

CHAPTER 12 - Part 2



Entering HK - Victoria Island on left

The ship arrived in Hong Kong 15th May 1982. Mr Shiu, the head laundryman onboard, known as No1, was looking forward to this visit as his No2 Son was getting married. The After Chiefs were invited to the banquet after the wedding ceremony. The banquet was held in a multi-storey building that had a restaurant on all the floors. I think we were on the third floor. There were big round tables that took up to 10 people each. Each table had its own drinks trolley with a steward to look after you and the meal was to be over 16 courses. There were holes with slots at the edge of the table in front of each diner. On asking what they were for, we were told that the heads of small monkeys were slotted into the holes and the skulls opened up to reveal the brains - a delicacy for the Chinese. Fortunately, that dish wasn't being served! Our most unusual dish was the first course of duck head soup, with ducks heads floating on top. You could pick up a head and pull the sinew that hung below to make the beak go up and down. Between each course, speeches were made and everyone was expected to yum sing (gulp down) a glass of brandy after each speech. Needless to say, by the end of the evening, we were all pretty shickered (drunk too).



Wanchai had changed since 1965 - restaurant on the left, front

We were enjoying our stay in HK, when on the 20th, a bolt came out of the blue.

Operation Armilla (The NZ Contribution)

The Armilla patrol is the Royal Navy's permanent presence in the Persian Gulf.

The Royal Navy had withdrawn its forces from the Persian Gulf in 1971 in line with the UK's general retreat from imperial commitments. However, tensions in the area remained high and Royal Navy ships were still a frequent sight in the area. In 1980 war broke out between Iraq and Iran. In response to the increased danger to British shipping and other British interests, a Royal Navy escort vessel was sent to the Gulf and at least one has remained there ever since. In addition to the surface combatant, the RN has also maintained an auxiliary of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary in the Gulf.

During the Falklands War, New Zealand offered assistance to the British Government and HMNZS Canterbury, which was the only operational frigate at the time, the first RNZN frigate to participate in Operation Armilla. She was relieved by Waikato. Both ships then did another patrol each, making a total of two patrols per ship.

The story starts with HMNZS Canterbury sitting alongside Hong Kong, 20th May 1982 and I was having breakfast in the Senior Rates Mess when the 0700 local news came on.

“It has just been announced that the NZ Frigate, HMNZS Canterbury, currently sitting alongside at the naval base in Hong Kong, has been seconded to the Royal Navy for duties in the Falklands conflict.”

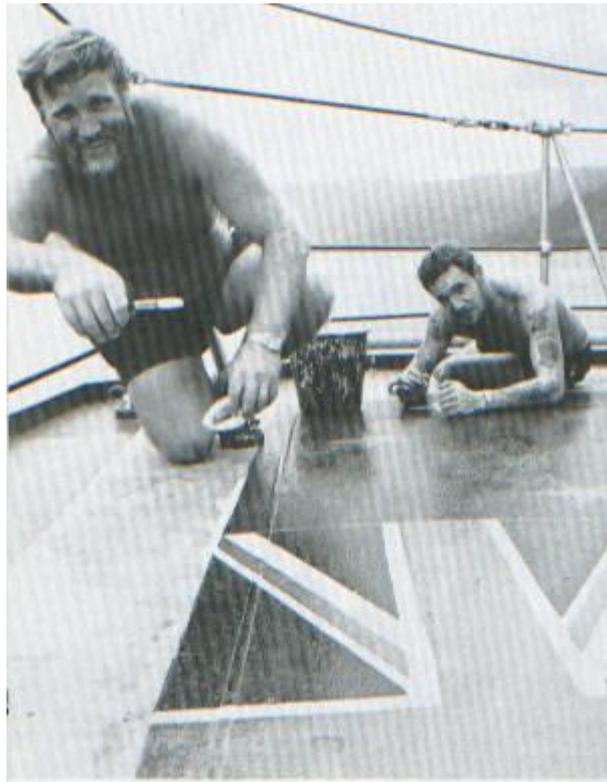
Having just about choked on my breakfast, I recovered to respond to a pipe on the Main Broadcast to go to the CO's cabin and on the way up, called into the MCO to check that no high precedence traffic had been received and relayed this to the captain. The Right Honourable Muldoon had been dining with the British PM, Maggie Thatcher at 10 Downing Street and had promised her an operational frigate to help out - probably his way of getting back at our Captain!

By now the ship was buzzing with anticipation and phone calls from home were starting to flood into the ship. We only had three telephone lines connected to the shore system so when leave was piped, many of the crew went ashore to the local Cable and Wireless Office to ring home.

The next day, Spike Hughes, Ross Campbell and I went to the China Fleet Club one last time to spend what Hong Kong money we had left and enjoyed several dishes washed down with San Miguel beer. Spike was to leave the ship in Singapore and fly home to his seriously ill wife.

We sailed for Manila on the 22nd May IAW our program but an Immediate signal 24 hours later ordered us to proceed with despatch to Singapore. I had jokingly said to my messmates prior to sailing from HK that we would probably be diverted to Singapore before going to the Falklands! Between HK and Singapore, our Frequency Standard broke down and we had to use the 643/CJP for the MRL with GZO.

We arrived in Singapore 26th May, but we didn't find out until about a week later that we were not going to the Falklands but to help in something called Operation Armilla - we felt like a tyre that had the air let out of it. This was met by relief from some members of the ships company (after all, we were only a "Bow and Arrow" ship) and disbelief by the more gung-ho types onboard. The RN frigate, whose place we were taking on patrol, departed for UK to have some armament changes (the addition of Sea Wolf - an anti-missile system) added prior to going to the South Atlantic. The biggest threat during Operation Armilla could come from Iranian or Iraqi fighter jets and in order to reduce this threat, the NZ Ensign was painted on top of the upper bridge. This allowed for national identification from the air and thus reduce the possibility of being shot at. Meanwhile, one of our mess members had been pretty stressed out and had gone every day to the Anglican church on base to seek solace.



POTASI Mike Law and helper, painting NZ Ensign on upper bridge

About 50 wives (including Vicki) flew up to Singapore as everyone (in NZ, Singapore and onboard) thought that Canterbury was going to the Falklands. On the flight up, the Captain of the aircraft announced that there were navy wives onboard going to see their husbands on HMNZS Canterbury, which was off to the Falklands. By the time the plane got to Singapore, the wives had been wined and dined for free and were looking pretty happy when they landed!

Vicki and I stayed at Pat and Dave Morgan's house on base. We knew them both from Waiouru. Pat was a Staff Sergeant in Signals and Dave was a WO1 in Artillery. We met up with them again when we posted back to Waiouru. Sadly Pat passed away some years ago as a result of cancer.

Everywhere Vicki and I went, the locals would come up and touch her red hair for luck - maybe I should have tried that...

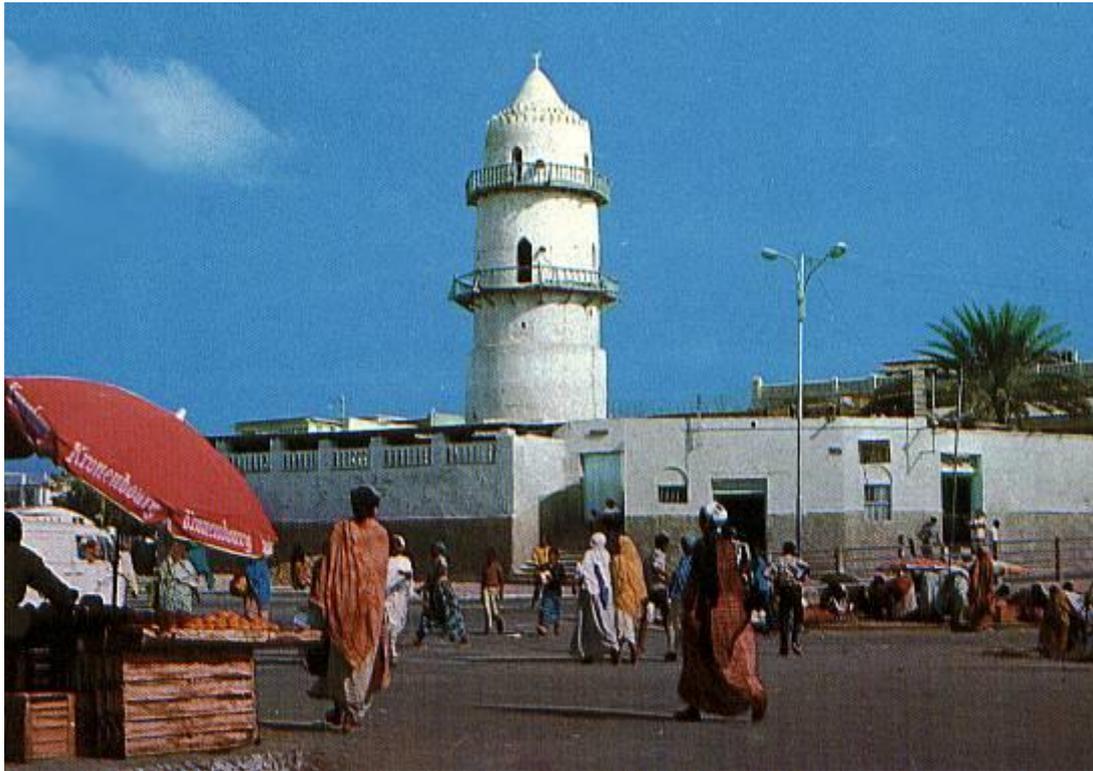


Pat and Vicki at Bobby's Stall, Sembawang

Vicki and I bought a large Persian rug, pots, pans, dinnerware, wok and a steamboat and stored them in the Naval Base laypart store until the ship returned from its patrol.

Exercise Starfish took place 3 - 9 June which included HMA Ships Stalwart, Brisbane and Parramatta. After the Exercise, the three RAN ships had their hulls repainted as they couldn't get it done at Garden Island, Sydney, as the Dockies were on strike. **HMAS Parramatta** was the last one to be done and this involved the ship being heeled over to starboard - hull cleaned and painted, then the port side done. This took about three days and prior to it starting, the RS (Bert Abel) came over to see me and asked a favour. As RAN ships weren't permitted to cease radio watch and go to hand message organisation, **Parramatta** had to remain on Broadcast A11B3 and ship to shore. Could he use **Canterbury's** rerad facilities - UHF to HF? Sure, we had the necessary HF clearances and the gear was set up with a UHF voice circuit set up between the two ships for engineering and **Canterbury's** port AWF whip assigned for the HF rerad to Darwin. It worked fine and I received a pair of Parramatta cufflinks. Bert said that Stalwart didn't have rerad facilities and the Chief on Brisbane was being his usual uncooperative self.

21st June, we departed from Singapore in company with a RN Ikara equipped Leander class frigate (HMS AJAX) equipped with SATCOM, and RFA Gold Rover. I had gone over to Ajax to be briefed by the CPORS on there (Jan Cudmore) and the ship also received publications and British keying material that we would need. In the Singapore Straits we raced passed the Ranger Battle Group who were on their way to the Indian Ocean. We transited the Indian Ocean to the point that juts out on the bottom left hand side of the Red Sea - the French protectorate of Djibouti. Stayed there for a couple of days and then escorted the two RN ships up the Red Sea. A phenomenon known as Ducting allowed abnormal distances of up to 1200 miles on VHF Channel 16 and a couple of hundred miles on secure UHF voice. The winds would whip the sand up from the desert and carry it across the Red Sea in the atmosphere. Watch on deck had to continuously keep the air intakes clear from the sand and the buntings had to change the NZ white ensign because they kept turning pink (the ensigns, not the buntings...)



The mosque at Djibouti - appeared in the 1950's movie "The Four Feathers". The middle of the town resembled a French village square, similar to the set of "Allo! Allo!" Outside of the square it was typically North African. There was a Soviet destroyer berthed along from us with a couple of armed sentries marching up and down and the Soviet sailors went ashore in groups of 10, accompanied by a Commissar. The air conditioning broke down on our first night there and most of the ships company slept on the upper deck, much to the amusement of the British, French and Soviet sailors.

After leaving the two RN units to make their way through the Suez Canal, we had to wait in the area for a while until the other frigate (HMS AURORA) and RFA Grey Rover came through the Canal to join up with Canterbury. This meant that we were now without our SATCOM link. However, we had pre-arranged to go onto a duplex MRL with the RAF base at Episkopi in Cyprus. We stayed on this MRL throughout the Patrol.

Whilst waiting for the other two units to join us, we visited Port Sudan and some of us had the opportunity to visit Suakin, which is about 35 miles down the coast. Suakin used to be the departure point for Muslims heading to Mecca. Apart from the fortifications, most of the city was made out of coral. Framework, window frames and doors were made out of wood and over the years, the inhabitants used the wood for fires there being no trees around for hundreds of miles. Consequently, most of the buildings had collapsed and the area looked like the aftermath of a nuclear explosion. Prior to this town collapsing, it was also used in the movie "The Four Feathers".



Locals near the entranceway to the old city of Suakin



Part of the old city

The RN frigate (Aurora) coming out to join us broke down and returned to Gibraltar. Our patrol consisted of Canterbury and RFA Grey Rover. We departed the Red Sea and went into the Gulf of Oman. Our job was to protect merchant shipping in the area by conducting patrols, monitoring merchant shipping and belligerent activities. Our helo visited the International airport at Oman a couple of times a week and so we were able to get mail regularly. Radio telephone calls back to home were held as often as operationally possible, but with the Task Force coming back from the Falklands, it wasn't uncommon to be told that you were 54th in the queue.

Communications duties included maintaining the MRL with RAF Episkopi, communications guard for RFA Grey Rover and monitoring all the International Distress Frequencies on the MF, HF, VHF and UHF bands.

Shortly before entering the Gulf of Oman, I was shaken by the LRO during the early hours of the morning and informed that we had received a FLASH grouper (an encrypted message in five letter groups). He was unable to set up the RACE crypto machine (KL7 replacement) as the message had been encrypted in a special keylist which was held by the Captain. I hadn't seen a FLASH message since my days on the Royalist in 1965 so I was keen to see what this was all about. I raced up to the CO's cabin, woke him up (fortunately he was a light sleeper) and requested if I could have the special crypto settings that were held in his safe.

I took this material back down to the MCO (Wireless Office) and instructed the LRO to set up RACE using the CO's keylist. When it was ready, I fed in the tape whilst the CO looked over my shoulder. It was a message from the Admiralty (MODUK (Navy)) that a Soviet Tupolev TU-95 bomber had left its base in Aden and would be in our area at daybreak. Sure enough, this huge bomber flew over us and came around for a close up. It was near enough to see the crew in the cockpit and the gunner in the rear turret. A friendly wave was given by both sides (and probably photos) and the bomber went on its way.



Codenamed BEAR

Operation Armilla 1982: Communications Circuits for the Patrol:

1. MRL (Duplex Secure RATT) with Cyprus - HF broadband aerial.
2. Simplex Orestes HF (Secure RATT) with RFA Grey Rover - 643/CJP - AWF whip.
3. Radfones with NZ - via UK (Portishead Radio) - AWF whip.
4. Monitor:
 - (a) 500 kHz - FM16 with MF Main Roof if/as required.
 - (b) 2182 (FH5), 4125 kHz, 6 and 8 MHz - AWF whip as required.
 - (c) Channel 16 – Type 689
 - (d) 121.5 MHz - AN/ARC182
 - (e) 243.0 MHz - AN/ARC159's could all be set to "GUARD" as well as monitor the frequency in use.
 - (f) UHF Ship to Air - our own helo and also for working with the Omani Royal Air Force Jaguar strike aircraft. These planes would fly out on a regular basis to participate in mock attacks on us and provide air cover if and when required whilst we were in Omani waters. The pilots were mainly British and Australian. Joe Tunnicliffe complained that Helo comms had become intermittent even though the most suitable AJE had been assigned for it. The coax lines for the AJEs ran from the UHF Office, back to the Mainmast and then back forrard to the Foremast. Various aerials were tried from Fore and Aft but to no avail. We put the emergency UHF cross up to the Forrard, Starboard Yardarm and Joe was pleased with the results - it stayed up during the patrol.

About every 10 days, we were permitted to anchor off a remote part of the coast of Oman and send personnel ashore for R & R. However, In order to make a good impression, the First Lieutenant, Lt Cdr Nick Byrne, decided that the RNZN were not going to spoil this coastline and so the very first pipe made prior to the Banyan Party proceeding ashore was "Do ya hear there. XO speaking. We want to make a good impression whilst we are here and so there will be no drinking or eating ashore - enjoy yourselves!" He became known as Be-no Byrne after that.

It was bloody hot ashore and no shelter and I spent my four hours ashore in the water up to my neck with a sun hat on, trying to keep cool. I never went ashore again after that.



Club Med Oman...

To add insult to injury, I walked up the beach to the top of the sand dune and discovered a long trench full of empty allied beer cans!

The best way to keep cool was to use the Ship's Olympic size swimming pool!



Chief Stoker Frank Lind and Self

We went into the IO to take on supplies from USS Niagara Falls - she was part of the **Ranger Battle Group**. We did a vertrep using their helo and a heavy jackstay transfer simultaneously, whilst a jazz band played on their flight deck.





USS Niagara Falls - worked with her before in 1976 whilst on Otago



The Sea Knight from Niagara Falls

The patrol concluded when we rendezvoused with HMNZS Waikato (CPORS Bob Ohlsen) off Colombo, Sri Lanka. We stayed there for about 8 hours to do our handovers and refuel whilst Waikato remained for a bit of R & R for a few days and try and mend her Folland, Port AJEs - our AJEs had guards on them and as we came alongside, our Starboard guard bent their Port Aerials.

I had asked for support from Waiouru between Singapore and the Gulf and the return passage. They were unable to assist as they were concentrating all their support for the ships in the Falklands. Between the Gulf of Oman and passage through the Indian Ocean to Singapore, we had to rely on the limited resources of the RAN station at North West Cape (NAVCALS Exmouth - VHB). This Station provided us with excellent support until we were able to establish communications with Navcommsta Darwin for the passage back to Singapore.

We arrived back in Singapore 14th August, picked up our rabbits, had some last good runs ashore and then departed for home on the 22nd August - I would see most of the WOs and Sergeants again in Waiouru. Stopped at Cairns for a couple of days before sailing and duly arriving in Devonport 6th September. Did a two-week handover to PORS Chris Bond and then Vicki and I posted back to Waiouru 21st September 1982. Canterbury was my last sea posting. Fleet SatCom Receive only had been fitted to Waikato during her refit and the same was done to Canterbury before she headed off on her second patrol.



Back Row: ARO Newland, ARO Deane, ARO Wilson, AGS Marshall, AGS Barakat, ASG Foster, ARO Dalrymple, AGS Cassin, ARO Gapes, ARO Munroe

Front Row: LRO Belcher, LRO Stokes, LSG Williams, LRO Hartley, CPORS Dell, Lt Streefkirk, S/Lt Parr, POYS Matenga, LSG McLean, LSG Prouse, ASG Ellice

The printer in Singapore got some of the SG ranks back to front!



The correct Red Sea Rig - Chief Stoker, Chief RS and Chief Stwd



BOBBY'S
SEMBAWANG
PATIO
FOOD STALL
MENU

TRADITION OF AUTHENTIC ORIENTAL CUISINE



Steamboat Speciality