

Miller, Commodore Duncan (Dusty) E. and Sharon Hobson. *The Persian Excursion: The Canadian Navy in the Gulf War.* Clementsports, NS/Toronto: The Canadian Peacekeeping Press/The Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1995.

By any stretch of the imagination the Persian Gulf War will go down in Canadian history as an odd one. Canada sent a field hospital, a squadron of aircraft and three warships. For the first time in history Canada "fought" a war with fewer people engaged in offensive military action than there were ministers in the Cabinet that sent them there. Prime Minister Mackenzie King must have smiled with delight from on high. The war seemed to suggest a new mould for Canada's overseas campaigns. It also suggested a new pattern for Canadian participation within the military excursions of the Western Alliance. Indeed, that new pattern is the sub-plot of *The Persian Excursion*, a collaboration of efforts by Commodore Dusty Miller, the Canadian task group commander, and the Canadian defence correspondent Sharon Hobson.

It was the absence of major ground combat units that marked the Canadian experience in the Gulf War as a significant departure in overseas expeditions. But that said, the navy did as much indeed more as it was possible to do in a war in which there was no effective opposition at sea. Indeed, Gulf waters provided the medium whereby first economic and then military pressure could be brought to bear on the hapless Iraqis. Canada participated in both phases. Miller and Hobson focus on the work of the navy and its three ship squadron in supporting the blockade of Iraq and once the war started in earnest the combat logistics of coalition naval forces. Miller was the senior Canadian naval officer at sea and the work is very largely his window on events. Perhaps for that reason, and because Miller sees in the Gulf experience the shape of campaigns yet to come, the didactic purpose of the book is clear from the outset. The authors set out to deal with the problems encountered and overcome in the mobilization, deployment and operations of the squadron in an attempt to identify potential problems and solutions in future operations.

The book is organized chronologically. The first three chapters deal with gearing up for war and the transit to the Gulf, including the tremendous can-do attitude of the Canadian government and armed forces in getting the ships ready for combat. Everyone, it appears, cut through layers of bureaucracy, red tape and over-time to find the kit and put it aboard. Canada's allies, too, not least the French, helped along the way, providing much needed equipment, logistics and technical support, and training enroute.

The next four chapters cover the squadron's initiation into its new operational environment: local climate and politics, the problems of alliance warfare, and the blockade operations in the southern Persian Gulf, where they earned an enviable reputation of effectiveness. Even the tanker *Protecteur* was put into service as part of the embargo force, intercepting ships and supporting operations with its own helos. In the end the three ships conducted no less than 25 percent of the challenges handled by the Allied fleet during the embargo operations.

Miller's ships were given a much more important assignment in early 1991, as the assault on Kuwait approached: to operate the "Combat Logistics Force" (CLF) of the coalition fleet. This obliged Miller and his staff, with support from the three ships, to control about 60 logistics and escort vessels as part of a massive resupply of all warships in the Gulf. In all, over 100 ships of all shapes, sizes and nationalities had to be resupplied, including the big American carriers that required 1.5 million gallons of jet fuel each every 48 hours as well as 200-300 lifts of ammunition. Miller and his staff had to coordinate the movement of supply ships, the vessels in need of replenishment and the protecting multi-national screen of warships. It called for a high level of professionalism, familiarity with NATO procedures and especially with Americans, a facility with languages, enough diplomacy to ensure that Argentine frigates could refuel in comfort alongside British tankers, and a clear lack of previous foreign entanglements. It was a job description which no other nation could match. By all accounts Miller and his staff did a superb job. The book ends with reflections on the role of the media in the war and a summary of lessons learned.

The Persian Excursion was never intended to be the final word on Canada's naval war in the Gulf. It contains, for example, virtually no sense for what was done on a day-to-day basis either in the embargo phase or while Miller ran CLF. Nor is *The Persian Excursion* memoir, although it comes close to that. It is rather a combination memoir and post-operation analysis by the man at the eye of the storm. In many ways it is an awkward and uncomfortable marriage. The main text talks about Miller in the third person, with his lengthy personal asides set off in italics. However, it works and the book is filled with a wellspring of interesting and useful information about the Canadian naval experience of the Gulf War. Recommended for modern naval libraries and for those interested in Canadian military history.

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