

# SEMAPHORE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SEA POWER CENTRE - AUSTRALIA

ISSUE 6, JULY 2004

## NAVAL OPERATIONS OTHER THAN WAR 1901-2004

For over a century, since its inception in 1901 with the creation of the Commonwealth Naval Forces, the Australian Navy has performed many operations other than war. These operations fall into the *diplomatic* and *constabulary* categories of the Span of Maritime Operations outlined in *Australian Maritime Doctrine*. Diplomatic operations involve supporting Australian foreign policy, while constabulary operations involve enforcing the provisions of international and domestic law in Australia's maritime zones. The Royal Australian Navy (RAN) has regularly been involved in deployments in support of Australia's foreign policy, as well as exercises on both regional and international levels to show presence. The RAN has had an ongoing role in national surveillance, and has also provided military assistance to the national and international community in the form of hydrographic surveying and charting. It has provided assistance to overseas communities, as well as disaster relief, search and rescue, and the evacuation of Australian and approved foreign citizens from regional trouble spots. The RAN has also been involved in peace operations, environmental and resource protection, the prevention of illegal immigration, and drug interdiction. The following examples provide a brief overview demonstrating the diversity of operations that Australia's Navy has undertaken over the last century.

In November 1918 the cruiser HMAS *Encounter* delivered drugs, stores and a Medical Relief Force to Fiji during the midst of the Spanish Influenza pandemic that killed over 25 million people worldwide. Despite a death rate of 10% amongst the native population, almost all of the crew volunteered to go ashore to assist, although these landing parties were not subsequently required.

During the Prince of Wales' visit to Australia in 1920 the battlecruiser HMAS *Australia* played a leading part in naval activities associated with the visit, including the RAN's first review in Port Phillip. During the interwar period, RAN ships regularly visited the New Guinea mandate, the Portuguese and Dutch territories, and the islands of the South Pacific to show the flag and maintain order. This included a request in 1927 by the British government for the light cruiser HMAS *Adelaide* to conduct a punitive expedition to put down a native uprising in the British Solomon Islands. The RAN also provided essential assistance to the Australian community, including bushfire and search and rescue assistance.

In the 1930s the economic situation worldwide worsened and naval activity in Australia was drastically reduced as funding was cut. Notwithstanding this, the RAN was still involved in a range of operations other than war. In 1934,

the heavy cruiser HMAS *Australia* embarked the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester for a Royal Tour of New Zealand and the Pacific, with the heavy cruiser HMAS *Canberra* acting as an escort. The sloop HMAS *Moresby* provided assistance to Rabaul after a catastrophic volcanic eruption in 1937 that destroyed much of the city and killed over 500 people. There was also a visit to New York in 1939 by the light cruiser HMAS *Perth* to represent Australia at the World Fair, and to express gratitude for an earlier visit to Australia by ships of the United States Navy in connection with the NSW 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

In the years immediately after World War II the RAN conducted operations to prevent smuggling and illegal immigration in Japan, as well as operations to dump unwanted ammunition and explosives. The destroyer HMAS *Warramunga* visited Guadalcanal to exercise a steadying influence during a period of unrest. The RAN also intercepted Japanese fishing vessels operating without authority in the waters of the New Guinea mandate.

In 1951 HMAS *Bataan* was involved in preventing the Nationalist Chinese enforcing a blockade outside China's territorial waters, thereby illustrating the ability of warships to exercise a coercive diplomatic role. During this decade, the RAN conducted surveillance tasks around Australia, performed its first rescue operation by helicopter, and conducted anti-smuggling patrols off North Borneo. The RAN surveyed shipping lanes, conducted a successful visit to Thailand, and the frigate HMAS *Queenborough* completed a global circumnavigation to show off Australia's technical capabilities after her conversion to an anti-submarine frigate. The Tank Landing Ship HMAS *Labuan* also carried an Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition (ANARE) party to Heard Island, to claim the territory for Australia.

In 1961 and 1962 RAN ships made goodwill visits to Saigon to demonstrate Australian support for the South Vietnamese regime, and surveyed shipping routes for ore carrying vessels in the Port Hedland area. Mid-decade, the destroyer HMAS *Anzac* represented Australia at the coronation of the King of Tonga. As part of Australia's diplomatic efforts the Navy assisted overseas communities, including conducting minesweeping operations off Bougainville and building a 210ft pier on Salakan Island in Borneo. As ever, the RAN was involved in search and rescue missions, including a high-speed dash from Melbourne to Macquarie Island to rescue a seriously ill member of ANARE. Assistance was provided after serious bushfires in Tasmania, and the first foreign vessel was arrested for illegally fishing in Australian waters. The RAN



Sea Power Centre - Australia  
Department of Defence  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
SPCA.Seapower@defence.gov.au



was also involved in a two-month operation shadowing a Russian trawling vessel in the Gulf of Carpentaria, as well as shadowing Soviet ships in the waters off Australia.

In the 1970s the RAN was involved in one of the biggest peacetime disaster relief operations conducted in Australia, Operation NAVY HELP DARWIN, following the devastation of Darwin by Cyclone TRACY in December 1974. In January 1975 Navy clearance divers responded within seven hours to the Derwent Bridge disaster in Hobart. The Navy also provided disaster relief during the decade fighting bushfires around Sydney. This decade also saw a commemoration of Cook's landing, including 48 ships from ten nations. The guided missile destroyer HMAS *Hobart* completed the RAN's first global circumnavigation in 21 years. The Navy was also involved in patrol and surveillance duties in northern Australian waters, directed towards the protection of territorial waters and contiguous fishing and resource zones. Overseas, a RAN task group visited Osaka at a time when Japan was rapidly becoming Australia's major trading partner. RAN ships supported the protest against French nuclear tests in the Pacific, and RAN personnel provided assistance to the United Nations Emergency Force in the Sinai. The RAN's exercise program provided a significant presence overseas, highlighted by the commencement of the RIMPAC series of exercises and of regular bilateral naval exercises with Indonesia. The RAN also provided assistance to Indonesia through the Defence Cooperation Program, and assistance to Papua New Guinea in the form of channel clearance and cyclone relief.

The 1980s were a period of high activity for the RAN. In 1981, the Navy conducted its first visit to China in 32 years. Also in 1981, as part of an Australian task force, the aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne* deployed on an extended cruise to show the flag in the Indian Ocean. Commencing in 1981 a major fleet unit was maintained in the North West Indian Ocean to observe Soviet ship movements during the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. In December 1985 the destroyer tender HMAS *Stalwart* conducted a resupply run to the ANARE mission on Macquarie Island, when the regular Antarctic supply vessel *Nella Dan* was trapped in ice for six weeks. In response to the 1987 Defence White Paper, the RAN initiated a high profile presence in the South West Pacific region and rolling deployments to South East Asia. Importantly, the RAN was involved in a wide range of renovation and construction projects in local communities. Overseas deployments were conducted to demonstrate presence and military capability, thereby reinforcing Australia's foreign policy and strengthening defence relationships with countries in our area of primary strategic interest. The Pacific Patrol Boat project saw 22 vessels delivered to reinforce the capacity of 11 South West Pacific nations to protect their maritime resources. The RAN provided relief assistance after an earthquake in Bali, wharf construction and channel clearance in the Solomon Islands, and cyclone assistance to the Solomon Islands and Tonga. The Navy conducted patrols and provided helicopters in support of counter terrorist units for the protection of Bass Strait oil rigs. Operation MORRIS DANCE saw ships placed on alert to provide evacuation of Australian and approved foreign nationals and intervention after the 1987 military coup in Fiji, repeated in 1988 during

Operation SAILCLOTH for instability in Vanuatu. The RAN also contributed to Operation IMMUNE, an ADF operation that provided essential transport during a domestic pilots' strike.

During the 1990s the RAN continued to undertake deployments to South East Asia and the South West Pacific as a commitment to presence in our region of interest. The commitment to national surveillance remained, with many boardings and apprehensions of suspected illegal fishing and people smuggling vessels. The exercise program continued, with the RAN participating in ADF, regional and international exercises. During this period, the RAN was placed on alert to evacuate Australian and approved foreign nationals from Papua New Guinea. It also provided assistance in a range of peacekeeping and relief operations to Cambodia, Somalia, Indonesia, the Solomon Islands and East Timor. The RAN played an important role in the Maritime Interception Force in the Persian Gulf, enforcing United Nations sanctions against Iraq. The largest number of RAN survey vessels assembled since WWII took part in survey operations off Arnhem Land. In a change of pace, the RAN took part in Operation CLAMSAVER, transporting baby clams to alleviate overcrowding on the Great Barrier Reef. It was also involved in several high profile rescue operations in the Southern Ocean that attracted a large amount of media attention.

At the turn of the century, the RAN was undertaking many and varied activities spanning the globe. As well as conducting military campaigns, the RAN provided support to the Centenary of Federation Celebrations, the Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the Rugby World Cup, and a visit by the President of the United States of America. The RAN also provided assistance to East Timor, the Solomon Islands and Bougainville, as well as continuing to participate in the Maritime Interception Force in the Persian Gulf. There were also some high profile chases, in conjunction with foreign navies and other Government agencies, to intercept vessels suspected of conducting illegal activities in Australian waters. The RAN provided disaster relief to overseas communities, as well as flood relief and bushfire relief in Australia. There were also ongoing sovereignty patrols in the Southern Ocean and surveillance operations to prevent the arrival of illegal immigrants.

Over the last century or so, the RAN has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to undertake a diversity of operations other than war. It has been used diplomatically in both benign and coercive operations to support the Australian Government, as well as providing assistance and disaster relief to civil communities in Australia and overseas. The RAN has also played an increasingly important constabulary role, related to both international and domestic law, including supporting United Nations peace operations, enforcing sanctions, environmental and resource protection, counter-drug operations, and preventing illegal immigration. These few examples demonstrate how significant the RAN's operations other than war have been over the last century, and suggest their continued relevance to Australia in the future.



Sea Power Centre - Australia  
Department of Defence  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
SPCA.Seapower@defence.gov.au

