



The Expeditionary Sailor in the War on Terror

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AMONG THE MANY ODDITIES on display in my home office is a print depicting Captain A. K. Wilson, Royal Navy, engaged in a hand-to-hand fight with an enemy warrior during Britain's 1884-1885 Sudan War, an action for which he would be awarded the Victoria Cross. I often have wondered how a Royal Navy officer—and a captain, no less—found himself in the desert fighting Arab tribesmen.

In February 2003, I found myself serving ashore in the Iraqi and Kuwaiti deserts. At the time, I was attached to the Navy's "Deep Blue" team, a unit created to develop innovative, transformational concepts for naval operations.¹ Although my permanent duty station was the Pentagon, I had been assigned temporary additional duties with the staff of U.S. Naval Forces, Central Command (NAVCENT), headquartered in Bahrain. Immediately after arriving in theater, I became NAVCENT's liaison officer to the Coalition ground component (Army) commander, a position I filled throughout the combat phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). This posting, which took me to Kuwait and Iraq, caused me to reflect upon what the Navy could, and should, be contributing to the ongoing war in Iraq and the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).

While I will offer examples from my own experiences in the Middle East, my purpose isn't to tell a personal story, but to put forward ideas on how the Navy might make broader contributions to ongoing operations in that troubled region and on other battlegrounds in the war against terrorism. My recommendations will lack the drama of Captain Wilson's heroic conduct. But, between his time and ours—and throughout the centuries that preceded both of us—there is a common heritage of Navy personnel participating in operations in the littorals and ashore.

Historical examples of Sailors engaged in similar missions include America's early 19th century war with the Barbary pirates of North Africa, the deployment of Royal Navy gunners at the Battle of Ladysmith during the Boer War, the Yangtze River patrol that began in 1854 and lasted until 1942 (best known through the book and movie *The Sand Pebbles*), and Operation Market Time in Vietnam, to name but a few.

With its expeditionary culture rooted in its founding and cultivated throughout its history, the Navy always possessed an inherent flexibility that allowed it to be responsive in a variety of combat and related missions. More recently, in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) as well as through all stages of OIF, Navy personnel were deployed to serve as liaison officers, planners, logisticians, and engineers. They also provided security, intelligence, weather, medical, clerical, and other services. Their

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skills, mobility, and agility made them particularly valuable to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) commanders.

Expeditionary Missions

Many essential missions in Iraq and in the war on terrorism are well suited to the capabilities of the Navy and its expeditionary Sailors. These missions aren't limited to the important and more familiar contributions made by SEALs and Seabees, or to strike missions flown from carriers or launched from surface platforms. The Navy should consider what it can provide across a broader sweep of operational requirements falling outside its commonly accepted roles.

Let us consider three examples of Navy contributions to operations in Iraq—examples that focus on defending that nation's vital, yet vulnerable, oil infrastructure.

Oil terminal security. On 24 April 2004, in the northern Persian Gulf, two Iraqi oil terminals, known collectively as OPLATs (oil platforms), were attacked by an undetermined number of bomb-laden suicide boats.² Fortunately, alert Coalition maritime forces disrupted the attacks, although two Sailors and one Coast Guardsman were tragically killed. In 2004, over 90 percent of Iraq's oil revenues were earned from exports delivered through those terminals. Months before the April attacks, the Coalition Maritime Force (CMF) commander in the Gulf had recognized their vulnerabilities and acted decisively to strengthen their defenses. In the days immediately following these attacks, a concerted effort was initiated to ensure the security of the OPLATs. In partnership with Deep Blue, the CMF commander sought out additional new technologies to strengthen platform defenses. Naval personnel rapidly identified and brought surveillance and protective capabilities into theater for installation on the terminals and for use by maritime boarding parties. The mission had a special urgency, and the Navy pursued it with appropriate seriousness and determination.

Through the summer and autumn of 2003, OPLAT defense was the responsibility of the Ground Force Commander in Iraq. But, he lacked



A U.S. Navy Sailor mans a watch post on Khawr Al Arnaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT) in the Persian Gulf, 11 November 2005. The terminal, located off the coast of Iraq, is one of two major platforms that export the majority of the country's oil.

U.S. Navy

the necessary tools and resources. This required the Navy to assess the OPLAT's vulnerabilities and provide appropriate defense assets. When the task of protecting the OPLATs was turned over to the maritime commander in the region, his on-scene commander, a Navy captain, assembled a combination of U.S. and Coalition Navy and Coast Guard surface and supporting ships, Marines, Iraqi security guards, Navy Mobile Security Detachments, and Special Operations Forces to provide for their defense. A similar composite maritime task force had not been assembled since Operation Market Time in 1965.

Oil security ashore. It was clear that reinforcing only one section of the network would cause the enemy to direct attention toward less guarded locations. Of particular concern was the vulnerability of those sites ashore that fed oil to the platforms at sea. Sensing that the same problems found on the OPLATs—poor material condition and lack of adequate defenses—existed throughout Iraq, the Navy began to consider what it could quickly contribute to assist in the protection and restoration of those sites.

The Coalition Provisional Authority and Oil Ministry needed a thorough survey of Iraq's oil infrastructure to appraise the condition of equipment and facilities and to establish priorities for repair and reconstruction. This type of work did

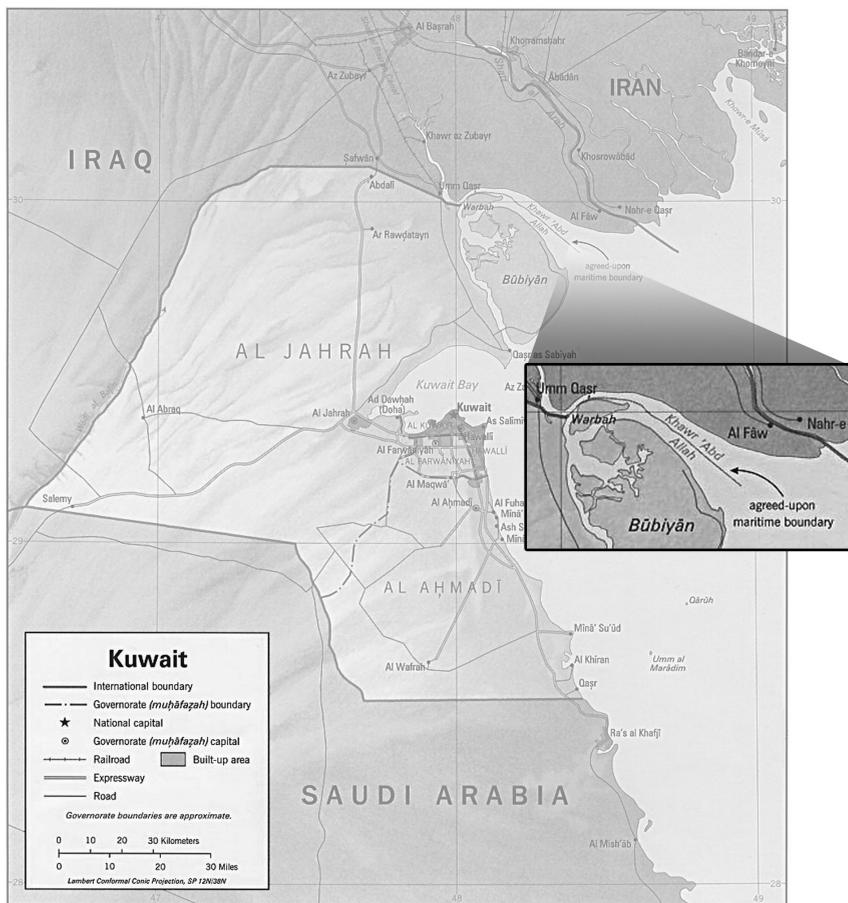
not necessarily demand engineers; it simply needed someone with the know-how to conduct inspections and the ability to evaluate operational opportunities and vulnerabilities. In May and June of 2004, Navy personnel from Allied Naval Forces Central Europe were actively engaged in such surveys on Iraq's Al Faw Peninsula. As veterans of innumerable Propulsion Examinations, Combat System Reviews, and other material inspections, who in the military is better at inspecting systems and putting together restoration and repair plans than Navy Surface Warfare Officers? Sailors more commonly engage in mechanical rather than civil engineering (with the notable exception of the Seabees), but there's a common engineering mindset that can offer solutions to the problems of post-combat reconstruction.

Having completed its inspection tour of the Al Faw Peninsula, the team proceeded to Baghdad where it presented its report on the state of the southern pipeline, complete with photographs, to the Coalition military commander responsible for infrastructure protection throughout Iraq. The photos showed damaged, severely corroded, or missing components and equipment. No doubt similar conditions existed throughout the country. Although the survey was cursory, it was persuasive, inspiring Coalition leaders to take more aggressive corrective and protective action.

Coastal security. Complicating the challenge of protecting the vital flow of oil was the more difficult task of managing the battle hand-off space between the predominately British Army ground forces ashore and the predominately U.S. Navy forces at sea. The Navy commander on-scene (the same officer responsible for defending the OPLATs) devoted considerable attention to this issue. For example, the insurgents who planned and executed the attacks on the OPLATs did not execute all their plans at sea. They lived,

planned, and assembled needed equipment ashore from support bases on the Al Faw Peninsula. It quickly became apparent that the surest way to protect the offshore infrastructure was to hunt the terrorists down before they put to sea and became a direct threat. This required thorough, ongoing land-sea coordination between forces. The naval commander had to work from a common doctrine that used the same terminology as his onshore Coalition counterpart.

In a similar vein, the ground and maritime commanders were challenged to protect shipping bound for Iraq's major export ports, Umm Qasr and Az Zubayr. Both ports are located approximately 50 miles inland along the Khawr 'Abd Allah Channel (see map), an exposed, vulnerable channel in need of constant dredging. Proper protection of this channel requires coordination between forces afloat and forces along the banks. This might not appear to be difficult, but it is. Waterborne naval patrols can easily mistake friendly forces ashore



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for the enemy—and vice versa—with the obvious potential for disastrous results.

A need for proper boats, weapons, detection devices, and communications gear compounded the inherent difficulty of these missions. However, the greatest problem wasn't equipment, but the lack of a common doctrine on how to coordinate and conduct these types of operations. The Navy has a responsibility to the Nation to learn how to perform this mission. This means more than simply investing in the required resources. It requires developing doctrine and training to a standard for operating boats and other vessels in inland waterways in cooperation with ground forces ashore.

Going Forward

It is not my purpose to put forward a comprehensive list of what Sailors are capable of providing in support of inland and littoral combat operations. My objective is to raise the issue for discussion. The Navy has much to contribute in the way of coastal and riverine warfare, support to Special Operations Forces, intelligence, and maritime intercept operations.

The Navy does a lot already, but can do more. To that end, the Director of the Navy Staff has published a memorandum titled "Implementation of Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Guidance—Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) Capabilities," dated 6 July 2005. In it, the former CNO directed several actions to expand the Navy's capabilities to prosecute the GWOT, among them the establishment of a riverine

force in both the active and reserve components, the formation of a civil affairs battalion, the creation of a Navy Expeditionary Sailor battalion concept, and the development of a Navy Expeditionary Training Team concept.

Sailors not only have specialized skills which could be put to excellent (if non-traditional) use, but also possess a core set of talents that our Nation sorely needs in order to successfully prosecute the ground portion of the GWOT. Lest anyone doubt that the Expeditionary Sailor can offer something of value to ground combat operations, I submit the following observation from the Battle of Lady-smith: "Upon the height thus won General Buller [Lieutenant General Sir Redvers Buller, the British Army commander] planted his powerful artillery. The naval 12-pounders were stationed behind sandbag defenses, which enabled them to defy the enemy's projectiles."³

The U.S. Navy clearly has important capabilities to contribute. The expeditionary mission is worth embracing. **MR**

NOTES

1. Former U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Vern Clarke created Deep Blue shortly after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on America. Its initial mission was to develop innovative, transformational concepts for maritime combat operations. Since then, it has participated in a wide range of naval missions such as developing the Expeditionary Strike Force and Fleet Response Plan concepts and identifying Navy operational lessons learned from OEF and OIF.

2. Neither the Khawr Al-Amaya oil terminal nor Al-Basra oil terminal is an oil well. Oil is piped underwater from the mainland to the terminals, then loaded onto ships for export.

3. Herbert Wrigley Wilson, *With the Flag to Pretoria; A History of the Boer War of 1899-1900*, vol. 2 (London: Harmsworth Brothers, Ltd., 1901), 449.

On Deck in the November-December *Military Review*

- ▶ Richard Russell—*Military Planning for a Middle East Stockpiled with Nuclear Weapons*
- ▶ Lieutenant General John F. Kimmons—*Transforming Army Intelligence*
- ▶ Lieutenant Colonel Gregory Wilson—*JTF-510, OEF Philippines: A Tutorial on How to Succeed in COIN*