

SEA KINGS IN THE PERSIAN GULF

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Operation Friction

The war in the Persian Gulf in 1991 marked the first time since the Second World War that a Canadian Joint Force Headquarters commanded elements of Canada's sea, land and air forces in a joint and combined combat operation. After the Korean Conflict, the Canadian Forces trained and prepared for a war scenario that foresaw operations under NATO command in Western Europe and the North Atlantic. The operations in the Persian Gulf, dubbed "OPERATION FRICTION", forced Canada to make rapid changes and introduce new procedures to sustain combat operations halfway around the world in an area and as part of a Coalition for which it had neither prepared nor planned.

Canada's Sea King helicopters were the first air force units in OPERATION FRICTION; however, they too were not equipped for the type of duties they would be tasked to perform. This led to the metamorphosis of the Sea King transforming it from a specialized anti-submarine helicopter into a multi-purpose maritime aircraft. The modifications made to the Sea King also enabled doctrinal changes that permanently expanded the capabilities and employment of this ship borne helicopter. As a result of these fundamental changes the Sea King provided the air force's vanguard in Canada's peacekeeping and peacemaking operations for the next decade.

United Nations Resolutions

Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990 in order to gain control over its vast oil reserves. Reacting quickly to this act of aggression, the United Nations condemned Iraq with the endorsement of United Nations, Canada co-sponsored, Resolution 660. On 6 August the U.N. Security Council unanimously approved Resolution 661, co-sponsored by Canada, imposing economic sanctions against Iraq. The same day the U.S. and the U.K. announced major troop deployments to the Persian Gulf. On 10 August, Prime Minister Mulroney announced that Canada would stand by its allies by contributing two destroyers and a supply ship to the multinational military effort in the Persian Gulf. Implicit in this announcement was that Sea King helicopters with their air and maintenance crews would deploy on these ships as part of the usual ships' compliment. On 25 August the U.N. Security Council passed Canadian co-sponsored Resolution 665, which called on states deploying maritime forces to use such measures as may be necessary to halt all inward and outward maritime shipping to ensure compliance with Resolution 661. In short, Resolution 665 invoked the provisions in Chapter Seven of the U.N. Charter sanctioning the use of offensive force.

The Plan

The Iraqis posed a serious threat. Their army, a million strong, including more than 200,000 in plundered Kuwait, looked invincible. Not only was it digging in for the long haul, but it bristled with modern missiles, 5,000 tanks, 10,000 other armoured vehicles, 4,000 artillery pieces, chemical weapons and most of the other paraphernalia of war. It was considered the fifth largest armed force in the world. Set against this, Canada's military contribution looked small. However, Canada made a significant contribution sending 25 percent of its operational warships to the Gulf. These ships were supported by more than 50 percent of the Sea Kings from 423 Squadron, the operational squadron charged with providing integral air support to Canada's Atlantic coast navy. The ships carried nearly 1,000 sailors and airmen, including a significant number of women.

All previous Canadian peacekeeping operations had authorized the use of force only for self-protection or to separate the belligerents. OPERATION FRICTION was the first time since the Korean War that offensive force had been sanctioned to enforce U.N. resolutions. Since OPERATION FRICTION was Canada's first foray into peacemaking in almost 40 years leadership would be critical to the success of the operation. Commodore Ken J. Summers was chosen to command the Gulf Task Group and Captain (N) Duncan "Dusty" E. Miller was selected second in command, his Chief of Staff. Commodore Summers and Captain (N) Miller handpicked experienced naval officers to replace lesser qualified personnel on their naval headquarters staff that was designated to form the Task Group headquarters. However, Major Pete F. Nordland, the current air officer on the naval headquarters staff was eminently qualified for the Gulf operation. He was an experienced scheduling officer who could juggle the Sea Kings' daily training, maintenance and operational schedules. Captain (N) Miller had worked with Major Nordland previously and he had a reputation as a hard working, knowledgeable professional who would be the perfect air officer for tasking the Sea King helicopters embarked on the Task Group ships as well as analyzing the threats and determining aircraft requirements.

The Task Group would also require a Deputy Chief of Staff (Air) to be the technical analyst who would assess deficiencies and ensure both the correct personnel and equipment were available for the Sea King operations. Brigadier General Barry Bowen, the Commander of Maritime Air Group, selected Lieutenant Colonel (LCol.) Larry A. McWha, the Commanding Officer of 423 Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron (HS 423), as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Air Operations. LCol. McWha was an exceptionally talented pilot who would attack his job aggressively and with confidence. He was a "hands on" leader who would be the first in the cockpit when either new techniques or equipment had to be tested. He was always ready to show his crews exactly what the Sea King could do and then expect them