



Thursday War

By LEUT Matthew Bailey

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Introduction

A Thursday War is the colloquial name given in the Royal Navy for the weekly war-fighting and damage control exercises that are held during Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST), so named because they are usually held on a Thursday.

The aim of this event is to prove Royal Navy ships are fit to join the operational fleet by testing vessel's readiness through a series of drills and exercises. These culminate in the so-called 'Thursday War', war-fighting scenarios designed to test a ship's companies' reaction to various situations and emergencies.



Able Seaman Communication Information Systems Brodie Davis writes on a damage Control board during a Damage Control Exercise in HMAS Parramatta in preparation for a two-month deployment throughout Southeast and Northeast Asia. Photographer: LSIS Jarrod Mulvihill.

The Royal Navy use this as a means to assess the battle worthiness of a ship after a work up period, however I see benefit of implementing a 'Thursday War' into the weekly program of a Royal Australian Navy Vessel by combining internal warfare training, flying operations, weapons firings , emergency casualty control drills, and damage control exercises.

The suggestion would be to conduct a weekly 'Thursday War' that would include overlaying scenarios allowing a ship to better prepare itself for duties it may face in a day at sea. Typically a 'Thursday War' involves a range of scenarios which include the vessel undergoing simulated attacks by aircraft, missiles, and submarines; sustaining damage and casualties, and testing the crew's ability to fight fire, floods and deal with personnel injuries while underway. The exercise is designed to test the ship's operational readiness to fight in a real war situation.

The US Navy conducts a similar training that is called COMPTUEX, or Composite Training Unit Exercise, This is a rehearsal each US Navy Carrier Strike Group performs before departing for deployment. Each ship and aircraft in the battle group trains in its specialty; COMPTUEX brings

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ships together to project force as a battle group. COMPTUEX is an intermediate-level battle group exercise designed to forge together the battle group and its components into a fully functional fighting team. COMPTUEX is a critical part in the pre-deployment training cycle, and a prerequisite for the battle group's Joint Task Force Exercise.

This article proposal would be that a ship set aside half a day once a week to conduct a scenario that would develop as it would in a war like situation. For example an intelligence brief given to the crew of the growing hostilities of an opposing force would raise the threat level, the action information organisation would then start a simulated warfare serial such as an Air defence exercise with the added on complexity of conducting an Anti-air firing whilst in the simulation, this would bring in the weapons electrical department and the boatswains. With the development of the scenario the possibility of a ship being hit by a missile would result in a damage control exercise that may require an engineering casualty control drill response from the engineering department and from the bridge.

With the Royal Australian Navy proceeding on the path of Task Group operations with Plan Pelorus in action, ships could either conduct 'Thursday War' in company creating a scenario that would test both units or conduct separate internal training specific to the requirements of an individual ship.



Lieutenant Aviation Warfare Officer Lachlan Murray, left, and Able Seaman Electronics Technician Ethan Jones fight a simulated fire during a Damage Control Exercise onboard HMAS Arunta. Photographer: LSIS Jarrod Mulvihill.

There is a lot of scope to continually change the dynamics of the scenarios presented to the crew, For example situations could be moulded so that Ships could be tested to ascertain whether or not they can operate in all spheres of warfare and in boarding operations. In doing so departments would develop their response to the continually evolving challenges presented to them. A ship's crew must remain flexible and adaptable to the variety of situations that could be presented to them on any day in the Royal Australian Navy.

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The possibilities for 'Thursday War' are only to be limited by the coordinating team's imagination; Air warfare, surface warfare, sub-surface warfare, boarding operations, humanitarian response and disaster relief are all capable of escalating to a more complex level when damage control, engineering defects and task group movements are overlaid.

Every department has a requirement to achieve a set amount of training aims each year. The effect of having a weekly dynamic test would either prove a proficiency in an area or highlight a weakness that can then be addressed in a timely manner. The Action Information Organisation on board a ship is obliged to sustain capability in a variety of scenarios. The bridge must stay proficient in all degraded modes of operations and in warfare while continually provided a service to the Operations Room. The Operations Room in turn has to remain capable of fighting in all spheres of warfare.

Both Engineering Departments as well as the Logistics Department on board RAN Ships are equally responsible to maintain proficiency and capability in their own individual roles as well as contributing to whole ship evolutions. The Weapons Electrical Department has aims to meet in both defect rectification and in weapon firings, and the Marine Engineering Department has large training responsibility within its own department as well as outside especially in regards to damage control. It is essential that the Logistic Departments are prepared for the current program that the ship has been tasked with whilst maintain a capability to adapt to a changing situation.

Co-ordinating large dynamic exercise such as 'Thursday War' has the potential to give all departments an opportunity to reach training aims and develop personnel within their own department while also strengthening the working relationships with other departments. By having a predetermined time to conduct this whole ship training evolution disturbances to work would be minimised.

The effect of 'Thursday War' would give a crew the opportunity to test out a plan of action that it could implement if they were faced with overlapping serials that can often be the causes of reduced performance as personnel may be assigned a task that they don't carry out on a regular schedule. The Damage Control Instructors would gain more experience by moving away from more traditional training and into a more 'war-like scenario'.

By taking an idea that has been used by the Royal Navy as a tool to evaluate and educate members of its force, the Royal Australian Navy could modify it slightly and employ it as a training instrument for single unit training or as a multi-ship exercise on a regular basis. The potential for growth of communication flow between departments and inter-department is a large benefit that would allow opportunity to become better accustomed to the standard practices of different branches resulting in overall better performance.

The implementation of a concept of this volume would require a sizeable contribution by many different people on board a ship, however the dynamic ability of 'Thursday War' would greatly outweigh the workload required.

LEUT Matthew Bailey joined the RAN in the mid-year 2013 intake, during New Entry Officer's Course (NEOC) he was the Gun Room Mess President and was awarded the Naval Institute Prize for his efforts. Upon graduation of NEOC he posted to HMAS Watson to complete Junior Warfare application. Phase II was spent on HMAS Sydney, Phase III was on HMAS Ararat and now, after the award of his Bridge Warfare Certificate, he is an Officer of the Watch onboard HMAS Warramunga.

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