway. Invariably some got out and then began the track that some of us are familiar with, across the top of the Northern Arabian Gulf, then to Iranian territorial waters for most of the time, Diamond Head and various other areas. You would have an opportunity to grab one and you might have 20 minutes to gain control of this vessel. If luck was on your side and you were quick, you could get on board the first one so quickly that he did not have time to raise the alarm on his VHF radio and warn his mates who were coming up behind him. If you were good, you could grab this first ship quickly, take him down, and then not turn him, not start bringing him towards COMISKEY, but just slow him down a bit. The others would then overhaul him over a matter of time, and this is a speed, time, distance in geometry game you played. On one occasion we were lucky and the others overhauled their mate and from their perspective nothing was amiss, there was no MIF around, they did not have a clue where we were, and suddenly there was a boarding party coming straight at them from the tanker. So that is what I meant about the Trojan horse – using all these sorts of ideas to maintain the element of surprise.



*HMAS Newcastle and USS Nimitz*

**PART VI:  
MULTINATIONAL  
INTERCEPTION FORCE  
OPERATIONS  
2001-2003**

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## Captain Allan Du Toit, AM, RAN

### *Task Group Commander SLIPPER One*

Following the dramatic events of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent invocation of the ANZUS Treaty, the Australian Government decided that the frigate HMAS *Anzac*, which was deployed to the Persian Gulf as part of a periodic Royal Australian Navy (RAN) commitment to Operation DAMASK, would be relieved in-theatre. In addition, the government directed that an amphibious transport ship (LPA) with an additional frigate as escort, would also be readied and despatched to the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO), as part of Operation SLIPPER, the Australian Defence Force contribution to the War on Terrorism. All three ships, together with a maritime command element, formed the RAN's Operation SLIPPER Rotation One commitment – the largest RAN group to deploy to the region since the Gulf War in 1991.

As the mission and employment of the non-DAMASK units within the MEAO was still uncertain during the planning and force preparation phase, two separate task organisations were sensibly established. However, the protracted adherence to this construct after tasking was confirmed, subsequently proved to be a convoluted, confusing and less than ideal arrangement. The task group under my command, which consisted of the LPA HMAS *Kanimbla* (Commander David McCourt) and the frigate HMAS *Adelaide* (Commander Norman Banks) formed Task Group 6271. The frigate HMAS *Sydney* (Commander Daryl Bates), which was destined to relieve *Anzac* for Maritime Interception Force (MIF) operations as part of the enforcement of United Nations (UN) sanctions against Iraq, formed Task Group 6274.

Each ship began an intensive preparation period, which involved capability enhancements, individual and collective training, as well as the never-ending embarkation of stores and equipment. The frigates each embarked an S70B Seahawk helicopter while *Kanimbla* embarked an SK50 Sea King. *Kanimbla*, which was fitted with a Phalanx close-in weapon system for the deployment, also embarked an Army RBS70 air defence detachment, an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) detachment, and two Army LCM-8 landing craft together with their crews and a specialist deployable maintenance group. In addition, *Kanimbla* also underwent an extensive strategic communications enhancement, largely using equipment from her sister *Manoora*, to enable her to support the possible in-theatre embarkation of the Australian National Commander and his staff. All units undertook a rigorous Sea Training Group assessment and RAAF/RNZAF supported workup to the operational level of capability (OLOC) prior to deployment. This also included harbour force protection and biological and chemical defence training to meet possible asymmetric threats.



On successful completion of her OLOC workup and assessment in the Northern Australian Exercise Area (NAXA), *Sydney* was dispatched directly to the Persian Gulf to relieve *Anzac* (Captain Nigel Coates), arriving on-station on 9 November 2001.

Meanwhile, *Adelaide* and *Kanimbla* were readied for deployment and my task group command element was stood up at Maritime Headquarters. This command element, which consisted of 12 staff, was a mix of my amphibious task group staff and members of the wider Deployable Joint Force Headquarters (Maritime) organisation to which I belonged. My staff and I were soon actively engaged in operational planning and the production of a concept for operations and operations order, in close cooperation with Maritime Component Commander Australian Theatre (MCC AST) staff. At that stage, the scope of likely operations was deliberately broad to provide maximum flexibility of employment and included maritime patrol, escort, boarding, sea lines of communication protection, sea lift, logistic support, EOD, forward operating base for Special Forces, national command platform and amphibious operations.

I subsequently joined *Kanimbla*, together with my staff, at Fleet Base West on 31 October for the OLOC workup of the ships in my task group. *Kanimbla*, which had sailed from Sydney on 22 October, had arrived the previous day, while the West Australian-based *Adelaide* had only recently returned to Fleet Base West from Operation RELEX where she had been involved in the now infamous ‘children overboard’ incident. This was to play heavily on the mind of her command for much of the deployment as subsequent events unfolded back in Australia.

During the workup period, the TG battle rhythm and reporting procedures were established and refined based upon anticipated tasking. The integration of a task group commander (CTG) and staff in *Kanimbla* was almost seamless, largely due to the commitment and drive of the command and operations staff, which boded well for the deployment.

After completing OLOC workup in the rough conditions of the Western Australian Exercise Area (WAXA), which fortuitously was to prepare us for winter operations in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG), TG 627.1 departed Fleet Base West on Friday 16 November 2001, following a farewell by the Governor General. A comprehensive TG exercise program was executed on passage and this period was also used to develop situational awareness of United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) operations and planning for potential operations in the MEAO. *Anzac*, on her way back from the Gulf, added to this by providing detailed briefings on MEAO operations to TG command personnel during a rendezvous in the Indian Ocean.

The TG transited to the Middle East via Diego Garcia where we conducted a fuelling stop and where we were joined by Commodore Flotillas, Commodore Jim Stapleton, for *Adelaide*’s final OLOC assessment. The TG finally sailed from Diego Garcia on 29 November 2001, entered the MEAO on the evening of 2 December and passed through

the Straits of Hormuz at a heightened state of readiness four days later. I transferred to *Adelaide* for this fast, but fortunately uneventful, transit of the Straits.

While en route to the MEAO, tasking for the TG finally began to firm up, ending weeks of uncertainty as to our employment on arrival in the Gulf. The Commander US Naval Forces Central Command and US Fifth Fleet Commander (C5F), Vice Admiral Moore was particularly keen for the RAN to assume a significant warfare command role and for *Adelaide* and *Kanimbla* to be gainfully employed in the NAG along with *Sydney*, as part of the MIF. He also recognised that *Kanimbla* was ideally suited to fulfil the role of Maritime Interception Operations (MIO) command ship. His views were strongly influenced by the recent success of *Anzac's* deployment and a brief visit to the MEAO by the Maritime Commander Australia and MCC AST, Rear Admiral Geoff Smith in late September, during which potential tasking for RAN units was discussed.

Following a US request and advice from the Chief of the Defence Force (CDF), the government finally agreed that both *Kanimbla* and *Adelaide* would also be made available for MIF operations and furthermore, that I would assume the role of maritime interception commander (MIC), enforcing UN sanctions against Iraq. This was to be effected on a monthly rotational basis with Commander Destroyer Squadron 50 (CDS 50), Captain David Jackson, USN, utilising *Kanimbla* as the MIO command ship. As a result, MCC AST chopped operational control (OPCON) of TG 6271 to the Combined Joint Force Maritime Component Commander US Central Command (CJFMCC CENT) on 5 December 2001 for MIF operational tasking.

At the commencement of MIF operations, RAN units were chopped to the OPCON of Commander Task Force 50 (CTF 50), Rear Admiral Mark Fitzgerald, USN (COMCARGRU EIGHT), embarked in the carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, who in turn assigned tactical control (TACCON) for MIO to the MIC (CTU 50.0.9) – callsign 'XJ'. In addition to the operational task organisation, CJFMCC CENT also established task groupings within Task Force 50 (TF 50) along national lines for coordination purposes. The RAN force was designated TG 50.9, and I was assigned duties as CTG 50.9, which was independent of operational tasking. It was under this arrangement that I scheduled and promulgated all RAN MIO patrol rotations and in-theatre port visits, in close consultation with CDS 50, to ensure that adequate coalition MIO coverage was achieved at all times.

From a national perspective, TG 6271 and TG 6274 remained under the theatre command (TCOMD) of the Commander Australian Theatre (COMAST) Rear Admiral Chris Ritchie, and the operational command (OPCOMD) of MCC AST throughout the deployment. MCC AST, who positively encouraged initiative and largely allowed me to get on with the job at hand with little or no interference from MHQ, in turn assigned national OPCON of TG 6271 to me. TG 6274, however, remained a separate entity throughout, although to all intents and purposes, all RAN units operated as a single task group while in-theatre, which was greatly assisted by the very good relationship that existed between me and the commanding officer of *Sydney*. The C5F RAN Liaison

Officer (RANLO), RANLO Bahrain and the very effective RAN logistic support element (LSE) which operated out of Bahrain, remained under NCC AST OPCOMD and in direct support of both TGs.

In addition, an ADF National Commander, Brigadier Ken Gillespie, was appointed by COMAST as the Commander Australian Contingent Operation SLIPPER (COMASC-S), to exercise national command over all Australian forces in-theatre. The principal role of COMASC-S, who, by then, had relocated to Camp Doha in Kuwait from Tampa in Florida, was to ensure that all ADF assets conducted operations in accordance with national policy. This was particularly important for Australian SASR forces conducting combat operations in Afghanistan. Because of the component method of command employed for all RAN units in-theatre, this additional command layer required constant work, and was not helped by poor national connectivity, particularly when I was embarked in US ships.

Returning to MIF command arrangements, the US Navy MIC (CDS 50) and his staff embarked in *Kanimbla* on 18 December 2001 from the destroyer USS *Peterson*. However, the lack of US SIPRNET (national classified information system) connectivity with higher authority during the misidentification and boarding by US Navy Special Warfare forces (SEALs) of the Iranian-bound tanker MV *Sandy* a day later, prompted C5F to direct CDS 50 to re-embark in a US unit. Subsequent to the *Sandy* incident, which caused a diplomatic incident between the US and Iran, C5F restricted MIC and his collocated SEAL C2 element to remain at all times in a SIPRNET and HAWKLINK (helicopter forward looking infra-red video) fitted unit. Although the latter requirement was subsequently waived, the RAN was not able to achieve the first requirement until half-way through Rotation Two, when the MIC and his staff finally embarked in HMAS *Manoora* which hosted a US-controlled SIPRNET enclave to provide the necessary national connectivity. This, together with the significant improvement in the previously frustrating coalition wide area network (COWAN) and chat connectivity for coordination and information exchange with US and British units, was a major breakthrough which was to pave the way for *Kanimbla's* subsequent command and control role during Operation FALCONER.

C5F, however, agreed that an RAN commander could still assume the role of MIC, provided that this was affected from a US unit. On this basis, I subsequently assumed duties as the MIC and CTU 50.09 (XJ) from CDS 50 on 5 January 2002 initially embarked in the *Spruance* class destroyer USS *John Young* (Commander Tim Smith) and later in her sister ship USS *Elliot* (Commander Jerry Provencher). This was an important event as it was the first time in the 12-year history of the MIF that a non-US officer had assumed command of multinational MIF operations in the NAG. I was particularly honoured to have this distinct privilege, with units from Australia (HMA Ships *Adelaide*, *Kanimbla* and *Sydney*), Canada (HMCS *Vancouver*), the United Kingdom (HM Ships *Kent* and *Fearless*) and the US (US Ships *Jarrett*, *John Young* and *Leyte Gulf*)

under my tactical command at the commencement of my time as MIC. This event was positively and extensively reported in the media back in Australia, which, because of the secrecy surrounding our deployment, provided the first real news for our families and friends, of what we were actually doing.

My combined MIC staff consisted of six of my CTG staff and three CDS 50 staff. The remainder of my staff remained in *Kanimbla* to facilitate national reach-back. As MIC, I was responsible for the tactical direction of coalition surface and air assets as well as SEALs assigned to enforce UN sanctions against Iraq. During this period, I also conducted a successful MIO surge period in cooperation with the Kuwaiti Navy and Coast Guard, many of whose officers had previously trained in Australia, and who warmly welcomed our presence.

MIO command rotated back to CDS 50 on 6 February and I again assumed duties as MIC on 6 March, again embarked in *Elliot* as my flag-ship, until I handed over to my relief, Captain James Goldrick, on 9 March 2002. I have no doubt that the successful completion of our mission and the particularly close interpersonal relationships that we established with our US Navy and coalition counterparts at all levels, paved the way for subsequent Australian MIO commanders and ultimately, for the significant command role that the RAN played during combat operations against Iraq in early 2003.

Following inchoop briefings in Bahrain and boarding party and container climbing training for all boarding parties, the TG sailed for the NAG on 12 December 2001 to join *Sydney* for MIF operations. The boarding party training conducted by the US Coast Guard detachment at the so-called 'MIO University' in Bahrain was further consolidated by two days of assisted compliant boarding familiarisation training with the COMISKEY (MIO holding area) guardship in the NAG, prior to conducting solo operations. The MIO guardship role was invariably carried out by the on-station US Navy AEGIS air warfare cruiser, which also fulfilled the role of NAG sector air defence ship.

*Adelaide*, *Kanimbla* and *Sydney* each conducted MIO with two 12-person boarding parties, which were capable of up to level two non-compliant boardings (NCB). These teams, which soon became very proficient, could be inserted into a target vessel by rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIBs) by day and night or by helicopter fast rope insertion by day only. In addition, *Kanimbla* created a third boarding party from the embarked EOD detachment that also had a very useful night time helicopter insertion and seizure capability, with no other contributing nation possessing a similar capability.

*Kanimbla* also very successfully embarked and provided a forward operating base for a SEALs boarding party and Special Boat Unit from Camp Doha and Ras Al Qulay'ah in Kuwait—the first such embarkation in a non-US Navy ship in the NAG. The SEALs also provided a forward observer based at Bubiyan Island at the mouth of the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA), providing early notice of the movement of outbound vessels.



*A boarding party from HMAS Manoora checks a suspect vessel*

Boarding parties were used to conduct routine compliant '986 boardings' (nicknamed after the UN Security Council Resolution authorising them) to check cargo manifests of legal seaborne traffic in and out of Iraq, and most importantly, to prevent the smuggling of oil and contraband out of Iraq. In addition, they also assisted in conducting health and safety checks of diverted vessels in COMISKEY. RAN boarding parties continued to achieve a very high success rate against oil smugglers, which, together with the increased number of vessels available to the MIC, allowed an almost continuous presence in the approaches to the KAA. This in turn forced the smugglers to significantly change tactics during the deployment of Rotation One units to the NAG. Initially, the smugglers were unperturbed by the presence of the MIF, conducting a number of well-coordinated breakouts, much as they had done during *Anzac's* deployment. This was achieved using an indicators and warning network which comprised of dhow picket lines; lookouts on the Mina Al Bakr Oil Terminal (MABOT) and Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT); a converted fishing vessel, the *Sarah*; and a converted tug, the *Greenville 2*. In order to coordinate the breakouts, the smugglers utilised a number of command and control vessels, including the large modern tankers *Nabil* and *Zakat*.

All smuggler vessels that were intercepted were fitted with heavy passive defences which included barbed wire, oil on decks, missing ladders, welded doors and steel plates over windows. The smugglers were also fully aware of the MIF requirement to remain outside Iranian territorial waters, and they were frequently tracked two nautical miles inside Iranian territorial waters, often using anchored light ships to indicate territorial boundaries.

The weather experienced during the deployment was generally as expected for a Persian Gulf winter. Cool temperatures were experienced for the majority of the time and winds were generally out of the north-west, with several periods of the notorious 'Shamal' winds which caused increased seas and the cancellation of MIO at times.

Pursuit and apprehension of smugglers originating in the NAG was vigorously conducted across the length and breadth of the Gulf, and on a number of occasions in the Gulf of Oman and as far east as the coast of Pakistan. The latter pursuits were conducted in close cooperation with the US Navy sea combat commander embarked in the carrier in the North Arabian Sea. This applied maximum pressure on the smugglers and made the point that, even though they might slip through the blockade off the KAA, they would be relentlessly pursued. During one of these pursuits, *Sydney* successfully apprehended the 16,000 tonne *Fal XII*, one of the largest and most modern tankers involved in the smuggling trade, in the Gulf of Oman.

After the initial successes of MIF forces in late 2001 and early 2002, the smugglers adjusted their tactics to avoid interception. No mass breakout occurred and the smugglers resorted to filtering out in small groups. Furthermore, even the latter became reluctant to challenge the MIF, electing instead to either reverse course or to remain within the KAA waterway. As a direct result, the illegal trade in oil out of Iraq diminished significantly to the point that the movement of steel-hulled vessels out of the KAA had all but stopped by the end of Rotation One. This, however, led to the increasing and brazen use of cargo dhows towards the end of the deployment to smuggle oil and dates, which was to present increasing challenges for subsequent rotations.

RANLO Bahrain, in close cooperation with Commander (Logistic) Task Force 53 (CTF 53), based in Bahrain, provided a comprehensive and very efficient air and sea logistic support network for all RAN units operating in the Gulf. Underway replenishment of fuel was conducted by the NAG support unit weekly, while stores were either delivered by the logistic helicopter, the ubiquitous 'Desert Duck' or consigned to the NAG support unit for fortnightly delivery.

Throughout Rotation One's deployment to the Gulf, no Iraqi naval movements were observed and Iranian naval and air maritime patrol activity remained within historical norms. Naval interaction with Iranian naval and air assets remained professional and non-provocative. There were, however, occasional tense moments with elements of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) while operating and boarding

smuggler vessels in the waters adjacent to the mouth of the Shatt Al Arab (SAA) waterway which delineated the maritime boundary between Iraq and Iran. While the Iranian Navy on a number of occasions actively assisted Australian and British units in 'flushing out' smuggler vessels from Iranian territorial waters in the southern Gulf and Gulf of Oman, there was continuing evidence of collusion between IRGCN elements and smugglers operating out of the KAA.

Although it was to be another year before action was initiated against Iraq, contingency planning was well underway in early 2002 for such an eventuality. In addition to controlling the expected mass departure of vessels trapped in the KAA, the NAG concept for operations developed at that time included preventing Iraqi forces from laying mines and destroying vital oil installations on the Al Faw peninsula and offshore oil terminals.

During Rotation One's 99 days in-theatre, 82 compliant boardings and 47 non-compliant boardings were conducted by RAN units. Of the 47 non-compliant boardings, 10 vessels were diverted and a total of some 50,000 metric tonnes of oil worth over 6 million dollars was seized. This equated to nearly half of all oil loaded in Iraq.

Rotation One units completed their time in the AO on 23 February 2002 (*Sydney*) and 4 March 2002 (*Kanimbla* and *Adelaide*), while I, together with key members of my staff, remained in-theatre until 10 March to hand over MIC duties to my successor. *Sydney* was relieved by HMAS *Newcastle* (Captain Davyd Thomas), while *Kanimbla* and *Adelaide* were relieved by HMA Ships *Manoora* (Commander Bob Morrison) and *Canberra* (Commander Roger Boyce).

On being relieved by the incoming TG 627.1 units, my TG disbanded and independently departed the MEAO on 6 March 2002 following a visit to Muscat in Oman. *Adelaide* proceeded directly back to Australia with a fuelling stop at Diego Garcia, arriving back at Fleet Base West on 17 March. *Kanimbla* returned to Australia via Phuket, Singapore and Cairns, arriving back in Sydney on 3 April 2002 to a rousing welcome after an absence of almost six months.

I would highlight just three main points that I was privileged to take away from this operation.

Firstly, the highly successful deployment of RAN tactical warfare commanders (TWCs) to the Gulf proved an excellent opportunity to test and benchmark the embryo RAN TWC concept and has provided the TWCs and their staff with sound operational experience and exposure. In particular, the TWC concept with a CTG at the captain level with a small staff not tied to a specific unit, was validated and more than proved its worth during Rotation One, and indeed during subsequent rotations in the lead-up to and during the war in Iraq.

Secondly, the seamless integration of Australian and US units, together with British and Canadian units, once again clearly demonstrated the close professional and personal relationships developed and nurtured over many years of exercising and operating together.

Finally, if there is one overwhelming conclusion that I would like to draw, it is that our men and women and their high standard of individual and collective training made the biggest contribution to the success of our mission.

Operation SLIPPER Rotation One conducted a very successful deployment to the MEAO. Rotation One units spent almost six months away from Australia, completed 99 days in-theatre and made a significant and widely acknowledged contribution to MIF operations and the War on Terror as part of coalition forces in the Gulf. Furthermore, I had the distinct privilege of being the first Australian MIO commander and indeed, the first non-US officer to assume command of multinational MIF operations in the NAG, since the institution of sanctions against Iraq 12 years previously. Finally, the deployment undoubtedly helped enhance interoperability between the RAN and the US Navy and further developed the ADF's capability to undertake effective combined and coalition operations at a distance in defence of our national interests.





*HMAS Arunta at speed, 2002*

# Twenty One

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## Captain Ray Griggs, CSC, RAN

### *Commanding Officer HMAS Arunta SLIPPER Three*

I am going to address the third rotation of Operation SLIPPER between June and December 2003, in which the defining feature was the emergence of the phenomenon of mass dhow breakouts.

I will look briefly at how dhows were dealt with during the course of the previous SLIPPER rotations; what changes in smuggler tactics took place; how they manifested in the oil breakouts of July and August 2002; the doctrinal and tactical changes implemented as a response; the date breakouts of late 2002; and conclude with some observations on lessons learned as a result of this phase of the RAN's participation in the Maritime Interception Force (MIF) operations. This view is based on my own observations on-station in HMAS *Arunta* and I will limit my scope to the period covered by Operation SLIPPER.

Dhows had not traditionally been a target of the MIF as it had been kept busy enough dealing with the stream of group three steel-hulled tankers that plied their trade down the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) waterway. There was a relatively low MIF effectiveness prior to the emergence of the organic non-compliant boarding (NCB) capability pioneered so effectively by *Anzac* during her 2001 deployment. As this capability proliferated due to the increased numbers of RAN and RN units in-theatre following the onset of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM/SLIPPER, the success rate of the steel-hulled vessels in evading the sanctions regime started to fall. With the advent of a much closer blockade during the latter part of the second SLIPPER rotation, the flow of steel-hulled vessels attempting to come out of the KAA started to diminish.

Throughout the majority of the steel-hull period, the MIF paid little attention to dhow traffic. Nevertheless, there were concerns at unit, and later at task group level, that dhows could be used to smuggle out oil, albeit in smaller quantities. In February 2002 HMAS *Kanimbla* became the first RAN ship to conduct dhow boardings when she boarded 16 dhows in one day. These boardings yielded illegal oil and was the first hard evidence that dhows were very much part of the game. It took until 10 June 2002 before the MIF commander (by then Captain James Goldrick) was able to get approval to permit MIF units to routinely board dhows.

By the time the Rotation Three units arrived in late June and early July, boarding dhows was an accepted and normal practice. As can be seen from Figure 1, the early days of Rotation Three were relatively quiet. On 19 July 2002 things started to get interesting. *Melbourne* had just completed her first patrol and was en route to Dubai,

and HMS *Argyll* (Commander J Kingwell, RN) and *Arunta* had the watch in area MA-1 South. Over the next seven days a series of multiple dhow breakouts occurred which stretched the two frigates both materially and organisationally. The availability of rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIBs) caused considerable concern during this period. The RHIB, of course, was the principal boarding team insertion tool against the dhow. Between the two frigates, *Arunta* had three RHIBs with only one serviceable, one degraded and the other with its engine removed so that leaks in the sump could be repaired. *Argyll* had one serviceable RHIB and one unserviceable awaiting the arrival of a new boat engine from the UK.

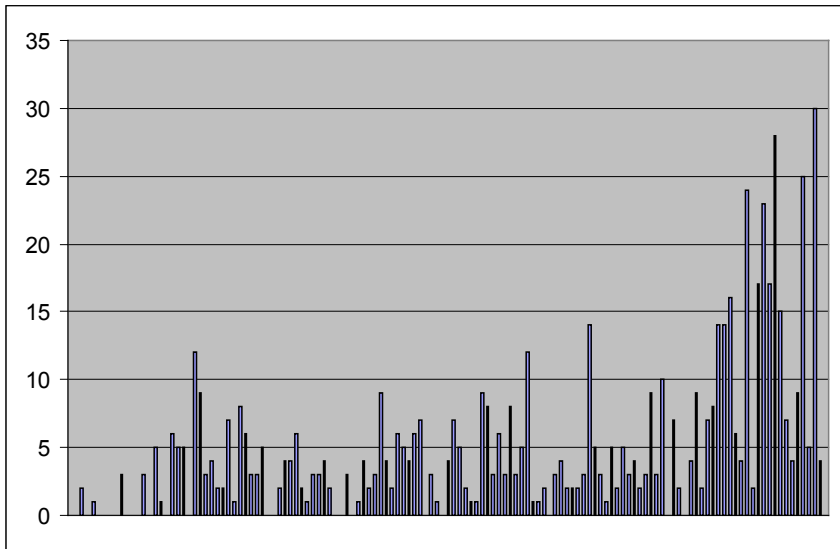


Figure 1 - Daily boardings completed by RAN units of Operation SLIPPER Rotation Three (HMA Ships Arunta and Melbourne) Jun-Nov 2002

The July breakouts consisted of 10 to 14 dhows per event spread out over 10 to 15 miles. In the early breakouts, use was made of unladen dhows positioned among the lead dhows to draw the boarding teams away from the laden vessels. During the day this was easier to combat as a visual inspection could allow the emerging vessels to be appropriately prioritised, but at night all vessels had to be boarded. Another tactic was to intersperse the breakout with one or two apparently unladen group three tankers. This complicated the command and control of the incident as the bridge teams were automatically drawn into two separate processes (a boarding process for the dhows and the diversion process for the unladen tankers down to the UN inspection area known as COMISKEY). The emergence of a group three tanker 'with priors for smuggling' would lead to an immediate interest from the battle group commander. It would also generate a significant increase in message traffic and information flow on key tactical circuits. This was, at times, disconcerting, as defeating the breakout relied on tight circuit discipline and minimising unnecessary transmissions.

With only two to three RHIBs in operation at any one time there was a need to use both ships and their embarked aircraft to assist in turning around dhows when the boarding teams were unable to keep pace. This required aggressive and close quarters manoeuvring and a modicum of bluff-calling which had to be effected quickly. In the early breakouts, up to 30 per cent of dhows were dealt with in this way.

By the third day of the initial breakout period, *Arunta* had three boats operating again. This created a problem as the amount of administrative information that needed to be passed during each boarding meant that more than two boarding parties on a single boarding control circuit became unmanageable. *Arunta* was further hamstrung by the fact that the operations room had no direct communications with the boarding parties and all information had to be relayed through the bridge team. With three teams feet wet, this necessitated an additional circuit and another communicator drawn away from normal duties.

The MIF had primarily been trained and prepared for dealing with the steel-hulled trade. The emergence of the dhow breakout phenomenon caused the development of a distinct breakout doctrine and some significant changes to MIF standing operating procedures (SOP).

Very early on in the first breakout period, the use of 14-person RAN boarding parties was seen to be excessive for dealing with a dhow. *Arunta's* teams were divided into five teams of six with two of the spare boarding party members pulled off boat crew duties to form the fifth team. The average dhow carried a crew of between eight and twelve and could be handled by a six-person stick. For mutual protection, teams operated in reasonably close proximity so that one boarding could be abandoned if there were signs of a difficult boarding on another dhow. The five-stick organisation allowed two sticks of six to remain in the ship for respite and to provide a fresh NCB capability should it be required for a steel-hull at short notice. The additional drain on the remainder of

the ship's company to sustainably support this level of operations was considerable. I knew we were getting close to the bone when my executive officer was the boat coxswain for one of the boarding parties. The smugglers returned a number of times per day and this was probably the most wearing aspect. Our main issue was when we were going to stick our hand up to the task group commander (CTG) and reduce our capability level, as fatigue was starting to become a major factor even with what was a very flexible structure.

One aspect of MIF operations that was evident from our arrival in-theatre was the highly structured way in which it was conducted. This was particularly evident in the command and control and approval processes. Each boarding (and a number of milestones within each boarding) had to be approved by the CTG (or higher on occasions). This often necessitated a great many details being passed regarding the vessel before boarding approval was given. There were obvious reasons for this as the amount of detailed knowledge and corporate memory available in the headquarters in Bahrain was quite extensive and the HQ could value-add to the process. It was, however, a process designed around a single, or at worst, two or three, group three steel-hulled tankers attempting to evade the sanctions process at one time. In the context of mass breakouts, even the CTG attempting to control the incident was difficult. From very early on, both *Argyll* and *Arunta* pushed for one of the up-threat frigates to be appointed the scene of action commander (SAC). This was duly endorsed by the CTG and worked extremely well. Given the geometry of most of the breakouts, the ship stationed on the western side of area MA-1 South was usually best placed to perform this role. All assets involved in each 'action' were assigned to the SAC and, critically, the CTG provided a 'blanket approval' to the SAC to conduct NCBs as required to defeat the breakout. It was the SAC who controlled the boarding priority, asset allocation and approvals for individual boardings. The SAC was still required to keep the CTG advised of a number of key milestones for each boarding activity. The decision to turn around a vessel, send it to COMISKEY or clear it for onward passage was always retained by the CTG. The reduction in circuit traffic was instantaneous and led to a much more efficient incident management regime.

Breakouts brought with them the need for formalised boarding party readiness states. In the steel-hulled environment, teams would go feet wet to patrol for up to six hours and other ships would not normally be required to supplement outside of their planned on-task windows. In a breakout it was automatic that the other MA-1 ship would provide whatever boat and boarding assets it could regardless of whether the ship's teams had just finished a six-hour patrol. This is where the five-stick organisation was very useful and the readiness notice for each stick was adjusted depending on the tempo of the day and the patrol times that were allocated. The original notion of the boarding teams' having a 24 hour on, 24 hour off, rhythm was discarded fairly quickly and an overall team management approach was adopted. The boarding parties responded magnificently and, even when they were 'least' ready (60 mins' notice), would regularly



go from being asleep to feet wet in 25 minutes. The team that we struggled with the most was the boat raising and lowering team. Due to limited numbers in the FFH (50 fewer than an FFG) and the need to maintain both the boarding organisation and an appropriately manned warfare defence watch structure, this critical but less glamorous task required careful management. There were few options left to expand the numbers of people trained in the task; they remained amongst the hardest working and unsung members of the ship's company.

Ship stationing within MA-1 was quickly seen as an issue during the initial breakout phase. The need to be stationed as far north as possible so as to have the greatest warning time, reduce the distance between ship and RHIBs (to reduce transit times and minimise any potential communications difficulties), and to maximise the benefit of the ship's onboard infra-red camera, were key issues. Conducting the initial boardings as far north as possible also meant that the width of the 'breakout front' could be kept manageable and be dealt with before the breakout vessels started to fan out.

Breakouts also brought with them a more complicated surface picture. In addition to the RAN and RN boarding teams, the US Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment (LEDET) operated off the US Navy ship stationed further south in the deeper waters of area MA-2 and the US Navy SEALs or the Polish Special Forces (GROM) operated off the longer 11-metre RHIBs or the Mk 45 special forces patrol craft. The SAC had no control over the special forces elements and continued to work through the CTG to coordinate and deconflict as required. With anything up to seven to eight unlit armed RHIBs and patrol craft operating at up to 30 knots in close vicinity to one another, the potential for fratricide was ever present. A number of measures were put in place to improve both the SAC and CTG's awareness. These proved successful in the final analysis, but this issue was a constant source of stress throughout the entire deployment.

The final change that came out of the initial period was the need to maximise the availability of the RAN's in-theatre RHIB assets. A spare RHIB was positioned in Dubai but was essentially just gathering dust. It seemed a waste of an asset to be sitting 24 hours' steaming time away when we were hurting for RHIBs on-station. The RHIBs were the mission-critical item and being worked very hard. No matter how carefully they were being driven, breakdowns were occurring and stretching the limits of the support arrangements that were in place. The CTG agreed to the proposal to embark the spare RHIB in *Arunta* and thus provide the task group with the flexibility to provide immediate access to the spare boat, should either *Melbourne* or *Arunta* require it. The fourth RHIB repeatedly proved its worth not only as a spare, but later in the deployment when four RHIBs were needed to combat the larger breakouts.

There were two vital policy changes that emerged from the initial six days of sustained breakouts. The first of these was the ability to remove the oil from (or de-lighter) the dhows rather than continually turning them around and sending them back up the KAA. Without some method of removing the cargo, there was the potential for an

endless merry-go-round of breakouts. The dhow crews would keep trying their luck with no fear of losing their cargo and we would be breaking people and equipment through what was a very tiring process.

This was a difficult change to get through for a number of reasons. The first task was to overcome the view that dhows could not safely anchor at COMISKEY while they awaited de-lightering. This view centred on the premise that bilge pumps in the dhows were run directly off the propeller shaft. Evidence from *Arunta* and *Melbourne's* boarding parties was crucial in confirming that the dhows could anchor. The next challenge was the mechanics of getting the oil off the dhows. They had a considerable number of small tanks, typically 50 to 70 cubic metres in capacity and often with makeshift pumping arrangements on board. This would make the process much more complicated than for de-lightering steel-hulled tankers. Another consideration was managing a large number of dhows in the COMISKEY inspection point. The COMISKEY guardship had a full-time job in maintaining good order and discipline over those vessels that had been apprehended and were awaiting de-lightering, or were subject to further decision on their status. The mechanics of escorting intercepted dhows the 40 miles down to COMISKEY was also not without its problems given the limited number of MIF assets available. There was some residual resistance to employing steaming parties due to the fresh and painful memories of the tragic loss of two US Navy sailors from USS *Peterson* when the ship on which they were acting as a steaming party sank.

Throughout most of August the CTG worked these issues with the battle group and Fifth Fleet command chain. There were a number of inter-agency and inter-governmental negotiations taking place within these command chains. In late August the policy change occurred and produced almost immediate results. As soon as the dhow masters became aware that they would have their cargo confiscated, the oil breakout phase drew to a rapid close. A small Kuwaiti flagged tanker was positioned in COMISKEY and in the end only de-lightered a handful of dhows – this was an example of deterrence at its most effective.

The other critical change was in the ability of the MA-1 MIF frigates to be stationed in MA-1 North. At the time the MIF policy was not to station ships in MA-1 North, largely because of its navigational constraints and the potential public relations disaster should a coalition frigate come to grief in these waters. While still not ideal, MA-1 North presented fewer problems to either *Arunta* or *Argyll*, than to *Melbourne*. The flexibility of shallow draughts, the RAN/RN approach to navigation training and, interestingly, the status of both RAN commanding officers as specialist navigators proved a persuasive line of argument for the CTG in convincing the battle group commander that the ships could safely operate in these waters. In mid-August, *Arunta* was the first MIF unit to be stationed in MA-1 North; *Melbourne* followed the next evening and this became the prime night-time station for the remainder of the rotation.



MA-1 North brought with it some major advantages in managing breakouts. It enhanced the MIF's ability to compile the surface picture further up the KAA to the point where *Arunta's* target indication radar could detect the dhows as they left their moorings. The stationing also pushed a group of vessels collectively known as the 'gatekeepers' further back into Iraqi internal waters. These gatekeepers would sit in MA-1 North and, it was firmly believed, report on MIF activities. After only a couple of nights of MIF stationing in MA-1 North, the gatekeepers retired. The increased warning time and shorter transit times for RHIBs also made management of boarding party readiness easier. The reliance on airborne infra-red cameras was reduced as the effectiveness of shipborne equipment dramatically increased with the change in stationing. This was of particular benefit in the more hectic date breakouts when the numbers of vessels would have swamped the single HAWKLINK-fitted helicopter that was able to give the CTG a real time infra-red picture of a boarding.

MA-1 North had its drawbacks too! Being within 10 miles of the Iraqi coast reduced the threat warning time particularly from the Seersucker missile sites on the Al Faw peninsula. The conventional military threats faced in SLIPPER have in some ways become understated since the combat phase against Iraq in early 2003. The reality is that the same threats existed and were prepared for by all four SLIPPER rotations. This was very clearly demonstrated in early September when the air warning went to Yellow late one evening and *Arunta* was ordered to clear MA-1 North due to the suspected activation of missile batteries on the Al Faw peninsula. In the early hours of the following morning, the *Arunta* operations team watched a strike package from USS *George Washington* fly overhead and neutralise the missile batteries. A similar situation occurred in November and proved to be a useful reminder to the ship's companies of the reality of the conventional threats that existed.

The navigational constraints in MA-1 North were significant. The combination of three knots of tidal stream, shoal waters, poor charting, numerous wrecks and the legitimate traffic using the main shipping channel in and out of Umm Qasr, quickly developed the skill of the officer of the watch in balancing weapon, radar and infra-red camera arcs and maintaining minimum approach distances on local traffic.

Following the decision to de-lighter dhows, the MIF frigates' tempo dropped a little, although small breakout attempts continued. September allowed both *Arunta* and *Melbourne* to help out in COMSIKEY and keep the flow of legal traffic in and out of Iraq flowing smoothly. By mid-October a new phase commenced with the arrival of the date breakouts. Dates are an extremely valuable commodity and with Ramadan approaching there was a new intensity in dhow masters' attempts to evade the MIF. These breakouts were characterised by increased numbers of dhows in the breakout – up to 25 dhows at a time – and a far greater reluctance of the masters to comply when ordered back up the KAA. Figure 1 clearly shows the increase in tempo with the onset of these breakouts. The management of these breakouts was largely an Australian affair –

*Argyll* had departed for home leaving *Arunta* and *Melbourne* to spend a most hectic final month on-station. The US Navy SEALs and USCG LEDET also participated. The lessons of the oil phase were well learned and improved waterspace management, refinement of the SAC concept, and the attachment of *Arunta's* communicators in LEDET RHIBs, improved their integration into the force and gave the SAC improved control.

There were a number of difficult breakouts to manage during this phase. One that was significant was a 21-vessel exodus on a night when the air warning was again Yellow. *Arunta*, the only MIF asset on-task, was stationed some 20 miles further to the south-east of the normal MA-1 North station due to a missile site activation on the Al Faw peninsula. Despairingly, we watched the dhows emerge from the KAA and work their way down, fanning out across an 11-mile-wide front. Over the next six hours, all four RHIBs, the helicopter and the ship battled to contain the breakout. One dhow managed to slide into Iranian territorial waters, but the remainder were contained and eventually herded back up the KAA. Every vessel was boarded at least once in what was an amazing team effort. The value of flexible stationing was again reinforced as was the importance of timely threat-related intelligence.

From an *Anzac* class perspective, one of the big issues was the complication of dealing with the breakout phenomenon while, at the same time, remaining cognisant of and alert to the conventional and asymmetric military threats. This was challenging in a ship with a single on-watch Principal Warfare Officer (PWO), particularly when acting as SAC. As commanding officer (CO) you invariably needed to take some of the load off the PWO while maintaining the broader view. The real danger was becoming a second PWO and losing the command perspective, particularly during some of the longer breakout events. The breakout was the perfect environment for a fast-moving surface craft to strike, particularly with up to seven to eight unlit RHIBs in the water at times. The need for both CO and PWO to have exceptional situational awareness was critical. Anti-ship missile defence (ASMD) positioning remained a constant requirement as the two incidents mentioned earlier showed. Probably the tensest time was towards the end of the deployment when the UN Security Council was negotiating UNSCR 1441 and, for a brief time, the likely Iraqi reaction was not clear.

During Rotation Three the Iraqi Navy PB90 class patrol craft emerged from the KAA for the first time in five years. They became regular players by day and added another layer of interest for higher command. The Iraqi Mark 5 patrol craft were also regular visitors to MA-1 and were watched carefully due to their assessed mine-laying potential (an assessment that was subsequently confirmed during Operation FALCONER). Together with the frequent patrols by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) vessels through the waters of MA-1, management of this waterspace was always complex. Thoughtful ship-stationing and patrolling were critical, particularly given the often poor visibility resulting from the prevailing meteorological conditions and the vital role of visual detection and tracking.

The knowledge gained by being able to operate ships in MA-1 North proved crucial during Operation FALCONER the following year. By that time US commanders had become comfortable with RAN and RN units being able to safely operate in these waters. Rotations Three and Four ships further built confidence in the limits of navigable waters by conducting their own mini surveys. This in turn enabled RAN CTGs to present flexible options for both SLIPPER and FALCONER which may otherwise not have been so readily accepted.

The ability to minimise the width of the breakout front was crucial, and hitting the initial wave of the breakout hard and early often set the scene for the remainder of that incident. More RHIBs in the water at the start invariably meant less overall boardings, less exposure of boarding parties to potentially dangerous situations (the use of a dhow as a terrorist platform occupied the minds of task group and ship command teams alike) and a quicker resolution of the incident. In the face of an overwhelming initial response by the MIF, even the date dhow masters were more inclined to head back up the KAA.

In Rotation Four the RHIB posture moved to a more overt one and the very clever idea of putting blue police lights on the RHIBs was employed by *Darwin* and *Anzac*. This provided a very good visual indication that the MIF were out in force. Stationing was the key and being able to support RHIBs with an organic infra-red camera by being further north also improved boarding party safety and the ability of the ship to react in the event of trouble.

As a result of the breakouts the MIF command and control processes were forced to evolve and become more flexible. A looser control regime was necessary to permit the SAC concept to work. Tight, centralised control remained in place for steel-hulled operations and any interaction with non-MIF military units. There were many occasions when this tight/loose command and control arrangement was used simultaneously (for example: the emergence of the PB-90s in the middle of a breakout) and without problem.

Fatigue management was another significant issue. From an *Anzac* class perspective, the long-term sustainability of defence watches is the only way of maintaining an appropriate level of defensive capability while executing a labour-intensive primary mission. Sensible patrol programming was a key mitigator and Rotation Three heeded the advice of previous rotations by ensuring that long patrols were effected early in the deployment while people were still fresh. A key psychological factor with the respective ships' companies was that each patrol was programmed to be progressively shorter. Had this strategy not been adopted, the period of the date breakouts would have been an even more difficult period. The extraordinarily successful safety record in the nearly 700 boardings undertaken by Rotation Three ships was, in no small part, due to the fatigue management strategy of both ships.

A major lesson was the need for greater flexibility in boarding party composition. The numbers trained prior to the deployment were insufficient to manage the dhow breakouts. By the end of the deployment *Arunta* had trained up an additional eight personnel who were able to be integrated into the boarding parties and allow the five-stick regime to be implemented and sustained. The only limitation on these people was that they were not fast rope qualified and were therefore confined to dhow boardings. They were, however, a real boon. The rapid transmission of these changes back to the Sea Training Group allowed *Anzac* and *Darwin* to arrive in-theatre trained for both steel-hull and dhow contingencies with appropriate numbers.

The final point I would like to make is the enduring importance of accurately compiling and presenting the tactical picture. The Northern Arabian Gulf was a heavy surface and air traffic environment which demanded constant and relentless attention to detail. The *Anzac* class proved its superior capability in this regard with the combination of its target indication radar and excellent combat management system. The RAN task group was blessed with magnificent CIS and CSO sailors who gave effect to the technology and proved extremely versatile. During Operation SLIPPER, manual plotting, allowed for far too long to fall into disuse, made a welcome return to all operations rooms. In an area with complex maritime boundaries and where there was a need to maximise the time available for the boarding parties to do their work, the paper chart and manual plot played a vital role.

In summary, the breakout phase proved to be a challenging period for the MIF and could have resulted in the integrity of the close blockade of 2002 being breached. That it was not, was due to a willingness to implement some innovative tactical developments coupled with important policy changes which allowed the MIF to keep the initiative.



*RAN boarding parties conducting a dhow inspection, 2002*

## Twenty Two

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### Commander Aaron Ingram, AM, CSC, RAN

*Commanding Officer HMAS Darwin  
SLIPPER Four, BASTILLE & FALCONER*

I intend to explain the evolution of maritime interception operations (MIO) during *Darwin's* deployment to the Persian Gulf with *Anzac* between November 2002 and April 2003, and the context in which those changes occurred. The total deployment was about 201 days from the time we left Australia till we got back; but a lot happened in quite a short time.

Preparedness for deployment was an issue for us but, having come from Maritime Headquarters during the initial SLIPPER Operations, I at least knew what to expect. Having been tasked with the border protection role during Operation RELEX, *Darwin* had been Bunnings warehouse aisle '04' for previous SLIPPER rotations. We had a real issue with cannibalisation of parts, but thanks to Commander Roger Boyce in *Canberra*, we managed to pinch from Bunnings aisle '02' so we could get going ourselves.

Crew stability, again was an issue for *Darwin*, in that having come back from RELEX with 160 or 170 people, we had to beg, borrow and steal from other units to get to the 230-odd personnel we needed to do the job. Moreover, *Darwin* had a number of people who were turning around for their second or third deployments in pretty short order, and that caused some fatigue problems later on. Regarding the quality of our sailors, I should note that when I took command we had the added burden of having our ship's name splashed all over the media after a tragic incident that took place during RELEX. To overcome that incident was quite a management and leadership issue, but every man and woman on board was determined to repair their reputation, and they did so magnificently. In short, the sailors rose to the occasion.

We had an operational level of capability (OLOC) workup and the task group commander (CTG) and his staff were actually involved and were part of that process. As such, they were able to understand the capabilities and limitations of the ships on Rotation Four as we came into theatre, which was very useful. *Anzac* and *Darwin* departed the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) on 19 April, having spent 170 days in-theatre, of which about 80 per cent was on patrol. Some themes will come out of that duration a little later – issues from a preparedness perspective about FALCONER, which actually occurred very late in our deployment.

UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1441, which declared that Iraq remained in breach of its obligations under other relevant resolutions, had not actually come into force before we deployed. We arrived in the MEAO at the end of Ramadan in November, but Ramadan was not really an issue. In fact more than anything else it was the weather that started to affect the tempo of operations. It was a particularly long and harsh winter and I think we underestimated how that would affect us. We had to acquire some extra cold weather gear to get us through and sustain our sailors when they were out on the water in the rigid hull inflatable boats (RHIB) and on the gun direction platform (GDP).

Rotation Four spent about 75 per cent of our time camped up in area MA-1 South, and the bottom of MA-1 North, usually either east or west of the Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT) and Mina Al Bakr Oil Terminal (MABOT). Occasionally, when there were more than two units available, we would spend some time in the top of area MA-2 for a bit of relief. The tempo at COMISKEY increased significantly during the deployment and the rough winter weather meant that, on many days, there was a huge backlog of boardings. On a number of occasions we found ourselves being sent down to COMISKEY to assist, only to be dragged back at night for non-compliant boardings (NCBs) coming out of the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) waterway, so it got quite busy.

Initially at least, *Anzac* experienced the high tempo 'dhow rush'. *Darwin* was not so lucky, as we experienced a hole in our sonar dome on the way over, and by the time we arrived things were starting to taper off. In essence, Maritime Interception Force (MIF) tactics carried on from where Rotation Three left off, with at least one MIF unit using deployed RHIBs in pouncer points to reduce the size of the KAA front and try to keep the situation under control. The successful blockade of steel-hull ships established by previous rotations meant that these were rarely encountered and we did not see ships with passive protection until they all tried to get out of the KAA two days after the war began. The steel-hulls we did see were the smaller vessels attempting to escape from COMISKEY. Tasks at COMISKEY continued as before, usually with a US Navy unit in charge.

RAN and RN units were generally needed up in MA-1 to deal with breakouts and one of the things that most concerned me was the navigation. The need to maintain that long-term presence as well as conducting MIO in the prevailing high winds and sea states, made life interesting to say the least, particularly when the constraints of the FFG's Mk 92 blind arcs restricted our manoeuvrability. I suspected that, had things got worse and I needed to escape in a hurry, the amount of water presented on the chart was not going to be enough. As such, I took it upon myself to do my own rapid survey on a spring flood tide, running over some shoals in an attempt to increase the amount of water I had available.

The Iraqi Navy, or at least its PB-90 class patrol boats, was also quite distracting, although probably more for the task group commander (CTG) than individual ships. We had a routine whereby we would shadow and report, but should they step over the line then someone else would come in to clean up. Fortunately we had fairly robust ROE, while they behaved themselves and stayed on their side of territorial waters.

In November the MIO commander also took over the role as the local surface warfare commander (LSWC), so the responsibility started to increase. From an individual unit's perspective this was welcomed, as we found ourselves with a bit more autonomy, particularly with scene of action commander (SAC) duties and so forth.

By December winter had really kicked in, with frequent periods of very poor weather; but the dhows – more date smugglers than oil smugglers – remained determined. The sustainment of our boats quickly became a priority, particularly for the CTG. The prevailing wind was generally from the north-west, which made it very difficult for the boarding teams to punch up that way into their pouncer points. However, when the seas came through it was a very short, steep and heavy south-easterly swell which caused most concern. We determined that, if we were going to sustain the operation, we could not keep our boats and people out there for such long periods of time. Fortunately we had found that the helicopter, its presence, and particularly its down wash, could still make life very uncomfortable for these heavily laden dhows. So we revised our tactics somewhat, and when the sea state was unsuitable for the boats, we were able to effectively turn around the dhows using the helicopter.

We did not see many steel-hulls, certainly none coming out of the KAA, but a number of those detained in COMISKEY tried to escape, perhaps taking advantage of the weather. On a number of occasions *Darwin* raced across the top of area MA-3 to intercept. In one incident we took down a large tug that collided with USS *Paul Hamilton*. This became an interesting evolution, for although we had the ROE to use warning shots to stop the escapee, we were not allowed to do so. Our command was also reluctant to allow fast roping, so we finally resorted to the traditional boat insertion.

After just a few days of very heavy weather COMISKEY would fill with two dozen or so ships that needed to be cleared. With two or three boats, depending on whether it was *Darwin* or *Anzac* assisting, the RAN units possessed a significant advantage. They could complete at least double the amount of work of a US Navy unit with their single RHIB. Further increasing our workload, the battle group was about to rotate and US Navy units were becoming scarce.

January saw a resurgence of dhow breakouts. The weather was often marginal, but we persisted with our tactics, utilising the helicopter and boats when we could get them up there. Unfortunately the foul weather meant some dhows got through, but there was very little we could do about it. On one particular occasion we were attempting to clear a large backlog in COMISKEY, when we were told to hurry up and get back



to MA-1 because there was a breakout in progress. In area MA-1, just one ship was trying to hold the fort, with about 50 dhows trying to get out. We cleared 14 vessels, of which some 13 we had had to round up on a 12-mile front across MA-3.

One of our biggest fears was that one of the many fishing dhows in the area might be a floating bomb. In late December inside MA-1, I had probably been getting too comfortable with dhows passing within 200 yards, so after New Year I changed tack. Instead of running around at three knots, *Darwin* would patrol at six knots minimum, to balance acoustic signature with manoeuvrability. The instructions to the officer of the watch were to alter course to achieve a closest point of approach of at least 500 yards. If any dhow continued to try to close we would then go through our force protection procedures. We also increased anti-piracy measures at night. All doors were locked internally using rope, while we kept a lookout in the helicopter control station with communications.

It would be safe to say that in December we were blissfully unaware of Operation BASTILLE, even though we thought that something might be coming down the track. However, by January there was no mistaking the growing tension and speculation about what might occur. I at least had a bit of a 'heads up'. I had hosted a MIF commanders' luncheon on board and as all were US Navy commanding officers, I received a pretty good brief on what they were planning. Later on came the brief by the CTG on the Australian plan.

As the BASTILLE/FALCONER plan started to emerge, our preparedness again came to the forefront of our thinking, particularly in the areas of nuclear, biological and chemical defence (NBCD), air warfare and damage control. It must be remembered that the busy tasking and constraints of MA-1 greatly limited what you could achieve. On the odd occasion we got down to COMISKEY for a replenishment at sea; we could then do a 76mm and .50-calibre surface weapons firing and CIWS pre-action calibration. But I remember that every time I tried to stop and do an engineering casualty drill we would have an unknown aircraft approach us that would necessitate initiation of warning procedures and emergency gas turbine re-starts. Thankfully these inevitably turned out to be oil rig helicopters, but we were frustrated in our training efforts on all occasions.

The MIO commander, as well as being the local surface warfare commander, also took on local air warfare duties. We then found that our CTG, with a very small staff, took on a much broader range of command responsibilities and so it was quite often difficult to deal with a lot of those normal issues that would normally go through Maritime Headquarters.

We came to February being briefed that the likelihood of war was not a case of if, but when. The dhow breakouts were fairly sporadic but they were becoming more persistent. Quite a number of them would require multiple reboards and, basically

from this point onwards, we actually maintained an almost continuous MIO surge. There were at least two MIF units up at MA-1 and a third in MA-2, boat patrols at all times and, when we could, a helicopter airborne at all times.

It was very apparent that the UNSCR part of the equation was almost secondary. Our whole reason for being up there with the MIO basically became counter-mining and counter-sabotage. We just could not afford to have vessels coming out, even though they might have been carrying dates, but possibly carrying mines, getting around the back of the aircraft carriers and the amphibious units and dropping mines in the rear.

We found the helicopter presence to be the best deterrent. A helicopter, particularly before sunset, certainly reduced the number of large breakouts. Also at this time we had the battlegroup changeouts and a lot more of the US Navy units were being trained up by the RAN and RN units. We had a much larger group of NCB-capable units so we could maintain this surge, and it was particularly important and gave each ship a little bit of respite. I think on every second or third night we would get down to a place we called the 'Promised Land' or somewhere – I can't remember – but down in the middle of MA-2.

By this stage the leakers out of COMISKEY had dried up. Our involvement in COMISKEY doing '986' boardings had virtually finished because we were needed up in MA-1 and the US Navy guardship maintained those duties. We were required to continue to train up a lot of newcomers. Three or four new British ships arrived requiring our expertise to get their teams up to speed. So we were doing a fair bit of babysitting as well.

Leadership, morale and team cohesion were probably among the biggest command focuses. At this stage we had the anthrax issue wreak havoc within the task group and I would say that it was probably my biggest challenge during my tenure in command. The return to Australia of almost 10 per cent of the ship's company just prior to a conflict, including almost half the cooks, and integration of new personnel as an MIO surge was underway, certainly tested the organisation. It was interesting that, when the policy was implemented, and as it was voluntary, I felt that, as a commanding officer, a lot of the command leadership aspects were removed. I had a number of sailors who were still trying to determine their decision come to me and say: 'Sir, if you order me to take this I will do it quite happily', and I thought that was interesting indeed. I said: 'I'm sorry, I can't'. We were up at MA-1 at the time and had been there for a few weeks and it was quite an interesting issue to have to deal with as well as maintain your focus on the job at hand.

Patrol craft from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) had been around throughout, but by this time our interaction with them was a lot greater. They were becoming a lot more interested in what we were doing. A number of times when we were operating near KAAOT and MABOT you would actually get quite close to these guys who had a number of boats, two or three at a time, with binoculars and weapons and so forth keeping an eye on what we were doing and it became a real game of cat and mouse.

In February we had the Iraqi Presidential Yacht, with a few holes in it, moved up to the Shatt Al Arab (SAA) waterway. It came out pretty suddenly one night and that caused quite a bit of excitement for the evening as did a number of other patrol forces that were moved from the KAA to the SAA. So that got everyone thinking about what was going on.

There was also a massive build-up of coalition forces at this time. The third carrier arrived with its associated supply ships, amphibious units and so forth and it became very, very crowded – not just on the water, but in the air. That became quite a bit of concern to us as well. Basically you had numerous units up there conducting interdependent but quite separate operations, and all getting in each other's way. As the junior ship I was kept on my toes with sea manners and customs as well as rule of the road, and quite often we had to barge our way through to get our job done.

By this stage the survey vessel HMS *Roebuck* had conducted a rapid environmental assessment which was a great relief and basically indicated an expanded amount of water available to me by at least 30 per cent. This made me feel a lot more comfortable, gave me a lot more freedom of manoeuvre, particularly when anti-ship missile defence and small boat attacks weighed heavily on my mind.



*A sailor from HMAS Darwin keeps watch, March 2003*

Interoperability at this stage was something we had worked on very hard in the task group. We all shared common radios – ADF WAGTAILs, and the coalition wide area network (COWAN) – and had a lot of procedures to avoid a blue-on-blue engagement. By this stage I think we, as a multinational force, were more than ready to deal with what was coming around the corner.

In March, we were basically back to where we were in November – the dhows were very persistent. The weather was improving as winter had finished, and they were becoming even more persistent. We had not seen it for some time, but on one particular night a couple of dhows tried to escape through Kuwaiti waters. They did that once, they got shot at and a crewman was killed. *Anzac's* boarding team was closest to the scene on that occasion, so we did not see the dhows attempt to escape through Kuwaiti waters after that.

The attempted evasion through Iranian waters was also starting to be foiled by the IRGCN, who actually almost became a de facto MIF partner at some stage. They were stopping them and turning them around as well. We found ourselves quite often with a dhow on the other end of the circuit pleading for assistance from Australian Navy units, so there was quite a bit of interplay there to make sure that we were not stepping on the toes of the Iranians. Again the tactics were to just maintain that surge and that is what we did.

On 17 March, the day before we were assigned to FALCONER, we witnessed an interesting phenomenon. We were expecting to have to go and clear out the KAA of dhows. With CNN and the BBC reporting imminent hostilities, during the day all these dhows started to stream down the KAA. The ones in the lead were waving white flags and wanting to dump their cargo and be let go.

We were appointed on the spot, as scene of action commander, and basically we suspected that these operations were coordinated and that rang true when we just grabbed the lead dhow and said 'Okay, bring them all down here and assemble them'. He got on the radio and the next thing you know about 50 dhows came down and neatly anchored themselves in an area we called the MCG. The MIF's role then was to inspect every one of them, not so concerned about their oils or dates, but to make sure there was no contraband, mines or other explosives on board. We then marked them so we knew when they had been cleared and then sent them down Red Route One, as it became known, down the western side of the NAG away from the high value units. We would pass them on to other MIF units stationed along Red Route One so we maintained tracking of them well clear down to the south and that went on well and truly throughout the night. Steel-hulls were contained in the KAA still and COMISKEY basically started to dry up.

Another factor in March that was concerning us was the threat of pre-emptive attack. Intelligence was quite concerning, so missile, mine, asymmetric attack and NBCD certainly got all our attention. There was a risk of blue-on-blue, with the numerous vessels all trying to operate in the same area. In fact one evening, I nearly shot a SEAL boat because, after ignoring numerous warnings, he finally flicked on his IFF mode 4. That happened, I think, on more than one occasion. *Kanimbla* had a similar experience with a SEAL boat.

We had H hour on the 19th, although the Tomahawks did not go at that time. We had a number of false starts, and as has been reported in the media, the plan actually changed and I had to tell a number of my people on numerous occasions to go to bed and not stay up for the fireworks show.

In March and April, during the hostilities, MIO changed quite significantly. The UNSCR was basically a thing of the past. There were no more dhows and we had established sea control pretty much in the mouth of the KAA. We had another breakout of steel-hulls between the 19th and 22nd of March and these were all the fellows that Rotations One and Two had been dealing with for the previous 12 months. It was a 'who's who' of group threes. They came streaming out. We assembled them all in an anchorage on the western side of MA-2 and, as we did for the dhows in the previous few days, we had to inspect them all, mark them and send them down Red Route One. We were in charge of that with the assistance of several other units and, again, that lasted for three days. It was quite a long task. COMISKEY was vacant and we had established sea control in the NAG. This proved to be a vital pre-condition for the Al Faw peninsula assault and associated naval gunfire support, providing a significant threat minimisation for these activities.

MIO for this period was basically to maintain a surge for counter-mining. *Kanimbla* intercepted a mine-laying tug during this period. That reinforced the reasons we were doing all this. As there were no merchant ships coming out, which had been one of our indicators that the place had not been mined, we could not rely on that information any longer, so we had to get up in their faces and prevent them from laying mines.

We had heard about the suicide boats that were found. At one stage we had a surface action group (SAG) with the commander in HMS *Chatham* at anchor. I have never done a SAG at anchor before, but we were covering the entrance to the SAA with our SM1 (Standard missile) because of the effectiveness of its surface-to-surface mode.

Following this tasking, the MIO and sea control duties fell to the NGS-capable units due to the pending Al Faw assault. *Darwin* was re-positioned to the south-west off Kuwait as the sole surface combatant providing force protection to the amphibious force assembly area. This provided another significant leadership challenge. Although the task was important and the asymmetric threat remained high, no formal instructions, higher command interest, or significant activity occurred for a week except for a

couple of Scud missiles fired towards Kuwait that were outside our area of influence. This sudden, completely autonomous and non-eventful re-tasking, compared to what other RAN units were doing and being publicly praised for in the KAA, caused the ship's company to feel isolated, forgotten, and unimportant. Keeping them focused on the task and mission, inspiring them to not become complacent, and reinforcing the fact that *Darwin* was still part of a team effort, required all of the energy I could muster. Thankfully, we were again re-tasked to resume KAA guardship duties for the remainder of the conflict. We were there to keep the waterway open for humanitarian aid to get through and for legitimate fishing dhows to operate.

Unfortunately the morale situation on board and with families at home was not helped by the lack of mention of *Darwin* in the ADF - initiated Operation FALCONER media coverage. This was exacerbated just prior to our outchop when higher command omitted *Darwin* from the visit schedule of the artist and photographer from the Australian War Memorial. The major lesson I learned from the deployment was that morale is a principle of war for a good reason – a ship CO's responsibility for it is difficult enough without the enemy's employment of information operations being aided and abetted by blue forces.



*Captain Peter Sinclair & Rotation Three staff, 2002*

## PART VI – OPEN FORUM

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**Captain Roger Boyce:** I have a question for Commander Aaron Ingram. You mentioned the weather affecting your operations, and I am wondering about a point that Rear Admiral Bill Dovers made which was the necessity to establish the background level of activity before you actually understood what was going on in the area and before you became effective. Did the weather have any effect on the fishing fleet that was up there at the time?

**Commander Aaron Ingram:** Certainly when we had the quite steep south-easterly seas the fishing boats tapered off and then the sun would shine and the boats would come out, including their little canteen boats, those little fast speed boats which also caused us a bit of concern.

**Commodore James Goldrick:** Clearly, on Rotation Three coming in, we had achieved the rules of engagement change the British needed to come into MA-1. One other factor, apparent through the last day and half, is the British focus on activities other than MIF operations. To what extent had the availability increased because we had a problem with HMS *Portland* which wanted to be there but frankly was not allowed to be there as much as she liked.

**Captain Ray Griggs:** HMS *Argyle* continued to be interested in operations other than MIF. The good thing about her was that she was very active and very good, but she was away a lot. She went into Kuwait, into Doha and also down to Shazah as well as Dubai.

**Commander Aaron Ingram:** In February and March when the four British frigates came up into the Persian Gulf, there was a restriction that only one at any one time could operate in the Northern Arabian Gulf. Consequently, they were changing out very regularly and we often had to train up a new ship.

**Captain Allan Du Toit:** I hear it was pretty consistent throughout. When they did operate they were effective. A classic example was over Christmas and New Year 2001/2002 where, of the 36 British ships in-theatre, not one was at sea and they were scattered from Mombassa to the Seychelles.

**Dr David Stevens:** We are lucky enough to have a representative from HMAS *Newcastle* in the audience – I would like to ask Lieutenant Commander Bateman to make some comments on current MIF operations [2003].

**Lieutenant Commander Simon Bateman:** I was flight commander in *Newcastle* for SLIPPER Rotation Two and, once again, flight commander in *Newcastle* for SLIPPER Rotation Six & CATALYST Rotation 1. CATALYST is the operation responsible for



the rebuilding of Iraq. It is still very busy up there and is still evolving. Lieutenant Commander Penny Campbell informed me this morning that United Nations Security Council Resolution 986 has now lapsed as of 22 November 2003. The resolution we are working on up there at the moment is 1483, which is essentially the stopping of import and export of a number of items, including weapons and artefacts, and stopping leadership and former Baa'th Party people coming out. However the Australians are not into leadership interdiction operations, so if our boarding parties were to come across any of these people, they would be handed across to the Americans.

Ship numbers have not changed that much; when I left there was an Italian helicopter carrier, HMS *Sutherland*, us, and two US Navy units. We had a few problems with the IRGCN. It seems a large number of ships for the maintenance of security of the Iraqi territorial waters, and it is. You look around on any one evening and there are just warships everywhere. They are kept busy, because shortly after we arrived in August the Americans decided they were going to start detaining vessels again. There was a little bit of a state of flux after the war, but come August they started detaining them again. They have got an area up there called the SMUG BOX; for SMUG BOX just read COMISKEY – it is just a little bit further north, on the western side of MA-1 South, and that is where the detained vessels now go.

One of the interesting tasks was facilitating the Iraqi legal system getting up on its feet. The Chief Petty Officer got a judge out to the ships and he held court on board each of the detained vessels and then made a decision. He made sure he was back on his little boat heading back to Iraq before he made a decision about these ships. Out of the twelve courts that he did, seven of the ships continued in detention and the crew and the items were charged. This was an interesting change in operations up there.

Traffic-wise, there is nothing coming out of the KAA really any more. The only traffic that comes out is very much regulated; we know all about it because it is coming from the port of Umm Qasr which is regulated by Stevedore Services of America. We are probably seeing more traffic coming out from the SAA now, once again regulated, as a contract has been let with Maersk to regulate operations from another port.

All the 'Wild West' traffic that was in KAA moved across to the SAA. That was very much the focus of our attention because that is where all the smuggling traffic is now coming from.

Smuggling still has a high priority because it is seen to be a confidence-builder for the Iraqi people. Smuggling is now seen as goods being taken from the Iraqi people and it is slowing down the rebuilding of the Iraqi economy.

We all thought that having people on the ground was the solution to stop the smuggling out of the SAA. But as we know, the forces on the ground in Iraq are spread quite thin outside of Baghdad. They all seem to be concentrating north of Baghdad, so the British

run Basrah and every now and then they will come on down the SAA just to see if they can police this illegal smuggling operation, but without much success.

In late September an American expeditionary strike group moved into the NAG for an operation. They were at the point of actually putting Marines ashore to try to halt the illegal traffic coming out of the SAA, but eventually withdrew.

The other thing that we are very keen on is security within the territorial waters, especially of the oil terminals. Captain Christian, [*Newcastle's* CO] who was XJ, designated a two-mile exclusion zone around the Mina Al Bakr Oil Terminal (MABOT). We were very worried about the dhow of death, as he called it, especially in August after we started hearing about the damage to the oil lines north of Baghdad. The last thing we wanted was damage to MABOT, bearing in mind the added damage to oil tankers alongside the facility. When I left we had three large tankers berthed on MABOT, with each taking out \$US40 million worth of oil, which, of course, is hopefully coming back into the economy via the Southern Oil Company.

We were very keen on maintaining security around MABOT. Late in August we were given the task of looking after the pumping station for MABOT on the Al Faw peninsula, when rumours – or intelligence – suggested that some of the former Iraqi Republican Guards were going to attack that pumping station. So we started to maintain a continual helicopter presence around the pumping station.

We are still experiencing problems with the dhows. Dhows are still slipping out of the SAA and, in conjunction with Iranian rig tenders, are taking away oil which is being offloaded in international waters south-east of the terminals.

The ongoing blue-on-blue concerns remain, as does the risk of dhows being used in asymmetric strikes. We still have the blue lights on top of the RHIBs, however we did have an incident when a RHIB returned without his blue light and our ever-present force protection patrols decided to light him up with a flare. Luckily the incident concluded without accident.

**Captain Ray Griggs:** One of the features of the traffic up there was the legal Iranian traffic from Khorramshahr down the SAA across to Kuwait – what happened with that?

**Lieutenant Commander Simon Bateman:** It is still a problem, and exacerbated by the fact that the traffic is coming out of the SAA now which we know is Iraq on one side, Iran on the other. The smugglers were quick to realise that we did not go near Iranian ships. Quite often the British Lynx helicopters would go close to Abadan, which is the port just near Khorramshahr. They would see these boats loading on the Iraqi side and they would come down with an Iranian flag. Unfortunately we could not go near them. Smuggling is still rife and is exacerbated by the traffic coming out of the SAA.



*HMA Ships Sydney, Success & Brisbane, December 1990*

**PART VII:  
LOGISTICS AND  
LEGAL ASPECTS  
1990-2003**

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## Twenty Three

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### Commodore Graham Sloper, AM, RAN (Rtd)

#### *Commanding Officer HMAS Success DAMASK I & II*

In this paper I will deal with the Royal Australian Navy's first task group deployment to the Persian Gulf, with particular emphasis on the afloat support aspects. Kuwait was invaded on 2 August 1990. On Tuesday 7 August we had a VIP Sea Day on board *Success* and during the day Rear Admiral Doolan, the Maritime Commander, took me aside and said: 'This is just an informal warning, but start getting yourself prepared. There will probably be an announcement later in the week.' The three ships that had just come back from the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 1990 exercise (*Adelaide*, *Darwin* and *Success*) were well worked up and would be the vessels going if there was a deployment to be made. We dropped the VIPs back in Sydney then headed south towards Melbourne.

We received the official notification of our deployment on the following Thursday night. We came back from Melbourne, arriving in Sydney at about midday on Saturday to prepare ourselves. We had tremendous support from everyone militarily, and even the trade unions. When I wanted some extra boats for mine patrols, knowing the logistics system, I said: 'I will have five', because I only wanted two. They came good and gave me six. I had nowhere to put them and the welders were out on strike at the time. But they were found in the local pub and they gave up their strike and welded on extra mountings and other things for us. Every military road fuel tanker and Shell tanker was commandeered and while we were ammunitioning on one side of the ship alongside, the road fuel tankers were pouring aviation fuel into us on the other. Quite a few rules were bent on that Saturday and Sunday. *Success* sailed on the Tuesday and we honestly thought we were pretty well prepared because we had just come from RIMPAC and Australian ships were doing fairly well over there.

Nevertheless, we had been on a peacetime footing and were not necessarily prepared for what we were going to experience. It was here that the Sea Training Group did a particularly fine job. Normally when we practised fire-fighting it tended to lack realism – who would allow a fire hose filled with sea water to be let off in his ship? Nor would you usually let off a smoke generator, because it would get into the computers. On this occasion we had all these things happening at once, combined with air strikes all the way around from Sydney to Fremantle.

Because we had virtually no air defence, other than our antiquated Bofors 40mm guns, we embarked a detachment from the 16th Air Defence Regiment while in Fremantle

with their RBS70 missiles. They were magnificent when they came on board and integrated extremely well.

From the time we arrived in the Gulf of Oman up until Boxing Day, we were on interdiction duties. To give you some idea of the scope and the numbers involved in that four-month period, there were 6945 intercepts, 487 boardings and 35 diversions. Usually there was an Australian ship in most of these intercepts, because Australia was leading the other forces in their rules of engagement. We had practised it so well in the previous 10 years and we always had approval to proceed to the next step. Some of the other navies had to go back to their national headquarters to get approval.

*Success* was supporting 12 navies in the Gulf of Oman and up in the North Arabian Gulf (NAG). She was a favoured ship for replenishment because we were multi-role and every other replenishment ship there was single role. We were also shallow draught so we could more easily get into the NAG and we were faster than the other replenishment ships. Generally, we were occupied in the NAG – we would go up and then we would come back to where the large tankers were to top up, before returning to the NAG.

As an indication of the workload on *Success*, since commissioning in 1986 and up to December 1988, she had done 386 replenishments in total. In 1990 we did 356, of which 218 were during Operation DAMASK. The work rate of the ship's company was just unbelievable. There was nothing too tough for them to take on. Generally we were compatible with most of the other navies – sometimes we were not – but we managed to modify rigs so we could do whatever was needed. On one day alone we conducted 17 replenishments. By about 2300 the guys were getting physically worn out and we still had two to go and I said: 'We are calling it off for a few hours. Everyone has got to get some rest before we have an accident'. It was like a trade union delegation on the bridge with all these sailors coming up saying: 'We are Aussies – we can do it.' They wanted to finish off the commitment we had. So we double-crewed every rig to finish and then they all went to bed for about eight hours. It was a really heavy workload, but the sailors felt that they were accomplishing something.

We generally sourced our fuel from Saudi Arabia or from the Americans through both their merchant support and their oilers. Generally the Americans got it from the Saudis.

We had arrangements on a knock-by-knock basis for payment with the British, the Americans and the Canadians, but not with other nations. So basically we came to an agreement that whenever I gave them anything, whether it was ice-cream or ammunition or fuel, I would signal to Australia for information to their embassy that subject to concurrence and the currency of the ship they should pay up at the going rate, say fuel at \$550 per tonne. They did that without any qualms whatsoever. At the end of the action the Saudis advised that they were not going to charge for the fuel.

Generally as far as other logistics were concerned we sourced them from various ports. They have specifically designed barges that came out to the three-mile limit and we had acquired a cellular phone. One of the 'benefits', that *Success* had was that we did not have SATCOM. We had the very old fashioned fleet broadcast with the old paper roll. But it meant that I could sit on the bridge and get everyone's status report. If a Belgian ship wanted 50 tonnes of spuds, you would get on the cellular phone and you would ring up one of the local providores and say: 'Could you be three miles off Dubai (or wherever)?' At two o'clock in the afternoon you would go and pick up your 50 tonnes of spuds, find the Belgian and give it to him. He would say: 'How did you know?' and we would say: 'We are Aussies - we know all this sort of stuff.' It never occurred to them that we would be so old-fashioned that we could read their broadcasts. That is where *Success* picked up the nickname 'The Stealth Tanker'. We used to just appear out of the blue with whatever anyone wanted.

There were some problems with aviation fuel. We had some of our tanks, capable of taking 1000 tonnes, full of it and it was the first time that we had carried so much. At that stage there was a wet-gas damping system which was putting water condensation into the fuel and our strippers could not get it out quickly enough to cover all the aviation needs. I discovered then that aviators lack of a sense of humour when you give them a bit of water in their fuel - they do not seem to take too kindly to it.

Another problem was with the old-fashioned communications, although a lot of what I am talking about has now been solved. It would take us two hours to get a 'flash' message, 24 hours to get an operational 'immediate', four days to get a 'priority' and anything up to 28 days to get a 'routine' signal. We did not have that much trouble getting rid of them because we could pass our traffic to other ships to get it out. But we did have a lot of trouble receiving up-to-date information. On rare occasions we got high frequency (HF) back to Australia, about twice a day for about an hour and a half to two hours. It was during one of these periods that the first instance of micro-management occurred. I am positive senior management did not know it was going on. For example, one night I was doing an intercept at about 2100 near the Straits of Hormuz, and we had HF communications and suddenly I received a request from Maritime Headquarters (MHQ) saying: 'What course and speed are you on? What are you going to do next? How far off are you?' We lost communications with Australia straight away. I finished checking and there was no doubt the Maritime Commander was unaware of what was going on. That is one of the dangers that you now face with improved communications - there will be micro-management and there is no easy solution. There were some other problems. For example, at one stage we had 13 different titles for the operation, depending where you were and what you were doing.

We found a lot of value in TV. We could receive CNN direct on Channel 36 from Dubai. We often got information on Scud launches from CNN before we got it from anywhere else.



Some other little lessons we learned. We found our next of kin forms were being used as the justification for leave warrants. With the increasing number of single parents now, people were using their children as their next of kin to justify travel to them on leave. The last thing you need is a chaplain going around to a seven-year-old boy saying: 'Your father has just been killed.' So that had to be changed. We found most personnel on board did not have a will. So a Reserve legal officer came on board in *Stirling* and again for the trip back from *Stirling* to Adelaide on the return voyage, and he assisted everyone with their legal problems. That was of immense value.

Veterans' Affairs at that stage was based on an Army requirement, and the Army does not have people going overseas until they are 18. So we found out our people under the age of 18 were not covered by Veterans' Affairs. I believe that has changed now as well.



*Replenishment operations in HMAS Success during DAMASK I*

I had some legal complexities involving discipline with the embarked detachment from the 16th Air Defence Regiment. When the first two combatants returned to Australia and were replaced by *Sydney* and *Brisbane* we had had no idea when we were going back in *Success*. So the boys from the three ships were drinking in one of the rugby clubs and a sub-lieutenant from *Sydney* turned around and said: 'Well, the reason *Success* is still here is you have not got it right, and when you get it right you will be allowed to go back to Australia' to which the Gunner of the Year for the 16th Air Defence Regiment, went *whack* and laid him out cold. So he was brought up to me on a charge of assaulting an officer. With all the evidence and his plea of guilty I had no choice but to find him guilty. I said: 'Before I sentence you, if it is any consolation I would have done the same thing, so I am giving you 14 days at 1 Military Correction Establishment (MCE) suspended.' The Chief Coxswain said: 'You can't do that' and I said: 'I can bloody well do what I like. It is my ship.' And he said: 'No, you can't do it'. So I said: 'Clear the court, everybody out.' I said: 'Why can't I do it?' He said: 'He is a soldier, you can only give him seven days.' I said: 'Good'. Whereas I could send a sailor away for 14, soldiers I can only do seven. I called him back inside and said: 'Sorry, I made a mistake, I can only give you seven days suspended, and that is what you have got.'

The sense of humour was always there. There were lots of things, like the ships alongside who paid us the occasional visit. One morning we woke up to find their funnels painted pink. So I just said it was their embarked air crew expressing their dissatisfaction with still being up there. But I was told that this was not true, especially when they found the pink paintbrushes in one of my gash bins. But the sailors kept their sense of humour throughout.

There were other things that rankled. We had to take the nerve agent pre-action (NAPS) tablets. We were told that they had to be taken three a day at eight-hour intervals, and if you did not have them within an hour either side of the set time you lost your immunity. That meant you had to change the whole routine of the ship to be able to give the sailors their pill at the right time.

When we got to the Gulf the temperature outside was over 40°, the water temperature was about 30°. That does not cool computers, so we had a lot of computing problems. We had even more troubles though, when we shut the ship ventilation down and had people on the upper deck manning the weapons in nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) suits. They could only stay there for about 20 minutes before they dropped of heat exhaustion. So we had to change the routines of the ship significantly while we were there.

The mine threat became the most serious thing we had to deal with, but in a ship the size of *Success* there was very little you could do. The quality control of the Iraqi mines was suspect, because when a moored mine breaks loose they are supposed to neutralise. The ones the Iraqis were using did not, and so we faced a drifting mine threat, which

is completely contrary to the Geneva Convention. You cannot see a drifting mine until it is within 1000 metres and it is very hard to manoeuvre *Success* in that time. So to keep the morale up we had a sentry up in the bow. We used helicopters during the daytime and boats whenever we could to patrol ahead. The sentry had a rifle, but would be no use whatsoever, because even if he shot the mine he would still get covered in shrapnel. But it kept the morale going. Another little aside – I said: ‘I want the mine sentry more comfortable up there. I will give him a nice, comfortable chair in the bow of the ship.’ About half an hour later I look up there and there is this lovely padded swivel leather chair. I thought that chair looked familiar and went back to my office to discover I did not have a chair anymore.

We had troubles with command and control. We had practised everything through RIMPAC. We knew how command and control worked. When we got up there we went into a thing called ‘loose association’. I had never heard of it before, and I hope I never hear of it again. It was a rotating procedure, where every month the command and control of the group is changed. It was very difficult. Then when we actually went into the Arabian Gulf I was put under a Canadian admiral for logistic work, but I was still getting instructions in command and control from the Australians. A lot of the time you did not actually know where you stood. Sometimes it was just easier to put your head in a bucket of sand and just get on with it.

All I can say is logistically we did not have a problem. I have never had to work as hard, or have a crew work as hard as they did while they were up there. It was just magnificent to see the way the crew reacted and at the end we were basically the only replenishment ship servicing the 12 navies. We just went round and round and round. About every 10 days they would give us a day off just to pull out of the threat area and then we would go and do it all again. All I can say is congratulations to all the Sea Training Group and everyone who got us ready for it because it was just magnificent.

# Twenty Four

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Commander Chris Percival, AM, RAN

*Officer in Charge Logistic Support Element DAMASK V;  
Commander Logistic Support Element SLIPPER Two,  
Three & Four, BASTILLE & FALCONER*

It is a pleasure to be able to discuss the logistics aspects of supporting Royal Australian Navy operations in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea over a period of about 10 years. I was lucky enough to be the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the logistic support element (LSE) in 1992 and Commander LSE in 2002-2003.

My emphasis will be on logistics support – then and now; that is, from 1992 until 2003. I am going to describe some logistics lessons and challenges faced as the Royal Australian Navy Liaison Officer (RANLO) and the OIC of the LSE.

I was in the Middle East from April to October 1992. HMAS *Darwin* was the only unit we were supporting. The ship was now working out of the Red Sea, which was a change from what had happened during the First Gulf War. The line of communications for logistics was certainly extended, as the LSE was located in Bahrain. The LSE comprised six personnel split from southern Europe to the Middle East. Some personnel were stationed at Hurghada, which is a beautiful resort on the Red Sea, and others at the United States Naval Air Station, Sigonella, in Sicily. Sigonella was utilised as the line of communication to take things from Bahrain to Egypt. It was quite convoluted, but a particularly efficient process, which enabled us to deliver and backload equipment and personnel through the region, courtesy of the intra-theatre United States (US) Navy airlift capability.

Command and control of the LSE in those days was a little bit different to what we see today. The command and control for the LSE was through the Naval Support Commander. We were responsive to Maritime Command and also the Commanding Officer (CO) of the unit on-station.

Bahrain was chosen because it was the US logistic hub for the Middle East. In those days the United States Administration Support Unit was a very small but effective group of people. They were on the same site where the US Naval Support Activity is these days but were only about one-tenth of its size.

Inch Cape Shipping Company, which provided great support for us over the last few years under another name, was providing support across the region for us at that time as well.

One LSE staff member was deployed continuously to Sigonella on a six-week rotation to ensure that the cargo we actually put on flights out of Bahrain would get to Hurghada. On numerous occasions we would end up sighting pallets at the end of the airstrip having been off-loaded because of other priorities within the US Navy system. The LSE member had to wait for the aircraft bound for Hurghada to actually depart Sigonella, and then call the LSE office in Bahrain and advise that the aircraft had left and there was no cargo on deck. Then we could safely assume that *Darwin's* aircraft could come into Hurghada and know it was actually going to pick up some stores.

At the Hurghada Air Head, we also had a rotational position embedded within the US logistic beach detachment. This person ensured the receipt and dispatch of cargo coming in for the unit on-station. This position also coordinated the provisions delivery – some of it good and some of it not so good – to the unit. I recall one incident when the truck from Alexandria arrived with fresh meat. The trouble was that it had been a seven-hour drive carrying fresh meat on the back of an open truck. When I asked why it was not refrigerated they said: 'Oh, you should have asked for refrigeration. We could have given you that.'

The beach detachment to the US had a very small office space that was set up with a brew room and a reception area. It was some distance out of the base, which was actually an Egyptian Air Force Base collocated with the Hurghada domestic air terminal. The outstanding accommodation was the Jasmine Village on the beach. Any night you could go out and have a beautiful wafting smell of grey water being used to water the plants in the gardens. I am not sure how many people ate their vegetables, and I was a bit suspect of the health hazards in doing so. Nevertheless it was the only place that was suitable. It had fans, not much air conditioning, but provided a great location. In fact, we had our INMARSAT set up covertly on the back of the veranda, cleverly disguised behind a curtain so no-one actually knew what we were doing.

One of the major issues we had – and this is still relevant today – was the support provided by the Australian diplomatic missions in the Middle East. In 1992 we worked very closely with the Australian Embassy in Riyadh. At that time we did not have any military attachés and support was provided by Australian diplomatic staff. They provided outstanding support, both to the LSE and also to the diplomatic clearance process for ship visits to foreign ports in the region. Of course, they covered all the areas, as they still do, from Riyadh – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Now it is the Australian Embassy in Abu Dhabi, supported by the Australian Consulate in Dubai, which covers the UAE.

The Embassy in Cairo provided the same level of support in Egypt, and also hosted a fantastic *Anzac* Day function, where we had a great game of cricket. We had a young lieutenant supply officer embedded in the staff there to provide support on the ground in Egypt. He also provided the interface we needed to ensure we were getting the

provisions and the delivery of services down to Hurghada and Safaga, where *Darwin* had the pleasure of going alongside for a short visit.

The port visits that the LSE supported out of Bahrain during my tenure as the OIC were Safaga and Hurghada in Egypt; Jeddah a couple of times; Yanbu Al Bahr in Saudi Arabia; Muscat in Oman; and Karachi in Pakistan. On one occasion the CO of *Darwin*, Commander Martyn Bell, called me and advised that he wished to conduct a port visit to Yanbu al Bahr in Saudi Arabia. While I had no idea at that time where this port was, as any good liaison officer would do, I advised that that would be no problems. Regrettably for me, Commander Bell was quite the astute CO and questioned whether I knew where this particular port was. Caught out big time, I had to admit I had no idea. He advised me to find Jeddah on the world map and look south. Sure enough, there it was. The industrial port of Yanbu al Bahr was a great challenge for us to get into for the first time. Subsequent visits for ships went in there, I think, with great success. The visit to Muscat in Oman of course was a great rest and recreation port for the sailors.

*Darwin's* final port call was to Karachi, as the ship chopped out of the region. I was asked to go and do a security assessment in Karachi. I popped down to the markets and wandered around there for a while and thought 'Well, no-one has shot me.' I responded and said: 'Everything is safe, sir.' Then, when he turned up with the Commander for the Naval Force and Security Forces they had three tactical vehicles with machine guns following him. I must admit to being a little concerned about my personal security after that. I certainly did not visit the markets again.

Host nation relationships were an important issue, and fundamental to our ability to get our job done effectively. Our relationship with Bahrain was particularly strong. Saudi Arabia was supportive, and I say that because we did have pretty good access to the country and their officials. Egypt was supportive, but the ability for us to piggyback on the US in Egypt enabled us to achieve a lot, which otherwise would have been extremely complex. Obviously the Embassy helped us to facilitate lots of things. Certainly the access and the lack of customs requirements, having gear sent via the US and intra-theatre logistic line of communication from Bahrain, allowed us to deliver and backload equipment, stores and personnel coming to and from Egypt without any problem at all. This obviously made it very easy to facilitate support for the ships operating in the Red Sea. We certainly had a great relationship with Oman during that period. I think at this time their musician trainees came out to be trained by the Army School of Music at Watsonia, so there was a direct relationship there. Our senior management had set up a great relationship with the Omani Navy as well. Pakistan was supportive in that obviously we would get into there and have a great visit.

Customs clearance was one of our challenges. We got things cleared in Bahrain, but we had to pay additional administrative charges to ensure things were cleared promptly. While things were seamless, or so they appeared, there was a cost involved. The

embarkation of RAN stores on US Navy flights meant there was a requirement for us to have people on the ground in all places: in Bahrain, Sigonella and Hurghada.

I will now move to the next phase of logistic support, which I think was the most dynamic of my experiences, because of the build-up in activities with which we were involved. The LSE in the Middle East adopted a phrase that was coined by my predecessors: 'absolutely anything, anywhere'. That was our intention: to provide support to the task group – anything to anywhere within the region.

When I arrived in-theatre in December 2002, the LSE comprised a team of seven people: myself; an OIC of the group who coordinated the RAN ship visits; a lieutenant as the deputy OIC of the LSE; a Chief Stores Naval (SN) and a Leading SN; a Petty Officer (PO) Naval Police Coxswain; and a sergeant lent to us as a detachment from the Joint Movement Group (JMG). The detachment from the JMG proved to be of immense value in the movement of people and stores coming in on the ADF sustainment flight process.

The disposition of LSE staff during 2002-03 was due to a number of reasons, not the least of which was a diplomatic requirement to have a small personnel footprint in Bahrain. Consequently I found myself, the Chief SN and the Leading SN in Bahrain on a formal basis; although we rotated through rather than remaining permanently located there because of restrictions on the number of permanent diplomatic staff. In Dubai we had the lieutenant commander and his small team. Fujairah became the site of the JMG detachment on a semi-permanent basis when the sustainment flights went from two to four per week. So we had people in three locations trying to provide the support that the ships and the personnel needed around the region.

Just prior to my departure from Australia, I was advised that command and control through Maritime Command was no longer to be the way we would do business. Our command and control was now to be along joint lines to Commander Australian Theatre (COMAST) through Commander Task Group (CTG) 633.1. I was therefore, as Commander LSE, directly responsible to CTG 633.1 for all logistic and personnel operations. We were responsive to Maritime Command, which again had some communication issues in the first instance.

The CTG, *Anzac*, *Darwin*, *Kanimbla* and Clearance Diving Team 3 (CDT 3) were the groups that we supported. Our support included personnel support, accommodation, logistics and management support.

US support was immense during this period – without it we could not have done what we did to provide the support that the units required. Commander Task Force 53 (CTF 53) and his staff were the US Navy Logistic Support Force for the Middle East region. They were the linchpin in all the operations and support that we provided to the RAN units. This was crucial to RAN sustainability during all phases leading up to and including Operation FALCONER.

COMMLOG 4 US Naval Forces Central Command provided an around-the-clock stock of all activities: intra-theatre, ship, air, road and also inventory management and supply.

The ageing Desert Duck transport aircraft are still there – the same SH-3 aircraft that we all dealt with throughout the 1990s. They are still doing a great job ferrying personnel stores and mail to and from the ships operating in the Gulf.

Afloat support, fuel and provisions came at regular intervals from predominantly US Navy afloat support ships coordinated by the LSE staff through CTF 53. The Fleet Intermediate Maintenance Activity (FIMA) detachment came up from Australia to work on both HMAS *Anzac* and *Darwin*. We were given the opportunity to put their 20-foot ISO container on a Boeing 747 aircraft that the Americans arranged for us, actually coming through Fujairah to on-load the gear to Bahrain. Without that we would not have been able to ship it because of the customs difficulties that we experienced going across borders from Fujairah, through the UAE, Saudi Arabia and then subsequently into Bahrain.



*Logistic Support Element badge*



Explosive ordnance procurement was a particularly noteworthy achievement. We had a requirement to get, at short notice, 5-inch gun ammunition and charge for *Anzac*. The Americans came to the party under the United States/Australia Cooperative Support Arrangement (ACSA), without any question or hesitation and provided the ordnance. It was the first time I had dealt with the Americans when they knew more about the implementing arrangement than I did, having actually drafted one for Maritime Command in the mid-1990s. That was very pleasing and pleasant to see that they were on board with it; they ticked it off and they organised the gear. They did not get the right stuff the first time, due primarily to a stock number discrepancy; but after a few deliveries and returns, all at sea at various locations in the Northern Arabian Sea, we got there eventually.

It was a long way from Australia to the air point of debarkation in Fujairah. Diplomatic clearance, especially for ammunition, was particularly complex and time-consuming. We again utilised the US intra-theatre delivery facility because for us to get the diplomatic clearance was nigh on impossible. Customs inspections and routines in the area of operations were fraught with frustration and, while we might get explosives ordnance through, it would take a long time to get from the point of debarkation to the actual point of use.

The split of the LSE manpower in Bahrain and the UAE was fraught with some difficulties, mainly because we could not have our group in the one spot to work together. That was, of course, due to a diplomatic requirement to meet a need, again to reduce the footprint. While we worked around it, ideally we would have preferred to have everyone together.

CDT 3 posed some particular challenges. There were 26 divers in the group, and four semi-trailers full of diving gear weighing some 45 tonnes. Unfortunately, we had nowhere to store the gear. Luckily we located a warehouse, next door to the port of Mina Sulman in Bahrain, which we were able to rent for a month. This was not a seamless operation and certainly required a lot of good luck and timing.

The liaison that we had with the diplomatic missions was outstanding. Without them I do not believe we could have done the things we did, formally and legally: diplomatic clearances into ports, helicopter clearances over ports, over-flights and all those other things that we needed to do. They really provided an outstanding service.

In terms of host nation relationships for my second deployment, Bahrain was robust. Saudi Arabia was strained in that we could not get access to the place at my level. I cannot talk about the higher strategic or operational level, but from my perspective it was difficult to get things done in Saudi Arabia. Our relations with the United Arab Emirates were strong, but Oman was more of a problem. I only say that because of the loss of over-flight privileges. The coalition was strong. The Royal Navy (RN) was strong, but did not give us much really because they did not have a lot to provide to us.

The friendly forces coalition centre (colloquially known as the F2C2) was outstanding. Through this venue we were able to engage the Polish with their logistic ship, which provided great support to our ships on-station.

The highlight of my deployment as the Commander of the LSE was the support we were able to provide to HMA Ships *Anzac*, *Darwin* and *Kanimbla* as well as CDT 3. We had a great working relationship with CTF 53 and my staff were outstanding. The fact that I nearly had an office allocated to me in the US Navy Support Activity in Bahrain was a major achievement.

On my way home I heard a CNN report in which a Major General from the US Air Force in Qatar said: 'The burden of success must be to protect lengthening supply lines', and I thought 'I have got to keep that.' It is so crucial to what we do as logistics people to try to support the operational organisation.



*Stores unloaded from the Desert Duck helicopter, 2002*

## Twenty Five

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### Lieutenant Commander Penny Campbell, RAN

*Task Group Command Legal Officer SLIPPER Four,  
BASTILLE & FALCONER*

I will address the legal issues relating to maritime interception operations (MIO) over a time-span of 13 years. My personal experience of the legal issues in the Gulf represents a small percentage of that time-frame; however, many of the more difficult legal issues – like establishing the Australian position on the excessive Iranian territorial sea claim, or finalising transit operating procedures through the Straits of Hormuz – had already been settled before I arrived in the area of operations (AO).

In reflecting on the legal issues of naval MIO from 1990-2003, what stands out is the regime of United Nations Security Council resolutions (UNSCR). That legal regime was established in the early days of MIO and served right through to the conflict in March 2003 and even governs current MIO today.

As you know, in the early months of 2003 the Bush administration pushed the Security Council to issue a further resolution, threatening war if Saddam Hussein did not give up banned weapons. Such a Security Council resolution was not passed, and military action commenced against Iraq on 20 March 2003.

The UNSCR implementing the sanctions regime and maritime embargo were not cancelled or suspended by the Security Council. The general view therefore, is that they are extant and continued to operate up to and during the time of the recent Iraq War. This produces the curious situation of having both the traditional laws of armed conflict and naval warfare, and the Security Council resolution mechanisms available to support maritime action once hostile actions commenced against Iraq. This was most important in the areas of blockade, boarding and searching, and in capture or seizure – areas common to both normal UN sanctions enforcement and traditional naval warfare.

The Security Council is the UN's enforcement arm. Its primary responsibility is to maintain international peace and security and it is charged under the Charter with the sole authority to determine what measures are necessary to restore that peace and security.

The important aspect to note about the sanctions and maritime interception regime established under the UNSCR is that the Council specifically referred to Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Article 39 of the Charter states:

The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.

The measures that the Security Council has available to it include, under Article 41, 'measures not involving the use of armed force' and it may call upon member states to 'apply such measures as complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.' The Security Council has acted previously under Article 41 to impose sanctions against Southern Rhodesia, South Africa, the former Yugoslavia and Iraq.

Under Article 42, the Council can step up the threats if it decides that the measures in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, and may decide to 'take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security.' Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members'. In other words, Article 42 authorises the use of force to carry out the terms of the resolution.

Since 1990, the Council has passed literally dozens of resolutions relating to Iraq. I will not go through every one of them, but will highlight the important ones.

On 2 August 1990, the Council passed Resolution 660, the first in relation to Iraq and its initial invasion into Kuwait. It was extremely brief – only four paragraphs – and in it the Security Council specifically referred to Article 39 (determining an existence of a threat to international peace and security) and Article 40 (calling on states to comply with provisional measures falling short of armed force). Resolution 660 called on Iraq to withdraw and on Kuwait and Iraq to 'begin immediately intensive negotiations' to resolve the situation.

Resolution 661 was passed four days later and it is comparatively long and detailed. In it, the Security Council did not refer to its specific powers under the Charter, but referred only generally to its powers under Chapter VII. It is curious that the Council did not refer to specific articles – such as Article 41 that refers to measures including partial or complete economic disruption not involving force; and Article 42 that permits the Security Council to take measures involving the armed forces of member states in actions including blockades. This is quite an important distinction.

What Resolution 661 did do, was to impose an obligation on UN member states to prevent the import into their territories of goods originating from Iraq (and Kuwait at that time) and to prevent the export or sale by their nationals of any goods (other than medical and food supplies) to Iraq. The resolution also established a committee whose initial role was to examine reports on the progress made by member states. This committee later became known as the Sanctions Committee and had a huge role to play in determining what could or could not be imported into Iraq.

Without explicit reference to Articles 41 or 42, it is not clear what level of force was permitted to be used by the maritime interception force (which was quickly established under the leadership of the United States) to enforce the sanctions against Iraq. The resolutions condemning Iraq's actions (firstly in invading Kuwait and later for failing to comply with various weapons inspection requirements) and authorising member states to enforce economic sanctions against Iraq are referred to Chapter VII, which is generally interpreted as authorising all necessary means, i.e. armed force if necessary, to achieve the aim.

This situation was clarified on 25 August 1990 with the passing of UNSCR 665. This resolution specifically calls upon 'those Member States cooperating with Kuwait which are deploying maritime forces to the area to use such measures commensurate with the specific circumstances as may be necessary under the authority of the Security Council to halt all inward and outward maritime shipping.' This is quite an important phrase. UNSCR 665 explicitly gave authority under the auspices of the Security Council to use such force as was necessary to halt all maritime traffic in order to inspect and verify their cargoes and destinations and to ensure strict compliance with the sanctions resolutions.

In April of 1991 the Security Council passed Resolution 687 which demanded that Iraq 'unconditionally accept' the destruction, removal or rendering harmless 'under international supervision' of all 'chemical and biological weapons' – this did not happen.

In 1995 the Security Council passed Resolution 986 – the oil for food program – but the terms of this arrangement were not agreed to by the Iraqi Government until the following year. This resolution was the genesis for the phrase '986 Boarding' which referred to the compliant boardings and searches undertaken by the Multinational Interception Forces (MIF) in the Gulf. Under Resolution 986 and subsequent resolutions which modified and extended the program, Iraq was permitted to export oil to be able to pay for humanitarian goods through a UN escrow account.

The Sanctions Committee took on a greater role in determining what goods were authorised to be imported into Iraq. It ensured that shippers were issued with appropriate UN letters in order to offer the MIF forces an approval for their cargo. Various UN bodies (UNMOVIC and IAEA) reviewed applications for the presence of

items contained in the Goods Review List. If a shipper wished to import an item that was listed in the Goods Review List, an application had to be made through the Sanctions Committee for a decision as to whether or not the items might be sold or supplied to Iraq. Obviously some items were clearly humanitarian in nature (blankets, baby food) and received clearance; other goods were somewhat more problematic due to their potential dual-use nature such as water storage trucks or chlorine.

The laws of naval warfare are now comparatively old. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols of 1977 – our most recent international examination of the laws of armed conflict – did not specifically address naval warfare. The traditional laws regulating the conduct of naval warfare were largely set down at the turn of the twentieth century in instruments such as the Hague Conventions, the Convention on Maritime Neutrality, the unratified London Declaration on Laws of Naval War of 1909, and the Oxford Manual of 1913. Despite their age, these Conventions are extant and, as recently as the 1970s, countries were still formally acceding to these instruments. While some of the specific terms of these instruments may now be outdated, the underlying principles continue to have real and considerable effect. In many ways relevant to MIO, these traditional laws overlapped what the Security Council resolutions permitted – visit and search, diversion and seizure, and blockade.

The general right of visit and search arises from a warship's right to capture enemy ships, to prevent ships from breaching a blockade and to prevent ships from carrying contraband. Warships of a belligerent state have the right to visit and search neutral and enemy merchant ships in order to determine their character, cargoes and destination. It is important to note that the right to visit and search merchant vessels only exists where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that they are subject to capture.

The right of visit and search may be exercised with regard to merchant vessels flying a neutral flag only if it is suspected that the vessel, in fact, has enemy character. A neutral merchant vessel is exempt from the exercise of the right of visit essentially if it maintains its neutrality – that is, it is only bound for a neutral port; it does not carry contraband or otherwise engage in activities inconsistent with its neutral status; and it complies with a request from an intercepting belligerent warship or military aircraft, to provide all information as to its character and its cargo that could otherwise be obtained by visit and search.

In recent years, the increased size and complexity of vessels and the greater bulk and variety of cargo carried has made it much more difficult to search vessels adequately at sea. Moreover, modern ships, aircraft, submarines and techniques of warfare have made such a practice unacceptably hazardous. As a result, it has come to be accepted that a vessel may be diverted into port for search without the necessity of a formal visit beforehand. If the cargo and character of the vessel are found to be innocent after search in port, the vessel will be released. A neutral port may not, however, be used for this purpose.

UNSCR 665 specifically authorised the MIF to 'halt all inward and outward maritime shipping'. This authorisation was far broader than the belligerent right of visit and search as it applied to all vessels, not just those suspected of having enemy character. The ability of the MIF to divert vessels to a holding area for inspection derived from the UN authorisation to use all necessary means to effect the inspection of any cargo on those vessels.

It has long been an accepted method of warfare that belligerents attempt to reduce one another to submission by interfering with the other's trade with other states. Due to the fact that the bulk of international trade is seaborne, this type of warfare is essentially an aspect of naval warfare. The theory is that if a state can prevent its enemy from importing arms, munitions, steel, fuel and other strategic materials, it can seriously impair the ability of its enemy to continue with the conflict. On the other hand, there has been much academic writing criticising the humanitarian impact of long-term sanctions and suggesting that, in reality, blockades seek their success by deliberately crushing the civilian populace so that it will rise up and overthrow the belligerent government.

There are some deceptively simple requirements for the implementation and enforcement of a maritime blockade. Firstly, there must be a public declaration of blockade specifying the commencement, duration, location and extent of the blockade. This gives shippers due warning that a blockade is about to commence and gives vessels, especially neutrals, an opportunity to leave the enemy port before it becomes blockaded. A blockade may be restricted to one or more ports, a given area of the coast or applied to the entire coast of an enemy.

A blockade must be applied impartially to the vessels of all states. It must not bar access to the ports and coasts of neutral states.

A blockade must be effective. Whether it is effective is a question of fact. The effectiveness of a blockade no longer depends on a large concentration of ships near the blockaded port as it did formerly. Modern weapons technology enables an effective blockade to be maintained with a relatively small number of ships stationed at considerable distances from the blockaded areas. Radar and aircraft have extended the area of effective patrol enormously. For example, MIF organic aircraft were effectively employed in both surface-search and also to 'herd' dhows back up the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA).

Under the First 1977 Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, the use of starvation as a means of warfare is prohibited. As a consequence, the declaration of a blockade for the sole purpose of starving the population or causing excessive damage to the population is prohibited. The blockading belligerent must allow the passage of medical supplies for the civilian population or for the wounded and sick members



of armed forces. UNSCRs prohibiting the import into Iraq of all goods retained the exemption for humanitarian supplies.

To my mind, the law of blockade had some advantages over the powers granted by the Security Council resolutions. The resolutions permitted the maritime forces halting all inward and outward shipping to board and search them regardless of the suspected nature of the vessel. There was no express permission –and I think it may have been difficult to interpret them this way – to prevent the passage of a safe and empty vessel to or from the Iraqi waterways once it had been boarded and determined to be empty of prohibited cargo. A blockade would permit this. Once the conflict commenced in March 2003, one of the aims for the MIF was to clear the KAA of civilian vessels to ensure clear access for amphibious operations. Fortunately, the dhows and other small craft had no intention of remaining in the area, but the UNSCR did not provide firm authority to require them, as empty vessels, to leave.

Another means by which belligerents may interfere with their enemy's trade is by preventing trade in specific goods only, rather than banning all trade. A belligerent is entitled to prevent the enemy from being supplied by sea with commodities which would be used in the prosecution of the conflict. Although carriage of contraband and breach of blockade are frequently involved in the same transaction, they are two different legal principles which must be clearly distinguished.

While there can only be a breach of blockade when a blockade has been established and notified, it is illegal to carry absolute contraband on its way to a belligerent from the time that the conflict begins, and illegal to carry conditional contraband after proclamation with respect to the goods concerned.

While a blockade is in force, sailing to any blockaded port is illegal; however, liability to capture for carriage of contraband depends entirely on the nature of the cargo and where it is headed. The penalty for breaching a blockade is capture of both ship and cargo, but for carrying contraband, the penalty falls primarily on the contraband goods.

Contraband has traditionally been divided into two categories—absolute and conditional contraband. The traditional definition of the former included such things as:

arms of all kinds ... , cartridges, powder and explosives specially prepared for war ... , military wagons, gun mountings all kinds of harness, ... saddle, draft and pack animals, clothing and equipment of a distinctively military character, saddle and draught animals suitable for use in war, warships including boats.

Today, absolute contraband would be regarded as referring to generally any type of weapon, ammunition, missiles, military clothing and equipment used or intended to be used for military purposes.

The other, more difficult category of goods to define is that of conditional contraband, which comprises goods which may be used for either peaceful or military purposes – so-called dual-use items. Conditional contraband is liable to capture only if it can be shown that the goods are destined for the enemy's military or for a government department of the enemy. It is curious that the vessel's papers are considered conclusive proof of the final destination of both the vessel and the cargo. The MIF soon learned not to rely on the ship's papers.

The London Declaration also contains a list of goods which may not be declared to be contraband. Interestingly, this list does not contain food, but contains such things as raw materials of the textile industries (cotton, flax, wool and the like), oil, seeds and nuts, raw hides and horns, bones and ivory, earths, clays, chinaware and glass, paper-making material agricultural and printing machinery, clocks and feathers, and finally 'articles serving exclusively to aid the sick and wounded' etc. The focus seems to be on non-military industries.

Again, I think contraband has some advantages over the resolutions. Certainly the Sanctions Committee had published an extensive list of goods which were prohibited from being imported into Iraq – this list could have been converted into a contraband list. If the maritime forces then identified a vessel containing contraband cargo, we could have captured it. Because we relied on the resolutions, we would have been in the situation of needing to go back to the Sanctions Committee for determination of any cargo that was on the Goods Review List. Such a referral took the decision-making process out of the maritime commander's hands and would have caused considerable delay in the disposal of a subject vessel. Fortunately, this never became an issue.

One argument put forward in support of commencing military action in March was that the terms of the United Nations Security Council resolutions passed in 1990 continued to apply and provided authorisation for the use of force against Iraq. In other words, because Iraq had not unconditionally accepted the cease-fire conditions to end hostilities in the first Gulf War, the cease-fire was not effective and the earlier Security Council authority to use force was never withdrawn. Indeed, this was the advice given by the Attorney General's Department to the Australian Government.

Certainly, I think it is beyond argument that, as of 20 March 2003, the full suite of the laws of naval warfare became available to the Coalition forces to meet their mission. But following the logic of the Attorney General's argument, it essentially means that, since the armed conflict had never ceased, the laws of naval warfare (rather than the UNSCR regime) could have been available to provide the legal framework to conduct MIO from 1990 to 2003.

The maritime mission for the naval units in the northern Arabian Gulf during the 2003 conflict was fairly simple – to maintain naval supremacy, and clear the Iraqi waterways. It was also important to ensure that the Iraqi regime and military could not be supplied

by sea. The coalition forces could have used the traditional laws of naval warfare as just outlined, or the long-standing and long-practised Security Council resolution regime. It was the latter legal framework that was utilised. Given that for the previous 13 years, the MIO forces had been using the sanctions resolutions regime – and importantly, that the neutral or friendly shipping in the Gulf was also familiar with the mechanisms of that regime – it was appropriate that those resolutions, rather than naval warfare, continued to be utilised.

Although the UNSC suffered a lot of criticism for its failure to act in forcing Iraq to comply with weapons inspections, the longevity, flexibility and success of the resolutions that provided the legal framework for MIO in the Gulf for 13 years should not be overlooked.



*Rules of engagement briefing for a boarding party  
from HMAS Kanimbla, March 2003*

## PART VII - OPEN FORUM

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**Captain Peter Lockwood:** During the war period of the second conflict, the logistics train was stretched to, and, in fact, I believe, past its limit. The ships were not operating with the 'desert helicopters' – we were sending our own aircraft in. We had cargoes – I think I had a cargo of fresh food – which spent about 10 days going from one end of the Gulf to the other. For a couple of reasons: one is I could not get off the front line to go and get it, and also the aircraft carriers kept sucking up all the logistics. I would like to ask Commander Chris Percival if he believes we had enough logistics for the second conflict, and whether there is enough flexibility in the logistics organisation we had to provide for a short notice response when a ship is caught out, or not released for various periods.

**Commander Chris Percival:** That's a good question. It is certainly something that needs to be considered. When I arrived in-theatre in December there were about 57 ships on-station, and the US concept of the Middle East Area of Operations covered the Red Sea, Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Oman and into the Persian Gulf area. When the war was about to start there were 167 ships in-theatre. One of the major frustrations was the continuing request to send an afloat support ship because every country, every coalition unit or country that was participating around the Middle East Area of Operations was providing weapons platforms and this placed considerable strain on the limited logistics resources.

The Royal Navy, although they had logistics ships there, were not able to provide much support because of the poor serviceability of their tankers. I know that the CO of *Kanimbla* was very frustrated with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships because of the difficulties in fuelling from them.

Certainly from my perspective, I was being frustrated by it all, trying to put a lot of things together and working very closely with the US Navy logistics organisation, with their scheduling every day, which they worked very hard to try and achieve. Obviously the priority of a ship on-station and to take it off task is a major consideration to be made at any time. That coupled with the rotation of the limited shipping, is the determining factor of whether or not you get your gear. If you cannot accept the cargo on a given day, you were unlikely to see it for 10 days because those afloat support ships have then got to go back to refuel and resupply.

What can we do about it? I think the US Navy Command and TF 53 logistic personnel were doing their best with the limited resources they had. They were limited in the number of afloat support ships they had. If we had provided an extra afloat support ship it is doubtful it would have made a lot of difference in such a large-scale operation.

The Desert Ducks were flying daily. *Kanimbla* provided one Sea King helicopter to the force, but the Desert Duck aircraft were ageing and I think they were doing more down time than they were operational. We needed more aircraft and afloat support ships, but we did not have them.

**Captain Peter Lockwood:** A significant challenge to you and to the CTF 53 people was how to support a force when you did not know where it was going to be in 24 hours' time. What do you do with the support infrastructure?

**Commodore James Goldrick:** This problem was apparent in 2002 as well and the stress on the United States' logistic ships was quite intense. One thing I think that was relieving that stress was the logistics chat rooms. Graham Sloper was talking about robbing the broadcast to find out what was going on – in fact the logistic chat room was absolutely fantastic for the ships. We could interact with the logistics ships and change both what you were demanding, and when and where you were going to get it. In this way we maximised the efficiency of the logistics ships. I suspect in 1990 that the stresses put on the logistic chain would have been even greater had there not been that improved ability to mix and match and try to cope with not knowing where the force was. What I do not know is the extent to which the Australian ships which were on the coalition nets would have been able to participate in the logistic chat rooms.

**Captain Peter Jones:** The chat rooms were invaluable but really it was the MIF commander who would coordinate all the requirements. So the ships would just say: 'This is what we need' and then we would have someone like Fred Ross [CTG staff officer] sort it all out. The chat room I thought was fantastic for logistics. Rear Admiral Bonser may want to talk about the issue which we were dancing around, and that was whether the Americans actually wanted a tanker, but we had made a fairly early call about what sort of services we were going to provide.

**Rear Admiral Marc Bonser:** That is correct, the designated forces that were authorised to go were the ones that were there and there was not going to be a change.

**Commodore Lee Cordner:** In the First Gulf War deployment, probably the best logistics decision that anyone ever made was the decision to keep our mail in Australian hands throughout. As you may recall, we used to have a weekly C-130 from Australia and the mail would normally be picked up by an RAN helicopter and taken to the ships—that was a vital issue for morale. Meanwhile we watched our US Navy colleagues' daily operational summaries bleating about not having seen mail for, in some instances, three or four months. An issue regarding the most recent deployments would be the heavy reliance on email now for maintaining family contact, and how this impacts on mail and related matters such as security.

The other issue I wanted to raise concerned the utility of different types of tankers. During *Sydney's* first deployment we shared part of the time with *Success* as our main support and then we had *Westralia*. *Westralia* had significant limitations in that she

was not able to provide the same one-stop shop support, did not have a full aviation capability, and could not provide the FFG's major liquids requirement for aviation fuel. We were burning through it at a rapid rate. That was a significant limitation and particularly when *Success* went off and we were left with *Westralia*, and the capacity for *Westralia* to transfer aviation fuel was, well, tortuous to say the least.

The next issue I wanted to mention applied during DAMASK II and again I wonder how this is being managed today, or to what extent it applies in more recent operations. This issue involves the reliance increasingly on vendor representatives or on civilian-based logistics support, not only into theatre but also in-theatre. In the DAMASK II case, *Sydney* had an electro-optical tactical surveillance device fitted for which we had absolutely no logistics support. It was fitted in a hurry – and the only way we could get any maintenance done to this equipment, which became invaluable to us because of its utility in mine search, was to get vendor reps out at sea in the middle of operations. We became aware that US Navy ships all around the fleet had large numbers of various types of vendor reps doing various types of maintenance. Our task group commander at the time was most uncomfortable with the idea of having foreign nationals flown around in our aircraft in the middle of hostilities. In fact I was not allowed to bring my maintenance team out and we went with an unserviceable system for some time. I think this increasing reliance, as we have moved forward over the last decade or so, on civilian logistics into areas of operation and within areas of operation is a significant issue.

**Commander David McCourt:** *Kanimbla* has an excellent level of band-width and we could have provided 24 hours email access both in and out of the ship. Initially we did that and we discovered some problems, particularly with the advent of the anthrax vaccinations and as you would all be aware, some of the media issues arose partially from the fact that some of our sailors were communicating with people back home specifically about the issue. As time marched on, we actually were able to refine the way we dealt with emails and certainly we never shut down the pipe coming into the ship, but we were able to regulate what went out of the ship. Sailors were extremely well briefed on what they could and could not send by email, and all emails leaving the ship were vetted by the communications staff. This imposed a significant manpower burden on the communicators because they have essentially got to do a dirty word filter on the emails and then once something is spat out they then have to read it, so there is certainly an impost there. However, what we discovered was that, over time, the number of people who actually did have breaches in their draft emails was actually much reduced and after a couple of people were charged and had their email privileges withdrawn, the breach pretty much dried up. It is a process of briefing, educating and monitoring what goes on and I think that it is quite manageable even in an operational area. Certainly we shut down email at critical times, such as when we are about to commence hostilities, and at times the Americans imposed restrictions with a system that they called River City, which is really just levels of restrictions as to who could

send what. During the war we probably only shut down email about three times, and certainly for no longer than 24 hours.

**Commodore Graham Sloper:** When we first went up there in 1990 we had a huge amount of trouble with mail. It was coming through shore sources and shore post offices which were raiding it. Anything that looked like a video was confiscated. Christmas presents were interfered with or did not make it at all. But that was eventually resolved by using Australian sources. Just for interest, in the time we were up there in *Success*, we sent out 96 bags of mail, a total of 1283 kilograms. We received 423 bags, which was 5500 kilograms of mail. So there was a lot of mail travelling around. But it did take us about three to four months to get the routine sorted out.

**Commander Chris Percival:** For mail we used the commercial National Mail Exchange process that the Navy has been using as a robust process for some years now. There were moves from a senior level to initiate a defence-managed activity through the sustainment flight into the theatre. From the Navy perspective we were correct in forcing the issue to remain and maintain what we had, which was commercial, into Bahrain. I note the comments about checking bags. What they have taken up is doing X-rays now so they do not open the sealed bags and they would query us if they had any question or concern about them before they touched them. This process worked very well for us. The delay then was getting it out to the ships by either the ship's aircraft or the Desert Duck. I think the process we had in place for access to international mail into Bahrain, leading up to and during the war, worked very well. We had a robust structure of tracking mail to ensure that we did not lose too many bags.

**Captain Peter Jones:** There is a different attitude by the British and the Americans to contractors in-theatre than we have. We certainly used American contractors when they were in the force. This is something that we will have to develop.

**Commander David McCourt:** A legal question that has always intrigued me is the issue of enemy prisoners of war. *Kanimbla* was the NAG area Enemy Prisoner of War coordination ship for the hostilities—this was an interesting role for us because we were not actually allowed to take prisoners of war. I have often wondered what the restriction was, and what the background to that restriction was. The matter came to a head when our boarding party came across an Iraqi tug full of Iraqi military people. The way I explain it is, we pointed our weapons at them and asked them to cooperate with us, and then removed their weapons and brought them back on board for some questions. It has always intrigued me that we were not actually allowed, in a war, to capture prisoners of war.

**Lieutenant Commander Penny Campbell:** The problem is not so much in our ability to capture them, we certainly could. The problems stem further down the process—once we had captured them, what could we do with them? We did not have the facilities to appropriately hold them, house them and look after them in accordance with the Geneva

Convention III. So the planning, or the theory, was that should we capture prisoners of war, the only people who could really handle them properly were the Americans. Now, the US is not a party to Additional Protocol 1 and we are. Additional Protocol 1 imposes extra obligations upon us on the handling and treatment of POWs. Unfortunately it was not a timely arrangement. Eventually we did get an arrangement between the US, the UK and Australia to deal with the handling of POWs, and under that arrangement we received assurances that, should the US handle Australian-captured POWs, the US would follow our international legal obligations rather than their own. At the time we were involved in transferring American-captured POWs we did not have that legal assurance and so there was that potential risk to Australia that our obligations would not be met by the Americans.

**Commander David McCourt:** In this case, all POWs were captured by Americans. There was a *Kanimbla* boarding party but there was always an American there, even when they were in *Kanimbla*. There was always an American with the POWs, so there was a continuous chain. It is just like anything else, if you run into a problem with one nation you exploit it or solve it with another nation. I was never particularly concerned about it.

**(Unknown speaker):** I was under the impression that blockade is a term only used when you have a declaration of war. Under the United Nations resolution there was no declaration of war. So we avoided the use of the word 'blockade' the whole time that we were there. Therefore that brings into point, how can they be a POW, when there is no declaration of war?

**Lieutenant Commander Penny Campbell:** I do not know if there is a quick and easy answer to this one. Countries these days do not declare war on one another because of the prohibition under Article 2.4 of the United Nations Charter, which prohibits states from using force in the settlement of disputes against one another. So no-one declares war any more because that is a very public breach of the prohibition under the United Nations Charter. The way that countries get around it—obviously we still have wars—under Article 51 of the Charter a state is authorised to use force in self-defence. So, I did not start the war, somebody else did, and I am just using military force in self-defence. The other legal authorisation for the use of military force under the Charter is through Security Council authorisation. They are parallel arguments, I suppose if you want to run both. The first is that the United States initiated conflict under Article 51 Self-Defence against a potential threat, if you like, of weapons of mass destruction. The other side to that is the United Nations Security Council authorisation to use force under Chapter VII.

So the fact that an armed conflict was in existence triggered the application of the laws of armed conflict regardless of how we ended up in the conflict in the first place. The blockade is a legal mechanism in conducting a war.



**Wing Commander Graham:** It is always a worry when you hear comments like: 'We were there but we were not permitted to take POWs'. There was certainly never any prohibition on Australians taking POWs during the recent conflict. In fact, the tripartite agreement we had with the US and the UK was signed two days after the conflict started. That agreement made it very clear that there would be an exchange of POWs between all three parties should they be taken and that they would be held by US or UK detainee or POW facilities, set up for those purposes. It was recognised by the US and UK both at Central Command and at the component and tactical level that the Australians did not have the capacity to hold, but they could certainly take POWs and they would be transferred to US or UK facilities. The problem with the whole POW issue, and I have seen it both in the Special Forces and Navy arena, is courtesy of what occurred in Afghanistan 18 months ago. The US developed a view of who were lawful and unlawful combatants, and therefore whether or not certain persons were accorded POW status. That influenced the Australian and UK view on whether or not they would, or what they would do, with POWs once they were taken. The problem with that is that if we took POWs, gave them to the US, they took control of them, and they could end up in Guantanamo Bay. The Australian and UK governments were not particularly happy with that arrangement. There then became the concept of what happens if we take POWs? It did not actually occur in Afghanistan. What happened was that then filtered across to the next conflict on Iraq and there was a perception that Australians would not take POWs, either in SF or in Navy capacity, just in case we had to give them to the US and they ended up in Guantanamo Bay. I do not know where that came from, because from a legal perspective we had a good framework in place. We did not actually take, formally, any POWs. This theory that is running around that we did not take or we were not able to take POWs needs to be quashed. We most certainly were and the framework existed for that to occur.

**Dr Anthony Bergin:** I would like to put a question to Lieutenant Commander Penny Campbell. As you are aware Australia has just signed up for maritime interception operations in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). The key point you made in your talk was that the legal backing for the interception operations in the Gulf over the last 12 years was UN Security Council resolutions. Now, given that it is pretty unlikely that you are going to get a Security Council resolution for the PSI, are there any legal lessons that you can draw from our Gulf experience as we develop a regime for interceptions under the PSI?

**Wing Commander Cronin:** Perhaps I could address that one. I think the lesson that we can draw from it, from a tactical and practical sense, is that should we be required to do PSI operations we will do them and do them very well. The main restriction on PSI operations as they currently sit is that they cannot occur under any international law on the high seas. To make the PSI operation effective against those states of proliferation concern, it simply will not achieve its end if it can only be achieved within territorial waters or contiguous-zone-type operations. Unless we are able to somehow shut down

the international air routes and sea lanes, the PSI is not really going to get out of the box. In terms of what practical lessons there are for the RAN, I think we have shown for the last 13 years that tactically we do it very well. What we actually need, from an international law sense, is a movement in terms of international law. The Security Council can achieve that, should it choose to pass resolutions to allow that to happen. If it does not there needs to be an actual movement in international law to allow some sort of interception on the high seas for certain concerns, such as terrorists, or shipment of proliferation-type weapons. If that does not occur, the PSI operations really are not going to go in the direction that we and others would like.



*Vice Admiral Michael Hudson observes pre-deployment NBC training,  
August 1990*

**PART VIII:  
MEDICAL AND  
PERSONNEL MATTERS  
1990-2003**

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### Commodore Michael J Flynn, RANR

#### *Officer in Charge Task Group Medical Support Element 2 DAMASK II*

My current position is as the Medical Controller for New South Wales, which has responsibilities in relation to state disasters. I spent nearly 29 years of full-time service in the Navy and I am currently in the Reserve. From the end of Vietnam until the First Gulf War, there was almost a disbelief that we would ever really be put in harm's way. This view has relevance for the preparedness of the three armed Services and how much defence was prepared to spend on its health resources.

Operation RED ORCHID in Bali in 2002 was a defining moment because, for the first time ever, we sent nine doctors and seven paramedics from New South Wales at very little notice, with no preparation and no legal authority from Sydney to Denpasar on the morning following the bombing. That gave me some insight into the experience gained through my long period in the military. It was interesting that our government agreed to send civilians into harm's way, which reminds us that the dividing line between the front line and the rear is now hopelessly blurred.

The other thing that came to mind was that our preparedness for bombings of civil areas now has to be applied to the major cities of Australia, particularly Sydney and Melbourne. It really hit home to me when the United Nations Headquarters in Baghdad was bombed. Rather than hearing that another 23 people have been killed, they flashed up the Brazilian Sergio Vieira de Mello, who was my commander when I was in Timor in 2000. To actually put a face behind that group of people killed was quite a moving experience. Ken Gillespie, the Australian National Commander during the Second Gulf War, was also in Timor when I was there and he managed to get appendicitis. He had his appendix taken out by a New Zealand surgical team down at Suai in what we would call a level three health facility, which is the basic level of health care that you get when you have a qualified surgeon and an anaesthetist.

My knowledge and expertise is largely drawn from my experience relating to the RAN health preparedness in the 20 years leading up to the First Gulf War and to some insights gained since then. I do not claim to have any direct knowledge about the preparedness for the Second Gulf War in terms of health preparation or related operations, but take the liberty of making some general observations based upon open reporting and unclassified sources.

If I have a message to leave with you it is that the expectation of high quality health support underpins all operational deployments. This expectation is infrequently articulated, but we often talk about it in health forums.

Health care support for the First Gulf War was appropriate for the task in hand and was due to a mixture of both good luck and good planning.

Planning for health support for future deployments in the ADF has been espoused by the doctrinal developments of JP2060 backed by at least some tangible resources. From a maritime perspective it is strengthened by the recent announcement by the government of the acquisition of amphibious heavy lift ships to replace *Tobruk*, *Kanimbla* and *Manoora*. Personnel are our key vulnerability and Major General Paul Stevens is currently conducting a review of ADF health care preparedness.

When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August of 1990 the RAN had no level three health support facilities at sea. Since the withdrawal of our forces from South Vietnam in 1972, following the election of the Whitlam Government, the Navy had experienced progressive rundown in its health service capability in terms of personnel, both full-time and Reserve, and its platforms. As one who had served throughout this period, in hindsight it was almost a pervasive sense that our forces would never again really go into harm's way post-Vietnam, and therefore frontline health support was a luxury that our cash-strapped military could ill afford.

The provision of level three medical support requires the presence of an appropriate health team that must include two key specialists, a surgeon and an anaesthetist. The RAN has long been served by a small dedicated group of Reserve specialists who provided this capability, until recently, with very inadequate recompense for their commitment.

With the decommissioning of HMAS *Melbourne* in 1982 and later HMAS *Stalwart*, the RAN lost its limited level three-capable platforms. An attempt to undertake a Falklands-style conversion, as done by the British in 1982, led to some work on HMAS *Jervis Bay* to try to make that into some sort of hospital ship. That was a hopeless failure and I think shortly after that *Jervis Bay* developed engine problems and was withdrawn from service.

Incidentally the willingness of a nation to commit a major hospital ship to conflict sends a very important message: 'We are serious, we are prepared to take casualties and we will treat our casualties'. A level three facility is now available to the fleet on HMA Ships *Kanimbla* and *Manoora*. This is a testimony to Surgeon Commander Schedlich who was very tenacious in his staff work with the ultimate results of careful analysis of these deficiencies. These ships have been deployed to several operational areas, including the Persian Gulf, Solomon Islands and to transport refugees in recent years, where their health facilities have been used.

There was no level three facility for the lead headquarters, Maritime Headquarters, (MHQ) in 1990. MHQ did have level two health support, including access to high quality dental care on all of its major combatants during Operation DAMASK.

Preparation for the treatment of nuclear, biological and chemical warfare (NBC), also known as CBR casualties, dominated health service planning by NATO countries in the decades before the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990. In Australia, however, core ADF health support training for NBC casualties during this period was only maintained by the personal dedication of three RAN medical officers: the late Surgeon Rear Admiral Jim Lloyd and two Surgeon Captains, Kerry Delaney and John Parks. It was never envisaged, however, that our forces would go into a CBR threat environment, hence the reluctance or unwillingness of the Army or the Air Force to even address the problem. The provision of a series of comprehensive NBC medical courses just prior to deployment would not have been possible without the work of these three naval medical officers. The knowledge gained during these courses provided a degree of confidence and reassurance to those officers charged with providing expert advice to commanding officers and to their crews in the known NBC threat operational environment. This also extended the provision of expert advice into theatre to allied units, many of which did not have the expertise, say, for example, of Surgeon Captain Delaney, who was the officer in charge (OIC) of RAN Task Group Medical Support Element 1 (TGMSE 1).

The acquisition of *Oliver Hazard Perry* class frigates in the 1970s provides an interesting contrast to the NBC defence preparedness of the British-designed River class frigates that they were replacing. The British design had the collective protection or citadel capability built into them, which the Americans did not. However, the *Anzac* class clearly had a citadel capability in its original design. It was deleted in the mistaken belief that it would save cost, and also on the basis that it was not envisaged that we would operate in that environment. From a health perspective we argued forcibly for the retention of that capability in the design phase with the project engineers, however, they did not listen to health personnel at that time.

In terms of interoperability of forces, the RAN has always benefited from the conduct of exercises both with NATO, SEATO and other forces and alliances. The reconnaissance by the then Fleet Medical Officer, Commander Schedlich, to the Gulf in 1990 provided the basis for planning health support for the deployed forces, predominantly Navy, to the Gulf during Operation DAMASK. Health level two support would be available on the major combatants, *Darwin*, *Adelaide* and *Success*; however, it would not be possible to provide level three support from an RAN platform. As a result of this deficiency, an agreement was reached with the assistance of the Australian Naval Attaché, Washington, for the provision of level three and level four health support from US Navy forces deployed ashore and afloat in the area of operations (AO). This support was to be facilitated by the integration of ADF health personnel on a major US Navy health facility.



The US Navy maintains a number of level four health facilities available for deployment. These include a number of air transportable fleet hospitals, TGMS and two hospital ships, USNS *Comfort* and *Mercy*. *Mercy* is homeported on the US west coast and *Comfort* on the east coast. *Mercy* had previously been deployed to the Caribbean and *Comfort* was deployed to New York following 11 September 2001.

These are highly capable, very expensive ships and arguably even the Americans cannot afford to run them and maintain them other than for symbolic reasons. These ships provide basically 1000 beds, 14 operating theatres, a CT scanner, frozen blood, and virtually everything you would expect from a major metropolitan hospital. As a result of the memorandum of understanding between the US Navy and the RAN agreement for the deployment of ADF health assets under the command of a senior Navy medical officer was reached. Importantly, this included provision for accreditation of professional recognition and indemnity for professional negligence. For most health professionals, my own health insurance, for example, provides me with cover for everywhere except the United States.

Accordingly, on 13 September 1990, RAN TGMSE 1, under the command of Surgeon Captain Delaney, with 20 personnel drawn from Permanent and Reserve forces of Navy, Army and Air Force, embarked on USNS *Comfort*. Unlike Army health support units, RAN medical officers do not usually exercise executive command. Orders signed by the then Chief of Defence Force (CDF), General Gratton, to Kerry Delaney and to myself as the OICs were unique for us. They symbolised the joint component of health support, albeit imposed because of deficiencies in single service capabilities rather than by design.

A total of 59 full-time and part-time personnel from three services then served under the command of two senior naval officers between September 1990 and March 1991. Their tasking was simple: to integrate with embarked US Naval health personnel to provide advanced level four health care to all allied forces in the area of operations. This included the three initial ships and, later, *Sydney*, *Westralia* and *Brisbane*, operating in and around the Persian Gulf as well as supporting ADF elements such as the clearance diving team, the logistic support element and other people on exchange, like Commander Les Pataky who was on USS *Blue Ridge*.

I was very fortunate to have under my command two senior Army colonels, Rob Atkinson from Adelaide, an orthopaedic surgeon, and a second orthopaedic surgeon from Townsville who became my executive officer. These officers had served in many theatres including Vietnam and they were very helpful in assisting me to undertake my command role.

Integration was undoubtedly enhanced by the conduct of operations and exercises preceding the First Gulf War, and the willingness of the US Navy personnel to embrace

their colleagues from across the Pacific. A smaller team of Canadian Defence Force health personnel were embarked in USNS *Mercy*.

During the preparatory phase of the campaign much effort was directed towards training and accreditation. Australian elements were totally integrated within the hospital ship operational organisation with staff occupying key clinical, administrative and leadership roles. Intensive casualty reception exercises were conducted in addition to shipboard safety and evacuation drills in both daylight and at night. There was also the problem of transporting patients from the 1000 hospital beds. We exercised this intensively.

Mass casualty theory turned into practice in November when a faulty valve blew in the engine room of the USS *Iwo Jima*, causing a high pressure jet of super heated steam to spread through the confined space. Six sailors died instantly, a further four sailors somehow made their way out of the engine space up several decks to the first aid room. These four were then medivaced across to *Comfort*. With 100 per cent burns, their fate was sealed; nonetheless heroic efforts were made over the next 48 hours until they succumbed to their injuries. Australian doctors and nurses, and particularly one of our very experienced male nurses from Victoria, were closely involved in the intensive care and surgery provided to these men whose deaths served as a highly visible reminder of the perils of life at sea, even in the absence of combat. The outsourcing and repair work undertaken to *Iwo Jima* in a Gulf dockyard has an interesting parallel with the replacement of the fuel lines in HMAS *Westralia* later in the decade.

Those of our staff who had seen major burns were involved in the counselling of the other health staff who had not seen such horrific injuries. The handover of health care responsibilities from TGMSE 1 to TGMSE 2, the first of my two units, on 2 January, prior to the outbreak of hostilities, was an emotional time. On the one hand, TGMSE 1 was going home; on the other hand, many felt that they had not really achieved what they had been sent to do – to provide high quality health support to the combatants. This sense of disappointment was undoubtedly reinforced by the knowledge that TGMSE 1 personnel would be eligible for the Australian Service Medal, but not for the Australian Active Service Medal.

From my perspective, TGMSE 1 personnel are as much veterans as those who were in the AO during hostilities. These comments also apply to the personnel on *Darwin* and *Adelaide* who were relieved by *Sydney* and *Brisbane* prior to the onset of Operation DESERT STORM.

In the final analysis, no Australians died in the First Gulf War; nonetheless, as in all campaigns, some experienced illness and injury and all were subjected to the kind of stresses that only those who have been on operational service can really understand. Most personnel have their inherent defence mechanisms that will enable them to accept that death will come in combat whether through enemy action, friendly fire, or

through accidents, some of which are due to the operational pace of activities, some of which are inherent to military service.

Of more importance to them is the knowledge that, should they be wounded or injured, they will have access to high quality operational health support close to the front line, wherever the front line is these days. Australian surgeons operated on personnel from a number of allied services, including the US, UK, Argentina and the Netherlands. Our nurses cared for them post operatively, our pathology staff played a key role in maintenance and testing of the frozen blood supplies. Clinical cases included severe trauma, testicular cancer and arterial aneurysms.

All ADF health personnel went through a detailed accreditation process to ensure compliance with US standards. Our personnel were subject to the same threats and stresses as other RAN personnel at sea. These included: uncertainty about the role of multiple vaccinations; CBR; infectious diseases, including prophylaxis for malaria; extremes of temperature, particularly after failure of the air conditioning system; water shortages on board; over 50 days without port visits; and severe restriction on communications exacerbated by some misunderstanding of the provisions of the Geneva Conventions. We were not actually even getting restricted signals on board which was a fault of the system. Frequent emergency exercises and drills in mass casualties and abandon ship, the possibility of CBR attack, and knowledge of the presence of mines, particularly with the mining of USS *Tripoli* and then *Princeton*, all added to heightened personnel stress, as did the presence of Scud, Silkworm and Exocet threats. We were certainly well forward of – and probably under the flight path of – that Scud missile that hit Bahrain in late January killing 28 Americans. Anecdotally, I understand that the Silkworm missile that was taken out by HMS *Gloucester*, was heading our way and with the huge profile of a ship like *Comfort*, the presence of a red cross on the side does not really give it protection. We also experienced heavy exposure to SMOIL (smoke, oil and gas) particularly in the northern part of the Gulf.

We were escorted by a Dutch frigate at one stage that picked up a mine on our route. Apparently, I did not realise until this week, that we were one of the two units most heavily exposed to SMOIL. We had people cross-decking on the USS *Ranger* and frequent flypasts by Harriers and other aircraft. I can personally clearly identify with the intensity of subjective feelings associated with some of these stresses. I have not included the oversupply of ice cream, or the complete absence of Vegemite or Fosters.

There was a lot of discontent amongst the American Reserve medical officers, some of whom had been there since August and had private practices to run and did not have the option of volunteering like Australians. One US Navy petty officer was posted and joined the ship six weeks after the birth of her third child. She was still lactating and after appropriate reassessment was repatriated to the US.

We had a little bit of time for relaxation on the flight deck. We had to wear our gas masks for long periods of time. We did undertake research, working out the actual physical workload of using the respirator over four hours. It was alright to don a respirator for 15 minutes; you put it on for four or five hours, and then you realise what it is.

A signal came out about the wearing of protective MOPP (mission orientated protective posture) gear in the engine rooms of the frigate, USS *Truett*, and I was able to provide some operational advice to the command about the futility of that in terms of dehydration and heat exhaustion.

Being deemed to be more operationally prepared than our sister ship *Mercy*, we deployed forward to the northern Gulf with the commencement of the ground offensive on 24 February to support the large US Marine amphibious force. With this came the need for further review of protocols and procedures. It also required special preparation for the reception of repatriated prisoners of war (POW), including the management of sexual assault for both genders, given that it was known that a female flight surgeon had already been captured by Iraqi forces.



*Casualty drills during DAMASK I*

I found myself instrumental in writing the protocols for repatriation of POW. Earlier in my career I served as a pilot and flight surgeon in VX4 Point Mugu in California. The commanding officer, Captain Frank Franks, had spent six years and three months in the Hanoi Hilton and, in a series of lectures, he gave me some incredible insight into what it means to be captured as a POW. I was therefore charged with writing the protocols for them. It gave me new insights into the requirement for resistance to interrogation (RTI) training which I did not actually undertake until I was a senior captain.

It transpired that, after the short ground war, many of the wounded and all the repatriated POWs were transferred directly to *Mercy* alongside in Bahrain. While *Comfort* was closer, by this time we were completely ensconced in the thick back fog that came from the many burning oil wells. Even though the ship was fitted with a basic instrument flying capability, access by helicopter was not possible. The ship remained on-station for another 10 days with no combat casualties received and this proved to be a frustrating period for all.

It also brought knowledge that two doctors had been killed by landmines after the cessation of hostilities, and another five killed in a medivac mission that was unrelated to actual combat.

The worst period of deployment came when we had been cut off from mail for about two and half weeks; our nursing sisters in particular would write letters off home, there were no emails of course, and no mobile phones. We had not had mail for two and a half weeks, although the Americans were getting theirs. They saw the helicopter coming in with yellow mailbags, (I think our bags were yellow and the Americans' were a different colour) and they said, 'The mail's arrived!' When they actually opened the bag, it was the mail that we had sent home three or four days ago. Not only did they not get any incoming mail, the outgoing mail came back.

Another incident occurred during a port ceremony in Bahrain when we were disembarking in the presence of the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Trade Committee. I was aware that there was a very big consternation. We had conducted a ceremony at colours in the morning where we hoisted the white ensign to the mast that basically should have the American flag, and all the other ships could see that there was an Australian flag flying. It did not mean much to me at the time, but I think from a commanding officer's perspective it indicated we actually owned the ship for a three or four hour period and I was distinctly unpopular.

There has been a recently released study by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Monash University looking at the health of Australian Gulf War Veterans. Of the 1873 who were actually listed in the record of honour, of those who served, nearly 1500 participated in this study, most of whom were Navy. The results are really a little bit disturbing. The overall morbidity rate of disease is about what you would expect compared with other service populations. There have been some deaths; there has

been at least one suicide that I am aware of, that I think was very directly related to service in the Gulf. Of more concern is that there is a large amount of uneasiness, particularly amongst the more junior people deployed to the Gulf who still have a lot of symptoms. They are very reluctant to accept the fact that there is a psychological factor to explain them and they are intensely unhappy. It seems to be associated with rank and age. The younger members of our community are more vulnerable than perhaps our age group was. If you look at the Vietnam studies, you will find that a lot of their early conclusions, particularly in the reports in the 1980s, have been now invalidated by later reports as you get a long-term follow-up.

In conclusion, Australian medical support played an important role in ensuring that our forces and the forces of our allies had access to the highest quality of frontline health care. Under the command of Naval medical officers, a joint force deployed and integrated seamlessly into an allied task force. High quality health care was delivered to many sick and injured. The knowledge that this care was available provided important reassurance to commanders and their forces that prosecution of combat operations would be backed by appropriate health support. For Operation DAMASK, the personnel involved are justifiably proud of the role that they played during this time.



*Families on hand to welcome back loved ones after service in the Gulf*

# Twenty Seven

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Chaplain Barrie Yesberg, RAN

*Chaplain SLIPPER Four, BASTILLE & FALCONER*

In this paper I will discuss the impact of the Gulf deployments on personnel and their family.

Recently, a couple called in to see me who I have known for many years. I have sailed with the fellow on two ships, conducted their marriage, and have been with them through the near death of their baby daughter and subsequent illnesses, court cases for her previous marriage and general ongoing pastoral concerns. The husband was deployed in HMAS *Darwin* during her most recent deployment to the Gulf. The wife mentioned that her husband had changed as a result of this deployment. We went on to talk about this for quite some time and it was very clear that the impact of the deployment on him and the family had been very real. This is not an isolated case, as confirmed in my discussions with people and my experience and discussions with the medical, psychological and social worker support people in Western Australia.

What we ask our people to do impacts on them personally, their work and their families. I was asked on the way back from the Gulf in May this year, what issues I had to work through with our people while away. I referred to my diaries where I kept notes and made the following list. This is not complete, but it is a general list. The issues are similar to those faced previously in my trips to the Gulf. Let me list some areas which fall loosely under the following categories: family, partner/spouse, friends, work, general and generational.

A number of moral dilemmas were encountered and I will discuss these separately. The main issues I was able to identify were: boarding fishing vessels, Australia's role, and life decision-making skills.

As the boarding parties moved from searching cargo vessels to cargo dhows and then to fishing dhows, discussion arose over whether this was appropriate. There was a feeling that this was only upsetting local people in the pursuit of their livelihood. The dilemma I think, was the value of oil and smuggled goods in a small vessel versus relative amounts of effort, and was there a point to it. There was a feeling that the maritime interception operations were encroaching into someone's personal and workspace. However, it appeared to be only the fishing vessels that posed this moral dilemma. The feeling that when people who were making a living from smuggling oil were caught, justice had been done, was very evident.



In terms of Australia's role, there was confusion over what were we defending – territory, values or politics. Michael Evans, the head of the Army's Land Warfare Studies Centre, in an article in *The Australian* newspaper, 11 November 2003, stated that:

The logic of war is always dictated by policy. As a result, in every war and security crisis we have faced since 1914, realpolitik has always dictated that Australia take up arms in defence, not of its territory but of its political interests and core liberal Western values.

This quote illustrates the dilemma many of our people in the Gulf thought about and discussed often. They were asking 'what are we really doing here?'

The issue of life decision-making skills was clearly illustrated for me in the ships and with the logistic support element personnel, over the issue of being inoculated for anthrax. Some personnel had no problem with the inoculation, but many questioned the rightness of the process, the vaccine and long-term effects. Making the decision to be inoculated was hard for many. Many were confused by the amount of information available and what they were receiving from both defence and home. Others did not find it easy without their normal decision-makers around them for support and to enable their decision-making. These decisions were being made, as the media (world and Australian news services), along with emails from home, were reporting the way the world was trying to decide what to do in Iraq. I came across numerous personnel during this time who did not know how to make a decision. I personally spent a lot of time with different ones, helping them to come to a decision about the inoculations.

The Royal Australian Navy's vision is to be:

a Navy with a worldwide reputation for excellence as a sea power, a well-equipped professional team of highly motivated quality people, serving Australia with honour, supported by a nation proud of its Navy.  
(Plan Green)

Officers and sailors take a great deal of pride in their task and I noticed that ships' companies and those ashore in the Gulf worked very hard to complete their deployments to an extremely high standard. This was done in very arduous conditions and high levels of perceived and real threat.

To maintain a high level of commitment in a professional way can have an impact which can lead to what I would call 'operational burnout'. This was particularly evident in those who had completed multiple deployments, particularly close together. I am finding very tired people who are losing interest in their task since coming home. Many have lived at a high tempo for a long time, so to come back to the mundane has been frustrating and demotivating for some. There is a feeling now that, as the tempo has appeared to slow, personnel may not get a chance to 'do it for real' again and, because they have 'done it for real', what is the point of only practising?



*On watch in the engineering spaces during Operation SLIPPER*

Retention may be an issue with those who have deployed to the Gulf based on some of these issues. I have talked with some who are beginning to look at options outside of the RAN. The downside of professionalism is 'burnout'. I believe that there are a significant number of those who have deployed to the Gulf who may be suffering burnout. The issues above are relevant and reflect being burnt out. The reconstitution policy is a good one, but the loss of interest and tiredness is concerning. This is across rank, category and experience levels. Our people lived up to the Navy vision in the Gulf because they took their professionalism seriously and many are now struggling.

Many of us are aware of the impact on a member of the crew if something is not going well at home. The impact of what was happening at home was felt in the Gulf. Each issue had an effect on the individual crew member. This, at times, had an effect on others. The morale of the individual and others is impacted by events at home whether we like it or not. There are two things worth mentioning relating to those at home while we have been in the Gulf: preparation and the resilience of families.

Preparation is vital for our people and their families. We spend much time in preparing ships and then think about our people and getting them ready, often near the end, which for many may not be enough time. There is some good preparation being done, but preparation that enables our people to deploy well without issues dragging behind them is vital. It is vital that the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual issues of deployment are addressed through helpful information being given well in advance of a deployment. This gives our people and their families confidence to be deployed. This does not stop issues arising as life goes on and things happen, but good personnel preparation mitigates against panic and unhelpful struggle. There are good attempts to do this in various places. This is true in Western Australia where we have a rigorous program of pre-deployment briefs, but not everyone takes advantage of these and it shows.

I have been impressed by the resilience of our families while their family members have been in the Gulf. Many will ride through great difficulties because they believe in and support the family member. They see a purpose in what that family member is doing. Our families have been a marvellous support, but they sometimes also come to the end of their reserves. This affects adults as well as children, particularly if there have been multiple deployments into the area. Several issues have also emerged through the Defence Community Organisation's (DCO) activities in Perth, for example:

- children struggling at school with one of their parents being in the Gulf and teachers and students being opposed to what is happening,
- cumulative affect of numerous deployments on adults and children,
- community reaction often fuelled by the media,
- worries about anthrax, and
- concern about their family member being at war.

Our families did well and carried a huge load which we who were deployed may never know. Our people in the Gulf were impacted by their experience; so also were their families. I believe more time needs to be given to the preparation and encouragement of our families at home. If they are coping well, then the family member in the Gulf will function well. This is important for a successful deployment. Let us never forget the role our families have played, and continue to play, in the Gulf.

I sailed with *Anzac* up the Khawr Abd Allah waterway and was onboard for the naval gunfire support (NGS) provided in support of British land forces. When the hostilities began and the ship was moving onto the gun line, I moved around the ship in the chaplain's way. The following four areas are what I found most people reflecting upon: mortality, family, their immediate section, and the task being performed.

As humans we think about life and future life, particularly in a tense, life-threatening situation. Some personnel were confident in this, while others really struggled, particularly in the unknown circumstances. There was the initial unknown on the gunline because we did not know what could be fired back at us, so people thought about death, life and what would happen to them if they died or were seriously injured. The chemical threat, I think, generated the most reflection on mortality. While a chaplain's role is important generally, it is here that he comes into his own, as people face a potential life-threatening circumstance in a war environment. Faith and quiet prayer played a large part in giving our people great strength in the situation. It was in these experiences that many found the confidence and courage to use their training and preparation.

A number of people, as they were able, looked at pictures of their families and talked about them. They wondered what they were thinking as they would hear the news of what *Anzac* would be doing. They also asked how their families would be looked after if something happened to them.

Personnel were very interested to know what was happening to the people they worked with – from their section – if they were not nearby. The welfare of their 'oppo' was very important. There was a thirst for news of others in different parts of the ship, to know how they were going. The crew was also conscious of crew members in other ships, while doing what they were doing.

The crew became very focused on the task at hand. The morality of what was happening in Iraq was not an issue at that time. The ship had been given a task to complete, so they were all going to pull their weight and do what was assigned to them to the best of their ability. The big picture of the NGS and what was happening became of interest, and each volley of fire generated discussion and a wondering about its effect. The spirit of cooperation and interest was very high because of the focus.

After *Anzac* left the gunline, I went across to HMAS *Darwin*. They were struggling and felt that they had been left out of the excitement. Many felt that they had not played an important role. There was disappointment, frustration and some professional jealousy. This took a while to dissipate, but it did. There was an initial perception that the NGS was everything and they had missed out. It took a while for the crew in *Darwin* to appreciate that their role was important. In that environment, what role was important and what was not was brought into sharp focus. Soon after these events I had the opportunity to visit with Clearance Diving Team 3 (CDT 3) and found similar, yet different, emotions and concerns. They had other concerns which impacted on their morale. In the midst of the conflict though, they had many of the same reflections as their 'oppo's' in the ships.

Not everyone was able to be in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO), but it was vital for our people to know others were supporting the effort back home. For

many it was comforting to know that there were people supporting our families and us on a day-to-day basis, particularly the people-support groups such as chaplains, psychologists, DCO and human resources groups. These groups did an exceptional job during my trips to the Gulf.

I was impressed with the way the divisional system operated onboard the ships and ashore. Young divisional officers and senior sailors worked extremely hard to ensure their people were able to operate at the best level that they could in the environment. They had the support of the command, which helped empower them in their role. No one is perfect and nor are those who operate the divisional system, but it works and worked well in the Gulf environment. Sailors were grateful for the command/divisional support, particularly when there were concerns at home.

The medical teams onboard or ashore worked tirelessly to ensure the best level of physical health for our people. During the issues with anthrax, for example, they went beyond the call of duty to enable people to have good information, the best forum for decision-making and the most painless administration of the anthrax injections, as well as cope with the daily health needs of the crew.

The support personnel at home and in the MEAO, command/divisional staff, and the medical teams helped to boost the morale of personnel and were enablers in the fulfilment to a high standard, of the task that naval personnel were asked to perform. These teams' evident interest in the care of personnel and their families, through the pre-deployment, during the deployment, and post-deployment phases, was vital and needs to be considered as other ships deploy to places like the MEAO.

There is a picture on the wall in the chaplain's office in HMAS *Stirling*, of a ship on the horizon surrounded by storm clouds. On the bottom is a quote by a person named Shedd which says, 'A ship in a harbour is safe, but that is not what ships are built for'. Ships at sea can only do what they are built to do because the crews are prepared and operationally effective. Personnel issues in any operation, both in the MEAO and at home, need always be high on the agenda, to enable our ships and units like CDT 3 to 'fight and win at sea'. I believe that the RAN generally and the personnel in the Gulf individually and as units, achieved the accolades and the good name they have there, because the RAN has paid attention to and been responsive to the needs of the personnel and their families. We should not pat ourselves on the back though and say we have done well and leave it there. There is still much to learn and much to do in the support of our greatest asset, our people.

# Twenty Eight

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Lieutenant Sarah Chapman, RANR

*Deployed Psychologist BASTILLE & FALCONER*

HMAS *Kanimbla* recently [2003] returned to her home port at Fleet Base East following a six month deployment to the Middle East in support of Operation FALCONER and operations against Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Prior to her departure from Australia, I was identified for secondment to *Kanimbla* during the deployment. The RAN currently employs twenty-five uniformed psychologists in a Reserve capacity for the provision of psychological support and assistance as and where needed, in either the maritime environment or ashore.

In December 2002 it was thought that the deployment of a mental health specialist would facilitate an evaluation of the merit or otherwise of routinely deploying a psychologist on maritime operations and enable specific recommendations to be made for preparing and sustaining personnel for arduous duties and recurrent maritime deployment. In addition, provision of psychological support and counselling for personnel deployed to the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) on RAN warships was deemed advantageous noting anticipation of hostilities with Iraq and Iraqi forces.

Traditionally, the provision of psychological support, counselling, Officer Candidature (OC), Transfer of Category (TOC) and other suitability assessments has been undertaken ashore and has been the purview of civilian psychologists, with supplementation as required from their uniformed Navy counterparts. Unlike the US Navy, who routinely embark psychologists in their aircraft carriers, the RAN has most often preferred to limit the employment of uniformed psychologists to shore establishments and until recently, recruiting centres. Implicit in this traditional division of labour has been the assumption that personnel requiring psychological support and counselling are largely unfit for sea and that OC, TOC and suitability assessments are more properly undertaken ashore. Noting that the 24 hour requirement for watchkeeping and boat operations in a maritime environment often results in disrupted sleep and ongoing or cumulative fatigue for many, there is arguably some merit in the latter.

Notwithstanding this, the current Fleet op tempo precludes many personnel from meeting deadlines for TOC and OC assessment or else results in an unnecessary delay in career decision-making and progression for those occupying billets at sea. Recent recognition of the need to provide further opportunities for career enhancement and progression whilst underway lies in the fact that the Sailors' Leadership and Management Faculty is now offering the Leading Seaman Leadership Course (LSLC) to ships at sea.

During her return passage to Australia on completion of Operation FALCONER, *Kanimbla* facilitated delivery of the third LSLC to be conducted at sea, in recognition of the difficulties junior sailors have in being released for this promotion prerequisite course. (It is noted that some personnel receive provisional protection without having completed the LSLC.) A psychologist teaches two of the modules comprising the LSLC, these being suicide awareness and prevention and stress management.

The *Joint Health Services Agency Health Plan* currently includes the provision of psychological support to deployed personnel. To date, this support has been provided by uniformed psychologists on short periods of annual Continuous Training and Continuous Full Time Service and has comprised mental health education sessions and psychological screening during the pre- and post-deployment stage, the latter being undertaken during return passage to home port.

As testimony to the utility of the psychological service available during Operation FALCONER, two hundred and forty-nine counselling hours were provided between 4 February through 14 June inclusive (this excludes report writing and psychological testing) for personnel embarked in HMA Ships *Kanimbla*, *Anzac*, *Darwin* and *Sydney*. Counselling included a range of services for anxiety, stress, anger and fatigue management respectively, as well as TOC, OC and other suitability assessments and ad hoc personal counselling. The latter included, but was not limited to, assertiveness training, time management, study skills training, relationship counselling and career choice and decision making.

These contact hours also included two Suitability for Retention assessments for drug-related offences in accordance with Defence Instruction (N) 13-1 and Return to Australia Psychological Screening (RTAPS) for Task Group and *Kanimbla* personnel returning home early from deployment. Lastly, counselling was provided for those personnel who refused to consent to anthrax vaccination prior to entering the MEAO and who were subsequently returned home to Australia.

The RTAPS comprises a questionnaire assessing the extent to which the deployed member has been subjected to traumatic incidents and known deployment stressors such as risk of unauthorised discharge of weapons, risk of being injured or killed and potential exposure to nuclear, biological or chemical threat. The RTAPS is accompanied by a psycho-education session highlighting the risk of burnout (emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation) to personnel returning home from extended military operations and the impact that this emotional and psychological state may have on attempts to re-establish intimacy with friends, family and loved ones. The third and final component of the RTAPS is an individual interview during which personnel may ask questions pertaining to their own psychological adjustment and anticipated homecoming in private with the interviewing psychologist. Whilst there has been some debate and contention regarding the provision of this service, personnel who attend an individual interview more often than not describe it as a worthwhile endeavour.

The other specialist psychological service provided during Operation FALCONER was Critical Incident Mental Health Support (CMS). CMS is the new counselling and intervention framework used within the Australian Defence Force following a critical or traumatic incident. Research has demonstrated that early intervention and support following a critical or traumatic incident can reduce the likelihood that the affected member will suffer long term psychological sequelae.

CMS counselling and intervention was provided to the embarked 817 Squadron flight after Shark 07 [the embarked Sea King] suffered a catastrophic engine failure whilst operating in Iraqi territory. CMS counselling was also provided to two Air Defence personnel following an unauthorised discharge of an RBS70 missile, two aircrew maintainers after witnessing two Royal Navy Sea King helicopters collide over the flight deck of HMS *Ark Royal* and to another member following an incident ashore during a port visit.



*Kanimbla boarding team with a captured Iraqi tug and minelaying barge, March 2003*



Information addressing mental well being, positive living skills, conflict resolution, stress management, and operational fatigue management was also distributed to personnel during the deployment. The pre-deployment psychological brief was delivered with the assistance of the embarked chaplain. Specifically, personnel were reminded of preferred and optimal ways to maintain intimacy and familiarity in relationships despite physical separation and distance and the anticipated emotional stages of adjustment to deployment to the MEAO in anticipation of supporting the coalition effort to liberate Iraq. The latter included provision of information regarding cognitive-behavioural techniques to manage anxiety, accept uncertainty and correct irrational, negative thinking that may affect individual operational effectiveness during the forthcoming operations.

Prior to the commencement of hostilities against Iraq, there was an increase in the number of personnel seeking psychological support for anxiety, fatigue and anger management. Counselling was provided with due regard to watchkeeping and operational requirements. The embarked Primary Casualty Reception Facility proved ideal for sleep management interventions, specifically instruction on progressive muscle relaxation.

Education and awareness was further provided with reference to operational fatigue management and the importance of fatigue countermeasures in remaining sufficiently alert to be considered fit for duty. Personnel were advised that the human body is least responsive during 0200 and 0600 and that most industrial and maritime accidents occur during these times. Fatigue countermeasures were highlighted to watchkeepers. These included:

- ensuring anchor sleep (a period of sleep obtained at the same time each day)
- strategic use of caffeine (use of caffeine during the early morning and early afternoon and the first half of a watch period)
- increased awareness that complex and interesting tasks are less prone to disruption from sleep deprivation than boring, uninteresting, repetitive and/or well-rehearsed tasks
- a twenty-minute sleep every six hours can partially satisfy human sleep requirements for as much as a sixty-four hour period
- individuals vary in the amount of sleep they need to adequately perform tasks, however research has consistently demonstrated that four hours of sleep within any one twenty-four hour period is the minimum requirement for adequate performance of vigilance tasks. Vigilance tasks are those requiring sustained attention such as those performed by Combat Systems Operators and Boatswain's Mates employed as lookouts.

A preparatory psychological briefing was also given to personnel embarked in *Kanimbla* who were likely to be involved in body handling and recovery of human remains if the ship were to proceed up the Khawr Abd Allah waterway to deliver humanitarian aid to Umm Qasr. The briefing addressed those aspects of body handling that personnel are least likely to consider, such as the initial emotional shock response to the sight and smell of a decaying or disfigured corpse and the emotional and physical fatigue that this work often brings. This was the first such session for many personnel, including the embarked coalition forces.

The overall psychological health and emotional well being of personnel deployed on Operation FALCONER in *Kanimbla*, *Darwin*, *Anzac* and *Sydney* met with expectation. Specifically, there was an increase in Command, Divisional and self-referrals prior to the commencement of hostilities against Iraq and a peak in the number of referrals for sleep, fatigue and anger management. Referrals for OC, TOC and career and ad hoc counselling increased once hostilities had ceased and personnel were able to pursue more routine administrative matters.

The tangible benefit in having embarked a psychologist in *Kanimbla* during her deployment to the MEAO and involvement in FALCONER is the development of mental health briefing materials, discussion papers, brochures and fliers to better prepare personnel deployed on future operations. The Army deployable psychology unit (1 PSYCH, Randwick Barracks) has an extensive resource library developed by the uniformed Army psychologists who have deployed to East Timor. It is intended that lessons learned during deployment to Operation FALCONER and RTAPS data obtained from personnel deployed on maritime operations previously will assist in developing support materials and counselling protocols more suited to the maritime environment.

As a uniformed psychologist I am frequently advised 'Just tell 'em to harden up!' and that (personnel) 'don't need psychologists; they just need their mates and their DO [Divisional Officer]'. In reality, their shipmates often don't have the answers (or if they do, they are often in a similar predicament and unable to provide objective advice and assistance). Similarly their Divisional Officers don't often have the time to invest in other than a single, unstructured session that does little other than make the member feel better for a short period. Whilst the talking cure is a well-reputed therapeutic tool and is most often provided by a social support network including family and friends, the role of a deployed psychologist differs in being a more structured, disciplined and informed process designed to educate the member and increase their level of self-efficacy.

The primary role of a deployed psychologist is to teach uniformed personnel to 'harden up'; to invest time in them and devise a structured program to assist them in resolving the issues and difficulties they are experiencing at sea. The distinct advantage in providing a deployed psychological service is the ability for the psychologist to observe

personnel in the performance of their duties in the operational environment to which they are required to adapt. The deployed psychologist has an enhanced understanding and awareness of the current situational demands on personnel and is able to design counselling interventions tailored to suit, or otherwise remain cognisant, of those demands. For example, assertiveness training was provided for a number of leading seamen during the course of the deployment. Personnel were assigned homework and given a structured program to increase self-confidence and enhance leadership skills in a seagoing environment. Whilst this information can readily be provided ashore, the opportunity to provide such information and counselling at sea encouraged these personnel to apply the principles they were being taught whilst in an operational environment and during routine performance of their duties. In the majority of cases this resulted in enhanced learning and a more realistic appraisal of the importance of skill development in this area.

It is a time-honoured law of human behaviour that when you don't know what to do, you do what you know. The argument that we have never previously employed psychologists at sea is an example of this natural tendency to ignorance. It appears the RAN is currently forward thinking in the provision of a deployable psychological service and cognisant that delivery of psychological support and assistance is a condition of service that has gained an increased profile with the introduction of the ADF Mental Health Policy. The way forward has not yet been made clear, but the provision of a deployable psychological service available in support of maritime deployments remains a distinct possibility.

## Notes

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- 1 This article first appeared in the *Journal of the Australian Naval Institute*, Spring 2003, pp. 23-6.

## PART VIII – OPEN FORUM

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**Commander Peter Leavy:** I have a comment which links two points that have been made: one by Commodore Flynn about the perception that health support does not have the degree of visibility that it needs outside the health fraternity, certainly in the planning stages. The second one was from Commodore Baker, in which he mentioned that there was a rigid personnel cap applied back in the First Gulf War, with the number of divers being the delta between the complements of *Success* and *Westralia*.

*Kanimbla*, this time round, sailed, as a lot of people will be aware, equipped for a level three health facility, but it was not fully manned. They needed around six extra people to crew it properly. One of the factors that hindered us getting the full capability embarked, and there were probably a number of issues, was the personnel cap. Too many people, myself included, spent too much time trying to argue the case and work the issue. The rigid personnel cap that was imposed at the outset had no flexibility built into it to be adjusted for numbers in-theatre as the job changed, and it certainly changed a lot as we moved on. We need to control the number of people in-theatre, but having a rigid personnel cap was probably not the way to do it. We need to look at how to better manage personnel strength in future.

**Commodore Michael Flynn:** *Kanimbla* was fitted for a very sophisticated eight-bed intensive care facility supported by another 32 low intensity facilities. To actually make it work as a mini-hospital you have got to have the surgeons and the anaesthetist as well.

General Stevens is conducting a review at the moment, in recognition, finally, that the level of health support from the Reserve is way down. The fact that the head of Defence Personnel Executive commissioned the study, not the Chief of Defence Force, probably says something. I made the point to General Stevens that when a lot of the decisions were being made in the 1980s it was very heavily dependent on the personal experience of the senior officers. I know, for example, General Sanderson was very supportive of health elements, and this derived from his experience in Vietnam and later in Cambodia.

Our experience levels with operations and conflict is now much greater than it was in 1989. At that time we had few people remaining with experience from Vietnam. Indeed, the commanding officer of HMAS *Hobart*, when it took the Sparrow from a USAF Phantom and suffered three fatalities, had no doubt about the requirement for health support. My senior surgeon lieutenant when I joined the Navy was the doctor who operated on the wardroom table of HMAS *Hobart*. Of course the incident was actually blue-on-blue-friendly fire.

**Lieutenant Desmond Woods:** You mention multiple vaccinations and the concern that has been expressed about them. You would be aware of the epidemiological evidence that suggests that the French, who were unvaccinated, have had no Gulf War Syndrome, or very miniscule numbers. You would also be aware that the civilians who were with us, for example Kuwaiti pilots, who were not vaccinated, have indicated no symptoms either.

My concern relates not just to the vaccinations themselves, and the fact that we had botuli, anthrax and plague injections within seven days, and many of us had blinding headaches and high fevers, but also we were taking NAPS tablets simultaneously. I really wonder about the efficacy and common sense of continuing to run the risk of combining vaccinations which may in themselves be innocuous with the unknown factor of bringing in NAPS tablets at the same time.

**Commodore Michael Flynn:** Recent research goes into epidemiology extensively and there is a lot of debate and argument about the efficacy of multiple vaccinations given over a short time-frame, and with the administration of tablets. At one stage we were told we had to take NAPS tablets, plus anti-malaria tablets, plus suprafloxin in case of anthrax. No-one has actually done the pharmacode dynamics of what happens when you put three of those in your stomach at the same time. There is another pharmacological agent you can take to reduce the incidence of radiation sickness in terms of a nuclear threat. Now the interaction of all of those things is going to take a long time to sort out and there is still serious debate amongst the professionals in the field. I do not think we are going to get an easy answer.

We have a dilemma under occupational health and safety regulations where we are required to provide a safe working environment and if that means vaccination against various threats, then so be it.

**Captain Roger Boyce:** While I was in the Gulf we had pretty robust support from the chaplains, not only Australian, but also some from the United States Navy. It always seemed to me that the chaplains from the United States Navy came from a fairly strange side of the track. I was wondering if you would like to make a comment on the efficacy of having chaplains from other navies come into our ships and whether or not the pastoral care they provided was as good as the pastoral care we can provide ourselves.

**Chaplain Barrie Yesberg:** The last time I was in the Gulf I came across the circumstance where all the chaplains who were at sea were Protestant. When we started looking at the potential conflict there were still a number of Catholic folk who would want particular ministrations and so we went looking for a Catholic chaplain. The chaplain we found was a bit of a character and most people appreciated his input. We also struck problems where we arranged for him to come, but then he got pulled out and was sent somewhere else. We predominantly had them come out for the more public area of ministry, church services, mass, and all those sorts of things. Also

available were pastoral and counselling services for those who sought such support. So yes, they were very helpful.

**Captain Ray Griggs:** Barrie, thanks for your presentation, it shows yet again the utility of a chaplain in being able to make the sorts of observations you did without any perceived agenda. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

I found your comments on moral dilemmas to be of interest. In *Arunta* we did not have any moral dilemmas about our task, and a lot of that stems from the fact that we got all our moral dilemmas out of the way during the operation that no-one speaks of [Operation RELEX] in late 2001. It was very clear-cut for my team, so I was interested to see that it obviously sprung up in other ships. The other point I wanted to make was about psychological support and pre-briefing and debriefing. The first experience I had of operational debriefing was coming out of RELEX; we did not do it going in, which was probably a mistake. It was extremely valuable on the way back from SLIPPER. We had a psychologist for the entire transit back as part of the Leading Seaman Leadership Course that we were running at the time. He did a mountain of work and probably headed off quite a number of issues, so by the time we got back a lot of that was sorted, or at least the dialogue that had commenced between him and some of those people was really important. From a command perspective I found that extremely useful and we need to see an even greater role for psychologists at sea.

**Chaplain Barrie Yesberg:** This topic came up again at the Gulf War Veterans Health Study penultimate review conducted here in Canberra on Tuesday. The Minister is yet to respond to it. One of the themes though, is that despite the fact that psychological care was available in the First Gulf War, the degree of penetration was a little bit variable. We are still getting these psychological symptoms, particularly in the people you do not see.

By definition if you are a Gulf War veteran and I presume many of you contributed to the findings in this document, you are survivors, and you are also senior and you have been promoted and everything is going well. The majority of the Gulf War veterans are not actually serving members at the moment. They are out there and some of those are the ones who are hurting. What has become more puzzling and more troubling is that there have been a whole lot of other campaigns since then: Somalia, Rwanda, Bougainville, Timor and the Gulf deployments and those involved with the refugees.

One message that the government and the department are now learning is that there is a requirement almost for lifelong follow-up. The stresses that our current operational units experience are not ones that psychology and religion can deal with, other than to perhaps prepare people better for the fact that they may suffer downstream effects.

Quite a lot of the dilemmas that I am talking about I have found by just sitting out on the flight deck, or down in the engine spaces, or where people happened to be. That is where they often talk through a lot of the dilemmas rather than at the command level. While things may be sorted out at one level, the day-to-day level, people often talk through a lot of issues sitting in the cafe and that is where you find thoughts being expressed about dilemmas.

**Lieutenant Commander Simon Bateman:** You mentioned that families were reaching the end of their reserves, especially in the case of extended, but probably more importantly, multi-deployments back-to-back. You also mentioned the work of psychologists, social workers and family liaison officers. I think most people would agree that, in most cases, by the time we get to the psychologists and social workers, we are getting pretty late in the piece and the damage may have been done. Commanding officers go to a lot of effort these days to write to ships' families and so forth and that generally occurs once a month or once every two months, which is a great thing. I believe there is merit in the DCO short-circuiting the system a little bit by making contact with next of kin on a regular basis throughout deployments just to see how things are going.

**Chaplain Barrie Yesberg:** The DCO cannot perform such tasks, because of the Privacy Act. They cannot get hold of addresses and phone numbers and contact families. They used to be able to do that, but that has all changed. The letters from the ships are very helpful and families appreciate reading those and seeing the pictures, particularly of their own loved ones.

**Commander Aaron Ingram:** Our families appreciated the regular series of emails from the commanding officer. The number of responses I received, even if I was only to say we are safe and well, was far more powerful and important than perhaps trying to crank up DCO to try to visit people. Email is a very powerful tool.

**Captain Andrew Gough:** The point I would like to make is that, while the Navy has come away with building into the LPAs a primary care reception facility, it is still debatable whether we actually have credible capability on that front at the moment or not. We do not have anything that resembles a formed unit that can be called a PCRFB [Primary Casualty Receiving Facility]. Nor is there any form of collective training or establishment of competency or currency framework for that group of people that would populate a PCRFB. There is no preparedness requirement and no individual readiness requirements for people to make sure that it can function. On that basis, while we have a facility, we are still a long way short of credible capability and our ability to cement it into our operations is going to fall short of the mark as long as that remains the case.

**Commodore Michael Flynn:** There is a scheme of complement mapped out with an OIC. It has been practised on either *Kanimbla* or *Manoora* if not in the last 18 months, then certainly in the last three to four years. Elements have also been exercised on US amphibious ships with more extensive capabilities, particularly during the exercise off the Queensland coast where they bring not just Navy, but Army and Air Force health personnel. Ultimately, there are some minor differences between the equipments. The anaesthetic machines, for example, on the American ships are quite different from ours, and their cylinders for oxygen are a different colour. But once you get over those things the actual principles of running a formed element on an amphibious platform are pretty much similar. So I take your point, but to try to get a realistic exercise built into the fleet exercise program and funds to pay the officers, because a lot of them are going to come from Reserves, is difficult. I understand there are some shadow billets to the key planning billets and they are probably double-hatted with people in Maritime Command and Headquarters Australian Theatre and other areas.

**Captain Tim Maddern:** It is probably fair to say that Andy's made a very valid point and a lot of the efforts in terms of getting PCRf together over the last five years or so have been *ad hoc*, and continuation training arrangements have been *ad hoc*. It has been activated to varying degrees at varying times and the American ships are a good example. We need to put a lot more effort into it making it a credible capability, particularly in terms of sustainability in which there are clear shortcomings at the moment.

**Commodore Michael Flynn:** My understanding is that the decision not to put a full element on board the ship going to the last war was made pretty much at the last minute. I know at least one officer who had his bags packed and was about to get on the plane to go when the requirement was withdrawn. I do not know the reason behind why it was not equipped for the last war. I can only assume that they had decided that the health support could be provided from other elements and it was a less important part of fitting it out.

**Captain Peter Jones:** I have spent many days with this issue. The operational requirement was there; we should have had it, particularly with the weather conditions where flying was, at times, doubtful. We made the offset by reducing the requirement down to eight people; we even offloaded sufficient people in the task group to get under the ceiling. At the end of the day, and you are right, people had bags packed and, in fact, people were ordered to go, but it was changed around at a high level at the last moment. Part of the reason was related to risk and people – we were committing ourselves to an operation but not wanting to put people at a high risk. We were committing to an operation and not wanting to have large amounts of casualties, therefore it could send a bad political statement to send a surgical team. That is my understanding of the situation. Certainly the British and the Americans thought we were quite peculiar in knowing what we were about to embark on and not having eight medical people in



the team. COMAST was quite supportive in trying to get that decision changed, but the decision was not changed.

**Captain Andrew Gough:** One of the ingredients we have not explored that is worthy of some attention is the changing nature of the Sea Training Group and its work about the time we were preparing or sending the first commitment in the Gulf. At the time, the RN and RAN had opened up an exchange of documentation between Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) and the Sea Training Group. The subsequent visit of *Sydney* to FOST as a precursor to all of this was instrumental in reshaping the way that we prepared units. That had a bearing on the way things were shaped for preparing the first wave of ships deploying to the Gulf.

Removal of the citadel from the *Anzac* class frigates has been mentioned a few times. Hopefully one of the things we have now improved in Navy is to make Navy Headquarters more influential in capability development planning. Back in 1997 Maritime Development, knowing that we only had one *Anzac* completed at the time, tried to get a study started into putting a citadel back into the *Anzac* ship. Those of us who had been up to the First Gulf War thought it was a bit peculiar that we removed it, and we actually got a quote in for \$110,000 to do a full study. Obviously when the seven ships were not yet completed, there was perhaps a possibility of actually doing this sensibly. However, it was not seen as a priority within the *Anzac* ship project, the Defence Materiel Organisation itself, and that is where the priority stopped. Hopefully one of the things we can pick up from this is that Navy is much more into that game – perhaps we can stop that happening in the future.

I understand that veterans from the First Gulf War from *Brisbane* have been making claims for post-traumatic stress. It appears that those involved heavily in the operations rooms side are not the ones that are mostly troubled. The problem appears to relate more to personnel who were down in the fire rooms and the damage control bases with a lot of time to think, hearing the initial action stations, getting the reports about missiles inbound and then nothing happening for a long period.

There is also an issue of self-worth. Certainly having done RELEX it is very important for the command to understand the sailor's morale, and family support is much higher if everyone in the task group thinks what they are doing is important. Some of the quite petty bickering between *Sydney* and *Brisbane* during the First Gulf War did not help because basically there were issues from the command that were undermining the self-worth of the ship's company in both ships. There were arguments about which role we should be doing and whether one ship was more important than the other ship. It is certainly a command responsibility issue to reach above that petty level and try to make everyone feel valued and that might help in the long run. Certainly there was no psychological debrief after the First Gulf War and that has been an issue.

**Captain Richard Menhinick:** That last point is not quite accurate; there was psychological debriefing made available, my understanding is that *Sydney* accepted it.

**Commander Aaron Ingram:** Just to pick up on Captain Menhinick's point and also Barrie Yesberg's observations of his visit to *Darwin*, and this feeling of self-worth. The relationship within the task group we had in FALCONER was excellent; the problem we faced in *Darwin* was that the media was such a powerful tool and our lack of mention in the media actually was the root of those problems that Barrie encountered. It caused me a great leadership problem in trying to keep people motivated and focused on the job at hand. It had an impact on the families in that they were not hearing about what we were up to and that also prompted some concerns for them as well. In future we need to consider very carefully how we produce media plans and conduct media campaigns in support of these operations.

**Captain Peter Lockwood:** Commander Ingram's point about the media is something that we did not actually capture in any of our presentations. There are a huge number of lessons from how we manipulated the media and worked with the media during the SLIPPER and FALCONER periods. In my post-deployment report I highlighted three areas of concern and the way that we worked with the media was one of them, especially the number of layers of bureaucracy.

**Commander John Mortimer:** One thing that concerns me about the Gulf deployments, border protection, and peacekeeping commitments to the Solomons, Timor, and so on, is that we seem to be denuding our traditional warfare skills by all these activities. The other implication of all these commitments is that it is giving Defence a big operating cost bubble which will ultimately bounce back into the capital programs and inhibit our ambitions for new capabilities.

**Commodore Russ Baker:** The cost issues are certainly recognised by the Chief of Defence Force and the arrangement we have is that Defence will get supplementation for the operating costs. The problem they have right now is defining accurately what those operating costs are. The more accurately we can define them, then the less of a problem it becomes. The government is certainly committed to supplementation of additional operating costs for these sorts of activities.

What was the first question again?

**Commander John Mortimer:** The overall skill levels. It seems we are getting very good at boarding ships and border protection, but are losing our edge in traditional warfare skills, nor are we undertaking the number of regional engagement exercises we did in the past.

**Commodore Russ Baker:** I guess when you asked that question first up I was interested with the fact that you said traditional warfighting and I guess there is a problem there – what is traditional warfighting? Is it how we fought 10 years ago? Have our roles changed? We would work a ship up to a very high level of operational capability before sending it to the Gulf and we would, I suspect, get it back at a much reduced level because it has little opportunity to exercise those skills while in the Gulf. We tend to come back at a lower level of operational performance, especially in things like anti-submarine warfare (ASW) where we are probably at a more reduced capability than we once were.

**Captain Peter Lockwood:** I was always a prophet of doom and gloom about this as well. Over the last two weeks we conducted an ASW exercise off the west coast with *Anzac* and *Darwin*, who were well over 12 months out of doing ASW; four other ships; maritime patrol aircraft from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Britain; a submarine; a towed array system; bi-statics; multi-statics; and 816 Squadron helicopters in the most complicated ASW exercise I have ever done without having worked up to it.

Day one was a shambles, day two was improving, I could see the light on the horizon, my ship broke, the commanding officer of *Darwin* assumed the task group commander's role, and by the end of the last day all these assets had come together brilliantly. I do not know why; there must be still some corporate knowledge that existed, some skills that we still had, but I was amazed by the way that we had reconstituted that skill on those particular areas quite quickly. The week before that, with our principal warfare officer (PWO) sea week where we had an air defence exercise of equal complexity, and again over a four-day period, we were able to reconstitute the skills quite quickly. I think that it is a case of corporate knowledge and that corporate knowledge is probably fading quickly.

**Commander Aaron Ingram:** The comment was made about performance of sailors in the Gulf – with the ASW exercise there was quite a realistic scenario and the sailors lifted when they knew what they were doing was realistic.

**Chaplain Barrie Yesberg:** One of the things that is very much in my mind as we go into these deployments is we could lose somebody in-theatre. We have not lost a single person in-theatre at all – to me that is really incredible when you consider many coalition parties have lost many, many people.

**PART IX:  
OPERATION CATALYST  
2004-2009**

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# Twenty Nine

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Captain Phil Spedding, OAM, RAN

*Commanding Officer HMAS Stuart SLIPPER Eight*

On the evening of 24 April 2004, three near concurrent suicide boat attacks were made against the Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT) and Al Basrah Oil Terminal (ABOT) in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG).<sup>1</sup> Coalition forces under *Stuart's* control disrupted the coordinated attack and prevented catastrophic damage to the terminals, however a US Navy boarding party from USS *Firebolt* that intercepted one of the boats sustained multiple, serious casualties.

The incident was probably the first time that most onboard *Stuart* were confronted with real danger, fear, injury and death. However, the officers and ship's company responded in a most professional manner, and dealt effectively with the challenges of that night, and the days and months that followed. The purpose of this short article is to reflect upon *Stuart's* involvement in the incident, which was the defining aspect of Operation SLIPPER Rotation Eight.

## Arrival in the Gulf

*Stuart* started the workup process for Operations CATALYST/SLIPPER in January 2004, and benefited from the accumulated knowledge of some 15 years of RAN Gulf Operations. After a number of inevitable challenges, we arrived on station in the NAG on 14 April. That day my Operations Team received an INCHOP brief from the NAG Maritime Security Operations (MSO) Commander, CO USS *Yorktown*, and I admit to being somewhat surprised when I was told that MSO duties would be passed to *Stuart* the following morning!

As MSO Commander, the main responsibility was to defend the Iraqi offshore oil facilities, KAAOT and ABOT. These two terminals supply around 1.8 million barrels of oil per day, the revenue from which is vital to national reconstruction efforts. Additional requirements were the defence of coalition shipping, and the maintenance of sea control in the NAG and approaches to the two key waterways - the Shatt Al Arab (SAA) and Khawr Abd Allah (KAA). Sea control included the gathering of maritime intelligence, and prevention of the movement of prohibited cargoes. This was achieved through a comprehensive yet flexible boarding regime, targeting merchant shipping and dhows.

The task group (TG) assigned to the MSO Commander normally consisted of one or two major fleet units (RAN, RN or US Navy), and two or three US Navy or USCG patrol boats. On 24 April I had stationed *Stuart* and *Firebolt* as the ABOT and KAAOT guard ships respectively. To assist with the sea control task, USCGC *Wrangel* was stationed in the approaches of the KAA, and USS *Yorktown* in the deeper water to the southwest of ABOT. Of note, *Firebolt* had unexpectedly joined the task group early on 24 April when a programmed escort task had been cancelled. Had she not joined, *Stuart* would have been patrolling near KAAOT overnight.

A 'security' zone had been established around each of the terminals, and the guard ships were kept very busy escorting numerous fishing and cargo dhows that attempted to transit through their zones. Ship's boats were regularly launched to investigate and warn-off the dhow crews, the intent being to inform and educate the masters about the establishment of the zones.

Overnight on 23 April, a concentrated boarding program had been conducted against dhow traffic, with *Stuart* boarding some 36 and querying many others. Nothing significant was discovered and boarding and query operations continued without incident throughout the daylight hours of 24 April.

## The Attacks of 24 April

Just on dusk (about 1914 local), the lookouts advised the on-watch PWO (principal warfare officer) of smoke in the general direction of KAAOT. After being called, I proceeded to the bridge and could clearly see the reported smoke. However, I had no further information available and suspected that a fishing dhow or other small craft had suffered some form of mishap, something which we had seen before, and were to witness on a number of further occasions. *Stuart* was conducting Engineering Casualty Control Drills and these were cancelled as a precaution, and the Engineering team restored propulsion in extremely quick time.

Sunset was at 1917 and shortly thereafter we received a frantic report via VHF that a fishing dhow had exploded whilst *Firebolt's* RHIB was alongside. The RHIB had capsized and six personnel were reported to be in the water (this was later amended to seven). I directed the OOW to close *Firebolt's* position at best speed, for at this stage I was still unsure of what had really happened, and was focused on providing assistance to *Firebolt* over four miles away.

*Stuart's* aircraft was airborne conducting surface search, and was some six miles from *Firebolt*. The aircraft was directed to close and to assist with the location and recovery of personnel, and was the first asset to arrive at the scene.

The aircrew witnessed a scene of considerable confusion. Through their searchlights, they could see personnel struggling in the water amongst oil and large amounts of debris. *Firebolt* had only been about 400 yards away from her RHIB when the dhow

exploded, and was now attempting to recover her personnel with lifelines and any other means available. Flares and searchlights added to the confused scene.

The aircrew initially attempted the rescue of a survivor who they could see had significant head injuries, but the casualty was unable to don the rescue strop for a winch recovery. With the survivor holding onto the strop, an attempt was made to drag him to *Firebolt*; however he was too weak to maintain a grip. Fearing imminent drowning, the decision was made to deploy the Sensor Operator (SENSO) into the water via a diver drop profile. The SENSO subsequently kept the survivor afloat until our RHIB arrived on scene. The RHIB crew then assisted with the recovery and transfer of casualties to *Firebolt* for initial treatment.

Whilst this rescue was being affected, a large explosion occurred in the vicinity of ABOT. On the bridge wing we first saw the smoke, then heard the loud blast and felt the heat on our faces. Distant small arms fire could be heard. It was at this point that I finally realised a coordinated attack of some sort was in progress, and was immediately conscious of how exposed both oil terminals were. *Yorktown* was ordered to close ABOT at best speed, and I decided to remain in *Firebolt*'s position so that *Stuart* support her and also provide protection for KAAOT.

*Stuart* was brought to action stations and the surface warning was raised to Red. I left the bridge for the operations room, where I believed I could exercise more effective control of the situation. The Executive Officer (XO) and Navigator, both experienced and capable, remained on the bridge.

Six minutes later, a second large explosion was observed in the vicinity of ABOT. As additional protection for the terminals, *Wrangel* was also ordered to close ABOT, although she was some 20 miles distant.

At 2007 *Stuart* received her RHIB alongside, transferring the first three casualties. Two of these were serious trauma cases with multiple injuries. The third had ceased breathing on initial recovery to *Firebolt*, but EAR, then CPR had been commenced. *Stuart* sailors had continued CPR during the RHIB transfer, but the patient was declared dead on arrival by *Stuart*'s Medical Officer (MO). The RHIB returned to *Firebolt* on a number of occasions, transferring equipment, casualties, and one sailor who was pronounced dead by *Firebolt*'s medic. The RHIB crew was not stood down until approximately 2200.

At 2020 *Stuart*'s aircraft conducted a medivac, via stretcher lift from *Firebolt*'s focsle, of a critically injured sailor. He was brought onboard, assessed and stabilised by the MO and her team, and eventually transferred ashore to Kuwait. The aircrew had to contend with a change in destination mid flight, a severe dust storm whilst on the ground, and deteriorating weather and visibility enroute to the ship, before they were finally recovered and stood down for tasking the following day. Sadly the patient was to die in hospital.



By around 2030, a clearer picture of what had happened at ABOT finally emerged. One of the tankers alongside reported that two small speedboats (approx 14 feet in length) had closed the terminals at high speed, coming under fire from the Iraqi security detail as they closed. Both boats had exploded prior to reaching the terminal, thus preventing any significant damage. Clearly, the fatal dhow explosion had been the trigger for the subsequent attacks against ABOT.

With *Yorktown* and *Wrangel* on station, and no further attacks forthcoming, by about 2230 I felt I could reduce the surface warning to Yellow. *Stuart* remained at action stations until all of *Firebolt's* casualties were finally evacuated ashore. Two medivac aircraft from the carrier *USS George Washington* were provided, and the final casualties departed the ship by 0054 on the 25th. I fell *Stuart* out from action stations shortly thereafter.

We subsequently learned that a total of three US Navy and USCG personnel died from their wounds, and the remaining four were evacuated home for long term care and recovery. A number of days later, an explosive filled dhow was discovered drifting in the Gulf - thankfully an unutilised element of the attack.



*HMAS Stuart patrols the North Arabian Gulf during SLIPPER Eight*

## Command Considerations

The incident was a challenge for me in command. Throughout I was conscious of the need to balance the demands of Task Group Commander (CTG) and ship's captain. When the dhow explosion was first reported, I did not make the association with a terrorist attack. I assumed that the dhow had suffered some form of catastrophic accident, and *Firebolt's* initial reports indicated nothing to suggest otherwise.

As Commanding Officer I felt obliged to help a fellow mariner in distress. When the first explosion occurred at ABOT, it was immediately clear to me that an attack was in progress, and I was conscious that ABOT was essentially unguarded except for the security detail. Although *Yorktown* was ordered to close ABOT, her draught in relation to the available depth of water meant that she could not transit directly, having to take a more circuitous route instead. I decided to remain with *Firebolt* to render assistance, and also to provide defence to KAAOT. I was to question the wisdom of this decision six minutes later when the second attack was conducted.

With *Stuart* at action stations, I had sufficient personnel available to handle and treat the multiple casualties that were being received onboard. I was also confident that sufficient measures were in place to ensure *Stuart's* safety. We held a large number of dhows visually and on radar, and these appeared no different to the dhow that had exploded. A small boat closed *Yorktown* at speed, totally unlit, and several warning shots were fired, but nothing further developed. An unidentified aircraft was also reported closing the terminals, which increased tensions somewhat.

As the CTG, I reallocated my limited resources to ensure the best ongoing protection of the oil terminals. The provision of a strike air package from *George Washington* was a welcome, if somewhat heavy handed, addition to my small force! I was conscious of the need for rapid reporting ashore, and saw very quickly the potential benefits of a same time reporting system like 'chat'. Whereas I only sent seven OPREP/SITREP messages on the incident, I maintained a near real time narrative report back to the US Navy authorities in Bahrain. This information flow was sufficiently effective that I was not pressed for any additional information, and my handling of the tactical situation was not hindered. The fact that I had previously worked within the NAVCENT Headquarters, and knew my Task Force Commander (CTF) very well, also assisted.

The XO and Navigator effectively controlled activities on the bridge, and I was able to concentrate my focus largely external to the ship. I used the WEEO (Weapons Electrical Engineering Officer) and two CPOCSMs (Chief Petty Officer Combat System Managers) as a mini 'think tank' to help ensure that I had taken all appropriate task group measures, and left the PWOs to coordinate the majority of the activities internal to the ship. This worked well, and allowed me to think as broadly as possible. However, as the incident stabilised, I was conscious I had not provided the level of information to the ship's company that I would normally have done without the task group responsibilities.

I therefore conducted a walkaround of the ship immediately prior to falling out from action stations, briefing the ship's company on what had occurred, and what the plans were for the following days. The ship's company was in a good state, although some of the younger members were clearly shaken by their experiences. Interestingly, they made it quite clear that despite the incident overnight, and perhaps because of it, they still wanted to proceed with a planned ANZAC day dawn service.

Early next morning, we had to facilitate the movement of some 50 US Marines from ashore to reinforce the platforms, and also work out coordination and logistic support arrangements. This was an interesting task for the XO and Supply Officer! Additional surface ships began to arrive in the NAG, and within a week force levels had more than doubled.

With the increase in assets, and heightened awareness of the threat to the terminals, it was clear that the NAG Concept of Operations required review. We convened a planning activity, with input from the task group, CTF staff, Naval Special Warfare planners, US Marines, and members of the Carrier Air Group. This planning was led by the WEEO (a staff course graduate) and the output was an appreciation of the tactical situation and the task group mission. This was forwarded to Fifth Fleet through the CTF, and helped to favourably shape the way NAG operations were conducted from that point. *Stuart* remained NAG MSO Commander until early May, when we proceeded off station for a port visit, and regularly held the duty again until our final OUTCHOP in mid-August.

## Lessons/Reflection

What sort of lessons can be drawn from the incident? The scenario that presented on 24 April was initially a very confusing one, and not like anything we had specifically trained for. However, good training during the workup, on passage, and whilst in theatre, ensured that personnel were competent in their duties and able to respond to the new and difficult situation. Delegation to key officers allowed me to concentrate on my CTG duties, and the ship's company reacted quickly, effectively, and most impressively to their changing circumstance. That effective training and delegation are critical to mission success is nothing new, and *Stuart's* experience vindicated the comprehensive force preparation that is provided to all deploying RAN units. The incident and the subsequent months on station also served to remind me of the inherent quality of our officers and sailors. They continued to serve effectively, and with good humour, through until our final OUTCHOP and return to Australia.

## Notes

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- 1 This article first appeared in *Headmark, Journal of the Australian Naval Institute*, Spring 2006, pp. 30-4.



*Petty Officer Benjamin Sime was awarded the Medal for Gallantry in recognition of his outstanding heroism during the terrorist attack on 24 April 2004*



*HMAS Stuart and a US Coast Guard cutter*

## Lieutenant Commander Kirk Hayden, RAN

*Staff Officer to Commander Task Force 58, 2005*

In early 2005, the Coalition Forces Maritime Component Commander, Vice Admiral Dave Nichols, USN, from the US Naval Central Command, approached the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) with a request to provide a one-star led command team for operations in the Northern Persian Gulf.<sup>1</sup> This request was a great honour for the RAN and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) as a whole, as it demonstrated the high regard the United States and coalition partners have for the professionalism of the men and women of the RAN.

The request was approved by the Australian Government in February 2005 with Commodore Steve Gilmore, CSC RAN, subsequently appointed as Commander Task Force 58 (CTF 58). Fourteen officers and sailors representing a broad range of specialist skills including operations, communications, logistics, intelligence and maritime law were drawn - primarily from Deployable Joint Force Headquarters (Maritime) - and posted to make up the command team, with Captain Stuart Mayer, RAN, appointed to the Deputy CTF position.

The RAN has had an ongoing commitment to coalition operations and a regular presence in the Northern Persian Gulf since the first Gulf War in 1991. The vital post war involvement by a number of RAN units was essentially in support of coalition maritime interdiction operations (MIO) in order to enforce United Nations sanctions against what is now the former regime of Saddam Hussein.

This role changed to combat operations during the second Gulf War and significantly, HMAS *Anzac* fired the first shots 'in anger' since the Vietnam War. Subsequently, after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, the role transformed to activity focused on maritime security and stability. Many RAN ships have contributed to the MIO role with great professionalism and success over the years. Several RAN officers, and their respective staffs, have served with distinction in command of MIO in the Gulf between 2001 and 2004.

The mission of CTF 58 is, however, considerably broader and encompasses the conduct of all coalition maritime security operations across the Northern Persian Gulf. These operations aim to set the conditions for security and stability in the maritime environment and include a range of specific tasks. These tasks include the protection of key infrastructure, interception operations (that seek to pressurise the environment and thereby detect, deter and deny terrorists use of the sea), anti-piracy operations, theatre security cooperation and escort of military sealift command shipping.

The evolving scope and circumstance of this mission elevated TF58 Command to a one-star position during 2004. As such, the appointment of Commodore Gilmore as the CTF was of historical significance as it was the first time the RAN has held this level of tactical responsibility in a coalition theatre of operations since World War II.

During the RAN period of command TF 58 was variously made up of warships from the US, UK, Australia and Iraq. These ships included a guided missile cruiser, frigates (including HMAS *Darwin* and then *Newcastle*), patrol boats, coast guard cutters, a forward support ship, fast attack boats and a US Navy special boat team. Also assigned to TF 58 were US Navy maritime security detachments and Iraqi marines embarked on the two large Iraq oil platforms for point defence duties. Shore based HH60 Seahawk helicopters completed the more regular composition of the force.

Commodore Gilmore exercised command from a US Navy guided missile cruiser with USS *Antietam*, performing the role of flagship during April and May 2005, and then



*Commodore Steve Gilmore takes control as CTF 158 on board USS Antietam, April 2005*

from sister ship, USS *Normandy*, from June until August. At any one time there were up to 1700 sailors and marines under the command of CTF 58.

The most significant responsibility - and one that was constantly on the minds of the entire Command team - was the protection of the vital Iraqi oil platforms. Ninety-five per cent of Iraq's oil exports are shipped through these platforms generating approximately 80 per cent of Iraq's gross domestic product. During CTF 58's tenure, the oil platforms pumped in excess of US\$7 billion worth of oil. Their importance to the people of Iraq, and the rebuilding of their economic infrastructure, cannot be overstated. In April 2004 these platforms were attacked by insurgents and tragically resulted in the death of three US servicemen from USS *Firebolt*. Involved in the protection of the oil platforms, HMAS *Stuart* was first on the scene and provided critical support to the victims of the attack. Significant efforts were made to further develop the security of these platforms and many initiatives were introduced to enhance their protection during the tenure of the Australian CTF 58.

Security of the legitimate maritime community - merchant vessels and the local fishing fleet - operating in the Northern Persian Gulf presented a challenge to TF 58. Considerable traffic density and the ever-present threat from insurgents created circumstances that demanded well-planned and skilfully executed visit and boarding operations. The calibre and capability of the boarding teams (provided by each participating nation), enabled such activity to be successfully conducted, with over 680 boardings completed by TF units during the deployment.

As CTF 58, Commodore Gilmore was responsible for the development and integration of Iraqi naval and marine assets into the task force mission. In time, this will lead to an eventual transition of responsibility for maritime security operations around the oil platforms and within territorial waters to the Iraqi forces. This aspect of the CTF 58 mission is a crucial element in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Iraq.

TF 58 staff took the lead in the establishment of the Iraqi transition working group, which brought together all the key players responsible for the training, development and operational employment of the Iraqi Navy, into a single formal body to direct and manage the transition process. Significantly, the Australian staff developed and promulgated the Iraqi Transition Roadmap (IQTR). This crucial document was constructed in close consultation with the Iraqi Navy Operations Headquarters and the UK-led Assistance and Support Team (AST) responsible for training at the Iraqi shore base in Umm Qasr. The IQTR is a comprehensive plan for the preparation, training and certification of the Iraqi Navy (IQN), including the marines. It also contains information on force structure, capability requirements, procurement plans, mission sets, and training and equipment issues associated with the conduct of operations in Iraqi territorial seas.



As part of the IQTR, a comprehensive process to test and, where appropriate, certify Iraqi Navy units as proficient to successfully integrate into the coalition TF was undertaken by CTF 58. As a consequence of this hard work, and the determination of the IQN, Iraqi patrol boats are now conducting a variety of operations alongside coalition partners. Iraqi marines are also in a certification process that seeks to facilitate transition of point defence of the two oil terminals to them before the end of 2005. At each milestone, the IQN and marines will relieve coalition assets for subsequent redeployment.

The opportunity to provide Australian leadership of such a significant coalition task force, engaged in vital operations in a dynamic and most challenging environment, has been a career highlight for the 15 RAN personnel. It has also been of considerable importance to the RAN, reflecting the enviable reputation it has as a world-class navy able to fight and win at sea.

## Notes

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- 1 This article first appeared in R Donnelly (ed), *Australia's Navy 2005*, Navy Headquarters, Canberra, 2005, pp. 20-1.

## Operations in the Northern Arabian Gulf

### **Captain Lachlan Simond**

On 1 March 2006 HMAS *Ballarat* and her crew of 185 personnel deployed to the Arabian Gulf in the middle east area of operations as part of Operation CATALYST, Australia's commitment to the rehabilitation and rebuilding of Iraq.<sup>1</sup> *Ballarat* operated with US, UK, Singaporean and Iraqi naval units to maintain security in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG).

*Ballarat* conducted Maritime Security Operations (MSO) to help protect Iraq's sea-based oil infrastructure in the NAG. The two oil terminals are the primary means by which oil is exported from Iraq and are essential to its economic future. The oil terminals are supplied from oil fields in Iraq and the oil is then pumped into tankers for shipment worldwide. It is assessed that the terminals average a pumping rate of US \$11,000 of oil per second, a total of US \$65 million per day.

*Ballarat's* mission in the NAG was to ensure that these oil terminals were protected from attack by terrorists or insurgents. This was achieved by providing a layered defence structure in cooperation with coalition maritime forces and the Iraqi Navy and Marines. In addition, *Ballarat* monitored all shipping movement in the NAG to ensure the safety and security of legitimate commercial shipping, and to monitor the import and export of goods into and out of Iraq. This is called Maritime Interception Operations (MIO).

Immensely proud of his ship and his crew's performance, *Ballarat's* Commanding Officer, Commander Malcolm Wise, RAN, cannot praise their efforts enough: 'We certainly flew the flag there. I think the reason that Australians are attractive for employment in the region is because we'll give anything a go. Rather than say, "It can't be done", we'll say, "How can we do it?" We ultimately came up solutions and achieved the task. There is a proud history of Australian frigates operating in the region and they have set the benchmark, which we have continued.'

The ship's motto, 'Defend the Flag', is a reference to the Eureka Stockade, and the Commanding Officer sees parallels between the historical Australian fight for equality and the ship's current mission: 'I think there are a number of parallels. The bedrock of the Eureka Stockade was a fair go for all and ultimately the mission up here is to

rebuild Iraq, so that the people of that country can have a fair go and a fair chance to live their lives.’

Having completed her first deployment to the Gulf conducting MSO in the region, *Ballarat* can be rightfully proud of her reputation – not bad going for a ship that celebrated her second birthday while on operations and was appropriately dubbed ‘The Little Frigate That Can’ by her coalition partners.

During her time in the Gulf, *Ballarat* conducted 96 boarding and security patrols, 607 boat evolutions, 18 replenishments at sea and vertical replenishments, 317 flying hours by its embarked Seahawk helicopter, and 505 investigative queries of merchant vessels.

*Ballarat* was away for 186 days, during which time three members of the ship’s company became fathers – one for the first time – and one a grandfather. The ship received 4983 kilograms of mail from family and friends.

## Forging Strong Connections in the Gulf

### Lieutenant Commander Andrew Morcom, RAN

The Khawr Al Amayah Oil Terminal (KAAOT) and the Al Basrah Oil Terminal are protected from sabotage or terrorist attack by several layers of defence. The platform is occupied by Iraqi marines and US Navy Security Detachment Personnel (in this case Mobile Security Detachment (SEC DET) Seven One Guam). On the seaward side a frigate, SAC-K (scene of action commander - K), supported by US and Iraqi patrol boats, patrol an exclusion zone. There is interaction between the SAC and personnel on the platform for the provision of meals (Meals on Keels) and showers (Showers on Keels), medical support, VIP and general personnel transfers.

During *Ballarat*’s time as SAC-K, a close working relationship developed with the USN SEC DET personnel on KAAOT. The *Ballarat* engineering team undertook some valuable work and repaired the domestic electrical wiring on an oil platform in Iraqi territorial waters. Before the repairs and upgrades, US personnel had to turn off the washing machine to use the oven; to use the washing machine, they had to turn off the lights; and to use the lights they would sacrifice one of their air-conditioning units and when it was 47 degrees Celsius outside it was often pretty dark.

Over a number of weeks *Ballarat*’s engineers visited KAAOT to assess what work and materials were required to upgrade the wiring matrix in the kitchen, lounge, radio room, berthing area and accommodation huts. After acquiring the necessary materials during a port visit to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, they began the upgrade.

The language barrier between the Australian sailors and the terminal workers was a big problem, but not insurmountable. The work was challenging as the engineering team had to first correct the original instalments to overcome safety violations. Finally,

a system that could accommodate growth and would not endanger personnel was provided.

Several buildings were re-wired; and a new electrical supply cable capable of handling a higher electrical current, a new electrical switchboard, and a safety switch to isolate power in the event of an electrical short were installed.

*Ballarat's* Chaplain Chris Aulich, RAN, and Leading Seaman Physical Trainer Matt Bell instigated the KAAOT - HMAS *Ballarat* Strongman Challenge to foster a sense of community between *Ballarat* and the USN SEC DET. It was a way of developing a bond and appreciating the positives of our cultures. The challenge consisted of chin-ups, push-ups and dips. Ten contestants endeavoured to punch out the most sets within a two-minute timeframe. Three contests were held, with KAAOT claiming the Challenge Cup (fabricated by Leading Seaman Al Coney) by defeating the *Ballarat* Musclemen two to one.

Both groups conducted themselves magnificently. A charcoal barbecue followed each challenge, further fostering fellowship between both groups.

*Ballarat's* sailors forged a bond with not only the US SEC DET but also Iraqi marines, and the Southern Oil Terminal Manager and his workers. *Ballarat's* sailors gained the trust of Iraqi marines and civilians – trust that is so vital to gaining momentum in the rebuilding of Iraq. It was only one of many other relationship building activities, in which Australian service personnel so often excel. The following quote from Lieutenant Mark Ellis, USN, Officer in Charge, KAAOT exemplifies the lasting impression which Australian servicemen leave:

From Mobile Security Detachment Seven One, especially the crew on KAAOT, we would like to thank you for the sacrifices that you have made to better our quality of life. We have enjoyed your assistance to our deployment for the past few months. Thank you for accepting us with open arms. You've given us outstanding meals, rebuilt our electrical system, and provided us showers when we were most in need. The most appreciated thing has to be the way you have provided us with a most positive view of your culture. Cheers and hope you find a safe and pleasant ride back home.

## Old School Seamanship in the Northern Arabian Gulf

### Lieutenant John Beatty, RAN

There are many skills needed to prepare a warship for deployment to the Arabian Gulf. These can range from conducting complex multi-ship boardings at night, through to feeding a whole ship's company in around 30 minutes. Although the ships may look the same, the technology used to complete the myriad of tasks has advanced quite considerably since the first rotation of RAN ships in the early 1990s. Despite advancements in technology, there still remains the need to revisit the 'first principles',

as you never know when technology may not be there to assist you. Earlier this year, HMAS *Ballarat*, while on patrol in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG), found herself in such a situation, following what was initially a routine security sweep boarding of the merchant vessel MV *Marjanak* in the early hours of 18 May 2006.

*Marjanak* was similar in function to the RAN Landing Craft Heavy (LCH) platform but slightly larger in size. She had been converted for general cargo transportation and had been at anchor waiting to be cleared by *Ballarat* (acting as Maritime Interception Commander) before continuing to her final destination in Umm Qasr, Iraq. The boarding was conducted in the early hours of the morning to escape the oppressive temperatures expected around the middle of the day. After the sweep had concluded and all was found to be in order, the Boarding Officer granted the Master permission to continue to the port of Umm Qasr. Although keen to proceed on his way, the Master mentioned to the Boarding Officer that he had a ‘small’ problem – he could not raise his anchor!

After a quick inspection of the anchor capstan by the engineers in White Boarding Team, it was soon realised the capstan was indeed unserviceable. In an effort to try to repair the faulty machinery, *Ballarat* dispatched a ‘fix-it’ team that comprised Chief Petty Officer Marine Technician Glenn Pope and Petty Officer Marine Technician Wal Baumhammer to the vessel. The engineers tried valiantly to repair the capstan, but it was deemed beyond repair. *Marjanak* was made fast to the seabed and she was not going anywhere soon.



*HMAS Ballarat's boarding party pass through a sea of dhows during SLIPPER Thirteen*

It was now close to midday, temperatures had pushed well over 40 degrees and the two-litre CamelBak water carriers worn by all personnel were being re-filled every 20-30 minutes. In order to better manage fatigue and heat stress, the boarding teams were changed out, with Blue Boarding Team taking over the security role.

So what does one do with an anchor not wanting to return to its hawse pipe? The second-in-charge, Petty Officer Bosun Jason Rowe, devised a cunning plan – it was now time to refresh those skills in ‘old school’ seamanship. He requested delivery of the necessary equipment and extra personnel to manually raise the anchor and its cable using deck tackle. Soon after, additional members arrived with the extra equipment and, most importantly, a hearty lunch made by the chefs back onboard.

With all members fed, rehydrated and thoroughly plastered with sunscreen, the team set to work to recover the anchor by deck tackle. It was a gruelling battle – man against gravity in one of the most extreme environments. Mid afternoon witnessed another change of the guard with the White Boarding Team returning to replace the exhausted Blue Team. Able Seaman Luke Ettridge took charge of the evolution and kept up the momentum. Inch by inch the cable was raised until the anchor was clear of the water and home in the hawse pipe. After eight hours in temperatures that remained well above 40 degrees for the majority of the day, *Marjanak* had her anchor home, and a very happy and grateful Master at the helm.

The recovery of *Marjanak*'s anchor was a commendable achievement that clearly helped strengthen the coalition's relationship with the merchantmen who ply the troubled waters of the NAG. It demonstrated the essence of teamwork and the unique ability of those who serve in the RAN to meet any task asked of them. Recovering the anchor of *Marjanak* tested the knowledge of some, tried the patience of others and proved that there is still much value in acknowledging the art of ‘old school’ seamanship.

## Fill ‘er up Mate

### Lieutenant Alistair Walsh, RAN

It was a fine sunny morning on 21 April when *Ballarat* came storming out of the morning haze, powering on towards her destination of Dubai. But she needed one thing to get there: a tank of fuel. That top-up of fuel would be provided by the latest and greatest aircraft carrier from the USA: The USS *Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76). Weighing in at 102,000 tons, with an overall length of 333 metres, she is the biggest carrier in the world.

*Ballarat* slowly drove up beside the towering frame of the mighty aircraft carrier, with its deck crew and pilots curiously peering down on us. After manoeuvring into the correct position next to the carrier, the two ships were connected. Lines were then

passed – they were fired from rifles on *Ronald Reagan* – and then used to haul the larger lines used to support the fuelling probe from *Ronald Reagan*.

Pumping started after the fuel hose was connected. The sound system on the upper decks of *Ballarat* played Australian and American eighties hits – much to the amusement of those on the carrier. When enough fuel had been passed to *Ballarat*, the connection was broken; *Ballarat* increased in speed and slowly pulled away.

Following the refuelling, *Ballarat* undertook some manoeuvres with the carrier, something not done regularly by Australian warships. *Ballarat* initially took up position one mile astern of the carrier before driving up beside her, sitting half a mile on her port side. The jet pilots on *Ronald Reagan* were about to strut their stuff and we had box seats.

With many of the ship's crew positioned on the flight deck and gun direction platform with cameras at the ready, the first F/A-18 Hornet could be heard warming up. The throaty roar of the jet engines rolled across the waves towards us. The sharp hiss of the steam catapult was the first indication that things were getting underway as the sleek body of the jet launched off the front of the carrier and climbed away into the sky. Over the next 15 minutes aircraft after aircraft was launched, much to the amazement of *Ballarat's* crew, most of whom had witnessed carrier flight operations only in the movie *Top Gun*.

After the last of the aircraft had flown out of sight, *Ballarat* turned on her heels and opened up the throttles in order to arrive in Dubai for some rest and relaxation.

## Notes

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- 1 These articles first appeared in C Barnes (ed), *Australia's Navy 2006*, Navy Headquarters, Canberra, 2006, pp. 16-7, 18-9, 36-7 & 38-9.

## List of Ships Deployed 1990-2009

(Dates reflect times away from Australia rather than time within the Area of Operations)

### Operation DAMASK

#### I

CTG 627.4	Commodore DB Chalmers, RAN
HMAS <i>Adelaide</i>	13 August 1990 - 21 December 1990
HMAS <i>Darwin</i>	13 August 1990 - 21 December 1990
HMAS <i>Success</i>	14 August 1990 - 7 March 1991

#### II

CTG 627.4	Commodore CJ Oxenbould, RAN
HMAS <i>Brisbane</i>	12 November 1990 - 22 April 1991
HMAS <i>Sydney</i>	12 November 1990 - 22 April 1991
HMAS <i>Westralia</i>	2 January 1991 - 9 June 1991
CDT 3	27 January 1991 - 9 May 1991

#### III

HMAS <i>Darwin</i>	2 April 1991 - 1 October 1991
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#### IV

HMAS <i>Sydney</i>	2 September 1991 - 28 February 1992
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#### V

HMAS <i>Darwin</i>	13 February 1992 - 14 August 1992
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## VI

*HMAS Canberra* 28 September 1992 - 19 April 1993

## VII

*HMAS Sydney* 22 June 1993 - 15 December 1993

## VIII

*HMAS Melbourne* 10 April 1996 - 16 September 1996

## IX

*HMAS Melbourne* 30 April 1999 - 5 September 1999

## X

*HMAS Anzac* 15 June 2001 - 24 November 2001

## Operation SLIPPER

## One

CTG 627.1 Captain AK Du Toit, RAN

*HMAS Sydney* 8 November 2001 - 8 March 2002

*HMAS Kanimbla* 22 October 2001 - 3 April 2002

*HMAS Adelaide* 8 November 2001 - 13 March 2002

## Two

CTG 627.1 Captain JVP Goldrick, CSC, RAN

*HMAS Newcastle* 24 January 2002 - 15 July 2002

*HMAS Manoora* 24 January 2002 - 19 July 2002

*HMAS Canberra* 25 February 2002 - 2 August 2002

### Three

CTG 627.1	Captain PJ Sinclair, CSC, RAN
HMAS <i>Melbourne</i>	30 May 2002 - 29 November 2002
HMAS <i>Arunta</i>	25 June 2002 - 2 December 2002

### Four

CTG 627.1/633.1	Captain PD Jones, AM, RAN
HMAS <i>Anzac</i>	28 October 2002 - 17 May 2003
HMAS <i>Darwin</i>	28 October 2002 - 17 May 2003

### Operation BASTILLE

HMAS <i>Kanimbla</i>	24 January 2003 - 17 July 2003
CDT 3	22 February 2003 - 30 May 2003

### Operation SLIPPER/CATALYST

#### Five

CTG 633.1	Captain MC Kellam, RAN
HMAS <i>Sydney</i>	8 April 2003 - 28 August 2003
HMAS <i>Manoora</i>	12 May 2003 - 6 November 2003 (sea lift)

#### Six

HMAS <i>Newcastle</i>	14 July 2003 - 12 December 2003
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#### Seven

HMAS <i>Melbourne</i>	27 October 2003 - 23 April 2004
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#### Eight

HMAS <i>Stuart</i>	10 March 2004 - 10 September 2004
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#### Nine

HMAS <i>Adelaide</i>	30 July 2004 - 25 January 2005
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## Ten

HMAS *Darwin* 28 December 2004 - 28 June 2005

HMAS *Tobruk* 4 April 2005 - 22 June 2005 (sea lift)

## Eleven

HMAS *Newcastle* 23 May 2005 - 21 November 2005

## Twelve

HMAS *Parramatta* 10 October 2005 - 13 April 2006

## Thirteen

HMAS *Ballarat* 1 March 2006 - 1 September 2006

## Fourteen

HMAS *Warramunga* 31 July 2006 - 2 February 2007

HMAS *Tobruk* 28 December 2006 - 16 March 2007 (sea lift)

## Fifteen

HMAS *Toowoomba* 3 January 2007 - 2 July 2007

## Sixteen

HMAS *Anzac* 5 June 2007 - 5 December 2007

## Seventeen

HMAS *Arunta* 12 November 2007- 11 May 2008

## Eighteen

HMAS *Stuart* 31 March 2008 - 30 September 2008

## Nineteen

HMAS *Parramatta* 18 August 2008 - 18 February 2009

**Twenty****HMAS *Warramunga***

12 January 2009 - July 2009

**CTF 58/158**

Commodore SR Gilmore, CSC, RAN

17 April 2005 - 12 August 2005

Commodore PG Lockwood, DSC, CSC, RAN

June 2006 - 16 November 2006

Commodore AK Du Toit, AM, RAN

28 September 2007 - January 2008

Commodore BJ Kafer, AM, CSC, RAN

17 October 2008 - December 2008

**CTF 152**

Commodore BJ Kafer, AM, CSC, RAN

January 2009 - 27 April 2009



*Commodore Bruce Kafer takes Commodore Ahmed Mashkor from the Iraqi Navy on a tour of the Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal, 13 December 2008*

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