

The implications of Indo Pacific Endeavour on a Thinking, Fighting - Australian Navy.

The essence of learning from the past paves foundations for thoughts, ideas and decisions that affect the future. As much as this is true for human behaviour, it is also true for global organisations and militaries. The rich history of the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) has sowed the seeds to what has now grown into the high-performance Navy of today. In the Second World War at just eighteen years old, Seaman Edward ‘Teddy’ Sheean strapped his wounded body to a machine gun, shot down two planes and continued to fire until he was beneath the water¹. Courage and Loyalty are seen in the actions of Teddy and to this day the RAN ingrains these values into their Sailors and Officers through initial military training. Chief Petty Officer Jonathon ‘Buck’ Rodgers sang hymns and led prayer for HMAS *Voyager* sailors escaping from the forward café until he finally said “*Well, the waters beaten us*”² and passed away along with eighty two of his ship mates. The actions of Chief Rodgers displayed self-sacrifice, composure and excellent decision making in times of crisis which now provide leadership foundations for emerging leaders of the RAN. It is also through historical tragedies such as the HMAS *Westralia* disaster where four crew³ tragically lost their lives in a catastrophic engine room fire. This event had significant implications on the RAN in lessons of safety, engineering, logistics assurance and adequate training. A plethora of historical events have shaped the Navy of today. However, arguably the most significant modern historical event which has and will continue to have enormous implications for the future of the RAN is not the actions of an individual but the creation and beginning of Indo Pacific Endeavour (IPE).

The Indo-Pacific was a key topic of the 2016 Defence White Paper, mentioned a staggering 70 times and labelled the third strategic defence interest as a “*stable indo-pacific region and a rules-based global order*”⁴ This determination initiated rigorous planning and ultimately the conceptualisation of IPE; which would soon become a history making event for the RAN and Australian Defence Force (ADF) only twelve months later. In September 2017 HMAS *Adelaide* was accompanied throughout an eleven week deployment by HMA ships *Melbourne, Darwin, Toowoomba, Parramatta, and Sirius*, making history as the largest coordinated task group of such advanced capabilities in over 40 years⁵. 1300 personnel from across the RAN, Army and Royal Australian Air Force executed an immensely successful set of community engagements and exercises in over twelve countries. The implications that IPE has had on the RAN directly impacts the direction of the RAN and its strategic goals in the future. The Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Michael Noonan, AO, RAN dictates the Navy’s cultural intent as; A Thinking Navy, A Fighting Navy, An Australian Navy⁶. The inception of the IPE directly affects each facet of the Navy’s Cultural intent which is outlined at depth throughout this essay.

¹ Australian War Memorial, ‘Ordinary Seaman Edward (Teddy) Sheean’, AWM, 2018, Viewed on 19 June 2019, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/P10676787>.

² T. Frame, *The Cruel Legacy: The HMAS Voyager Tragedy*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2005, p.2.

³ Navy, ‘CN Address at the 20th Anniversary of the fire on HMAS *Westralia*’ 5 May 2018, viewed 19 June 2019, <http://www.navy.gov.au/media-room/publications/chief-navy-speeches-20th-anniversary-fire-hmas-westralia>.

⁴ Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence White Paper*, 2016, p.70.

⁵ Department of Defence Ministers, *Task Group deployment to strengthen regional military cooperation*, 4 September 2017, viewed 19 June 2019, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-releases/task-group-deployment-strengthen-regional-military-cooperation>.

⁶ The Australian Naval Institute, *CN Publishes Statement of Intent*, ANI, 30 August 2018, <https://navalinstitute.com.au/cn-publishes-statement-of-intent/>.

Implications on a Thinking Navy.

The implications of the IPE are not only evidenced in tangible outcomes such as humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and cross military training but also in enhanced intellectual capital. Sailors and officers alike have shifted their focus and mindsets from deployments and events happening in the Middle East towards the Indo-Pacific region. Because of IPE17 and its continuation sailors and officers now discuss, debate and ultimately plan for the next IPE by strategizing about how the RAN can best leverage its assets to achieve strategic objectives across all levels. This change in perspective and thinking has prompted members to understand and engage with aspects of geopolitics and the importance of protecting Australia's strategic interests. The implication that the IPE has had on achieving a thinking Navy has been critical to shaping the future of RAN leaders mindsets. More than ever sailors are thinking of the bigger picture, their situational awareness has grown beyond task specific thinking to the why, how and what their contribution is at a strategic level. These decisions and thought processes are the direct result of members being involved in activities with significant importance to the Australian Economy.

Bigger picture thinking has long been a key driver in employee motivation and empowerment across modern organisations. Inspiring Sailors through projecting the bigger picture is highly effective, often employees tend to go the extra mile, feeling compelled to achieve and do more through their organisations impact on the world. Inspiration goes hand in hand with productivity, when engaged and highly inspired Sailors don't waste time with indecision because they understand the goals, objectives and strategic intent of the Navy as a whole. IPE provides a collaborative and deeply moving experience for the Sailor, engaging with and seeing first-hand what their impact as an individual and a Navy can be. This behaviour generates a culture of passion, focus and leadership. Importantly, the bigger picture enables innovation, Navy is an advocate of innovation and development through technology, management and processes.

Research by Imperative in their 2019 *Workforce Purpose Index Pathways to Fulfillment at Work*⁷ report claims it is statistically impossible to be fulfilled in life if you aren't fulfilled at work. In their 2015 Workforce Purpose Index it was also found that 28% of the workforce has a purpose mindset where work remains a key source of meaning in their life and having a positive impact on others and the world is highly important⁸. The RAN, through IPE17 is in a unique position to provide an opportunity to Sailors and Officers in partaking in hands on roles within humanitarian training and engagement efforts across the Indo Pacific region. Reports of community engagement consisting of music, dancing, learning and education⁹ has enriched the modern Sailor and Officer which also offers a human perspective on what began as a fundamentally strategically important event.

Implications on a Fighting Navy.

IPE17 was a significant feat for the RAN, as stated for the first time in over 30 years a lethal task group deployed headed by the Landing Helicopter Dock HMAS *Adelaide*. The lethality of the Australian Navy was on full display - it is a fighting Navy. Admiral James Stavridis stresses the importance of inter militarily operations and exercises in his book; *Sea Power*:

⁷ Imperative 2019, '2019 Workforce Purpose Index', *Imperative*, viewed 17th August, <https://www.2019wpi.com/>

⁸ Imperative 2015, '2015 Workforce Purpose Index', *Imperative*, viewed 16th August, https://cdn.imperative.com/media/public/Purpose_Index_2015.

⁹ T Smith, 'Smiles the key to a successful IPE19', *Navy Daily*, May 2019, viewed 16th August 2019, <http://news.navy.gov.au/en/May2019/IPE19/5243/Smiles-the-key-to-a-successful-IPE19.htm>

*The history and Geopolitics of the World's Oceans*¹⁰ Admiral Stavridis denotes that maintaining consistent lines of communication and joint activities increases confidence throughout militaries and enhances prospective cooperation in future events. The Thucydides Trap, a dangerous yet relevant theory highlights that when intentions are not understood and sea power is misjudged, it will inevitably lead to armed conflict, such was the case for World War II. In the past 500 years there have been sixteen cases of a ruling power being threatened by a rising power and of these events twelve ended with war¹¹. Diplomacy is paramount in avoiding conflict and inadvertently spiralling into the Thucydides Trap. This multinational, multi service engagement method of building relations within the first IPE assisted in the avoidance of the catastrophic implications of Australia doing nothing at all.

The Indonesian government concurs with this perception. Due to the success of IPE17 and proceeding years the Indonesian strategy has adopted a shift towards increased comfort in enhancing interoperability engagements across nations, particularly with Australia¹². This shift in relations and relationships is significant and paramount in maintaining a force that is lethal as well as cooperative and globally recognised. IPE provides an opportunity to showcase the capabilities that the Australian Navy possess, not just in fire power, sea power and dominance but in joint collaboration and interoperability. Near region operations such as IPE will remain at the forefront of thought for many members of the RAN, the implications of considering current and future capabilities within a fighting context is vital in the successful sustainment and delivery of future RAN vessels and fighting power.

Implications on an Australian Navy.

A \$1.6 trillion-dollar economy¹³ depends on an effective Australian Navy. The Australian Navy has diverse and complex international trade marine resources that rely on the freedom of trade routes, shipping lanes, multinational relationships and communication. A vigilant and agile Australian Navy will bring together and strengthen what is a changing and complex region of the world. With professional and empowered Sailors and Officers the capabilities of the RAN can be tested and demonstrated for the world to see and understand. The implications of IPE on Australia came with commentary and assumptions from foreign countries. China was reported to view IPE as provocative and have since stated their confusion as to the necessity in choice of region¹⁴. Although these relations are still developing, the comments remain a crucial reminder in the importance of transparency and communication on a domestic and global scale.

The Australian public is kept well-informed of international engagements and operations that the Australian Defence Force participates in, this facilitates a sense of interest, excitement and eagerness to understand Australia's stance and actions taken on the global stage. Honour, Honesty, Integrity, Courage and Loyalty define what is the Australian Navy of today, this encompasses not only the Sailors and Officers that represent the best of Australian society but

¹⁰ J. Stavridis, *Sea Power: The history and Geopolitics of the World's Oceans*, Penguin Press, USA, 2017.

¹¹ The President and Fellows of Harvard College, '*Thucydides's Trap*', 2019, viewed 16th August 2019, <https://www.belfercenter.org/thucydides-trap/case-file>

¹² P. Varghese, 'The geopolitics of Australia's India economic strategy', *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, October 2018, viewed 16th August 2019.

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *1345.0 - Key Economic Indicators, Summary*, August 2019, viewed 16th August 2019, <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/1345.0?opendocument?opendocument#&from-banner=LN>.

¹⁴ B. Birtles 2017, 'China says Australia disrupting 'stability and peace' in South China Sea; build-up on islands continues', *ABC News*, 15th December, viewed 16th August 2019. < <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-15/china-blames-australia-for-disrupting-stability-and-peace/9264190>>

the communities and families of which they come from. As an Australian Navy, an overwhelming sense of pride runs through the veins of those that serve and with operations such as IPE these are the individuals that deliver Australia's greatest capability – people. Without the maintenance, support and management provided by elite and capable support and technical staff the RAN could not have executed such a highly effective and important operation. IPE was a testament to Defence capability and material worthiness achieved through collaboration across nations and defence industry.

Concluding remarks.

Teddy Sheean, Chief Rodgers - Their names live on forever as our ships, establishments, awards and monuments are named after them and other individuals that have forged a legacy that lives on, never to be forgotten. The sacrifices that these maritime brothers and sisters have made has directly been responsible for the culture of the RAN today. In a more modern context, Indo Pacific Endeavour as a historical event has now impacted on the future culture of the RAN and the Australian economy. IPE has shaped the geopolitical space and Australia's influence within the Indo Pacific region which is arguably one of the most important strategic events of the 21st century.

The RAN has highly skilled sailors and officers that operate in dynamic and complex environments fostering an environment that relies on a thinking Navy. The Chief of Navy has quoted directly that the priority and importance of the RAN contributes to "*current and future security and prosperity of Australia*". IPE provided an opportunity to display the reward of retaining an abundance of high calibre sailors and officers. The sea power and lethality on exhibition denotes an equipped and reliable force which remains and showcases a Fighting Navy. With empowered, proud and highly trained Sailors and Officers, IPE has paved the way for an environment that embodies a thinking, fighting – Australian Navy.