

# **NAVAL COASTAL WARFARE OPERATIONS FROM 2000 TO OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM AND THE DEFICIENCIES THAT PROMPTED THEIR ADDITION TO THE NAVAL EXPEDITIONARY COMBAT COMMAND**

**A Monograph  
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Over the last decade the importance of Naval Coastal Warfare (NCW) to the United States Navy as a viable asset in the war on terror and conflicts in the Middle East is on the rise. Because the Navy's focus during the decades between the Vietnam War and the attack on the USS Cole was primarily on the former Soviet threat, shallow water forces were considered low priority. As a result NCW became a "not so expeditionary" force manned primarily by reservists. From the year 2000 through Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), NCW has operated with deficiencies in manpower, weapons, ammunition, vehicles, communications and training.

Very little unclassified historical information or lessons learned is available, so a brief historical account of Naval Coastal Warfare Group One units during a few routine exercises and OIF will demonstrate their deficiencies as well as provide a historical record that is long overdue.

With the creation of the Naval Expeditionary Combat Command and the inclusion of NCW forces under its umbrella, many of the deficiencies have potentially been eliminated.

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## Abstract

NAVAL COASTAL WARFARE OPERATIONS FROM 2000 TO OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM AND THE DEFICIENCIES THAT PROMPTED THEIR ADDITION TO THE NAVAL EXPEDITIONARY COMBAT COMMAND by Commander Curtis M. Leshner, USNR, 53 pages.

Over the last decade the importance of Naval Coastal Warfare (NCW) to the United States Navy as a viable asset in the war on terror and conflicts in the Middle East is on the rise. Because the Navy's focus during the decades between the Vietnam War and the attack on the USS Cole was primarily on the former Soviet threat, shallow water forces were considered low priority. As a result NCW became a low priority force manned primarily by reservists. From the year 2000 through Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), NCW has operated with deficiencies in manpower, weapons, ammunition, vehicles, communications and training.

NCW units have participated in many overseas exercises prior to OIF. During these exercises the threat of rear area attacks from terrorist groups became a major concern for all U.S. forces. In assessing the threat NCW found that not only was the threat to U.S. ships in the ports they were protecting more at risk, but that their own lodging sites and personnel in transit to duty stations were very vulnerable to attack.

By the time OIF was underway NCW had not addressed most of the deficiencies they had seen during previous exercises and now they would be asked to perform missions that had never been attempted by NCW units before. Force protection missions at Kuwaiti and Iraqi ports along with a vital mission at the Iraqi oil platforms would need to succeed regardless of the problems encountered by the NCW units.

The reader will see that there are four main deficiencies that NCW needs to solve. 1) Manning that is inadequate, untrained and unsuited to rapid deployment because it is mainly a reserve force. 2) Inadequate amounts and types of equipment. 3) Communications systems that do not allow communications between all units in theater. 4) NCW units are low priority when it comes to funding.

Very little unclassified historical information or lessons learned is available, so a brief historical account of Naval Coastal Warfare Group One units during a few routine exercises and OIF will demonstrate their deficiencies as well as provide a historical record that is long overdue.

The reader will also see the transition of NCW as it changes from a small configuration in early 2000 to a larger more viable configuration in the Maritime Expeditionary Security Force which is a component of Naval Expeditionary Combat Command (NECC). With the creation of the NECC and the inclusion of NCW forces under its umbrella, many of the deficiencies have potentially been eliminated.

Since very little published historical information on NCW exists, portions of the information contained within this monograph are taken from recent interviews, transcripts of interviews with NCW personnel conducted during the summer of 2003, my own experiences and my personal journal entries recorded during actual operations. Published sources of information include articles from professional journals, periodicals, monographs and analysis papers.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
The Exercises .....	7
Operation Iraqi Freedom .....	12
Kuwait Navy Base .....	16
Preparing for the Invasion .....	19
Moving into Iraq.....	23
GOPLATS .....	31
Other Missions.....	35
Naval Expeditionary Combat Command.....	37
Recommendations and Conclusions.....	41
Glossary of Acronyms.....	44
Bibliography .....	47

## Introduction

Naval Coastal Warfare (NCW) had a significant role in the preparation for and execution of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Although the men and women of NCW performed valiantly with the training and equipment at their disposal, the NCW community recognized that in order to effectively conduct future missions a transformation was needed. Not only were they asked to conduct operations for which they had never trained specifically, they were asked to accomplish their missions with equipment suited to a much smaller scale and smaller theater of operations. Anti-Terrorism Force Protection (ATFP) has become a vital and high visibility mission for NCW due to the increase in acts of terror aimed at the United States over the past two decades. Prior to September 11, 2001, NCW routinely provided coastal and port security for military exercises. Since 9/11, members of the NCW community have maintained a constant presence supporting OIF in theater and in other areas crucial to the Global War on Terror (GWOT). However, the narrative of their contributions to OIF and a description of the transformation that has made them a more viable and visible component of the U.S. coastal defense community has yet to be written.

There are two reasons for this paper. One is to create a written record of a snapshot of NCW operations over the last decade since few specifics can be found in any publications. The other is to give the reader a sense of how NCW has changed from small undermanned units that operated almost independently and with very limited interaction with other U.S. coastal operations, to a vital component of what has become a much larger military community. Because there is very little historical literature available<sup>1</sup>, one will at times read accounts from a first person perspective as I recall events of which I was a witness or active participant.

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<sup>1</sup> Inquiries made to Professor of Operations, Naval War College, Newport RI, and Fleet Historian from Commander Naval Air Forces.

The reader will see that there are four main deficiencies that NCW needs to solve. 1) Manning that is inadequate, untrained and unsuited to rapid deployment because it is mainly a reserve force. 2) Inadequate amounts and types of equipment. 3) Communications systems that do not allow communications between all units in theater. 4) NCW units are low priority when it comes to funding decisions.

I was a member of Mobile Inshore Undersea Warfare Unit 114 (MIUWU 114) from October of 1999 to September of 2004. I spent my entire NCW career within the weapons department and deployed to OIF as the Weapons Officer and Department Head. Most of the published pieces of literature on NCW are short articles from professional journals, analysis papers or theses that briefly describe in general terms what NCW does or mentions, without detail, operations that NCW has participated in, in the past. Although there is an enormous amount of information about the Navy's Riverine and Special Warfare units, practically no historical information or lessons learned regarding NCW exists. Searches and inquiries to the Naval War College in Newport Rhode Island and the Fleet Historian at The Naval History and Heritage Command turned up very little unclassified information or lessons learned. Therefore, much of the historical information will be drawn from personal recollection, personal journals and live interviews. In addition, written transcripts taken from interviews that were conducted during the first few months of OIF will also be used. Technical information will be drawn from past and current technical or conceptual Navy publications.

The American experience with riverine warfare began during the Revolutionary War and has continued intermittently through operations today in Iraq.<sup>2</sup> The traditional blue water Navy with its capital ships and epic sea battles has regularly overshadowed riverine warfare. Shallow

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel A. Hancock, "The Navy's Not Serious About Riverine Warfare," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings (Jan 2008): 14-19.

water warfare is normally conducted by a smaller branch of the U.S. Navy often referred to as the brown water or green water Navy. NCW is a major component of this current naval coastal force. The mission of NCW has been to conduct security operations in the littoral areas of a coastal region both here at home and overseas. One problem has been that the importance of littoral operations has waxed and waned over the past two centuries and thus appropriations, planning and funding was prioritized to the traditional deep water assets. "A century would elapse before the U.S. Navy, during the Vietnam War, would replicate its riverine operations of the Civil War with the creation of robust green and brown water forces."<sup>3</sup> The Navy has repeatedly lost sight of the importance of shallow water forces, many times due to financial considerations. Our Navy's institutional amnesia need not be a permanent disability. The United States has sought a brown-water combat capability so frequently that coastal and riverine forces should be permanently integrated into our fleet rather than as the tactical situation demands.<sup>4</sup>

NCW and the U.S. Coast Guard have not allowed any attacks on their high value assets to occur while under their protection over the past few decades. In this author's opinion, the attack on the USS Cole most likely would not have occurred if an NCW unit had been deployed to protect the Cole. At the time of that attack, an active duty NCW unit did not exist. U.S. Coast Guard Port Security Unit (PSU) 309 was deployed after the attack to guard the Cole as the Navy sadly picked up the pieces and brought its fallen sailors home.<sup>5</sup> The worst attack on a Navy vessel in many years did not come from an enemy naval ship, enemy aircraft or a missile launched from

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<sup>3</sup> Gordon I. Peterson, CAPT, USN (RET.), "The U.S. Navy Expeditionary Combat Command," *Naval Forces IV* (2006): 29.

<sup>4</sup> Edward H. Wiser, "BRING BACK the BOATS!," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceeding* (February 2006): 36-40.

<sup>5</sup> Scott Gourley and Richard Scott, "Naval Force Protection- Defending The Defenders," *Jane's Defense Weekly* (November 24, 2004): 3.



a rogue nation. The attack came from just a few terrorists in a small boat whose ideology justified the attack, in their minds, with a reward in the afterlife.

Anti-terrorism force protection (ATFP) in ports and coastal waters is an extremely important mission to all of the U.S. services. Especially when one considers the amount of supplies and equipment that passes through those ports for operations the size of OIF. Yet the U.S. Navy continues to allocate most of its funding to the blue water assets. The Navy's Sea Power 21 Sea basing concept calls for land based expeditionary force units to be logistically self sustaining.<sup>6</sup> Yet NCW units, as the reader will see in the included historical accounts, are incapable of sustaining themselves due to insufficient allotments of vehicles, ammunition and personnel. Much like their counterparts in the riverine units they are forced to barrow from other theater assets since they have no service support elements.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that many of the NCW units are made up of reserve sailors is not a problem as long as they have the time to train prior to deployment. The problem surfaces when an urgent mission develops and there is not an active duty unit that can deploy to meet the urgent demand. ATFP is a 24/7 mission and requires active duty manning and funding that can be supplemented with the reserves. The attack on the USS Cole in addition to other problems during overseas exercises raised questions as to whether NCW could continue to be an almost completely reserve force.

Following several of the exercises early in this decade NCW perceived that the protection of their own units was becoming a problem. Weapons and ammunition allotments were increased and more intensive training was conducted, but as will be revealed in the OIF missions, the ability to protect themselves, had still not been achieved. The landward security forces were still too

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Rawley, LCDR, USN, "Naval Coastal Warfare: The Fleet's Eye's in the Littorals," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* (October 2004): 72-73.

<sup>7</sup> Hancock, "The Navy's Not Serious About Riverine Warfare," 14-19.

small, vehicle mounted weapons for convoys were improvised and materials for perimeter defense of encampments still needed to be scavenged.

Because NCW has had to make do with what funding support they can get, they have had to operate with inefficient communications systems and radar assets that can't detect a contact as quickly as can a human lookout in a tall tower. A good example of poor communications during OIF was seen during one of NCW's critical operations at the Gulf Oil Platforms (GOPLAT) in the northern Persian Gulf. The GOPLAT mission involved protecting the Iraqi platforms after special forces had captured them so that they would not be destroyed by departing Iraqi forces. This mission turned out to be a particularly dangerous mission not only because of the insufficient size of the boats used, but also due to the lack of communications with other units in the area. Poor communications systems not only make NCW missions more difficult but also create situations that could result in avoidable mishaps.

To be fair, it seems that the Navy's hands are tied to a certain extent. In a report by the House Armed Services Committee on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007 the House, "requires the Secretary of the Navy to ensure that 100 percent of the Navy's requirements for steaming days per quarter for deployed and non-deployed ship operations and 100 percent of the projected ship and air depot maintenance workload are funded before Navy appropriated funds for operation and maintenance may be used for the NECC."<sup>8</sup> U.S. superiority on the seas and the prosecution of the Global War on Terror are vital, but do we want to limit funding ATRP for U.S. ships and risk another costly event like the USS Cole attack?

MIUWU 114 is one NCW unit that experienced firsthand what it was like to operate in a modern and dynamically changing environment with equipment and SOPs that were decades old. Throughout this monograph several of the operations conducted by MIUWU 114 in cooperation

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<sup>8</sup> Peterson, "The U.S. Navy Expeditionary Combat Command," 34.

with various partner NCW units will be described. The narrative will start by briefly discussing how operations were conducted prior to 9/11 during exercises such as Natural Fire, Bright Star, and Cobra Gold. The reader will quickly discover chinks in the armor of NCW regarding allocation of assets and communications for missions that in the past assumed supplies moved in secure rear areas. New asymmetrical enemy tactics would show how that complacent assumption no longer applies and that Navy procedures for protecting ships and the movement of supplies between water and land would need to be revised.

The reader will eventually see NCW's deficiencies fully revealed as I tell the story of how MIUWU 114 and NCW Group One (NCWG1) overcame numerous obstacles during OIF. As preparations for the war progressed, familiar problems developed for NCWG1 Units at the Kuwaiti Port of Ash Shuaybah and at Kuwait Navy Base (KNB) where NCW started to realize that the book on operations was about to be re-written.

The final chapter will give the reader a clear picture of the current configuration of coastal warfare, now a component of the Naval Expeditionary Combat Command or NECC, in order to reveal how some of the past deficiencies may have been addressed.

## The Exercises

During the last few years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and first years of the new millennium NCW units were manned almost exclusively with Navy Reserve personnel. As a result, they mainly operated in low intensity exercises protecting assets in ports and inland water ways for a relatively short time. Since the reserve program demands only a single two week active training cycle per year it was standard operating procedure to utilize three different NCW groups during a six week exercise. One group for a two week set up phase, one group for the actual two week exercise phase and the last group for a two week pack up phase. Typically only one groups' equipment was utilized for the entire exercise in order to reduce logistical costs. The standard NCW footprint consisted of one Harbor Defense Command Unit (HDCU), one MIUWU and two Inshore Boat Units (IBU). The HDCU was the main command, control, communication, computers, and intelligence (C4ISR) entity. The MIUWU consisted of the watch standing crews which provided security and operated communications and sensor platforms. The IBUs included two heavily armed 27ft gun boats and their crews. Altogether, 100-125 personnel were learning to coordinate, cooperate and troubleshoot problems in live operations during a short two week period of time. Two weeks per year is not much time, especially when one considers the amount of training and coordination that is needed during joint exercises with other services, including the U.S. Coast Guard.

At the time, every NCW unit belonged to one of two NCW Group commands: Group One (NCWG1) in San Diego California had responsibility for Pacific and Indian Ocean theaters and Group two (NCWG2) in Norfolk Virginia oversaw operations in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean theaters. The only active duty sailors were a small contingent of support positions at each Group command and a handful at each unit. Therefore, if a crisis were to develop requiring NCW support, reserve units had to be mobilized and then deployed. Mobilization of a reserve unit is a slow process that can take one to two weeks if the process goes smoothly. The

fact that NCW did not have an active duty unit ready to deploy at a moment's notice was one of the first shortcomings that would require modification.

Other deficiencies started to surface at an exercise in the summer of 2000 called Natural Fire. MIUWU 114, IBU 14, IBU 16, and HDCU 14 were deployed in phase one to Mombasa Kenya to guard the motor vessel (MV) Pless at the port of Mombasa. Instead of setting up a tent camp as NCW units are prepared to do, we were lodged at a hotel while Seabee units and auxiliary Marine units were lodged several miles down the beach at a different hotel. Early into phase one an intelligence report indicated that U.S. forces participating in Natural Fire were a high priority target for Al Qaeda. In addition, several young male men of Middle Eastern descent were spotted acting suspiciously in the hotel commons areas and parking lot. When confronted they immediately left the hotel.<sup>9</sup> With the recent bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi still fresh in the minds of U.S. leadership, it was decided that a maximum security posture would be implemented for U.S. forces. At the time, NCW was normally only outfitted and trained with small arms; 9mm, M-16 and 12 gauge shotgun. Not everyone was issued a weapon since we were only provided enough weapons and ammunition to train with. We were ill-equipped to protect ourselves at the hotel since most of our weapons were issued to watch standers on duty. Since the hotel security consisted of security guards with bows and arrows to keep baboons out of the hotel, the decision was made to move NCW to the hotel with the other U.S. forces where we could be better protected. To beef up security the hotel grounds were secured with barbed wire, the front entry driveway was barricaded and crew served weapons were stationed strategically around the property. At the hotel, NCW personnel were expected to do our part with the enhanced security, but since watch standers were constrained with normal operations we were forced to arm

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<sup>9</sup> Scott Jerabek, CAPT, USNR, interview by author, tape recording, Leavenworth, Ks., August 18, 2009.

unqualified yeomen and supply clerks with small arms or to station them at crew served weapons positions. Needless to say, the inability of NCW units to adequately protect ourselves coupled with the requirement of having to place untrained personnel with weapons they were unqualified to operate was clearly a problem.

For MIUWU 114 and the IBUs it was business as usual at the port. The gun boats were more than capable of protecting themselves and the high value asset (HVA). MIUWU 114 had 3 pieces of mobile equipment that required security. The Radar Sonar Surveillance Center (RSSC) or van as it was normally called was co-located with a portable sensor platform (PSP). Security for those consisted of two lookouts that were armed but primarily focused on the HVA and one sentry at the door to the van. The last piece of the trio was the mobile sensor platform (MSP) which required 2-3 people; one technician and at least one armed security guard. NCW is expected to receive an upgrade to the MSP designated as a Towed Sensor Platform (TSP).<sup>10</sup>

Transportation was a major concern. Local bus drivers were hired to drive NCW watch teams to and from the hotel and our duty sites. The problem was that we were not allowed to carry weapons on the buses and thus 30-40 people traveled day and night without self defense and in most cases without communications. Again, an inability to operate independently in an environment with unforeseen circumstances was making NCW units vulnerable.

The Natural Fire exercise ended without incident for NCW. Whether we got lucky or the adaptive measures taken transformed our appearance into too hard of a target for enemy attack may never be known. The one certainty gathered from this exercise was that NCW was unprepared to protect its rear areas from potential adversaries.

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<sup>10</sup> Scott Gourley, "US Navy expands force protection," *Jane's Defense Weekley*, (August 24, 2005).

Exercise Bright Star held biannually near Alexandria, Egypt in the fall of 2001 was much of the same for NCW.<sup>11</sup> MIUWU 114, two IBUs and HDCU 14 arrived two days late on September 15th because of delayed flights due to the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. The atmosphere at the Port of Alexandria was tense to say the least. We were restricted to our temporary base camp which was collocated with our port security operations. Marine Corps FAST teams were added to the HVAs that were in port to enhance their security. Communications now became a problem since the FAST teams had no way to communicate directly with the IBUs. As a result, an NCW watch officer with a Sabre radio was stationed aboard the HVA to coordinate information flow. It was an inadequate solution to the problem because in the event that an adversarial watercraft were to make a run at the HVA, timely coordination amongst all the players involved, which would have been time critical, would have been nearly impossible.

Weapons were limited in supply and were issued only to top priority watch standers. Ammunition was rationed since the only rounds in theater were each unit's meager training allotment. Transportation to and from the airfield that was designated for the arrival and departure of U.S. forces was provided by coaches leased through an Egyptian tour company. Again, NCW was vulnerable due to their lack of resources and fortunate not to have been attacked. One positive policy change that resulted from Bright Star was that future NCW units would be sent to exercises with a full war load of ammunition.

Cobra Gold is an exercise that takes place in Thailand every year. In late spring of 2002 MIUWU 114 was deployed to participate in phase three of the exercise. Due to the U.S. involvement in the Global War on Terror (GWOT) no IBUs were sent to Thailand due to commitments elsewhere. We were tasked with providing security for one HVA in port and two

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Fawcett, "Jointness Is Key to Success in Coastal Warfare," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, (August 2003): 57.

HVAs at anchorage approximately 2 miles offshore. Marine Corps FAST teams were again stationed with our watch teams on each HVA. The van and MSP were positioned ashore to give the best radar coverage possible. To replace the IBUs, NCW rented several small boats with two Thai police officers aboard to loiter close to the HVAs. We stationed one member of our MIUWU watch team aboard with an M-16 to provide a weapon since the Thai police had none. Because the HVAs were 2-3 miles from shore, the sea state made life for those on the small boats difficult and routinely resulted in sea sick crew members. The Navy's substitute for the IBUs would have been no match for terrorists intent on doing harm to one of the HVAs. The only chance of stopping an adversary would have been the FAST team. Since most IBUs were deployed to homeland ports to help the Coast Guard, the NCW units at Cobra Gold were again left to make do with what limited resources were available and once again left vulnerable. Transportation to and from our hotel and the port consisted of contracted tour buses. Although the buses were comfortable they were also an obvious target to opportunistic adversaries.

As one can see, NCW in the early 2000s lacked several resources. The weapons and ammunition were insufficient for their mission and their own protection. Transportation issues made them a soft target in a time of increasing terrorist threat. Communications between NCW units, Marine FAST teams, and other vital assets was an inefficient and confusing mess. A shortage of manning was becoming a problem due to the before mentioned protection issue and lack of training and availability of forces on short notice were casting doubts as to whether NCW could remain a purely reserve force. NCW leadership had some issues to address. The question was would they initiate any solutions prior to OIF which was just on the horizon?



## Operation Iraqi Freedom

In early December of 2002 *Deployment order 172* was issued by the Secretary of Defense officially mobilizing NCWG1 units for participation in OIF.<sup>12</sup> NCWG1 units were sent to the OIF theater in three groupings referred to as waves. The first wave of units to deploy consisted of MIUWU 114 commanded by CDR Scott Jerabek, IBU 14 commanded by LT James Rund, IBU 16 commanded by LCDR Dave Salzer and a C4ISR detachment from NCWG1. On December 5<sup>th</sup> we reported to San Diego for mobilization processing, training and pack up. We essentially had one week to complete all mobilization procedures, learn how to operate the new surveillance equipment, train to use our new MOPP gear and get everyone weapons qualified on newly issued weapons. On December 13<sup>th</sup> we departed on five C5 aircraft for Kuwait City International Airport where we arrived on December 14<sup>th</sup> to begin preparations for the invasion of Iraq. NCWG1 forces were commanded by Captain Allen C. Painter as Commander Task Group 51.9 (CTG 51.9) who worked directly for Commander Task Force 51 Admiral W.C. Marsh.<sup>13</sup>

The living area we were initially assigned to was located at Camp Arifjan, a U.S. Army staging area several miles inland and about a 30 minute drive from the Industrial Port of Ash Shuaybah, also known as the Sea Port of Debarkation (SPOD). The Kuwaiti government allowed the U.S. to use Ash Shuaybah to offload equipment and supplies for the upcoming invasion and it was there that NCWG1 would conduct its first operations. The mission there was extremely busy and important with “more equipment moving into theater through the SPOD prior to the beginning of the war than moved into the entire theater during Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Garofolo, LCDR, USCGR, "Commander's War Diary, Commander, Naval Coastal Warfare Group One, Commander, Task Group 51.9," (2003): 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 7.

Transportation to and from the SPOD became the first major obstacle for us because we did not have a sufficient number or suitable type of vehicle to do the job. U.S. personnel had already been attacked on Kuwait's roads, so the decision was made to use vehicles that were less conspicuous. The solution was to have LCDR Betty Rogers, the unit supply officer, lease several vans and SUVs from local vendors to support the transportation requirements.

Having learned a few lessons from exercises like Natural Fire, we managed to expand our weapons program prior to leaving the states. Additional personnel were added to enhance security and enough small arms were procured to issue one to each watch stander; all of whom were fully qualified to carry their weapon. In addition, each NCW MIUWU was issued two MK19 grenade launchers, two .50cal and two 240N crew served weapons. These weapons turned out to be vital to the port security posture. With crew served weapons there are considerations such as fields of fire that then had to be included for the first time into the port security design; a concept we had never had to be concerned with before.

The IBUs were the first to be on station at Ash Shuaybah while MIUWU personnel set up a brand new variation of the command center called the Victor Four or Mobile Operations Center (MOC). The MOC was configured to be more versatile than the van. It utilized the same communications equipment and sensors as the van, built into two custom fitted HMMWVs and a drash tent to allow for more room. This was the first time we had ever utilized the MOC in an operational setting. "We were thrown into a situation with a high threat level and we were operating with units we never trained with and had to set up the Victor Four. We had never operated that equipment before."<sup>15</sup> We were operational within a couple of days and in plenty of time for the arrival of the first HVA on December 19<sup>th</sup>. As it turned out, the port had a control tower that was several hundred feet tall. With the permission of the Kuwaiti port supervisors,

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<sup>15</sup> Scott Jerabek, CDR, USNR, interview by John Garofolo, LCDR, USCGR, (June 5, 2003): 2.

MIUWU watch officers stationed a lookout in the tower. From that vantage point, watercraft or “contacts” could be seen at a great distance, most times before the NCWG1 radars could even detect them due to all the interference at the port. Once all equipment was functional and tested, standard operations began as described by below:

“An extensive seaward security plan was put in place for protection of the SPOD from water-borne attack. The harbor was divided into four primary sectors, A/B within the harbor and C/D outside the harbor. A minimum two-boat security patrol was established; one boat inside the harbor and a second in a ‘gatekeeper’ position guarding the harbor entrance. During HVA escorts, two boats were used as escort while two other boats maintained existing two boat harbor patrol. A detailed small boat Rules of Engagement continuum was developed to ensure increasing levels of force for determining hostile intent.”<sup>16</sup>

The force protection burden was enormous due to the volume of small boats, fishing vessels, pleasure craft and commercial ships transiting the area.<sup>17</sup>

We had known for some time that if the Bush administration decided to go to war with Iraq that MIUWU 114 had been selected to be the first MIUWU in theater and the MIUWU that would enter Iraq. The plan initially called for NCW units to conduct security operations in three locations; Ash Shuaybah, KNB and Umm Qasr Iraq. Our job was to establish the port security at these locations and then conduct normal operations until relieved. We had been advised that we would only be operating at the SPOD for a few weeks until relieved by the second wave of NCWG1 units due to arrive in January.

Our next project would be to set up the same seaward security operations at KNB, so in preparation, we moved our living quarters to KNB. The MOC we were utilizing was designated to travel with us to Umm Qasr so we continued to exercise it until wave two arrived with their MOC and had it up and running.

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<sup>16</sup> Garofolo, “Commanders War Diary,” 7

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3.

On January 10, 2003 NCWG1 wave one turned over operations to wave two. Wave two consisted of HDCU 114 commanded by Capt. Mike Shatynski, MIUWU 106 commanded by CDR Patrick J. Cooley, IBU 17 commanded by LCDR Christopher Brown and IBU 15 commanded by LT James Harper.<sup>18</sup> Capt. Shatynski was designated as Force Protection Officer of the SPOD. The SPOD consisted of “the port and associated piers, a 160-acre dirt lot that was subdivided into a life support area for more than 3,500 personnel, an equipment marshalling yard and an abandoned four story building which was converted into the SPOD command and control center, which became known as the C2 building.”<sup>19</sup> While Capt. Shatynski’s port security mission was the major focus it was the landward security responsibilities that created the most problems as he describes.

“The most unexpected challenges for the unit were brought about by a significant landward security requirement. ‘The largest amount of time I spent was on the landward side. We were the tail wagging the Army dog in the SPOD.’ Not too surprising was the demonstrated capability and success of the seaward security forces in successfully carrying out their mission. Shatynski characterized the seaward security success as ‘a tribute to the NCW people because they made the seaward side seem easy. There were virtually no safety issues, no attacks, anything that arose was dealt with quickly.’”<sup>20</sup>

Partnering with the Army or Marines for the landward security of the ports would be a challenge that never seemed to have a simple solution. Army units assigned to a port were always assigned there temporarily. Inevitably, the Army would task them with a different mission and within days they were gone. The NCW units were then forced to try to fill the gaps with personnel that were needed for the seaward mission.

Although the number of security members of the NCW units had been increased prior to OIF, it was still not enough to be completely self sufficient at ports of this size. The

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>20</sup> Mike Shatynski, CAPT, USNR, interview by John Garofolo, LCDR, USCGR, (June 1, 2003): 3.

transformation of the NCW configuration was underway, but much too slowly for the type of operations that were being assigned in the OIF theater. The units were still short of personnel, transportation was still a figure it out as you go evolution and, as reserve units, we were still getting comfortable with our new equipment. Yet, the Navy, Army, coalition nations and Maritime components were relying on us for protection of their vessels.

## **Kuwait Navy Base**

The official name of the Kuwait Navy Base is Bader Mohammad Al-Ahmed Naval Base. It is a relatively small base but more than adequate for the Kuwaiti Navy and U.S. forces to operate at simultaneously. The working relationship was one of friendship and cooperation. “We had to be very cognizant of their concerns and culture. It turned out they were wonderful to work with and appreciated the fact we were respectful of their culture.”<sup>21</sup> The camp at KNB that was home to some 4,500 sailors, Marines, Coast Guard, Army soldiers and international troops was called Camp Patriot.

The first NCWG1 unit to operate at KNB was the C4ISR detachment from wave one. On December 26<sup>th</sup> they erected their Reserve Mobile Ashore Support Terminal or RMAST which was collocated with the Commander Maritime Prepositioned Force (CMPF) Operations Center. The terminal was important because it possessed SHF capability in addition to other essential communications links vital to the impending operations. The Seabees from Amphibious Construction Battalion 1 arrived in early January to establish a base camp.<sup>22</sup> Once we had turned over the established security operations at the SPOD to wave two we immediately began

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<sup>21</sup> Jerabek, “interview by John Garofolo,” 2.

<sup>22</sup> Garofolo, “Commander's War Diary,” 10.

establishment of the KNB seaward security plan. Since the MOC we had used at the SPOD was being prepared to travel to Iraq, we were sent a familiar old RSSC van which would be the command center for KNB operations.

The KNB port did not have a tower as tall as the tower located at the SPOD and so our visible horizon was quite a bit closer. However, there was significantly less interference with the radars. The van was positioned at the end of a sea wall so its protection was more of a challenge. Surrounded by water on three sides with only one route of escape, we were susceptible to enemy divers or a Special Forces attack from the water. Also of great concern were the beach homes that were located just outside of the KNB property. It was impossible to tell if anyone was gathering intelligence on our operations from one of those houses. Crew served weapons were essential for the safety of our position, but the fields of fire were severely limited by the beach houses and the port itself.

The IBUs launched their first boats on January 13<sup>th</sup> and operations were up and running shortly after. Captain Douglas Ash of the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve was one of the first Coast Guard members in country and he assumed the duties of the Force Security Officer of KNB. Close coordination was required with the Kuwaiti Navy since they were operating at their normal routine while we provided security for U.S. vessels. Due to a lack of direct communications with the Kuwaiti crews and the language barrier that existed between us, two command centers were established. The first was the Joint Force Security Operations Center (JFSOC) which consisted of one or two Kuwaiti naval officers and one NCW watch officer to handle issues regarding landward and seaward security, MEDEVACs and other emergency situations. For example, we were surprised to discover that the Kuwaitis had very few personnel for base security. Therefore, U.S. forces were required to man some of those base security positions. It was the JFSOC's responsibility to sort out the details. Since many of the U.S. units other than our NCW crew were transient visitors to KNB or gainfully employed in preparing for the war, we were on the hook to provide people for these security positions. As a result, we were forced to pull our people out of

regular watch sections and put them at stationary or roving sentry stations, making us shorthanded.

The other command center was the Kuwait Naval Operations Center (NOC). An NCW member was stationed at the NOC as a liaison to help coordinate the identification of or escort of U.S. and foreign vessels entering the port. We were rarely given a schedule of foreign traffic inbound to the port so the NOC liaison was a key contact in deciphering if the inbound contacts were authorized into the port. Any U.S. vessel entering the port was always escorted by an IBU and Kuwait Navy vessel. The Kuwaiti boats were larger and much better suited to rougher sea states so a Kuwaiti boat would typically meet a U.S. vessel several miles out and then hand off the vessel to the IBU approaching the harbor. The escorts were necessary because we were very concerned about a suicide boat being jammed full of explosives and then rammed into one of the HVAs.

One concern when utilizing any port are mines that can be laid by submarine or swimmer. Typically we will request that EOD dive the pier where an HVA is due to dock and make sure it is well vetted. Coordination with EOD can sometimes be a challenge depending on their tasking, so we occasionally have had to use divers from other services. The SS Cape Johnson was one of the first Maritime pre-positioned ships to utilize the seawall pier at KNB. The cargo consisted of missiles, one thousand pound bombs and ammunition, so one can see the importance of a well vetted pier. More than 30,000 tons of ammunition was offloaded at KNB in support of OIF.<sup>23</sup>

Immediately adjacent to the port was an area of beach that proved to be suitable for amphibious operations. Joint logistics over the shore (JLOTS) utilized Army LCUs and barges to deliver equipment ashore. Navy amphibious ships from the USS Tarawa and Nassau ARGs had a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 10.

steady flow of LCUs, LCMs, LCACs and helicopters dropping off vital cargo at the same beach area. NCW had little to do with the amphibious offload since they are trained to provide their own protection. In all, the amphibious off load was the largest since the Inchon landing during the Korean War.<sup>24</sup>

On February 20<sup>th</sup> NCW wave three arrived at KNB to relieve us. Wave three was composed of MIUWU 109 commanded by CDR John Watts, IBU 11 and IBU 13. The transition went smoothly, but the same problems that we had faced also plagued wave three. The insufficient landward security provided by the temporary Marine or Army units forced NCW personnel off of their seaward security watch bill and into some type of sentry duty. Turnover was complete by the 25<sup>th</sup> of February and now wave one could begin planning the mission into Iraq.

## **Preparing for the Invasion**

As Weapons Officer, I assumed several responsibilities for MIUWU 114. In addition to being a qualified watch officer for our port operations, I was responsible for maintenance of all vehicles and equipment, all security personnel and weapons, and I was the unit convoy commander. I worked closely with CDR Jerabek and our operations officer, N3, LCDR Steve Lee to plan the move to Umm Qasr. Unique to this situation was the fact that this was the first time we had ever established operations at what had been an enemy port just hours before. We had maps and satellite photos of the area but very little additional intelligence information. As a reserve unit, we had trained to convoy as a self sufficient unit, set up our camp and operate the equipment for 24 hrs, then pack up and convoy home. Every overseas exercise I had ever participated in we had the luxury of staying in a hotel or our camp site had already been erected

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 12.



by the time we arrived. There would be none of that for this mission. This time we would be moving every piece of equipment we possessed along with supplies enough to last until our lines of communication were established. We had no idea how long that would take. In order to move one MIUWU, two IBUs and a C4ISR detachment, the convoy plan called for over 30 vehicles and we didn't have that many.

As with many military planning processes, the original plan is not necessarily the one that is implemented and our plan was no different. Our original plan was to convoy to Umm Qasr with a Navy EOD team, an Army transportation unit and an Army civil affairs detail. The Army would handle the landward security and we would have the seaward, or in this case river, responsibilities. By the time the invasion kicked off on March 19<sup>th</sup> the plan had changed to traveling in a convoy with just NCW wave one forces and operating at Umm Qasr with a British Port Operations company as our landward security partner. The convoy plan changed over a dozen times as the unpredictable situation in Umm Qasr changed. The port operations configuration and location was never settled until we were on site. Our solution to the daily changes was to create convoy plans for several configurations and implement the one that was dictated by the situation.

Our original plan was to move everyone and everything at once and we didn't have the vehicles required. My first solution was to call upon the Army transportation battalion at camp Arifjan to ask for help. The Army was unable to support my request so I decided to approach our logistics officer, N6, LCDR Betty Rogers for some help. She responded by leasing three 18-wheelers from a local company and thus making up for our lack of vehicles. Once again a valuable lesson was learned for the NCW community showing that a mobile expeditionary unit with a shortage of vehicles is severely handicapped.

All of our equipment and vehicles were pre-staged at a marshalling yard that we had cleared at KNB with the help of the Seabees. Since we had leased the flatbeds, we were forced to use larger connex boxes that were designed to fit them. As one might expect, we didn't have a

forklift large enough to lift the boxes onto the flatbeds, so we were at the mercy of the Seabees and Army to load them for us. Then there was always the concern as to how we were going to unload the boxes when we arrived in Iraq. Insufficient equipment was again making life difficult. As it turned out, we were able to commandeer the use of a large Iraqi forklift that was captured at the Umm Qasr port.

With everything pre-staged at the marshalling yard and ready to go, we now started training to protect ourselves in case we were attacked during convoy. Back at Whiteman AFB, which is our home base, our biggest concerns during convoy operations were keeping our convoys together and what would our options be if a vehicle was to breakdown or get into an accident in Knob Knoster, Missouri. We never trained on reactions to IEDs or ambush. Fortunately, several members of our security division were trained Gunners' Mates or civilian police officers or both. They designed a training syllabus of techniques and scenarios which we used to train our personnel just in case we ran across trouble. Their weapons familiarity and expertise also enabled them to develop a rigging to mount our crew served weapons to several of our HMMWVs for protection and show of force during the convoys. It was necessary to develop that rigging because the HMMWVs we owned were not fitted for weapons mounting.

The last part of our preparation was to drive the route north through Kuwait to the border so the unit would be familiar with it. We had good maps of Kuwait and Kuwait City so that portion of the route would be simple. The route followed the main highway around the west side of Kuwait City. Then once North of the city there were only a few roads to the border. We drove our assigned route as far as the berm on the south side of the "DMZ" that separates Iraq from Kuwait. That portion of the route would not be difficult. The difficult part would be crossing the border and finding the way to the port with no maps, no reconnaissance, and the possibility of doing it at night.

As the upcoming invasion approached and wave one prepared to move to Umm Qasr, CTG 51.9 learned that the U.S. Army 4<sup>th</sup> ID was to move from Turkey to Kuwait. As a result, the

40 ships involved in the move would need to refuel in Fujairah. At the time, IBU 22 had already been deployed to Fujairah to provide port security. NCW decided that additional protection was needed so IBU 16 was pulled out of the Umm Qasr mission and transported on board the HSV-X1 Joint Venture to Fujairah on March 13th.<sup>25</sup>

Elsewhere in theater, U.S. Coast Guard units were starting to arrive. The Coast Guard was a vital part of the NCW team during OIF. On February 18<sup>th</sup>, Port Security Units (PSU) 311 and 313 arrived in theater. PSU 311 was commanded by CDR Rickey Thomas and PSU 313 was commanded by CDR Don Karol. With the cooperation of NCWG1 operations officer CDR Lee Christopherson, USCGR, as action officer, they began planning security operations for the vital GOPLAT mission.<sup>26</sup>

“In the Iraqi territorial sea of the Northern Arabian Gulf two gas and oil platforms represented the future of the new post-Saddam Hussein Iraq. In order to guarantee their future, the two platforms, or GOPLATs known as Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal (KAAOT) and Mina Al Bakr Oil Terminal (MABOT) were taken by Navy and coalition forces in the early hours of the war. Naval Coastal Warfare forces operating under the direction of Commander, Task Force 51 were responsible for planning and executing the post-take down occupation and security of the platforms until they were turned over to civilian Iraqi control.”<sup>27</sup>

Although the USCG units were under control of NCW leadership, NCW decided not to include MIUWUs or IBUs in the GOPLAT mission. With the arrival of the Coast Guard, NCW now had all units in place for the start of the war. As of March 19<sup>th</sup>, when the invasion of Iraq started, NCW's presence in the gulf theater consisted of security operations at Ash Shuaybah, KNB, and Fujairah with units ready to move to Umm Qasr and the GOPLATs.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 19.



Figure 1. Map of Northern Arabian Gulf<sup>28</sup>

## Moving into Iraq

The night of the initial invasion of Iraq was March 19<sup>th</sup>. Days earlier President Bush had given the Iraqis a forty-eight hour ultimatum. At our level we had not received any communications as to when the war would start, so the President's ultimatum served as our only early warning. As a result, on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup> we conducted a ROC drill to fine tune our movements and finalize convoy plans with the British. A handful of EOD and NCW personnel were selected as an advance party to follow the Army troops into Umm Qasr and radio us when the area was cleared for us to proceed in with the convoy. CDR Dave Weeks the NCW

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<sup>28</sup> Basil Tripsas, Partick Roth, and Renee Fye, *Coast Guard Operations During Operation Iraqi Freedom*, Monograph, Alexandria: Center for Naval Analyses, (2004): 27.

Operations Officer and LCDR Steve Lee were the two NCW representatives on the advance party.<sup>29</sup>

No one knew how long the air war would last, but it was expected that once ground forces moved into Iraq that the Army would sweep through Umm Qasr in a matter of hours and that we would be called soon after. The night of the 19<sup>th</sup> of March the air war started, but on a much smaller scale than we had expected. The 20<sup>th</sup> seemed to be about the same except that now Saddam started shooting back. Every time he launched a missile the alert system at the KNB RMAST would detect it and the watch officer would respond by sounding the alarm over the KNB public announcement system. The first time the warning was sounded all personnel at KNB donned their MOPP gear and sprinted for their shelter just as practiced. The alert system sounded three or four times the day of the 20<sup>th</sup> and three or four times that night. Complacency soon set in for all of us and by the time the alerts were sounding on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> people were rolling out of their cots with MOPP gear already on and walking leisurely to their shelters. Only one SCUD missile had managed to get to Kuwait and it had hit a shopping mall in Kuwait City in the middle of the night.<sup>30</sup>

The night of the 21<sup>st</sup> was the busiest night for the air war and we could hear aircraft flying high over head. The ground war started and the missile alerts continued. We expected to be called at any time to move to Umm Qasr. The battle for Umm Qasr took much longer than expected. We did not receive orders to move on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the only news we had were CNN reports of the fighting in Umm Qasr. The advance party was still bivouacked in the desert near the border waiting to move in. The 23<sup>rd</sup> we again heard nothing except that we would receive periodic calls from the advance party speculating on what should be on the convoy once it moved out. Each call

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<sup>29</sup> Curtis M. Leshner, LCDR, USNR, journal entries from Operation Iraqi Freedom, December 2002-June 2003, Combined Arts Research Library, Command and General Staff College, Leavenworth, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 9.

initiated a knee jerk change to the convoy plan and unnecessary changes to the configuration. If we had been outfitted with enough vehicles to move everything at once these changes never would have been necessary or a problem. Then came the call we had been waiting for. I was in the RMAST late that evening when I was handed the phone. On the other end of the line was the Captain Michael Tillotson Commodore of CTF56. He wanted us to proceed the next morning only with generators, water, and any tents we could haul. This was one configuration we never expected. No boats, no surveillance equipment, no C4I Detachment, no British. I called for one last meeting with my convoy planners and we put together a convoy of 10 vehicles and 35 people. Almost 20 vehicles and over 100 personnel would not be on the first convoy.<sup>31</sup>

The next morning we loaded the vehicles and prepared to move. The Army 53<sup>rd</sup> Transportation Battalion coordinated all movement through Kuwait into Iraq. Once I had received clearance from them and we chalked our clearance numbers to the sides of our vehicles, we departed out of KNB for Umm Qasr. The trip was uneventful until we were well out of town and into the desert along the coastline. At that point I received a cell phone call telling us to hold our position and await further guidance from CDR Jerabek due to a few small fire fights that were still occurring in Umm Qasr. We pulled into a mosque parking lot located about halfway along the route. After a short time we were told to proceed back to KNB because Umm Qasr had not yet been cleared and the U.S. Army units had not yet turned over the city to the British 42<sup>nd</sup> Commando Unit. Apparently the advance party had only made it across the border a few hours before and they were not comfortable with the situation. No sooner had we turned the convoy south and were getting ready to depart the mosque when the phone rang again giving us orders to proceed to Umm Qasr.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 14-17.

On the way to the DMZ we passed the wreckage of a Marine Corps H-46 that had crashed the night of the invasion and was said to be the first casualties of the war for the U.S. We reached the berm after noon and were stopped behind a British convoy and told to wait there for an escort. At that point I felt confident that the lack of any kind of map of Umm Qasr was no longer a problem. The British unit we were stopped behind had already departed by the time the sentry at the berm told me to proceed to the U.N. compound. I asked if we were getting an escort and he said we might get one at the U.N. compound. So we proceeded into the DMZ with no map and no directions. I knew the U.N. compound was just over the border into Iraq, but as we progressed I didn't see anything that appeared to indicate a border except for a tall gated fence that we passed through. We were passing Kuwaiti tanks that were positioned along the DMZ and I spotted a group of buildings to our right off of a dirt road. With the story of the Army transportation convoy that had wandered into enemy hands early into the invasion still fresh in my mind; I decided to send one HMMWV to the buildings to see if that was the compound we were looking for. Upon their return I was told that those buildings were not the compound we were looking for, we were still in Kuwait and no one knew where we should go. At that point I called for the convoy to stay put while I and those in my lead vehicle found the right place. About a mile ahead we spotted a vehicle that looked like a U.S. HMMWV near a break in another berm. As we approached, a British sentry stopped us and then allowed us through the berm. As we passed through, a light blue sign with black letters warned that this was the entry into Iraq.<sup>33</sup>

As we passed through the berm we entered a different world. The guard shack was all shot up. Trash, brass casings and evidence of a battle were everywhere. Within 50yds we were at the entrance to the U.N. compound that the Iraqis had captured before the war. As we entered we could smell gun powder and fires burning. A few buildings were still smoldering and troops were

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

carrying things out of the buildings and throwing them on trash fires. Along a wall were about a dozen Iraqi EPWs handcuffed and sitting facing the wall. A U.S. Army Sergeant inside the compound introduced me to his Captain who in turn handed me off to a British LtCol of the British 42<sup>nd</sup> Commando who was in the process of turning over with the Army. He said to bring my convoy into the compound and wait for an escort and that the area had not yet been cleared of all hostiles. My party and I proceeded back to our convoy and lead them in. No sooner did we get parked and get everyone out of their vehicles when our escort showed up. We left immediately for the port to meet the members of our advance party who had arrived at the port only a few hours before. Our escort made several wrong turns on the way to the port, which gave us a chance to see the existing condition of the town. British troops were still moving house to house clearing any last enemy fighters and destroyed vehicles and buildings were scattered about. We arrived at the port about an hour before dark with just enough time to find a spot in the port authority building to bed down for the night.<sup>34</sup> Over the course of the next few days enemy attacks on our positions were limited to occasional sniper fire and one 130mm shell that an Iraqi gun crew launched which narrowly missed at our camp.<sup>35</sup>

Over the next six days from March 25<sup>th</sup> to March 30<sup>th</sup>, a total of five convoys between KNB and Umm Qasr were required to get the rest of the NCW personnel and equipment moved, two of which were return trips to KNB with empty vehicles. Clearly one can see that the shortfall in vehicles was a serious issue and limited NCW's abilities to quickly deploy and establish operations.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 18,19.

<sup>35</sup> Jerabek, "interview by author".

<sup>36</sup> Leshner, "Journal," 20-26.



NCW DET IRAQ, as we were now called, was commanded by Captain David Brown who was designated Force Security Officer Umm Qasr. Due to a family emergency he returned to the states in early May and was replaced by Commander Jerabek. Prior to the final convoy to Umm Qasr it was decided to keep IBU 14 at KNB and a detachment of 4 boats from PSU 311 was sent instead. The final footprint of NCW forces that ended up in Umm Qasr after the numerous plans and changes that were made prior to the move consisted of MIUWU 114, a detachment from PSU 311, and a C4ISR detachment from HDC 114.

On March 27<sup>th</sup> NCW DET IRAQ started operations by supporting the U.S. Marines and the British 17<sup>th</sup> Port Maritime units which were providing landward security and port administration respectively. On March 29<sup>th</sup> the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) Sir Galahad was the first coalition HVA to enter the port and was transporting humanitarian aid supplies. The PSU boats were able to escort the HVA safely to the port, but they did so without any surveillance help because the MOC was not operational until the 5<sup>th</sup> of April. In the meantime, rather than have a piece of high dollar equipment sitting unused, the MSP's surveillance equipment was utilized to supplement landward security as needed.<sup>37</sup> After many discussions amongst NCW leadership it was decided the MOC would not be set up at the port in order to reduce the visible coalition presence. As a result, it was finally decided to set the MOC up on a peninsula opposite from the main pier and the MSP was relocated across the Khawr Abd Allah Waterway. Both locations were unimproved pieces of desert that were vulnerable to attack and difficult to get to for a quick reaction force should an attack occur. The MSP was only accessible by boat or a by a vehicle driven from Umm Qasr, north to Basra and southward down the Al Faw peninsula to their location. If the MSP location was attacked, they were sitting ducks. Our team of watch officers

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<sup>37</sup> Garafolo, "Commander's War Diary," 17.

expressed concern over the MSP location, but were told the MSP would stay put. Fortunately there were no enemy incidents at either location.<sup>38</sup>

The British set up their tent camp inside a large warehouse while DET IRAQ set up camp in the adjoining parking lot. There was no perimeter fence or wall of any kind around the complex and again the security of the NCW units was in question. Since barbed wire, fencing materials, and barriers of any kind are not standard to NCW units, empty shipping containers found throughout the port were barrowed to establish a secure perimeter around the camp.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 2. Port of Umm Qasr, Iraq<sup>40</sup>

Communications continued to be a challenge in Umm Qasr. Cell phones, saber radios, UHF and VHF were all used to coordinate efforts for the seaward security mission. For anyone who has been in any military operation, with the exception of aviation, this might not seem like

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<sup>38</sup> Leshar, "Journal," 28,29.

<sup>39</sup> Garafolo, "Commander's War Diary," 17.

<sup>40</sup> Google MAPS

anything out of the ordinary, except that landward security forces, the IBUs and HDC could not talk to each other. Every piece of information was routed through the MOC like a switchboard or relay station. For example, if a lookout spotted something that an IBU needed to investigate, the message was passed through the MOC watch officer rather than direct. There was no common radio that every security asset was outfitted with to monitor and communicate easily.

On April 6<sup>th</sup> the RFA Percival arrived becoming the second humanitarian aid vessel to visit Umm Qasr and the first to arrive under the full security of NCW DET IRAQ.<sup>41</sup> Operations progressed without incident until the mission was complete in the middle of May. On May 17<sup>th</sup> the British 17th Port and Maritime Regiment began to detach from Umm Qasr. On May 25<sup>th</sup> CENTCOM approved the cessation of the Umm Qasr mission and NCW DET Iraq started preparations to return to Kuwait.<sup>42</sup> In order to avoid numerous convoys back to KNB the Administrative Officer, N1, LCDR Mike Leshner, my twin brother, organized transportation for May 28th on the HSV-1X Joint Venture which is an experimental catamaran. The Joint Venture was unable to transport all NCW assets so I was put in charge of a small detachment that spent one last night packing up the last of our equipment. On May 29<sup>th</sup> we convoyed back to KNB as the last of the NCW forces to leave Iraqi soil.

MIUWU114 was now without a mission and IBU 16 was no longer needed in Fujairah, so both were headed home by the middle of June. NCW continued to provide security at the Kuwaiti ports with the help of the PSUs and continues to maintain a presence in Kuwait as of the writing of this monograph.

The Umm Qasr mission was a challenge that had never been attempted before by NCW. The obstacles and problems were not insurmountable, but the deficiencies that we had to work

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<sup>41</sup> Garafolo, "Commander's War Diary," 17.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 18.

around were familiar. Due to an inadequate inventory of vehicles, convoy planning and execution was difficult and inefficient. Because we did not have the right equipment, the borrowing or renting of needed vehicles was costly and/or time consuming. Communications in the operational environment were unreliable and slow. The issue of not having enough weapons seemed to have improved measurably, but the inability to establish a secure campsite, in what was previously enemy territory, such that the personnel and equipment were not vulnerable to enemy attack had a long way to go.

## **GOPLATS**

The original plan for the GOPLAT mission was for the Navy SEALs to capture the two platforms with the assistance of Polish Special Forces. A Marine FAST team would relieve the SEALs for 24 hours and then turn over the security mission to the U.S. Coast Guard. The plan changed at the eleventh hour and called for a night time transit, 50 miles to the GOPLATs, with eight 25ft Coast Guard boats being escorted by the Army LCU Mechanicsville. The LCU carried the Marine FAST team and additional Coast Guard personnel. Early morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> the SEALs captured both platforms and by 0600 the Coast Guard and Fast teams were aboard setting up security. The 25ft boats patrolled the perimeters of the platforms with five at MABOT and three at KAAOT.<sup>43</sup> In addition, defensive positions were established using .50 cal and M-60 crew served weapons. The Marine FAST team was given another mission and thus was gone by daybreak, so sixty Coast Guard personnel were left with the security responsibility of the two

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 21.

vital oil platforms and custody of 41 enemy prisoners of war (EPWs) captured in the initial seizure. The EPWs' were interrogated and transferred off the GOPLATs around the 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>44</sup>

The mission aboard the GOPLATs started badly for the PSUs. On March 22<sup>nd</sup> a storm blew through the area causing five to eight foot seas. The water around the GOPLATs is relatively shallow, however they are 30 miles out to sea and 25ft boats are too small to handle sea states of that type. The storm forced the LCU's that were present to head for their mother ship leaving the lighterage barges and Coast Guard boats to fend for themselves. At MABOT, PSU 313 decided to launch their boats because they were being damaged at their moorings and battered against the barges. During the boarding process as Petty Officer Fulton was trying to jump aboard the last boat, he came up short and hooked his arm over the boats rail. The next wave crushed him between the boat and the lighterage barge it was moored to. Petty Officer McLean, who was already aboard, pulled Fulton to safety. Immediately, on-looking coxswains on other boats started making emergency calls for MEDEVAC. An Australian helicopter that was in the area answered the call and transported Fulton to the USNS Comfort for treatment.<sup>45</sup>

Members of the PSUs were in contact with two larger Coast Guard ships, the Boutwell and the Walnut. Both moved toward the GOPLATs to try to assist the PSUs in protecting their boats. The overmatched small boats sought refuge with the Boutwell but very little could be done and the 25ft boats were sent back to MABOT under the escort of a zodiac from the Boutwell. The boats were tied off to stanchions on the leeward side of the platform and left to ride out the storm.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> RickeyThomas, CDR, USCGR, interview by John Garofolo, LCDR, USCGR, (June 23, 2003): 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 5.

The next morning after the storm was over damage assessment began. The five boats were still intact but the lighterage barge had broken loose and had to be recovered by the Mechanicsville. One third of the PSU's food and fuel had been lost off the barge. CDR Thomas contacted CTG 51.9 and recommended the boat mission be cancelled. They agreed and KAAOT was contacted and told to send their boats to MABOT for transit back to KNB. Prior to transit the boats were topped off with fuel. Unfortunately, two barrels from the barge had been completely contaminated by water during the storm and the sea water damaged the engines of three of the boats. The Mechanicsville towed the three damaged boats and escorted the rest half way to KNB where an Army tug took over and finished taking the boats back to port. Although the overall mission was a success the small boat mission to the GOPLATs was over.<sup>47</sup> The Boutwell and other CDS-50 ships took over the seaward security for the GOPLATs.<sup>48</sup>

Back on the GOPLATs life was still miserable. The living conditions were horrible with filth, trash, and rats everywhere. The conditions forced many of the Coast Guard personnel out onto the open decks to live in order to avoid the stench. On the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the mission another storm blew through the area, this time tearing through their shelters and forcing many to huddle in the center of the platform to avoid being blow overboard.<sup>49</sup>

Without the boats and only the crew served weapons for security the PSUs were vulnerable. KAAOT was located where there was a great amount of activity such as fishing vessels and dhows. Fortunately, they experienced only one incident with a serious threat. On the second day of the war Iranian speedboats circled KAAOT and made high speed passes. They got to within 400 yards but departed after flares were fired in their direction.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>48</sup> Tripsas, "*Coast Guard Operations During Operation Iraqi Freedom*," 33.

<sup>49</sup> Don Karol, CDR, USCGR, interview by John Garofolo, LCDR, USCGR, (June 6&12, 2003):5.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 5.

CDR Don Karol observed that one of the biggest problems during the Coast Guard's missions was poor communications. Within Task Group 51.9 the communications were good but there was poor communication with other task groups. For instance, the 50 mile night transit the night the PSUs launched out of KNB they had no communications with any ships or Special Forces teams, so de-confliction was nonexistent. In addition, at some of the Kuwaiti ports, ships entering the port area had no idea that NCW units were providing port security and thus could have misinterpreted the intentions of the small NCW craft as they approached.<sup>51</sup>

The mission at the GOPLATs ended for the Coast Guard on June 12th, the day agreed upon between the U.S. Coast Guard, Kellogg, Brown and Root, a subsidiary of Haliburton, and Southern Oil Company, the Iraqi owners of the GOPLATs. The mission had lasted 84 days and was considered a success due to the hard work of the Coast Guard PSUs and because of the importance of the platforms to the Iraqi economy. The lessons had been learned for NCW the hard way on this mission. Captain Doug Ash, Deputy Commanding Officer of NCWG1 summarized it best:

“The port security units were not the best units to put on the gas and oil platforms because the boats were too small- the seas were devastating. In fact when the boats were taken out to the GOPLATs they didn't even last three days. We had a storm come in; we almost had significant injuries and critical damage to the boats. ... We needed to have, (at a) minimum 110 foot patrol boats out there. I'm talking about the assets that we have. Maybe the 87 footers, but port security boats were the wrong boats for that mission. (as were) the platform's Mark 19s and 50 caliber (weapons). The Coast Guard tried to get the Navy to put out Mark 38 weapons (25-mm chain guns) and it was a no go. Had we had a large vessel or anything relatively high speed I doubt the weapons on the platforms would have been successful. And obviously the weapons on the boats and any kind of seas and any type of sea state ... were virtually useless.”<sup>52</sup>

The GOPLATs mission, like the Umm Qasr mission, was a venture into new territory for NCW, but this time the inexperience in conducting this kind of mission was more costly in terms

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Tripsas, “Coast Guard Operations During Operation Iraqi Freedom,” 33.

of casualties to personnel and equipment. The boats that were used were too small for a mission as far out to sea as they were asked to go. In addition, things also could have been worse due to the lack of adequate communications between coalition assets and the PSUs. Fortunately that problem did not result in even more casualties.

## **Other Missions**

NCW was not deployed only to the Persian Gulf from 9/11 through OIF. There were also units deployed to the Mediterranean theater. PSU 309 commanded by Mike Milkovich was originally recalled to active duty to deploy to Turkey. As the build up to war in Iraq progressed the Turkish would not allow U.S. forces to operate in their territory so their mission was cancelled and they were sent to Sicily to protect the NATO pier at Siracusa with units from NCW Group two.<sup>53</sup> During that mission no U.S. boats were allowed in the water so NCW assets were essentially shore based only. By April 2003 PSU 309 was moved to KNB to supplement the landward security there.

IBU 26 was on a 21 day mission to Vieques, Puerto Rico in early January 2003 when they received word of their impending mobilization. IBU 26 was mobilized with IBU 27, IBU 24 and MIUWU 203 on February 5th to the Mediterranean theater. None of these units were at full strength due to many members who failed to meet health standards or were at high year tenure. The solution was to mobilize an additional MIUWU and split the personnel between units to man them at full strength. IBU 26 was sent to Souda Bay, Greece where they started operating within

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<sup>53</sup> Mike Milkovich, LCDR, USCGR, interview by Garofolo, John, LCDR, USCGR. (July 2003): 2.



a couple of days. During their five month operation they successfully escorted over 440 ships while enduring periodic protests by local Greek citizens<sup>54</sup>.

NCWG2 units experienced many of the same problems as their counterparts in NCWG1. Manning shortages characteristic of reserve units was one of the most serious. Because of these shortages, units were forced to train new personnel while on deployment during real world operations, to include weapons qualifications. At their home stations many NCW units do not have immediate access to firing ranges or facilities to store weapons or ammunition. As a result, weapons qualifications are difficult. Equipment for personal safety and transportation tended to be two problems almost identical to NCWG1. The equipment was either old, unreliable or unsuitable to the missions required. Transportation could almost never be completed in one full unit maneuver<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Chris Wichman, LCDR, USNR, interview by author, 12 September 2009, LCDR Chris Wichman interview, tape recording, Combined Arts Research Library, Command and General Staff College, Leavenworth, Ks.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

## Naval Expeditionary Combat Command

The Navy has attempted to address many of the deficiencies displayed in previous chapters. The process started when Naval Coastal Warfare was assigned to Maritime Force Protection Command (MARFPCOM) shortly after the first year of OIF.<sup>56</sup> During this period NCW was transformed into a larger formation described as a squadron and designated as Maritime Expeditionary Security Squadron before finally being designated as the Maritime Expeditionary Security Force (MESF).<sup>57</sup> MESF is now a major component of the Naval Expeditionary Combat Command (NECC). In August of 2005 the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) ADM Michael Mullen started a move toward improving the Navy's shallow water forces.<sup>58</sup> In October of 2005 RADM Donald K. Bullard moved quickly to organize the NECC and announced that riverine units would deploy by 2007.<sup>59</sup> Then on January 13, 2006 NECC was officially established.<sup>60</sup>

NECC will provide for Naval ground force support by consolidating ground related Naval activities under one chain of command. It will be the single advocate for Navy Expeditionary Forces which include MESF, Riverine Force, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), Naval Construction Force (NCF), Navy Expeditionary Logistics Support Group (NAVELSG), Expeditionary Training Command (ETC), Expeditionary Combat Readiness Center

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Benbow, Fred Ensminger, Peter Swartz, Scott Savitz, and Major Dan Stimpson, *Renewal of Navy's Riverine Capability: A Preliminary Examination of Past, Current and Future Capabilities*, Report, Alexandria: Center for Naval Analyses, (2006): 32.

<sup>57</sup> Jerabek, "interview by author".

<sup>58</sup> Peterson, "The U.S. Navy Expeditionary Combat Command," 27.

<sup>59</sup> Benbow, "*Renewal of Navy's Riverine Capability*," 7.

<sup>60</sup> Michael A. Stolzenburg, MAJ, USMCR, *Unified Vision Of The Future: Riverine Squadrons And The Security Cooperation MAGTF*, Master's Thesis, Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command And General Staff College, (2008): 56.

CRS-5 (ECRC) and Maritime Civil Affairs Group (MCAG).<sup>61</sup> With the exception of MESF, it is not within the scope of this monograph to discuss each component of the NECC in depth. However, the single line of authority implemented within the NECC should provide greater visibility and support to the MESF that was missing prior to its development.

The MESF was established through the realignment of NCW units like those mentioned previously with Mobile Security Squadrons, Mobile Security Detachments, Embarked Security Detachments and Embarked Security Teams. In addition, Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) teams were projected to be part of the MESF team as of the 2007 MESF Concept of Operations (CONOPS).<sup>62</sup>

The MESF CONOPS describes that the Navy has recognized many of the deficiencies mentioned throughout this monograph. MESF will “deploy adaptive force packages tailored for the specific missions to achieve greater efficiency and combat readiness than the current NCW force.”<sup>63</sup> When addressing the past capabilities of NCW and the Navy Security Force (NSF) the CONOPS states that, “both forces, while executing creative in lieu of solutions to meet Combatant commanders....mission requirements, are not optimally organized to support the growing demands for maritime security operations in the near-shore operational environment.”<sup>64</sup> In addition, the CONOPS describes how the Navy has asked many individual augmentees to supplement units that were undermanned in order to meet security requirements, many times asking technically trained personnel to assume security positions.<sup>65</sup> Clearly this is a result of the instances like those mentioned in chapters two and three where yeoman and technicians were

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> —."U.S.Navy Maritime Expeditionary Security Force Concept of Operations," (April 2007): 7.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

asked to grab a weapon and stand duty. MESF establishes a force capable of meeting the full range of requirements and, “closes a critical gap essential to full mission readiness for Maritime Security Operations (MSO).”<sup>66</sup>

Within the MESF organization the required operations are grouped into three categories: Ground Defense Operations, Afloat Defense Operations, and Additional Operations.

Ground Defense Operations consist of:

- Ground, point and area defense
- Airfield/aircraft security and defense
- Rapid response
- Land convoy escort
- Surveillance/reconnaissance

Afloat Defense Operations consist of:

- Waterborne, point and zone defense
- Subsurface attack defense
- Port security harbor defense
- Harbor approach defense (HAD)
- Vessel escort
- VBSS
- Embarked security
- Mine warfare support
- Surveillance/reconnaissance

Additional Operations consist of:

- Detention operations
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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 8.

Law enforcement/law and order

Search and rescue

Customs

TSC support

Humanitarian and civic assistance

Defense support of civil authorities (DSCA).<sup>67</sup>

As part of these operations MESF will have an alert force on standby ready to deploy within 96 hours to fulfill an urgent mission and be self sustainable for up to 15 days.<sup>68</sup>



Figure 3. MESF Capabilities within the expeditionary environment<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 2-1,2-2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 1-4.

## Recommendations and Conclusions

Within the list of operations MESF is capable of one can see that a few solutions to prior NCW problems have been addressed. For instance land convoy escort would seem to solve the security problems that were faced during the Umm Qasr convoy preparation and execution. Ground defense should solve the problem of relying on Marine Corps, Army or augmentees to fill gaps in landward defense. Embarked security may fill the positions previously assumed by Marine FAST teams and personnel trained for detention missions would be better suited to fulfill POW responsibilities than were the PSUs that operated on the GOPLATs.

Outside of MESF but still within the NECC organization the Seabees and EOD will be available to help solve some of the same problems as were experienced by NCW in previous missions except that requests for services will have a shorter chain of command for approval and ideally will be part of the planning process. Logistics will also be more responsive since NAVELSG will be the NECC logistical workhorse.

Naval Coastal Warfare, at least for now, seems to have the ear of Navy leadership. The establishment of NECC shows the Navy has a clear understanding that terrorist attacks and asymmetrical warfare are major threats to U.S. interests in shallow water theaters worldwide. The question is how long will it last? Riverine units during Vietnam were well funded and equipped while their mission was a high visibility and high priority concern. Then when the conflict was over they were all but forgotten. What will happen to NCW if the threat of terrorism starts to decline or potential threats to U.S. assets trend towards deeper water conflicts?

NECC has the assets to make NCW truly expeditionary. By configuring an active duty component that can respond within a 96 hour window that is self sustainable for 15 days, NECC units should be able to avoid many of the problems from previous decades. One would expect that the training and proficiency of active duty units should be at level equivalent to any other active duty command and supplemented with reserves as needed. In addition, NECC will have

plenty of personnel to draw from, especially in the case of trained security forces. Relying on the Army for landward security help should be a strategy of the past.

Vehicles and equipment should no longer be a concern either. The vast number of vehicles available within a single chain of command, the specialized equipment of units like the NCF and the addition of land convoy security forces should make expeditionary missions much easier. No longer should tens of thousands of dollars be spent leasing vehicles from foreign vendors. No longer should NCW forces be forced to use make shift weaponized vehicles for their convoy protection and no longer should units need to scavenge surrounding areas to fortify their campsites.

The creation of NECC has addressed most of the problems mentioned in this monograph with three exceptions. The first being the inadequacy of the boats used on the GOPLAT mission. This problem was not so much a problem of inadequate assets as it was an incorrect decision. I believe the choice of boats used was an overestimation of the boats' capabilities coupled with a lack of understanding of the environment. More capable boats were clearly available and should have been used.

The second exception is that of communications. The number of individual units within NECC has made communications even more complex. It will be vital that all units in theater be able to efficiently and effectively communicate with each other. Relying on the archaic systems used the past two decades to foster communications between NECC units or commands will be a significant challenge.

The last and most important problem for MESF and probably all of NECC is that the same philosophy exists that has plagued shallow water forces for centuries. As budgets tighten, funding declines and perceived threats disappear NECC may be considered secondary to the blue water Navy and the first to be asked to downsize or operate with less. Already, the MESF

manning structure that was slowly converting to a more active duty centric force is reverting back to relying more heavily on reserves.<sup>70</sup> Competition for assets within NECC is increasing and already the VBSS mission has been relegated elsewhere.<sup>71</sup> Signs are somewhat discouraging that the simultaneous and/or expeditionary operations of all types of NECC units may not be possible.

Naval Coastal Warfare is in a good yet unfamiliar position where it appears to have access to numerous assets that it has lacked in the past, all under the authority of a single chain of command. ATRF is a priority mission to the Navy and is in many ways closer to the fight than the blue water Navy. Conditions seem to be in place for NCW to function more effectively than it ever has before, but as Captain Jerabek stated in a recent interview, “Now there are more commands in the food fight.”<sup>72</sup> Even though the available resources are numerous there are more commands within NECC that will be asking for them. NECC leadership will decide where assets are allocated so it will be up to NCW commanders to remind their chain of command of the problems historically encountered by the NCW community in order to avoid repeating them.

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<sup>70</sup> Jerabek, “interview by author”.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



## **Glossary of Acronyms**

ADM	Admiral
AFB	Air Force Base
ARG	Amphibious Ready Group
ATFP	Anti-Terrorism Force Protection
CDR	Commander
C4ISR	Command, Control, Communication, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance
CMPF	Commander Maritime Pre-positioned Force
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
CONOPS	Concept of Operations
CTF	Commander Task Force
CTG	Commander Task Group
DET	Detachment
DMZ	De-militarized Zone
ECRC	Expeditionary Combat Readiness Center
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
EPW	Enemy Prisoners of War
ETC	Expeditionary Training Command
FAST	Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team
GOPLAT	Gulf Oil Platform
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HDCU	Harbor Defense Command Unit
HMMWV	High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle
HSV-X1	High Speed Vessel

HVA	High Value Asset
IBU	Inshore Boat Unit
ID	Infantry Division
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
JFSOC	Joint Force Security Operations Center
JLOTS	Joint Logistics Over Shore
KAAOT	Khawr Al Amaya Oil Terminal
KNB	Kuwait Navy Base
LCAC	Landing Craft Air Cushion
LCDR	Lieutenant Commander
LCM	Landing Craft Mechanized
LCU	Landing Craft Utility
MABOT	Mina Al Bakr Oil Terminal
MARFPCOM	Maritime Force Protection Command
MCAG	Maritime Civil Affairs Group
MEDEVAC	Medical Evacuation
MESF	Maritime Expeditionary Security Force
MIUWU	Mobile Inshore Undersea Warfare Unit
MOC	Mobile Operations Center
MOPP	Mission Oriented Protective Posture gear
MSO	Maritime Security Operations
MSP	Mobile Sensor Platform
MV	Motor Vessel
NAVELSG	Navy Expeditionary Logistics Support Group
NCF	Naval Construction Force
NCW	Naval Coastal Warfare

NCWG	Naval Coastal Warfare Group
NECC	U.S. Navy Expeditionary Combat Command
NOC	Naval Operations Center
NSF	Navy Security Force
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
POW	Prisoner of War
PSP	Portable Sensor Platform
PSU	Port Security Unit
RADM	Rear Admiral
RMAST	Reserve Mobile Ashore Support Terminal
RFA	Royal Fleet Auxiliary
RSSC	Radar Sonar Surveillance Center
SEAL	Sea Air Land Forces
SHF	Super High Frequency
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPOD	Sea Port of Debarkation
USCG	United States Coast Guard
USCGR	United States Coast Guard Reserve
UN	United Nations
USNS	United
VBSS	Visit, Board, Search and Seizure

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