AUSTRALIAN NAVAL
COMMAND AND LEADERSHIP
IN RECENT OPERATIONS

EDITED BY

JOHN PERRYMAN AND ANDREW FORBES
Australian Naval Command and Leadership in Recent Operations

Proceedings of the King-Hall Naval History Conference 2011
The Sea Power Centre - Australia was established to undertake activities to promote the study, discussion and awareness of maritime issues and strategy within the Royal Australian Navy, the Department of Defence and civil communities at large. Its mission is:

• to promote understanding of sea power and its application to the security of Australia’s national interests

• to manage the development of RAN doctrine and facilitate its incorporation into ADF doctrine

• to contribute to regional engagement

• to 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.

Comments on this volume or any enquiry related to the activities of the Centre should be directed to:

Director
Sea Power Centre - Australia
Department of Defence
PO Box 7942
Canberra BC ACT 2610
AUSTRALIA

Email: seapower.centre@defence.gov.au
Website: www.navy.gov.au/spc
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes on Contributors</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Reflections: An Antidote to Aberrant Ways</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Peter Jones</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMAS Stuart and the USS Firebolt Incident, 2004</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Phil Spedding</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commanding Combined Task Force 158, 2007-08</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Allan du Toit</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command of Combined Task Forces 158 and 152, 2008-09</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bruce Kafer</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command and Responsibility in Combined Task Force 150, 2009-10</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Richard Menhinick</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMAS Toowoomba Conducting Counter-Terrorism/Piracy Operations, 2009</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ivan Ingham</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command and Leadership in Crisis: Operation SUMATRA ASSIST II, 2005</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>George McGuire</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of Command and Leadership: The SIEV 36 Incident</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Barry Learoyd with Paul Hetherington</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commanding Joint Task Force 631: Operation ASTUTE, 2009-10</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Stuart Mayer</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Leadership Perspectives from Iraq and Afghanistan</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Doug Griffiths</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Aviation Command and Leadership</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Chris Smallhorn</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Admiral Sir George King-Hall, KCB,
Foreword

The 2011 King-Hall Naval History conference, *Command and Leadership in Recent Operations*, was held at the Australian Defence College, Canberra, on 8 June 2011. It differed subtly from previous conferences in that the speakers were, with one or two exceptions, not naval historians or well-known academic naval commentators but serving members of the RAN with first-hand operational experience.

Each of the presenters reflected on command and leadership challenges they had faced while participating in contemporary naval operations and to that end the papers presented in this volume vary in both style and content as one might expect. Readers may detect in some papers an unfamiliar rawness which, during the editing process was not tempered, particularly when it served to highlight important observations or lessons learned. The astute reader will recognise where this is the case.

Throughout the conference the speakers covered a broad cross-section of maritime operations ranging from those conducted in local waters, such as Australian border protection patrols, to those executed further afield in the Middle East, Southeast Asia and off the Horn of Africa where ongoing acts of piracy continue to pose a threat to maritime security.

The aim of the 2011 conference was to examine the important elements of command and leadership in maritime operations and to hear, first-hand, the views of some of those involved in them. Their observations and individual critiques underscored a number of important lessons applicable to contemporary naval operations and stimulated a great deal of interest during the question and answer period that followed each session.

The proceedings of the 2011 King-Hall Naval History Conference, presented in this volume, serve to reinforce the importance of capturing, preserving and disseminating the recent history of the RAN, enabling hard-learnt lessons and experiences to be shared with those who will, in the future, face similar operational challenges as practitioners.

John Perryman, CSM
Senior Naval Historical Officer
Sea Power Centre - Australia
May 2014

Andrew Forbes
Deputy Director (Research)
Sea Power Centre - Australia
May 2014
Note: Ranks held were at the time of the conference.

Rear Admiral Allan du Toit, RAN began his naval career in the South African Navy before migrating to Australia in early 1987, where he accepted a commission in the RAN, and has served in a wide range of single-Service and joint appointments at sea and ashore. He has extensive operational experience in the Middle East, including command of Combined Task Force 158 in the North Arabian Gulf between September 2007 and March 2008. He previously served in the Gulf as RAN Task Group Commander between November 2001 and March 2002 as part of Operation SLIPPER. During that deployment he also became the first non-US Navy officer to command multinational maritime interception operations enforcing UN sanctions against Iraq.

Commander Doug Griffiths, RAN is a mine warfare and clearance diving officer who has served in a variety of operational and executive positions at sea and ashore in both the RAN and Royal Navy. Commander Griffiths deployed as the officer in charge of the Deployed Explosive Ordnance Disposal Detachment in HMAS Kanimbla for Operation SLIPPER, the Iraqi Liaison Officer on the staff of CTF 158 in 2006, and more recently as the Counter Improvised Explosive Device Exploitation Chief for Headquarters International Security Assistance Force in Kabul in 2009.

Petty Officer Paul Hetherington joined the RAN in 2001 as a boatswains mate. Throughout his career he has served in numerous RAN ships including HMA Ships Arunta, Betano, Pirie, Albany, Broome, Maitland and Launceston seeing operational service in the Middle East, Solomon Islands and Bougainville. In more recent times he has served on the front line of Operation RESOLUTE in the Northern Australia Area of Operations.

Commander Ivan Ingham, AM, RAN began his naval career as a rating in the Royal Navy in 1980 before graduating as an officer from the Britannia Royal Naval College in 1987. After specialising in air warfare he saw service in a variety of RN and RAN ships while on exchange duties. Commander Ingham transferred from the RN to the RAN in 2001 and gained further operational experience serving in the Middle East Area of Operations, notably in HMAS Anzac during Operation FALCONER. His seagoing command appointments include HMA Ships Townsville and Toowoomba in which he again deployed to the Middle East Area of Operations in 2009 conducting counter-terrorism and counter-piracy patrols.
Rear Admiral Peter Jones, DSC, AM, RAN joined the RAN in 1974 and is a surface warfare specialist. Throughout his career he has held a diverse range of appointments including command of the frigate HMAS *Melbourne* and the Australian Surface Task Group. From September 2002 until April 2003, he held the appointment of RAN Task Group Commander in the Arabian Gulf and for much of that time he also commanded the multinational Maritime Interception Force. During the 2003 Iraq War he discharged the duties of Maritime Interception Operations Screen Commander.

Commodore Bruce Kafer, AM, CSC, RAN joined the RAN as a cadet midshipman in 1977, and after initial seaman officer training he specialised in hydrographic surveying. His seagoing career includes command of HMA Ships *Flinders* and *Leeuwin*, and a two-year exchange posting with the Royal Navy. During that exchange he saw service in the Iran-Iraq War participating in mine clearance operations. During 2008-09 Commodore Kafer commanded two combined task forces responsible for security and interception operations in the Middle East Area of Operations.

Lieutenant Commander Barry Learoyd, RAN joined the RAN in 1970. In a career spanning four decades, he has seen extensive sea service both as a sailor and commissioned officer. Promoted lieutenant commander in January 2008 he assumed command of patrol boat crew ASSAIL 2 in June 2008. During this command he conducted 55 foreign fishing vessel and 11 suspected irregular entry vessel boardings.

Captain George McGuire, CSC RAN joined the RAN in 1985 and qualified as a surface warfare officer in 1993. Throughout his career he has served in a variety of operations, participating in the planning and execution of the initial ADF entry into East Timor as well as forming part of the advanced headquarters element in Dili. In June 2009 he deployed to the Middle East Area of Operations as director plans in Combined Maritime Forces and on his return to Australia in 2010 he assumed command of the Australian Amphibious Task Group. His seagoing command appointments include HMA Ships *Hawkesbury* and *Kanimbla* the latter in which he participated in Operations SUMATRA ASSIST I/II in 2005 off Indonesia.

Commodore Stuart Mayer, CSC, RAN joined the Royal Australian Naval College in 1984 and is a surface warfare specialist. In mid-2002 he assumed command of HMAS *Canberra*. He has broad operational experience having participated in a wide range of regional deployments and operations, including service in East Timor and the Northern Arabian Gulf. Following command of HMAS *Anzac* he was promoted to commodore and appointed Commander of the multinational International Stabilisation Force in East Timor on 24 October 2009.
Commodore Richard Menhinick, CSC, RAN joined the RAN in 1976. During his career he gained extensive operational experience in the Middle East Area of Operations which began with participation in ‘Armilla Patrols’, monitoring Iran and Iraq, when on exchange with the Royal Navy. During the 1990-91 Gulf War he served in HMAS Brisbane and from December 2009 to April 2010 he was appointed Commander of Combined Task Force 150 in the Middle East Area of Operations. His seagoing appointments include command of HMA Ships Warramunga and Anzac.

Captain Chris Smallhorn, RAN joined the RAN in 1987. He is a qualified aeronautical engineer and test pilot. During his career he has deployed in a variety of RAN ships and held a number of aviation appointments including command of the Aircraft Maintenance and Flight Trials Unit at HMAS Albatross and as Commanding Officer of 816 Squadron.

Commodore Phil Spedding, DSC, AM, RAN joined the RAN in 1982 and is an anti-submarine warfare specialist. His command appointments include the patrol boat HMAS Townsville, the frigate HMAS Stuart and national and coalition command as Commander Australian Surface Task Group. He has broad experience in both domestic and overseas operations including service off the former Yugoslavia and in the Middle East Area of Operations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABOT</td>
<td>Al Basra Oil Terminal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACV</td>
<td>Australian Customs Vessel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADF</td>
<td>Australian Defence Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-IED</td>
<td>Counter Improvised Explosive Disposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMF</td>
<td>Combined Maritime Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONOPS</td>
<td>Concept of Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTF</td>
<td>Combined Task Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTG</td>
<td>Commander Task Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOD</td>
<td>Explosive Ordnance Disposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-FDLT</td>
<td>East Timor Defence Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMAS</td>
<td>Her Majesty’s Australian Ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMS</td>
<td>Her Majesty’s Ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAF</td>
<td>International Security Assistance Force (Afghanistan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISF</td>
<td>International Stabilisation Force (East Timor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAA</td>
<td>Khawr Abd Allah (waterway)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAAOT</td>
<td>Khawr Abd Amaya Oil Terminal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kg</td>
<td>kilogram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>km</td>
<td>kilometre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kt</td>
<td>knots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>metre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mc</td>
<td>Mine Warfare and Clearance Diving Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEAO</td>
<td>Middle East Area of Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAVCENT</td>
<td>US Navy Central Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nm</td>
<td>nautical mile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAG</td>
<td>Northern Arabian Gulf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PII</td>
<td>Potential Irregular Immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWO</td>
<td>Principle Warfare Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAAF</td>
<td>Royal Australian Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAN</td>
<td>Royal Australian Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHIB</td>
<td>Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RN</td>
<td>Royal Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAA</td>
<td>Shatt al-Arab (waterway)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBS</td>
<td>Special Broadcasting Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIEV</td>
<td>Suspected Irregular Entry Vessel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOLAS</td>
<td>Safety of Life at Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USNS</td>
<td>United States Naval Ship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USS</td>
<td>United States Ship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rear Admiral Peter Jones, DSC, AM,
Admiral Sir George King-Hall, the last Royal Navy (RN) Commander-in-Chief of the Australia Station, was a great proponent for an Australian navy. His support was at times to the dismay of their Lordships of the Admiralty who, for a considerable period, would have been happy for the Australian government to continue to help fund the RN presence on the Australian Station.

Sir George, like his father Admiral Sir William King-Hall, his brother Admiral Sir Herbert King-Hall and his son Commander Steven King-Hall (who was later Baron King-Hall) were all voracious readers and diarists. This exceptional naval family drew much in terms of their professional and personal development from sharing their experiences among the family and also in reading of the experiences of others.

A navy’s involvement in operations is cyclical. It is therefore important to share these experiences and to record them for posterity. The cyclical nature of operations is reflected in Admiral Sir George King-Hall’s naval career. He joined the RN in 1864 at the high point of Great Britain’s global supremacy. But he did not see operational service until he was captain of the sloop HMS *Penguin* in 1887. It was in that command that he acted against slave traders in eastern African waters. The outbreak of slave trading required some old lessons to be re-learnt. Namely extended range, small operations that proved challenging for juniors officers and sailors alike. I commend Admiral Sir William Creswell’s memoirs *Close to the Wind* which provides a fascinating insight into those patrols. Creswell wrote of that period:

> Those old enough to have served in the Navy in the ’seventies will remember what a deadly slow time it was for everybody, particularly so for an ambitious young man in a hurry. There was no active service going on anywhere. The lists were crowded, and promotion at its slowest. When in the previous year, volunteers had been called for Nares’ Arctic expedition, over two hundred lieutenants sent their names in, and I had been one of the 194 not wanted. The only work the Navy was engaged in that offered any chance of advancement for special service was here, the ‘East Coast’ in the suppression of the slave trade, and in this I had determined to try my luck.¹

Looking at our Navy’s history, the cyclical nature is clear to see. When the first class of cadet midshipmen joined the Royal Australian Naval College in 1913, only one of the college officers - Captain Bertram Chambers and two of its wizened old sailors wore medal ribbons on their chests. One of them, Chief Petty Officer Harefield,
had served in the steam and sail hybrid frigate HMS Shah when, on 29 May 1877, she had fired the first torpedo in anger in an engagement against the Peruvian rebel-controlled armoured-turret ship Huáscar. The torpedo missed, hampered by being slower than its target.

No one else on the staff had seen operational service. Such was the dearth of ribbons that when one of the 1913 entry cadet midshipmen, Eric Feldt, was to be awarded a bravery decoration for pulling his sister from the clutches of a crocodile, it was suggested it would not be a good thing for a cadet midshipmen to have a medal ribbon on his chest. It would draw to much attention to him. All that would change of course in less than a year following the outbreak of World War I.

Between then and until the end of the Korean War the RAN saw regular operational service. But even then the nature of that service was not always diverse. For example, no one was to know that in 1945 when Commodore Harold Farncomb commanded an Australian-US task group in combat that it would be 58 years before another RAN officer would do so. It was fortunate that his predecessor, Commodore John Collins, had written about his experience of operating within the US Navy command chain. I know from my own experience as a task group commander during Operation FALCONER that John Collins’ As Luck Would Have It and Admiral Sir Sandy Woodward’s memoirs of the Falklands War, Hundred Days, were invaluable guides to me while undertaking my duties.

In the Cold War our Navy had few opportunities to expose its people to operational service. Many of those officers and sailors who joined the RAN just after the Vietnam War would not see operational service in their entire careers.

The challenge this presents for a navy is twofold. The first is operational inexperience can lead, at least initially, to sub-optimal performance in the next conflict. The second point, and one we have to continually guard against, is the navy can fall into bad habits and exhibit aberrant behaviour if it is not exposed to operational service at regular intervals. Rules of the Game: Jutland and British Naval Command, the seminal work by Andrew Gordon, is the classic case study of the Victorian Royal Navy. Among other things that navy began to place undue importance on ship appearance, ‘show the flag’ cruises, officer-of-the-watch manoeuvres (or steam tactics as they were then known) and drills unrelated to the operational business of navies. This misplaced priority led to the rise of officers who were not necessarily good at war at sea.

Gordon makes the compelling case that these misplaced priorities and promotions contributed, in part, to the sub-optimal performance of the RN at the Battle of Jutland. Steven King-Hall, who served as a junior officer in the light cruiser HMS Southampton during that battle (and who was lucky to survive the day) wrote in his memoirs:
When war was declared on Germany on 4th August 1914 the Royal Navy, Britain’s sure shield, was like the prehistoric Brontosaurus, a very big body with a very small brain.

He went on to say:

The fact was that in 1914 the Royal Navy was almost totally unprepared for war and remained in that condition for most of the period 1914-18. The contrast between 1914-18 and 1939-45 in this respect was extraordinary.5

I believe this institutional misalignment was repeated in the case of the RAN in the 1990-91 Gulf War. The Navy, up to the invasion of Kuwait, had an inordinate preoccupation with officer of the watch manoeuvres and the cocktail party circuit associated with ‘Up Top’ deployments. Less important was realistic warfare training and damage control exercises.

A closely related element to this, is a loss of ‘offensive spirit’ both institutionally and exhibited by leaders. Once again going back to the RN in World War I, when, in the summer of 1917 Sir Eric Geddes became the First Lord of the Admiralty observing that ‘the prevailing aims of the Admiralty were defensive in character, leaving all initiative to the enemy.’ Geddes replaced Admiral Sir John Jellicoe with Admiral Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, an officer,

imbued with the offensive spirit (who) felt in his bones that in default of the early adoption of bold aggressive action there was every chance of England losing the war.6

Wemyss was a natural partner to the equally offensive-minded Admiral Sir David Beatty who was commanding the Grand Fleet. Looking back over naval history we can invariably see the most successful leaders, Horatio Nelson, Arleigh Burke, Andrew Cunningham and our own Hec Waller to name a few, were offensive-minded to the core. As a final aside to this aspect, there is fertile ground for research if anyone looked at the changing nature of naval officer performance reports and their assessment criteria. It is my contention that as a result of war experience the criteria focused on an officer’s warfighting and leadership abilities. The further from war, the focus became staff and management abilities.

My final point is that if a navy becomes focused, through circumstance on a narrow range of maritime operations, it may loose the edge in the other aspects of naval warfare that make up the wide span of naval operations. In our case we have had to guard against the risk of becoming the best navy in the world at boarding operations but less proficient at more high-end warfare.

So what is the relevance of King-Hall’s observations and Gordon’s hypothesis to us? We must recognise that the RAN will not be in the Middle East Area of Operations
forever, nor will it always be conducting the specific range of operations it performs today. There will be periods of operational calm.

We must therefore capture these and other firsthand accounts. This includes those from the lower deck and those serving in headquarters. Among other things, these observations will help form part of an antidote to our Navy developing any aberrant ways. At the very least it will provide a reference point to those future officers and sailors who sail into harm’s way and encourage them to have an offensive spirit.

Finally, I would say that these firsthand accounts must be supplemented by thoroughly researched operational histories of our operations. I think we can learn from the operational histories of the RN. Closer to home the Australian Army’s excellent books concerning the Battles of Kapyong and Maryang San serve as exemplars of where we must go.

Endnotes

5 S King-Hall, My Naval Life 1906-1929, Faber and Faber, London, 1951, p. 93.
Commander Phil Spedding, OAM, RAN captain of HMAS Stuart, pictured exercising with the UAE Navy in the Southern Persian Gulf, 12 May 2004.
In April 2004 Commander Phil Spedding, RAN, was in command of the Anzac class frigate HMAS Stuart (III) operating in the Middle East Area of Operations under the auspices of Operation SLIPPER.

The event sometimes referred to in the RAN as the ‘Firebolt Incident’ is now drifting into history. It is now seven years since my experience in the top end of the Gulf, and one has to ask the question, is it still as relevant as it was when I first began talking about it on a regular basis in 2006?

The incident took place on 24 April 2004, and involved a coordinated multi-access small boat attack against two Iraqi oil terminals situated in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG). The attack was in response to the way that the coalition was conducting its operations in the NAG and, interestingly, it was determined by questioning suspects picked up months after the attack, that it was planned and executed inside of three weeks, which is pretty impressive. It proves that these sorts of enemies are quite adaptive, quite smart and that they can react quite quickly in terms of planning and executing an assault.

It was a dhow that attacked, or went to attack, the northern oil terminal, Khawr Abd Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT). It was intercepted by a rigid hulled inflatable boat (RHIB) from the US Navy patrol boat, USS Firebolt, and that is the one I will focus on. It subsequently detonated and resulted in the injuries and deaths of a number of Americans.

Triggered by that detonation, were a series of follow-on attacks made by small skiffs, which made high-speed assaults against the larger of the two terminals, Al Basrah Oil Terminal (ABOT). They were engaged by small-arms fire, and luckily detonated prior to reaching the terminal. The attacks resulted in no significant damage to the oil terminals or the ships alongside them. This was a great outcome involving a certain amount of luck coupled with a pre-existing plan.

Weeks and months later it was found that additional vessels were connected with that attack. A bombed-up dhow, similar to the one that had gone to KAAOT, was found drifting, unmanned in Saudi waters, and there was conjecture that another boat may have been involved but it was never found. So, it was quite a complex and well put together assault, when you consider the three weeks taken from conception to execution - quite impressive.
The outcomes from that were significant. As a tactical event, it had quite a large operational and strategic impact. For the US Navy, these were the first surface combatant casualties in the conflict at sea. So it was significant for them, and in particular its small ship component. For the US Coast Guard, which provides the boarding parties for the US Navy patrol boats, this was their first combat death in action since the Vietnam War. So they also viewed this as a significant event.

In terms of the actual oil infrastructure; pumping was suspended for about 24 hours. Not because of damage to the terminals, but due to precautions taken such as dropping off all the circuit breakers, isolating power and so on. That had an impact in terms of lost revenue. What I did not realise was it also has an impact on the Iraqi people ashore, because if oil is not flowing through the system, the gas by-products used to generate power and provide gas for cooking and heating in southern Iraq are not being produced. So it had a flow-on effect ashore as well, which was quite enlightening. It was, however, a blip which *The Economist* tracked at about $5 billion in the world stock markets, all as a result of one little tactical event.

The effect in the NAG was that the maritime interception operations and the broader mission ceased overnight and we implemented a focused maritime security operation which went to the extreme. From this incident forward, one always had to push to get the envelope opened up; otherwise people would default back to this ‘protect the oil platforms at all cost’ mentality.
I will now discuss HMAS Stuart’s role in this incident, the fallout and some command considerations from my perspective as well as some reflections albeit seven years hence.

Following a standard work-up process, Stuart arrived in the NAG on 14 April 2004 following a brief port visit to Bahrain. I thought we would settle in gradually and get a feel for the operation before eventually taking over as the Commander Task Group (CTG) up there in the top end of the Gulf. Our US cruiser friend, however, had other ideas and within about 12 hours of our arrival we were designated the CTG. It was a rapid learning curve.

The sort of tasks that we were given as the CTG included: defending ABOT and KAAOT, maintaining sea control in the NAG, compiling and reporting an accurate recognised maritime picture, gathering maritime intelligence, and preventing the movement of prohibited cargo. I would like to highlight the maritime intelligence piece because the big push was that the oil platform defence task was just about finished. It was 12 months since the beginning of the war and there had been no insurgency and there had not been any maritime activity other than the usual localised maritime crime. So really, that mission was considered complete. Where we needed to go as a coalition was against the broader global war on terror, push down the Gulf, push out past the straits and get involved in that broader mission - rather than worrying about the NAG.

So the plan was that by July 2004 there were only going to be patrol boats and no major fleet units in the top of the Gulf and that by September it was going to be an Iraqi responsibility. It became apparent later that there were some assumptions in that planning which may have been somewhat flawed. But that was the plan at the time and there was no suggestion of any credible threat to the oil platforms.

That, to an extent, shaped the views of people in the US Navy Central Command (NAVCENT) Headquarters in Bahrain, and it was a challenge for me to keep our own ship’s team attuned to the fact that there could well be an incident occurring while we were up there. These sorts of predictions can be quite dangerous.

We usually had three vessels as the standard lay-down to carry out tasking. Normally two US patrol boats, like Firebolt and smaller US Coast Guard coastal patrol boats (very professional, good little units). They were generally accompanied by one major fleet unit, be it an Australian, British or US frigate or cruiser. It was a pretty small force in keeping with the scheduled drawdown.

On 24 April 2004 we had completed a surge operation that involved putting as many boats in the water as we could generate. This was because we had received a tip-off about some arms smuggling. The British up in Basra were really concerned about arms being smuggled up the Khawr Abd Allah waterway (KAA), so we put a number of boats in the water. I think Stuart alone boarded 30-plus dhows with the intent of trying to find arms but we found nothing.
Why is that significant? In the post-attack intelligence report, a reconstruction of the attack based on tactical questioning, revealed that the actual boats which conducted the attack were in the NAG for three days before they actually carried it out. Their intent was to get a good feel of the local situation and to just appear as though they were normal fishing craft operating in the vicinity. Interestingly, we boarded a bunch of boats that night but the ones that conducted the attack were obviously not amongst them.

*Firebolt* was meant to be performing an escort task into Kuwait but she joined us unexpectedly on the morning of 24 April. If she had not joined us, my force lay-down would have been very different on that night and the consequences for me, and for the RAN, may have been very different. Potentially it would have been my boarding party that would likely have carried out the task that *Firebolt* undertook. So her appearance was significant.

On the night of 24 April I had four ships under my command. The US Coast Guard patrol boat *Wrangell* was stationed up in the approaches to the KAA to monitor the traffic coming in and out of it. *Firebolt*, because she was small, nimble and well armed, was up around KAAOT. The cruiser USS *Yorktown* had come back and joined us, so I stationed her down in the south. Cruisers are big ships with a deep draft and her commanding officer, understandably, did not like going too far into the Gulf. Consequently, I took *Stuart* just to the north of ABOT.

All the dhows tend to come running down the Shatt al-Arab waterway and out of the KAA and they skirt just across the north of KAAOT, which is a sort of demarcation line between the Iraqi and the Iranian territorial waters. It is an ill-defined boundary and there are heavy dhow concentrations coming through there. So, whoever had the task around there was usually kept busy shepherding dhows out of the areas around the oil terminal. Before the 2003 Iraq War, dhows were permitted to fish around there and the fishermen thought it was quite an imposition when the coalition forces told them they no longer could. It did not really fit with their history.

There were numerous dhow incursions during the day and the expectation was that *Firebolt* would simply shepherd them away. There was no exclusion zone in place then, as was established after the attack. In those days it was a 500m safety zone under the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982*, and then there was a declared restricted zone around that. But it did not have any enforceable right. So the fishing vessels, quite literally, could just go anywhere up to 500m from the terminal while our force was kept busy all day shepherding them away.

At 1914hrs in the evening my principal warfare officer (PWO) woke me from my dogwatch slumber with a report of smoke up to the north in the vicinity of KAAOT. We did not think too much of it at the time which was just around sunset. It was only a few minutes later, at 1918hrs, that we received a report concerning a dhow exploding. I have to say that when you are conditioned with a mindset of “there is no
threat to the terminals’ and in an environment where you are seeing dhows all the

time, it took us all a while to attune that this was an unusual event. That was until
we started getting reports that Firebolt’s RHIB was capsized with personnel in the
water. At first I thought this was some sort of catastrophic accident so we proceeded
at best speed to render assistance.

My Seahawk helicopter, airborne at the time, was also ordered to close and
investigate. At 1922hrs I provided an update to the ship’s company over the
main broadcast and, by way of highlighting a failure of command, it was the last
information pipe I made until about 0100hrs the next morning. We practice these
updates routinely in exercises and become accustomed to hearing the familiar
preamble of ‘PWO speaking’, but when you are really busy you just forget to do it. It
was a failing on my part that I will discuss later.

As Stuart proceeded to the scene, preparations were made for receiving casualties.
Meanwhile, my helicopter arrived at 1923hrs. By then it was quite dark and under
the Seahawk’s search lights could be seen debris, wreckage and people struggling
in the water. We ordered our sea boat away to assist but the air crew were in the
most immediate position to help. The aircrewman in the Seahawk was Petty Officer
Ben Sime who has since been awarded a Medal of Gallantry for his efforts to save
life that night. I will not dwell on that too much but he basically dropped from the
hovering aircraft into the water to support a US sailor who was clearly struggling
and who was unable to be winched on board. Sime kept that sailor afloat until a boat
could eventually reach him and then take him back to Firebolt.

At 1932hrs, just after Sime entered the water, there was a really large explosion
in the vicinity of ABOT that I witnessed from the upper deck. At that point I found
myself thinking, ‘this is no accident, this is some sort of attack.’ We immediately
went to action stations. I had two focuses then, the dual hats of commanding officer
and CTG. As commanding officer I was thinking, okay, I had better do those internal
things: hands to action stations and make sure we are prepared and ready to respond
as a ship. Externally, as the CTG, I found myself considering the bigger picture. I had
boats scattered all over the place and was conscious of the need to rapidly redeploy
and put ourselves in the best posture we could be in, in case anything else followed.

The casualties from the capsized RHIB were initially recovered to Firebolt and then
brought across to Stuart. At 1938hrs there was a second explosion at ABOT, and I
think some of the more lurid press reporting described it as ‘rattling the hangar
door.’ It was certainly a large and loud blast. During the evening we received reports
of low, slow fliers from Yorktown, but we certainly did not see that. Maybe this was
just people becoming twitchy during the event. Yorktown also spotted another small
boat moving at speed that may have been the one found unmanned and drifting
after the event. She subsequently fired warning shots but nothing more was seen
of that vessel.
Firebolt’s initial casualties were recovered onboard Stuart from our RHIB at 2007hrs and our small medical team did a tremendous job in terms of administering initial treatment to them. There were seven casualties in total, three of whom died. All were treated in Stuart prior to being flown either by our own or US medevac helicopters across to Kuwait.

I mentioned earlier that the Seahawk sensor operator, Petty Officer Sime, had gone to the assistance of those in the water. Having done that, he was subsequently recovered by Firebolt, and I have to admit that for a time we lost track of him. At 2020hrs when it was time for our Seahawk to carry out a stretcher lift from Firebolt we had a moment of internal crisis as we did not know where our sensor operator was. It took a fair bit of staff effort to actually locate him. Happily we discovered he was safely onboard Stuart having come back with the initial casualties, but he was in no fit state to fly. The flight commander then took his spot in the back of the aircraft as the winch man, and although he was officially out-of-date, he performed a complicated stretcher lift from Firebolt to bring the remaining injured back to Stuart.
One of the things that impressed me about the aviators throughout the night was their approach to risk management. The decision to deploy the aircrewman into the water, the decision to undertake a winch procedure outside of normal operating procedures with non-standard equipment and to subsequently fly into Kuwait in really bad or deteriorating visibility to a changed location, and then to return to the ship right on the boundaries of crew rest time. Every step concerning the way it was done was a good application of aviation risk management. It was impressive and it was well ahead of what the rest of the ship was doing in terms of understanding and applying risk.

It was not until 2121hrs, a good couple of hours after the first report of smoke, that we really had a good feel for what had happened. That is when we got the first coherent report from a merchant ship concerning the skiffs approaching the ABOT. This explained the explosion, and we started to piece it all together. I was then able to pass that assessment up the chain of command at 2132hrs.

The Cyclone class patrol boat USS Firebolt. Three of her crew were killed and four badly injured during the dhow suicide attack of 24 April 2004.

Basically our predecessors had not been patrolling KAAOT. This allowed dhows to get quite close to the terminal, and the plan had been to detonate a dhow alongside a riser pipe. That was to be the trigger to draw coalition forces north, leaving ABOT vulnerable and open to a follow-on high-speed skiff attack. It was quite a complex, well thought through attack.

It was not until 2254hrs that Firebolt reported that she had accounted for all her personnel. At that point I said, ‘Righto, we will just wait for the final medevac aircraft, but I am going to do a walk through [the ship]’, because at that point I realised I had not initiated an information update to the ship’s company. I walked through
Stuart from stem to stern talking to all onboard I encountered, explaining what had occurred, praising them for their actions, and telling them what would likely occur in the immediate future. The really important part, which made me glad that I did it, was the feedback I received from my crew. It would have been helpful, however, if I had made those information pipes I referred to earlier, during the night.

At approximately 0100hrs, one of the questions the sailors asked was, ‘Are we still holding the Anzac Day dawn service?’ I have to admit, I was not particularly keen, but when we conducted it the next morning it was a really powerful thing. It was an important part of getting back to normality and I am glad we did it.

The incident was largely handled by those on watch: the PWO in the operations room, the navigator on the bridge, the executive officer running between the bridge and boat deck, the flight deck team doing their thing. That allowed me to focus on external matters, feeding the information demands of the national command and the Combined Task Force command.

My real work started the day after the attack. It was a case of ‘okay, we have had something happen. What do we do now?’ Interestingly, the incredible thing about the Americans is their ability to generate forces quickly. The next morning we had 50 marines fly out to the ship and we put 25 into each oil terminal the next day. Additional ships soon started arriving and I had 12 ships on station within a couple of days. The US ability to reinforce was stunning.

The information demand for reporting upwards was extensive, and that took up a lot of my time. I initiated a comprehensive post-incident report and there were two reasons for this: first to capture the lessons learned, and second to give recognition to our people. I reasoned that if we did not tell the story, then no-one would know what the story was and my people would not be credited for their actions. It was a very important activity.

A US Navy Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) team arrived onboard to perform a forensic analysis of the attack. It was an activity that had a number of Australian agencies quite concerned and there was some disquiet that blame for the incident might be attributed to the Australian CTG. Understandably this caused some excitement.

Most importantly, we realised that the game in the NAG had changed and the existing concept of operations (CONOPS) and thinking was wrong. We knew that the 1500-strong NAVCENT Headquarters would soon start generating a plan and to that end we got ahead of the game by formulating a new CONOPS that we forwarded to our Commander CTF 158 and to the US 5th Fleet. That became the genesis of the 5th Fleet CONOPS and the one that remained largely in place until the end of the CTF 158 mission. It was an impressive piece of work which my team completed in only a couple of days.
Keeping the families of Stuart’s crew informed about what had occurred was a really important aspect following the incident. One of my lieutenants drafted an email on my behalf to all the families explaining what had occurred, that we were all safe and what would be happening next. I made one addition, which was ‘If you have any questions, drop me a line,’ and they did … a lot of them. But it really became a personal relationship with the families and that continued until we returned back to Australia where a lot of them met the ship on arrival, and they thanked me for that information and feedback. So keeping families attuned to what had happened and the state of the ship throughout the deployment was very important.

I had to care for my people, and I do not mean only those in Stuart but those in the task group too. Firebolt stayed on patrol for the next week, even though she had lost personnel, and we put people from Stuart with them to help. This forged a very close bond between the two ships which endured throughout our deployment.

The most poignant point was that this significant incident happened just nine days into our deployment in the area of operations. The real leadership challenge was keeping the team focused and appropriately tuned up to sustain it for the next four-and-a-half months.

We did all sorts of things to keep it interesting. I had regular luncheons with the various task group commanders. We conducted a Christmas in July and later commemorated those killed from Firebolt when she came back on her next patrol. She rafted up next to us and we had a barbecue followed by a memorial service. Everyone who was not on watch attended and I was overwhelmed by the turnout coupled with the obvious camaraderie that existed between the two ships companies. I think that having that memorial service, grieving for those we had lost and working through it as a group was very important and helped to sustain us throughout the rest of our deployment.

Returning to command and leadership; my command focus was split between being a ship’s commanding officer and looking after my people and fulfilling the role as CTG, both in a national sense and a coalition sense. Sometimes I was torn between where I needed to apply my energies.

Commander CTF 158, Rear Admiral Kurt Tidd, USN was a good man to work for. His concern was the mission and when I spoke to him during the evening of the incident his view was, ‘what other assets do you need to accomplish the mission.’ And that was a really supportive thing to hear. We worked closely with him to develop the new CONOPS and I understood clearly where his focus was.

At the operational level, Commodore Cam Darby, RAN was the Australian national commander in Baghdad. He was a very experienced naval commodore with whom I got on well. He worked the coalition piece with the US commander up in the headquarters which took care of the coalition angle there.
Back in Australia, the Maritime Commander was great too. He was worried about the wellbeing of his people in *Stuart* following the incident and he gave us excellent support. I spoke to him at about midnight and he asked me, ‘Is there anything you would like?’ I said, ‘No, we are pretty good.’ He responded, ‘Would you like me to tell your wife anything?’ I said, ‘Yes, that would be great, sir, just tell her all is well.’

So he rang my wife on Anzac Day morning in Australia. Unfortunately she was at the Anzac Day dawn service and had turned her phone off. The Admiral then left a message which was meant to reassure her: ‘Karen, it’s Raydon, look, there’s been an attack, there are a few people dead, but Phil is fine.’ It was not perhaps the message he meant to convey but the intent was great, even if the execution was a bit flawed.

The Commander NAVCENT was concentrating on prosecuting the whole campaign, so his focus was again different to ours.

What was interesting was at the strategic level. I was scheduled to go to Kuwait City on 25 April to participate in Anzac Day commemorations. Obviously I could not do that and I had to have a phone conversation with the Prime Minister and Chief of Defence Force to explain why I was not going into Kuwait. The line of questioning from the Prime Minister was very much about understanding what had happened, because his role was guaranteeing public support for the ongoing Australian involvement in operations in the Middle East, and Iraq in particular.

Looking back on why he was asking certain questions, he wanted to be able to situate himself where he could engage with the media and other agencies to explain why Australia was there and how the *Firebolt* incident, and *Stuart’s* role in it, fitted into that broader role; this was very interesting to reflect on.

Within hours of the incident we received a complimentary signal from the Americans which I greatly appreciated yet there was stony silence from Australia. I thought this was very odd. I had received nice phone calls from the Commander Joint Task Force, nice phone calls from the Maritime Commander, but nothing in writing, not an email, not a signal saying good job from the Chief of Navy. Now, when you are tired and stressed and emotional one tends to dwell on these things, and I reflected on this many times asking myself, ‘Did we do a good job, did we do a bad job?’

The Chief of Navy visited the theatre not long afterwards, and I bailed up a member of his staff and said, ‘We were surprised there was no signal, can you illuminate us?’ He replied,

Well, quite clearly there was an NCIS investigation into the incident. We did not know if blame was going to be attributed onto you and therefore onto the RAN, so it would have been imprudent for the RAN to publicly praise you until that line of inquiry was complete.
At the time I thought that was terrible. On reflection I can see exactly what it was, because the Chief of Navy’s job is working the navy reputational issues as part of the broader coalition with the United States. So it is understandable. At the time though, it grated me, but now with the passage of years I can see it for what it was.

People can do great things in difficult circumstances but you have got to lead them, you have to set them up so they can do those things. You have to train them and then you have got to let them do their jobs. That was certainly the philosophy we tried to follow in *Stuart*. Effective and appropriate delegation has to be practiced all the time so that in a demanding circumstance it is second nature for people to take charge and do things.

We had some great performers. The navigator and the executive officer both did great work. My PWO remained on watch for hours and did a fantastic job, for which he was quite rightly recognised. My weapons officer was great, providing me with considered advice that took into account things that I never would have, so I used him as my thinker.

At different levels within the ship people were doing some truly remarkable work exercising situational leadership. This was true throughout the command chain, whether it was a leading seaman in a boat, a senior flight maintenance sailor down on the flight deck running his flight deck teams, a seaman in the boat spaces or a medical senior sailor. The demands of the situation brought out the individual and we certainly saw plenty of that.

Being a CTG for a number of subsequent operations I realised that the real job is to take the pressure off your unit commanding officers and be that buffer so that they can get on with the tactical or the internal job. The CTG role is to shield them from higher level concerns.

The final part I would like to discuss is about dealing with incidents. We set up a pretty good process for keeping an eye on each other after that event in terms of watching for signs of fatigue and stress, and we did have a couple of people who we ended up landing. I found humour and example were two great weapons to use as part of mutual support arrangement.

It is good to look after your people but as the commander, how do you look after yourself and make sure you are being looked after as well? If it had been *Stuart* patrolling KAAOT and not *Firebolt* and it had been RAN personnel who had been lost, was I well enough equipped to deal with that personally? Was the system well enough equipped to support me through that? I will just leave that as something for you to think about because commanding officers are usually good at looking after their people but we should remember to have in place a process and a mechanism for looking after ourselves as well.
Commodore Allan du Toit, RAN, the Commander of Task Force 158 pictured on the Khawr al Amaya Oil Terminal in January 2008.
Commodore Allan du Toit, RAN was appointed in command of Combined Task Force 158 in the North Arabian Gulf between September 2007 and March 2008, commanding maritime forces from Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Singapore and Iraq. He previously served in the Gulf as RAN Task Group Commander between November 2001 and March 2002 as part of Operation SLIPPER.

I would like to begin my discussion by providing a bit of background information about the area of operations that Combined Task Force (CTF) 158 operated in, focusing on what we were doing up there, the mission, the threat environment, the lines of operation and some of the operational achievements.

Some of the key issues as Commander CTF 158 were that I was commanding and operating at the operational level, but I also straddled the dividing line between the operational and tactical levels, and it is important to keep this in mind. I exercised operational control over coalition forces from Australia, the United States, United Kingdom, Singapore and Iraq, and I did that through a Commander Task Group (CTG), Commodore Phil Spedding, RAN.

As Commander CTF 158, I contributed to the theatre campaign plan and I engaged with regional allies at the strategic and the operational level; through the CTG, I executed the plan at the tactical level.

In broad terms CTF 158 operated up in the northern part of the Arabian Gulf. CTF 152 operated in the central and southern parts of the Arabian Gulf and CTF 150 had a very large area of operations extending from outside the Strait of Hormuz, effectively all the way around to the Suez Canal.

By way of background, the Al Basra Oil Terminal, commonly known as ABOT, and the Khawr Abd Amaya Oil Terminal, known as KAAOT were critical infrastructure in south-eastern Iraq. Together they provide the economic means for Iraq to be able to move forward with 90 per cent of its oil exports passing through those two oil platforms. Clearly, if the flow of oil through those platforms was disrupted, the economic means by which Iraq could move forward would be significantly affected.

I would add that they remain a high value target to any force that might be trying to destabilise Iraq. Disruption to the flow of oil through those platforms by
insurgents would also have done much to discredit the coalition. Certainly, that was demonstrated on 24 April 2004 when such an attack was mounted; as recounted by Phil Spedding.

KAAOT was built in the 1950s and was capable of accommodating oil tankers of between 30,000 and 40,000 tonnes which was fairly standard back then. It was built in shallow water closer to the coast hence the pipeline was not lengthy. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, following the advent of supertankers, the terminal could not accommodate the larger ships and, consequently, ABOT was built. It is situated in deeper water thus allowing large tanker access. So today that is the principal export terminal with smaller tankers going to KAAOT.

That was the reasoning behind the command and control headquarters being established on KAAOT, because we had the space and we were not covered with tankers every day of the week.

CTF 158 was established in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG) after the 24 April 2004 insurgent attack and usually embarked in amphibious ships, cruisers or destroyers. Certainly, the first Commander CTF 158 operated from a destroyer, then transferring into the command and control barge Ocean 6 which was moored to the end of the KAAOT terminal. In it, a containerised command and control facility was established and when I took over command we initially operated from it. About a month or two into my command we moved across to the ‘splendour’ of KAAOT and a container village that had been built there. Unfortunately there were no catering arrangements in place so we lived off US ration packs. I think we had a bottle of water to shower and wash with and do whatever else we needed to do. So it was quite tough when we first moved across, but that is all part of character building.

Command of CTF 158 rotated between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Liaison officers from each partner formed part of the staff and I had US and UK liaison officers as part of my team. My team returned home in January 2008, and the United States took over as the CTG with their staff. But I actually remained on as Commander CTF 158 with a complete US team mostly operating underneath me. We did that for continuity before the British came. There was quite a lot of work going on at that stage strengthening the regional relationships, particularly between Iraq and Kuwait. We did not want to lose that momentum, and that worked out very well. At one stage we considered getting an arrangement in place in which a fully integrated UK/US/Australian team operated as a task group command. Unfortunately we never quite got to that.

Briefly, that was the mission; the key issue there was to allow operation of those two oil terminals, always with the objective in mind of training and equipping the Iraqi Navy. It had been decimated during the 1990-91 Gulf War and it was important that it rightfully take back that responsibility for the patrolling and sovereignty of Iraqi waters. That has now been largely achieved.
Iraq’s Khawr al Amaya Oil Terminal, home to the headquarters of Task Force 158. The platform was badly damaged during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s.
It was a high threat littoral environment due to traffic density and a very busy part of the world. There were a lot of dhows and fishing boats constituting the normal maritime traffic, in very constrained navigable waters and indicators and warnings against any asymmetric threat were minimal.

There were a variety of groups posing a threat to our activities, ranging from violent extremists (and we had already seen attempts by them to attack the platforms), through nationalists (and their disputes when vying for power in Iraq), to established maritime criminals. Piracy and criminal acts have been ongoing in that part of the world for many years. Then there are external extremists in that part of the world and opportunists, in the form of Iran, wishing to further destabilise security.

How did we achieve our mission up there? It was through a means of layered defence. The oil platforms were vital to Iraq’s reconstruction. We achieved protection through good situational awareness across the area of operations, and that is where intelligence and our surveillance and reconnaissance were absolutely indisputable. We then had a layered defence that started well away from the oil platforms and finished at the platforms themselves by way of point defence. It was also very important to have close bonds with the local and international maritime communities.

One of the things I want to highlight is the ScanEagle unmanned aerial system that operated out of southern Iraq, which was passed to our control the moment it cleared land. That was really our day-to-day eyes in the sky and it gave us a really good feel for what was happening in both the approaches to the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) and the Shatt al-Arab (SAA) waterways. It also kept a very close eye on what Iran might have been doing in that part of the world. Not long before I took command there was an incident involving HMS Cornwall where 15 sailors and marines were detained by elements of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps Navy following a routine search of a vessel suspected of smuggling, in the vicinity of disputed territorial waters, and to that end the issue of keeping an eye on Iran was extremely important.

I should emphasise that Iran had every right to be there. It is a country that has its own sovereign national interests in that area. The border between Iraq and Iran to this day continues to be a disputed area and I saw the Iranians as being yet another neighbour. We had the Iranians to one side, Kuwait on the other side and we were responsible for the integrity of Iraq’s waters. It would have been nice to have been able to talk more freely with the Iranians, because they had legitimate reasons to be there, having said that, we needed to take the offensive and be prepared for anything that the Iranians might throw at us.

Possible methods of attack against the oil platforms under our protection included: small, armed watercraft which could also pose a multi-access threat; and attack from a tanker that may have been taken over and used in a simple kinetic or weapons-born improvised explosive device type assault. That certainly would
have been a major catastrophe in that area, not only from the immediate impact on the oil terminal, but also to the environment. Swimmer or diver attack could not be discarded nor could aircraft suicide attacks which were not considered beyond the realm of possibility either. Of course the issue of improvised explosive devices being smuggled onto those platforms by civilian workers was also a possibility. Specialists were routinely coming in, so we had to make sure there was a very strict control regime in place to ensure improvised explosive devices were not smuggled on to the platforms.

The legal basis for our rules of engagement came from United Nations Security Council Resolution 1790, which at that time operated between December 2007 and December 2008. Criminal activity was dealt with by relevant articles from the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982* concerning acts of piracy and the issue of Iran involved an approach of de-escalation while making sure that we could, if necessary, take the appropriate offensive action.

Indeed, one of the issues following the *Cornwall* incident was that it cast a cloud over the British operating procedures resulting in them temporarily suspending boarding operations. The first British boarding during my command did not occur until a couple of weeks into my tenure. They really were licking their wounds trying to come to grips with all the lessons that had been learned from that. In fact the first British boarding following the *Cornwall* episode involved greater than normal interest from Whitehall and well-wishes from the British Defence Minister to make sure that all went well, which it did.

We had four lines of operation. The first one was maritime security operations to deter, detect and deny terrorist opportunistic and criminal activity. The second was the issue of mission ready Iraqi forces, to train and deploy the Iraqi Navy and marine units for oil platform defence and territorial security; I was ably assisted in this by the British training team operating out of Umm Qasr. Theatre security cooperation became increasingly important, principally between Iraq and Kuwait. There was still a lot of distrust between them following the 1990-91 Gulf War when the Iraqis had put the hierarchy of the Kuwaiti Navy up against a wall and executed them. So one can imagine trying to build on that and bring those two sides together to work in a cooperative manner. It took up a lot of my time and effort. The fourth and final line of operations was the issue of consequence management. What would we do if there was an accidental oil spill in that part of the world or if there was a terrorist attack which impacted on the environment? We did not have the wherewithal to be able to deal with major oil spills, but we clearly would have had a role in coordinating that in the first instance.

The desired end state was clearly a self sufficient, committed Iraqi maritime force capable of providing a comprehensive naval security environment in the NAG that would allow the uninterrupted operation of ABOT and KAAOT. That has been largely
achieved. The British have very recently shut down the training team. The Iraqis have taken the delivery of new off shore patrol vessels from Italy, and Swiftships is building a large fleet of small, inshore patrol craft. While there is still a United States presence in the broader area there, the Iraqis have now taken on that responsibility for both oil platforms. I think that is a pleasing end state.

Broadly speaking, some of the operational achievements during our time up there included: overseeing the safe loading of over 100 tankers, generating approximately US$17 million for the Iraqi economy. I think that is very significant. I might also add that it was not just Western oil tankers loading up there; there were a large number of vessels heading to China and also to the Indian subcontinent, so to say that this was just an operation to safeguard the flow of oil to the West is quite wrong. In fact we were doing our bit for the broader global economy.

There was also the issue of training and certifying Iraqi maritime forces for point defence of the oil platforms, we achieved that during our time, and they also started becoming involved in boarding and inspection operations of vessels coming into the area.

We transferred responsibility for the KAA waterway to the Iraqi Navy, previously a responsibility of the coalition, which gave it the confidence to patrol the inshore areas.

We facilitated the operational relationship between the Iraqi Navy and the Kuwaiti Navy (and its coastguard). As I mentioned, that relationship was one that was mired in a lot of distrust on both sides. The American view was to go straight in and say, ‘Well, we have got to sort this out.’ That approach did not work out during the period of my predecessor. What we worked hard at was to build up the relationships. One of the things one learns very quickly in the Middle East is you cannot rush things. You have got to build up personal relationships first. Once established, only then can you start tackling the hard issues and moving forward.

That was one of the main reasons, having worked very closely with the Kuwaiti Navy during my tenure, that it was virtually only during the last week of my command that we actually got to a point where we could get the Iraqis and Kuwaitis to discuss international waters onboard a British auxiliary vessel and sit around a chart looking at how we might best be able to get those two nations to work together. That was the reason I stayed on for the extra few months - to get to that point.

With regard to relationships, the Chief of the Kuwaiti Navy had trained at HMAS Creswell as a young midshipman and had done sea time in HMA Ships Vampire and Vendetta attaining his bridge watchkeeping certificate. This gave me an inroad into building a relationship with the Kuwaitis to enable them to take on those responsibilities. So do not ever underestimate the relationships built early in careers and how that might pan out later in an operation.
The importance of building relationships is absolutely essential and I saw that as one of my principal roles as the Commander CTF 158. It was upwards and outwards to allow the CTG to get on and do his job without unnecessary interference and not to be encumbered by 3000nm screwdrivers, be it out of Bahrain or out of our national command chain in Australia. Clearly I had to deal with our national command chain. I had to deal with my immediate boss, who was the Commander US 5th Fleet in his capacity as the Commander Combined Maritime Forces. I had to deal with the Iraqi and Kuwaiti navies. I had to deal with Baghdad by way of a reconstruction and training regime for the Iraqi Navy. I had to deal with my adjacent commander of CTF 152, which was operating in the central part of the Gulf out of an aircraft carrier. There was also the relationship with my CTG and the commanding officers of the ships. Balancing all of those and bringing them together was probably my principal role.

Added to that was the relationship with the tanker operators. We ran a conference once a month in Dubai where we got all the tanker operators together to give them the confidence to send their ships up to the northern part of the Gulf, where they would be safe and the security would be there for them to be able to take on oil.

That was a great lesson for me in not only operational and strategic level command but also diplomacy as well. You will learn very quickly that no one nation can do it alone, hence the need for a coalition, sharing knowledge and experience between us, all growing from those experiences, all bound together by a common purpose and goal. I think that was very important and it extended beyond our traditional allies working with Kuwait and Iraq in that part of the world.

Of course, working in a coalition brings with it challenges as well, and that is one of balance between coalition and national requirements. Differing national rules of engagement and guidance require a task force commander and, indeed a task group commander operating in that environment, to be cognisant of them. Although our rules of engagement were similar to other nations involved there, there were some subtle differences, and you had to be aware of that.

As an example of this, I recall my time in the Gulf as a CTG when I had vessels from Canada under my command. They could not go into Iraqi claimed territorial waters whereas Australia could, so one had to be very careful where one placed assets to make the best use of them operationally.

Of course, political constraints are a fact of life for all nations involved in coalition operations, and I have discussed the first RN boarding which occurred during my time following the lifting of the suspension after the Cornwall incident. Different national security policies are also factors and there is also the issue of different equipment and procedures. We exercise and operate together extensively as coalition partners but there will always be those differences and you have got to be aware of them.
With regard to successful operational command I would like to share with you some personal views built up over many years as an executive officer, a commanding officer, as a task group commander, as commander of a combined task force and ultimately as Commander Border Protection Command. I think leading by example is first and foremost. There is the need for self discipline. You need to have an open and receptive mind. You need the ability to grasp the essentials that are important to success. You need firmness and speed in your decision making. That does not mean that you make rash decisions. You think things through logically. Think first before you act. But act decisively and act as quickly as you can.

Calmness in a crisis, I think, is absolutely indispensable. You need to instil that calmness within your team so that they know that the command is in firm hands and that you trust them.

The ability to accept and discharge your responsibilities and be accountable is also very important. The ability to explain to your people clearly what you want to achieve and why, to tell them what you want to do, but do not tell them how to do it. Allow them, and have the confidence in them, to get on to deliver the goods.

You need to be bold and display that offensive spirit. Even though we were effectively involved in defensive operations in the NAG, we needed to keep in mind the ability to be offensive if and when required. We were challenged at times with a number of penetrations of our screen. Undoubtedly it was Iran and that could have generated an unwanted situation very quickly.

A key issue is to empower your people and delegate effectively and allow them to get on and do what they have been trained to do. Encourage individual initiative and generate that mutual trust, respect and confidence in your team. It is a two-way street built on confidence and trust.

You need to pace yourself and your team as well. That is very important. It is easy when you are involved in operations for week on week, month on month, to just keep giving 100 per cent all the time. There are times, however, when you will be called upon to give 150 per cent. It becomes very important to recognise opportunities when you can actually pace yourself employing fatigue management strategies.

Maintain your sense of humour. I cannot emphasise that enough - it is very important. You need to have a capacity for risk management. We need to be careful with all the risk management that is in place that we do not become risk averse. I am not saying for one moment that we do not need to take cognisance of managing our risk appropriately, but we never want to become a navy that wants to be able to fight and win at sea but which has become risk averse. So, maintaining that balance is very important.
With my background in naval history in mind, reading both contemporary and historical journals and books is absolutely fundamental so far as I am concerned. When I went to the Gulf as CTG for the first time in 2001, on the way over I re-read Admiral Sandy Woodward’s *One Hundred Days* concerning his experiences as a task force commander in the South Atlantic during the Falklands campaign. I re-read that book again when I went over as Commander CTF 158, because that was a fundamental book written by someone who had been through that and had experiences in operations.

The last point I will make is to keep the balance and have fun, because it can be fun commanding a small ship, a large ship, a task group or being in a task force.
It was both a privilege and a pleasure to command two groups of RAN officers and sailors and upwards of 1000 coalition men and women in various ships during my appointment as a task force commander in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO).

I was appointed as Commander Combined Task Force (CTF) 158 in late January 2008 which was a significant advantage because it gave me almost seven months to prepare, both individually and with key members of my task force headquarters team, for the forthcoming deployment.

The command group assembled in early August 2008 when 32 of us congregated in Fleet Headquarters to begin a two month work-up. It was not simply a case of arriving at Sydney airport on the day of departure and flying off to the Persian Gulf. This period gave me an opportunity to work closely with my chief of staff and collaboratively go back through previous command group post-operation reports to get a sense of what we needed to focus on in bringing our team together. We spent a significant amount of time working up and reviewing lessons learnt and I think that was one of the significant advantages of the pre-deployment phase. It gave us a real sense of familiarity with the operational area and I was fortunate that some members of my team had previous operational experience, either in command groups or in RAN ships that had served there.

The key thing about the work-up was that as a group we undertook all of our force preparation and training together, stressing that each individual in the group was critical to the mission ahead. Usually there is a ceiling placed on the number of ADF personnel who are deployed in certain operations but in our case we were actually going a little bit above it by including an able seaman imagery analyst who was to later prove her weight in gold.

We deployed in early October, and by mid-October, following a series of briefings, visits and having met with various national and coalition commanders, I assumed command of CTF 158 working from the Khawr Abd Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT) lying south-east of the Al Faw Peninsular in the Arabian Gulf. My area of responsibility was north of 28° N, which cut across south of the Kuwaiti-Saudi Arabian border, meaning it bordered the territorial waters of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and Iran.
The CTF 158 command element comprised my 32 RAN staff complemented with US Navy personnel, which included a security detachment and ‘Seabees’ who were conducting maintenance and repair work around the oil platform. There were also Royal Navy (RN) personnel on board the platform on detachment from a larger training team based in Umm Qasr in Iraq and a significant Iraqi marine detachment providing the point defence capability for both KAAOT and the Al Basrah Oil Terminal (ABOT).

Between October and December there was a high degree of uncertainty concerning our ongoing tenure with CTF 158. This was a consequence of UN Security Council Resolution 1790 expiring on 31 December 2008 and the inability of Australia to successfully implement a Status of Forces Agreement with Iraq for us to remain in her territorial waters. There was a lot of work occurring in the background to try to resolve this and while that was going on we literally had our kit bags half packed, not knowing whether we were going to stay or leave. Our uncertainty ended on 24 December 2008 when an executive order was received ordering the RAN task force staff and HMAS Parramatta to leave Iraqi territorial waters.

The decision to withdraw RAN assets generated a management and leadership challenge in itself before I relinquished command of CTF 158 on 29 December. Parramatta departed the area of operations at 2359 on 31 December 2008 thus ensuring that she remained actively on task for as long as possible. She consequently redeployed into the CTF 152 operational area undertaking patrols until relieved by HMAS Warramunga on 22 January 2009.
After a short period of leave in Australia, I returned to the Middle East where I assumed command of CTF 152 in Bahrain. CTF 152 operates in the Arabian Gulf where it coordinates theatre security cooperation activities with regional partners, conducts maritime security operations, and stands ready to respond to any crisis that may develop. Its initial area of responsibility extended eastwards to the western limits of the Strait of Hormuz, but when Resolution 1790 expired on 1 January 2009, this area of responsibility was shrunk and renamed CTF Iraqi Maritime, and only incorporated the territorial waters of Iraq - an area of about 500km², right up in the north-western corner of the North Arabian Gulf (NAG).

What that meant was the CTF 152 area of responsibility was extended northwards to the northern part of the Gulf as well. From the perspective of commanding a CTF 152 operation, that generated additional issues for us in extending our scope of operations up into the NAG.

My appointment as Commander CTF 152 meant that our period on deployment was extended from five to seven months and this was another leadership and management issue in itself. My staff numbered 30 comprising 17 RAN personnel, 10 US Navy personnel, 1 representative from the Royal Bahrain Naval Forces and 2 from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Naval Forces. We were headquartered in the US Naval Support Agency in Bahrain which was a truly integrated headquarters.

This environment presented new challenges too. For example, I had a US Navy captain as my Commander Task Group (CTG) who was unfamiliar with the operations or ability of the RAN. I discovered that those Americans who had served predominantly in ships based on the east coast of the United States, which operated in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Gulf had, unlike their west coast counterparts based in the Pacific, little or no idea of RAN expertise, its operational history or its capability. We may as well have come from Austria as opposed to Australia. It was therefore pivotal that in the early stages of our time there we develop relationships and establish our credibility amongst the US Navy staff in particular. In the Gulf, the US vice admiral had a staff of about 1500 and we were trying to integrate ourselves into that organisation as well.

I worked for Vice Admiral Bill Gortney, USN while I was deployed with both CTF 158 and 152. An F-18 pilot, he was a great man to work with. He reminded me much more of our RAN commanders in that he would state his intent and then give me the flexibility to get on with implementing it. He only wanted to know specifics of what was going on in the event of a departure from his intent or when a significant incident occurred, otherwise the mission was mine.

Vice Admiral Gortney wore many hats: he commanded the US Naval Central Command, the US 5th Fleet, Combined Maritime Forces, NSA Bahrain and when CTF Iraqi Maritime was established, he became the Maritime Component Commander for the coalition command in Iraq as well. Under his command he had in the order...
of 25,000 US Navy personnel. This was a huge sweep of command that included personnel serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere over the central command theatre. It was amazing to see that headquarters in operation.

During my stint in CTF 158 and 152, I had two Australian national commanders appointed as Commander Joint Task Force 633: the first was Major General Mick Hindmarsh and the second Major General Mark Kelly. It was fascinating to see how those two men operated and actively engaged with their people at all times. It was another example of the importance of relationship building with the various operational commanders in the coalition around the Gulf. They were frequently on the road and I recall that I saw each of them on three or four separate occasions.

There was a challenge associated with understanding how the Australian Army operated and despite the fact that it was a joint headquarters there was a distinct ‘khaki’ emphasis to it. I learned to understand and appreciate that fairly quickly, in order to ‘manage my manager’ and be able to manage up through the organisation as well. It presented me with some challenges and there were occasions when I invoked a caution from either Dubai or Baghdad to point out the error of my ways.

I was much more familiar with working in a naval construct where one does not necessarily work through a headquarters, to another superior headquarters or another beyond that. I was more accustomed to sending a signal stating my intent and then getting on with the task. There were certainly times when I considered a signal was all that was necessary. I would plead forgiveness afterwards if indeed that was considered necessary. I believe that we achieved all of the objectives set for us. Part of that command challenge was shielding my people from what was going on above them. There were times when it seemed that a lot of flak was coming down our way from our national headquarters and I felt it was imperative that I absorbed all of that, allowing my CTG to concentrate on the task in hand.

In broad terms the CTF 158 mission was to conduct defensive operations in the NAG to allow the ongoing operation of ABOT and KAAOT. Approximately 1.5 million barrels of oil were pumped out of those oil terminals per day, which is not large by Gulf standards, but it was significant for Iraq. Based on 2011 prices, that was worth something in the vicinity of US$50 billion per annum in revenue for Iraq’s economy and I believe it remains their single point of failure.

That is something we had to stress to all who were engaged in that particular operation - from the senior commanding officers to the most junior seamen. It was imperative that they understood the importance of what they were all doing.

Interestingly in the time since our deployment there has been a significant amount of effort undertaken to increase the capacity of that particular facility to export oil out of Iraq. While I was there we were looking at supporting, from a security perspective, the construction of single-point moorings adjacent to those
platforms and the construction of a large central pumping facility whereby the oil would actually come out to those facilities and be pumped from them to the various moorings. What fascinated me when I first arrived was that the pumping facilities were ashore and not out on the terminals. If something untoward occurred, such as an attack, the Iraqis would shut off the oil pumping stations from the Al Faw Peninsula leaving 12nm of oil in the pipeline continuing to flow out to the platforms. The real issue, in the event of an emergency and from an environmental protection perspective as well, was to find a solution that enabled the flow of oil to be shut off adjacent to the terminals.

From a security point of view what that meant was that by positioning single-point moorings adjacent to the platforms, it was actually extending the area for which we were responsible for the security. So that was something that we were devoting a lot of attention to not only with the Iraqis but also with the US Navy and Royal Navy contingents that were there too.

Another significant security concern was the friction that exists between Israel and Iran. At that time Israel was threatening attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities and as we were directly under the flight path between Israel and those facilities, it had me wondering what the second and third order effects of any attacks might be? Would there be some form of retribution or a response by the Iranians, if that were to occur? We were the closest coalition asset to the Iranian coastline in the event of that happening and it was certainly a scenario that caused some concern for me.

Two major fleet units and four minor war vessels were assigned to CTF 158. That number fluctuated occasionally and sometimes we fell below the minimum number prompting me to express that concern to my commander in Bahrain.

As a consequence of one of those remonstrations I was allocated additional assets and on one particular day, I had 14 ships under my command comprising:

- three Arleigh Burke destroyers
- three large amphibious ships
- two frigates
- four US Navy/Coast Guard patrol boats
- two Iraqi Navy patrol boats.

Somewhat amusingly that happened to coincide with the day that the Fleet Commander, Rear Admiral Nigel Coates, RAN chose to visit me and as we looked out over the ships around us I submitted: ‘Sir, my fleet’s bigger than yours at the moment.’ I thought my tenure as a task force commander was about to conclude. In fact the number of ships present was simply a function of ships relieving one another before departing the area of responsibility. The key thing of course was to ensure that we maintained a force flow so we could effectively provide security in
those sectors established around the oil platforms which was critical to security as far as perimeter defence was concerned.

With regard to battlespace awareness, I found we Australians tended to be more interested in getting out there on the front foot and being offensive. What I observed of the RN group before us was that it was more defensive in its actions. It tended to ‘circle the wagons’ around the two oil platforms with the focus very much being on those few nautical miles around them. They were not looking out across the area of operations at what else was going on.

From the time we arrived, in order to enhance our situational awareness, we started to focus our attention more broadly up the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) waterway, up into the Al Faw Peninsula and down to the southeast where the Iranians were operating at and around their oil terminals. That proved beneficial because we observed that quite a few of the aforementioned shore based pumping stations did not have wire security fences around them. Consequently, vehicles could access them with no difficulty whatsoever. One particular piece of intelligence revealed footprints coming up out of the sea into one of these pumping stations prompted us to inform the British command in Basra that they had issues on the ground there. There seemed little point in protecting the oil platforms at sea, if the single point of failure was going to be the pumping stations on the coast. Consequently, significant efforts were made to upgrade the security at those facilities which at that time was, I believe, a function of the transition plan for Iraq. I learned later that the security of the pumping stations had been contracted out to a company that was not doing anywhere near the work that should have been done to ensure their protection.
I increased the use of intelligence gathering assets such as unmanned aerial vehicles making use of them for as long as I could to gather as much information as possible and that is where my imagery analyst proved her worth. She was plotting all of the information we gathered on her system and each day she provided an overview of the movement of vessels, particularly dhows, in the northern part of our area of operations adjacent to Iran’s territorial waters. This helped us to determine any suspicious looking vessels and it proved a very effective means of increasing our understanding of what was happening or likely to happen.

Consolidating the relationship that was developing between the Kuwaiti and Iraqi navies was also very important. We built upon the framework that had been established by previous task force commanders and worked extremely hard with the heads of both of those navies to enhance their relationship. Bringing them together in a positive and constructive way was important, so much so, that during my stint in command of CTF 158 they signed what was called the ‘KAA Protocol’, which was a contract covering joint patrols of the KAA waterway. It ensured there was de-confliction in what they did and some agreement too with respect to the handing over of illegal fisherman and so forth in each others territorial waters. That was a very positive outcome.

In autumn and winter the NAG is not a particularly pleasant or friendly place to be. The maritime boundary between Iraq and Iran was routinely contested and during our time there the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy was quite active. That added to the uncertain security situation between Israel and Iran. In many instances I think that what they were trying to do was cause a disproportionate response to some of their incursions into our sectors to potentially divert attention from what was occurring between themselves and Israel. I am not entirely sure that there was a strategic activity going on, but certainly there was a degree of coincidence between when they would undertake those activities in an attempt to seemingly embarrass us.

When we deployed I did not really understand how deeply involved I would become in relationship issues involving the Iraqi Navy, the Iraqi Marines Corps and the South Oil Company. My staff and CTG worked tirelessly to maintain a relationship between the oil company workers on the platforms and the Iraqi marines who were meant to be protecting them. The relationship was fractured and we spent much time attempting to preserve it and ensure that it was productive.

Of course there were also cultural issues. Our focus was a long term aim to get to an end state that enabled Iraq to protect its own platforms. We could see that being two, three or four years in the making but the Iraqi focus was a much shorter timeframe and we had to have that meeting of minds to determine our combined objectives for the mission.
As far as CTF 152 was concerned, its mission was to counter terrorism and illegal maritime practices, and to defeat destabilising activity in its area of responsibility. It was different in a number of respects to the CTF 158 mission, and it was fundamentally more operationally focused.

In CTF 152, my staff and I were required to respond to a range of issues or incidents that might occur in the Gulf. The area of responsibility bordered the territorial waters of seven nations. There are almost 1000 static facilities throughout the Gulf, so it is impossible to protect all of them. Some of those sit literally on the boundaries of the territorial waters or the agreed exclusive economic zones of many of those nations in the Gulf, so there is an ever-present degree of tension. There is a high shipping density, with roughly 17,000 movements per year, and the stability of regional trade and the free flow of oil are vital to sustaining the global economy. Smuggling has always been prevalent, and terrorism had emerged as a new threat. There is also an historical trade crossroad and the tensions continued to prevail. It was further complicated due to the diversity of cultures and post-colonial era influences that we experienced there.

All of this added to the complexity of the mission in a large area of responsibility. Up in CTF 158, even though our ‘flagship’ was a stationary oil terminal, I could see my ships around me. It was very much like being in a task force at sea doing your business, whereas in Bahrain, I was separated from my units by anywhere up to 300-400nm at times.

Our challenges included the implementation of a new campaign plan. We did not have the luxury of preparing as we had done for the CTF 158 mission and consequently we were unprepared for the mission that we were about to undertake. We received scant information from our predecessors in CTF 152 before we deployed into Bahrain, so there was a challenge for us in getting to understand the mission from the outset.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 and Australian rules of engagement caused us significant concerns while we were in CTF 152 making life difficult, particularly when our coalition partners had rules of engagement that were much more flexible. In the business we were in, which was boarding suspected smugglers or suspected terrorist vessels, I felt constrained.

Communications proved much more difficult from where we were headquartered and the varied and differing national communications networks made it challenging at times for us to maintain effective communications, particularly with our ships at sea.

Battlespace awareness remained an ongoing consideration in CTF 152. The elephant in the room was Iran and it continued to be so throughout my time there and it was interesting to learn from our Gulf state partners the extent to which they would go to avoid offending Iran.
We were also tasked with preparing the UAE Naval Force for command of CTF 152 for the first time. In that type of environment, we had little understanding of how we measured success in our operations. It was much easier in the NAG because we were preventing attacks on the platforms and maintaining security of Iraq’s territorial waters, whereas in CTF 152, the challenge was to identify how well we were doing and how to measure success.

I discovered it was far more effective to work with the coastguards than with the navies in that area, because the coastguards were more aware of smugglers’ activities. They knew who was a bad or good guy as far as dhows were concerned but we did not learn that until late in our mission. We should have been working closer with the coastguard right from the outset to better understand what was going on in the area of operations.

A challenge I had with my command staff, particularly with respect to the US Navy staff, was that my CTG was wearing three hats. He had come across to the Gulf as a surface combat commander in a carrier strike group and up until about three days before he arrived he was unaware he was coming into Bahrain as a CTG. He arrived with a staff of only 10, so our arrival was a welcome addition to his already overstretched team. He was a surface combat commander, a destroyer squadron commander and of course the CTG for CTF 152 as well. So, again, the challenge for us was to ensure that we balanced the workload and relieved his staff of some of the responsibilities they had for the task force in particular. At the same time, we were educating them about what we could contribute to the mission.

As far as our achievements were concerned in CTF 152, we made significant advances in theatre security cooperation and engagement with the Gulf Cooperation Council military leadership.

With regard to Kuwait and Iraq; I continued to work with both and we reached a point when we departed that they began the first of their cooperative training activities. We had also developed a program of training for them which included things like navy-to-navy and operational talks. Junior officers from both navies were also getting to sea together in their respective patrol boats. All of that was building upon the work that Commodore Allan du Toit, RAN had done previously to enhance the relationships between the two navies.

The operational level headquarters was really an eye opener for all of us who were there at the time. The reinforcement of relationships and integration of the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets into our particular battlespace awareness meant what we had a capacity to be able to conduct broader level surveillance and maintain a good overall surface picture.
In time we developed a robust set of metrics for measuring our performance, with the assistance with an Australian defence scientist embedded in the US Navy headquarters, which proved advantageous.

With respect to challenges, the appreciation of the political and diplomatic circumstances was crucial to our success and this took time to really understand. An appreciation of a commander’s roles and responsibilities at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of warfare was also very important. Balancing the command and control regime and the requirements of our national and the operational commanders was also important. The multi-dimensional roles of the CTF commanders that were there and our rules of engagement in the CTF 152 mission, also presented their own unique challenges.

On one occasion I was sea riding in *Warramunga* when she was cued to a potential smuggler transiting across the Gulf from Iran towards Saudi waters to deliver drugs. In complying with Australian rules of engagement, *Warramunga* was unable to do anything other than approach it to conduct an assist/visit type boarding. Consequently a US Navy destroyer was directed to join us from the south while *Warramunga* shadowed the dhow overnight.

The US Navy destroyer was in the vicinity by sunrise and immediately chopped to her own national command. I could not order the Australian commanding officer to undertake that particular boarding due to the limitations of my national rules of engagement and even though we had had two perfectly serviceable boarding parties in *Warramunga* we were compelled to watch while the Americans conducted the boarding. As soon as it was completed the destroyer chopped back to my command and continued on with her patrol. As one might imagine we had some very frustrated sailors onboard *Warramunga* at the time. That was just one example of the constraints we were operating under at the time.

The coalition partners had varying national priorities, and that struck home both in CTF 158 and 152. I discovered that the British had a focus on diplomacy and engagement, and in building business for the United Kingdom whilst they were there in the Gulf. As did the French and the United States to a large degree, so they were undertaking activities in support of their own national interests. I had ships assigned to me for a certain amount of time before they proceeded elsewhere to participate in a trade display or something similar in a distant port.

As far as the US Navy was concerned, it was accepted that if the threat from Iran was to increase, my *Arleigh Burke* destroyer would chop to its own national command and disappear over the horizon. So understanding each country’s priorities was also something I had to come to terms with.

Agility and flexibility in changing our missions from CTF 158 to 152 was primarily achieved by sending a tiger team to Bahrain to facilitate our move. My chief of staff
in CTF 158 preceded me resolving numerous issues regarding communications and accommodation, which proved very helpful.

The last point I would like to cover concerns conditions of service and the welfare of my team. The question in my mind was: were we in a conflict or not? Do I return people home who are struggling with welfare situations or are they required to stay? It transpired that I sent three people back to Australia to manage domestic situations. Two of them returned and one did not. It was, however, something I had to consider and balance against the mission. In World War II, that kind of contemplation never existed.

From a leadership perspective there was quite a bit to consider including managing fatigue and morale of the staff, and the uncertainty surrounding our tenure. The group that I took into CTF 152 was significantly smaller than the team we had in CTF 158, so determining who would stay and who would be sent home was another challenge, as was communicating that to my people.
Morale and motivation following our redeployment to Bahrain also required careful management. The accommodation was very good in comparison to KAAOT and it was strange living there. The mission was also different and we found ourselves more divorced from what our ships were doing. We went from a 24/7 operation where there was a degree of stress and tension with the adrenalin flowing, to one where the team was sitting in a demountable building, communicating via Centrix to ships that were widely dispersed. At times it was becoming a grind and the challenge became maintaining morale, focus and motivation in that kind of environment.

There was also my own wellbeing to consider. One has to be able to manage oneself and understand when you are starting to feel the effects of fatigue and identify those occasions when you need to have some rest and respite.

Some of the mechanisms that my senior staff and I employed included a rigorous staff selection process. I only had two people who were appointed for me. One was my CTG, Captain Peter Leavy, RAN and the other was my chief of staff, Commander Brian Delamont, RAN. Otherwise, we worked together to build the team.

We also conducted a comprehensive reconnaissance of our area of responsibility - I visited the MEAO a few months before we deployed to meet the various commanders and got a sense of what the mission was all about.

The force preparation we underwent as a formal body was part of that process and we undertook the first assessed mission readiness evaluation of the RAN command groups. We used simulators at HMAS Watson and had members of the RAN Sea Training Group, who had been with commodores Du Toit and Spedding in a previous CTF 158 rotation, take us through a range of scenarios. The Fleet Commander oversaw our final assessment and we were certified ready to go. That certainly increased confidence in our own ability to deploy straight into the area of operations and hit the ground running. It is certainly a strong recommendation for the future.

In late April 2009 my Australian staff and I relinquished command of CTF 152 to a US Navy Command Group.
Commodore Richard Menhinick, CSC, RAN, was appointed the inaugural Australian Commander of Combined Task Force 150 in December 2009.
Commodore Richard Menhinick, RAN was the inaugural Australian commander of Combined Task Force 150 from December 2009 to April 2010.

The RAN has two key pieces of doctrine and from the first, *Australian Maritime Doctrine*, comes a reference to ‘the spectrum of operations’ which highlights that maritime forces are useful at every level of that spectrum. But how are ongoing operations in the Middle East reflected in this document?

The operations that I was commanding as the inaugural Australian Commander of Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 from December 2009 to April 2010 stretched across this spectrum of operations. General war and national survival were really the only two of these that we did not have a direct mission to complete.

To set the scene it is important to understand what CTF 150 and Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) actually are. CMF is a US-led coalition of 25 nations (plus three nations with observer status) committed to:

- countering violent extremism and terrorist networks in maritime areas
- working with regional and other partners to improve overall security, stability and regional nations’ maritime capabilities
- responding to environmental and humanitarian crises, when requested.

The CMF staff component included naval representatives from 21 of the 24 countries involved in the planning and operations cells. The forces of 13 nations worked under my command, or directly with me, during my tenure and thus one can see how truly multinational this maritime operation is.

As Vice Admiral Bill Gortney, USN - the Commander US 5th Fleet and Commander CMF - stressed the ‘continued security of the maritime environment is the mission which underpins global prosperity.’

Although I was working for Commander CMF, he was also a US National Commander as Commander US 5th Fleet. Similarly I was a deployed commander of an Australian task group and I remained at all times under the national command of the Australian Commander of Joint Task Force 633, initially Major General Mark Kelly and then Major General John Cantwell. Thus it was a challenging leadership environment.

It may not be fashionable to say but I consider the maritime command positions in the region, as exemplified by CTF 150, are our most strategic command. It is the one command that covers the broad canvas of the Middle East and Indian Ocean, outside
of Afghanistan. Direct interaction, visits, exercises and high-level diplomatic talks occur with senior people and operational personnel of countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Yemen, Jordan and Pakistan. My team was working every day, side-by-side, within the CMF and US 5th Fleet Command. We were making significant gains in working with the nations of the region to assist them to counter the dangers presented by a tense and dynamic strategic, operational, cultural, religious and legal environment. We were engaged on a personal basis with chiefs of navy and senior parts of government and all our interaction occurred with the relevant Australian ambassador and defence attaché present. That is true strategic effect and access.

Throughout my time in command I had with me 26 RAN personnel and we formed a headquarters team co-located with the US 5th Fleet Command, deploying command elements to sea as necessary for focal and surge operations.

Over a four-month period we commanded 38 ships from eight nations. We also commanded aircraft from those ships, including helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles, together with land-based maritime patrol aircraft from six different nations including Australia.

During the command tenure we intercepted and queried over 500 vessels and boarded an additional 140. We were also responsible for coordinating the complex logistics resupply which is another significant consideration in maritime operations, especially as the area of operations encompassed over 7.7 million km².

My force normally included the Australian major surface combatant permanently deployed to the region and occasionally one of the Australian AP3-C Orion maritime patrol aircraft.

There were two other combined task forces within CMF. CTF 152 carrying out the same mission, but within the Arabian Gulf, and CTF 151 conducting counter-piracy operations within my area of operations. When I was there, CTF 152 was commanded by the UAE followed by Kuwait, a great boost for the Gulf cooperation nations. CTF 151 was commanded consecutively by the United States, Singapore and Republic of Korea.

By way of history, CTF 150 was established not long after the beginning of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in February 2002 with a focus on counter-terrorism. The United States, Germany, Spain, Italy, France, the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Pakistan, Canada, Denmark and Australia have each shared its command.

The strategic multinational aspects of the operation and its close regional links can be seen from the fact that I took over command from Rear Admiral Zakuallah of the Pakistan Navy, handed back command to Rear Admiral Zafar Mahmood Abassi of Pakistan, who in turn was relieved by Commodore Gregory Sammut, RAN.
Maritime security operations are all about:

- ensuring security, stability and global prosperity in the maritime environment
- assisting in countering destabilising maritime activities
- promoting the security efforts of regional nations
- disrupting illegal trafficking
- deterring extremism and gaining intelligence and an understanding of the maritime pattern of life.

Australians are used to commanding and operating across vast areas. The CTF 150 area of operations encompassed the Gulf of Aqaba, south of the Seychelles and across to India and up to the Strait of Hormuz.

Of interest, Australia and the RAN has been in the Middle East with either ships and/or command elements almost continuously since 1990, but this was the first time we had commanded combined operations outside of the Arabian Gulf itself, which brought with it a new set of complexities for irregular warfare and an increased level of ambiguity.

The Middle East Area of Operations has a strategic, operational and legal environment that presents a number of unique challenges. These include:

- the nature of the region
- the years of conflict and ongoing tensions with regional neighbours
- the lack of clear boundaries in respect of territorial waters
- differing obligations under International law
- the lack of a United Nations mandate for the maritime environment.

This makes command very complex.

The environment is further complicated by each of the coalition nations operating under their own discrete rules of engagement.

The complexity of the area of my command encompassed the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, northern Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz. Considerations included:

- sea lines of communications and chokepoints vital to the world economy (Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb)
- areas that are a breeding ground for violent extremism
- failed and failing states that constitute a security challenge
- illegal destabilising or terrorist-related activities such as drug smuggling, human trafficking and piracy
- a delicate political situation in the region
• a complex environment with massive shipping throughout, fragile maritime infrastructure and seasonal weather patterns that greatly affect the maritime environment.

In short, the area commanded by CTF 150 is in essence the maritime flank of operations in several countries, particularly Afghanistan. This period also overlapped with Saudi operations on the border with Yemen and the Houthi insurgency in Yemen. It should be remembered that Al Qaeda threats in the vicinity of Bab el-Mandeb were ongoing and some 25,000 ships or about 7 per cent of the world’s shipping, passing through there each year while about 40 per cent of the world’s total shipments of oil also pass through the Strait of Hormuz. The 28 July 2010 attack on the Japanese tanker MV *M Star* by a small explosive laden boat is a case in point.

The main focus of our operations was to:

• prevent or disrupt attacks
• intercept or deter the smuggling of illicit cargo such as narcotics, contraband and fuel that fund the terrorist activities
• intercept weapons and ammunition
• intercept or deter the movement of terrorists themselves by sea or even people smugglers and their activity, especially into Yemen.

With regard to the main movements of contraband and people in the region Yemen has to deal with a continual tide of illegal immigrants or refugees from Somalia via the Gulf of Aden, and Eritrea via the Red Sea. The issue for us was monitoring their safety from a distance, trying to ascertain whether the boats were carrying people into Yemen or whether they were pirates, terrorists or carrying illicit cargo to fund terrorist activities.

For all intents and purposes the coast of Pakistan, and to a degree Iran, was in effect the coast of Afghanistan. From there the main pattern of the flow of illegal activities took place, across and down into Africa, Yemen and Oman. This posed differing problems for us, ranging from long-distance interceptions and monitoring where aircraft and unmanned aerial surveillance assets were key to short-range and response operations in the Gulf of Oman. Consequently we always needed to remain flexible and on our toes. By far the best way to win was to deter in the first place with a strong and obvious presence, therefore, the principle of persistence in maritime operations was key and an area we focused on.

Maritime operations across 8.5 million km$^2$ of seas and oceans are strategic probably more so than operational. Fifteen nations had sea borders to my area of operations.

A key role of any commander in such a region is to visit the nations and talk with their governments where appropriate and certainly their senior naval command and other maritime law enforcement agencies. We did this in Saudi Arabia, Jordan,
Oman, UAE, Bahrain and Pakistan. This invariably was done wearing dual hats covering both CMF and then Australian national issues and always in company with the Australian defence attaché and ambassador.

Knowledge of Australian strategic interests and a respect for the cultural and regional interests of the nations involved was vital. The strategic outlook drove the operations at all times. A failure to engage across the highest strategic levels will lead to failure at sea in the Middle East. We needed to remember at all times that we were only visitors there to assist the regional nations to ensure that their economic development was unaffected by criminal or terrorist-related maritime activity and that on leaving the area would be a better place for them.

We were making significant gains in working with the nations of the region to assist them to counter the dangers presented by a tense and dynamic strategic, operational, cultural, religious and legal environment. For example, we had officers from the Saudi Navy working with us in our headquarters and we had a command team from Singapore focused on the counter-piracy operation with us as well. This was helped by the cooperative nature of sea operations and the fact that interoperability comes very naturally to navies who have a tradition of working closely together.

This is a powerful ingredient that is not well understood by some strategic commentators. Working effectively on the surface of the sea, in ships, is a strategically powerful message. It always has been and always will be and continues to send a message of how a nation really thinks of itself on the world stage. This is why the contribution to the mission in the Middle East and Indian Ocean is a vital activity.

Another issue is the importance of the sea itself, given the just-in-time nature of shipping, the sea lines of communications in this region are vital to the modern global trading community, especially its need for resources.

This now leads to an important point: the legal regime underpinning our operations at sea. The sea is a fascinating and not well understood domain mostly covered in international maritime law terms as the high seas, but increasingly challenged by coastal jurisdictions and the competition for resources.

Legally, it remains the last of the global commons, not at the beck and call of any single nation but subject to international agreements and laws, underpinned by a common mariner focus on the danger of the sea.

Nations that have depended upon or utilised the sea to exploit and garner wealth tend to support freedom of the seas, whilst nations that have not historically had a tradition of sea faring tend to wish to expand their control as far from the coastline as they can. Thus the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 (LOSC) and the customary international law of the sea that underpins maritime operations can be interpreted in different ways by nations depending on their position. This impacted
heavily on the nature of the irregular warfare we were conducting at sea within CTF 150 and it makes working at sea in the vicinity of land a very complex issue.

Additionally, the nature of the sea as a global commons provides those who wish to export and exploit violence under the cover of the sea many opportunities to do so, remaining largely immune from interdiction. The sea is their friend, often because the focus of the world is predominantly on the land.

Thus our overriding focus is the legal basis for operations. The legal basis for the CMF presence in this region is based on customary international law, treaty law and various United Nations Security Council resolutions.

There are a few of these of which Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001) provided the foundational reference for the coalition, such as a duty on all states to:

- prevent and suppress the financing of terrorist acts
- suppress recruitment of members of terrorist groups
- eliminate the supply of weapons to terrorists
- take necessary steps to prevent commission of terrorist acts
- deny safe haven to those who finance, plan, facilitate or commit terrorist acts.

This was followed by Security Council Resolution 1377 (2001), which adopted a declaration on the global effort to combat terrorism and then Security Council Resolution 1456 (2003) that emphasised that terrorism can only be defeated by a sustained comprehensive approach involving the active participation and collaboration of all states. The Security Council has since recognised and endorsed counter-terrorism operations via additional Security Council resolutions in 2007 and 2008. Another, recent, Security Council resolution relating to terrorism is Resolution 1904 (2009).

However, despite the many resolutions relating to combating terrorism, the Security Council has placed the onus on states to repress terrorism within the bounds of their own national laws and jurisdictions.

These resolutions do not provide any further guidance or authorisation to member states in relation to countering terrorism, nor how to meet obligations imposed under Security Council Resolution 1373. Whilst the resolutions are generally passed pursuant to Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the word formula of ‘all necessary means’ has not been used, which means that members states are not authorised to use force or engage in maritime interception operations against known or suspected terrorists on the high seas.

Therefore, we continue to operate using international law under LOSC, other treaties and customary international law as the legal basis for conducting operations.
There is no treaty that provides powers for a warship to stop, board, or search a foreign-flagged ship in order to disrupt or detain a suspected terrorist or those supporting terrorism on the high seas.

One of the reasons a more robust resolution has not been passed to date is that the United Nations and member states have always considered protection of the freedom of navigation to be of vital importance, and the concept of flag state jurisdiction is a fundamental part of that freedom.

This means that use of force against known or suspected terrorists, and those providing support to terrorists, is limited to self-defence under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Consequently the high seas, where CTF 150 operates, is not an area within the jurisdiction of states, except for those provisions relating to flag and coastal state consent.

This needs to be well understood. A maritime commander’s authority to interdict shipping rests with the flag state of that vessel or to determine the flag of a vessel where that flag is not determinable by other means. Once onboard if things are found action can only be taken with flag state consent. However, if the vessel is found to be without nationality, measures are permitted within the rules of engagement to deal with such instances.

To even attempt to command and operate in such an area requires competent legal advice on hand at all times. The level of legal advice in a command role in a coalition environment requires an advanced level of knowledge of maritime and operational law plus a deep understanding of the strategic context.

To be successful you need to understand and respect the legal positions of each and every one of the nations who are providing assets, and of those nations that comprise the region itself. After all, we were just visiting and we needed to command and operate in such a way as to garner and keep their trust and respect. This requires a focus continually at the strategic and operational level, conducting senior regional engagement visits is as key a factor in conducting the irregular warfare at sea as is the tactical employment of assets.

Each of the 24 nations comprising CMF has a differing view of maritime security operations and obligations in relation to counter-terrorism. As an example, some nations have declared they are in a state of armed conflict with terrorists, while others view terrorists as criminals, not combatants. These differing views create challenges in coordinating tasks as everyone has to deal with varying constraints and permissive actions.

These differences are reflected in rules of engagement and other policy approaches to a broad range of issues, such as different political climates between two nations and implications that come with this such as the fact that a completely legal action
may be perceived as provoking a use of force which must be avoided. A commander needs to be very aware of these issues at all times as well.

The key ingredients to success at the strategic and operational level are:

- to be strategically aware before you take command (well before):
  - know your nations’ strategic aims
  - understand the aims/history of those you are working with.
- Know the history of the command (really know it) - have ‘good’ ideas been tried before?
- Forge personal linkages and trust within and across operational boundaries.
- Respect the culture of the region you are commanding and work to engage them at every level. They will still be there after you withdraw and perhaps your nation just might want to be welcomed back.
- Know your left and right of arc.
- Really understand the command chain - national and international.
- Know the law - UN Security Council resolutions and LOSC for example.
- Know the detail of the rules of engagement (of each nation) and make sure:
  - your directive matches it
  - your aims are covered by it
  - your personnel are very focused on it
  - your lawyer gets it!
  - because if the rules of engagement are wrong you will fail.
- Know the tactical capabilities and limitations of:
  - personnel in your command
  - ships/aircraft/ formations under your command.
- Link everything to the strategic:
  - if the objectives do not match - failure will result.

My philosophy of command is based on my leadership principles. My view is you cannot go far wrong with these:

- They are basically my philosophy on leadership and are the signature behaviours under New Generation Navy.

They translate well at any level.
As far as leadership itself is concerned, the following are true at any level of command:

- Act quickly/act fairly - watch out for ‘wardroom syndrome’ as I call it (those closest to you do not come ‘fully formed’).
- Never neglect safety.
- Watch for the last few months - the routine things will catch you out.
- Leadership is a personal thing:
  - It needs a passionate commitment to your people.
  - It needs an unselfish commitment to your people.
  - It needs a sincere engagement with families.
  - It need consistency and decisiveness:
    - You are the leader - people expect you to lead. They want you to lead.
  - Never tell a lie, never mislead and never develop false expectations - you only have one shot at it.
  - Enjoy it, be passionate, be honest and be yourself - that is all your people want - but it is essential to do.
  - Get out and about - your chief of staff and deputy should be wondering often where you are and who you have spoken to.
- It does not need:
  - Playing favourites - especially with nations and national staffs.
  - Inconsistency, double standards, timid behaviour or indecisiveness.
- Focus on your people and your command - but keep a weather eye out for squalls.
  - Do not be afraid to ask for advice - it has always happened to someone else before.
  - Own up before you are found out and follow procedures.

In summary though, this is an operation of which all Australians can be proud. The Navy and Air Force personnel involved in it are most professional and are valued very highly by those within CMF and by all those I met in the regional nations we were helping. Within CMF a cooperative and collegiate approach has been established in order to understand the legal approach taken by various nations within the constraints and freedoms of each nation.

A commander must appreciate this and put the legal issues at the centre of their command.
Commander Ivan Ingham, RAN, on the forecastle of HMAS Toowoomba prior to deploying to the MEAO in support of counter-terrorism and counter-piracy operations in June 2009.
Commander Ivan Ingham, RAN has served variously in the Middle East Area of Operations participating in operations SLIPPER, FALCONER and CATALYST. In 2009 he was appointed in command of HMAS Toowoomba which deployed to the MEAO in 2009.

Between 1990 and 2000 the RAN conducted ten Operation DAMASK deployments to the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO). In the nine years that followed, it conducted another 20 deployments supporting Operations FALCONER, CATALYST and SLIPPER. Where the earliest deployments saw our ships, aircraft and personnel working in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Oman, subsequent deployments saw them conducting either maritime support operations in the southern and central Gulf, or maritime interdiction operations in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG). In the six years to 2009, the RAN has been employed chiefly within the NAG where it played a key part in providing maritime protection and security.

All this changed in 2009 when I deployed in command of HMAS Toowoomba on Operation SLIPPER and the RAN began a new chapter of operations in the Middle East. The new commitment to counter-terrorism operations with Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 and counter-piracy operations with CTF 151 would see the RAN withdraw to the North Arabian Sea and also move much further south to the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden.

Moving into these unfamiliar operating environments provided a raft of new challenges, opportunities and experiences for my crew, and differing command and leadership dimensions for me. One of the challenges included the continual presence of the SBS television network’s Pirate Patrol documentary film crew which was embedded in Toowoomba from the final week of our work-up until our return from the deployment seven months later. That, coupled with uncertainties associated with our forthcoming mission, and the introduction of a theatre-wide ban on the consumption of alcohol in the MEAO all required my careful consideration and utmost deliberation.

I will attempt to capture the changing nature of RAN operations in the Middle East by describing some of our key activities and highlighting some of the challenges we encountered. I will conclude by reflecting on some of my own personal thoughts and observations.
At the end of 2008, the last remaining ADF units departed Iraq and the RAN focus shifted to supporting operations in Afghanistan. At that time, HMAS *Warramunga* moved down to the central Arabian Gulf and began maritime support operations while proposals for reshaping our contribution to coalition operations were considered by the Australian government. Behind the scenes, progress was being made to understand the international and domestic implications of Australian and RAN involvement in counter-terrorism and counter-piracy operations. Work was also begun to develop new operational guidance and provide revised maritime rules of engagement.

I joined *Toowoomba* and assumed command on Thursday 26 March 2009. The following Monday we sailed from Fleet Base West for Unit Readiness Week 1.

Work-ups are a complex and demanding process that hinge on a range of readiness factors such as:

- the materiel and maintenance state of the platform
- the equipment fit including enhancements
- the effectiveness of a ship’s internal organisation, planning and administration
- the total numbers of personnel, the manning shape, personnel qualifications, experience, training and currency
- the attitude and enthusiasm of our people and their willingness to work together as a highly cohesive team
- the quality of leadership and management
- culture.

I could see that *Toowoomba* was in very good shape, both materially and organisationally, when I assumed command. This was testament to the considerable efforts of my predecessor and his leadership team, particularly noting that *Toowoomba* had been notified at relatively short notice to replace HMAS *Darwin* for the MEAO deployment.

My crew showed continuous improvement throughout the five week unit readiness work-up. A lack of emerging defects, a robust organisation and a highly positive
attitude, were all promising signs of our collective potential to meet the challenges that would follow. This extremely busy and challenging period provided me with an early insight into the capabilities of my ship and the strengths and weaknesses of my team. I suspect the same observations were being made about me. Almost immediately, I realised Toowoomba had an exceptional executive officer, outstanding heads of departments, the most professional operations officer and navigator I have worked with, an outstanding ship’s warrant officer and coxswain, and an extremely high performing group of chief petty officers. In unison this group had already galvanised my team.

I was, however, becoming increasingly concerned by the lack of information relating to our future mission, noting that everything was being kept ‘close-hold’ until a formal decision and announcement was made by the Australian government. This situation created a range of interdependent command and management implications. The biggest issues related to the uncertainties of our tasking and the effect a number of ‘unknowns’ might have on our planning, our preparations, our people and our forthcoming deployment specific mission readiness training. The implications of integrating a first-of-its-kind Level 4 Boarding Team, comprising nine specially trained clearance divers, into an already tightly bonded ship for the final week of our mission readiness work-up, also required careful management and consideration.

Notwithstanding these implications we moved into our mission readiness work-up and started to progress through a range of scenarios aimed at creating the situations and tasks we might encounter. The newfound confidence of my bridge and operations teams, along with the slick integration of the boarding team and my embarked helicopter flight provided some of the most memorable highlights of this final pre-deployment period.

After making excellent progress throughout the work-up and after achieving all our assessment milestones and competencies, Toowoomba was certified as being ‘mission ready’ on 15 May. Exactly two weeks later, on 29 May 2009, the Australian government announced that it was committing RAN and Royal Australian Air Force assets operating in the Middle East to counter-terrorism and counter-piracy operations.

Departing Fleet Base West on 9 June, we enjoyed a productive but largely uneventful passage until we were tasked to render assistance to the yacht Desiderata. This further highlighted the importance of being ready to respond to the unexpected.

Toowoomba refuelled at Diego Garcia before continuing the voyage to the MEAO where a handover was conducted with Warramunga on 22 June. This served as a psychological milestone for both ships and the opportunity to spend a short period in company was useful for final face-to-face discussions. I noted that many in
Warramunga showed signs of long-term fatigue, and this was a point I would do well to remember during the coming months.

After a short period inside the Gulf where we received our in-chop briefs from the staffs of Commander US 5th Fleet and Commander Joint Task Force 633, we then moved back out into the Arabian Sea to commence our operations in earnest.

Our first mission between late June and mid-September was to conduct counter-terrorism operations in the North Arabian Sea. The mission directive was ‘to create a stable and secure maritime environment free from terrorism and associated activities.’ This required us to move into different patrol boxes specifically positioned to enable us to monitor and check maritime traffic moving between the coasts of Iran and Pakistan and the coasts of Yemen and Somalia.

This type of work, which often goes unseen, contributes to the wider coalition effort by deterring and countering the movement of people, equipment, weapons, drugs and currency - and any other illicit activity supporting terrorist networks. In addition to our own daily helicopter sorties, the surveillance from fixed-wing maritime patrol aircraft from Al Minad coupled with Royal Navy (RN) Merlin helicopters operating from Seeb, Oman and organic air support from the US aircraft carriers Ronald Reagan and Nimitz underpinned our effectiveness as a maritime surveillance and response asset.

Another key factor that had an enormous impact upon our effectiveness throughout this period was the seasonal Indian Ocean south-west monsoon. At that time of the year, the northern Arabian Sea is dominated by unrelenting gales and a huge rolling swell that makes even the simplest of tasks a challenge. Even with reduced levels of traffic during this period, detecting and tracking vessels that remain in the area is much more difficult given the degraded conditions and the reduced radar and visual detection ranges. The wind and swell also adversely affects flying operations. Ship helicopter operating limits for ‘flying winds’ and flight-deck operating limits with respect to pitch and roll and the ship’s motion generally, created significant challenges for the officer of the watch and greatly increased the risks for our aircrew and the flight deck team.

The weather had the same impact on boat operations and the deployment of our boarding teams. In this respect, the skills, experience, fitness levels and specialist equipment employed by our boarding team mitigated much of the environmental risks and permitted a level of capability and readiness that would not have been otherwise possible.

It was interesting to note that the conditions were such that the US Navy aircraft carrier had to suspend flying operations owing to excessive pitching and flight deck motion.
Clearly then, risk management was a key factor in my decision making, particularly in balancing the requirements of a very important mission against the significant environmental risks posed at that time of the year. Plans and intentions for the helicopter, the boats and our boarding teams always got my closest attention. On several occasions, the conditions were such that the flight commander, the navigator and I were all involved in supporting the officer of the watch during the recovery of the helicopter. Likewise, I chose to remain watchful and be ready to be involved at short notice in other practical matters should it suddenly be necessary. Being present for the launch and recovery of our boats provided a visible indicator of the priority I attached to these activities, the importance command placed on the safety of our people and the integrity of our mission-essential boats.

On one occasion we attempted an aerial fast-robe boarding party insertion on a critical contact of interest only to be thwarted by marginal weather conditions. The boarding was consequently conducted successfully by boat illustrating how developing situations during counter-piracy operations require a level of ongoing adaptability. The sensitive nature of the intelligence we were receiving on this particular contact, our certainty concerning its identity and the fact that we had been tracking it amongst a large number of other dhows for several days was not known by the embedded SBS film crew who filmed the boarding for its documentary.

Our time in the northern Arabian Sea provided my crew with valuable operational experience. However, notwithstanding the great benefits provided by intelligence cueing and maritime patrol aircraft support, the task of locating and tracking critical contacts of interest across these great distances in such difficult environmental conditions proved enormously challenging for my team.

There were also considerable difficulties for those making plans ashore. The paucity of coalition warships and the fragility of maritime patrol aircraft support reinforced the importance of our helicopter and the vital role *Toowoomba* made in contributing to the overall counter-terrorism effort.

By early September, as we approached the halfway point of the deployment, my team looked forward to moving south to the Horn of Africa where we would join CTF 151 and begin our new mission ‘to deter, disrupt and defeat piracy in order to protect global maritime commerce, enhance maritime security, and secure freedom of navigation for the benefit of all nations.’

The more enclosed waters of the Gulf of Aden were in stark contrast to the Arabian Sea. With tankers carrying three million barrels of oil and other ships transporting 90 per cent of Asia and Europe’s maritime trade along this route, the International Recommended Transit Corridor, or the IRTC as it is now commonly known, is one of the world’s busiest and most important shipping routes.
During our rotation, warships from 24 nations operated in the Gulf of Aden. While ships from CTF 151 were assigned to patrol inside boxes situated along the length of the IRTC, other warships from Task Force 465 (European Union Naval Force, deployed under Operation ATALANTA) and Task Force 508 (Standing NATO Maritime Group 2, deployed under Operation ALLIED PROVIDER) provided close escort to shipping listed on the High Risk Register and those vessels participating in the World Food Programme.

Every day we encountered Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Japanese and Russian warships - all conducting their own independent national counter-piracy operations. As my US Commander CTF described it ‘Counter-piracy work in the Gulf of Aden is like the bar scene from Star Wars, it is where everyone is looking for a piece of the action!’

In spite of better weather, and improved sensor and operating conditions, the very high volume of contacts, most of which were invariably fast moving and usually detected only at short range when emerging from the coasts of Somalia and Yemen, presented more new challenges for my team.

Late in the afternoon of Sunday 20 September, my officer of the watch overheard a merchant ship reporting that she was being approached by a fast-moving skiff. The report went on to highlight that the skiff was carrying a large group of armed personnel. The position of the merchant vessel was 17nm east-north-east of our position, and some 5nm beyond our patrol box. The suspected piracy attack was

HMAS Toowoomba’s interception of a suspicious skiff on 20 September 2009. A search of the vessel revealed a cache of weapons including a rocket propelled grenade launcher, six AK47 assault rifles, a G3 assault rifle, a large quantity of ammunition and a kilo of methamphetamine.
therefore unfolding inside FGS *Bremen*’s patrol box. However, it transpired that *Bremen* was 55nm further to the east and clearly not in a position to respond. Just over an hour later, with the support of a Japanese maritime patrol aircraft and *Bremen*’s Lynx helicopter, we had closed on the skiff, boarded it and confiscated one rocket-propelled grenade, six AK47 automatic rifles, one G3 assault rifle, three rockets, large quantities of ammunition, and a kilogram bag of methamphetamine.

In spite of a great deal of military effort and cooperation, we continue to face serious difficulties in our attempts to effectively counter piracy and other associated activities that increasingly threaten trade, security and maritime safety within this region. The scale of the area, volume of traffic and short-notice nature of attacks by protagonists who appear as innocent fishermen or traders one minute, only to be revealed as opportunistic pirates the next, makes this is a difficult mission to undertake. Rules of engagement, wider legal issues, national sensitivities and myriad other practical, geographical and logistical issues make anything other than deterrence and response (in self defence) operations extremely problematic.

What I have learnt about counter-terrorism and counter-piracy operations is that each is very different. The counter-terrorism tasking requires a long-range, sustained maritime effort. The deterrent value we provide is difficult to measure but our work in this role makes an important contribution to the wider effort ashore and is important given the longer-term, regional and strategic affect. There is an ever-present risk from extremist threats.
The counter-piracy effort is very much in the media and public eye. This tasking requires high level vigilance, readiness and speed of response. Again, the deterrent value is real but difficult to quantify. This work is important symbolically noting our contribution to the international community. Further, this work is at the epicentre of a global maritime military effort. Here the RAN is on the centre stage, operating alongside the most powerful navies in the world, gaining experience and credibility while ensuring we remain relevant to current real-world operations.

With regard to our embarked film crew; its scrutiny of the mission from behind the camera highlighted an important new dimension and some of the potential pressures an embedded film crew imposes on a ship’s company. Particularly when considering the duration of the deployment, the uncertainties of our tasking and the risks involved with allowing ‘fly-on-the-wall’ access throughout a period of risky real-world operations. For me, there was significant tension between the need to provide them free access to gain material important for promoting the RAN while not having *Toowoomba* turned into a film set. Whilst some of my people were happy to participate in the filming, others were less comfortable and some downright objected to the presence of the film crew. From a command perspective, I was extremely supportive of their work but remained ever mindful that the footage and our comments could easily be misrepresented or edited entirely out of context, intentionally or otherwise.

Alcohol and culture whether as separate points or together are very big subjects. Culture and culture building was something I placed great importance on from the day I joined to the day I left *Toowoomba*. Culture stems from the Latin word ‘colere’, which means to ‘tend, guard, cultivate and till’. For me, culture is like a plant or a tree, it needs to be grown and cultivated so in time you can harvest from it. In other words, ‘we reap what we sow’. Our culture proved to be important to the success of our work-ups and then provided the foundation stone for our deployment. Our culture was vital in our approach to implementing the requirements of the alcohol ban which in itself, proved another major command and leadership challenge, a subject worthy of further discussion in its own right. For me, culture is about creating an environment where your people know what is expected, they know what to do and they are happy to do it. After a while they start imposing the highest standards on themselves and each other, they strive to do what is right and they want to do their best.

Looking back on that deployment I am now able to make a couple of interesting comparisons. The first is that the biggest challenges I encountered in *Toowoomba* were essentially the same as those I faced during my command of the patrol boat HMAS *Townsville* over 2005-06. Namely, that people are the most important factor. They present the most demanding and the most difficult aspects of command. Five per cent of them involve 95 per cent of the work. They bring you the most trouble,
the greatest challenges but at the same time they give you the highest sense of achievement and they are the subject of your greatest pride. The people and their culture underpin the success or otherwise, of every ship.

Then there is the time management challenge:

- the tasks you spend the most time on are often the least important
- talking versus e-mail
- people versus other routine but nevertheless important tasks
- doing versus reporting
- operations versus administration
- now, tomorrow, this week, this month, this deployment, this year - all versus the next
- the constant tension between meeting the demands of today, whilst investing sufficient time in the future; you do not know you are not getting it right until it is too late and, by then, it has probably started to go wrong!
- fatigue management
- ensuring my people had sufficient room and space to grow and learn - whilst still affording them an appropriate level of involvement and oversight
- encouraging my people to set and strive for their own standards of excellence without being over burdensome or unrealistic in my demanding command expectations.

My second observation is that both of my years as the commanding officer of Toowoomba were equally demanding from a command and leadership perspective. Looking back I realise that during my second year in command, which involved a return to a more routine operating program and a raise, train and sustain deployment to Southeast Asia, I was presented with quite different but equally challenging issues to those that I faced during the previous high-tempo year of work-ups and deployed operations.

This leads me to my final observation which is ‘whilst the nature of what we do in command can be quite different, the challenges, the risks, the chances of failure and the opportunities for success remain constant’.
Captain of HMAS Kanimbla, Commander George McGuire, RAN. Following the loss of Shark 02, Kanimbla’s crew turned to their captain whose inspired leadership saw them through the difficult weeks following the accident.
In April 2005 Captain George McGuire, RAN was commanding the amphibious ship HMAS Kanimbla (II) which was operating in support of back-to-back humanitarian missions in Indonesian waters. Disaster struck Kanimbla when one of its embarked Sea King helicopters from 817 Squadron crashed with fatal consequences.

The following views concerning command and leadership are centred on command in crisis and, in particular, how I found myself unexpectedly dealing with the deaths of nine members of the ADF.

From an Australian perspective that is bad enough, but when one takes into account that we were at a remote island, operating in another country’s waters in the midst of a natural disaster relief effort, it presents many challenges. Suddenly I found myself having to deal with what was going on in that community, while trying to do what I needed to do to look after my own people.

To begin with I will establish a quick timeline of events and then focus on a few details about what was going through my mind at certain times.

HMAS Kanimbla had been operating off Banda Aceh, Sumatra, Indonesia, since 11 January 2005 in response to a tsunami that struck the island on 26 December 2004. The initial emergency/crisis phase was over and the ship had settled into a pattern of steady-state disaster relief.

The ship was at sea and for those less engaged in what was happening ashore boredom emerged as an early command management issue. But that is another story and one exacerbated by the uncertainty surrounding our return date to Australia. It was not until late February 2005 that we learned that we would be going home the following month. The unknown concerning mission length meant we were not working to an established deployment timeframe and as such the crew and their loved ones back in Australia could not look forward to an end date.

I will pick up the timeline from when Kanimbla was berthed in Singapore on 29 March 2005. We had been there on rest and recreation for just two days having effectively spent the previous three months at sea. There I received a phone call from the Maritime Commander ordering the ship to sail immediately. I recall him saying, ‘You have got to go around to Nias, there has been an earthquake.’ My first thought was ‘where is Nias?’ We subsequently planned a transit up around Banda Aceh, before heading down to the island of Nias itself.
The epicentre of the earthquake was just north of Nias and we did not know with any certainty where the damage was. Nor did we know clearly what our mission was. It had been decided that Australia had to do something and I had received an order to sail the ship. We picked up some medical people from Pulau Weh, near Banda Aceh, along the way and steamed off to render assistance. So in terms of planning we had to make an assessment concerning what we could actually do and deliver when we got there. In essence we were very much steaming into an unknown environment.

Having recalled the majority of Kanimbla’s company from shore leave, we got away from Singapore at 0100hrs on the morning of 30 March. Twenty-one of my crew who missed the ship in Singapore were recovered later as we passed Banda Aceh. Unfortunately we had only one shaft available on getting underway and for the first 12 hours at sea we were limited to 11kt. Transiting the Singapore Strait with that impediment, while being overtaken by 50,000 tonne merchant ships, was an interesting evolution and something that added to our frustrations.

In terms of that shock sailing it really was one of those times where as leaders we can’t be ‘lovely and soft’, and that has its place, but on this occasion I took a straight, firm bat. We had been ordered to do something, we had the capability, people were in need of assistance and we were going to help. So we needed to prepare ourselves for it ‘full stop’. I think that sometimes you have to stand up and get on with it and cut short the time than can be taken by some as they dwell on ‘why me’ - I needed the focus of my people to be on the impending mission.

Expectation management was the next biggest thing on my mind. This was going to be different to Banda Aceh, where there was a huge loss of life and my crew had been
involved albeit that we had arrived later in that operation. An Anzac Field Hospital had been established ashore; we had successfully unloaded a cargo of engineering equipment ashore and then remained off the coast in a support role, not in direct contact. That said; many, including myself, helped ashore in difficult conditions. I subsequently became the maritime component commander to the larger combined joint task force and so Kanimbla became part of a larger organisation.

As far as Nias was concerned, we were going to have a far more direct involvement. Kanimbla was ‘it’, limited to our own medical and aviation capability. We were going to provide the support that Australia was offering the Indonesian government and the expectation management challenge was to make people realise that this was not going to be the same as Banda Aceh. Indeed all humanitarian assistance is not the same. In the case of a tsunami, as we found out, the wave surges inland to a point, beyond which life is ‘normal’. For those on the coast it is a different story, highlighting that there can be two completely different landscapes right next to one another.

For the 200,000 killed in the Banda Aceh region the number of non-fatal casualties was a remarkably low percentage of that. It was certainly a significant number on its own, but proportionally low. At Nias after the earthquake hit, about a thousand people were killed out of a population of about half a million people but there were tens of thousands of people injured. The earthquake had shaken the entire island causing the widespread destruction of buildings and structures that fell on people across the entire landscape. It was not isolated to a small coastal strip.

In my opinion something we do not do too well at times is planning and I think we are now recognising that this is something we need to be more professional at. I found that the military appreciation process, even the shortened or rapid version we conducted, does work and helps immensely, even if only to learn more about yourself. Although we did not really know what we were going into, the process enabled us to forecast how we might be required to operate.

I first went ashore at Nias for six or seven hours and during that time I was not in contact with my ship. However, my team got on with what I wanted to be done inside the limitations that I had given them because we had sat down and gone through the plan and I had explained to them what I expected and how I thought we should be involved.

In practice, and hardly surprisingly, the plan changed and I would like to highlight, that a commander’s intent can differ distinctly from the reality of a given situation. The planning did provide that common understanding though and it was important that everyone had knowledge of that. Once we arrived at Nias we went straight into the crisis phase. There was very little situational awareness about what was going on ashore which was to be expected in the first few days following a disaster.
The relief effort was not solely a military operation as there were loosely organised aid agencies present too. They attempted to coordinate their actions through key organisations, but ultimately there was no command structure to fall back on to coordinate the best use of our collective assets. It was all begging, pleading, borrowing, diplomacy and from my perspective I obviously had to remember we were representing Australia. About the only thing that did come out of that was that I was appointed as the Australian national commander for our effort into Nias. In other words, *Kanimbla* was Australia’s representative.

I was not a non-governmental organisation and I could not just go and do what I wanted to do. I was working to the Indonesian government liaising with the regional governor, with the mayor, with the local military to make sure that what I thought we should do actually fitted into the Indonesian government’s plan. So again, there is that strategic intent, and one must make sure that you understand strategically where you stand.

Gunungsitoli is the capital of Nias which is where we first went in and from where the relief effort was being coordinated. Teluk Dalam is located further south and the relevance of it will become apparent later. Tuindrao, in Amandraya province, is where *Kanimbla*’s Sea King helicopter (Shark 02) crashed. We also did a lot of relief effort into Sirombu and Lahewa, a township we adopted for about four days. These were the key places in which we operated.

The earthquake that struck Nias measured 8.7 on the Richter scale. The northern end of the island - remembering that the entire island is about 120km long, about 30km wide and features 1500m high mountains - was lifted up by about 3m while the southern end of the island dropped by about 0.5m. When one considers the power necessary to lift something that big right up out of the ground it is quite incredible.

Prior to the crash of Shark 02, I had what I now refer to as my ‘starboard bridge wing moment.’ I remember it vividly. It was one of those times in command when everything was perfect; it really was. I could not have been prouder of my team at that stage. We had been ashore, I had come back onboard, the helicopters, one of which had been unserviceable in the morning, were both flying, the ship’s surgery was open and we were receiving and treating casualties. Family members of those injured had been brought on board too. My ship’s company was doing a great job looking after everyone while our LCM-8 landing craft were loading and delivery rice on behalf of the Indonesian government. Everything was working well and it was one of those moments when I actually took time to reflect on being part of a magnificent organisation. It was just an incredible feeling. Unfortunately shortly after that the situation changed dramatically.

I would now like to discuss some aspects of command before detailing the events of the Sea King helicopter crash. In a peacetime environment, such as we were operating in, I think that commanding officers can sometimes become a little
The area of operations in which HMAS Kanimbla was operating at the time of the Sea King tragedy.
bit caught up in believing that we are the ‘be all and end all’ and in some ways the system instils this in us. Unchecked this can at times lead to some negative behaviour. However, when a crisis happens, all eyes turn to the commanding officer; they really do. People are watching you and how you are reacting. Calmness and professionalism really does breed calmness and professionalism and to be able to exercise that is extremely important.

When a crisis occurs you get a glimpse of how well trained our people are and of their full potential, provided that you give them broad direction. It is amazing, during a crisis how people seek the guidance of a leader to endorse even those decisions that are obvious. People want to hear you say ‘Yes, that is what I want done’ and they will bring matters to you for your attention because they just want that reassurance, ‘Yes, that is what I need done. Yep, crack on and do that.’ It gives them a sense of purpose.

The most vivid example of that, I suppose was with Lieutenant Commander Michael ‘Duck’ Waddell, the pilot of the sister Sea King helicopter, Shark 21, who was hovering over the crash site. After I learned of the crash via the bridge-wing loudspeaker I actually jumped on the communications circuit because it became obvious that Duck wanted to talk to me. It was important to get him to tell me what the situation was, understand what he was seeing and to affirm his decision to land on the ground.

While he was likely to land anyway because there was a chance of helping people out, it was important that he received affirmation of his decision to do so, even though I was on the other side of the island; people want that command direction. I knew who he was, I knew he was experienced and together we talked through what was unfolding. Naturally I gave him approval to land because there really was no choice other than to go in and check for survivors.

Communicate, explain and reassure are themes that will become evident later on but this was that initial shocking moment immediately after the crash. In effect Shark 21 had discovered the wreckage, told us about it, landed and recovered two survivors before returning onboard. I met the aircraft on arrival, staying clear of the medical side of things because there were two critically injured personnel who needed immediate attention.

I then started speaking with Duck about what he had seen and what had happened. I was engaging him and talking to him about the scene where the nine casualties were. Duck could definitely see at least two bodies in the wreckage as it was burning and as you can imagine it was an emotionally charged conversation as he described to me what he encountered. Unfortunately what happened back on the strategic side - and we worked this out later on - was that there was a Singaporean aircraft near-miss at another location down in Teluk Dalam. So…, the Indonesian military believed that this was the aircraft incident we were concerned about.
When we advised our embassy that we had an aircraft down and started asking the Indonesian military for some assistance they responded: ‘No, no, no, everyone survived; everyone is okay and they are waiting in a building to be recovered.’ So, that confused message went from the Indonesian military on Nias to our defence advisor and back to Joint Operations Command.

I was subsequently told, ‘No, there are another seven survivors and they are waiting in a building.’ I then had to again talk to Duck Waddell about whether he could get the remaining aircraft back in the air and fly back to the crash site to verify these claims. The sun was going down and the Sea King was not certified to land at non-airfield sites at night. When we got the aircraft airborne, a couple of minutes before sunset, there was only about 45 minutes of daylight remaining. But that discussion with Duck and my decision to send that same aircrew back to the crash site when we probably knew that there would be no survivors; that decision was quite a hard one to make.

Following the initial recovery of Duck’s aircraft I had made a main broadcast pipe to the ship’s company concerning what had happened, explaining that there were two survivors and that we had lost nine of our personnel. I also outlined my broad intentions concerning what I intended to do next.

The second pipe I made to the ship’s company concerned the possibility that there was a slim hope that there were other Australian survivors at the site. On completion of that pipe, I ordered ‘hands to flying stations, stand by to launch Shark 21 afts’. I was conscious of the need to lead my ship’s company - that was my order and that was my requirement and so the wheels went into motion. That caused a bit of an emotional rollercoaster for me. I will admit that after I had made that pipe I walked into my cabin and in private gave the bulkhead a really good kick because it was a
case of me asking some people to do close to the impossible, to get back and go and see it again. To their credit they got up and they did it.

The launch of Shark 21 was followed by a quiet time during which I had to make some decisions. One can then imagine the entire ship’s company waiting on news. Were there more survivors? Did we lose nine? Are there another seven people alive? The expectation that we may not have lost nine personnel was soon taken away following the return of our aircraft. Once the news was in I made a further pipe confirming the loss of our personnel. That is when I went and walked through the mess decks where I found that the crew had gathered in small groups and in the ship’s café in larger groups. There was obviously an amazing amount of tears at that time surrounding the news that we had lost those people but being there to explain and be seen - that was an important time.

My concerns then turned to the recovery of our personnel and securing the crash site. We were in a foreign country so we did not enjoy the normal liaison that we would have had back at home. Everything was convoluted because we were not going back through our own organisation and there was much to consider. What was going to be the coroner’s requirements? Who had jurisdiction on this matter? Who would lead an aircraft accident investigation? What should we do to the aircraft? What should we be careful of insofar as securing the crash site?

It was my decision that we would recover our own personnel. The Indonesia military and national police offered to do that for us and although appreciative of that, there was just something in my mind that said, ‘They are my people, we are going to go and do it.’ That decision triggered considerable planning on how we would execute the recovery. We did not have the second aircraft available to us now, for very good reasons, and arranging transport took considerable planning and I must admit it was very much ‘just-in-time’ planning.

We examined potential landing sites for the LCM-8 landing craft we carried and tried to determine how we might get to the crash site noting the state of the roads. We had some personnel ashore in a medical team down in Teluk Dalam, a township to the south, and they assisted by liaising with some of the locals who managed to get us some vehicles for the following morning. We received this information at about 0400hrs the following morning.

It was my decision to lead the team. That was one of those things that just occurred naturally to me. They were my people and I had promised that I was going to go and collect them. That decision was followed by the approach of a small delegation of my heads of departments who came up to me and said, ‘Sir, we are a bit worried. What happens if this has a psychological impact on you and we are not able to continue?’ I had not even thought about that aspect of it and must admit that I was a little bit taken aback.
So I had that to consider, and after thinking it over for a while I concluded, ‘No. If it feels right’ - and it did feel right to me - ‘that is what I’m going to do and we will deal with it’. The initial plan was that I would not get involved in the actual body recovery itself and that I would stay at least 10m away from the wreckage. From there I would coordinate the operation and deal with the locals, etc. It did not quite work out that way.

We then had to work out who was going to accompany me. Due to the previous two frantic days that included transiting the Malacca Strait, convening planning sessions and so on I had gained very little sleep and my executive officer and I agreed that we would ask for volunteers in the morning. Volunteers who ideally did not know the people we had lost well and who might be divorced from that immediate connection. I then got my head down at 0430hrs for a couple of hours sleep because I was going to have to go ashore at 0630hrs.

Within my team I had five medically trained personnel, surgeons and those sorts of people who had actually dealt with trauma before. We asked the ship’s photographer if he was capable of coming with us because part of the forensic requirement was going to be a lot of photographic evidence of the crash site itself. We also teamed up with a linguist once we were ashore which came as a secondary issue.

It was a very disjointed arrival when we actually got there. About 3-4km from the actual site the road was completely gone. Up until that point the Indonesian national police had been rebuilding parts of the road for us as we went along. Overall, it was a journey of about three-and-half hours by the time we got ourselves to the crash site. We crossed some very rough terrain that necessitated some very skilful driving before we transferred onto mopeds which were used to shuttle the team to the site.

When I got up there the local governor was waiting and I started gathering information concerning what was happening and in particularly about what had caused the Sea King to crash. Some wondered if it may have been pilot error since Duck had come back and said one of the locals told him ‘Too close to the trees. Too close to the trees.’ So we first thought that there may have been a tree strike on descent that caused the aircraft to crash. It was important to understand the cause of the crash as it had obvious implications on whether the remaining Sea King helicopter, Shark 21, was fit to fly.

Another major issue that was not resolved until I got to the site was how we were going to recover our people. Where were we going to take them to and how were we going to get them home? We asked the Indonesian military if it could provide an aircraft to fly them out and they obliged. It flew to Sibolga, which is on the mainland of Sumatra, and from there they were transferred to a RAAF C-130 aircraft for the flight home. But I did not find that out until we were involved in the recovery itself. So in the back of my mind I was thinking ‘I have got nine people here in body bags. What am I going to do next?’
After speaking with a few of the locals through the linguist it became clear that the aircraft had suffered some sort of catastrophic failure. That was certainly my opinion and all the evidence seemed to support that. The Sea King did not clip anything, did not hit anything and the fact that the aircraft had rolled over told a different story. It looked as if it had come from the direction where the heavy trees were rather than from the open side which was in fact the case.

As I alluded to earlier, I was going to stay away from the actual body recovery but the heat, humidity and the psychological pressure of doing what we were doing really hit the team. I had told them to work in teams of three, attempting one body recovery at a time. I determined that we were not actually going to take the bodies the 100m up to the ambulance area one by one; we were going to keep everyone together next to the crash site until we were ready for that next step.

It was exhausting work and one can imagine the difficulties involved in going through the wreckage before extracting someone. Consequently, I made a decision, because my team was in need, to assist with the last five body recoveries. I put on long sleeves and a mask and assisted in a very physical hands-on way. Obviously that was a pretty hard day.

When I returned to Kanimbla that loneliness of command really hit me. The rest of the recovery team had gone to the wardroom or into the chief’s mess but I was alone in my cabin. It became one of those times when the tempo served to keep me going. We sometimes talk about the loneliness of command but when you have just been through something like that, guess what? There are still all the issues with dealing with the larger operation to consider and of course going back to Australia. That was a pretty difficult night.

One of the things I determined and which I made a point of when I made the last pipe on the night of the crash, was that we were going to continue the mission. That may seem obvious to some, but telling the ship’s company that we were actually going to do what we could and get involved in the mission was important.

In one instance there was a 14-year-old girl who had a very complex pelvic fracture that we could not do anything about in Kanimbla. In the opinion of my surgeon it was far too complicated for his medical team. Irrespective of that I gave instructions to get her onboard because I wanted the ship’s company actually doing something and taking part in the mission. We could give her better pain relief than she would have received anywhere else and she subsequently became a bit of a ship’s favourite with the crew looking after her. We subsequently got her into the hospital at Gunungsitoli and organised her to be transferred to USNS Mercy when it arrived some days later. Onboard Mercy she had the full reconstruction necessary and it was those little success stories that kept us going.
After we had completed the body recovery it was really a matter of going back up to Gunungsitoli and talking with the Indonesian military to determine how and where we could provide the best assistance. A Singaporean field hospital was situated there and ferries were coming from Sibolga across to Gunungsitoli, so it was pretty well looked after there. However, there was not a lot of relief reaching the northern part of the island so the Indonesian military agreed that I would go to the north and we selected Lahewa to go in to.

Effectively my over-arching requirement was to find somewhere where I could get my entire ship’s company ashore to see for themselves the damage that was done and witness the help we were providing to the people. This helped them to understand why we were actually there. It made sure that they understood why we actually conducted the mission and why Kanimbla was on station.

Lahewa is located at the top northern end of the island and had been lifted up by the earthquake by about 3m. There were areas that were now permanently out of the water which previously had been under the water. There we treated about 700 people in a medical clinic over a period of four days, which was quite an effort. We were not necessarily treating people for earthquake related injuries but there was a lot of care administered for ailments that you would not normally see in Australia.

From a professional perspective, the doctors loved it because they were getting to see tuberculosis and other sorts of things that they did not see too often. Funnily enough, as soon as we established the hospital, all the people from the surrounding districts came in to have their ailments treated too. While this was going on the
ship’s company was ashore entertaining the crowds - kids in particular - and engaging with the people. So this was now ‘Operation Kindergarten Cops’. The ship’s company was sent ashore by departments and for the most part they were with their mates. They taught the Indonesians how to play cricket too; so in 50 years’ time if they beat us in a test match it is probably our fault.

There was no shore power or water and we consequently undertook to repair the town’s generator and water pumps. Food was also in short supply. It was not just about the Indonesians though, it was really a lot about us as well, making sure that we had that connection. We made sure that we were not going to leave them in the lurch and liaised with the Red Cross and Oxfam who subsequently took over our clinic and the infrastructure work we had initiated.

Other considerations concerned conducting a memorial service and this proved to be an important part of the grieving process. If you go through something like this, and I hope you never do, it is something that helps with that sense of grief. I think we all want that ceremony or something to focus on. The first ceremony we held was onboard Kanimbla on 5 April at the same time that the RAAF C-130 aircraft carrying our fallen was touching down in Australia. It coincided with the ramp ceremony back home at which time ‘our family’ were being handed back to their natural family.

It was an emotional experience particularly as the commanding officer making the commemorative speech. I had a quick conversation with the chaplain beforehand and one of the key things he explained to me was that everyone grieves in different ways. So one of my key themes of that speech was to convey to people that just because they were not crying as much as the person next to them, or because they could get on or crack a joke, that it was okay. Everyone deals with grief in different ways. It was important to make sure people did not stand back and think that because one person had been crying for five hours that they were more affected than them. That was not necessarily the case. Everyone dealt with it in their own way.

After we finished up in Lehawa, I announced that we were going to undertake a return trip into Tuindrao, which we did to lay a temporary memorial. We also helped out and cleaned up about 900 tonnes of rubble from some of the sites there as well. It was important to go back to the site.

As well as reporting up through the usual naval chain of command I also had some very robust discussions with higher authorities. When something happens such as we had experienced it is generally a unique situation. Most of the people you are working for have never experienced it and will not understand it. So it is really up to you to tell them what you need and be quite forthright in doing so. Remaining on task was agreed to and supported following a number of discussions.
A separate robust discussion centred on a visit to the affected area by the Minister for Defence, the Chief of Navy, Chief of Air Force and the Minister assisting. The Australian-based planners wanted me to leave Lehawa and move Kanimbla back around to Gunungsitoli in order to make this visit logistically easier. This did not sit well with me and I think that they failed to appreciate that they were taking the whole reason we were there away from us. We were there to help the people and to take us away from that task to support this visit made no sense to me at all. This was conceded in the end, but it puts you under enormous pressure when you are talking directly with admirals saying ‘my mission is here’ and recommending strongly that you do not move your ship. Some times you have to be prepared to advance an opposing viewpoint.

Happily they understood that this was a legitimate concern and in the end they came to us. Interestingly on that day when we had all of them standing there, just after they had gotten off the aircraft, an aftershock struck and a concrete wall fell on a young girl. We immediately responded, ripped off the rubble, took her out, x-rayed her…did the whole lot. So they got to see first hand that it was actually not just about visiting or shaking hands, they really saw what was going on and how important our part in this mission was.
Planning the passage home was also a challenge and to that end I set up a pseudo-democracy, because I controlled the outcome. There was a lot of talk about the families waiting for us back at home and a perceived imperative for us to return to Australia as soon as possible. Remember, we had crash sailed on New Year’s Eve without knowing an end date, that had been followed by being given a date to return home by which was subsequently cancelled and then we had deployed once more. With that in mind I received instructions that we were to go straight home to waiting families on completion of Kanimbla’s involvement in the operation. It occurred to me that this might not be in my crew’s best interest. One of the key things I recalled from reading about Australia’s Vietnam War experience was the adverse effect of getting people back home too quickly.

We had already planned to return home via Singapore where it was intended to hold a wake for our shipmates and this was something that was really important to us. It would give us the opportunity to actually grieve ourselves and have an outlet as a group. I was adamant that we should have that opportunity and in order to convince those back in Australia I determined to have a vote to gauge the preference of my crew. I said ‘There are two options. I think we should go to Singapore - they want us to go straight home’. I then went and primed all the right people to make sure we came out with the ‘right’ answer.

On arrival in Singapore on 15 April we held a wake and played a video of the ramp ceremony that had taken place in Australia. This helped my crew to understand how the tragedy was affecting Australia and how the whole thing had been telecast. It was an important thing to do. After that we went to a place called the Four Floors of Nightclubs where the crew got the opportunity to really unwind. It was a big night and something that we all needed.

It was one of those moments in which I felt that I knew what was best for my people and had to tell my chain of command, ‘This is what I need.’ Happily they agreed. After everything that had happened the psychologists were actually surprised with the post-operation survey results they were getting out of the ship, particularly in terms of the crew’s thoughts concerning the success of the mission.

Among other issues I had to contend with was dealing with the media. That is an entirely different discussion in itself encompassing the good, the bad and the ugly. It is, however, a reality to contend with. I had 13 members of the Australian press arrive in my ship two hours before the Sea King crash. That turned out to be a blessing in disguise and it was very deeply in disguise when it first happened I can tell you. The press remained onboard throughout the recovery operation and whereas they would normally arrive, photograph a crash scene or do a story and then withdraw from it, in this instance, the media was actually immersed in the emotions that we in Kanimbla were going through. I think that really helped in the
way the story was portrayed back in Australia. They saw the grieving process unfold before their eyes and cameras and actually became part of those grieving.

For the ceremony we held on 5 April I said there was to be no cameras and no press. I was a little bit tired and emotional when I made that decision and my heads of departments subsequently took me aside, reassured me and suggested that it might be a good thing for the media to be present.

I agreed but insisted that they were not to be amongst us. They could attend in a separate location and there was to be no cameras put in the faces of our personnel. When I looked up during the ceremony, which was an emotional affair, I saw about half of the press group with tears streaming down their faces. I thought then that ‘yes, this actually is a good thing’ because they had actually gone through that cycle with us.

I do not wish to harp on it but I included the tradition of a beer issue as part of my overall deployment strategy. The first day we crash sailed and the night we were going around Banda Aceh I approved a beer issue. Those that drew their beer issue congregated in the café and they were all conversing. It was about getting the crew together and interacting and to that end my intent was achieved. I also approved ‘hands to bathe’ when we were on our way between Lehawa to Sibolga to pick up stores. We were in fact running a little behind time but in spite of that I ordered ‘stop the ship, we are going for swim.’ It was just one of those decisions I made which allowed people some brief moments of normality. **Kanimbla** proved a great platform for swimming. We just lowered the stern door and of the 300 people we had onboard we had about 250 in the water, in spite of everything else that was going on. We
arrived at our destination a little late, and that was okay, because they were still there and waiting.

Other command considerations involved supporting *Kanimbla* families back at home. There was an amazing emotional rollercoaster that our families went through as well. I will be ever thankful to my wife who went to seven of the nine funerals representing the ship on my behalf. To go through those funerals in rapid succession was a huge emotional burden that she took on, personally, for me. Obviously the other families at home were going through the same cycles in various different ways as well.

On the voyage home I realised that the families had not spoken to anyone who was actually there and involved in what had happened. So I determined that if any of them wanted me to come and talk to them about what happened I would be pleased to do so. Of the nine personnel that we lost I met with 17 separate family units and that was probably the most emotionally draining two and a half weeks of my life. It was a very, very hard time.

There were lots of tears from me and from the families. I did not hold back. I told them everything they wanted to know, including the body recovery process and what I saw up until the point when they became uncomfortable. I said, ‘Well, until you tell me to stop, I will continue to tell you about what happened.’ When talking with the families I was quite amazed at the different things and the different times that caused me to choke up and I had issues explaining what went on. But it was also very cathartic for me as well to make that connection with them.

More importantly, the ship’s company knew that if something like that was to happen to them that I would engage their families in the same way. We actually are an organisation that cares about providing that level of support. We do have to be very careful though. Navy wants to manage things and there was talk about how it would manage the families, how it would do this and that, and it would be done with the best of intentions. However, sometimes I really found myself fighting between the two and just seeing Navy as an organisation, or Navy and Air Force in this case, that perhaps did not quite get what the families were going through because they were trying to manage it and put some process to it, which is our natural way of doing things.

At times I was really caught between offering advice to families, which was counter to what I think the Services wanted. I said, ‘Mate, if you want this, this is what you need to do,’ and gave them advice on how to make sure they got what they wanted rather than rely on a system that got everyone aligned into doing what it wanted. The board of inquiry was obviously a long experience too but that is a separate discussion.

What I took away from this experience is that it was a mission accomplished in spite of the adversity we encountered. I take enormous pride to this day when I look back
on it, on all we achieved, how we dealt with the adversity that we had to go through, how many people we actually helped and that is a really hard thing to quantify in your mind. We lost nine, but on the other hand we helped tens of thousands. How do you balance that? That is a really hard thing to do. The people of Banda Aceh lost 200,000 in the tsunami. The people of Nias lost about a 1000 people in that earthquake, plus tens of thousands injured. How do you balance all that up? Obviously some people are closer to me but that is my overwhelming memory from Operation SUMATRA ASSIST II.
Lieutenant Commander Barry Learoyd, commanding officer of patrol boat crew ASSAIL 2, on the bridge of an Armidale class patrol boat during an Operation RESOLUTE patrol.
Challenges of Command and Leadership: The SIEV 36 Incident

Barry Learoyd with Paul Hetherington

Lieutenant Commander Barry Learoyd, RAN, was the commanding officer of patrol boat crew ASSAIL 2 embarked in HMAS Albany; and Petty Officer Paul Hetherington was one of the senior sailors serving in ASSAIL 2.

I assumed command of patrol boat crew ASSAIL 2 in June 2008 and soon after joining I conducted a fisheries patrol during which I monitored my team performing the day-to-day work associated with Operation RESOLUTE. I quickly observed that the crew was tightly wound. For example, a routine evolution such as launching a sea boat could take up to 20 minutes, due mainly to superfluous orders and reports flowing to and from the bridge, with me included in most of them. I quickly realised that the decision making process onboard was far too complicated. I discussed this with my executive officer and senior sailors, my plan being to turn ASSAIL 2 from ‘talkers’ into ‘doers’. My aim was to command by veto, complete all the necessary checks, make sure the officer of the watch was able to complete everything he needed to and then let him get on with it. My involvement subsequently became one of observer, advisor and in the end, command approver. By the end of the next patrol the sea boat was launched and in the water within five or six minutes.

The majority of ASSAIL 2 members quickly learned that taking personal responsibility for their actions, having the courage to admit when they did not, making teamwork the preferred method of day-to-day core business and supporting each other up and down the divisional chain made for a much happier life at sea. This culture was well embedded when we intercepted and boarded the Suspected Irregular Entry Vessel (SIEV) 36 on 15 April 2009.

In the early hours of that morning, HMAS Albany was conducting a sweep in the vicinity of Ashmore Island when a contact of interest was detected. To the north of Ashmore Island is a lagoon which Indonesian fishing boats entering Australian waters frequently head for to ply their trade. However, this contact of interest had missed it and was positioned to the southwest possibly thinking he could still get in from that direction. This, however, was not possible, nor would he have known that tucked up inside the reef was ACV Ashmore Guardian performing the role of Ashmore Island warden.

The distance between Ashmore Island and Darwin is about 455nm, roughly just over one days steaming in an Armidale class patrol boat. In the vicinity of Ashmore
Island are a number of oil and gas installations as well as the floating production storage and offloading vessel *Front Puffin* which at that time was operating some 80nm distant. Her presence was later to prove invaluable.

My initial instruction to my boarding officer was to get onboard the SIEV quickly, safely and take positive control to prevent her from grounding on the reef as she tried to approach. To assist, *Albany* was positioned between the SIEV and the reef while the vessel was stopped by my party and boarded.

From a tactical perspective, *Albany* was designated as the on-scene commander while HMAS *Tobruk* was nominated as the long-haul vessel although at that time she was in Darwin and at least 48 hours steaming away.

There were 49 asylum seekers and crew onboard SIEV 36 but it was not possible for me to take them onboard *Albany* as I was required to continue my patrol in search of another SIEV expected to arrive in the area at any time. Experience told me that had I brought them onboard their presence would have hampered ongoing operations.

Confining the SIEV in Ashmore Island lagoon, a recognised marine park, was not an option either due to environmental concerns over the discharge of ballast, or bilge water being pumped over the side. That course of action was only permitted if a SIEV was inspected and found to be unseaworthy, which it was not.

The subsequent plan was to escort SIEV 36 to the northwest of Ashmore Island so that in the unlikely event that she foundered the vessel would be well clear of the protected marine park area. I was directed to hold it there until *Tobruk* arrived 48 hours later. In the meantime HMAS *Childers*, under the command of Lieutenant Commander Brett Westcott, RAN, with patrol boat crew ARDENT 4 embarked, was ordered to join me and provide support.

With the scene set, it seems appropriate to step through the timeline of the events as they unfolded. I apprehended SIEV 36 at 0933hrs on Wednesday 15 April 2009 and *Childers* arrived at the scene at 1830hrs that evening.

On joining I conferred with Westcott and we determined that one of us would hold the SIEV overnight while the other continued a barrier patrol in readiness for the arrival of the second SIEV. I subsequently transferred from *Childers* Flight Lieutenant Joleen Darby (her medical officer) and a transit security element to provide extra security on my quarterdeck; remaining with the SIEV on a short towline overnight. During that time Darby transferred to the SIEV where she conducted initial health and safety checks on the potential irregular immigrants (PII).

*Childers*, meanwhile, commenced the barrier patrol detecting a contact which proved to be a large foreign fishing vessel which was subsequently boarded between 2140hrs and 0150hrs. The boarding did not result in an apprehension and at 0551hrs the following morning *Childers* returned to relieve *Albany* as part of an agreed fatigue
management plan. At that time a handover was effected which involved exchanging steaming parties in the SIEV.

During that process the second in command of my boarding party provided a substantial brief to Childers’s boarding officer and his team. The opportunity was also taken to provide breakfast and water to the SIEV occupants and make sure that they understood what was going on. They were briefed that they were going to be taken to Australian territory, in this case Christmas Island, and this information was passed on to a fellow we nicknamed ‘H’, an English-speaking chap, who we made use of as an interpreter believing that he would pass it on to his fellow asylum seekers.

The evidentiary chain of proceedings also needed to be maintained, so all of the paperwork from the previous day was also passed to Childers. The weather was calm, hot and humid for an April day, and there was nowhere for the steaming parties to escape the sun which was another reason why we conducted the boarding party swap-out.

The events that followed saw us enter the high-threat phase of the incident. Sunrise on Thursday 16 April occurred at 0722hrs and it was around that time the PII became agitated. They sabotaged the engine in the SIEV and fuel was discovered leaking into the bilge. By then I had completed my handover and Albany was departing the area to resume barrier operations west-north-west of Ashmore Island. At 0730hrs, with concerns over the situation in the SIEV rising, ‘high threat’ was called by Childers who at the same time recalled Albany to her position.

At 0745 there was an explosion in SIEV 36 and a mass-SOLAS situation was initiated by both Childers and Albany.

At the time of the explosion I had turned Albany around and was heading back towards the scene with my crew closed up at boarding stations. Based on my experience I judged that the explosion was most likely caused by vapour as there appeared to be a lot of hot gases escaping from the top of the vessel.

Immediately following the explosion Childers launched a life raft and threw life rings into the water. An unforeseen consequence of that was that a line attached to one of the life rafts became fouled around Childers’ port propeller shaft temporarily inhibiting her ability to manoeuvre. As I continued my approach I could see the SIEV about 60m away with smoke coming from her. Because Albany was already at boarding stations I had been able to quickly launch my two rigid hulled inflatable boats (RHIB) both of which arrived on the scene about three minutes after the explosion.

From that moment we slipped straight into the rescue phase. It was an amazing achievement. Collectively we recovered 53 people from the water including nine members of the ADF in approximately 20 minutes. Unfortunately three of the PII were deceased and two of them were never found, making five fatalities in total.
The uniform that we were wearing that day certainly protected us during the recovery phase. We were dressed in disruptive pattern naval uniform which to a large degree shielded those involved from the heat generated by the burning vessel. Five ADF personnel sustained injuries which were, in the context of the day, minor.

By 0758hrs all ADF personnel were accounted for and by 0815hrs most of the PII had been recovered. By 0859hrs treatment of the severely injured and traumatised was well in place. It should be remembered that neither *Albany* nor *Childers* was equipped with medical facilities to deal with an event of that magnitude. *Childers* treated twelve priority 1 casualties, fifteen priority 2 casualties and four assessed as priority 3. In *Albany* my crew was dealing with three priority 1 casualties, eight
priority 2 casualties and four assessed as priority 3. To put this into context, priority 1 casualties were considered stretcher cases in need of urgent medical care, priority 2 cases were those who were less severely injured but who still required urgent medical care and priority 3 casualties comprised the walking wounded.

Because I had only a primary healthcare provider onboard Albany (a petty officer coxswain), I needed to get my priority 1 cases into Childers where they could be treated by her doctor. We needed to cannulise these people urgently and get water and the like into their bodies so they would not dehydrate as a result of their burns.

Fortunately the nearby Ashmore Guardian, having observed the explosion, was able to launch its sea boats and it sent additional medical supplies out to us. As this was taking place the search for the two unaccounted PII continued until 1000hrs. I conducted a sweeping search around the stricken SIEV passing close by it so I could look down to see if there was still anyone in the vessel. Unfortunately there was little to be seen other than smouldering debris and ash.

While the sea boats from Ashmore Guardian remained on the scene collecting evidence, Childers together with Albany departed for Darwin with the intent of getting the casualties to the nearest port as quickly as possible. That plan changed in transit when we were directed to proceed to Front Puffin - a decision that inevitably saved many lives.
There has long been a debate concerning whether good leaders are born or whether they are created, and the ‘nature or nurture’ discussion will continue to be argued for many years to come. I believe that inside all junior sailors, senior sailors and officers alike, there exists a dormant ability to lead those around us when stimulated by certain conditions in certain situations. I possess no degrees in psychology or human behavioural science and, as such, I can only speak from personal experience and in particular my experience relating to the SIEV 36 incident.

Up until the explosion onboard SIEV 36 and the subsequent mass-SOLAS situation, leadership was exhibited by virtue of rank and position. This we know as command leadership. The boarding officer would give an order to the second in command of a boarding party, who in turn would detail the boarding party members to carry out the order. This is the way we are raised from our first day of naval training and it is constantly instilled in us in everyday naval life. Command leadership is vital to our ability to maintain order and discipline and without it the very framework of military life ceases to exist.

Most of what I saw on 16 April 2009 was a totally different kind of leadership and one that I refer to as leadership by necessity. People who would not normally be known to be strong leaders were seen to rally others to achieve tasks that were vital to the rescue and rendering of medical aid to those in need, simply because that is what the situation dictated. They knew what needed to happen and they took action. People followed them without question, regardless of rank or position, and the results of the day speak for themselves.
The environment that we were operating in was a dangerous one, with potentially catastrophic consequences in the event of failure. For some involved there was a hull engulfed in flame only metres away from their rescue craft as they made snap decisions that ultimately led to the rescue and treatment of all but five of those who were aboard SIEV 36. Those making decisions and leading their boat crews into danger to rescue total strangers were not seasoned rescue teams; they were, for the most part, young sailors with minimal experience in operations and even less in hazardous rescue situations.

Until recently the RAN did not focus any leadership training at the junior sailor level. Once promoted to leading seaman, it was an expectation that one was able to lead groups of subordinates to achieve certain tasks. For some people with a natural abundance of leadership ability this proved to be an easy task but for others there was a need to have that leadership nurtured and developed. This process takes time, effort and patience for both the mentor and the person being groomed for the leadership role. Sometimes effective leadership skills are never developed fully, but this is not to say that they do not exist somewhere within a person.

Leadership by necessity is the temporary, rapid development of an individual’s leadership skill that allows that person to elicit a positive response from another person or group of people to a certain situational need. I saw many examples of this during the rescue phase of the incident. One example was of a junior sailor sitting idle in the boat they were in charge of in the debris field. Clearly they were overwhelmed by the situation and acquiescing to the directions being given by a sailor junior to them from another boat crew. By virtue of their rank and position they were rightfully in command of their vessel, however, the situation demanded that their boat be mobilised to participate in the rescue. The junior sailor in the other boat saw the problem, knew that something must be done and so, out of sheer necessity, with another junior sailor boarded the boat and, through this newfound power of leadership directed them accordingly to achieve the desired results. This is an example of leadership by necessity and, in a high-adrenalin, high-danger situation it is a powerful asset to possess. Unfortunately, it requires specific stimulation in specific conditions to be revealed and everyone reacts differently to different stimuli.

Some may argue that the junior sailor who took charge was gifted with a natural ability to lead others and I would agree. They have since proven themselves to be of strong character with the ability to rally others to achieve specific goals. In its purest form isn’t that what leadership is?

Leadership is an ability that I believe everyone possesses. A person may have the ability to lead but for some reason they cannot, or do not, tap into it in a normal circumstance and when they do it is often temporary. In ASSAIL 2’s crew I witnessed an example of this when a junior sailor demonstrated uncharacteristic leadership when the rescue phase transitioned into the triage phase.
Albany’s quarterdeck was littered with over a dozen men screaming in agony who were suffering from severe burns and various other injuries. Albany’s medical team was limited to the primary healthcare provider, a petty officer coxswain and an assistant (a leading seaman cook), both of whom were frantically working to treat the high priority cases as they were recovered. It was sheer chaos. The rest of the ship’s company just did not know where to start or what to do to help. At that point in stepped the aforementioned junior sailor who calmly started instructing the crew to provide first-aid support to the injured. The sailor organised separate areas for different priority patients, detailed personnel to perform specific tasks and, regardless of rank or standing, they followed the instructions without question. They were confident and clearly in control as the sailor went around the quarterdeck giving praise, encouragement and advice to all involved. Out of necessity that sailor was the leader on the quarterdeck that day but once the event was concluded, the sailor was quick to shed the newly acquired leadership role, I will not, however, ever forget what the sailor achieved that day and that is a credit that can never be taken away.

It is also worth mentioning the resourcefulness of sailors in crisis situations. The first and last order issued during the rescue phase that day was ‘mass-SOLAS’. Everything that happened after that was the culmination of solid leadership, examples of which can be defined as leadership by necessity. There were many examples of fine leadership from those who were known to be competent leaders but the point is that leadership in crisis will be found in the most unlikely individuals. Commanders should rest assured that when a situation deteriorates and crisis is imminent there will be those who will rise to produce a result that does themselves, their commands and the Navy as a whole proud.

One order and one order alone was all that was issued that morning by Lieutenant Commander Learoyd from the time that SIEV 36 exploded to the time that the injured PII were stabilised sufficiently to begin our transit to Front Puffin for casualty evacuation. That was enough to galvanise Albany’s crew and get the job done. We knew what was expected of us and acted accordingly. To quote General George S Patton ‘Do not tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results.’ I could not imagine a tougher test for a command.

For a long time I underestimated the leadership ability of those that chose to follow rather than to lead but since having gained firsthand experience in the effectiveness and power of leadership by necessity I have a different view. I have great faith in the ability of any group of RAN officers or sailors to take charge in extraordinary situations and am confident that they will always produce optimal outcomes. I am proud to say that I have witnessed a first rate example of Navy’s ability to adapt, improvise and overcome in a high-stakes crisis situation. I am prouder still to say that I served that day alongside the men and women of patrol boat crews ARDENT 4 and ASSAIL 2.

[Lieutenant Commander Learoyd]
What I saw on that day was initiative, courage, compassion and leadership and it was evident at all levels. When I refer to ‘all levels’ it includes me talking to my command headquarters which in turn was talking to other ADF command elements. Those groups were organising support that continued all the way to the specialised care units in Darwin hospitals. Other levels of leadership included those within the steaming party prior to the explosion and among the boat coxswains following it.

Unsurprisingly Petty Officer Hetherington has not said anything about what he did during the SIEV 36 episode. He was one of the boat coxswains that day who I observed closing the burning SIEV to rescue 12 people from the flames. He made a conscious decision concerning what he needed to do and as far as I am concerned his performance was heroic.

Some of the PII spent about 10 minutes on the back of the SIEV waiting to be rescued because they were afraid to go into the water. This is probably because many of them came from a landlocked country where they never got the opportunity to learn to swim.

[Petty Officer Hetherington]

If you ever find yourself in a situation such as the crews of ASSAIL 2 and ARDENT 4 found themselves, be very, very careful of those who think they are about to die; they will do anything to survive, committing unspeakable acts to save themselves. I watched one man jump from the transom of the burning SIEV and leapfrog onto another man’s head so he could get to the rescue boat safely without having to get wet, and that is something that sticks in my mind. So, exercise utmost caution when you are dealing with someone who thinks that their life could be in danger because all bets are off as far as they are concerned.

[Lieutenant Commander Learoyd]

Many of the reports I received from the people in the sea boats indicated that it was really difficult to pull survivors into the RHIB. This was due in part to the boat’s flotation collar but also because when they reached down into the water to try and grab them by their arms, all that was coming back in-board was burnt skin. My crewmen were not able to actually get a good grip. They learned very quickly that they needed to grab them by the back of their pants in order to haul them up into the sea boat.

While my team was busying itself with the SIEV, Childers was concentrating on accounting for all of the ADF personnel. We were later taken to task on that, particularly by the media which persistently questioned ‘Why did you do that and not just go and rescue the person who may have looked to be in more dire straits?’ My initial thoughts on that are that I looked after my shipmates first; second, from a professional perspective, getting the ADF members out of the water first meant that I could re-use them in the rescue. They were the two schools of thought that went
through my head and I certainly would expect that my mates would come and rescue me if I was in a bit of strife. Certainly I would rescue someone closer to me who was not an ADF member but I would certainly expect that ADF members would look after their own.

Continuing along the theme of command versus leadership I would like to mention a couple of things about my own command philosophy. Command is certainly responsibility and accountability by appointment but in my opinion it is more than that. The old adage ‘A ship is known by her boat’ still rings true today. Your team is a reflection of your command style. My style of command is coaching and leading, giving praise when needed and necessary but also giving negative comment and feedback when warranted. I expected my team to be professional at all times in discharging their duties and my command philosophy reflects that.

My purpose was to achieve the mission. Whether that was a fisheries or a SIEV/border/migration patrol it did not really matter. I needed to be able to achieve my mission. My method was to train my crew to a high standard as part of daily life at sea. My aim was to make sure that everyone in the crew, from the youngest seaman upwards, knew every job that needed to be done so that if someone was incapacitated they could step up and perform their duties as well. I found that it worked very well. Everyone was keen to be involved because they could see that they were being cared for and we were making sure that they themselves understood what they were required to do. They had a personal responsibility to do it.

Communications in a patrol boat is of vital importance, particularly when on patrol. Quite suddenly a task may change following the receipt of instructions from Headquarters Northern Command. This may happen four or five times during a single patrol and you need to be able to communicate the reasons why the task has changed to your crew, keeping them informed allowing them to continue to perform at their optimum level of efficiency.

I also identified a number of leaders within my crew whom I could rely on. I made it my goal to provide a workplace which encouraged people to come back and work for me. I have had three or four phone calls from people saying, ‘I see you were posted to this position. I want to come back and work for you.’ I can tell you there is nothing like that sort of feedback to make your day.

I believe that people must, and will, step up and take action - Petty Officer Hetherington provided some very good examples of this - and one should not underestimate the stimulating effect that adrenalin and a sense of duty has in people. I watched two female sailors onboard Albany use a garden hose to lift two male asylum seekers ten feet out of the water. Each of the asylum seekers would have weighed between 70-75kg; it was great initiative and an amazing effort on their part.

Reaction to stress is different in everyone. In my case I do not eat when I am stressed and a member of my team noticed this, bringing me a meal after having spent 14
hours on my feet. Sustainability of effort is important but we must make sure that we look after our people and not let them work until their body simply shuts down.

Training works and that is a really important point. Allow people to get on and do their job. The training that we give our people is second to none. Trust is also implicit. One must trust the people they are working alongside.

After the SIEV 36 incident I made sure that my team looked after one another and understood how to look after each other. This was most evident during the subsequent inquiries involving a police investigation and a coronial inquiry a process that lasted almost a year. Look after your team and their families. It was very important that we were able to communicate with the families of my crew to assure them that the ADF members onboard both patrol boats were all okay. You have to be prepared to fight for your crew’s wellbeing and interest, particularly when there is negative media concerned. We copped a lot of negative media comment following the incident and it was very important to make sure that everyone understood that in a democracy the media can say what it likes. We knew what we did and we needed to be able to make sure that we continued doing our job. Trust and respect are hard won but easily lost. An unexpected outcome of all of this was the emails I received from families relaying some great positive feedback.

Able Seaman Quinton Boorman (right), Petty Officer Paul Hetherington (centre) and Able Seaman Michael Lordan (rear), photographed following the award of a Group Bravery Citation for their efforts in rescuing survivors from SIEV 36.
We were pretty lucky in that we went back to Ashmore Island just after Anzac Day, 9 or 10 days after the event. The day that we arrived we laid a wreath at the scene where the tragedy had unfolded resuming operations the following morning which culminated in another SIEV boarding later that day.

Postscript

Lieutenant Commander Learoyd’s leadership on 15 April 2009 was recognised through the award of a Chief of Defence Force and Chief of Joint Operations commendation.

On 22 August 2011, 18 ADF personnel were recognised by the Governor General, Her Excellency Quentin Bryce, for their response to the SIEV 36 tragedy. Included in this group were Petty Officer Hetherington and 14 other RAN personnel who were awarded a Group Bravery Citation for their involvement in rescuing passengers and navy crews after SIEV 36 exploded. Leading Seaman Matthew Keogh from Childers, was awarded the Bravery Medal for his contribution in saving life at sea.

This award is also recognition for all the men and women who put themselves on the line when they pull on the uniform and undertake Operation RESOLUTE in northern Australian waters. It is a task that is undertaken every single day, and one that requires great persistence, dedication and professionalism.

Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, AO, CSC, RAN
Chief of Navy
Commodore Stuart Mayer, CSC, RAN following his appointment as Commander Joint Task Force 631 and Commander International Stabilisation Force Timor Leste in October 2009.
On 24 October 2009 Commodore Stuart Mayer, RAN was appointed the Commander of Joint Task Force 631, assuming responsibility for the International Stabilisation Force in East Timor.

Professional mariners are most comfortable at sea. I consider my own relationship with the sea somewhat unique for I served in four separate appointments in the guided missile frigate HMAS *Canberra*. I first joined *Canberra* as a midshipman under training and eventually went on to have the privilege of commanding her. As one might expect, I got to know *Canberra* well and she became a very tangible part of my professional essence. As I approached the end of my time in command, there was a point at which I found myself becoming melancholy and it was about this time that I had a visit from Rear Admiral Raydon Gates, RAN the then Fleet Commander. I said to him, ‘Sir, I am getting to the end of command, and I was wondering how one separates oneself from the ship?’ My view is that when you are the captain of a ship you really are that integrated - you are the ship and the ship is you. You refer to other commanding officers by the name of their ship, which may sound old and traditional to some but it remains a truism. For example, I would greet fellow captains with ‘G’day, *Arunta,*’ knowing that I was talking to not only the physical captain, but also the spiritual embodiment of the ship.

So how does one cut that tie? That was the question to which Rear Admiral Gates responded: ‘You must understand that your first naval career is coming to an end. You can either embrace the second part of your career in the same way that you have the first, or you may leave’. After a short pause he added ‘Or, you can pursue another option which is to try and go back to sea again.’

I went with the last option and was lucky to go back to sea in HMAS *Anzac*. Some years later I was to find myself in the same predicament knowing that I had run out of options. At the end of my time in *Anzac* I was alerted to stand by to receive a phone call from the Chief of Navy. Clearly this concerned my future and I was already thinking how I would manage proceedings. I would need to temporise, ask for some time to consider what was being offered to me and be very careful about the way I went forward. These were of course logical thoughts, all of which vanished when the Chief of Navy said ‘I would like to promote you’. My response was immediate ‘Yes, sir’. It then dawned on me that I had not even asked what it was he wanted me to do on being promoted. That was how I was introduced to the idea of being the Commander of Joint Task Force 631 in East Timor.
I do not intend to belabour the line of operations except inasmuch as they dictate what is different about command in a joint environment ashore to a maritime one at sea. There are a number of different factors to consider but chief among these is that it really is about the people. There is no capability in a joint task force (JTF), a maritime task group or a warship without the people. If you have not got the people bit sorted out, you will be a failure. It is always about the people.

The International Stabilisation Force (ISF) mission was a security operation involving about 1000 personnel comprising four infantry companies, an engineering troop, an M113 armoured personnel carrier troop, Black Hawk helicopters and a combat service support unit. Overall it created a pretty heavy security footprint at a time when we were getting towards the end of an intense period following the attempted assassinations of the President and Prime Minister and the subsequent chase for the various criminal elements through the hills of East Timor.

During my time in command I was tasked with drawing the force down from 1000 to 600 personnel and changing the focus of the mission in accordance with a plan developed by Joint Operations Command and my predecessors. I would like to focus on leadership constants and leadership lessons that I extracted from that experience.

But first let me give some context to activities in East Timor. In 2006 security in East Timor broke down and Australia was requested to step in to stabilise the situation. Ground forces were rapidly inserted and a Status of Forces Agreement was formalised later. The agreement with the United Nations came only after we were on the ground and had established the necessary security for the UN to come
in and operate. We were basically building backwards, retroactively creating the framework to support what we were actually doing. The fact that this came after our commitment did not concern people greatly because at the time everyone understood there was a clear and present requirement for us to help the people of East Timor.

Over time the security situation began to improve, at least until the 2008 assassination attempt, and by about 2009 we had some clear direction from President José Ramos-Horta on where he wanted to go.

When I got there the original security mission had largely been achieved. There was a climate of increasing security within Dili which was central to how the East Timorese people interpreted the overall security situation throughout the country. The outliers are largely a reflection of what goes on in Dili except in political terms.

I also realised that the East Timorese were getting a little bit tired of seeing foreigners in camouflage uniform carrying machine guns through the streets of their country. It was hard to communicate to the commercial sector of East Timor that we had faith in its future when our actions did not support our words. Why was it that at any time we walked into a restaurant we did so with a loaded weapon? It was a mixed message that we were sending out and I realised that we needed to step back from that and decide if we truly believed things were improving. Clearly we needed our posture to match our rhetoric.

I understood that when security is a challenge there is a need for force protection, but that was not what we were seeing on the ground. We were seeing improved security and we needed a posture that reflected it. What was challenging was actually learning how to step away from that imposing look with heavy weapons and begin patrolling with less intimidating side arms, a posture more befitting of personal security and more reflective of the security situation. This was a big step for us, culturally, and it involved managing the practicality of force protection, the strategic message, maintaining a ready posture and dealing with sub-unit culture. Cultural change is as much an operational as an organisational tool.

In December 2009 the ISF was directed to assume a new mission and that was part of the discussions we in the JTF Headquarters were having with Joint Operations Command. It is important to remember that the campaign was owned by Joint Operations Command, administered through the Military Strategic Commitments Division belonging to the Vice Chief of Defence Force and it was directed at achieving a national strategic outcome. It is not a case of one JTF commander having a good idea followed by the next. We were the temporary owners of the mission. We got to apply the mission how we saw fit based on the conditions on the ground, but it was essential that our decisions fitted into a campaign that went beyond the presence of individual commanders.
In 2009 we went through the process of re-scripting our involvement. When Australian troops first arrived in 2006 it was a very heavy security phase. But as stability returned and the moments of madness declined we started building in more dimensions to the role of the ISF. We started initially with training support to the East Timor security forces, not just in how to do certain things but also improving the professionalisation of the force itself, the organisation of the force, the logistical sustainment of the force. All those bits and pieces that are needed to forge a sustainable military force.

Then by about 2008 we started in the role of capacity building and we saw the primary role of security continue to diminish. While security and response was always the foundation of the ISF mission, the improved security conditions allowed us to expand into security sustainment activities and, as these activities gained traction, we were provided with new options to diversify and expand what we did. However, the mission was never an open ended one and by the time we started to move into the capacity building phase we were already looking at reshaping the force and the focus.

From November 2009 the new mission for us was to support the development of the East Timor government’s security capabilities in order to underpin the development of East Timor as a stable democratic nation. We were to become the insurance plan but we were also to move into a support role with East Timor security forces leading and the ISF transitioning to a more ‘normal’ posture. The Timorese wanted to know we were there but they wanted the opportunity to do it themselves with us supporting them in the transition. People loved knowing the ISF was on the ground. They loved to know that we were actually available should anything go wrong, but they did not want to see us that much. So it was a case of how do you give assurance without overwhelming visibility? And that meant that the signature of the force was something that we had to manage.

At the same time, the Timorese were aware that we needed to support the development of their security sector. There were some latent tensions between the police force and the military, however, when the Chief of the East Timor Defence Force, General Taur Matan Ruak and the Police Commissioner, Lounginhos Monteiro were seen shaking hands and actually socialising and working together, that served as one of the biggest steps forward in security in East Timor since 2006. There was genuine warmth between these two security sector leaders and as their relationship developed, so too did the relationship of their subordinates.

Understanding that aspect of the human terrain is not typically something naval commanders are involved in but it was critical to achieving the mission, and this is particularly so when living in the community that you are seeking to protect. Knowing the human terrain, understanding what they are thinking, knowing how they are related to one another and listening to them - both the said and unsaid - is critical.
We had four lines of operation to support the new mission: security, capacity building, shaping and influencing, and sustainment.

The security operation involved the readiness to provide security support. Our ability to meet the requirements of the UN Integrated Mission in Timor in which we agreed to provide protected mobility, aviation support and the ability to evacuate UN staff if it was required. We also maintained and developed military skills which had as much to do with us retaining our edge as well as training the East Timorese and operating with them.

The capacity building was a much more congested workplace as there were other elements to consider. We had the medical assistance program, the defence cooperation program as well as other nations seeking to assist the Timorese. There were coalition members inside and outside our tent. The United States was not part of the ISF but it was clearly a coalition-type partner and interested. They had a different way of doing things but they were on our side; Japan similarly. China was involved too and one should never underestimate the influence of the Portuguese in East Timor either.

Understanding how the Timorese saw the Portuguese was important. There is a strong segment of Timorese society, typically the older generation, that remembers with some nostalgia Portuguese East Timor. The links to Portuguese cooking, traditions, language and faith is evident, as are the ties within the Lusophone states.
that have their own sports competitions and strategic dialogues. For Timorese aged in their 30s and 40s there is less prevalence of this nostalgia while younger people, who have grown up largely under Indonesian influence, listen to Indonesian pop music and watch Indonesian television shows and who, as a result, think differently to previous generations. So when one interacts with East Timorese people you have to understand which generation they come from. Not dissimilar to Australia but it is perhaps a more pervasive factor in how individuals solve problems.

In the capacity building task we focused primarily on the East Timor Defence Force (F-FDTL). We were trying to improve its engineering skills so it could get involved in nation building projects such as rebuilding bridges, schools and so on. We also worked with the military police to foster the development of due process and in conjunction with our defence cooperation program commitment this also included working with newly recruited infantry soldiers. Where possible we supported the Australian Federal Police teams conducting the East Timor police development program as well. Everyone wanted to have a piece of the capacity building phase and each nation was armed with good intent, but sometimes it created a donor fatigue for the Timorese with all of us asking the same sort of questions.

Shaping and influencing was a big deal for the legitimacy of the ISF. Why were we still there? Why were we armed? Were we an occupying force or were we a security force? These questions required us to keep a very close engagement with people at all levels in the community, maintaining the line that the ISF was a ‘force for good’, that the ISF comprised people that ‘you want to have around.’

Engaging with key leadership was pivotal and not just at the most senior levels. I would routinely sit down and drink coffee with President Ramos-Horta or General Ruak as well as the bishops and newspaper editors. This program kept me on the move for many days of the week bouncing from one meeting to the next.

We implemented an ISF patrolling program which was more about community engagement than it was about security. This resulted in us adopting a more open posture where we moved within the society rather than supervising the society. We needed to be seen as a legitimate and valued provider of security in order that our mandate was secured not by paper but by the good will of the Timorese and to some extent by the United Nations also. In terms of the nation-building tasks – we tried wherever possible to operate with F-FDTL teams both to foster understanding and to transfer skills. This was a very effective tool and one that many people found to be personally rewarding as we provided concrete help to regional communities. These were not always big tasks and often we carried out simple projects like putting fly wire on school windows. East Timor is a country where people die of malaria in numbers we would struggle to fathom, so a simple task, an inexpensive task and one that the troops loved to do, was one that made an important difference to the schools we helped, the communities we operated in and the F-FDTL soldiers we operated alongside.
The sustainment element of the mission proved to be a real issue. We were at the end of a long supply chain and there was relatively little that we could acquire locally without adversely impacting upon the community. Logistics ashore in an underdeveloped nation is a little more complex than simply submitting a request for stores. Part of what we got was delivered to us commercially and actually understanding what a commercial contract can do and cannot do for you in an operational environment is important. We actually had to do sustainment as part of our daily bread.

The challenge of logistic sustainment can be seen in simple things such as going to the bathroom. Where do you put your refuse? For us there was one set of sewage pits dug by engineers of the International Force for East Timor in 1999. Those pits were about to be closed down by the government and this presented a new problem concerning how to get rid of waste. There was no existing infrastructure and we could not just dump it in the sea. In very short order we found ourselves rushing to deploy to East Timor an ability to treat sewage for 1000 people. Achieving this took a lot of work, a lot of effort and a lot of change. There was no off-the-shelf solution and it took a great deal of ingenuity by our contractors, Joint Logistic Command and amongst the team at Joint Operations Command.

At sea we tend to concern ourselves with things like ‘how many water purifiers have we got running’? For shore operations this consideration is on a completely different scale. Civil engineers, surveyors, movement specialists, military sealift and line haulage are needed to get the job done. In the end we did get the job done. We identified a sewage system that would treat the waste, we shipped it to East Timor and we set it to work in a matter of weeks, not months or years, and thereby looked after both our people and our reputation in the community. We could not have done this without a great team on the ground and committed support from Joint Operations and Joint Logistics commands.

One of the most significant challenges I found was retaining the enthusiastic support of key decision makers to maintain a security force when security was improving. I wanted a narrative of ‘security is improving’ and the logical question from the Timorese was ‘Well, when are you going?’ If the conditions are improving ‘when will you go’ is a fair question to be asked. I was just not ready to provide an answer. In order to balance this dilemma I found my biggest challenge was to achieve my mission while softening the security signature and protecting my people. Maintaining consistency in the narrative, while retaining the ability to respond, was at the forefront of my mind, particularly with the reduction in force size when there was still the need to meet the demands of security in spite of the change.

Insofar as commanding a ground force is concerned, I recognised that I did not need to be a soldier to command soldiers. I needed the soldiers to know that I respected what they did and that I was interested, and that is the nature of command. I
recognised the need to convince those I commanded that I believed in the worth of every one of them and you can only convince them of this if you truly do believe it yourself. The only way to build that belief is to get to know them and see them doing their job. You do not need to show them how you can do it better, what you need to show them is that you are interested, that they are valued and, from time-to-time, you have to explain how what they do helps to achieve the mission.

Authentic leadership is a key to earning respect. One cannot just turn up with one-star rank slides on and expect to get respect. It is rarely just given to you, you must earn it and the way you earn it is not by sitting in your office and producing PowerPoint slides. It is by getting out there.

Authentic leadership is about understanding the mission and caring. You not only have to be committed individually and intellectually, you have to be committed emotionally because exercising genuine command comes from a real visceral level. Authentic leadership is about you being there. You need to be ‘all in’ and not fake your commitment. People can smell fake commitment miles away.

I believe that as a commander your fundamental role is about communication of purpose. If you do not understand the purpose, how do you communicate it to anyone? The biggest command question that must be answered is ‘why’? It is an answer that has to engage the mind and the heart, it is not just intellectual, and it is as much visceral. The answer to ‘why’ has to be understood and believed and you cannot do that with a minute, a directive or a PowerPoint slide.

You need to get out of the office and see your personnel doing the job. Walking around the hills of East Timor can be tedious but I did it and my team saw that. These days, from the moment you assume a command position, there is no shortage of phone calls and video teleconferences. There is no shortage of secure ‘this’ or secure
'that’. You can fill an entire day doing nothing but staff work and you can easily become just a senior staff officer. You have got to break that to be a commander because nothing communicates as strongly as presence.

Everything communicates, not just your words, and communicating and informing are two very different things. Sometimes we think we have communicated when in fact all we have done is informed. Communication requires a feedback loop and that requires a bit of time, you have got to allow time for the information to soak in and feed back to you from those you are engaging with.

Leadership and encouraging leadership is to know what is right and then act on it and accept that the right thing is not always the ‘correct’ thing. While I was in East Timor I received a phone call from the President requesting a favour. It concerned a compassionate issue and he asked if I could put someone on our contracted air service and take them to Australia. I said yes. I was chastised by my own staff and from some in Australia on how I had breached the rules. Each of them was correct. I did break the rules and in hindsight I wish I had found another way to get the desired result, but in the time I had available I made a call. It was the right thing to do because the person, from a humanitarian point of view, needed help. It was the right thing to do because the President of East Timor, who was the Head of State directing the future of the whole security mission, wanted a favour and in that climate favours count. Sometimes you have got to do the right thing while knowing it is not necessarily the correct thing.

Thinking small - we have got to learn to think small and long, not big and short. Often when presented with a problem we come up with a big solution. We create it, we sell it and we execute it. We then move on to the next problem which has become our way. Ironically we sometimes deride others for doing that but we are guilty of it as well, particularly with regional friends that operate in a more consultative manner. We actually have to think in terms of a longer, smaller game. It is not how we operate at home but sometimes we have to slow down to move forward. I learned quickly that ‘Timor time’ was ‘Timor time’. I lived in their time and I had to learn that they were not going to necessarily move to mine because I simply wanted to ‘get on with it’.

Working through issues over Timorese coffee was central to understanding the human terrain as was appreciating the influence of life outside the gate. At one point it rained steadily for three days. Everything in Timor was flooded. From a mariner’s perspective at sea this would have amounted to little more than an unpleasant few days but in East Timor there were whole streets flooded, schools were closed, kids were on the streets, rice could not be distributed and security problems began to emerge. I learned that I was living in a community, not just observing it, and that you have to be responsive to it. One boss, many stakeholders and many more influences.
Understandably the Australian media was watching the mission closely and as a leader it is increasingly important to understand the role the media plays. You get one chance to get a story right. After that it speeds away from you faster than you can catch it up. For me, the example was a tragedy involving a motor vehicle accident in which an ISF vehicle struck and killed a local woman. The woman was immediately attended to by the ISF drivers and was transported by ambulance to hospital in good time. The ISF doctor went to visit her but could not talk with her and instead spoke with the referring doctor who told him that she was doing well, that the injuries were of a minor nature and that she was likely to recover and be released within 24 hours.

We reported the incident and the positive prognosis up through the chain of command believing all was well. The ISF doctor went back a week later as part of a routine visit to ask, how the lady had recovered and was told that she had gone. This was subsequently reported to me and I assumed she had been discharged. The doctor went back a third time as part of the process of tracking injuries and asked about the woman’s recovery, only to be told that she had died two weeks previously.

I then found myself reporting this tragic turn of events to my superiors at the same time that the media first learned of it. Suddenly I had a situation where a story emerged that the ISF had accidentally killed someone, it had not paid compensation and that it had shown no concern for the family. We had about 12 hours warning that the story was going to print but we could not reach the journalist to discuss the story and so it was released portraying us in a very poor light which went viral on Australian internet websites.

All of us were very upset about the accident. We were concerned that the information we received led us to conclude she had recovered when this was not the case, which meant we had not done the things we would have done had we been given the facts. The reporting of that incident drove the operational agenda for weeks working against the strategic message we were trying to communicate.

No doubt we were wrong and should have done better on this issue, but the way the story broke made us look as if we did not care when nothing could have been further from the truth. In failing to follow through on tracking the woman’s recovery vigorously we also failed in communicating bad news and we had to chase hard to try and ensure we corrected those elements of the story that we could.

This incident interrupted the strategic fabric of the mission. The pace in which it got away from me taught me not only the practical lesson of aggressively tracking civilian casualties but also about the speed at which information travels. As a commander you only get one chance to get a story right and running down a story once it has started takes an exponential amount of energy. It was a hard lesson to learn in a tragic circumstance, but it was an important part of my command experience in Timor that I shall never forget. Thankfully along with the hard lessons came many good ones and I am grateful to have been a part of an important mission for the ADF that made a real difference to the people of East Timor.
Commodore Stuart Mayer parades for the last time as the Commander of the International Stabilisation Force in Timor Leste before relinquishing command to Colonel Simon Stuart of the Australian Army.
Lieutenant Commander Doug Griffiths on top of TV Hill, Afghanistan, Operation SLIPPER, 31 July
In September 2009 I returned to Australia following a seven month operational deployment to Afghanistan. On the day I arrived home I switched on the television to breaking news that there had been a car bomb attack on the Headquarters International Security Assistance Force in Kabul. As I watched I saw three members of my former explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team, plus other EOD personnel, responding to the incident at the front gate. Days earlier I was the officer in charge of that very tight team and it ‘hit me for six’. I did not expect this at all.

My team was on the job, in harms way doing what we had previously done together, doing what I had led them to do in the past, yet I was looking on. It was simply surreal. At that moment I felt lost… empty. I felt that I should have been there leading my men and it took me some time to reconcile that my contribution had been helping to make that team so effective.

I have been asked to discuss aspects of both operational and tactical leadership based on my experiences in operations conducted in the Northern Arabian Gulf (NAG), Iraq and Afghanistan. Before I do that I feel that I should first provide some background information about myself that will help to put into context how my leadership style has developed. I will then focus on some of the opportunities that I have had to exercise tactical and operational leadership.

I joined the RAN in 1989 and graduated from the Australian Defence Force Academy in 1991. I went to sea in a variety of different classes of ships and enjoyed my time as an officer of the watch. But what I really wanted was to be a mine warfare and clearance diving officer (MCDO).

In recent times I have reflected on the topic of leadership and have come to the conclusion that I actually did not learn much about how to be a leader during my formative service as an officer of the watch. I worked in some great teams and under the direction of some excellent captains but as an individual I did not get the opportunity to exercise true leadership during that phase of my career.

In 1995 I fulfilled my wish and qualified as an MCDO. A unique aspect of this is that it is the only specialisation in the RAN in which enlisted personnel actually select their superiors. If you do not fit in, then the sailors will elect you out of the branch.
On successful completion of my diving course I was posted to Australian Clearance Diving Team One (AUSCDT ONE) and this is where I started to learn what it meant to lead.

In my opinion, not enough leadership opportunities exist in the RAN to allow a junior officer to exercise true leadership. Clearance diving teams, however, are an exception and although the learning curve was steep for me as a newly appointed diving officer, that time proved invaluable for the rest of my career and it shaped the way I approached future opportunities.

Following my time at AUSCDT ONE, I went back to sea using my experiences with small teams to further develop my leadership in successive appointments as an executive officer. Over a four year period I filled three back-to-back executive officer appointments in both Australia and the United Kingdom serving under six separate commanding officers, in three platforms, in two navies. This was a bit of executive officer overload, but it helped me develop as a leader under the guidance of some great commanding officers.

**HMAS Kanimbla**

After the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, I was given the opportunity to deploy as the officer in charge of the deployable EOD detachment in HMAS *Kanimbla* during Operation SLIPPER.
I had worked up the detachment as a member of fleet staff but only joined as officer in charge for the mission readiness assessment. Joining the team late provided its own issues for although I had worked up the capability, I had not been worked up as part of the capability. I knew all the operators professionally and they knew me but I was a new commodity. I was now the boss.

In that situation I felt I was the one being assessed. I knew the team’s strengths and weaknesses, both from previous postings and deployments, and from assessing them during the unit readiness evaluation. But I had not proven myself to them as a leader. The roles were reversed.

I had to quickly evaluate the function of the team, as well as get a better understanding of team dynamics, strengths and weaknesses whilst trying to work out my own position as a member of the Commander Task Group (CTG) staff.

My approach with the EOD detachment was based on a constant two-way flow of information, honesty and integrity. My team had to be honest with me and vice versa. I also had to prove my physical courage and ability as an operator. In my opinion an effective MCDO leads from the front and having credibility as an operator is essential. I had to prove I could deal with EOD and improvised explosive device (IED) problems as an operator, demonstrate my proficiency with small arms, fast roping and diving. Not to mention still being able to represent the detachment to the CTG.

As far as challenges are concerned, nothing is more problematic than a bored diver. This was always going to be a problem during a five-month deployment. So to avoid potential issues, the team had to be kept busy, motivated, interested and out of trouble.

As a team we developed a night, non-compliant, helicopter inserted visit, board, search, and seize capability for the task group.

We had the determination to sell that capability to the CTG. We trained for it, and executed it to good effect, at night, on two occasions. As a result we increased the task group’s boarding capabilities enhancing the ability of the RAN to maintain the Iraqi oil blockade and our ability to exercise sea control.

**Iraq**

In July 2006 I again deployed to the Middle East, this time as a member of the staff of Combined Task Force (CTF) 158. Although I worked as a battle-watch captain when with the task group, my primary role was that of a liaison officer with the Iraqis. In that position I was the direct liaison between CTF 158 and the Iraqi Navy.

This required me working very closely with both the British-led Naval Advisory Training Team and the Iraqi Navy. I saw my role as not only the link between commands, but also as a mentor for the commanding officers of Iraqi patrol boats and the Iraqi Navy command teams as they regenerated their operational capability.
To be effective it was essential for me to assess the capability of the crews and operations teams I was working with and to determine the best course of action to integrate the Iraqi maritime forces into the coalition order of battle.

Initially this proved difficult - and after a considerable period of frustration I took my concerns to the CTG who advised me that I should not insist on the same standards of performance that I would expect in the RAN. It took time, but after about two months I had finally built a rapport with the Iraqi Navy teams in Umm Qasr, and I had established my credibility and earned their trust. This required listening, patience, many days in Iraqi patrol boats, and endless cups of dodgy tea. But it paid off.

My ‘aha moment’ came when the Iraqi operations commander, Commander Hammeed, placed his hand on my shoulder after a meeting and asked if I was a father and what my son’s name was. I told him, and from then on he and his team insisted on referring to me as Abu Joshua.

At that time I knew that I had reached a defining moment. I had earned their trust and respect. For me this experience was all about identification of strengths and working on those strengths to achieve the best outcome for the Iraqi Navy. I had to identify and influence their best qualities and provide opportunities for them to develop.

Throughout the process it was about establishing my own credibility in order to be effective. Failure to make a positive impact would have been detrimental to the speed we were able to integrate Iraqi forces with coalition assets.
My learning curve was again steep, but it was rewarding. I found myself advising CTF 158, the Iraqi Navy leadership group in Umm Qasr and Baghdad as well as the coalition headquarters at US Navy Central Command in Bahrain.

So, unlike my first deployment where I worked essentially in a tactical role, Iraq saw me working within both the tactical and operational areas of leadership. This certainly held me in good stead for my next sea command and later operations in Afghanistan.

**HMAS Diamantina**

I will not dwell on my time in command of HMAS *Diamantina*, suffice to say, minor war vessel command is certainly one of the best jobs available in the RAN and that the opportunities I had allowed me to further develop my individual leadership style.

**Afghanistan**

Following my command of *Diamantina* I immediately went to Kabul into the embedded position as the exploitation chief for the Counter Improvised Explosive Disposal (C-IED) branch in Headquarters International Security Assistance Force.

What was unique about my time in Afghanistan was the diversity of my experiences. In the morning I could be getting my hands dirty leading small teams on the ground at a tactical level, in the afternoon I could be providing operational level advice and direction to coalition assets across the country and in the evening I could be providing strategic level input to Afghanistan government ministers or ISAF flag-ranked officers.

My title of ‘exploitation chief’ is a term not commonly heard within the Navy. Exploitation is the investigation and examination of IED incidents post-blast to determine the device type, construction, and explosive composition. In C-IED we normally try to work left of the ‘bang’. But when we cannot that is when exploitation takes place. The end result is that successful exploitation will provide actionable intelligence to assist in the breaking of insurgent IED networks. My job in Afghanistan was to oversee and supervise a nation-wide coalition exploitation network encompassing 42 nations and Afghan security forces.

I provided supervision of the coalition exploitation architecture, which involved overseeing the safety of IED teams, exploitation assets, and integrating technical processes and biometric collection protocols. One of the other interesting jobs I
had within the headquarters was to act as the point of contact between it and the Afghan/Pakistani joint operation teams for the sharing of C-IED information, this often yielded some real information gems.

Perhaps the most significant role I had within Kabul was as the ISAF-lead for mentoring the Afghan EOD exploitation assets. This covered the Afghan Army’s 201st Corps, the Afghan National Police and the endless frustration of dealing with the CIA-mentored Afghan Secret Police. However, the effort to build relationships gave my team considerable access to insurgent suspects, device material and unfettered access to incident scenes and weapons caches.

As with my experience in Iraq, I found being effective in Afghanistan required much listening, lots of tea, some ego massaging and lots of juggling expectations. Effective interaction with local security forces was again about building rapport and trust. But within ISAF it was about me understanding the capabilities and limitations of all the assets I had to coordinate. These ranged from Polish and Hungarian elements that could not leave their bases and therefore could not be employed, Romanian elements that did not have appropriate self protective equipment, through to more professional nations such as the United Kingdom, United States, Norway and Australia. But even then, these proved at times problematic and required additional effort to appease personalities and assuage egos.

My actual team was very small and consisted of three people including me. I had an Irish EOD sergeant as my second in command and for operations outside the base I would take either a British Army EOD captain or my deputy branch chief who was a US Navy EOD commander. On top of this I had an interpreter who, throughout my time in country, proved invaluable.

This team formed the nucleus of what is known as the advisory response team (ART). This team was a first response mentoring team that provided post-incident liaison and command-and-control assistance to Afghan first responders when dealing with IED incidents.

The ART also backed up coalition exploitation assets at blast scenes providing scene cordon security to allow coalition forces to exploit a blast site. Essentially this was like herding cats on a chaotic and massive scale. Failure to control a scene and maintain a cordon would subject coalition assets to increased risk of insurgent attack and deny us exploitation evidence.

So, what were some of the issues that I faced in Afghanistan?

First was dealing with the unknown. Interestingly, to many in Afghanistan, I was an unknown quantity. I was Australian, I was not NATO and I was a navy guy in a land war. So really what did I know?
I must admit, although I was comfortable in my professional knowledge, there was much to learn. I had to continually assess the capability of assets I was providing guidance to and also understand their issues, various personalities and the ISAF/NATO system.

I found the organisational dynamics and the politics tiring, especially dealing with contractors, multiple nationalities, organisations of three-letter acronyms, the Afghan security forces and members of government up to the three-star and ministerial level.

By now many will have noticed the general themes in my leadership perspectives. Not surprisingly though, much of what I learned from my previous maritime-focused deployments was applicable in Afghanistan. I found that to be ultimately effective within ISAF and in influencing and mentoring Afghan security forces my challenges were:

- to build relationships, respect and trust with the Afghan forces I was entrusted to mentor
- to prove my ability as a IED operator and C-IED exploiter to build credibility
- to build a strong team, both within the ART as well as internal to the Headquarters International Security Assistance Force organisation and with coalition assets in Kabul area
- to prove that the RAN was credible in a land warfare environment; surprisingly this was only an issue with the Australian Army
- to make judgment calls based on safety and preservation of life; often it was necessary for me to lead both up and down
- to fully understand what my team was dealing with and how they were handling situations post-event.

It is fair to say that some days were worse than others and understanding myself and my team was important to be able to identify when someone needed a break or the opportunity to simply back off. It is also very important to identify this in yourself. It has been hard for me to admit it, but this is an area that I continually fail in.

As with the lessons I learned in my previous deployments, I found it essential to know my team and my role as the priority. However, if I did not prepare myself professionally and mentally prior to deploying, I would not have been as effective.

As an embedded officer it is rare to be put through a mission readiness evaluation. This was interesting as I came straight from sea to a land warfare environment and received very minimal force preparation. However, I consider myself fortunate as my past experiences, training and self-initiated force preparation did not leave me unprepared. This was good because I was always ‘outside the wire’, working in small teams doing the job that I needed to do. So, making sure I was prepared was essential.
Throughout the deployment I needed to train, drill and build a solid team around me and know the capability and limitations of individuals and organisations alike. I had to lead both up and down, and be prepared to deal with the aftermath of some horrific days and horrific events.

During my time in Kabul:

- I managed a complete revision of the coalition exploitation architecture to optimise the effectiveness of C-IED exploitation
- I oversaw the establishment of a system that was better equipped to kinetically target the insurgency through the provision of actionable intelligence
- My team provided EOD/IED support for cache recovery and weapon buy backs to remove in excess of 2000 potential IED from the battlefield
- I personally learned to effectively lead a team comprising multiple nationalities, cope with multiple three-letter acronyms and head strong personalities with very strong egos, for the purpose of reducing the IED threat to our troops on the ground.
I have mentioned the importance of knowing the team but I also learnt that it is as important is to understand your own limitations: physically, morally, ethically and emotionally. Leadership, I have learned, is both situational and dynamic. Plans always needed to be adjusted for the safety and welfare of the team and the mission. Flexibility is essential. In Kabul I needed to be willing to make hard decisions based on my own observations or from evaluating the advice and experience of those around me.

Kabul certainly exhausted me more than any other job I have had. I did, however, find it hard to leave. I found it hard to hand my team over to someone else and watching my team taking charge of an incident that happened at the front gate of Headquarters International Security Assistance Force only days after leaving it and arriving home was difficult. It was hard to let go, yet it was rewarding to know that the effort that I had put into building a solid team had paid dividends.

**Conclusion**

Looking back on my service in the NAG, Iraq and Afghanistan I learnt much about tactical and operational leadership summarised as follows:

- There is often a very fine line between levels of leadership. You may be at a tactical level, but you must be able to contribute at levels well beyond your perceived pay grade.
- Communication is paramount - up, down and internal.
- Be willing to listen and take advice.
- Learn about the culture you are working in; be respectful of differences and work hard to build trust.
- Learn to drink tea, regardless of the state of the cup it is served in.
- With regard to teams, I have learned that it essential to identify strengths and weaknesses. It was also important for me to base an effective team around strength development.
- As an individual, you have to know your own weaknesses and be willing to acknowledge them, and work to develop them. Therefore self preparation is essential. In an operational situation, deficiencies in ability or leadership will quickly become apparent.
- You must always be prepared to display moral and physical courage and be prepared and willing to make difficult decisions and, once made, have the courage to stand by your decisions.
- It is always important to lead by example and respect the contribution of the team and always acknowledge the contribution of others.
- Finally, have humility and understand that you do not know it all and as such know when to seek help.
Captain Chris Smallhorn,
I would like to begin my discussion with the ‘bottom line up front’ principle. I am going to steer away from that exciting ‘shooting bullets’ part of our business and push more into how we actually get ourselves there. I will also discuss the command culture that we must achieve in order to take us across the next decade with all of the new capabilities that I hope will flow into our Service, and examine how we might influence events to see them arrive more quickly or at least on time.

I will also ask that you examine yourselves and your own personality types as I delve into some of the weaknesses that many, type ‘A’ military officers generally exhibit. There are all sorts of different styles of leadership. Air command, just like any other command, evolves over the ages. It can be influenced by the environment, the mission, or differing personality types. It also evolves due to the risk tolerance of the time.

What is the Navy’s air command model at the moment? As a current commanding officer of a Fleet Air Arm Squadron I can tell you it is not about kicking the tyres, lighting the fires and shooting the enemy out of the blindness of the sun. Today RAN aviators operate more remotely with many of our units deployed on the other side of the world. In support of that we have a whole range of systems in place to enable that to happen including: operational airworthiness; flight safety; risk management systems; technical airworthiness; tactics and procedures; orders; oversights; demonstrable accountability; aviation mentoring at the command level right through to the professional flying level. Collectively it is a combination of hearts, souls and at times an overbearing regulatory environment. These systems are necessary to safe and effective operations and must be managed cautiously and carefully at all times.

Another factor to consider when commanding an organisation at the unit level is that you have got to ‘get out there’ and see what is going on. You must go to where your people are operating, and I would offer that advice to any squadron commanding officers. When we have aircraft operating on the other side of the world the argument should be made, through Joint Operations Command to get out there and see your team at least once a year.
In my own experience, during my first year in command of 816 Squadron, I conducted such a visit to the Middle East Area of Operations because one of the issues that had bothered me was what we would do should an aircraft go down in the whole of force response context? Were we actually sitting in the combat search and rescue response list? What is our word of the day? What was our number of the day? What was our crew position of the day? So I asked the aircrew the question and they said,

We do not know, we do not know because we are actually not listed on the air plan at the time. We do not know because we do not actually engage inside that combat search and rescue role that US 5th Fleet were offering us.

But the question was, were we really in combat search and rescue? And did we actually know what combat search and rescue truly meant? We did not have those sorts of assets. The Americans did and their approach to combat search and rescue at sea was certainly different to what it would have been over land.

So we worked towards a downed aircrew plan, as we coined it, which was more appropriate to the mission of the time. We asked questions such as: ‘If an aviator crashes on the Iranian side of the line, are we going to go and get him?’ And when we asked those questions at the command level, the answer was immediately, ‘yes’, but the question actually could be ‘does the government want us to go and get them?’ or do they want him to become a government detainee? Do we want to cross the line? Now whilst we would like to think those are fairly simply questions to answer, they need to be questions that are asked in order to get the answer such that they are not being asked in the heat of the moment. We went through a desktop process and ultimately built an aircrew downed response plan so that we actually had some decision matrices on the way through. It is about keeping the mind open. It is about creating a culture that recognises that we work in a complex and somewhat complicated environment as opposed to one based on checklists, standard operating procedures and regulation. I believe that one must appreciate the system and environmental complexity in order to think through how one will command and what culture we need to sustain to cultivate the system.

Figure 1 is one such system. There are many systems that could be applied to command and this one is not bespoke to air command. However, it is the one that works for me and one that I put together after a couple of tours in command roles and then implemented. While there are three individual elements they all overlap at some point.
I will first discuss aviation regulation adherence in the top right corner of Figure 1. Safety, airworthiness, threat, regulatory growth - what does all that mean? We all like to put safety first, at the top of the pile but I suggest to you that it is actually just an enabler, an enabler for persistent airpower. Airworthiness is a term which is as much a concept as it is an action and it is there to determine safety of flight. But it is safety of flight in a particular role, a particular environment, and a particular configuration of the aircraft and the crew. The safety program that underpins that is there to make sure we can do it persistently.

An important piece of regulation is risk management which as a discipline had its birth rights in nuclear engineering and experimental flight test, presumably because bad things happen in those fields, and it made sense to study these things. It has now become part of our day-to-day business and parlance. But due to the volume of work required to enact and maintain it, it does create some challenges in getting our mission done, as it threatens the very pillars which it actually sought to protect, those pillars, in our case, being airworthiness and safety.

Provision of maritime air capabilities is ultimately what it is all about. That is what we are trying to do. In order to achieve that, the aim is to create an environment where personnel can, in spite of the regulations and the overbearing nature of those regulations at times, have a tactical warfare and technical program of continuous improvement. It is through that mindset and culture that we grow better in our complex endeavours instead of stagnating.

I like to use terminology with my team at Naval Air Station Nowra that essentially says ‘You can only actually fight one jihad at a time, but you can have a couple of fist
fights along the way’. I guess we often like to think big and in terms of ‘changing the world’. However, I think we can only actually handle one of those scenarios at a time as an organisation. It is about having a culture that allows our highly intellectual individuals, the people who surround us at sea and in our squadrons, to actually come up with ideas and create an environment where the idea can be implemented. Small programs, high volume, high return; that is the environment we should be creating. Part of achieving this is to know your people.

Aviators are a peculiar bunch. In the past I have used an analogy that managing aviators is like managing children with masters degrees who think they have a doctorate. Navy’s psychologists have determined that most aircrew have much in common with musicians and artists; that gives them an element of unpredictability which means we have got to have a regulation box to keep them tied in. Maintenance personnel are somewhat easier to regulate but it is the aircrew that sometimes present a challenge.

British Field Marshall Sir Bernard Montgomery had another theory. In his memoirs he dedicates a chapter to, what we now call essentially type ‘A’ and type ‘B’ personalities: intellect versus motivation. He stated ‘My lowly motivated and highly intellectual people are the ones I have to prod, but when I prod them they really come up with some good ideas’. These were his intelligence officers and planners. Montgomery continued

My lowly intellectual - they will be motivated. I do not want any of those, but the ones who are just a little bit down towards the centre, they are my soldiers. They are the guys out in the field who are going to go and do the job and take the orders.

He then wrote, ‘my highly motivated, highly intellectual people, they are my commanders. They are the people who are going lead divisions in theatre’. At the bottom right-hand side of Figure 2 is the highly motivated idiot. Montgomery considered them ‘the most offensive individual to any military organisation [that should] be dispensed with at all costs’.

![Figure 2: Montgomery’s personality types](image-url)
Taking this into consideration I tried to work out where aviators sit within that organisation and found that they appear in the top, right quadrant of the box in Figure 2 which is where they are recruited to; this is a view supported by the Navy’s psychologists. It may be that naval aviators are not going to solve world hunger or discover the next best technique for brain surgery, but they are clever enough to think. They are clever enough to ask questions, and they are most certainly deserving of a good response and good systems that allow them to make a difference. Aviators are usually driven, at times they are self-absorbed, they are impatient and they have a tendency, as a result of that impatience, to practically drift.

The question is then, are you much different? Are any of us much different? My thoughts are that the majority of people that gravitate to the armed forces, particularly into operational roles, are type ‘A’, or bordering on type ‘A’, personalities. The important thing to understand when one has an ‘A’ type personality is that you may want to make things happen immediately, in your time and in your way but this can play out in unforeseen ways if there are no boundaries.

Clearly, making things happen is difficult when faced with regulations, orders or procedures that are not making sense. The question is ‘are you likely to want to try and fix it?’ Are you also the one who is likely to want to try and make that change and use the tools of our trade, such as risk management, to make that difference? Then, when you make that difference, do you comprehend how it affects pre-existing regulations? Why were they established in the first place and what is the risk of changing it? Often individuals are good at identifying a problem and working towards fixing it, but there is a tendency to be less thorough in fully appreciating the historical reason for a pre-existing regulation or the potential interdependencies we may disrupt in altering it. It is this phenomenon that is termed in aviation as ‘practical drift’. It is the likelihood of an organisation to naturally drift from known procedures, albeit for practical reasons, without fully appreciating the secondary and tertiary ramifications. We must have regulation around our business with the aim of slowing or stopping the drift from the known.

But regulation and innovation are not the best of friends. To quote Donald Douglas, from the Douglas Aircraft Corporation ‘When the weight of the paper equals the weight of the airplane, only then can you go flying’. At the moment, I think it is a lot heavier than the paper versus the aeroplane. We do have an extraordinarily regulated system, regulations that have grown over time, but those same regulations can be the barrier to innovation, and therein lays the balancing act.
Some years ago I was reading about business philosophies and saw the plot in Figure 3. I thought it was very pertinent to our business and our ability to be operationally responsive to events. When considering regulation against innovative/abstract thought, and with the earlier profile of aircrew in mind, we seek to manage these behaviours with a good dose of regulation. I suggest that at the moment the Navy is sitting somewhere down in the area shown by the circle with a line through it in Figure 3. We are heavily regulated and at times we are denying the opportunity for abstract and innovative thought. I think we need to be in the box on Figure 3, and this is where our organisation needs to be if we are truly going to be able to take ideas out of our theatres of operation and put them in place in a reasonable time frame.

It is a balancing act and we need to make sure that we create an environment that is both innovative and timely but compliant in a regulatory sense. This, in essence, is the air command challenge as shown in Figure 4. Because aviation is a heavily regulated environment we need to be able to give our people the opportunity to carry out their mission in a flexible and innovative fashion, and that is ultimately the greatest challenge for us.
So what sort of organisation do we want to have? Three options are shown in Figure 5. Most would have a preference for a simple organisation. When we see a problem come up, we identify it, we categorise it and then we take an action. Ultimately it is checklist based, a standard operating procedure involving little actual thought. If one thinks of the way we conduct a lot of our business, and aviation is certainly one of those businesses because of its heavy regulatory oversight, we run the risk of falling firmly into this trap. Now this is not just to say what the system is. The system is only as good as the people. However if we only take a simplistic procedural based approach we run the risk of not sponsoring an innovative environment.
Sitting in between ‘simple’ and ‘chaotic’ is ‘confusion’. Confusion is just a single step away from a bit of chaos in actually not knowing which way to go, meaning, when your complicated or complex problem is put in front of you, if your organisation is actually designed around a very simplistic approach to thinking, then you are only a step away from not knowing what to do at all, because you created that culture.

However, sitting at the top of Figure 5 is the organisation that we want to get to, a complex, complicated thought process but not a complex and complicated organisation. It is the idea that you have an organisation where your culture is to approach every problem in an intellectual and thoughtful manner using systems that sponsor mature thought. An issue is noted, analysed, a plan set in motion, data and results recorded to ensure effectiveness and reasonableness, then it is acted upon in terms of progressing procedures and training packages. But the question is, how does that actually work in some of those immediate type responsive situations? In the more immediate responsive situations, if you have already created the culture where everyone thinks that way, they will be more likely to make better decisions albeit under time and operational pressures. We must seek a way of thinking as an organisation attuned to managing complex and complicated endeavours.

About three years ago a non-military search and rescue aircraft crashed about 15nm south of Sydney. A call came through early one morning for Navy to see if it could provide a response to it: two helicopters with night vision capability. Our aircraft would be working in concert with a series of other aircraft, police, and emergency services helicopters.

When the call came through, I sat down and looked at this particular problem and thought ‘that sounds reasonable to me.’ Now, because I was thinking in a very simplistic way I concluded, ‘it is a search and rescue task as an aircraft has gone in, two aircraft is better than one. That is reasonable.’ However what I did not do was sit back and listen to all the information that was being given to me. Included in that information was that the aircraft vanished off radar at 15nm, not ‘we tracked’, not that ‘it glided’, not that ‘It possibly spreads debris across many miles.’ The information received was that ‘We just tracked it on radar and then at 15nm south of the airport it was gone in a matter of seconds’, which meant it was most likely a fairly localised impact. Now, 15nm south of Sydney is probably only about 2nm off the coast, not too far south of Botany Bay Heads. When considering the search area that we were invited to go into and operate at night time, it was an extraordinarily small search box.

So without thinking it through and analysing the problem I took a very simplistic and responsive approach. I had fallen into the trap of over simplifying the response and as a result assigned too many assets to the job. I had actually created a flight safety issue, too many aircraft at night operating at low level in a geographically small area. We were now going to try and push, as it turned out, two police helicopters, one
emergency service helicopter, a fixed wing aircraft, and two Seahawk helicopters into a search area that was, at best, going to be 5 x 5nm. It was a bad decision because I took a simplistic approach to it.

Luckily, I had experienced people to call for advice and I contacted my superior officer to inform him of the tasking. He said, ‘Chris, a couple of years ago we had something similar happen and I tasked two aircraft. We got a little bit of a rap over the knuckles for over-tasking, not because of the flight safety implication, just for over-tasking.’ That forced me to think and whilst it was not the rap over the knuckles I was worried about, it made me think about how many aircraft we were realistically going to put into that area? Did we really need that many? I finally arrived at the right decision, tasking only one aircraft, but only because I was questioned by a more experienced officer.

It is an example of a culture of simplistic thought. Simplistic thought where I was not absorbing all the data. Because that was a relatively immediate tasking one might argue that I could be forgiven for making such mistakes. However, if the whole organisation is always thinking at the complex, complicated thought processes level - because that is our business - then perhaps I might have thought about it a little bit further.

Finally I will make a few comments about passion and privilege in the sense of air command. Essentially, in terms of the command role, you need to show that passion. If you show the passion, I assure you that those you lead will see it. You have got to be emotionally attached to the outcomes. The hearts and souls, in the end, are the best weapons that you have. If you win the hearts and souls of the people you lead there is no stopping them. So, ‘where will you be?’ is the question that I like to ask myself at the beginning of every job. Where are we going to be in a year’s time? Where are we going to be in two years time? Do we want to set specific objectives? You must ensure that you have a team that is focused on an outcome so that we get the journey right, and we get the thinking right, because in our business you actually do have to have a destination.

The cornerstone in my view is leadership, leadership and communication. They are the tools of our trade. If we maintain that emotional hearts and souls based leadership, where we know where we intend to go and then we are able to communicate it, you are already on the road to success.

I like to try and find a point where I question whether the system is working. Is there an example that I could offer you to say that we are on the right track? The example that I would like to finish with is that of Operation FLOOD ASSIST that took place in southern Queensland in early 2011. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief tasking is, in my view, among riskiest tasking we take on. It is risky because we have building block training programs to get us into that space, but we do not do an enormous amount of training in that space. We are relying on people to make mature judgement decisions at the right time often in complex and complicated circumstances.
During FLOOD ASSIST there were a couple of particular events which, I think, indicated that we have got some of the right cultures in place. In the most atrocious weather conditions, managing fatigue, but with good risk management principles in place, we had good reach back into the headquarters occurring at the right time and in a timely fashion. This resulted in the order of some 300 people being moved out of the Grantham region by four helicopters. I am comfortable, based on that evolution, to say our personnel are thinking the right way. They are not being risk averse. They are using the risk management principles and their decision making skills to their advantages.

There is always a nice story that comes out of these crises and I thought I would leave you with one. It involved an Army Black Hawk helicopter that rescued a 91 year old lady from her traditional ‘Queenslander’ home in downtown Brisbane. The Black Hawk hovered over the top of the house and winched down a member of its crew onto the porch. He went in and confronted the old lady who did not understand the threat facing her and her home. Water was flowing down on the property and was nearly halfway up the stairs. The aircrewman announced ‘Ma’am, we have got to go’. ‘Why? What is it?’ was the response. ‘Your house is under threat. Your life is at threat. I need to take you out’ replied the aviator. She replied, ‘I cannot go. I cannot’ and began rummaging around on the shelves and the like. The aircrewman interjected ‘you cannot take anything, I am sorry - just you - we need to get you out of here.’ ‘But I need to find some money’ she announced. ‘No, ma’am, you do not need any money’. Her response was ‘But how will I pay for the taxi?’ - ‘No, ma’am, I have a helicopter for you. Everything is good to go.’ It was a lovely touch.

My intent has been to steer a little bit away from the operationally focused subject matter and discuss the culture I think we need to achieve so that we can actually go into the next decade. I trust that this discussion stimulates some thought concerning that.

**Endnotes**

1 These three elements (word of the day, number of the day and crew position) form challenge/response requirements associated with CSAR recovery to ensure proof of identity.