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DEFENCE NEWS

Royal Australian Navy in review January to July 2011

The Royal Australian Navy has had a busy start to the first half of 2011, with ongoing operational commitments, exercise participation, forward planning and training to prepare the fleet for the exciting future capabilities which will be realised over the next five years.

Operation Slipper

In February, the guided-missile frigate (FFG), HMAS *Melbourne*, completed Operation Slipper Rotation 24, returning to Australia after a successful 6-month deployment to the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO). HMAS *Stuart* (FFH) replaced *Melbourne*. During her 184-day deployment, *Stuart* made a significant contribution to counter-piracy activities in the Gulf of Aden. Her most notable achievements included rescuing three Yemeni fishermen held hostage by Somali pirates off the Horn of Africa; and disabling an unoccupied pirate skiff by live fire using her 12.7mm Mini-Typhoon. In May, the fast helicopter frigate (FFH), HMAS *Toowoomba*, sailed from Fremantle to take over Operation Slipper duties.

Other Operations

In January, the Navy went to the aid of the people of Queensland in the aftermath of the state's devastating flood disaster. Navy helicopters conducted numerous

rescues. Survey ships (SML), HMAS *Shepparton* and HMAS *Paluma*, joined the mine-hunter catamaran (MHC), HMAS *Huon*, in waters around Brisbane and Moreton Bay to help re-open a shipping channel to deep-draught commercial vessels. A clearance diving element identified hazards in the river in a sustained operation in challenging conditions. Several hundred Navy personnel, predominantly engineer sailors from the Fleet Support Unit, were also deployed to assist in vital flood clean-up work in communities throughout south-east Queensland.

In April, the Australian commander of Combined Task Force 150, Commodore Gregory Sammut, and his 26-member fleet battle staff returned to Australia following a 6-month deployment to the MEAO, where he commanded ships and aircraft from several nations. CTF150 promoted maritime security to counter terrorist activities, in an area spanning more than 2 million square miles.

Capability Enhancements

In February, the Navy gained an exciting glimpse into its future with the launch of the hull of its first helicopter landing dock (amphibious ship) – LHD 01; and the keel was laid for the second – LHD 02.

The landing platforms amphibious (LPA), HMA Ships *Manoora* and *Kanimbla*, remained in an operational pause during early 2011. *Manoora* decommissioned at the end of May, following 17 years of distinguished service.

In May, Navy also took lease of the icebreaker *Aurora Australis* from P&O to provide an amphibious transport capability while the landing ship heavy (LSH), HMAS *Tobruk*, underwent maintenance in dry-dock. *Tobruk* is scheduled to re-enter service at the end of August.

In April, the Government announced that Australia had been successful in its bid to acquire the United Kingdom's Bay class amphibious ship, *Largs Bay*, at a cost of £65 million. Ex Royal Fleet Auxiliary, *Largs Bay* will be delivered in late 2011, and she is expected to enter service with the Navy in early 2012. The first elements of her crew deployed to the United Kingdom to commence mandatory competency training in June.

In June, the Government announced the acquisition of 24 MH-60R Seahawk 'Romeo' naval combat helicopters, which will replace the current fleet of 16 Seahawk S-70B-2 helicopters. The Romeos will provide the air-to-surface strike capability which was to have been provided by the Seasprite programme. The first two helicopters will arrive in mid-2014 for testing and evaluation with operations expected to commence in mid-2015.

In June, the upgraded HMAS *Sydney* (FFG) became the 'first of class' ship to conduct acceptance testing of her recently acquired Standard Block 2 Missile (SM-2). HMAS *Perth* (FFH) joined *Sydney* at the Pacific Missile Range and used the opportunity to test and evaluate her anti-ship missile defence upgrade.

The auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel, HMAS *Success*, returned to Australia in May after undergoing double-hulling conversion work in Singapore to meet International Maritime Organisation standards.

Key Events

Early 2011 has been marked by Navy's 100-year birthday celebrations. In February, the Perth Mint launched a silver coin tribute to commemorate 100 years since the granting of the 'Royal' prefix to the Royal Australian Navy (RAN). In June, Australia Post commemorated the milestone by releasing a series of 'then and now' stamps featuring Navy ships and personnel from past and present.

In March, the Bridge Training Facility at HMAS *Watson* officially launched its new state-of-the-art bridge simulator. The new high-technology simulator uses computerised virtual-reality software to replicate a working bridge, complete with a 240-degree view of a computer-generated two-dimensional screen. The simulator replicates the full range of maritime operations and can be reconfigured to match most classes of ship in the Navy's current fleet. New functionality includes boat operations, interdiction, and docking and beaching evolutions pertinent to the new landing helicopter dock ships.

The RAN School of Survivability and Ship Safety officially opened its new Damage Control Training Unit in June. The state-of-the-art facility is the best in the world, allowing trainees to learn fire fighting, flood damage control and toxic hazard escape and evacuation techniques in a simulated ship-borne environment, complete with hydraulic rolling, pitching, and realistic flooding situations.

Major Exercises

The first half of 2011, saw the new *Triton* exercise series commence with *Triton Storm 1-11*, the first major fleet work-up period conducted in February off Jervis Bay. Five ships and approximately 600 personnel conducted live firings, seamanship exercises, boarding training, anti-aircraft exercises, and mine hunting during the period.

The major exercise was built upon in March when Exercise *Triton Storm 2-11* was held in the Western Australia Exercise Area. Around 1200 officers and sailors from the Australian and New Zealand navies participated in the exercise, along with aircraft from the Australian and New Zealand air forces.

The Triton Series is an important evolution in Navy's training calendar, aligning with the Fleet operating concept, which seeks to concentrate ship in-company time so training outcomes can be aggressively pursued and professional development opportunities exploited.

Headquarters, Australian Fleet