

When hostilities began, there were 43 support helicopters in theatre: 19 Puma and 12 Chinook aircraft from the Royal Air Force, together with 12 Royal Navy Sea King helicopters detached from duties with the Royal Marine Commando Brigade. The Support Helicopter (SH) Force was employed in direct support of 1 (BR) Armoured Division, their primary allocated task being casualty evacuation. However, in the event the force operated in a variety of support roles, including the ferrying of prisoners of war back to allied internment camps. Before the start of the land offensive, the SH Force was engaged in Divisional training exercises before moving, in mid-January, to its Forward Operating Bases to the south and east of Hafar al Batin. Once the land battle began, the force continued to support the Armoured Division into Iraq and then into Kuwait. When hostilities ended, the helicopters had flown a total of 2,358 sorties and carried more than 1,261 tonnes of equipment and stores, and 17,773 troops and prisoners of war. Fortunately, they were not required much for casualty evacuation. The SH Force overcame many unique engineering and operational challenges to become a most effective support element of the British land forces.

The Royal Air Force Regiment provided the SH Force with integral sections of Gunners and a Landrover-borne defensive element. As the land offensive approached, reinforcements were moved up from Muharraq and the majority of No. 1 Squadron (RAF Regiment)'s armour, consisting of Scorpion and Spartan vehicles, was flown from Germany into the desert strip of Al Qaysumah. The Squadron re-grouped quickly, crossed the breach into Iraq with 1 (BR) Armoured Division and ended the war astride the Kuwait-Basra highway. The Royal Air Force Regiment strength in theatre rose to 1,000, representing 20 per cent of the Royal Air Forces's deployed manpower. As in previous conflicts, they responded rapidly to unforeseen circumstances and demonstrated a characteristic flexibility in performing a wide diversity of tasks.

In this section on the air campaign, I have dwelt, quite properly, on the operational aspects. However, I was also impressed by the achievements of logistics staffs in support of over 160 aircraft of 16 different types deployed in theatre. The establishment of large stockpiles of aircraft spares, weapons and fuel, and regular air resupply, ensured that there were no significant logistics constraints on our air operations. Moreover, the high availability and serviceability rates of our aircraft reflected the outstanding efforts of our ground crews and all those in a lengthy supply chain. In addition, I commend our engineering staffs for the extensive preparation work that they conducted in the early months of the Operation. As our aircraft had been optimised for war in the Central Region of Europe, they needed to be modified and enhanced to fit them for operations in the desert. A total of 242 different modifications were embodied in 303 aircraft, at a cost of over 300,000 service manhours.

#### NAVAL OPERATIONS

Once again, it is important to put the United Kingdom contribution into proper perspective. While we provided the second largest naval force after the United States, our ships represented less than 10 per cent of the total Coalition strength. Nevertheless, in some areas the Royal Navy played a proportionately much greater part than our numerical presence might imply; this necessitated full integration with the predominant USN and the transfer of tactical control of a number of our ships to USN Task Group Commanders. It is noteworthy that only the USN and Royal Navy took part in offensive maritime operations.

The overall plan envisaged that the Coalition naval force would move progressively further north to dominate the extreme northern Gulf, neutralise the Iraqi Navy, and conduct MCM operations and Naval Gunfire Support in preparation for the arrival of the main amphibious force off Kuwait. The Royal Navy's initial contribution was to provide two Type 42 destroyers, HM Ships GLOUCESTER and CARDIFF, which formed an important element of the forward air defence barrier protecting the three US Carrier Battle Groups, USS RANGER, ROOSEVELT and MIDWAY and their escorts, in the central Gulf. The Type 42s also supported surface surveillance operations in the north. The Iraqis had the capability to attack our ships with stand-off missiles launched from aircraft, ships and coastal batteries, which led SNOME to operate the remainder of his ships under the umbrella of the layered Coalition air defence established throughout the Gulf.

As the campaign progressed, the Primary Casualty Reception Ship, RFA ARGUS, was stationed close enough to the forwardmost ships to balance timely medical and airborne logistic support against acceptable risk, and was escorted by SNOME's Flagship, HMS LONDON, for added protection against air attack. It was from this position that RFA ARGUS was able to provide immediate medical assistance to the casualties sustained when USS TRIPOLI suffered mine damage. The rest of the British Underway Replenishment

Group of RFAs ORANGELEAF, FORT GRANGE and OLNA, together with the Forward Repair Ship RFA DILIGENCE, remained further down threat in the Gulf in company with HMS BRAZEN, while RFA RESOURCE and three LSLs SIR PERCIVAL, SIR TRISTAM, and SIR BEDIVERE held the reserve ammunition stocks for 1 (BR) Armoured Division. The MCM Group consisting of the Hunt Class vessels ATHERSTONE, CATTISTOCK, HURWORTH, DULVERTON and LEDBURY, together with their command and engineering support ships, HMS HERALD and RFA SIR GALAHAD, were poised in the southern Gulf. Subsequently, these supporting echelons moved further north to maintain the cohesion of the force.

The non-appearance of the Iraqi Air Force was as apparent as sea as elsewhere, and the only airborne attack to be mounted in the direction of naval units was on 24 January when Saudi fighters successfully engaged two Floggers and one Mirage FI before they could launch their missiles. Consequently, while HMS GLOUCESTER and HMS CARDIFF contributed fully to air defence in the front line, it was in the prosecution of anti-surface warfare that the Royal Navy made most impact in the early stages of the conflict. Although only a small element of the total Coalition surveillance effort, Lynx helicopters from Royal Navy escorts flew nearly 600 sorties in the northern Gulf on search and interdiction operations against Iraqi naval units.

The first anti-surface action occurred on 29 January when RAF Jaguars detected Iraqi fast patrol boats heading off the Kuwaiti coast as part of a combined operation to attack the port of Al Khafji. Lynx from HM ships GLOUCESTER, CARDIFF and BRAZEN were launched to locate and engage the enemy flotilla with Sea Skua missiles, leaving two sunk or damaged and scattering the remainder which were attacked by fixed-wing aircraft as they sought shelter along the coast. Over the next two days, our Lynx successfully pressed home further attacks against Exocet-armed patrol craft. These incidents, together with continued Coalition attacks on enemy units during the subsequent 'Battle of Bubiyan Channel', effectively broke the back of Iraqi naval resistance and led the allied Naval Commander to declare Coalition sea control of the Gulf on 8 February. Thereafter, Iraqi units made only isolated attempts to operate at sea, all of which drew attacks from the air, with more successful engagements by Royal Navy helicopters, including four by the Lynx embarked in HMS MANCHESTER which took our tally of sunk or disabled enemy ships to at least ten.

HMS MANCHESTER had arrived in the Gulf at the end of January with HM Ships BRILLIANT, EXETER and BRAVE as part of Group YANKEE to augment and subsequently relieve the ships of Group X-RAY. A minor but nonetheless notable aspect of HMS BRILLIANT's arrival was the inclusion in her complement of members of the Women's Royal Naval Service who were serving in combatant ships in a war zone for the first time.

The greatest threat to our ships was posed by mines. Evidence of the scale of Iraqi mine stocks was well known from our involvement in clearance operations after the Iran/Iraq war, and we fully expected a very large number of both moored and more sophisticated ground mines to be laid in preparation for this war. In the Gulf itself, the presence of this weapon, like the potential threat of chemical and biological munitions as well as the residual threat from air launched anti-ship missiles, had to be considered in every aspect of naval operations. Ships and aircraft frequently spotted free floating mines throughout the Gulf, some of which demanded ships to take swift avoiding action before specialist Explosive Ordnance Disposal teams could deal with them.

The primary role of the Coalition MCM Force was to conduct pre-cursor mine clearance operations off the Kuwaiti coastline so that the USN battleships MISSOURI and WISCONSIN could close to bombard shore defences in preparation for a possible amphibious landing by the US Marine Corps. The initial mine clearance operations were related to a raid on Faylakah Island east of Kuwait City, codenamed Operation DESERT SLASH, which represented an integral part of the overall campaign deception plan. Early on 14 February, HMS HERALD and the five Royal Navy Minehunters met up with the USN MCM Group north of Bahrain to transit towards the operation area. Based on available intelligence, the optimum route to the designated Battleship Fire Support Area (BBFSA) had been identified, but was necessarily close to enemy held territory and so put ships at risk not only from the mines themselves but also from shore missile sites. Meanwhile, RFAs ARGUS, DILIGENCE, SIR GALAHAD and OLNA moved forward to provide close support for the Group. HM Ships LONDON, BRAVE and EXETER afforded air defence protection for these high value units, while HMS GLOUCESTER was assigned to escort USS MISSOURI. Clearance operations started on 15 February and were conducted without incident until the morning of 18 February when USS TRIPOLI, the USN MCM Command