

NAVAL STAFF HISTORY

MIDDLE EAST  
OPERATIONS

JORDAN / LEBANON - 1958

KUWAIT - 1961

1968

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Jordan / Lebanon - 1958

Kuwait - 1961

*September 1968*

*By Command of The Defence Council*

*J. Durnitt*  

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# 1958 Naval Operations

### BACKGROUND TO EVENTS

1. The miscarriage of the Anglo-French attack on Egypt in 1956 had left the whole Middle East in a state of instability owing to the resultant collapse of British prestige and influence in the area. Prior to the Suez operations, Great Britain had been the patron of the Baghdad Pact (Turkey, Iraq, Persia, Pakistan, Great Britain), strongly supported by the ultra-conservative and pro-western Government of Iraq dominated by Nuri-es-Said, and had been linked to the Kingdom of Jordan in the role of protector by the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty.
2. Combined with her protective role in the sheikhdoms of the Arabian Coast and Persian Gulf, this had made her the leading western influence in the Middle East. The attack on Egypt, however, with its apparent favouring of Israel, had been an affront to the whole Arab world. The loss of British prestige occasioned by the Anglo-French withdrawal under Russian threats and American and United Nations opposition had damaged the position of Britain's chief Arab supporter, Nuri-es-Said, who now appeared to be not merely Britain's toady, but Britain's dupe.
3. It had also made it necessary for King Hussein of Jordan, unenthusiastically supported on his throne by a government tending towards support for President Nasser's schemes for a union of Arab states under Egyptian leadership, to announce his intention to abrogate the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty under which he accepted financial aid without which his kingdom could not continue to exist.
4. Nuri-es-Said had found himself obliged to propose Britain's ejection from the Baghdad Pact. British influence over the Arab world, hitherto dominating, was in almost total eclipse. Its replacement became a feature of the East-West cold war. Egypt and Syria turned towards Russia for aid in support of President Nasser's ambition to head a union of all the Arab states. The U.S.A. moved in opposition.

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5. On 5th January 1957, President Eisenhower, in a speech to Congress, enunciated what came to be known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. He stated that 'the reason for Russia's interest in the Middle East is solely that of power politics. Therefore a greater responsibility now devolves upon the United States to make more evident its willingness to support the independence of the freedom-loving nations of the area.'

6. Congress was asked to authorize economic co-operation and programmes of military assistance, including the employment of U.S. forces to 'protect the territorial integrity and political independence' of nations 'requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism'.

7. The Doctrine, which was accepted by Congress on 9th March 1957, was welcomed by the members of the Baghdad Pact, the Lebanon and Iraq quickly indicating their acceptance; but it was rejected by the representatives of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, meeting in Cairo. King Hussein was personally in favour of accepting American help in replacement of the British aid discarded by the abrogation of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty. His government, on the other hand, following an emergency meeting in Amman on 2nd April 1957, announced that Jordan was ready to accept aid from any source, provided it did not affect its sovereignty or independence, and that it had been decided to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.

8. When the King refused to accept this and, on 10th April, dismissed his government, an attempted army *coup*, followed by rioting and demonstrations, demands for the resignation of his cabinet and the removal of certain palace officials, faced him with imminent revolution. By moving his trusted Bedouin troops to Amman and declaring martial law, by an admirable display of personal courage, and encouraged by an American demonstration of support by the 6th Fleet cruising off Beirut, the King weathered the storm. Thereupon, with his Treasury empty, he asked the U.S.A. for aid.

9. The State Department in Washington which, while Jordan had been under British protection, had regarded that country's continued existence with indifference, had come to realise that its dissolution, followed inevitably by a war of succession between Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Israel, would bring about 'that chaos Moscow hopes to exploit'. Within the space of a single day, Jordan had asked for, been offered and accepted, \$10 million.



10. As a result of this assumption by the U.S.A. of patronage of Jordan, as well as U.S. co-operation with Ibn Saud, the post-Suez instability in the Middle East passed, for the time being, out of a critical phase. Nevertheless, at the end of 1957, with martial law still in force in Jordan and with Syria and Egypt accepting Russian aid, the balance was still an uneasy one.
11. It was thrown into violent oscillation on 1st February 1958 by the announcement by Presidents Nasser of Egypt and Kuwatly of Syria of the union of the two countries as the United Arab Republic. Countermoves by other Arab States quickly followed. Jordan and Iraq, which Nasser denounced as traitors to the Arab cause, formed the Arab Federation with King Feisal of Iraq as its head, though each ruler retained his throne and sovereignty over his own domain. Great Britain welcomed this move. In the face of Egyptian propagandist attacks, Nuri-es-Said came again to power in Iraq after a period in retirement and formed an uncompromisingly conservative and anti-Egyptian government.
12. Between the two Arab combinations - Egypt and Syria on one side, Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia on the other - was the Lebanon which, with its partly Christian population, remained unattached. Its internal situation was disturbed. Powerful opposition parties were attacking President Chamoun because of his suspected desire to amend the constitution to allow him to stand for a second term of office in September. Chamoun's popularity was further undermined by dissatisfaction of the opposition and some government supporters with American aid, which they compared unfavourably with the aid being given by Russia to Egypt and Syria.
13. These internal political issues assumed an international aspect when gun-running from Egypt was reported, in support of the Moslem Arab nationalist groups who composed the opposition, and a Lebanon customs post was attacked from Syria. On 13th May 1958 the Lebanese Foreign Minister informed the American, British and French Ambassadors that his government would expect military assistance if it was needed.

#### PRELIMINARY NAVAL MOVES

14. The Admiralty at once warned the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean (Admiral Sir Charles Lambe) that the government was considering appropriate action and that the most likely call on the Navy would be to transport No. 40 R.M. Commando from Cyprus to Lebanese ports. On the following day it was agreed that the Amphibious Warfare Squadron - H.M.S. *Meon*, 2 LSTs,

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

2 LCTs and a navigational ML - should be sailed from Malta for the Eastern Mediterranean, ostensibly to take part in the large-scale AFMED Exercise 'Medflex Fort', which was in progress.

15. The Squadron arrived in the Eastern Mediterranean on the 19th May and remained based on Cyprus for the next two months. While standing by for any Lebanese operation that might be ordered, they came under the operational control of the Flag Officer, Middle East (Rear Admiral A. C. Miers, V.C.) and took part, until 6th July, in coastal patrols against Eoka gun-running.

16. On the evening of the day the Amphibious Warfare Squadron left Malta (14th May), the Commander-in-Chief was ordered to sail H.M.S. *Ark Royal* with suitable escorting ships 'with all convenient despatch as soon as possible under cover plan with utmost secrecy' to provide fighter cover for landings of U.S. and British troops in the Lebanon. Secrecy was hardly possible in the prevailing atmosphere of Middle East tension, but a cover plan fortunately existed in the imminence of another AFMED exercise for which the carrier and twelve escorts were scheduled to sail in two days' time. Giving out that all British forces taking part in that exercise were being sailed twenty four hours earlier than planned as a test of readiness, the Commander-in-Chief sailed these ships early on 16th May under the command of the Flag Officer, Second-in-Command, Mediterranean Fleet (Vice Admiral Sir Robin Durnford-Slater) with orders to proceed to the Eastern Mediterranean as soon as clear of Malta. They arrived there on the 18th.

17. A carrier force, varying in strength and composition from time to time, was thereafter maintained in the area for the next five and a half months except for the brief period 1st to 18th July referred to later. On 10th June H.M.S. *Eagle*, flying the flag of Vice Admiral A. N. C. Bingley, Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers, relieved the *Ark Royal* which returned to the United Kingdom and FOAC assumed command of the force.

18. The British force available in the Mediterranean at this moment comprised the carrier *Eagle* (Captain J. B. Frewen), the cruisers *Sheffield* (Captain L. P. Bourke, R.N.Z.N.), flagship of the Flag Officer Flotillas, Mediterranean (Rear Admiral R. A. Ewing)<sup>1</sup> and *Bermuda* (Captain R. R. S. Pennefather) and nine destroyers or frigates.

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<sup>1</sup> Vice Admiral Durnford-Slater was relieved as Flag Officer 2nd i/c Mediterranean Fleet and Flag Officer Flotillas, Mediterranean on 4th June 1958 by Rear Admiral Ewing.



## DEVELOPMENT OF THE CRISIS

19. Meanwhile the campaign to force the resignation of President Chamoun and thereafter swing the Lebanon away from its pro-Western alignment and towards closer relationship with the United Arab Republic had been intensifying until a state of desultory civil war existed. It was left unresolved owing to the refusal of the commander of the Lebanese Army, General Chehab, to order his predominantly Christian troops to intervene in a political quarrel in which the government enjoyed only the partial support of the people.

20. The Lebanese Government now raised the issue in the United Nations where the Security Council decided to send a group of observers to 'arrest infiltration and arms smuggling between Syria and Lebanon'. The Secretary General Mr. Hammarskjöld, visited Beirut and Cairo; but though on his arrival early in June he expressed himself firmly against British or American military action and he left without any further public statement, President Chamoun declared he intended to ask for military assistance through the United Nations or from friendly powers.

21. In anticipation of such a request, plans for a joint Anglo-American operation (Code Name 'Blue Bat') had been made whereby American Marines would be landed to seize the airfield at Beirut, after which British troops would be flown in by air. The main support for the soldiers, both landing and operating ashore, would be provided by the British and United States carriers.

22. The consensus of opinion expressed by delegates to the U.N. Assembly, however, was that military aid was unnecessary and President Chamoun made no request at this time. By the end of June, when the British Squadron had been standing by at 12 hours' notice for more than three weeks, the Flag Officer, Aircraft Carriers decided that the prospects of 'Blue Bat' being carried out were remote and he obtained the concurrence of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean to withdraw the *Eagle* to Malta for a much needed 14-day self-maintenance period. She therefore left Cyprus on 1st July.

## REVOLUTION IN IRAQ

23. The Middle East situation remained explosive, however, with the hostility between the United Arab Republic and the Arab Federation unabated. In Iraq, with Nasser's power now extended to her frontier with Syria and thus in a better position to aid and incite the anti-government elements, the pro-British regime under

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Nuri-es-Said had become more than ever unpopular. After an unsatisfactory visit to London to solicit help, Nuri appealed to the Moslem members of the Baghdad Pact to meet at Istanbul in mid-July. The sands were running out for him, however.

24. Though Nuri had been remarkably successful in maintaining peace in his country while chaos reigned over the rest of the Arab world, his autocratic rule under which all Liberals were excluded from politics, imprisoned or exiled, had raised strong opposition in a number of quarters.

25. Plans for a military coup had been maturing for some time and in May 1958 the brigade commanders involved had agreed that any one of them could act independently of the others if he found himself in a position to capture or kill Nuri, the young King Feisal and the ex-Regent Abdul Illah simultaneously. This opportunity now occurred when the 20th Brigade under Colonel Aref and the 19th under Brigadier Kassem arrived in Baghdad on 14th July en route for Jordan in support of King Hussein. With ruthless speed and efficiency the soldiers struck. Nuri-es-Said, Abdul Illah and Feisal and his family were murdered and a republic proclaimed.

### LEBANON AND JORDAN APPEAL FOR HELP

26. On the following day President Eisenhower announced that, in response to an urgent appeal by President Chamoun, U.S. forces would be stationed in Lebanon 'to protect American lives and, by their presence there, to encourage the Lebanon government in defence of Lebanese sovereignty and integrity'. On the evening of 16th July, King Hussein made a similar appeal to the British *chargé d'affaires* in Amman.

27. Operation 'Blue Bat' was at once set in motion by the U.S. 6th Fleet as a purely American venture. Though Hussein asked for British or American forces to come to his aid, London and Washington agreed that any criticisms of foreign intervention should be shared. Consequently the British air-lift of troops prepared for 'Blue Bat' was to be transferred to Amman, the operation being given the Code Name 'Fortitude'. This comprised the air-lift by transport aircraft of the Royal Air Force of 16 Parachute Brigade Group to Amman with the object of securing the airfield there and of protecting the King, his government and lives and property in the country.

NAVAL SITUATION IN MIDDLE EAST

28. The crisis which had thus developed found the only available aircraft carrier, *Eagle*, at Malta, with her aircraft disembarked. A calculated risk of such a situation arising had been taken by the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean and the Flag Officer, Aircraft Carriers in order to give the carrier a period of self-maintenance, the imperative need for which was soon to be demonstrated.

29. Besides the *Eagle*, there were three cruisers in the Mediterranean. The trials cruiser, *Cumberland*, was paying a visit to Genoa. The *Bermuda* was at Malta, while the *Sheffield*, flying the flag of Rear Admiral R. A. Ewing, Flag Officer Flotillas, was at Limassol (Cyprus). In Cyprus waters there were five destroyers and/or frigates while the frigates *Tenby*, *Torquay*, *Surprise* and *Salisbury* were at Malta<sup>1</sup>. There also, available to play a part in any troop lifts which became necessary, were the R.F.A. *Retainer* (Fast Replenishment Ship), H.M. Ships *Striker* (LST) and *Bastion* (LCT). The other ships of the Amphibious Warfare Squadron were in Cyprus waters taking part in the regular security patrols. They comprised the Headquarters ship *Meon*, H.M. Ships *Anzio* and *Reggio* (LSTs) and *Counterguard* and *Redoubt* (LCTs). Finally there was the Inshore Flotilla comprising the senior officer's ship H.M.S. *Woodbridge Haven* and 14 coastal minesweepers of the 104th and 108th Squadrons of which seven were at Malta and seven in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ships of the Inshore Flotilla were not employable in Operation 'Fortitude', but, by increasing their sea time on Cyprus patrols, they were able to release destroyers.

30. So much for the situation in the Mediterranean when the crisis broke, at which time the Ministry of Defence ordered the British Defence Co-ordination Committee (BDCC) Middle East to carry out Operation 'Fortitude' and the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean was instructed by the Admiralty to take various

measures with regard to troop movements which will be considered later.

31. The Iraq revolution, however, as opposed to the events it triggered off elsewhere, primarily concerned the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies (Vice Admiral Sir Hilary Biggs) and his sub-Commander, the Senior Naval Officer, Persian Gulf (Captain G. F. M. Best). The ships available on that station were, by good fortune, conveniently placed at the critical moment to undertake with the minimum of delay the tasks required of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Three destroyers were undergoing refit at Malta and two at Gibraltar.

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Besides the three frigates of the Persian Gulf Squadron, *Loch Fyne*, *Loch Killisport* and *Loch Insh*, the carrier *Bulwark* with her attendant frigate *Ulysses* was at Mombasa while, within three days' steaming of that port were the cruiser *Gambia*, flying the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, himself and the frigates *Bigbury Bay* and *Puma*, in the latter of which was embarked the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic and South America Station.

32. Except for the dispatch of the frigate *Loch Fyne* on 14th July to act as guardship in the Shatt-al-Arab, the East Indies Station was not called on to take action, however, until 19th July. In the meantime ships of the Mediterranean Fleet had been having a busy time.

### TRANSPORT OF NO. 45 COMMANDO TO LIBYA

33. With the Parachute Brigade about to fly from Cyprus to Jordan, No. 45 R.M. Commando at Malta, which had been due to sail shortly to relieve No. 40 R.M. Commando in Cyprus, was now required to go there at once as reinforcement. During the 15th July, therefore, they and their vehicles were embarked in H.M. Ships *Bermuda*, *Surprise* (Commander M.S. Ollivant) and *Salisbury* (Commander A. G. Watson) and the R.F.A. *Retainer*. Eight officers and 17 other ranks of No. 3 Commando Brigade Headquarters were also embarked in the *Bermuda*, the remainder of this Headquarters being embarked in H.M.S. *Striker* (Commander I. S. Primrose).

34. Just before these ships sailed for Limassol at 1700 on 15th July, the frigate *Tenby* (Commander W. R. D. Gerard-Pearse) left Malta for Tobruk in accordance with orders received by the Commander-in-Chief from the Admiralty to send a frigate there to stand by to evacuate King Idris of Libya in the event of a *coup d'état* in that country. Hardly had these movements begun when the Commander-in-Chief was instructed to sail H.M.S. *Cumberland* (Captain H. G. T. Padfield) as soon as possible at 20 knots from Genoa to Gibraltar to embark the 1st Battalion, Royal Sussex Regiment and transport them to Tobruk. Soon afterwards the Admiralty instructed the Commander-in-Chief to send H.M.S. *Bermuda* to Tobruk with Royal Marines of No. 45 Commando and to relieve H.M.S. *Tenby*.

35. On this latter order Admiral Lambe commented, 'Unfortunately this specific order for the deployment of a single ship took no account of the detailed loading of 45 Commando or of the facilities for unloading vehicles at Tobruk, factors of which

Their Lordships were inevitably unaware. In consequence a considerable muddle ensued which took some time to sort out. The matter was not simplified by the news on 16th July that King Idris had moved his residence from Tobruk to Beida which is much nearer Benghazi.'

36. This, indeed was only the first awkward episode in an operation to put troops into Libya which Captain Pennefather of the *Bermuda*, after a succession of orders and counter-orders, of landings and re-embarkations, wryly suggested might have been given the Code Name of 'Duke of York' instead of 'Huntsman'. In anticipation of orders which, in fact, reached her at 2330 on 15th July, the *Bermuda*, at 2200, shaped course for Tobruk. At 1300 the next day the *Tenby* joined her, having received orders to embark the element of No. 3 Commando Brigade Headquarters from the cruiser for onward passage to Cyprus. When, shortly afterwards, orders were received from the Admiralty that only the *Tenby* might enter Tobruk harbour for the present, the transfer was effected at sea by jackstay. As the last man was being welcomed aboard the frigate, information came in that both ships might, after all, enter Tobruk though no men or vehicles were to be landed without further orders. At 1500 both came to anchor in the harbour.

37. There they remained for the next few hours while Captain Pennefather gleaned from Wing Commander Lawe, station commander at El Adem, information on the situation locally, where all was completely quiet. He also learned that King Idris had been for some weeks in residence at Beida, considerably closer to Benghazi than Tobruk. This item of information evidently reached the Admiralty at this time as, at 2215, an Admiralty signal was intercepted which requested the Commander-in-Chief to sail H.M.S. *Bermuda* to Benghazi.

38. The *Tenby* had been sailed for Limassol at 1915 to join the Flag Officer, Flotillas and at 2330 the *Bermuda*, in anticipation of orders, sailed for Benghazi. Two hours later, however, her commanding officer was ordered by the Commander-in-Chief to concentrate H.M. Ships *Bermuda*, *Salisbury*, *Striker* and *R.F.A. Retainer* at either Benghazi or Tobruk at his discretion in order to be ready to land the whole of 45 Commando to support the government and protect the King of Libya. Captain Pennefather judged Tobruk to be the more suitable of the two alternatives. The *Bermuda* reversed course and anchored again at 0700 on 17th July.



## MOVEMENTS ON EAST INDIES STATION

39. While these precautionary moves against a spreading of the disturbance were being taken, others nearer the storm centre were in progress. On the East Indies Station, H.M.S. *Loch Fyne* (Captain B. Pengelly) at Bahrein, received orders from both the Admiralty and the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station, to sail forthwith for the Shatt-al-Arab to act as guard-ship there in case of the Iraq situation worsening. Subsequently the Commander-in-Chief criticised his own as well as the Admiralty's action in thus naming a particular ship instead of leaving the choice to the Senior Officer, Persian Gulf. For, as it happened, SNOFG had stationed H.M.S. *Loch Killisport* (Commander I. J. Davis) out in the Sitra Roads at short notice for steam for any eventuality, while the *Loch Fyne* was in the process of storing and provisioning and effecting some engine repairs in the Khor Kaliya where she was tide-bound until two hours before the next high water. Thus she reached the Shatt-al-Arab in a half-stored state and half-provisioned six hours later than the *Loch Killisport*, fully stored and provisioned, might have done.

40. Other precautionary steps taken on the East Indies Station were to order the carrier *Bulwark* (Captain P. D. Gick) and the *Ulysses* (Commander K. S. Mair) to remain until further orders at Mombasa, whence they had been about to sail on a cruise to Madagascar, and to stand by to lift a battalion of the King's Own Royal Regiment and the Headquarters 24 Brigade to Aden. At this stage the transfer of these troops was to be a precautionary move against the possible need for military action to defend Kuwait from any aggression by Iraq (Operation 'Valiant').

41. The cruiser *Gambia* (Captain E.T.L. Dunsterville) and the frigates *Bigbury Bay* (Commander G. C. Mitchell) and *Puma* (Commander R. P. Clayton) interrupted their cruises to make for Mombasa and by 17th July all these ships had assembled there.

## AIR LIFT OF TROOPS TO AMMAN

42. In Cyprus, preparations went ahead during the 15th and 16th for the two battalions of the Parachute Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Pearson, to be conveyed to Amman in aircraft of the R.A.F. Transport Command, while H.M.S. *Sheffield*, with the destroyers *Trafalgar* (Captain C. D. Madden) and *Jutland* (Commander T. W. Stocker) were sailed during the 15th to cruise off Tripoli (Lebanon) in case the British and U.S. nationals working there had to be evacuated.



43. By dawn on the 17th all was ready for the air-lift and the fleet of transport aircraft took off. Their route took them from Nicosia airfield to Cape Pyla (Cyprus), then directly to Lod (Lydda), Israel, where they turned east for Amman. Though this route crossed the Amphibious Objective Area of Operation 'Blue Bat', which was the air defence responsibility of the U.S. Amphibious Force Commander, it was to be given individual fighter cover by the British Middle East Air Force and H.M.S. *Eagle*.

44. At a conference at Joint Headquarters, Episcopi, to which the Chief of Staff to FOAC was flown on the evening of the 17th, it was agreed that the R.A.F., who could only provide a Combat Air Patrol of two fighters and only during daylight hours, would be responsible for the northern part of the route, while H.M.S. *Eagle* would look after it from the point where it entered the American air defence sector in the Amphibious Area to where it crossed Israeli territorial waters.

45. Embarrassment and even humiliation assailed the participants in the air-lift, however, when, as the leading aircraft were approaching Amman, orders for it were countermanded from London because no permission had been obtained to overfly Israel. The first five aircraft went ahead and landed Brigadier Pearson and a small advance party, while the remainder turned back to Cyprus. A triangular argument on this question ensued between H.M. Government, the U.S. State Department and the Israeli Government before permission to resume the air-lift was finally obtained.

#### OPERATIONS OF THE CARRIER GROUP

46. Embarrassment became also the lot of the Flag Officer, Aircraft Carriers when, during 17th July, defects developed in one of H.M.S. *Eagle's* boilers, a hole being burned in the back brickwork plate. The ship's maximum speed was reduced to 25 knots, allowing a speed of 20 knots on passage and it became evident that she could not reach a position in which to give cover to the air-lift until the evening of the 18th.

47. The *Eagle's* boilers were, indeed, to continue to cause concern throughout the ensuing operations. In addition to this burning through of the brickwork of Y2 boiler, an area of red heat was discovered on the rear casing of B2 boiler two days later. The engineers struggled manfully with these major defects, however, and by 24th July had managed to rebrick Y2 boiler and reconnect the starboard inner shaft.

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

48. Another difficulty which now arose was occasioned by the paucity of destroyers and frigates available. It was known that the United Arab Republic had a number of submarines, 'E'-boats, destroyers and frigates disposed mainly at Alexandria and Latakia. It was also suspected that four Russian submarines were in the Mediterranean based in Albania. FOAC felt bound, therefore, to allocate four escorts to the carrier while a fifth would be stationed as a picket between H.M.S. *Eagle* and the Egyptian coast. To meet this requirement, H.M.S. *Sheffield*, patrolling off Tripoli (Lebanon), had to be left without any escort. Fortunately it was decided during the first night of the operation that the situation in the Lebanon did not call for a continuation of this patrol and H.M.S. *Sheffield* was then withdrawn.

49. During the afternoon of 18th July the *Eagle* made rendezvous to the south west of Cyprus with her escorts, H.M. Ships *Cavendish* (Captain P. U. Bayly), *Jutland*, *Dunkirk* (Commander J. Nash), *Trafalgar* and *Salisbury* and with the R.F.A. *Tideflow* from which the force refuelled. Just before sunset, No. 802 Squadron of Seahawks was embarked, having flown from the U.K. via Dijon, Pratica di Mare (Italy), El Adem (Libya) and Akrotiri (Cyprus) in 36 hours. At 2230 the same day H.M.S. *Eagle* reached a position some 50 miles to seaward of Haifa, well to the southward of the American operating position, and began operations.

50. Fighter aircraft were armed with 120 rounds/gun, later reduced to 60. They had orders to intercept and identify all unknown aircraft which seemed as if they might threaten the air route or the force. They were to approach no closer than 300 yards to an aircraft or three miles to the Israeli coast. They were not to open fire without instructions unless they, or British or American forces, were seen to be attacked.

51. During the five days the air-lift was protected, 388 operational sorties were flown by fighters and 112 by Gannets and Skyraiders. 208 aircraft were approached and identified, of which 121 were allied transports (none of the R.A.F. aircraft was fitted with IFF 10). The remainder consisted of 14 civil and 7 military aircraft of the United Arab Republic, 7 Israeli military and 59 miscellaneous civil aircraft.

52. A/S ships had orders to fire a single, live projectile at least 1000 yards distant from any submarine contact unless the carrier or cruiser was directly threatened, in which case the submarine was to be attacked. Aircraft were to comply with this when within ten miles of the carrier/cruiser, otherwise they were to act as in LCAFO 88/57. This, in brief, forbade any

offensive or provocative action but, subject to these limitations, called for contact to be maintained with any unidentified submarine.

53. The *Salisbury* was stationed as picket 50 miles from the *Eagle* between her and the Egyptian coast. AEW patrols were maintained over the *Salisbury* against 'E'-boats and low flying aircraft, and Gannets flew an A/S patrol, 40 miles square, round the main force. By day, two sections of Seahawks patrolled near the transport route and one about 40 miles to the south west of the *Eagle*. At night, one section of Venoms was maintained on patrol to cover both the air-lift and the force.

54. The even tenor of these operations was tragically interrupted at 0300 on 23rd July when a Sea Venom of 894 Squadron crashed into the round-down on landing and caught fire. The pilot, Lieutenant A. G. Hamon and observer, Sub-Lieutenant A. J. Hayward lost their lives. All aircraft airborne had to be diverted because of the foul deck and a Sea Venom had to be sent to Lod, having insufficient fuel to reach Cyprus. There it was readily accepted as an aircraft in distress - as indeed it was, its fuel running out while it was still on the duty runway - and its crew was most courteously treated by the Israeli authorities whose only concern was to prevent the news of the presence of a British military aircraft and crew on their territory leaking to the press. This they achieved by concealing the crew and aircraft and sending one of their own planes to Cyprus to collect the starter cartridges needed to send it on its way. The aircraft rejoined H.M.S. *Eagle* ten hours after it had been diverted.

55. Operations on the above pattern continued throughout the five days the air-lift was protected. For part of the time there was also an American air-lift from Beirut, following a route parallel to, but inshore of the British one. This too was given cover. No hostile move was made against the air transports or the ships, though Egyptian fighter patrols off the coast started towards the end of the operation.

56. A number of possible submarine contacts were made by British and American forces. The difficult asdic conditions in the Mediterranean at that time of year made classification unreliable and, from intelligence reports on the movements of Egyptian submarines it is unlikely that in fact any submarines were in the area.

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

### CARRIER GROUP WITHDRAWN

57. By 22nd July it had become apparent that there was no likelihood of a further air-lift of troops. The supply lift had been greatly reduced and would in future fly only at night in order to relieve the Israeli government's embarrassment by making the air-lift as inconspicuous as possible. The Flag Officer, Aircraft Carriers therefore obtained the concurrence of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean and the British Defence Co-ordination Committee Middle East (BDCC(ME))<sup>1</sup> to withdraw the whole force to Cyprus during the night of 23/24 July to rest, replenish and prepare for a further operation which was under consideration, namely the air-lift of reinforcements to Jordan in the shape of the Guards Brigade. These were to be staged through El Adem, an airfield without radar or AA defences. H.M.S. *Eagle* would therefore be required to provide air cover and control R.A.F. fighters. In the event this operation did not take place.

58. On 22nd August H.M.S. *Albion* (Captain A. B. Cole) arrived to take over temporarily from H.M.S. *Eagle* which returned to Malta for a fortnight's self-maintenance before resuming her duties in Cyprus waters on 10th September when the *Albion* returned to the United Kingdom. (The *Albion's* movements are given in more detail later.)

59. Except for the partial breakdown of the *Eagle's* machinery and for the awkward pause in the air-lift while the diplomatic wrangle over the permission to overfly Israel was in progress, Operation 'Fortitude' had progressed fairly smoothly. The same cannot be said for the conjunct operation 'Huntsman' to provide a military force ashore in Libya which, as recounted earlier, had been under way. Nor were the preparations to send reinforcements to Jordan, soon to take place, a model of inter-Service planning.

### DEPLOYMENT OF R.M. COMMANDOS IN LIBYA

60. To take 'Huntsman' up where we left it, we must go back to the morning of 17th July when H.M.S. *Bermuda*, with the major part of 45 R.M. Commando and some of their vehicles embarked, anchored for the second time at Tobruk. No orders to land the Royal Marines having yet been received, and as ships required in the forward area were heading for Tobruk with personnel or

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<sup>1</sup> Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Land Forces.  
Air Officer Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Air Forces.  
Flag Officer, Middle East (representing Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean).



stores for the Commando, Captain Pennefather decided to bring them alongside the *Bermuda* on arrival to transfer their loads to the cruiser, so releasing them as quickly as possible. The first to arrive was H.M.S. *Salisbury* with 6 officers and 37 other ranks and by 0900 she was on her way again to join FOAC.

61. At noon H.M.S. *Surprise* with 5 officers and 65 other ranks arrived and anchored, joined later in the afternoon by the R.F.A. *Retainer* with vehicles, one officer and 39 other ranks. A meeting of service representatives, Her Majesty's Ambassador and the British Consul General, presided over by Brigadier Williams representing the BDCC(ME), had been called for the morrow at Benghazi to discuss the next steps, but in the meantime the troops had perforce to remain embarked for the night.

62. Stores of petrol and water in jerrycans, and field rations, arrived early the next morning aboard H.M.S. *Torquay* (Captain E. M. Usherwood) and were transferred to the *Bermuda* after which the frigate sailed for Limassol. The Benghazi Committee, to attend which Captain Pennefather flew, recommended that 45 Commando should be off-loaded at Tobruk as soon as possible and sent forward by road to Benghazi and that the 1st Royal Sussex Regiment, which was on its way to Malta in H.M.S. *Cumberland*, should be retained there until the situation clarified. It was also decided to establish 3rd Commando Brigade Headquarters at Benghazi. As Captain Pennefather ruefully remarked, 'This latter decision involved the first of many reshuffles since most of 3rd Commando Brigade Headquarters were on their way to Cyprus and had to be recovered. It also involved considerable sorting of vehicles and equipment which had been loaded indiscriminately in various ships since it was originally intended to off-load all in Cyprus.'

63. Approval of the Committee's proposals had to be awaited, however, and when H.M.S. *Striker* arrived at Tobruk on the evening of the 18th, with 225 personnel, 32 vehicles, 12 trailers and a quantity of stores, all belonging to 3rd Commando Brigade Headquarters, she was ordered to remain at anchor. It was not until 2130 on Saturday 19th July, half an hour after the landings had been announced by the B.B.C., that instructions were received to land the Commando 'with as little publicity as possible'.

64. By this time the *Striker* was already berthed on the LST hard and, with the aid of two R.A.F. 'Z' Lighters to ferry vehicles from the ships at anchor, the off-loading was progressed through the night, the R.F.A. *Retainer* being sailed again for Cyprus at 0430. By dawn on Sunday 20th July, all vehicles,

stores and equipment had been landed and a small advance party sent on its way by road to Benghazi.

65. The arrival of H.M.S. *Bastion* (LCT) (Lieutenant Commander N. E. Bridger) shortly afterwards proved a godsend, as she alone was able to go alongside at Benghazi and be used for running stores ashore from ships. She was therefore loaded with all stores which could not be carried in the vehicles, together with some additional material which, with personnel for 3rd Commando Brigade Headquarters and 45 Heliborne, arrived in H.M.S. *Tenby* from Cyprus. The *Bastion* was then sailed for Benghazi and the *Tenby* for Cyprus within two hours of her arrival. Finally, at first light on the 21st, the commando vehicles left by road in seven convoys, arriving at Benghazi at 1630 the same day.

66. The *Bermuda* and *Surprise* reached Benghazi the following morning and by 1100 the last of 45 Commando had been taken aboard the *Bastion* for transfer to the shore, and the *Surprise* sailed for Malta. Captain Pennfather and his men can hardly be criticised for presuming that the erratic course of their trooping trip was at last at an end. The cheers with which, under the eyes of the Commander 3rd Commando Brigade, the *Bermuda's* ship's company wished 'Godspeed' to the Royal Marines were understandably tinged with relief. Hardly had the last echoes of the cheering died away, however, when a signal was handed to the Captain ordering him to cease disembarkation until further orders.

#### 45 COMMANDO RELIEVED BY SUSSEX REGIMENT

67. Three hours later these orders were received. The 1st Royal Sussex Regiment was on its way aboard H.M.S. *Cumberland* and would arrive the next day. 45 Commando was to be re-embarked for Cyprus, 3rd Commando Brigade Headquarters for Malta. The 'General Post' of vehicles and sorting of equipment which this entailed and which was continued through the night was not encouraged by a further signal around midnight announcing that 45 Commando could not be accepted in Cyprus until 40 Commando had completed their current operation on 29th July. The *Cumberland* duly arrived at noon on 23rd July and by the end of the day had disembarked her passengers by ships' boats, vehicles by means of the *Bastion*, and stores by dumb lighter and had begun the embarkation of 3rd Commando Brigade Headquarters, stores and vehicles. This was completed by 1500 on the 24th and, with the majority of the Brigade Headquarters, the *Cumberland* sailed again for Malta.



68. There a further freighting task awaited her. The carrier H.M.S. *Albion*, which had been engaged in working up her squadrons in the English Channel preparatory to a commission east of Suez, had been obliged to land her squadrons and embark No. 42 R.M. Commando, equipment for 3rd Division Headquarters and vehicles for 19th Brigade, and take them to Malta. Her squadrons were to be flown out subsequently to rejoin her.

69. The equipment and vehicles were now given onward passage to Cyprus in the *Cumberland*. Returning to Malta on 31st July on completion of this task, the cruiser was ordered, only two days later, back to Cyprus to prepare to embark a battalion of the Brigade of Guards for passage to Aqaba. This proved to be one of the abortive moves in another piece of wayward planning which will be examined later and, in the event, was cancelled on 3rd August when the *Cumberland* was finally released to resume her trials programme.

#### 45 COMMANDO TRANSFERRED TO CYPRUS

70. In the meantime H.M.S. *Reggio* (LST) (Lieutenant Commander N. C. Abraham) had arrived at Benghazi from Cyprus bringing 728 Squadron Helicopters, some further vehicles for 3rd Commando Brigade Headquarters and, unfortunately, a number of vehicles for 45 Commando which now had to be unshipped at Benghazi and re-shipped for return to Cyprus. The necessary re-shuffle having been completed, the *Reggio* sailed for Malta. The *Bermuda*, having embarked the greater part of 45 Commando, sailed at 2100 on 24th July, leaving the remainder to be brought on by the *Striker* which was due at Benghazi the following morning with the heavy vehicles of the Sussex Regiment.

71. The loading and departure of H.M.S. *Bermuda* had not called for any great haste as she apparently had 4½ days in hand to deliver the Commando in Cyprus. She sailed at slow speed only to hear, three hours after leaving Benghazi, that the Commando could, after all, be accepted at Limassol early in the afternoon of 26th July. This called for a speed of 20 knots which brought the cruiser to her anchor in Akrotiri Bay at 1201 precisely on the 26th.

#### DECISION TO REINFORCE TROOPS IN JORDAN

72. For the moment, the confusion in which much of the naval force in the Mediterranean had been engulfed by unco-ordinated planning in London had been resolved, and a lull in the tempo

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

of events occurred. This was only temporary, however, as on 2nd August the British government decided to reinforce the troops in Jordan by one battalion group to be flown to Amman if permission to overfly Israel could be obtained, otherwise to be transported by sea to the Jordanian (Red Sea) port of Aqaba.

73. The first of these alternatives was quickly found to be impossible and, as has been mentioned previously, H.M.S. *Cumberland* was ordered to Cyprus from Malta to embark the 1st Battalion, Guards Brigade. All preparations had been made for her reception and loading when it was decided, on political grounds, that it would be unwise to send her through the Suez Canal with troops embarked. Instead, H.M.S. *Bulwark*, by this time at Aden, was to embark the 1st Battalion of the Camerונים.

## MAINTENANCE OF CARRIER IN EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

74. Before transferring our attention east of Suez, where the centre of activity now moved, it is convenient to note that the Eastern Mediterranean Task Force was to be maintained continuously until the end of the Lebanon/Jordan crisis because, as the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean put it in a signal to the Admiralty on the subject of carrier availability, 'Nobody else can give the Army in Jordan much help', and our lightly armed force there could have found itself badly in need of such help if the Jordanian Army's armoured force had turned against it.

75. The fortuitous presence of the *Albion* in the Mediterranean enabled the *Eagle* to be relieved between 22nd August and 10th September, during which the latter returned to Malta for two weeks of much needed self-maintenance. The pressure under which the *Eagle* had been working can be gauged from the fact that during the 95 days since she had left Devonport, it had been possible to give leave on only 17 occasions. Advantage was taken of another fortunate circumstance later - the arrival of the *Bulwark* in the Mediterranean on her way home to re-commission to give the *Eagle* a second self-maintenance period and a visit to Istanbul between 1st and 24th October. A few days after this the crisis finally resolved itself.

## OPERATIONS ON EAST INDIES STATION

76. But meanwhile, lacking permission for a regular air-lift to overfly Israel, and bearing in mind the insecurity of the sea

route through the Canal, reinforcements for our troops in Jordan had to be routed from Aden to Aqaba. It will be recalled that at the opening of the crisis H.M. Ships *Gambia*, *Bulwark*, *Ulysses*, *Puma* and *Bigbury Bay* were assembling at Mombasa. The two last-named belonged to the South America and South Atlantic Station, but on 15th July the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station was informed by the Admiralty that all available forces in the Indian Ocean were assigned to the support of the Commander, British Forces Arabian Peninsula (CBFAP). On 19th July, therefore, the *Bulwark* and *Ulysses* embarked the battalion of the King's Own Royal Regiment (the former loading, besides personnel, forty vehicles, five Mobat guns and some 117 tons of stores) and sailed the same day for Aden, as did the *Gambia*. The *Puma* and *Bigbury Bay* loaded a quantity of Army stores and sailed later.

77. By 23rd July all had arrived at Aden and troops and stores had been disembarked. The greater part of the vehicles were retained aboard the *Bulwark* against the possibility of a further troop movement to the Persian Gulf as called for by Operation 'Valiant'. The carrier was, however, capable of full flying duties and during the following week some of her Sea-hawks and Sea Venoms, as well as her Whirlwind helicopters, joined in military operations mounted by the CBFAP, working from the R.A.F. Station, Khormaksar, while others carried out flying practices operating from the carrier.

78. The Persian Gulf remaining quiet, H.M.S. *Bulwark* was not called upon to carry troops to Kuwait. H.M.S. *Gambia*, however, proceeded to Bahrein to stand by to assume the duties of the cruiser called for in Operation 'Valiant', namely to act as Headquarters for the force Commander, embark the Bahrein battalion and land them at Mina al Ahmadi, the oil port of Kuwait, to capture the oil pier and installations and thereafter give gun support to the troops ashore, including paratroops who would be air-lifted from Cyprus.

79. The repercussions of the Middle East crisis, which had already drawn the *Puma* and *Bigbury Bay* from a neighbouring Station, spread also to the Far East Station where the Commander-in-Chief was called upon to lend two destroyers to reinforce the Persian Gulf Squadron. H.M. Ships *Cossack* (Commander The Hon. D. P. Seely) and *Cavalier* (Commander J. D. Cartwright) were selected and sailed for Ceylon on 15th July, the *Cossack* carrying on to Bahrein. Thereafter one of these destroyers or the frigate *St. Bride's Bay* (Commander J. H. Groom) from the Far East Station remained available in the Gulf. Later

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

the cruiser *Newfoundland* (Captain A. R. Hezlet) was also lent to the force for Operation 'Valiant', taking over as cruiser guardship from the *Gambia*. On 14th September 'Valiant' was put back to 14 days' notice. H.M.S. *Newfoundland* was then relieved by H.M.S. *Sheffield* from the Mediterranean and the ships of the Far East Station returned to Singapore.

### SECURITY OF SUPPLY ROUTE TO AQABA

80. All these movements were essentially precautionary and, in the event, the threat to our interests in Kuwait did not at this time materialise. Of more immediate importance to the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies until 7th September - when the East Indies Station was abolished - and thereafter to the Commodore Arabian Seas and Persian Gulf<sup>1</sup>, was the security of the supply route to our forces in Jordan through the port of Aqaba at the head of the Gulf of that name. The maintenance requirement was eventually to reach 75 tons/day which included 40 tons of AVTUR and 5 tons POL. Oil supplies for the Jordanian government by the normal overland route having ceased, the undeveloped port of Aqaba had also to be adapted to receive them from tankers.

81. The entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba was through the narrow Straits of Tiran, the shores of which were on the one hand Egyptian and on the other Saudi Arabian territory. The right of free passage which the British government claimed, had been disputed by the Egyptians even before the Suez episode. A British transport, the War Department Coaster *Empire Roach* was stopped by an Egyptian corvette in 1951. In 1955 the British S.S. *Anahim* was shelled by Egyptian shore batteries.

82. On this occasion, therefore, the frigate *Loch Ruthven* (Commander W. B. Smith) which was about to begin passage home to pay off, was sailed from Aden to escort the tanker *Clyde Explorer* and the coastal tanker *Widad* through the straits. In order not to betray undue interest in this line of communications until the two War Department transports, *Empire Guillemot* and *Empire Roach*, carrying army supplies, had passed through the Suez Canal, H.M. Government decided

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<sup>1</sup>On the abolition of the East Indies Station, the Senior Naval Officer Persian Gulf, under the new designation Commodore Arabian Seas and Persian Gulf (CASPG) became fully integrated into the Commander British Forces Arabian Peninsula's unified command, though the Commodore continued to be responsible directly to the Admiralty for operations in his area other than those along the coast of the Arabian Peninsula.



that no British warship should visit Aqaha yet, and after seeing the two tankers safely through the straits, the *Loch Ruthven* was instructed to establish a patrol out of sight of land to seaward. The R.F.A. *Wave Victor*, however, after fuelling the frigate, was sent on to Aqaba to discharge her diesel oil and investigate methods of discharging her furnace fuel ashore and a regular radio schedule was kept up with her. On the evening of 31st July H.M.S. *Loch Ruthven* was relieved by H.M.S. *Bigbury Bay* and the former was released to resume her passage home.

### TRANSPORT OF CAMERONIANS TO AQABA

83. Meanwhile, as previously noted, the decision had been taken, on 3rd August, to reinforce the Parachute Brigade in Jordan by transporting the 1st Battalion Cameronians from Aden to Aqaba in H.M. Ships *Bulwark* and *Ulysses*. When the order reached the *Bulwark* at 0100 on 4th August, she was at 12 hours' notice for steam and was carrying out a ten day Planned Maintenance schedule. Nevertheless at 0300 she was instructed to sail at 1030 having embarked troops, stores etc. The vehicles were already aboard, as previously noted. During the forenoon 600 tons of furnace fuel were taken in and by 1030 the main engines were warmed through and the ship was ready to steam on two boilers, while external cleaning continued on the other two.

84. This creditable achievement by the engineers was wasted, however, for the main body of the troops, stores, weapons and ammunition did not begin to arrive until 1015 and the embarkation, for reasons outside the control of the ship, proceeded very slowly. It was thus not until 1700 that the *Bulwark* and *Ulysses* were able to sail. On the evening of 6th August they made rendezvous with the *Bigbury Bay* and the three ships proceeded in company to Aqaba, arriving early on the 7th.

85. Helicopters were sent ashore to make initial contact. By 1050, all troops, equipment, stores, ammunition and vehicles had been disembarked using helicopters, boats and towed lighters and 5,000 gallons of AVGAS for the Royal Air Force transferred to a bowser brought out on a lighter.

86. The *Ulysses* had sailed at 0700 to fuel from the R.F.A. *Wave Victor* in the Red Sea, after which she was to return to Aqaba as guardship, and at 1115 the *Bulwark* also left, clearing the Straits of Tiran at 1600, receiving a 'Well Done' signal from the Flag Officer, Middle East. On the 10th August the *Bulwark* was back again at Aden ready to resume operations in

support of the Army in the Arabian Peninsula, her primary task. The *Bigbury Bay*, on relief by the *Ulysses*, sailed on 8th August to return to Aden also. The British force in Jordan by this time comprised some 3,200 troops plus one Field Battery, Royal Artillery.

### PROBLEM OF COMMAND STRUCTURE

87. All this had been very satisfactory, but nevertheless, difficulties had for a time arisen owing to the command structure in the area. Though troop reinforcements had, for political reasons, come from Aden, the line of supply for Jordan was from the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal, to Aqaba and was therefore of concern primarily to the Flag Officer, Middle East, in his capacity as a member of the BDCC(ME). The Red Sea had, however, as recently as the 1st April been transferred from the Mediterranean Station to the East Indies Station. The Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station, under whose operational control the Gulf of Aqaba had thus come, had to rely for his intelligence on the Commander British Forces Arabian Peninsula (CBFAP). But this authority was not concerned with Aqaba as it was in the area of responsibility of the BDCC(ME). The Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station therefore found it difficult to keep himself fully informed of the situation there. On 29th July the BDCC(ME) petitioned the Chiefs of Staff to allow the Flag Officer, Middle East to take over operational control. This was approved on 3rd August for the period of the operations which ironed out the difficulties.

88. With the reinforcement of the military force in Jordan smoothly accomplished and the British carrier force remaining poised in the Eastern Mediterranean ready to bring air strike support in the possible event of the Jordanian Army, with its armoured elements, turning against the British troops, the situation in Jordan had been stabilised.

### CARRIER SUPPORT OF MILITARY OPERATIONS IN OMAN

89. The CBFAP, with unrest amongst the tribes in the hinterland of the Aden Protectorate on his hands as well as a smouldering rebellion against the Sultan of Muscat and Oman in the mountains of Jebel Akhdar, in the suppression of which he was involved, was now anxious to take advantage of the presence of H.M.S. *Bulwark* in his area. Air support available for Operation 'Valiant', should this have to be mounted, was meagre. He therefore obtained the approval of the Chiefs of Staff on



26th August to release the carrier from the troop-carrying role scheduled for her in 'Valiant' so that she could be available to provide air support.

90. Three days later, however, the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies felt constrained to point out that this could not be guaranteed. Long periods of calm to be expected during September in the Gulf, requiring high speeds for deck-landing operations, and a high seawater temperature, which made such high speeds difficult to achieve, might make it impossible to operate aircraft or, at best, permit them to be operated only with reduced load. Furthermore, so long as 'Valiant' was at 24 hours' notice, the carrier would have to be kept in the vicinity of Bahrein and, until the weather became less hot, aircrew efficiency would drop rapidly after more than a week inside the Gulf. The validity of this assessment was to be confirmed three years later when, as a result of an Iraqi threat to Kuwait, the carriers H.M.S. *Victorious* and *Centaur* were to experience prolonged operations in the Persian Gulf.

91. The Commander in Chief suggested, therefore, that for the time being the *Bulwark* should either (a) operate off the Muscat coast against the Jebel Akhdar rebels or, (b) remain at Aden with her squadrons disembarked for air operations in the Protectorate; either of which would relieve the R.A.F. squadrons for the 'Valiant' commitment.

#### SALVAGE OF FRENCH AND LIBERIAN TANKERS IN COLLISION

92. In the event, (a) was adopted; but after operating for one full day on 12th September, H.M.S. *Bulwark* became involved in a large-scale rescue and salvage operation as a result of collision between two large tankers. One of them, the French *Fernand Gilabert*, was towed to Karachi by H.M.S. *Loch Killisport*. The other, the Liberian ship *Melika*, was found abandoned and on fire. After a night of fire-fighting and salvage work by parties from the *Bulwark*, the fires were brought under control and the ship prepared for towing. Arduous and complicated towing operations by the carrier, assisted by the frigate *Puma*, over the next six days, finally brought the *Melika* safely to anchor off Muscat on 20th September. On the following day one more day's operations in the Jebel Akhdar was carried out before the *Bulwark* shaped course for Aden preparatory to starting on her passage home via the Mediterranean.

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

### TRANSFER OF MINESWEEPERS TO ADEN

93. A fresh naval commitment had in the meantime arisen as a result of the decision that an operational minesweeping force should be sent to the Red Sea as a precaution against any mining threat to our supply route to Aqaba. H.M.S. *Woodbridge Haven* (Captain, Inshore Flotillas) (Captain J. S. DGLISH) and H.M. Ships *Walkerton* (Commander R. D. MacDonald) and *Wilkieston* (Lieutenant Commander O. C. Wright) (Coastal Minesweepers), were hurriedly sailed on 9th August from Izmir where they had been taking part in a NATO minesweeping exercise, and H.M. Ships *Kildarton* (Lieutenant A. Malone) and *Lullington* (Lieutenant Commander A. A. G. Harper) were detailed from Cyprus to complete the force. With as many of the Captain, Inshore Flotillas' requirements as possible, including chart folios for the CMSs, the latter two ships were sailed, together with the R.F.A. *Brown Ranger*, for a rendezvous north of Port Said.

94. The *Kildarton* had hardly left Cyprus waters before a crankshaft balance weight on her starboard engine broke off and she was reduced to one engine. The *Carhampton* (Lieutenant N. A. B. Anson) was taken off patrol to replace her, but when it was subsequently decided that a force of three CMSs could be accepted until the *Kildarton* had been repaired, the *Carhampton* was ordered back to Cyprus with the *Brown Ranger* after the latter had replenished the force.

95. H.M. Ships *Woodbridge Haven*, *Walkerton*, *Wilkieston* and *Lullington* passed through the Canal during 12th and 13th August and arrived at Aden on the 19th. The *Kildarton* rejoined the flotilla there two days later. Though no mine-sweeping task actually arose for these ships, they were to prove useful to the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies who, with his exiguous force of smaller ships, had, besides providing guardships at Aqaba, Aden, Bahrein and the Shatt-al-Arab, to maintain anti-arms-smuggling patrols along the coast of the Trucial Oman and generally meet the requirements of the CBFAP, in his long-drawn, often frustrated, operations in aid of the Sultan of Oman in the Jebel Akhdar.

96. The Aqaba post, in fact, was filled continuously by visitors to the Station, H.M.S. *Ulysses* being relieved on 22nd August, to begin her passage home to pay off, by H.M.S. *Modeste* (Commander P. B. Stuart) herself on her way home from the Far East Station. The *Modeste* remained until 7th September when the *Woodbridge Haven*, accompanied by two CMSs, arrived to allow her to continue her voyage home. Two CMSs were

thereafter maintained at Aqaba, exchanges being made from time to time amongst the flotillas, reliefs coming from Aden or the Mediterranean as convenient. A frigate usually accompanied them at Aqaba, H.M.S. *Bigbury Bay* returning from the Mediterranean for a second spell as guardship on 3rd October and remaining until relieved by H.M.S. *Loch Fyne* on the 21st.

## PROBLEM OF PROVISION OF CARRIER IN EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

97. By early October, however, plans for evacuation of our force from Jordan towards the end of that month were being prepared. Against the possibility of this being a somewhat delicate phase, it was considered important that a fully operational carrier should be available in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean began to sound a note of warning that this might be difficult to provide. H.M.S. *Bulwark*, taking a turn there from 1st October to allow H.M.S. *Eagle* to return to Malta for repairs, was due to leave for the United Kingdom on the 23rd. The *Eagle* had to leave the area not later than 31st October for docking at Gibraltar. H.M.S. *Victorious* would not complete self-maintenance until 4th November and would have only achieved her first work-up period at that time. She could not be considered operational until after a second work-up period on 15th November and commitment to the Jordan operation would necessitate her squadrons concentrating on the ground attack role at expense of her full work-up.

98. There remained H.M.S. *Albion*, which would have completed her work-up after the delay caused by her trooping trip, but which had a tight programme scheduled east of Suez, including a period of flying in support of the operations in Oman and an important exercise (Midlink) with the Pakistani Navy. This would be thrown out if she were to be retained in the Mediterranean beyond 1st November.

99. Although, in the event, the carrier requirement was just met through the air-lift portion of the evacuation from Jordan being advanced, the above has been recounted to show how tight-stretched our resources were to compete with a comparatively minor operational situation, though there were four carriers in commission in the area.

## WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS FROM JORDAN

100. Following much negotiation on the international level to get over the obstacle of overflight permission, the decision was

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

taken to withdraw British forces from Jordan beginning on 20th October and finishing very early in November. The main body of troops and R.A.F. personnel were to be taken out by air from Amman to Cyprus, overflying Syria and the Lebanon, between 25th and 29th October, while the considerable amount of stores and equipment was to be removed by road from Amman to Aqaba and thence to Cyprus in War Department LSTs.

101. The last troops to leave were to be the Cameronians and the Chiefs of Staff decided that this battalion - its vehicles embarked in the War Department L.S.T. *Evan Gibb* - should be transported to Kenya aboard the cruiser *Ceylon* (Captain F. R. Twiss) which, like other ships, had been borrowed from another Station. In this case the *Ceylon*, on passage from the U.K. to join the Far East Station, had first been lent to the Flag Officer Flotillas Mediterranean as his flagship during the absence of the *Sheffield* in the Persian Gulf and had then been put at the disposal of the Commander, British Forces Arabian Peninsula as relief for the *Sheffield* as the current guardship for the Persian Gulf.

102. This commitment had been decreasing in importance with the simmering down of the Middle East crisis and the principal task of the cruiser had become the supervision of the salvage of the oil tanker *Melika* at Muscat (see above). The *Ceylon*, which had brought a large quantity of steel plates and girders for repair of the tanker, remained at Muscat for only three days, from 13th to 16th October. Then, leaving H.M.S. *Loch Killisport* in charge of the *Melika* operation, she moved on to Bahrein to embark the 300 officers and men of the 24th Infantry Brigade Headquarters, and their stores and baggage, for passage to Aden whence they were to return to Kenya by air on conclusion of the Middle East crisis.

103. This task was completed by 24th October and on the 28th the *Ceylon* sailed from Aden for Aqaba which she reached on 1st November. In the interval, considerable planning confusion with regard to the lift of the Cameronians had had to be sorted out. The Army had announced that the number to be embarked was 640. CASPG had informed the Flag Officer, Middle East that no more than 300 could be accommodated but FOME advised his colleagues on the BDCC that 400 was a more realistic figure for an eight day journey to Mombasa at that particular time of year. FOME's suggestion that H.M.S. *Albion*, which was about to move from the Eastern Mediterranean to Aden, should call at Aqaba to embark the surplus was vetoed by the Chiefs



of Staff, who quoted precedents from the Korean War for a complete battalion being easily accommodated in a cruiser<sup>1</sup>.

104. The Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Land Forces, unwilling to subject the battalion to unnecessary discomfort, proposed that the surplus should be embarked in LSTs, only to be told by CBFAP that he could not supply any and by the Chiefs of Staff that no Middle East LSTs other than the *Evan Gibb* were to be sent so far afield. The matter was therefore referred once more to London and permission was now obtained to use H.M.S. *Albion* and her attendant frigate *Chichester* (Commander R. D. Bute) provided that no more than 150 soldiers were embarked in the carrier, which would permit her flying operations to continue without interference.

105. At this point the Army announced that the strength of the Cameronians had been magically reduced to 540 which, it was apparent, could very nearly be squeezed into H.M.S. *Ceylon* and the *Evan Gibb*. When H.M.S. *Albion*, which had been due to transit the Canal on 31st October, was held up at Port Said for 24 hours, FOME decided that, with the reduced numbers, it would be far simpler after all to do without her and use the *Ceylon*, *Evan Gibb* and *Chichester* only. This had the added advantage that only the few embarked in the *Chichester* would have to be disembarked at Aden and sent to Kenya by other means.

106. The embarkation took place on 2nd November 1958 and was enlivened by a visit of ceremony by King Hussein who visited and walked round H.M. Ships *Ceylon* and *Loch Fyne* and inspected a Royal Guard mounted on shore by the Cameronians. After this inspection the Colonel Commanding the Cameronians (Lieutenant Colonel A. C. A. Mackinnon) asked permission of His Majesty 'to march the last British troops out of Jordan'. King Hussein nodded his assent, whereupon the Cameronians' guard marched off with drums beating and pipes skirling, being saluted by the Jordanian Army Guard as they left. By daylight on 3rd November all ships had cleared the Straits of Tiran and the evacuation of Jordan was complete.

107. H.M.S. *Ceylon*, after calling at Aden for fuel, arrived at Mombasa on 9th November, where the Cameronians disembarked. Discomfort for the troops had been fortunately confined to two days, 3rd and 4th November when, during the journey to Aden,

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<sup>1</sup> H.M.S. *Ceylon* transported 21 officers and 600 other ranks of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders from Hong Kong to Pusan in August 1950, a journey of four days.

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a strong head-wind of 25 to 30 knots was met, causing considerable washing down. This, combined with the inevitable and constant funnel fumes which affected the *Ceylon* whenever any head wind was met, caused a great deal of dirt and discomfort as well as some sea-sickness.

### COMMENTS ON OPERATIONS BY FLAG OFFICERS CONCERNED

108. On completion of these Operations, the various Flag Officers had a number of criticisms and comments to make. Both the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean (Admiral Sir Charles Lambe) and the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station (Vice Admiral Sir Hilary Biggs), as quoted above, drew attention to the unfortunate consequences of the two occasions when the Admiralty nominated a specific ship for a task rather than leave the selection to the Flag Officer on the spot. Nevertheless, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean commented favourably on the improvement in this respect as compared with the Suez operation of two years earlier.

109. In the Mediterranean the most instructive aspect of the operations was the problem of maintaining a Carrier Task Force in the forward area for a long period. During the first three months H.M.S. *Eagle* was divorced from dockyard support except for a nine-day period in July, when a planned fourteen-day self-maintenance had to be curtailed owing to the flare-up of the Iraq revolution. The carrier, as related above, suffered a period of defective machinery at a critical moment of the operations.

110. The problem was twofold:

a. To keep operational a carrier and six escorts as well as two frigates on Cyprus patrol out of the meagre force available, and

b. To main the welfare of the ships' companies under conditions of virtually no leave and scanty recreation over so long a period.

111. With regard to a., the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean commented:

'The Carrier operating cycle of "20 days out, 10 in", was once again proved to be entirely sound, though it was found that if the Carrier had to remain for more than three weeks in the forward area the machinery, particularly the main propulsion and auxiliary machinery, was bound to deteriorate. Spells in harbour of about four days, with a reliable



water supply, enabled the ship's company to slow down this deterioration considerably. Nevertheless, after about 30 days a proper self-maintenance period, probably longer than usual and supported by the Dockyard, became essential.'

112. 'As with recreation the position would have been very much more difficult had it been winter, when short notice for steam, difficulty of supplying water at anchor, and other factors would have seriously interfered with self-maintenance in the forward area. The only satisfactory answer would have been more ships.'

113. 'From the experience of these six months one lesson stands out above all others. This is that to maintain an aircraft carrier continually poised for operations of this nature it is necessary to have on the station 2 carriers and 2 sets of escorts. With anything less, both morale and machinery must inevitably suffer. Morale would not break down, but because the effect would be felt in the long term it must not on that account be neglected. Machinery would deteriorate and might break down. In the circumstances of last summer I had, from time to time, to take a calculated risk to ensure that the ships received adequate maintenance. On the day that King Feisal was murdered, *Eagle* was in Malta completing a self-maintenance period. In the event this was not serious; but it might well have been.'

114. 'The requirement for the carrier was met, except for a period of about a fortnight before we went into Jordan, by:

- a. *Albion* coming from the U.K. for a spell.
- b. Using *Bulwark* on her way back from east of Suez.
- c. Skimping on *Eagle's* self-maintenance.
- d. High passage speeds and allowing turn-over half way between Malta and the operational area.

The percentage availability for carriers, at 73 per cent, was higher than the recognised normal maximum for these ships, 66 per cent.'

115. Turning to the question of escorts, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean wrote that:

'It was clearly not possible entirely to meet the requirement for 8 destroyer/frigates (2 on Cyprus patrol plus 6 with the carrier) with an operational availability of just over 7.

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The following unsatisfactory expedients were therefore necessary:

- a. Use of cruisers in destroyer/frigate role.
- b. Use of Amphibious Warfare Squadron ships on Cyprus patrol.
- c. Since the carrier task force operational area was close to Cyprus, destroyer/frigates in lull periods doubled the roles of Cyprus patrol ships and carrier escort. CMS standing off in Malta were detailed to be at short notice to replace the destroyers on patrol if the latter were called to the carrier.
- d. The heavy repair ship H.M.S. *Ranpura* was sent to the forward area for a time so reducing repair facilities at Malta but avoiding loss of time on passage and accelerating repairs. Time alongside the repair ship in the forward area has been counted as operational.
- e. Work-ups of ships joining the station were abbreviated to an extent which inevitably reduced efficiency.

The availability of destroyer/frigates was increased by retaining 2 squadrons on the Station beyond the normal expectation of their GSC.'

116. With regard to welfare and morale, the Flag Officer, Aircraft Carriers (Vice Admiral Bingley) reported that:

'The weather throughout this period was exceedingly hot and humid. As much as possible was done to alleviate the boredom and discomfort which are the inevitable consequences of 2,500 men being cooped up in this cramped and overcrowded ship with no shore leave for weeks on end. At sea, hands were piped to bathe daily, whenever the weather permitted and, in harbour, as many ratings as there were boats to carry were landed on the beach throughout the daylight hours. The flight deck was given over to deck hockey tournaments, sports meetings and concert parties whenever aircraft were not operating from it. Such information about the situation as could be released was regularly passed to the *Eagle* and ships in company. Nevertheless, as week succeeded week, with the position seemingly unchanged and the weather becoming ever more humid, life was not easy. Should the need to keep a carrier at short notice in Cyprus waters persist into winter months, when even bathing parties could not be landed, it will be essential to provide canteen and sports facilities ashore and a pier at which to land.'

117. Nevertheless the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean was able to report that:

'..... morale remained high. Boredom stemming from lack of variety in work and play was the chief enemy. The position was aggravated by:

a. The very limited recreational facilities available in Cyprus, though the service authorities ashore were very generous with such amenities as they had to offer.

b. The fact that there was virtually no port which British ships were permitted to visit within 1,000 miles of Cyprus.

Had these operations taken place in winter time when the beaches are no longer an attraction and boatwork in the exposed anchorages is difficult or impossible, then it would have been essential to withdraw ships more frequently.'

118. Summing up the insufficiency of the forces at his disposal for the task in hand, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean concluded:

'From these experiences one lesson emerges that transcends all others in importance. This is, that to maintain a force of x ships poised for limited war operations for any length of time, there must be 2x ships available on the station. This is not a new lesson, but it is one that is sometimes brushed to one side.'

## COMMUNICATIONS SHORTCOMINGS

119. As seems inevitable in Joint Operations (at any rate prior to the establishment of an integrated Ministry of Defence), signal communications came in for sharp criticism. The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean commented on

'the gross misuse of precedence and classification and many examples of verbosity ... It was noticeable that a very bad example was set by the Ministry of Defence in these respects ... These lessons have been learnt after every crisis of recent years, and yet no improvement appears to have taken place. It is reluctantly concluded that the only practicable solution to this problem would be the introduction of a monitoring bureau with power to take disciplinary action on breaches of the perfectly effective rules which exist, and failure to comply with which so seriously jeopardises communications efficiency.'

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120. Similarly, the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station reported on

'the considerable room for improvement in inter-service agreement on the interpretation of the rules for use of Classification and Precedence. Generally speaking throughout the present crisis a large volume of Operational Immediate and Top Secret Traffic has not appeared to warrant its precedence and/or classification.'

121. He went on to suggest that, 'The fact that Top Secret signals are handled by other than officers in other services appears to lead to a gross over-use of this classification which results in considerable extra work by officers in naval ships and establishments where the rules are rigidly enforced.' As an example of verbosity he quoted a signal 'received in my Headquarters from the Admiralty which gave all the information required in 51 groups, while another authority gave me the same information unnecessarily "written up" in 210 groups'. Similar criticisms were to be made three years later by senior officers engaged in the Kuwait operation, indicating that little or no improvement had been made in this matter in the interval.

122. Other communications difficulties which will not be gone into in detail here concerned:

a. The need for increased communication personnel, especially in flagships, whenever a crisis erupts. A suggested solution was the establishment of a Central Emergency Communication Pool, dispersed among selected shore establishments in the U.K. The Director of the Signal Division was able to satisfy this demand by earmarking the Home Exercise Pool for this purpose.

b. The need for progressing nationally as well as between the U.S. and U.K. the inter-service planning on which a start had already been made at the time the report was written.

c. The requirement for improved standardization of:

(1) Callsigns systems used by the R.N. and U.S.N. in peace or cold or limited war. These only (at that time) became compatible when used on a NATO basis for global war.

(2) Methods of address, reference and distribution which differed greatly between the three U.K. services and were liable to lead to misunderstandings which seriously prejudice operations.

d. The shortage of communication personnel in R.F.A.s.

## SHORTCOMINGS OF TROOP TRANSPORT BY AIR

123. Perhaps the most important strategic lesson to be learnt from these operations (and one which was again to be demonstrated three years later) was the precarious reliability of troop transport by air. Firstly it is subject to the uncertainties of obtaining permission to overfly intervening foreign territory. A total failure to respond to the King of Jordan's request for immediate military aid almost resulted from Israel's intransigence in this matter. At the end of the crisis further intensive diplomatic effort and the intervention of the United Nations Mission in the Lebanon was required before permission could be obtained from the United Arab Republic to overfly Syria and the Lebanon to evacuate the Parachute Brigade and R.A.F. personnel from Amman to Cyprus.

124. This requirement for overflight permission indeed bedevils the whole question of air transport of troops in an emergency. It was gravely to prejudice the success of operations three years later in defence of Kuwait when threatened by Iraq. The situation was then only saved by the fortuitous presence of the commando carrier *Bulwark* in the area with No. 42 R.M. Commando embarked and of the LST H.M.S. *Striker*, loaded with half a squadron of tanks - a good example of the advantages to be reaped from the maintenance of self-contained forces beyond the Suez barrier.

125. Nevertheless, although air transport may be prevented from fulfilling the role popularly ascribed to it of rapidly delivering troops to a trouble spot, it can be invaluable as a freight-carrying service to keep ships provided with essential stores and spare gear and so it proved in the course of this operation.

## VALUE OF CARRIERS IN TROOP TRANSPORT ROLE

126. Another unsatisfactory aspect of troop movements by air transport is the difficulty of delivering the troops simultaneously with their vehicles, heavy stores and weapons. The Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station commented particularly on this matter when referring to H.M.S. *Bulwark's* lift of the King's Own Royal Regiment from Mombasa to Aden:

'As things turned out', he wrote, 'it was extremely fortunate that H.M.S. *Bulwark* and a frigate were actually in Mombasa when the "coup" took place in Iraq and that H.M.S. *Gambia* and two frigates were within three days steaming of Mombasa,



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as this enabled a battalion, the M/T at light scales of another battalion, ancillary troops numbering about 500, together with several hundred tons of equipment to be lifted from Kenya to Aden in much faster time than would have been possible by using the air lift available.

'The lift of these troops and equipment in H.M. Ships again brought to light one of the problems of the rapid movement of troops by air or in H.M. Ships (other than carriers). This is the lack of facilities to carry quickly to the same destination as the troops the comparatively large amount of M/T required to give them mobility and hitting power. Unless it is possible to pre-position this M/T, which is usually uneconomical in both maintenance, personnel and vehicles, troops often arrive at their destination without essential M/T for their fighting role.'

127. To the Commander-in-Chief's proposal to meet the requirements for rapid transfer of troops in emergency by adding 'at least two of our redundant light fleet carriers to the Army's troop transport fleet', there are some obvious impediments. Nevertheless his experiences and views add weight to the arguments of the supporters of maintaining aircraft carriers in commission for use in limited war or 'brush-fire' operations.

128. Against this - or possibly in support of an increased number of carriers being maintained with an eye to their use in the troop-carrying role - must perhaps be recorded the reaction of the Flag Officer, Aircraft Carriers on hearing of H.M.S. *Albion's* diversion from working up her squadrons to embark No. 42 R.M. Commando:

'My peace of mind', he wrote, 'was not helped by the news that the *Albion*, whom I expected to be working-up at the rush so as to get ready to replace either the *Eagle* or the *Bulwark* if their defects grew to a level which made them unfit to operate, had disembarked her aircraft and was being used as a vehicle and troop transport ... It sets back the date of the ship's attainment of operational efficiency by a much longer time than the gap in her work-up. Carriers may well be urgently needed during the next few months at any of a dozen trouble spots in the Middle East and elsewhere; and it is of the greatest importance that our slender allowance of these ships should be kept up to a state of training and maintenance which will ensure that they are available for the many demands which they alone can meet. There are many ways of carrying lorries about but only one way of producing mobile air power.'

129. A compromise between the views of these two Flag Officers may perhaps have been found in the subsequent conversion of H.M. Ships *Bulwark* and *Albion* to commando ships, though this arrangement further reduces the 'slender allowance' of carriers and does not make the commando ships available for transporting Regular Army units. For the rapid movements of these, air transport has still to be relied upon with all the disadvantages mentioned by Vice Admiral Biggs.

130. Reliance upon air transport in any particular set of circumstances is open to objection for another reason also. The Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station found that the various standing Joint Operational Instructions (JOI), covering possible emergencies had been compiled independently of each other. Each relied upon the whole of the available air transport.

'In consequence', he commented, 'on this occasion, when several JOIs were put into force at the same time, the air transport lift which is written into most of the JOIs as available had to be split between the various JOIs with the result that troop movements were delayed in each.

'It would seem that, in this very volatile Middle East area where what happens in one Arab country tends to have repercussions throughout the Arab world, it would be prudent to plan on the worst case, i.e., when several JOIs have to be put into effect simultaneously, since this will tend to produce a more realistic answer.'

## CONCLUSION

131. To conclude this précis of the naval aspect of the Jordan/Lebanon operations of 1958, it is noteworthy that the main criticisms by the Flag Officers concerned are directed either to strategic features such as the inadequate forces available to deal with any serious crisis or to inter-service shortcomings. So far as the Navy alone was concerned, the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Station was able to say:

'It is most gratifying to see how few of the many mistakes which occurred at the time of Suez and again at the onset of the Muscat/Oman rebellion have been repeated. I have no doubt that before long we will, by the continual practice that we have, have a crisis where the Navy makes no mistakes.'

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# Kuwait 1961

## Deployment of Forces and Naval Operations

### THE SETTING

1. The States along the western shores of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman have been a close concern of the British Government, and the waters off their coasts of the Royal Navy, for upwards of 150 years - ever since, in fact, the East India Company began to trade with Mesopotamia and Persia. The Gulf States, largely arid desert, with little incentive to trade, engaged instead in piracy and the slave trade, in the suppression of both of which the British Navy occupied itself, while the British Government established itself in the role of protector of the independence of the states against the territorial claims of Turkey. Listed from east to west, the states are given below.

2. *MUSCAT AND OMAN*, a narrow strip of territory along the Arabian Sea coast running from the boundary with the South Arabian Federation to the entrance to the Persian Gulf, with the exception of a strip of coast line from Dibah to Khor Kalba which belongs to the Sheikh of Sharjah and so forms part of Trucial Oman (see below). The political link of this independent state with Britain is the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation signed on 20th December 1951 which 're-affirmed the close ties which have existed for over 150 years'. Muscat and Oman is, however, not a protected State, is independent and fully responsible for its own international relations. H.M. Government are not under any obligation to protect the Sultanate though they have done so on various occasions over about the last 150 years. The government has been a hereditary Sultanate since 1741. Prior to this it was an elective Imamate and the Sheikhs of the interior have never willingly acquiesced in the Sultan's overlordship. From time to time they elect an Imam and stage a rebellion. As recently as 1956 the Imam Ghalib bin Ali and his brother Talib, with Saudi-Arabian assistance, recruited and trained a force of some 500 Omanis and captured Nizwa, the capital of Oman proper. The Sultan appealed to H.M. Government for assistance and a desultory campaign ensued until February 1959 in which a small mixed force of British and local troops,

backed by air support, finally evicted the rebels from their stronghold, the mountain feature known as the Jebel Akhdar. The leaders of the revolt, however, escaped.

3. *TRUCIAL OMAN*. This comprises seven Sheikdoms occupying the coastal strip formerly known as the 'Pirate Coast', from the entrance to the Persian Gulf to the borders of Qatar (see below). The seven Sheikdoms are Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and Kalba, Ajman, Umm al Qaiwain, Ras al Khaimah and Fujairah. Originally bound by a treaty signed in 1820, following piratical acts against the East India Company, which prescribed peace with the British Government and perpetual abstention from plunder, piracy and slave trading, they entered in 1853 into a 'Perpetual Maritime Truce' (hence the name). In 1892 the Sheikhs signed an 'Exclusive Agreement' under which they bound themselves, their heirs and successors on no account to enter into any agreement or correspondence with any power other than the British Government, receive foreign agents or cede, sell or give for occupation any part of their territory save to the British Government. Until recently poor and undeveloped, the discovery of oil in Abu Dhabi will transform at least some of them in the near future.

4. *QATAR*, which embraces the whole of the peninsula of that name, has relations with the British Government similar to those of the Trucial States by a treaty signed in November 1916. It contains an oilfield centred on Dukhan with an oil port at Umm Said.

5. *BAHREIN*, which consists of an archipelago of which the biggest island is Bahrein, some 30 miles by 10 miles, is likewise under special treaty relations with Great Britain by which H.M. Government is responsible for the Sheikh's foreign relations and accepts responsibility to protect the State against external aggression in the same manner as British territory. Oil was discovered in 1932 bringing immense wealth to the Sheikh. From the little island of Sitra oil pipe lines and a road extend on a causeway three miles to seaward to a deep-water anchorage. On the island of Muharraq is a modern international airport.

6. *KUWAIT* is an independent Sheikdom in the north-west corner of the Persian Gulf, some 190 miles by 160 miles in extent with its northern and western frontiers common with Iraq, its southern with the Saudi-Arabian province of Hasa which separates Kuwait from Qatar. Until 1899 Kuwait was nominally a part of the Turkish province of Basra; but the British Government never recognised this and in that year the Ruler signed an Exclusive Agreement subjecting foreign relations to British control.

Oil production began in 1946 and a refinery and deep water port were constructed at Mina al Ahmadi. The enhanced status conferred by the resultant increase in wealth led to a desire on the part of the Ruler to free himself of British domination. Kuwait's assumption of full responsibility for her international relations was tacitly accepted by H.M. Government as early as March 1960, but it was not until 19th June 1961 that the Exclusive Agreement was formally abrogated by an Exchange of Notes. Nevertheless H.M. Government continued to be 'under an obligation to protect' Kuwait in a military sense.<sup>1</sup>

## THE CONTINGENCY PLAN

7. Ever since the Iraq revolution in July 1958, when the conservative, pro-western government of Nuri-es-Said was overthrown and he, the young King Feisal and the ex-Regent Abdul Illah, were murdered, the political climate of Iraq and the unstable personality of its dictator, General Kassem, had made a forcible attempt to absorb Kuwait a distinct possibility. A Reinforced Theatre Plan (RTP(AP)No. 7)<sup>2</sup> for intervention was therefore prepared in October 1959 and was finalised under the code-name of Operation 'Vantage', being brought up to date from time to time to take account of improvements in military facilities which became available. The latest revision of the movement appendices to the Plan<sup>3</sup> was made in December 1960 and preparation of a successor plan (Bellringer) was being undertaken during the early months of 1961, some of the improved items of which had been given effect to as Operation Instructions for various units. The revision to 'Vantage' took account - apart from an increased number of transport aircraft being available - of the arrangements under which the Amphibious Warfare Squadron had been transferred from the Mediterranean Station to the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf Command and the LST, H.M.S. *Striker*, was kept loaded with half a tank squadron. In addition, tanks owned by the Kuwaitis were stockpiled in Kuwait for our use, while at Bahrein British artillery was stockpiled. All units concerned were kept permanently at four days' notice.

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<sup>1</sup>Reply by Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to a Question in the House of Commons on 4th February 1959.

<sup>2</sup>COS(59)288.

<sup>3</sup>COS 1620/16/12/60.

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8. The Plan visualised three possible circumstances under which intervention might be called for:

A(i) Given four days' warning during which certain preliminary moves would allow a balanced force of a tactical HQ and two battalions of infantry with an armoured squadron (half LST-borne and half stockpiled in Kuwait) supported by two frigates and one Day Fighter/Ground Attack Squadron (Hunters), to be in Kuwait within 24 hours of the executive order.

A(ii) Given no warning, the requirement was to land a small force in Kuwait as soon as possible after the Ruler's request had been made. The importance of meeting the request promptly was to be considered greater than that of ensuring that the initial force was balanced or that the follow-up element was immediately available. Under this plan two infantry/parachute companies would arrive on D + 1 (i.e., within 48 hours of a request from the Ruler), supported by a frigate and by a squadron of Canberra bombers which would arrive from Germany and be based on the airfield at Sharjah (Trucial Oman). A section of PR Canberras should be already at Bahrein as they were scheduled to move there from Cyprus in periods of tension in the Gulf independently of 'Vantage'. By the end of D + 2 the land force would have built up to a tactical headquarters and two battalions with the LST-borne half squadron of tanks. On the following day a DF/GA squadron (Hunters) would arrive and the personnel for the half squadron of tanks stockpiled at Kuwait. The main build-up was to be completed by D + 6 except for a field battery R.A. arriving on D + 7 and the balance of the armoured squadron from Aden on D + 12.

B. Assumed that Her Majesty's Government had decided upon military intervention to suppress an insurrection without the invitation of the Ruler. This need not be considered here as the circumstances did not arise, beyond noting that it entailed a parachute drop to capture Kuwait airfield.

9. So far as naval support for 'Vantage' was concerned, the three frigates of the Gulf Squadron would be required to provide gunfire support while the ships of the Amphibious Warfare Squadron, including the *Striker* with her embarked half squadron of tanks and three War Department LSTs, had various transportation tasks allotted to them. The eventual addition of a carrier

and her escorts to the naval force was also envisaged, but as these might have to come from anywhere east of Suez, their arrival could not be more exactly forecast than D + 7-21.

10. Such, in the briefest terms, were the several plans in being. In the event none of them was exactly implemented. Although, in fact, four days' warning was indirectly provided by the march of events, advantage was not taken of it by the Ministry of Defence to set the wheels in motion by establishing a G-day and ordering the preliminary moves. Thus many of their provisions, particularly the movements which depended upon air transport, went awry as will be seen in the ensuing narrative: in compensation, however, an unexpected bonus was granted to the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, by the fortuitous presence of a Commando Ship with a R.M. Commando embarked and by the fact that the whole of the tanks of the 3rd Dragoon Guards were already ship-borne, half in the *Striker* and half in the War Department LST *Empire Gull*, on account of a change-round of tanks planned for the 29th June. Crews for only the *Striker's* tanks were ship-borne, however. Owing to the *Empire Gull's* lack of air conditioning, it had been decided that tank crews should not live in her in the heat of the Persian Gulf summer and they were due in the normal course of events to arrive at Bahrein by air from Aden on the 30th.

#### ONSET OF THE CRISIS

11. During the first half of June 1961 the situation with regard to Kuwait seemed reasonably quiet. To quote from the subsequent Report<sup>1</sup> by the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, Air Marshal Sir Charles Elworthy, 'The latest assessment of an Iraqi threat was contained in JP(61)58 dated 12th June 1961, in which it was stated that it was unlikely that Iraq would risk an attack on Kuwait, that for political reasons such an attack would probably be preceded by an attempted insurrection, and that some warning could be expected, though the possibility existed of a small-scale Iraqi putsch of which we might have little or no warning.'

12. On the 19th June an Exchange of Notes between H.M. Government and the Ruler of Kuwait formally abrogated the Exclusive Agreement of 1899 under which Kuwait had surrendered responsibility for her foreign relations to H.M. Government. The Notes concluded by re-affirming the readiness of

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<sup>1</sup>COS(61)378.



## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

H.M. Government to assist Kuwait if the Government of Kuwait so requested. As mentioned above, this merely confirmed a state of affairs that had already been in operation for some time. Whether the Iraqi dictator, General Kassem, appreciated this fact or not, his reaction was to announce on the evening of the 25th June at a Press Conference that a Decree would be issued on the morrow appointing the Sheikh of Kuwait as Qaimaqam of Kuwait in the Province of Basra. This, of course, signified Kassem's claim to Kuwait as Iraqi territory, a claim elaborated in the statement presented to the Diplomatic Corps in Baghdad on the 26th which based itself on Kuwait's one-time inclusion in the Turkish Empire as part of the Province of Basra.

13. It at once became a matter of great urgency to know whether Kassem was planning any military move in support of his claim. This was not easy to assess as troop movements had been in progress preparatory to the holding of military parades on July 14th, the Iraq National Day. The starting point for any aggressive move would be Basra, whence elements could reach the Iraq-Kuwait border in 12 hours. On the whole, the British Ambassador in Baghdad considered aggression unlikely though not out of the question. On the horns of a dilemma whether it was advisable to take precautionary steps and so perhaps give Kassem a propaganda advantage and encourage him to act, or, on the other hand, to await developments and so fritter away the warning period granted them, the British Government decided to watch and wait while the Ruler of Kuwait was assured of help should he require it.

14. Nevertheless, by the evening of 28th June uneasiness at the situation led the Chiefs of Staff to order, as a precautionary measure, all forces required for Operation Vantage to states of readiness as in the appendices to the operation order. In addition the Commando Ship H.M.S. *Bulwark* (Captain R. D. Franks) which by good chance had reached Karachi, with 42 R.M. Commando embarked, on her way from the Far East Station to the Persian Gulf to carry out hot weather trials, was ordered to proceed directly to Kuwait. These orders did not actually put 'Vantage' into motion or establish a G-day which would have given the various units a precise time-table to follow. The Flag Officer Middle East (Rear Admiral A. A. F. Talbot), however, at his headquarters in Bahrein, decided to anticipate the executive order. Forces under his command were deployed as follows:

KUWAIT 1961

- a.* In Bahrein area: H.M.S. *Meon* (Captain A. G. McCrum)  
Captain, Amphibious Warfare  
Squadron
- H.M.S. *Loch Alvie* (Frigate - Com-  
mander J. H. Nethersole)
- H.M.S. *Striker* (LST - Commander  
M. H. J. Petrie) with half squadron  
tanks and crews embarked
- H.M.S. *Parapet* (LCT - Lieutenant  
Commander J. A. N. Cuming) (at  
Bahrein slipway)
- H.M.S. *Bastion* (LCT - Lieutenant  
Commander J. R. Nightingale)
- H.M.S. *Redoubt* (LCT - Lieutenant  
Commander D. G. Hardy)
- b.* At Karachi: H.M.S. *Loch Fyne* (Frigate - Com-  
mander P. J. M. Shevlin)
- c.* At Mombasa: H.M.S. *Loch Ruthven* (Frigate -  
Captain D. B. Law) for Internal  
Security Duties at Zanzibar if  
required.

The other naval LST normally on the station, H.M.S. *Anzio*, was at Malta undergoing repairs and her crew were in process of recommissioning H.M.S. *Messina* instead. Three War Department LSTs were also in the Gulf. At Bahrein were the *Empire Grebe* and the *Empire Gull*, the latter, as mentioned before, with half a squadron of tanks embarked. The *Empire Skua* had just left Dubai, in the Trucial Oman, to return to Aden.

15. During the night 28/29th July the following naval action was taken:

- a.* H.M.S. *Bulwark*, then tide-bound in Karachi but fully fuelled, was ordered by the Admiralty to sail for the Persian Gulf with dispatch as early as the tide permitted.
- b.* The Commanding Officer 42 R.M. Commando (Lieutenant Colonel E. R. Bridges, R.M.), who had been reconnoitring areas for the hot-weather trials in Muscat and the Trucial Coast was recalled to Bahrein.

c. The change-round of tanks between the *Striker* and the *Empire Gull*, planned for the 29th, was ordered to be stopped.

d. The ships at Bahrein were brought to 30 minutes notice for sea except for the *Parapet* which was to be got off the slipway as soon as possible.

e. H.M.S. *Loch Fyne*, three days docked down at Karachi, was instructed to undock and get ready for sea as quickly as possible and the Pakistani authorities were asked to make every effort to expedite this.

f. H.M.S. *Loch Ruthven* was ordered to sail for the Persian Gulf at her best speed.

g. H.M.S. *Loch Alvie* was ordered to embark the military stores laid down in Operation Vantage for Frigate 'B'.

16. At the same time the Admiralty instructed the Commander-in-Chief, Far East Station<sup>1</sup> to sail H.M.S. *Victorious* and escort (on passage from Singapore to Hong Kong) to the Persian Gulf with dispatch and to bring the cruiser *Belfast* to short notice.

## PREPARATORY MOVES

17. At this stage, in the absence of any executive order to implement 'Vantage', the transport aircraft from outside the Middle East Theatre, upon which the operation largely depended, were at various notices for readiness, a few in the U.K. at between 12 and 24 hours, but the majority at between three and five days. During the night 28/29 June, the Chiefs of Staff passed on to the Commanders-in-Chief a warning received from the Military Attaché in Baghdad that 'it now seems likely that Kassem is preparing for crash action against Kuwait. Earliest date on which complete tank regiment could be in Basra is morning of 1st July.'

18. At their meeting on the 29th June<sup>2</sup>, the Chiefs of Staff, for the first time, examined the question of the route to be followed by the air-borne reinforcements from the U.K. and Cyprus required to implement 'Vantage'. They noted that

'There were three possible overflying routes for reinforcements from the U.K. and from Cyprus. First, the northern

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<sup>1</sup>Adm 282040Z.

<sup>2</sup>COB(61) 41st Meeting.

route over Turkey and Iran. Three days' notice was normally required before this route could be used. It was 3,500 miles in length, and was the best for the move of the parachute battalion from Cyprus. It was, however, unsuitable for Beverleys. The second route was that via Khartoum. Beverleys and Hastings using this route, which was 5,000 miles in length, would need to land and refuel at Khartoum. It was probable that overflying clearance for this route could be obtained. The third possible route, via Kars, was 7,000 miles long and was thus the least to be preferred; moreover, it was doubtful whether clearance from Nigeria and the Congo could be obtained. The best course was to approach the countries concerned for clearance for the northern and the Khartoum routes. Whilst the transport aircraft themselves were at the appropriate notice, it would not be possible to pre-position slip crews and ground parties until it was known which routes were to be used.'

19. This situation starkly exposed the insecure foundations on which any intervention plan relying mainly upon air-transport rested. The Committee, however, took note that the Foreign Office would seek clearance for overflying on the northern and the Khartoum routes and the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East was so informed by signal<sup>1</sup>. The same message authorised all preparatory measures short of actually moving into Kuwait in order to achieve the highest state of readiness. Specifically, these measures were listed as:

'a. H.M.S. *Bulwark* to lie off Kuwait and to be joined by H.M.S. *Meon*, *Striker* and *Loch Alvie* and War Department LST *Empire Gull* with tanks embarked.

b. H.M.S. *Centaur* to sail from Gibraltar for Eastern Mediterranean under orders from the Admiralty.

c. Personnel of one armoured squadron less two troops to move soonest from U.K. to Bahrein ready to man tanks stockpiled in Kuwait.

d. Parachute battalion to move from Cyprus to Bahrein.

e. One Ground Attack Canberra Squadron to move from Germany to Sharjah.'

c. and d., of course, could not be implemented until overflying permission had been obtained. Meanwhile the Commander-in-Chief had ordered the two squadrons of DF/GA Hunters - No. 8

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<sup>1</sup>COSMID 11 TOO 291830Z TOR 300351Z

from Aden and 208 from Nairobi - to Bahrein, H.M.S. *Striker* in company with one frigate to sail to Kuwait and remain out of sight of land, and LSTs and LCTs to start loading the stores at Bahrein as laid down for them in 'Vantage'. Anticipating these orders, FOME during the 29th had ordered the LCTs H.M.S. *Bastion* and *Redoubt* to start loading, which they completed by mid-day on the 30th. The LST *Empire Skua* was ordered back to Dubai to embark the armoured cars of 11th Hussars. H.M.S. *Meon* (representing Frigate 'A' in Plan 'Vantage') and H.M.S. *Striker*, towing a Rhino ferry, had been sailed at 0800 on the 29th for a position roughly equidistant from Kuwait Town and Mina al Ahmadi where they would be best placed to execute any operation ordered.

20. This position was reached by mid-day on the 30th June, at which time the *Bulwark*, having made the passage from Karachi at 24 knots, had entered the Gulf and was approaching Bahrein. Embarked were 42 R.M. Commando, less 'B' troop, unit vehicles consisting of 16 × 3 ton, 18 × 1 ton (including 1 × 1 ton water bowser) 25 ×  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton and trailers and 30 Citroen 2 CV, as well as 1 × 3 ton, 1 × 1 ton and 9 ×  $\frac{1}{4}$  ton vehicles of Headquarters, 3 Commando Brigade R.M.

21. With the fast units of his local force thus moving forward, the Commander-in-Chief was becoming understandably anxious for G-hour to be established which would set in motion the plan for reinforcement from outside his station, particularly as these moves had absorbed all the locally-available transport aircraft. A signal from the Chief of the Defence Staff<sup>1</sup> on the subject of means of detecting the advance of Iraqi forces was received, which visualised the initial defence as a delaying action by the Kuwaiti Army tanks and the eight stockpiled tanks in Kuwait manned by British crews, until the LSTs could land their tanks, the *Bulwark* land her Marines and the Parachute Battalion be flown in. Referring to this, the Commander-in-Chief replied<sup>2</sup> emphasising that pre-positioning of adequate British forces in Kuwait prior to Iraqi aggression was a pre-requisite to success of Plan 'Vantage'.

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<sup>1</sup>COSMID 14 TOO 292355Z TOR 300215Z.

<sup>2</sup>MIDCOS 8 TOO 300825Z TOR 301035Z.



## G-HOUR NOMINATED

22. On the afternoon of the 30th June he reported<sup>1</sup> that all forces required to be concentrated in Bahrein in accordance with the preliminary moves of 'Vantage' had been called forward and suggested<sup>2</sup> that 301200Z be nominated G-hour. Two signals from the Chief of the Defence Staff<sup>3</sup> crossed the Commander-in-Chief's, ordering 'Vantage' to be implemented and nominating 301600Z as G-hour.

Neither these nor a further signal<sup>4</sup> announcing that the Ruler of Kuwait had now formally requested assistance constituted authorization for any troops to land. The Commander-in-Chief urgently sought for clarification, which came to him, after a three hour delay, by inference from a signal<sup>5</sup> laying down that, in order to fit UNO information procedure, no forces should enter Kuwait before 0700Z 1st July. The hiatus fortunately did not cause any delay in the movement of forces.

23. The situation at this stage, late on the night of Friday 30th June as seen by the Commander-in-Chief was as follows:

- a. An Iraqi attack on Kuwait seemed imminent.
- b. Sufficient 'teeth' forces must be built up in Kuwait as soon as possible to repel them, and accept the risk of attack on 1st July when a delaying action at best would be feasible.
- c. The Ruler's request meant that landings would be unopposed so that there was no requirement for a parachute drop (Plan 'B').
- d. The initial force required was assessed as not less than two Infantry Battalions, a Squadron of tanks, a Squadron of Armoured Cars, together with two Squadrons of Hunters in immediate support.
- e. This force should be completed by dawn on 2nd July.

24. The Commander-in-Chief envisaged that this force would be made up of:

- a. 42 R.M. Commando from *Bulwark*.

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<sup>1</sup>MIDCOS 11 TOO 301532Z TOR 301634Z.

<sup>2</sup>MIDSEC 46 TOO 301342Z TOR 301446Z.

<sup>3</sup>COSMID 17 TOO 301545Z TOR 301635Z.

<sup>4</sup>DEF 1228 TOR 301615.

<sup>5</sup>COSMID 19 TOO 301802Z TOR 301925Z.

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

b. No. 2 Parachute Battalion, which, under 'Vantage', could be flown direct from Cyprus to Kuwait in Transport Command and Near East Air Force aircraft and which were expected to arrive at Kuwait beginning at 0700 on 1st July.

c. Half Squadron 3rd Dragoon Guards from H.M.S. *Striker*, plus a further half squadron provided by the stockpile tanks in Kuwait.

d. Part of a squadron of armoured cars on their way by sea from the Bahrain stockpile (in H.M.S. *Redoubt*).

e. Nos. 8 and 208 Squadrons, Royal Air Force (Hunter GA/DF aircraft).

To provide a third battalion, 45 R.M. Commando would be flown from Aden at high priority as aircraft became available. The task of the force in Kuwait would be firstly to secure the air-field and then to move forward to prepare to meet an attack north west of Kuwait Town.

### OVERFLIGHT DIFFICULTIES

25. Thus the Commander-in-Chief was at this stage confident that the force enumerated in paragraph 23d, which he considered the minimum necessary, would be entering Kuwait the following morning. His hopes now, however, received dislocating blows in the shape of two signals<sup>1</sup> telling him firstly that Turkey had not cleared overflights and calling for a report as to what troops he would use to replace the parachute battalion; secondly that in the light of Turkish and Sudanese refusal to permit overflying, the available Britannias would fly to Aden via El Adem-Libya/Egypt and Congo/Sudan borders-Entebbe/Nairobi, and that the Parachute Battalion would not be carried. A further attempt was being made to obtain clearance through Khartoum for Beverleys and Hastings.

26. The effect of this upon the Commander-in-Chief's planning and decisions is best given in his own words as extracted from his Report<sup>2</sup> on the operation:

'The prospect of this unexpected delay in the building up of teeth arms in Kuwait was a serious blow, since it meant that,

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<sup>1</sup>COSMID 21 TOO 302126Z TOR 302225Z.

COSMID 25 TOO 302230Z TOR 010140Z.

<sup>2</sup>COS(61)378.

throughout 1st July, all that could with certainty be landed in Kuwait would be 42 Commando from *Bulwark* and the half squadron of Dragoon Guards from *Striker*, though I hoped that aircraft arriving in Aden during the day could fly in elements of 45 Commando and 11 Hussars. I therefore requested<sup>1</sup> whether the landing should be postponed, although in the light of H.M. Government's agreement to meet the Amir's request for assistance and the current intelligence appreciation, I felt that the risk of going in straight away was inescapable. In the event, however, Sudanese overflying rights were granted during the initial moves and in spite of the difficulties that confronted Transport Command, long-range Transport reinforcement arrived in my Command in greater numbers and earlier than required by the plan. This enabled me to fly in 45 Commando from Aden as planned, though as a direct result of the initial Turkish refusal, the arrival of the Parachute Battalion in Kuwait was inevitably delayed.

'Nevertheless the Turkish and Sudanese refusal of overflying made my review of the situation on the morning of 1st July far from reassuring. The basis of the 'Vantage' plan to meet Iraqi aggression had been that we would receive a warning period and, during this time, transport aircraft with reinforcing personnel would arrive from the United Kingdom and elsewhere to enable a balanced force of two battalions with supporting arms and R.A.F. support to be built up in Kuwait within 12 hours of the order to land; this force would build up to a reinforced brigade group in 5 days. We did not receive four days' warning in which to concentrate in Bahrein and precious time, aircraft and aircrew hours were being consumed by the circuitous routes which had to be used. I decided therefore that all available airlift from Aden was to be allocated to 45 Commando and 11 Hussars despite the consequent dislocation ..... To strengthen the inadequate ground forces in Kuwait, I sought and immediately obtained the agreement of the Political Resident, Persian Gulf, to the despatch from Bahrein to Kuwait of the two companies of 2 Coldstream Guards. I also instructed the Flag Officer, Middle East to consider the use of part of the ship's company of the *Bulwark* to assist as necessary in Kuwait rear areas. To make up for the non-availability of the Parachute Battalion it was necessary to speed the lift of a battalion of 24 Brigade from Kenya, and with your agreement I asked for assistance of transport aircraft from the Royal Rhodesian Air Force

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<sup>1</sup>MIDCOS 15 TOO 010406Z TOR 010753Z.

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

which had been offered during my visit to the Federation. This request was met immediately and three Rhodesian Canadairs arrived at Nairobi on 2nd July and played a most helpful part in the build-up of forces in Kuwait.'

### INTERVENTION OF THE COMMANDO SHIP - NO. 42 COMMANDO DISEMBARKS

27. It emerges clearly from the above that but for the fortuitous presence of the *Bulwark* and 42 R.M. Commando in the area and the happy chance by which both half squadrons of tanks of the 3rd Dragoon Guards were already afloat when the emergency broke, the only British troops in Kuwait during the first 36 hours would have been two companies of Coldstream Guards and one half squadron of tanks, a force which could have done little to aid the Kuwait Army had the Iraqis attacked.

28. As it was, however, though the various sea-borne forces were not in a position to land punctually at H-hour (0700Z), their arrival was sufficiently prompt to demonstrate H.M. Government's willingness and capacity to respond speedily to the Amir's request. The *Bulwark* was delayed two hours by an abortive attempt to re-embark the Commanding Officer of 42 R.M. Commando by helicopter off Bahrein which was frustrated by high winds and low visibility. She arrived in position 7 miles north of Mina al Ahmadi at 0745Z when Captain Franks became the Naval Force Commander as CTF 317. The first wave of helicopters now took off carrying 'C' troop of the Commando, landing at the airfield at 0817Z. The original intention had been that one troop should occupy the airfield while the remainder flew straight to the Al Mutla Ridge along which the defence line was to be extended. It was discovered, however, that Kuwait Army troops had already taken up positions on the Ridge and would be likely to open fire on any troops arriving in helicopters. The whole of the Commando was therefore landed at the airfield. In spite of very low visibility caused by driving sand, this was completed by 1340Z, the airfield was secured against ground or airborne attack and 'X' Troop moved by motor transport to guard the water distillation plant eight miles away in Kuwait. At 1700Z, 'A' Troop moved forward by motor transport to Al Mutla Ridge, twenty miles away and took up a defensive position.

## DISEMBARKATION OF ARMOUR AND COMMANDO VEHICLES

29. While all this was going on, the Captain, Amphibious Warfare Squadron (Captain A. G. McCrum) had been suffering frustration and difficulty in arranging the disembarkation of the tanks from the *Striker*. In his headquarters ship, H.M.S. *Meon*, with the *Striker* in company, he had sailed from Bahrein at 0800Z on the 30th June and that evening reached the stand-by position ordered by FOME, in the vicinity of which the two ships patrolled during the night in a rising gale and sandstorm (Shemal). Consideration of a suitable landing place in Kuwait from air photographs, JIB reports, charts and maps and some preliminary reconnaissance which had been carried out during a visit to Mina the previous week, elicited the fact that while all beaches in the area were extremely poor from the Amphibious Warfare point of view, the three least unsatisfactory areas in order of preference were:

a. The Shuwaikh area, the inner reach of Kuwait harbour which was being developed as a port, where a hard was known to exist.

b. The beach immediately west of Ras al Ardh (a cape some five miles east of Kuwait town).

c. Beaches about 6 miles south of Mina al Ahmadi.

30. The Shuwaikh area had the great advantage that it would reduce the tanks' 'marching' distance by 25 miles and during the early hours of the 1st July approval was sought of FOME to alter the landing place to Shuwaikh, instead of Mina, as laid down in the orders. This had not been received when orders to land the tanks at H-hour (0700Z) came in, so a compromise beach was selected some miles north of Mina towards Kuwait which would also shorten the distance tanks would have to go to reach the Al Mutla Ridge.

31. Before this could be implemented, however, detailed knowledge of the beach characteristics was needed and the *Meon* was steered at full speed to the area. But now the lack was keenly felt, not only of the advance notice of an intended tank landing and the prior beach reconnaissance normally considered necessary but also of the Special Boat Section attached to the Amphibious Warfare Squadron. At the time that the *Meon* and *Striker* sailed from Bahrein this Section was engaged on a beach reconnaissance on the Batina Coast of the Gulf of Oman and could not be recovered in time to rejoin the Amphibious Warfare Squadron - another consequence of 'Vantage' being got under way without the four days' notice envisaged for it. The



## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

*Meon* thus had no beach landing craft embarked. The ship's beach reconnaissance team was landed at 0345Z on what looked like a promising beach, but 1¼ hours later returned with information showing conclusively that not even the Rhino ferry could get into the beach except for a brief period either side of high water.

32. Approval for a landing at Shuwaikh having been received in the meanwhile, Captain McCrum decided there was nothing for it but to go there, looking at the beach near Ras al Ardh on the way. The *Loch Alvie*, which had joined the *Meon* during the night, was detached to her bombardment berth in Dohat Kadhima (29°23' N, 47°46' E), a deep bay to the westward of Kuwait harbour, and the *Meon* set off at full speed for Kuwait harbour entrance, leaving the *Striker* and the Rhino to follow at their best speed. A strong 'shemal' was now blowing and on passing Ras al Ardh it was at once clear that a landing there was impossible.

33. Pressing on to Kuwait, the *Meon* arrived in the harbour at 0645Z and, with the beach reconnaissance party, Captain McCrum went ashore to reconnoitre. A signal had been made to the Political Adviser, Kuwait, asking him to arrange for the harbour authorities to meet the Captain AW in the new port at 0700Z but for various reasons this rendezvous was not made and Captain McCrum found the port almost deserted except for a 'multitude of zealous Kuwaiti guards' who had been alerted to a rumoured threat of an Iraqi parachute attack and ordered to clear the port area. These orders they were bent on carrying out unadulterated by any unforeseen considerations such as those entailed by the arrival of friendly forces by sea. Fortunately at this stage a member of the firm carrying out the development of the port appeared, a British ex-Chief Petty Officer, who at once made himself helpful.

34. From him it was learnt that the hard on which the Captain AW was relying had recently been broken up for construction of a jetty. He suggested an alternative possibility but as there was no way of getting through the guards without authority and an interpreter, he drove Captain McCrum to the Agency to obtain them. Thus helped they reached the proposed beach at 0945Z. Examination showed that though the *Striker* herself could not beach there, the Rhino could and it was decided to act on this.

35. With the swirling, gale-borne sand of the shemal reducing visibility to about five cables, Captain McCrum felt anxiety for the safety of the *Striker* and her Rhino, making the long, narrow passage into the new port. He managed to get off to her in a tug

and remained aboard her for the last part of the journey, which was completed with considerable skill, the *Striker* finally mooring after some anxious moments, with three anchors down in a strong tide and wind. By 1200Z all was ready for free ferrying. The Rhino, towed by a tug arrived shortly afterwards and by 1320Z the first load of tanks was ashore. The last load of tanks was landed at 1455Z, 'probably a record', reported the Captain AW subsequently. '4 LCAs were used to assist the Rhino's own two engines and the beast can never have moved so fast.'

36. The Rhino and LCAs now turned to assist the *Bulwark* in landing her Commando vehicles, the portion of a Commando landing which, of course, cannot be achieved without either taking the ship alongside a jetty or using lighters or ferries of some sort. This could have been done by berthing alongside at the oil port of Mina al Ahmadi, some 20 miles down the coast from Kuwait town; but hearing that Captain AW had found a suitable beach and had a Rhino ferry, Captain Franks chose to anchor in Kuwait harbour, six miles from the Shuwaikh beach.

37. The heavier vehicles were ferried in the Rhino, whose normal speed of 5 knots was raised to 8 or 9 by securing two or more LCAs alongside, which themselves carried ¼ ton vehicles. As Captain AW commented, 'this valuable craft presented a formidable spectacle when sighted proceeding with all despatch with 4 LCAs secured alongside'. The disembarkation went on through the night and by 0710Z on the 2nd July all vehicles were out of the ship. Referring to the disembarkation of the Commando and its vehicles and of the tanks in H.M.S. *Striker*, the Commander-in-Chief commented that 'Great credit is due to all these units for overcoming appalling difficulties.'

#### DEPLOYMENT OF NO. 42 COMMANDO

38. 42 R.M. Commando had been relieved of responsibility for airfield defence late on 1st July by one of the two companies of Coldstream Guards which had been flown in from Bahrein. At 0300Z the following morning, therefore, 'Y' troop was lifted forward from the airfield to Mutla Ridge by helicopter while the remainder of the unit moved forward by motor transport. As the Commando transport came ashore it was sent forward to marry up with the unit, which operation was completed by mid-day, while 'B' Echelon established itself with all its stores on the beach at Shuwaikh.

39. As, in the event, no fighting occurred during the Kuwait operation, the remainder of 42 Commando's doings can be

summarised. The unit remained on Mutla Ridge until 7th July, consolidating the defensive positions and co-ordinating fire plans with various supporting arms including a squadron of Kuwaiti Centurion tanks, Hunter aircraft of the R.A.F. and bombardment ships. Logistic support and liaison with the Commando ship was maintained by helicopters working mainly in the early morning and late afternoon. For most of the period sandstorms restricted visibility. Temperatures up to 125°F were experienced but by restricting work as far as possible to the period before 1000 local time and after 1500, heat casualties were kept to a minimum. On 7th July the Commando was relieved by the 1st Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, which had arrived from Kenya. The Royal Marines then withdrew into mobile reserve at Juan Camp in Kuwait Town, with 'Y' troop taking over airfield security duties from the Coldstream Guards who returned to Bahrain. This situation continued until the 20th July when the Commando was re-embarked in the *Bulwark* at Mina al Ahmadi.

#### LESSONS OF THE COMMANDO OPERATION

40. Before leaving the story of 42 Commando to return to the main stream of the narrative, it must be noted that this most convincing demonstration of efficient and timely intervention with very little prior notice was not carried out without difficulty. This rose entirely from the fact that, as the *Bulwark* and her Commando were not included in the plan for Operation 'Vantage', no copy of the operation orders was held, nor was much up-to-date information held concerning enemy forces, own and Kuwaiti forces, topography and beaches. Maps were later found to be inaccurate and misleading. The force communications plan was not available until noon on D-day. In their joint report on the operation,<sup>1</sup> the Captain of the *Bulwark* and the Commanding Officer of 42 R.M. Commando urged that the Commando ship should be kept supplied with all current operational plans in which she might be called to participate and with up-to-date intelligence on the various localities concerned.

41. On the assault phase and subsequently, the Commanding Officers wrote:

'The assault was mounted using the techniques developed in exercises. Ammunition was issued and the Commando prepared to land in a warlike posture whilst the ship made ready to defeat a genuine sea and air threat. Over half the unit

<sup>1</sup>MII/276/128/61.

transport was removed from the after part of the Flight Deck and struck below to the hangar as aircraft were brought up on deck. This allowed seven spots to be used by helicopters.

'Visibility at the time of the fly-off was poor and two Kuwaiti helicopters flew to the ship to act as guides to the Squadron. Later it was found that the Grid reference indicating the airfield was false and the Kuwaiti pilots led the assault wave by a roundabout route. Had the usual method of navigating and pathfinding been used greater accuracy would have resulted and a speedier build-up obtained.

'There is still no clear direction on the system of command and control of helicopters after the assault phase. It was generally considered that the helicopters were available and in support of the whole military force. The other view is that they should remain in support of 42 Commando only; in this way they make 42 Commando a special, partly-heliborne unit. There is a danger that helicopters may be frittered away in liaison, communications and general duties for a force such as a brigade. Furthermore it may be necessary to withdraw the Commando and helicopters for use elsewhere.'

42. On this occasion, as the report from H.M.S. *Bulwark* makes clear, the helicopters were used mainly to support 42 and 45 Commandos and after D + 1 very little tactical use was made of them, though one tactical move of a Commando Troop was effectively carried out during a brigade exercise. In this connection the recommendation was made that 'The Military Commander must be made constantly aware of the helicopter's military potential. A liaison officer should be attached to the formation headquarters. The immediate publication of H.M.S. *Bulwark's* handbook 'Operations from a Commando Carrier' would help to provide written information for all commanders and all services.'

43. Two features of the helicopter organization in particular proved their worth - the Helicopter Control Team (HCT) and the Sarbe beacons landed with it. It was recommended that the former should be complemented for all Commando Carriers and provided with its own vehicles and equipment. The beacons proved of great value in guiding helicopters to landing sites in the more featureless parts of the desert.

44. With regard to logistic support:

'*Bulwark* maintained 42 Commando with all supplies, ammunition, defence stores and NAAFI stores and supplemented rations with bread and fresh vegetables throughout the period



## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

1st-21st July. During D-day and D + 1 water was supplied to 42 and 45 Commando. The latter being in a particularly desolate area and bereft of transport would have been in difficulties without air supply.'

45. With justifiable satisfaction it was noted that:

'42 Commando was the only fully-equipped unit ashore for at least seven days. Maintenance was excellent and the envy of other unit commanders. The ability of *Bulwark* to deliver the Commando in every respect ready for battle with its own transport and self-contained supply organization provided a very significant comparison with the state of readiness of units arriving by air. Moreover, movement of naval forces to a threatened area was possible at a time when it was politically impossible to move land and air forces.'

### BOMBARDMENT SUPPORT

46. The other naval movement during the 1st July was that of the frigate *Loch Alvie* to her bombardment berth. The *Loch Alvie's* berth was established on the three-fathom line at the head of the Dohat Kadhima which she duly reached at H-hour (0700Z) after feeling her way in shallow and largely unknown waters in the smother of a strong 'sbemal'. This position she held during daylight hours, getting under way at dusk to maintain anti-FPB and mine-running dhow patrol off Kuwait Bay during each night. Before sailing on the evening of the 1st July she landed her R.M. Detachment, at the orders of FOME, to join 42 Commando on Mutla Ridge, which they did on the following morning.

### THE AIR-LIFT BEGINS

47. While sea-power was stepping into the breach made in the plan for Operation 'Vantage' by the initial refusals of overflying permission, the Staff of the Commander-in-Chief Middle East at Aden were kept at full stretch in their efforts to improvise substitutes for those parts of the plan that had gone awry. Items that were under local control were proceeding smoothly enough. No. 8 Squadron R.A.F. (10 DF/GA Hunters) reached Kuwait from Bahrein soon after the first helicopters from the *Bulwark*. The Tactical Air Commander (Group Captain Joel), the Wing Leader (Wing Commander Neville) and R.A.F. ground crews and other key personnel arrived shortly afterwards in Beverley aircraft and established an Air Support Operations Centre. Later



on the same day (1st July) the Commander 24 Infantry Brigade, Brigadier D. G. T. Horsford, arrived in Kuwait from Nairobi to establish an embryo headquarters. Though this headquarters was entitled to a high degree of priority, it fell a victim to the dislocation of the air transport arrangements and was to remain only partially assembled for some days. To quote from the Commander-in-Chief's Report:

'I know that General Officer Commanding East Africa Command felt strongly that the forward movement of 24 Brigade Headquarters should not have been delayed. But I arbitrarily switched priorities for the deliberate purpose of getting all the teeth arms into Kuwait that I possibly could.'

### CONSEQUENCES OF OVERFLIGHT DELAYS

48. By the end of the first day of the operation (1st July) the situation was that the land force deployed in Kuwait comprised: No. 42 Commando less one troop, with the R.M. Detachment from *Loch Alvie*, two Companies of Coldstream Guards from Bahrein and a half squadron of tanks of the 3rd Dragoon Guards landed from H.M.S. *Striker*. Combat air support was available from No. 8 Squadron of Hunters.

49. That this force was woefully weak and unbalanced to confront any Iraqi attack had been indicated by the Commander-in-Chief's signal MIDCOS 15 (TOO 010406Z) in which, after expressing his anxiety, he had asked for confirmation that zero hour should stand as 0700Z or whether landings could be postponed until a more viable force could be put in. Similar misgivings were voiced by the Commanders' Committee (Persian Gulf) and the Commander 24th Infantry Brigade in a signal from FOME (TOO 010605Z). Landings had already begun, however, by the time the Chief of Staffs' COSMID 27, confirming the 0700Z zero hour was received.

50. The parachute troops called for by 'Vantage' being held up by the lack of overflight permission, the 'teeth' arms immediately available comprised principally No. 45 R.M. Commando at Aden. During 1st July the Chiefs of Staff decided<sup>1</sup> to despatch the first five Britannia aircraft to Aden at six-hour intervals via the El Adem-Nairobi route without the parachute troops, the first aircraft leaving at 010600Z. The same signal, however, notified the Commander-in-Chief that the Turkish Government

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<sup>1</sup>COSMID 26 TOO 010209Z.

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

had agreed to overflight, though by night only, and that the situation would be reviewed at 010930Z. Consequently during the afternoon of the same day the Commander-in-Chief learnt<sup>1</sup> that overflying permission had also been granted by the Sudan and that the parachute battalion continued to be at his disposal to call forward as the air transport situation permitted. The Commander-in-Chief noted that:

'This simplified my problems to a great extent but on the other hand required a complete re-appreciation of the air transport situation since further infantry was urgently required. In consequence the night of 1/2 July was again one of great activity at my Headquarters, particularly by the Air Movements Staffs. A valuable teleprinter conference held in the early hours of 2nd July by the Air Officer Commanding with the Ministry of Defence resulted in firm decisions on the programmes of the Britannias from the United Kingdom to enable the lift of the Parachute Battalion from Cyprus to begin the following night.'

### AIR-LIFT IN FULL OPERATION

51. In the meantime, however, the five Britannias mentioned above were already en route to Aden from the U.K. bringing R.A.F. personnel and personnel of a parachute light battery, and would arrive during the 2nd July, as would other transport aircraft from the Near East Air Force and three Canadairs of the Royal Rhodesian Air Force. Transport aircraft from the Far East Air Force had already arrived during the 1st. Thus the second infantry unit to deploy in the forward area would not be the Parachute Battalion (originally planned to be the first) but 45 Commando from Aden. The Commander-in-Chief subsequently reported:

'With the arrival of these aircraft it was possible to accelerate the flow to Kuwait. The whole of 45 Commando had left Aden by the evening of 2nd July and, overflying of Turkey having been arranged, Britannia and Comet aircraft started the lift of 2 Parachute Battalion direct to Kuwait that night, a move which was continued on the following two nights. Thereafter the main effort was diverted to moving units of 24 Brigade from Kenya and the remaining reinforcements from the United Kingdom. 4th July saw the maximum number of aircraft employed on the lift and this comprised a

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<sup>1</sup>COSMID 28 TOO 011056Z TOR 011255Z.

total of 14 Britannias, 12 Beverleys, 27 Hastings, 3 Royal Rhodesian AF Canadairs and 2 Argonauts (on charter) in addition to the normal AFME medium range transport force of 12 Beverleys and 6 Valettas which from the beginning had been employed mainly on the shuttle between Aden, Bahrein and Kuwait.'

52. The next paragraph of the Commander-in-Chief's report touches upon an inherent weakness in any plan relying upon air transport for its implementation.

'In Plan 'Vantage', movements personnel and technical reinforcements were given a high priority so that the route could be fully activated before large numbers of troops began to flow along it. Owing to the absence of the planned warning period, many of the problems of the build-up phase were caused by what I considered to be the imperative need to get fighting troops quickly into Kuwait at the expense of Headquarters and administrative personnel. Thus many of the pre-planned reinforcements were off-loaded in Cyprus and at Aden to lift the parachute battalion and to give 45 Commando and 11 Hussars overriding priority.'

53. In other words an airborne military expedition cannot be efficiently launched without the benefit of a warning period (in this case four days) during which the route can be decided upon and 'activated'. Lacking this, 'teeth' arms have to be sent forward in whatever aircraft are immediately available, leaving their headquarters, administrative and technical backing to follow later, and the control and handling of the air traffic has to be improvised. As the Commander-in-Chief commented elsewhere in his report, 'I had previously given an undertaking to the Brigade Commander that I would not put him into Kuwait without a balanced force, but in the event I was forced to do just that.' What effect this would have had if the Iraqi threat had materialised before the build-up was complete can only be surmised.

#### AIR DEFENCE DURING INITIAL PHASE

54. The lack of balance inherent in an air-transported force in the matter of tanks, armoured cars and motor transport vehicles was in this case largely offset by the fortuitous arrival of H.M.S. *Bulwark* in the Gulf and by the fact that the only British Amphibious Warfare Squadron was based at Bahrein. So far as the Commando ship was concerned, once her vehicles had been landed she was required to fill, as best her limited capability allowed, another gap in the equipment of an air-

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transported force, namely an air-warning and fighter direction radar station. A R.A.F. Type 787 Radar had, indeed, been included in the operation plan ('Bellringer') which was being prepared at the time the crisis broke and equipment for it had recently arrived at Bahrein. It was flown forward at an early stage and there manned with its operating crew flown out from the U.K. but it was not until D + 18 that it became fully operational. Even then its performance was very limited. Until the arrival of H.M.S. *Victorious* on D + 11, the *Bulwark's* radar was the only air defence set available.

55. H.M.S. *Bulwark* remained at anchor in Kuwait harbour during daylight hours of the 2nd July, during which time air defence of the ship by R.A.F. Hunter aircraft, using the limited ship's radar cover, was arranged. In this connection the *Bulwark* reported<sup>1</sup> that 'a continuous air picture was maintained .... the radar picture was adequate' though 'the amount of civil air traffic in the area and the absence of a standing Combat Air Patrol to investigate contacts prevented the effective use of the available air picture. Identification of contacts was not helped by the absence of IFF Mk 10 in the R.A.F. aircraft. It is therefore considered that, had an air attack on the ship taken place, there would have been very little warning.'

56. Commenting on this, the Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers (Rear Admiral R. M. Smeeton) considered<sup>2</sup> that 'air defence was not effective during this phase'. At dusk the *Bulwark* sailed for Mina al Ahmadi where arrangements to refuel on the following morning had been made. Thereafter, until 12th July, the Commando ship followed a daily routine of remaining at sea during the night to reduce the risk of any attack being mounted by Iraqi FPB's known to be based in the Shatt-al-Arab, and returning to anchor off Kuwait during the day to continue logistic and liaison support of her Commando.

## SIGNAL COMMUNICATIONS ORGANISATION

57. Of the Amphibious Warfare Squadron, the headquarters ship, H.M.S. *Meon*, took up a berth alongside the new jetty of Kuwait at 0300Z on 2nd July and established herself as a Naval movements and communications centre and a base for the Beach troop and Assault Squadron. The vital importance of the role played by H.M.S. *Meon* as communications centre and relay was

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<sup>1</sup>MII/276/128/61.

<sup>2</sup>MII/276/128/61.

strongly and repeatedly stressed in Flag Officer Middle East's report<sup>1</sup>. To quote some of his remarks on the situation early in the operation:

'A nucleus 24 Infantry Brigade Headquarters was in position. Virtually no Army/RAF communication support existed. Under these difficult initial conditions, which are almost certain to re-occur in other operations of this type, the value of H.M.S. *Meon* became immediately apparent. Complemented with her own 601 Ship Signal Troop Royal Signals and equipped with a relatively large number of old low-power HF transmitters, the ship and her Ship Signal Troop established a circuit linking H.M.S. *Meon* with the Forward Airfield and the Brigade Headquarters. To the rear, she was in constant communication with Bahrein on PGN and with H.M. Ships in the area on TF Common. Thus she became the focal communication point for 'Vantage' and in this role she handled a very considerable volume of relay traffic for all three Services and for the Ministry of Defence. In addition she acted as crypto guard for the other two Services pending the arrival of their crypto facilities ... At this time there were only two Cypher Operators at Brigade Headquarters.

'Although H.M.S. *Meon's* workload gradually decreased as and when the other two Services improved their own facilities, throughout her period at Kuwait she continued to provide the only reliable entry for traffic from ships to authorities ashore and vice versa ... When H.M.S. *Meon* relinquished the duties of communication guardship, shore communications, which had depended on her, deteriorated rapidly. Had better overall communication facilities been available to H.M.S. *Meon*, her value would have been greatly enhanced.'

#### OPERATIONS OF AMPHIBIOUS WARFARE SQUADRON - 1ST/2ND JULY

58. Meanwhile H.M.S. *Striker* had sailed at 2300Z/1 for Bahrein for a further load of stores and equipment, leaving the LCAs of the Assault Squadron at Kuwait. H.M.S. *Bastion* had entered harbour at midnight and her freight of heavy stores and equipment having been discharged during the day by naval working parties assisted later by local labour, she sailed again for Bahrein. H.M.S. *Redoubt* arrived at 0745Z/2 with armoured cars

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<sup>1</sup>FOME's NO. 356/ME 386/70 dated 15th September 1961.



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from the Bahrein stockpile for the 11th Hussars. Within an hour of her arrival these had been disembarked and the *Redoubt* was on her way back to Bahrein. The last to arrive that day was the WD LST *Empire Gull* at 1100Z with her half squadron of tanks and other vehicles which were disembarked by the Rhino ferry. By 1630Z she was cleared and sailed for Bahrein. One other naval contribution to the military build-up on 2nd July was the landing of H.M.S. *Loch Alvie's* Royal Marine Detachment to join 42 Commando on the Mutla Ridge.

### THE BUILD-UP. ESTABLISHMENT OF H.Q.

59. By the evening of 2nd July the access of transport aircraft mentioned above had enabled the build-up of land forces in Kuwait to proceed. No. 45 Commando and the personnel of the 11th Hussars to man the armoured cars brought in H.M.S. *Redoubt* were arriving from Aden, the parachute light battery, though without their mortars or vehicles, from the U.K. and elements of Headquarters 24 Brigade from Kenya. Coming during the ensuing night would be the first aircraft carrying 2 Parachute Battalion, overflying Turkey.

60. During 2nd July the Commander-in-Chief and the GOC Middle East Land Forces who had up to now been exercising their commands from Aden, moved to Bahrein, setting up a joint Headquarters. The Commanders' Committee (Persian Gulf) which, under the chairmanship of the Flag Officer, Middle East, had been exercising joint command in the Gulf area, was superseded and absorbed.

61. The Commander-in-Chief commented:

'Thus was established a Headquarters that was fully adequate for my needs. The GOC and the AOC had small staffs while FOME's full headquarters was already at Bahrein ... Under this hierarchy, command of forces in Kuwait was exercised by Commander 24 Brigade for Land Forces, the Senior Air Staff Officer AFME (Air Commodore T. B. de la P. Beresford) who took over as Tactical Air Commander when the AOC moved to Bahrein, and the appropriate senior officer for Naval forces off the Kuwait coast.'

62. During 3rd July the last of 45 Commando arrived in Kuwait from Aden and a part of 2 Parachute Battalion from Cyprus. Crews to activate the Centurion tanks stockpiled at Kuwait arrived from the U.K. The air-transported build-up had by this time got into its stride. During the 4th and 5th the Parachute Battalion was completed and the Parachute Light Battery received its mortars and equipment. From Kenya came the 1st Royal Inniskillings and 34 Field Squadron of the Royal Engineers.

On the 5th also, H.M.S. *Loch Fyne* arrived to share the bombardment task with the *Loch Alvie*, having left Karachi on the evening of 1st July after hastily undocking and embarking a quantity of HE ammunition and extra bombardment fuzes for the Frigate Squadron. The arrival on the same day of H.M.S. *Parapet* from Bahrein with the guns for the 29th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, and of the WD LST *Empire Skua* bringing the squadron of 11th Hussars from Dubai, completed the initial contribution of the Amphibious Warfare Squadron to the build-up and their task became a routine job of re-supply. By 7th July a further infantry battalion, the 1st King's Own Royal Regiment, had been delivered from Kenya permitting the two companies of Coldstream Guards to be returned to Bahrein, and sufficient personnel of the 29th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery arrived from the U.K. to set up a headquarters and make operational one battery of the guns brought in H.M.S. *Parapet*. On that day, too, the frigate *Loch Ruthven* arrived from Mombasa and joined the other two ships of the 9th Frigate Squadron in providing Naval Gunfire Support and defensive patrols off Kuwait. H.M.S. *Bulwark*, while continuing in her allotted role and supporting 42 Commando, had made preparations to receive up to 200 soldiers on board for rest, bathing and rehabilitation in air-conditioned surroundings, an arrangement which took effect on the 7th.

63. Finally, by 9th July, when H.M. Ships *Victorious*, *Lincoln* and *Cassandra* arrived in the North Persian Gulf, the build-up was considered complete. The total strengths ashore in Kuwait at this time were: Navy 23, Army 4,112, Royal Marines 960, RAF 596 - a total of 5,691.

64. By this time the Intelligence appreciation of the situation<sup>1</sup> had come firmly to the conclusion that Iraqi military activity was defensive in character. With this assurance that no attack was likely in the near future, the Commander-in-Chief was able to consider the redistribution of his forces on a semi-permanent basis and to halt the flow of military reinforcements from the U.K.

65. As regards the latter, Plan 'Vantage' allowed for the replacement in Aden of one infantry battalion and the Commander-in-Chief had asked for replacements in Kenya for the two infantry battalions of 24 Brigade which had been flown to Kuwait. The Chiefs of Staff had informed him<sup>2</sup> that HQ 19 Brigade and the 1st Duke of Wellington's Regiment were being moved to Kenya but that the move of the 1st Royal Fusiliers and 1st Royal Welsh Fusiliers to Kenya and Aden respectively was

<sup>1</sup>JIC(61)53/10.

<sup>2</sup>COSMID 50 TOO 071410Z TOR 080326Z.

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being deferred pending confirmation of their being required. The Commander-in-Chief was now able to confirm<sup>1</sup> that HQ 19 Brigade and 1st Duke of Wellington's Regiment were sufficient for Kenya but that the move of the regiment for Aden as a reserve firstly for Kuwait and secondly for East Africa should proceed. This was to satisfy the proposals for future deployment made on 8th July<sup>2</sup>. In the event, however, though advance elements were flown out, neither of the Fusilier regiments was required, owing to the unexpected permission to retain the parachute battalion.

66. Thinning out of the force in Kuwait was deferred pending any possible flare-up of the situation arising out of Kassem's celebration of Iraqi National Day on the 14th July which, as the Commander-in-Chief expressed it, 'might perhaps seem (a day) of destiny to an unpredictable personality'. However, besides the previously mentioned return of the two companies of Coldstream Guards on the night of 6th July, No. 8 Squadron was also withdrawn to Bahrein on the 9th and the Air Officer Commanding was able progressively to release Britannias and Comets back to their normal Transport Command functions. The battalions of 24 Brigade were deployed on arrival to relieve the two Commandos who fell back to form a reserve.

### ARRIVAL OF CARRIER TASK FORCE - PROVISION OF AIR DEFENCE

67. On the arrival off Bahrein on the 9th of H.M.S. *Victorious* (Captain J. M. D. Gray), flying the flag of Flag Officer, Second-in-Command Far East Station (Rear Admiral J. B. Frewen), and her escorts H.M. Ships *Lincoln* (Commander J. W. Napper) and *Cassandra* (Commander S. H. Drummond), the Rear Admiral and some of his staff flew to the Commander-in-Chief's Headquarters for discussions on operating procedures and cycles etc. for the Naval squadrons. On the 10th Rear Admiral Frewen took over from Captain Franks as CTF 317, being joined on the following day by the frigate H.M.S. *Yarmouth* (Captain H. R. Hewlett), also from the Far East Station. On 17th July H.M.S. *Finisterre* from the Mediterranean joined the force and on 21st July H.M.S. *Bulwark* was withdrawn. Admiral Frewen's report<sup>3</sup> states:

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<sup>1</sup>MIDCOS 38 TOO 100805Z TOR 100847Z.

<sup>2</sup>MIDCOS 33 TOO 080831Z TOR 081230Z.

<sup>3</sup>MII/276/128/61.

'Because of light winds, consequent need of high speed for launching and the *Victorious's* eccentric steering in under 20 fathoms at speed, the Carrier Operating Area was established 80 miles to the south-east of Kuwait. To extend the air warning net, H.M.S. *Lincoln* was sent inshore, where her radars and especially her metric set (Type 960) gave excellent results and substituted for the lack of any effective coverage by shore-based radar.

'The threat of Iraqi MTB and anti-shipping air strikes was later discounted and escorts were sent inshore to assist the Loch class frigates in their naval gunfire support and harbour patrol duties. One escort was kept with the carrier throughout. The submarine threat was disregarded.

'The *Victorious* meanwhile achieved a fairly steady cycle of 4 days' flying followed by 2 days' replenishment and maintenance, broken by a visit to the Bahrein Exercise Area with as many escorts as could be mustered to exercise screening, gun and torpedo fire. Serviceability of aircraft, at first poor, rose steadily and the subsequent long patrol proved a matchless training cycle in as testing conditions for men and material as could have been devised in peace-time.

'On 31st July the Force was relieved by H.M. Ships *Centaur* (to whom I transferred my flag), *Saintes* and *Camperdown* from the Mediterranean, and by H.M.S. *Blackpool* (who had taken the place of H.M.S. *Cassandra* two days previously), and H.M.S. *Llandaff* from the Far East. This force continued to provide air defence and naval gunfire support for the Army in Kuwait. It took part in gunnery and other exercises off Bahrein from time to time and was withdrawn (less H.M.S. *Llandaff*) on 15th August.

'Both carriers and their A/D frigates achieved advanced states of training in communication and procedures with the other two Services ashore at Kuwait, carrying out tactical air reconnaissance on all flying days and a number of valuable ground controlled close air support exercises.'

68. Commenting on this, the Commander-in-Chief wrote:

'In this role her (*Victorious*) radar, backed up by the AD frigate and RAF Type 787 deployed forward at Randatayn<sup>1</sup> and the capabilities of her Sea Vixen aircraft provided for the first time a reasonably sophisticated day and night air defence for the forces in Kuwait, whilst her Scimitars made

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<sup>1</sup>This set did not become operational until D + 18 and its performance was limited.

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

an effective supplement to the Hunters in the ground attack role. It was unfortunate that owing to lack of wind in the Gulf, the Scimitars had to be used without long range tanks which cut down their time in the operational area to twelve minutes. Experience showed that, due to dust conditions, *Victorious's* Type 984 was not effective over the land and the AD frigate was therefore stationed closer inshore as Type 960 could provide this cover; the performance of these AD ships in the particular land formation and conditions was excellent. Arrangements were made for a third to join the Station to maintain a constant cycle at the head of the Gulf, and these ships with the R.A.F. Hunters made available a good air defence by day.'

69. This evaluation of the air defence situation following the arrival of H.M.S. *Victorious* was considered over sanguine by most of the naval authorities concerned, though FOME, by implication, lent colour to it when he wrote<sup>1</sup>:

'There is clearly a need for a proper air defence force and, if the R.A.F. cannot meet this commitment, we shall have to fall back on the present arrangement of a combination of carrier and AD frigate. The former is not fully effective, in the north Persian Gulf, without the latter.'

70. The Director of Navigation and Direction, referring to this<sup>1</sup>, thought that

'FOME is seriously over-estimating the ability of Naval Ships and aircraft to provide air defence. The fighter defence system of the Royal Navy is designed to defend ships at sea and far enough from enemy air bases for sufficient warning to be available for it to be put into action. It is not designed - and it is not physically possible to design it - to provide "effective" air defence of troops ashore.'

71. The Flag Officer, Aircraft Carriers (Rear Admiral R. M. Smeeton)<sup>2</sup> considered that

'All reports show that the Royal Navy improvised a workable air defence organisation which made the best use of the available ships, aircraft and equipment. Nevertheless, I very much doubt whether the organisation would have been able to repulse an attack on either the carriers, Kuwait Harbour, Kuwait New Airfield, or the Army Forward Defended Localities.'

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<sup>1</sup>MII/282/15/61.

<sup>2</sup>MII/276/128/61.



## CARRIER AIR DEFENCE OPERATIONS

72. With these comments and opinions in mind we therefore move on to examine in more detail the operations carried out by the carriers and A/D frigates. The *Victorious* had been on passage from Singapore to Hong Kong when the order to proceed to the Persian Gulf was received on 29th June. A limited programme of day and dusk flying was achieved on 30th June and of day and night flying on 1st July. Thereafter no flying was possible until operations began on 10th July. In consequence all pilots were somewhat out of flying practice, particularly those of 892 Squadron (10 Sea Vixens) (C.O., Lieutenant Commander A. Gray) on which the Air Defence task depended, calling for night flying. This had to be worked up under difficult conditions of visibility on account of dust and sand haze and it was not until nearly the end of the *Victorious's* operational period in the area on 31st July that six crews were fully qualified. A work-up was also required in the actual roles called for, namely the air defence of Kuwait (primary role) by the Sea Vixens, and Close Air Support for the troops in the field by the 10 Scimitars of 803 Squadron (C.O., Lieutenant Commander T. C. S. Luce).

73. The performance of the primary task of air defence during the period when the *Bulwark* only was on station has been examined above and found wanting. With the arrival of H.M.S. *Victorious* and her A/D frigate H.M.S. *Lincoln*, more extensive means became available for this task, which comprised the air defence of the Carrier Group, Kuwait Harbour and the ships in it, Kuwait New Airfield and the Army Forward Defended Localities. The effectiveness of the carrier's radar cover was reduced by the necessity for the carrier to operate some 70-80 miles to the eastward of Kuwait. This was imposed by the need to have sufficient sea-room to manoeuvre and depth of water under her keel for the high speeds involved in landing aircraft in the prevailing conditions of high ambient temperature and light wind. This applied particularly to Scimitars which, without drop tanks, rocket projectiles or bombs, could not be catapulted unless there was at least 3 knots of natural wind, while to be launched with a full load of fuel and bombs, 18 knots of natural wind was required.

74. The *Lincoln* was therefore detached to take up a position in the Kuwait area where she could serve as a Local Air Defence Ship as well as an advanced picket for the carrier group. In all ships, centimetric radars suffered severely from clutter caused

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by meteorological conditions. The *Victorious* reported<sup>1</sup>

'Detections in the clutter and tracking through it was always difficult. The skill of the operators improved with experience, but their efficiency was bound to be less than under standard conditions.'

Nevertheless, when stationed in the bay of Kuwait some six miles north of the town, the frigate reported<sup>2</sup> that she was not radar land-locked by the flat, low-lying terrain and that contacts out to 60-70 miles in the direction of the Iraq-Kuwait border were obtained on her Type 982 (10 centimetre) radar and to 130 miles on her Type 960 (metric) radar. In an air defence exercise on 20-21 July, when 8 sections of R.A.F. Hunter aircraft were controlled in intercepting Sea Vixens and Scimitars approaching the coast from H.M.S. *Victorious*, no difficulties were experienced and 15 interceptions were achieved. H.M.S. *Llandaff*, which relieved H.M.S. *Lincoln* on 31st July reported similar conditions but less satisfactory results which she ascribed to lack of practice by her AD personnel.

75. The Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Victorious* thus felt able to report that 'the A/D frigate became a very valuable component of the Air Defence system' and that '(though) naval radars are not designed to provide cover over land areas ... a workable organisation was set up which provided a reasonable substitute for an R.A.F. Ground Controlled Interception station'. Air Defence Communications were reported on favourably by both H.M. Ships *Victorious* and *Lincoln*, propagation conditions giving contact at long ranges. The absence of UHF in R.A.F. Hunter aircraft, however, caused some difficulty owing to a shortage of VHF radio in ships and the consequent lack of sufficient channels for direction. Another difficulty in direction of R.A.F. aircraft arose from their lack of IFF Mk. 10.

### EFFECTIVENESS OF CARRIER AIRCRAFT

76. Apart from any shortcomings of the ground organization and control of air defence, the number of fighters available was also less than adequate. In this respect the Task Force Commander (Rear Admiral Frewen) commented<sup>3</sup> that not being fitted with 'Sidewinder', the Scimitar was not an effective interceptor fighter. The carrier was therefore limited to her Vixen squadron

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<sup>1</sup>H.M.S. *Victorious* No. 130/5 of 30th July 1961.

<sup>2</sup>MII/276/126/61.

<sup>3</sup>MII/276/128/61.

for the purely intercept aspect of air defence. Fulfilment of the Air Defence Task was further prejudiced by a low serviceability rate of fixed wing aircraft, particularly in H.M.S. *Victorious* where the aircraft in the deck park had been exposed to S.W. monsoon conditions and suffered much from corrosion. The Commanding Officer of the *Victorious* reported<sup>1</sup> that 'The serviceability of the complex new generation naval fighters was never high enough for *Victorious's* Direction Officer to have a reassuring number of aircraft to engage the threat posed by the Iraqi Air Force.' In both carriers the sand-laden air of the Persian Gulf at that season caused many defects though with experience their incidence was reduced by laborious repeated cleaning of exposed greasy surfaces and re-greasing. High ambient temperatures caused a number of failures of electrical and electronic material. Some of the *Centaur's* better serviceability record can no doubt be attributed to advantage being taken of the lessons learned in the *Victorious*, but the fact that the former had been able to keep up a steady flying programme prior to arrival in the Gulf was another important factor. Regarding this aspect Admiral Frewen commented<sup>2</sup>

'More than ever before, the best assurance that an aircraft will fly today is that it flew yesterday. A carrier entering operations without a day or two's flying immediately previously may find the serviceability of its jet aircraft low however good the maintenance ... At the same time it must be recognized that a carrier running in on offensive operations would almost certainly take calculated serviceability risks and thus increase the number of aircraft she can launch straight away.'

77. Turning to another aspect of Air Defence, namely Airborne Early Warning, little experience of this was obtained by the Gannets of 849B Flight (Lieutenant Commander A. D. Levy) whose flying was confined largely to surface searches and communication work. It was established, however, that lack of sea room in the land-locked Gulf would cut down the maximum early warning of a low strike to about 80-100 miles while detection of higher strikes would be affected by temperature layers at various heights, depending upon whether the AEW and strike aircraft were between the same layers or not.

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<sup>1</sup>H.M.S. *Victorious* No. 130/5 of 30th July 1961.

<sup>2</sup>MI/276/128/61.

## CARRIER AIRCRAFT IN CLOSE AIR SUPPORT ROLE

78. The secondary role assigned to the Carrier Group was that of Close Air Support of troops in the field, a task which fell to the Scimitars. Here the meteorological conditions - high ambient temperatures and low wind speeds - in the Persian Gulf at this season and the capacity of the catapults imposed severe limitations. As mentioned above, in H.M.S. *Victorious*, steaming at 26 knots, in the average surface temperature experienced (32°C) a minimum of 3 knots natural wind was required to launch a Scimitar carrying only internal fuel and ammunition and four 5072 pylons. Various combinations of additional equipment such as drop-tanks, bombs and rocket projectiles raised the natural wind speed required by varying amounts, the greatest being 18 knots if four 1,000-lb bombs were carried. As the average wind experienced was 8 knots, with a few days when it rose to 15 knots, the Scimitars were usually limited in fuel capacity and endurance as well as in offensive capability. Owing to the inability to launch with fuel in the drop-tanks and the fact that the majority of sorties were at low level, sortie cycles of 40 minutes flying and 40 minutes turn round had to be flown. The Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers noted <sup>1</sup>

'Endurance and weapon-carrying capability of the Scimitar in conditions of low natural wind and high ambient temperatures is heavily penalized by the low catapult performance of all Carriers except H.M.S. *Ark Royal*, therefore it is essential that wet accumulators and roto valves are fitted in all ships.'

79. In the event, the effect of these limitations was in one way reduced by a government ban<sup>2</sup> on the use of bombs for counter-offensive action. On the other hand this limited the potential effectiveness of the Scimitars by confining their offensive capabilities to 2 inch RP. Referring to this the Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers commented:<sup>3</sup>

'The serious deficiencies existing in the present ability of the Aircraft Carrier Squadron to contribute an effective effort in a conventional war operation, which have already been brought to Their Lordships' notice, are re-emphasised by these reports.'

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<sup>1</sup>MII/276/128/61.

<sup>2</sup>COSMID 40 TOO 031333Z TOR 031515Z.

<sup>3</sup>MII/276/128/61.

'If political restriction on the use of bombs is likely to be imposed during future similar operations, Naval Staff weapons requirements must now be reconsidered, as within a very short time only conventional and guided bombs will be carried other than the 2 inch RP.'

80. Such simulated operations as the Scimitars were able to carry out were much restricted by the poor visibility and on some days no overland flying was possible. The squadron commander considered that 'It would have been difficult to have identified a target and to have kept it in view during a live attack. In addition, the presence of sand dust in the air created many technical problems, not the least of which was last minute cancellation of a flight due to inability to spread wings correctly.'

81. On 31st July the Carrier Group comprising H.M. Ships *Centaur* (Captain J. A. C. Henley), *Saintes*, *Camperdown* and *Blackpool* relieved the *Victorious's* Carrier Group. Their experiences in the Air Defence and Close Air Support roles were very similar to those reported by the *Victorious* except that, as mentioned previously, the serviceability record of the *Centaur* was somewhat better. It is not proposed to examine them in further detail, therefore.

#### SIGNAL COMMUNICATIONS SHORTCOMINGS

82. As seems inevitable in joint operations, signal communications came in for much criticism. The absence of any 'Complan' at the outset, H.M.S. *Bulwark's* report<sup>1</sup> states, 'meant that communication staffs could not be briefed on the organization. This situation prevailed throughout the force and hindered the smooth flow of traffic for some time.' The Flag Officer, Middle East in his report on communications<sup>2</sup> says that MIDEAST Joint Complan No. 2 together with the RN Supplementary Complan came into being on 30th June 1961 and reached H.M. ships the following day. 'It was perhaps a pity', he commented 'that the Complan was classified TOP SECRET since this clearly complicated its handling and restricted its distribution.'

83. An early difficulty which is inherent in any intervention operation is the hiatus in communications until Army and R.A.F. radio stations can be established ashore. During this period, in the words of the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>MII/276/128/61.

<sup>2</sup>FOME's No. 356/ME 386/70 dated 15th September 1961.

<sup>3</sup>COS(61)378.



## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

'Communications between Bahrein and Kuwait were provided by using a relay ship in the forward area<sup>1</sup> and also by means of a radio circuit between Jufair and Kuwait Army HQ - a hand speed morse circuit of low traffic capacity.

'The use of a relay ship, when available, is strongly supported as it is the quickest means of providing communications in the early stages of a sea-borne operation. In such operations, the ship requires to be fitted with RTT for rear link communications and to have mobile radio detachments embarked to provide communications forward from ship to shore. Its use, however, in no way replaces or reduces the Army and R.A.F. requirements for modern, efficient, air-transportable equipment which can be flown in early and set up quickly ... A quantity of the air transportable and mobile radio equipment was old and out of date; when this had to be used on vital circuits, communications efficiency was hampered.'

84. The great advantages gained by the use of H.M.S. *Meon* as communication relay ship have been referred to previously, but from the point of view of the naval task force commander, the signal load placed on the flagship was too great. H.M.S. *Bulwark's* report<sup>2</sup> states that 'Had hostilities started in the 10-day period before the arrival of the *Victorious* it would have been very difficult to cope with the traffic load. The ship's 12 HF transmitters would have been insufficient for naval secondary circuits in addition to flagship duties.' In this respect H.M.S. *Victorious* reported:<sup>3</sup>

'The communication organisation for TF 317 which has required 80 per cent of the signal traffic to pass through the flagship has put a heavy load on the communication department of that ship. The fact that the flagship is also the fixed-wing carrier has necessitated nine lines being jammed virtually continuously and has kept the Radio Staff in two watches throughout the period in the Persian Gulf.

'As the carrier-operating area is 80-100 miles from Kuwait' the use of the maximum possible number of Medium Power HF Transmitters has been necessary, and has again proved the inadequacy for carrier operations of the five Type 618 Low Power Transmitters fitted in the ship.'

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<sup>1</sup>H.M.S. *Meon*.

<sup>2</sup>MIL/276/128/61.

<sup>3</sup>H.M.S. *Victorious* No. 130/5 dated 30th July 1961.

85. Referring to the first of these aspects, the Flag Officer, Second-in-Command, Far East Station commented:<sup>1</sup>

'The 'Vantage' Communications organisation was designed for an intensive operation and was over-complicated for the protracted, uneventful operation that, in fact, ensued.'

H.M.S. *Centaur's* report<sup>2</sup>, however, states that the adoption of a revised Complan on 28th July

'greatly eased the load on the carrier/flagship. As a result of the abolition of the 'OK' broadcast, and a consequential saving in the hands required to run this circuit and process broadcast traffic, the Communication Department was just able to remain in three watches throughout the period ...'

In support of this the *Centaur's* signal statistics showed an average of 151 messages a day handled by the Bridge Wireless Officer between 1st and 10th August when she was flagship as compared with 352 messages a day handled by the *Victorious* during the 22 days she acted as Task Force flagship. On the other hand the revised Complan increased the load on the small ships. H.M.S. *Blackpool* reported<sup>3</sup> that

'The amount of signal traffic demanded that the communication staff in a frigate worked almost to their limit, and in time the system would have broken down. Further difficulties were experienced in communicating with freighting R.F.A.s used for replenishment at sea and with War Department LSTs owing to their lack of crypto material. As far as the former was concerned the difficulty was overcome by the loan of an RO and provision of inter-service BRITEX and C/S encryption. With the latter, however, in the words of FOME, 'It became evident that the problem of keeping these ships supplied with material and ensuring that their Masters knew how to operate this rather cumbersome and tedious system was beyond the capacity of the Station's meagre resources. Because of this, the system was withdrawn.'

## NAVAL COMMAND ORGANISATION

86. Turning to the question of location of the flag, Admiral Frewen continued:

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<sup>1</sup>MII/276/128/61.

<sup>2</sup>H.M.S. *Centaur's* 058/2 dated 12th August 1961.

<sup>3</sup>MII/276/128/61.

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

'In 'Vantage' the flagship has been the fixed wing carrier and many of the communications difficulties experienced stem from the fact that the carrier has had to operate remote from the forward area ... The carrier, even working watch and watch, was unable fully to meet the communications requirements of the OTC ... A cruiser was required ...'

87. The Flag Officer, Middle East<sup>1</sup> agreed that many of the difficulties were caused by the senior officer of the Carrier Group being also the Task Force Commander. He wrote:

'Experience of this operation now leads me to think that this is not the best arrangement because:

- a. The carrier's communications are 'inward looking' due to own aircraft operations, safety etc. They must be so.
- b. Erratic movements are inevitable due to variations of wind, flying programme etc. This strains the carrier's medium power short range communications unnecessarily.
- c. Since the carrier group must remain at sea at a considerable distance from Kuwait, joint liaison with other forward Commanders is difficult if not impossible in an emergency.
- d. The carrier's proper role and supporting air communications may be prejudiced by the needs of the Commander Task Force in exercise of his overall command.'

88. Admiral Talbot's conclusions are quoted below in full because, though they referred to the peculiar situation of Operation 'Vantage' they may well be applicable to operations in other regions.

'While there are normally obvious advantages in having the Commander Task Force afloat, I now consider, in the 'Vantage' setting, where the Naval Force Commander (Flag Officer, Middle East) is already in the forward area (Bahrein) and in close and constant touch with the Commander-in-Chief, the Political Resident Persian Gulf and other Single Service Commanders, the Flag Officer, Middle East is himself better placed to assume overall command of the various Task Groups.

'It is therefore intended, should an operation similar to 'Vantage' have to be performed again, that the Flag Officer, Middle East should exercise command of the Naval Task Force from the Bahrein Headquarters with Task Group Commanders as follows:

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<sup>1</sup>MII/276/128/61.

*a. Carrier Group.* Comprising the Carrier(s) and close escort, Replenishment at Sea tanker and Air Stores Ship, commanded by a Flag Officer.

*b. Inshore Group.* Commanded by the Captain, Amphibious Warfare Squadron and comprising the Amphibious Warfare Squadron, the ship allocated for Naval Gunfire Support and the Mine Counter-Measures forces.

*c. Commando Ship Group.* Under the command of the Commanding Officer of the Commando Ship and comprising that ship and her escorts.'

## INTER-SERVICE SIGNAL COMMUNICATIONS

89. Critical of the signal communication organisation as all the senior naval officers concerned were, nevertheless both the carriers, supported by the Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers, concluded that Intra-R.N. Defence communications were generally satisfactory. The Flag Officer, Middle East's report on Naval Communications in Operation 'Vantage'<sup>1</sup> is a voluminous and comprehensive document which cannot be considered in detail here. He concluded, however:

'Although, inevitably, many difficulties were met, it remains a fact that the Naval Communication Organisation stood up well to this emergency and that by and large it provided a more rapid means of communication than that available to the other two Services.'

A different picture emerged when inter-service communications were examined.

90. To take the Commander-in-Chief's comments<sup>2</sup> first, he reported:

'The lack of an established joint organisation and procedure was seriously felt in the forward area ... More practice is required to improve inter-service working and to this end, the same equipment and personnel must be employed in exercises. The manpack UHF SR43 was used for the first time and its performance was promising ...

'A quantity of the air transportable and mobile radio equipment was old and out of date; when this had to be used on

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<sup>1</sup>FOME No. 356/ME/386/70 dated 15th September 1961.

<sup>2</sup>COS(61)378.

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

vital circuits, communications efficiency was hampered. The air-transportable field RTP established at Kuwait airfield for the circuit from Bahrein proved invaluable. The high temperature and sandstorms put equipment to a severe test particularly batteries and charging engines while some radio sets also suffered from over-heating.

'Difficulty was caused by the delays to and piecemeal arrival of radio equipment, including essential accessories. To set up communications quickly, personnel must arrive as scheduled complete with working stations. Semi-hazardous stores such as batteries and charging engines posed a problem as acid or spilt petrol from unemptied carburettors necessitated their being off-loaded whilst en route to Kuwait. As they are heavy and bulky they could be included in stock-piles.

'The ACP series do not meet the needs of an operation of this kind. For instance, the lack of a common procedure for the use of address groups and call signs both complicates the production of a Joint Complan and also compromises address groups/call signs. Similarly when an outstation of one Service joins a primarily single-service net, trained on single-service procedure, it is impracticable for the whole net to change to inter-service procedure.'

## SIGNAL ABUSES

91. Apart from technical and organisational shortcomings, the Commander-in-Chief commented on a general abuse of priority indications and security classification:

'During a 25-day period, Aden COMMCEN handled 397 Flash, 541 Emergency and 8,799 Operational Immediate messages: none of these was a tactical enemy contact report and the majority were therefore strictly an abuse of precedence rules. During the period, communications were being built up, especially to and from the forward area, and were in consequence limited; had hostilities broken out, the free use of high precedence would have had to be prevented.

In the initial stages of the operation there was an over-use of Top Secret classification which led to delays. Many messages were verbose and contained too many addressees as the principle of sending only to those who need to know was not always followed. Wider use of the 'All informed' procedure would have eased Army communications in the forward area.'



92. In this respect the Flag Officer, Middle East remarked<sup>1</sup> that, 'The gross misuse of precedences mainly by non-Naval users combined with many differences in staff procedures and training tended to introduce further difficulties and delays in an already complex situation.' Commenting on the spate of high priority classified messages he suggested, 'It was fortunate that fighting did not start.'

93. With regard to Close Air Support communications, a full range of HF, VHF and UHF circuits was envisaged by the Joint Complan; but the portable equipment on shore required to implement the plan, responsibility for which rested with the Army and the R.A.F., became only very tardily available. Consequently, as Flag Officer, Middle East's report notes:

'With the exception of 42 Commando, partial UHF air support communications were not available until D + 2 and fully effective communications on all Air Support Communications could not be guaranteed until D + 6 at the earliest. Although operational circumstances dictated this slow build-up rate, similar conditions might well re-occur in future operations. It was, in any case, fortunate that H.M.S. *Victorious* did not arrive in the forward area until D + 10.'

94. Admiral Frewen, as the Task Force Commander, reiterated<sup>2</sup> these shortcomings but took a contrary view of the consequences of the carrier's delayed arrival. He wrote:

'It was not until 13th July that satisfactory communication was obtained between H.M.S. *Victorious* and the ASOC and other shore stations, though H.M.S. *Bulwark* who had been operating closer inshore obtained reasonable communication earlier. It is considered that the reasons for this were:

- a. Understandable pre-occupation of Army with own internal communications.
- b. The late arrival of Brigade HQ communication equipment.
- c. The non-arrival of the strike carrier until 10th July and consequent lack of urgency to meet joint communication requirements.
- d. The shortage of medium power transmitters ashore and afloat.'

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<sup>1</sup>FOME's No. 356/ME/386/70 dated 15th September 1961.

<sup>2</sup>MIL/276/128/61.

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

95. The report recommends that greater priority should be given to the early provision of joint communications and that 'there seems to be a definite requirement to fit more medium power HF equipment in carriers and flagships'. On the subject of Air Defence communications, the Flag Officer, Middle East commented:

'In 'Vantage', the responsibility for the Air Defence of Kuwait rested with the R.N., supported whenever possible by the R.A.F. No provision, however, had been made in the Joint Complan for the necessary control and reporting communications required when using R.A.F. aircraft and radar facilities. It became necessary, therefore, to make 'ad hoc' arrangements using circuits already established for other purposes.'

96. The Task Force Commander's remarks on this question were:

'The continued use by the R.A.F. of VHF-fitted aircraft imposed the usual limitations. No direct air-to-air communication was available and ground-to-air communication was only achieved by provision of extra equipment. Ship/R.A.F. air communication was possible using Type 86M, which once again proved its worth, but as one set only was fitted in A/D frigates, only one channel was available at a time, and frequencies had to be shared between air support and air defence requirements. It is understood that the ground/air UHF equipment (Type A43) had never been used before this operation and suffered from teething troubles. It is recommended that all equipment earmarked for use with naval aircraft be kept in working trim.'

97. In this connection the Flag Officer, Middle East recommended<sup>1</sup> amongst other things:

- a. Early action be taken by R.A.F. to convert to UHF.
- b. H.M. Aircraft Carriers be provided with four UHF portable equipments for use in the field in the initial stages of an operation so that immediate close air support can be guaranteed.

Finally, after commenting on the inadequacy of co-operation between the communications officers concerned and inter-service muddle with regard to call signs and address groups,

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<sup>1</sup>FOME's No. 356/ME 386/70 dated 15th September 1961.

Admiral Frewen recommended that 'in an operation of this sort a Chief Signals Officer should be appointed responsible to the overall commander for the conduct of joint communications'.

98. The Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers, discussing the lessons learnt from the Kuwait operation<sup>1</sup>, struck an even more critical note:

'The chaotic state of joint communications for close air support and joint air defence that has been described in so many reports is alarming. Indeed, I fully agree with the Flag Officer, Middle East that it is just as well that no fighting took place in the early stages.

'It is clear that the normal small-scale close air support exercises periodically carried out by carriers are insufficient and that full-scale communication trials and exercises must in future be held in all overseas commands. All ships, shore agencies and formation and unit headquarters likely to be employed in various theatre contingency plans must be realistically deployed, preferably near likely operational areas and full signal traffic for a typical operation passed. No such exercise involving carrier groups providing close air support and air defence has been held in the Middle East Command.

'The inter-service muddle that has been reported over call signs, recognition, cryptography, nomenclature, A43R channel allocation, joint CW operating, communications with WD LSTs, joint air defence communications, local communication co-ordination, and the lack of sufficient VHF sets in ships, UHF sets ashore and in R.A.F. aircraft, and medium HF transmitters in ships and ashore, all goes to show that the British Joint Communications-Electronic Board must be made a much more powerful and effective authority.'

99. In subsequent comments on the above, the Flag Officer, Middle East thought that:

'Whilst it is agreed that there were many difficulties in providing adequate close air support and air defence communications particularly in the initial stages of the operation, it would be wrong and misleading to describe the situation which prevailed as "chaotic".'

100. The above paragraphs on communication problems met during Operation 'Vantage' touch only lightly upon an aspect of

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<sup>1</sup>MΠ/276/126/61.

## MIDDLE EAST OPERATIONS

the operation which clearly exposed many serious inter-service shortcomings. For a full appreciation of the existing state of affairs the very full report and recommendations submitted by the Flag Officer, Middle East (No. 356/ME 386/70 dated 15th September 1961) together with the reports and recommendations by the Flag Officer Second-in-Command, Far East Fleet and the Summary of Lessons Learnt by the Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers (MII/276/126/61) must be studied.

### WELFARE AND MORALE

101. A most important factor for future guidance in operations East of Suez is that to be considered under the general heading of *WELFARE AND MORALE*, owing principally to the severe climatic conditions encountered. The Commander-in-Chief in his report<sup>1</sup> restricted himself to the conditions of service and the amenities arranged for the forces ashore. No mention is made of any effects of lack of acclimatisation amongst personnel brought out from the U.K. From the medical angle, 'The sickness incidence of the forces in Kuwait was far below the forecast figure. Due to exaggeration by the Press, concern was felt in the U.K. over the number of cases of heat exhaustion. In fact, all cases treated in hospital were mild during the period of this report.' The Navy only figures in this connection by reason of the facilities provided by H.M.S. *Bulwark* to which, each day, 200 men were taken off 'for a 24 hour stay to enable them to sleep in air-conditioned spaces, have their laundry done, and generally refit themselves'.

102. During the first week of the operation, H.M. Ships taking part were all fully air-conditioned. Thus the Flag Officer, Middle East, referring to this period<sup>2</sup>, was able to report that:

'Needless to say, with such a worthwhile job to do, morale in the ships had been very high despite long hours and appalling working conditions of great heat and sand. The ships being air-conditioned in living and sleeping spaces, there have been no cases of heat exhaustion afloat.'

### EFFECTS OF CLIMATE

103. On the arrival of ships less fully air-conditioned from other stations, however, particularly the fixed-wing carriers,

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<sup>1</sup>COS(61)378.

<sup>2</sup>MII/389/6/62.

the combating of sickness and the maintenance of efficiency and morale became more difficult. All ships reported that morale remained high, the principal reason given being the ability from the start to announce with confidence the period of Persian Gulf operational conditions the men were going to have to put up with. Nevertheless the air squadrons in the carriers found the morale of their ground-crews under a strain owing to the longer working hours necessary to keep up the required aircraft serviceability as compared to the light tropical routine of the remainder of the ships' companies. There were several cases of heat exhaustion in the carriers and most ships reported a successive falling-off in efficiency.

104. To take the small ships first<sup>1</sup>, no serious medical casualties occurred, though they enjoyed no air-conditioning. On the other hand a proper night's rest was a rare experience, and the consensus of opinion was that after three weeks of operations under such conditions efficiency would fall off to a serious degree.

105. In the carriers the situation was more complicated as some spaces and sleeping billets enjoyed air-conditioning, others did not. Prior to arrival in the Gulf, both ships employed an extensive 'Beat the Heat' propaganda with exhortations by senior officers and medical officers on the precautions necessary. As a result casualties were kept to a minimum, though the majority of the ships' companies to some extent suffered from prickly heat. In H.M.S. *Victorious* nine men affected by the heat and humidity were admitted to Sick Bay for periods up to 48 hours and 40 were treated on the attending list. In H.M.S. *Centaur* 67 cases were seen in the first 11 days, though the daily numbers gradually decreased. Of these, 19, including two severe cases of heat exhaustion (both senior boiler-room ratings), were admitted to the Sick Bay. On the night of the 9th August, however, when the humidity rose sharply and night flying in a minimal wind required high power for prolonged periods, a great many cases occurred and almost the entire staff of both boiler-rooms had to be relieved and given treatment, eight of them being admitted to the Sick Bay.

106. The great majority of these cases were unconnected with the availability or otherwise of air-conditioning, occurring as they did as a result of excessive heat in working spaces which

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<sup>1</sup>MII/276/126/61 and MII/276/125/61.



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cannot be air-conditioned. This applied to most working places, including the hangars, and in addition to the actual medical cases recorded, the effect was to slow down the rate of work and the speed of mental reaction to problems.

107. Thus the *Victorious* recorded that in the Engine Room Department after a week of operations the speed of response to orders and emergencies noticeably slowed down. Men working in some compartments were estimated to be less than 50% efficient after three weeks in the Gulf. Cooks were reaching the limit of their endurance by that time. The air squadrons in both the carriers found maintenance tasks taking progressively longer - up to 50% longer in some cases - owing to the very trying conditions in the hangars. The *Centaur's* report considered that four days of day and night flying programmes was the maximum that could be undertaken - at any rate in peace-time.

108. More insidious, but equally conducive to a lowering of efficiency as work under gruelling conditions, was the lack of proper rest for those unable to find undisturbed sleeping billets in air-conditioned spaces. As mentioned above this was felt to some extent in the smaller ships; but in the carriers it was exacerbated by the disturbances of night flying operations and by the necessity to keep the ground crews of Air Squadrons to their normal two-watch system of 12 hours each watch while the ships' companies were enjoying a special tropical routine. Those who had air-conditioned mess-decks could sleep undisturbed even when their periods of watch below fell during working hours. Others either had to put up with trying to sleep in temperatures of 100°F or more, or find air-conditioned billets in passages or compartments used for other purposes or in the open air. Sleep for them was shallow and disturbed either by severe prickly heat or by noise and activity around them. Speed and reliability of work of those affected fell off and night watchmen were liable to fall asleep. To quote from the remarks of the Principal Medical Officer of H.M.S. *Victorious*, 'Probably 50% of the ship's company are borderline fatigue cases getting insufficient sound sleep in 24 hours.'

### IMPORTANCE OF AIR CONDITIONING

109. In general it can be said that the absence of sufficiently thorough and efficient air-conditioning in the fixed-wing carriers was the chief factor limiting the length of sustained operations. The Task Force Commander was of the opinion<sup>1</sup> that:

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<sup>1</sup>MII/276/128/61.

'If a Force is to work in the Persian Gulf in summer it must be air-conditioned. Firstly, throughout accommodation spaces, to ensure sleep. And secondly, throughout offices, to enable the Command and all officers and men doing administrative work to think clearly - after a few days it is impossible, not just difficult to do so.

'Ships' companies find it difficult to understand the space, labour and financial restriction of converting warships to air-conditioning. It is suggested, unless this is already being done, that Their Lordships' policy on this matter should be widely promulgated. It should then be sufficient that, during refits, substantial air-conditioning should be seen to be undertaken ...

'After two or three weeks, ships' companies in un-air-conditioned ships in the Persian Gulf in summer become inefficient and fatigued. This was only really serious in carriers; acclimatised reliefs for certain categories would almost certainly have been needed if these ships were required to operate longer. The danger of heat exhaustion in boiler rooms of carriers steaming at full power may prove an operational limitation whether the ship's accommodation is air-conditioned or not.'

110. The Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers commenting on this aspect of the operations<sup>1</sup> noted:

'The constant theme running through the reports from both ships is the extreme temperatures and humidities experienced and the difficulty of living and fighting effectively under such conditions ... There is only one solution - aircraft carriers must be air-conditioned throughout.'

#### LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING AIR-CONDITIONING PLANTS

111. To some extent such air-conditioning as was fitted failed to give satisfactory results. H.M.S. *Victorious* reported<sup>2</sup> that 'The one million B Th U vapour refrigeration plants are sensitive to sea water temperature and to change of load. Difficulty was experienced with all four plants when the ship entered the Gulf of Oman and encountered sea water temperatures in excess of 90°F.'

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<sup>1</sup>MII/276/128/61.

<sup>2</sup>H.M.S. *Victorious* No. 130/5 of 30th July 1961, Appendix E.

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112. The conclusion was reached that these plants 'will not work in sea water temperatures above 95°F'. In H.M.S. *Centaur* similar plants, 'Operated very well owing to devoted nursing by an extremely conscientious ERA. Breakdowns have been few and short ... both plants have operated satisfactorily with circulating water inlet temperatures up to 94°F, but above this the performance falls off.'

113. As the Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers commented:<sup>1</sup>

'With the thermo-compression type air-conditioning equipment it is apparent that at sea temperatures over 90°F there is a tendency to instability. Since this is the time when successful operation is most vital the running of this equipment must be investigated under high sea temperature conditions and the necessary modifications made.'

114. Though in both Engineering and Electrical departments there were reported<sup>2</sup> a number of defects, not all attributable solely to climatic conditions, the Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers was able to say:<sup>1</sup>

'Main, flight deck and auxiliary machinery continued to operate satisfactorily with the conspicuous exception of

- a. Thermo-compression type air-conditioning machinery.
- b. Cooling machinery for aircraft radar and air-ventilated suits.
- c. Liquid oxygen plants.'

## MINE COUNTERMEASURES

115. Before concluding this study of the Kuwait operation, the steps taken to provide Mine Countermeasures should perhaps be mentioned. On 4th July preparations began to activate three of the reserve Coastal Minesweepers at Aden. Orders were subsequently received that only one ship, H.M.S. *Lanton*, was to be commissioned and work was stopped on the other two when they were about 95% de-preserved. Meanwhile six ships of the 108th Minesweeping Flotilla had been ordered to the area from Malta and, together with the *Lanton*, they arrived at Bahrein on 22nd July. All ships arrived requiring maintenance and could not be regarded as operational for some three days. As for the *Lanton*,

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<sup>1</sup>MII/276/128/61.

<sup>2</sup>H.M.S. *Victorious* No. 130/5 of 30th July 1961.  
H.M.S. *Centaur* No. 058/2 of 12th August 1961.

the Flag Officer, Middle East commented <sup>1</sup> that she

'could not be considered as an operational minesweeper since she had not been on a DG range for some years. The lack of a DG range on the Middle East Station places the minesweepers in considerable hazard if required for operational minesweeping. Observing that the Persian Gulf is the only area of the Middle East Station that is really suitable for influence mining, it is for consideration that the Reserve Coastal Minesweepers should be stationed at Bahrein where they are seven days nearer the probable task.'

## CONCLUSIONS

116. Nothing could have been devised better than the Kuwait emergency to test the accepted method of deploying our limited forces to deal with a 'brush-fire' outbreak and the equipment available. This particular emergency had been long foreseen. Operational plans for dealing with it had been kept constantly under review and brought up to date. No other emergency was simultaneously in eruption. Yet the system was found wanting in several vital particulars.

117. Superficially considered, no more prompt way of delivering military power to a trouble spot would seem to exist than that of air transport. Once the necessary aircraft have been collected and the route 'activated', the troops can arrive within two or three days almost anywhere in the world, though at the time of writing aircraft which can transport heavy armoured vehicles are not available to the Royal Air Force. The Kuwait operation showed, however, that the system is easily thrown out of joint by political difficulties.

118. Notice of four days was necessary to set the operation afoot; but though *warning* of impending trouble was received on 25th June - five days before the eventual D-day, 30th June - owing to political considerations it was not until late on the 28th that orders could be given for forces required for the operation to be brought to the states of readiness laid down in the plan, and another 24 hours elapsed before authorisation was given by the Chiefs of Staff for preparatory measures short of actually moving into Kuwait to be taken. Even then essential, planned movements of troops and equipment from the U.K. and Cyprus could not be started owing to difficulty in obtaining

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<sup>1</sup>MII/282/15/61.

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overflight permission from various intervening countries. Had it been necessary to rely solely upon air transport and the naval forces normally immediately available, at the end of D + 2 only two companies of infantry and a half-squadron of tanks would have been deployed to help the small Kuwait Army meet any attack from Iraq. Even when the air lift got under way, its achievements cannot have been very satisfactory if the opinion of the C.O. of No. 42 Commando is to be accepted that '42 Commando was the only fully equipped unit ashore for at least 7 days.'

119. As far as air defence of the area was concerned, this was expected to be provided until the arrival of a carrier between D + 7 and D + 21 by the two squadrons of Hunters in addition to their ground attack duties and without benefit of air direction until the stockpiled R.A.F. Type 787 radar could be set up and manned. The fortuitous presence of H.M.S. *Bulwark* in the area only marginally improved the air direction situation.

120. The Kuwait emergency also provided a revealing test of the organisation and equipment of radio communications between the Ministry of Defence and Area Headquarters, between the Commander-in-Chief and subordinate commanders and between the services, and of the training and competence of the users of the communication systems. Many technical shortcomings were exposed; but perhaps the most disheartening revelation was the continued disregard of the rules of precedence and security classification of signals, particularly by the Army and Air Force, and the verbosity of messages, which resulted in great congestion of communication systems and the swamping of signal and crypto staffs. Had fighting actually broken out there can be little doubt that the system would have rapidly broken down. Complaints of this state of affairs have been a recurring feature of Flag Officers' reports of joint service operations: little or no improvement has been achieved.

121. The key role played in the maintenance of communications by H.M.S. *Neon* acting as communications centre provides a strong argument for the inclusion of specialised headquarters/communications ships in future construction programmes.

122. Turning to the purely naval aspects of the operation, the outstanding features were as follows:

- a. The vital contribution to whatever success was achieved of the commando ship *Bulwark* and No. 42 Commando, so fortunately available.



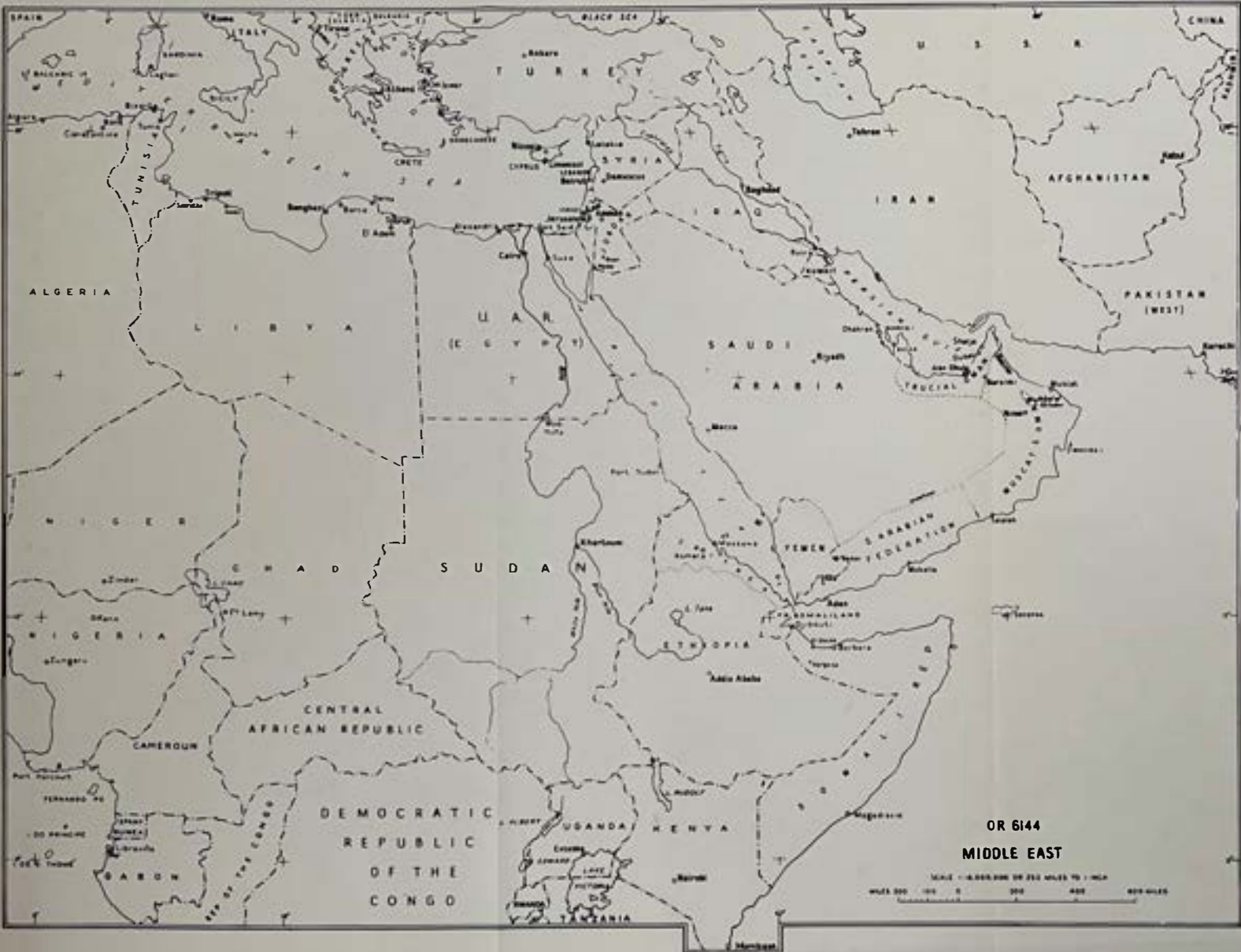
b. The equally important part played by the ageing ships and craft of the Royal Navy's only Amphibious Warfare Squadron.

c. The total reliance for air defence upon the carriers' aircraft and air direction systems and the shortcomings in their equipment for the purpose.

d. The danger that could have arisen from a mining attack and the likelihood of this recurring if similar emergencies happen elsewhere, unless sufficient M.C.M. forces are strategically placed in advance.

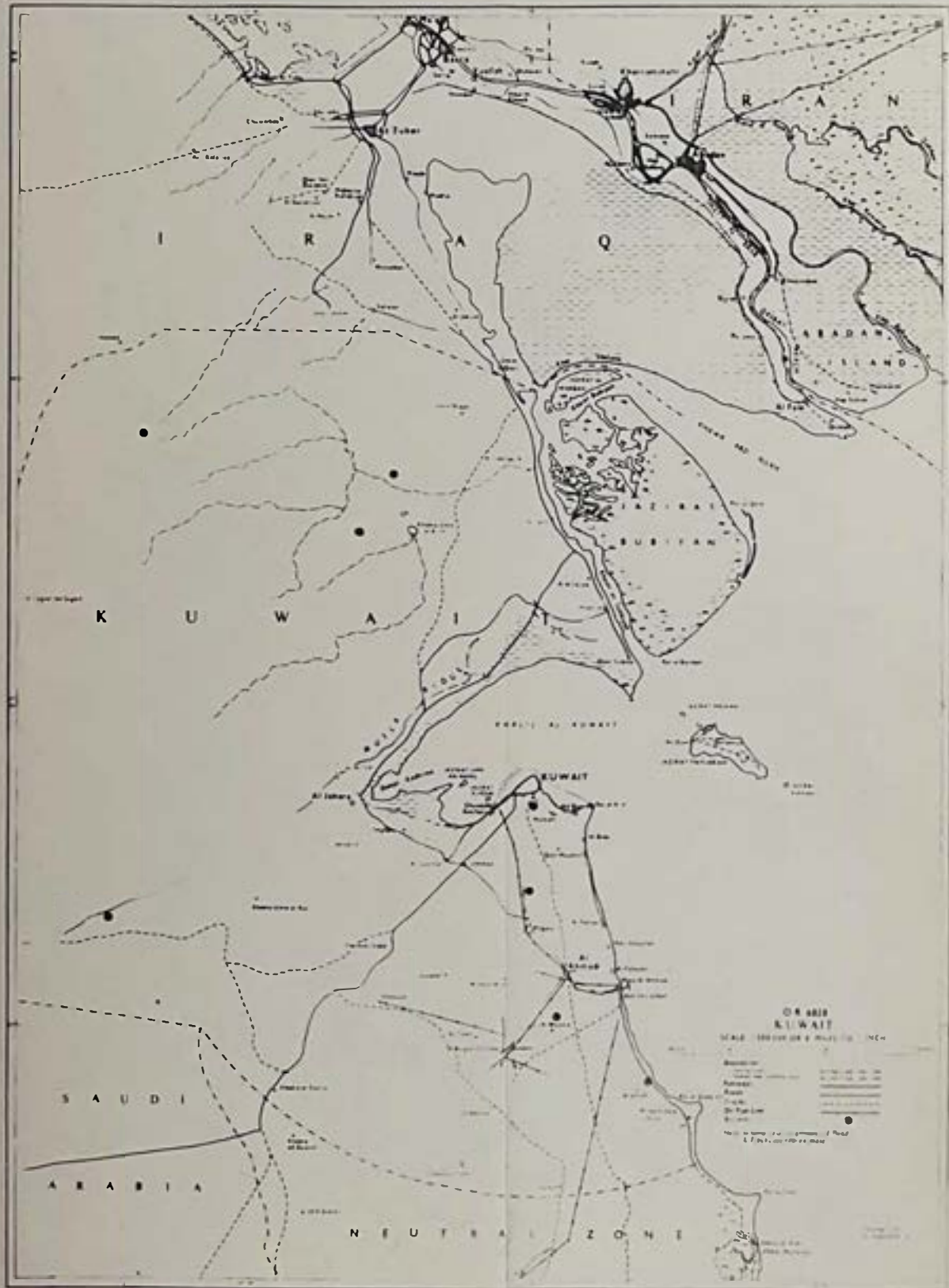
123. Finally, the comment of the Flag Officer, Middle East, endorsed by the Flag Officer Aircraft Carriers, that it was 'just as well that no fighting took place in the early stages' provides a strident warning that much needs to be learnt and improved if our methods of deploying an emergency 'fire brigade' are not to suffer disaster if serious opposition is encountered.

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