

EXERCISE RED ALLIGATOR

Photographs kindly supplied by LA(Phot) Shaun Barlow

In the first training exercise by UK Land Forces on Saudi Arabian soil since the first Gulf War, Royal Marines have deployed onto the country's scorching deserts as part of the Royal Navy's TAURUS 09 deployment.

250 Royal Marines from Charlie Company, 40 Commando, deployed from UK amphibious landing ships HMS Bulwark and RFA Lyme Bay, supported by HMS Somerset, using the fleet of landing and raiding craft operated by 539 and 4 Assault Squadrons Royal Marines. Saudi naval units operating with UK forces included the frigate HMS Madinah, the tanker HMS Yanbu, coast guard vessels, maritime and troop-carrying helicopters and 180 Saudi Marines with associated vehicles and equipment.



anti-tank missiles, and a VIP demonstration watched over by His Highness Vice Admiral Prince Fahad, Commander Royal Saudi Naval Forces. It is the first time in 16 years that conventional UK Landing Forces have trained with Saudi troops in Saudi training areas, marking a significant advancement in relationships in a region of great strategic importance to the UK.

Speaking as the exercise came to a successful end, Commodore Hudson said:

"A task group of this size does enable the Royal Navy to conduct significant wider regional engagement activity with coalition allies. We have been partners with Saudi Arabia for many years therefore the opportunity to conduct joint amphibious exercises was hugely appealing to both nations but it requires careful planning and our teams have been engaged for over 12 months pulling all the strands together.



Landing craft from RFA Lyme Bay and HMS Bulwark land the troops ashore

More than a year in the planning, Exercise Red Alligator consisted of a maritime phase as the ships transited down through the Red Sea and then conducted the amphibious offload of troops, followed by combined Saudi-UK training ashore at Wadi Sirr, 80km north of the port town of Gizan.

Led by Commander UK Amphibious Task Group, Royal Navy Commodore Peter Hudson, the exercise also saw Saudi Arabian battle staff headed by a Saudi Navy Commodore embark on TAURUS 09 flagship HMS Bulwark to plan and co-ordinate the land assaults. Royal Navy personnel also transferred into the Saudi units to share practices and provide a link-up.

The five-day exercise culminated in an extensive live firing exercise, including the firing of Javelin



A Saudi Navy Black Hawk helicopter inserts Royal and Saudi Marines ashore