

NAVAL OPERATIONS IN THE ARABIAN SEA

INTRODUCTION

For several months prior to the commencement of hostilities, it was evident that a political solution to the problems the erstwhile East Pakistanis were faced with was unlikely and military confrontation was coming. This early warning in a large measure contributed to the high state of preparedness of the Indian Navy at the time of the Pak pre-emptive offensive on 3 December 1971(1).

Another contributory factor was the anti-insurgency operations conducted by the Indian Navy in Sri Lanka during March and April 1971 at the request of the Sri Lankan government and which provided the necessary impetus for building up its operational readiness.

It was decided that in the event of an armed conflict, victory on the western front would have to be ensured by delivering quick and decisive blows at the very commencement of hostilities and maintaining continuous pressure until the achievement of complete supremacy at sea. In the western theatre, concerted action was to be taken to launch a bold and direct thrust towards the citadel of the Pak Navy, Karachi, at the onset of hostilities, destroy Pak naval forces defending Karachi and at sea, bombard port installations, prosecute trade warfare by capturing Pak merchant shipping and imposing contraband control, ensure full protection to our shipping around the globe from the threat likely to be posed by Pak naval ships and submarines and cut off supplies of men and material to the Pak forces to the east from west Pakistan by severing the lines of communication between the two wings.

Naval operations in the Arabian Sea were the responsibility of Vice Admiral S.N. Kohli, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command with headquarters at Bombay and Rear Admiral V.A. Kamath, Flag Officer Commanding, Southern Naval Area based at Cochin.

Warships of the Indian Navy were already racing to their deployment stations when the Pakistan Air Force carried out a pre-emptive attack on Indian airfields in the Western Sector on 3 December(2). "Seek and destroy all enemy warships" was the order received by the Flag Officers Commanding-in-Chief of the Naval Commands and the Fleet Commanders from the

Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral S.M. Nanda, "The maritime link between the two wings of the enemy is to be sliced forthwith. Ensure that no repeat no supplies reach the Pakistani war machine from seawards".

STRENGTH AND COMPOSITION OF THE WESTERN FLEET

The forces allotted to the Western Fleet, commanded by Rear Admiral E.C. Kuruvila, comprised one cruiser, nine frigates, three destroyers, three Petya class frigates, two tankers, one submarine tender, three survey vessels, eight minesweepers, five patrol boats, eight missile boats, two submarines and one tug(3).

The cruiser was the 11,040-ton Mysore (Captain R.K.S. Gandhi) which was armed with nine 6-inch guns for operations against surface targets (SU), eight 4-inch guns for both surface and aerial targets (AA) and twelve 40-mm guns for aerial targets.

INS Trishul (Captain K.R. Nair) and INS Talwar (Cdr S.S. Kumar) formed the 15th Frigate Squadron, the Trishul being the senior ship of the squadron. Each of these general-purpose frigates was armed with two 4.5-inch guns used against surface and aerial targets, four 40-mm AA guns and two Limbo 3-barrel depth charge mortars for use against submarines.

Three anti-submarine frigates, INS Khukri (Captain M.N. Mulla), INS Kirpan formed the 14th Frigate Squadron, the Khukri being the senior ship of the squadron. Each ship of this class was equipped with three 40-mm AA guns and two Limbo triple-barrel depth charge mortars.

INS Betwa, and anti-aircraft frigate, commanded by Cdr. R.K. Chaudhuri, had four 4.5-inch AA/SU guns, four 40-mm AA guns and its anti-submarine weapon was one Squid 3-barrel depth charge mortar.

INS Cauvery (Cdr I.K. Erry), INS Krishna (Cdr R.A.J. Anderson) and INS Tir (Cdr M. Pratap) were frigates of World War II vintage. The Cauvery and Krishna had four 4-inch SU guns, four 40-mm AA guns and two depth-charge throwers for anti-submarine purposes each. The Tir had one 4-inch SU gun, one 40-mm AA gun and two 20-mm AA guns. These three ships were basically training ships but were being used as frigates for the duration of the war.

The destroyers attached to the Western Fleet included INS Ranjit (Cdr R.N. Singh) equipped with four 4.7-inch SU guns, four 4-inch AA guns, four

depth-charge throwers and eight 21-inch torpedo tubes and INS Godavari and Ganga, each equipped with six dual purpose 4-inch guns and four rapid firing 20-mm AA guns.

The three small Petya class frigates, INS Kiltan (Cdr K.P. Gopal Rao), INS Kadmatt and INS Katchall comprised the 312 Division, the Kiltan being the senior ship of the Division. Each one of these vessels was equipped with five 21-inch torpedo tubes and four dual purpose 3-inch guns.

The two tankers were INS Deepak and INS Sagardeep, each carrying a helicopter on board.

INS Amba was the submarine tender and was equipped with four 3-inch dual purpose guns.

The three hydrographic survey vessels attached to the Western Fleet were INS Darshak, which carried a helicopter on board, INS Suttlej and INS Investigator.

INS Konkan was the only ocean minesweeper in the Western Fleet while the coastal minesweepers were INS Karwar, INS Kakinada, INS Cuddalore and INS Cannanore and the inshore minesweepers were INS Bassein, INS Bhatkal and INS Bulsar.

The five assorted patrol boats were INS Atul, INS Pamban, INS Savitri, INS Subhadra and INS Suvarna.

Eight missile boats, armed with deadly surface-to-surface missiles, were attached to the Western Fleet. These were INS Nirbhik, INS Nipat, INS Nashak, INS Nirghat, INS Vinash, INS Vijeta, INS Veer and INS Vidyut. The Squadron Commander was Cdr B.B. Yadav.

INS Kursura and INS Karanj were the two submarines. Each of these submarines had eight 21-inch torpedo tubes and a maximum speed of 20 knots (nautical miles per hour) on the surface and 15 knots submerged.

The tug attached to the Western Fleet was INS Hathi.

As regards the air element, INS Vikrant which was the flagship of the Western Fleet, had temporarily been transferred to the Eastern Fleet during 1971 and hence, naval air support to the Western Fleet was provided from shore stations(4). At Bombay, there were four Seaking anti-submarine helicopters, three Alize anti-submarine aircraft and three anti-submarine Chetak (Alouette) helicopters out of which two were

The Indian Air Force provided air support to the operations in the western waters for maritime reconnaissance with Superconstellations, Ilyushin 14s, An-12s and Dakotas(5).

PAK NAVAL FORCES IN THE WEST

Immediately preceding the 1971 operations, it was believed that the Pak naval forces had already been deployed for an attack on the Indian naval units, harbours and the merchant marine on the high seas. The western wing of the Pak fleet comprised one cruiser, four destroyers, one fast anti-submarine frigate, one survey ship, eight minesweepers, two Jaguar class motor torpedo boats, three submarines, six midget submarines, twelve chariots/TRAs, three auxiliaries and two seaward defence motor launches. Karachi harbour was reported to be congested with about 75 merchant ships(6).

The Pak naval forces had been carrying out exercises off Karachi during November 1971. Some submarines were also reported to have taken part in these exercises.

The cruiser, PNS Babur, carried eight 5.25-inch guns (SU), fourteen 40-mm guns (AA) and six 21-inch torpedo tubes.

The two destroyers, PNS Badr and PNS Khaibar, were equipped with four 4.5-inch guns (SU), ten 40-mm guns (AA), one Squid triple-barrel depth-charge mortar and eight 21-inch torpedo tubes each(7). PNS Shah Jahan was armed with three 4.5-inch guns (SU), six 40-mm guns (AA), two Squid triple-barrel depth-charge mortars and four 21-inch torpedo tubes while PNS Alamgir was armed with three 4.5-inch guns (SU), six 40-mm guns (AA), two Squid triple-barrel depth-charge mortars and four 21-inch torpedo tubes.

The fast anti-submarine frigate, PNS Tippu Sultan, carried two 4-inch guns (SU), five 40-mm guns (AA), two Squid triple-barrel depth-charge mortars and four 21-inch torpedo tubes. The survey ship, PNS Zulfiqar, was armed with one 4-inch gun (SU) and two 40-mm guns (AA).

The eight minesweepers were PNS Mehmud, PNS Momin, PNS Mashal, PNS Mubarak, PNS Mujahid, PNS Mukhtiar, PNS Munsif and PNS Muhafiz, each one of which was fitted with two 20-mm (AA) guns.

There were two fast Jaguar class motor torpedo boats which had been recently acquired and were to be used for coastal defence.

The three submarines attached to the western wing of the Pak fleet were PNS Hangor, PNS Mangro and PNS Shushuk, all of them of the French Daphne class, capable of doing 15.5 knots submerged and each fitted with twelve 21-inch torpedo tubes.

There were also six midget submarines which, besides being able to operate in shallow waters and offer smaller targets to sonar sensors were able to carry chariots for clandestine sabotage operations in enemy harbours, shore installations, etc.

There were twelve chariots and TRAs (used for training) in the Western Pak Navy.

The little chariot, which is shaped like a torpedo with a diver sitting astride it, and released by the midget submarine near enemy posts or ships at anchor, was difficult to detect at night and could seriously disable powerful warships by attaching limpet-mines, bombs, etc., to their hulls. The chariot and its rider or pilot then silently returned to the midget submarine which had carried him to the enemy port.

The three auxiliary ships included two tankers, Dacca and Attock, and one tug, Madadgar.

There were two seaward defence motor launches, SDML 3517 and SDML 520, each one of which carried one 3-pounder and one 20-mm AA gun.

Strengths of the rival fleets in the West were fairly well matched, as shown in the table below:-

<u>Ship</u>	<u>Indian Navy</u>	<u>Pakistan Navy</u>
Submarines	2	3
Cruisers	1	1
Destroyers/ Frigates	15	5
Auxiliaries and smaller vessels	28	34
Total	<hr/> 46	<hr/> 43

From the comparison of forces allotted to the Pak Navy's Western Wing and those deployed by India's Western Naval Command, it is clear that there was no decisive advantage to either side in terms of 'material'. Victory would, therefore, go to the better side, with higher morale, superior training, and the will to dare.

THE PAK NAVY PREPARES FOR WAR

There were developments in the Pak Navy which indicated that it was preparing for a major operation. For instance, it was reported that the Pak Naval units were regularly carrying out exercises at sea, the pennant numbers of the minesweepers, which were usually displayed on the hull, had been painted over and the patrol craft had been camouflaged with yellow and grey paint(8). Pak warships were sighted off Minicoy Island steering eastward and westward courses and carrying out firing exercises.

By the time an emergency was declared in Pakistan on 23 November 1971, all Pak naval units except two minesweepers had proceeded to sea and the C-in-C of the Pak Navy had assumed control of sailing and routing Pak merchant ships. On 24 November, the Pak authorities called up all reserved and all personnel on the verge of retirement were asked to continue in service. All shipping was prohibited to approach or enter Karachi harbour after sunset and directed to remain 75 miles away till sunrise. On 25 November, all aircraft were prohibited from flying within 3 nautical miles of Karachi. These developments indicated that preparations were afoot for a full-scale naval operation by end November/early December 1971.

It was assessed in New Delhi that the Pak naval forces on the Western Front would be assigned many important roles in the coming war. The Pak surface forces would primarily be deployed to defend Karachi in depth while remaining within the PAF air cover. Elements of this force were likely to attempt a sneak hit and run attack on the Saurashtra coast at the commencement of hostilities, as was done in 1965(9). The submarine forces comprising the submarines, midgets and chariots would be deployed off Karachi, Saurashtra, Bombay and further south, with the midgets and chariots attempting a pre-emptive attack on Bombay, Cochin and Goa at the commencement of hostilities. In support of the surface forces, the PAF would provide strike cover and carry out maritime reconnaissance in depth. The ships and submarine forces would attack Indian merchant ships at sea and try to block India's sea lanes wherever possible. PAF aircraft would attack Indian naval and merchant ships at sea within the strike range of Pak airfields. The submarine forces or naval ships, or even merchant

ships, sailing craft, etc., would attempt to mine the approaches to Bombay, Goa and Cochin. The Pak forces would attempt to block the port of Cochin by sinking a block ship in the channel leading to Cochin and units of the Pak surface fleet would attempt occupation of one or more islands in the Lakshadweep and Minicoy group.

THE INDIAN NAVY CLEARS THE DECK

The overall assessment of the Pak naval strategy, therefore, was that its forces would attempt to inflict as much damage as possible in a pre-emptive coup de main at the commencement of hostilities and then withdraw to Karachi where the PAF and the Pak Navy's submarine arm would strike us hard if Indian naval units counter-attacked their maritime citadel(10).

Based on this threat perception, the tasks assigned to the Indian Navy's Western Command and Southern Naval Area were really challenging. The primary task was the destruction of Pak naval forces by taking offensive measures from the very outset. Energetic steps were to be taken to paralyse enemy's sea-borne trade and traffic and to capture Pak merchant ships. In addition, measures for blockade and contraband control were to be instituted when so ordered by higher authorities; all ports and harbours were to be made secure against pre-emptive underwater attacks and shore targets, especially in Saurashtra, were to be protected against pre-emptive hit-and-run raids. The Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command, was to assume world-wide control of all Indian merchant shipping.

In order to forestall a pre-emptive underwater attack on Bombay, Goa and Cochin, a pattern was evolved for the units of the Western Fleet to sail out whenever the situation deteriorated, thus depriving the midget submarines of their principal targets at these places(11). This involved the calculated risk that ships of the Fleet would have to withstand the strain of additional steaming for an undetermined period, and some of the bigger ships were quite old. This was particularly important because sustained high-speed steaming would be required in offensive operations against a well-defended harbour, if the situation did demand such an operation.

In order to forestall a sneak raid on targets on the Saurashtra Coast, missile boats were deployed between Diu and Okha sometime before the commencement of hostilities. If required, these boats would be augmented by additional boats from Bombay and would then strike Karachi. Even though these boats had been designed by the Soviet Navy primarily for defensive

deployment, it was decided to use them in an offensive role. This daring improvisation carried risks as well as advantages. But it paid rich dividends in the 1971 war, and won for the Indian Navy the respect and admiration of professionals all over the world.

In order to pre-empt a possible attempt by the Pak naval forces to execute a surprise attack at the commencement of hostilities, it was planned to launch a series of strikes against Karachi and the Makran Coast until the Pak naval units were forced either to react and get destroyed at sea, or to retire into Karachi.

To counter the threat from Pak submarines, suitable evasive measures were planned, such as coasting within shallow waters. This would render Pak submarines ineffective, while Indian forces could freely coast along until they broke out into the sea at random points. As soon as the deployment of Pak submarines and their positions were reasonably clear, offensive anti-submarine operations would be launched.

The most important aspect of trade warfare was the capture of enemy merchant ships and denial of the use of the sea lanes to the enemy. It was assessed that the Pak authorities would re-route their east-bound traffic along the Makran coast and seek the cover of the international shipping lanes from Sri Lanka to the Persian Gulf, while their west-bound traffic would hug the Arabian and African coasts(12). It was also appreciated that soon after hostilities commenced, Pakistan would divert its ships to neutral ports for the duration of the war. It was, therefore, decided to try to capture Pak merchantmen and ships carrying contraband in the first few days of the war at the very time that many Fleet units would be busy striking enemy ports.

Two other aspects of the operations had to be played off the cuff. The first one was the presence of a fairly large number of US, British and Iranian warships, including two aircraft carriers, in the north Arabian Sea for CENTO exercises being held from the last week of November 1971 till the first week of December 1971. Possibilities of mutual interference between these exercises and the Indian Fleet's operations would have to be borne in mind, and any dislocation or operations minimised(13). The second aspect was the possibility of hitting innocent neutral merchant ships during missile attacks. This risk was obviated by the Pak Naval C-in-C banning the approach of merchant shipping within 70 nautical miles off Karachi between dusk and dawn. As a result, the Indian Navy could safely engage all long range surface radar contacts at will during the crucial hours of darkness.

The three ships attached to the Southern Naval Area, which was responsible for the Southern 600 nautical miles of the West Coast and the 19 islands of the Lakshadweep and Minicoy group of which 10 were inhabited, were INS Amba, INS Godavari and INS Ganga(14). These were to patrol east of Sri Lanka and west of southern tip of India across the route from Colombo to the 8° and 9° Channels, to intercept Pak naval and merchant ships doing the east-west crossing or neutral ships carrying contraband. Two other ships, INS Konkan and INS Hathi, were to be used for patrolling outside Cochin harbour.

THE WAR BEGINS

On 1 December 1971, it was appreciated by the Chief of the Naval Staff that hostilities were imminent and that Pakistan might attempt a pre-emptive midget submarine attack on the Western Fleet in harbour(15). On 2 December, the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command, sailed the Fleet to an area 200 to 300 miles off Karachi, so that if and when hostilities commenced, it would be well placed to start offensive operations and intercept enemy merchant ships.

On 2 December, INS Cauvery was at Goa, and the Petya class frigate INS Katchall and two missile boats, INS Vidyut and INS Nirghat, were at Okha to forestall any hit-and-run raids on the Saurashtra coast. The frigate INS Kiltan and two missile boats, INS Nipat and INS Veer were at Bombay and sailed on the morning of 3 December to join up with the Saurashtra Force. The training ship INS Krishna and minesweepers of the 18th Mine Counter-Measure Squadron were patrolling off the Floating Light outside Bombay Harbour and the two submarines, Karanj and Kursura were on operational patrol in their designated areas. This left the Fleet with 13 ships. Of these, the cruiser, INS Mysore, the tanker INS Deepak, and two ships towing the two missile boats formed the six-ship main body. The remaining ships provided the anti-submarine screen.

IAF aircraft were to provide maritime reconnaissance for the Fleet when required. Seaking and Alouette helicopters were to augment anti-submarine patrol off Bombay for which shore-based anti-submarine Alize air-craft were also available.

On the morning of 3 December 1971, the Flag Officer Commanding the Western Fleet made the following signal to the ships of the Fleet: "There is most reliable evidence that Pakistan will commence an all out offensive against us in Bangladesh tomorrow, Saturday(16). Our forces are fully prepared to meet this threat and will mount a counter-offensive that

will carry the war deep into BANGLADESH. It is not certain whether the enemy will attack us in the WEST. If he does, it will automatically become an all-out war and the Western Fleet will be actively participating. Your Commanding Officers will inform you of my immediate offensive plan at the right time should the war spread to the WEST. If there is no major reaction by the enemy in the WEST we shall have to wait for a while before taking the offensive.

"Before I deploy you to battle, probably very soon, I would like you all to know that I have the fullest confidence in each one of you and complete faith in our final victory at sea. Our cause is just and I can assure you that God is with us.

Be bloody bold and resolute".

At this time CENTO Exercises were being held in the north Arabian Sea and the ships reported to be taking part in the Exercises were all ships and submarines of Pakistan Navy except the Tughril, Alamgir, Shah Jahan and Madadgar and a fairly large number of ships and submarines of the US and Royal Navy.

The latest weapon in the armoury of the Indian Navy were the recently acquired missile boats and radical tactical innovations had been made to use these boats offensively and to maximum advantage(17). The shipborne air element, i.e., the helicopters, would provide long range reconnaissance reports on targets to the missile boats which would immediately swing into action and deliver the first blow. The surface ships would then follow up and finish off the crippled enemy. Since the missile boats had a limited operational range, they would be required to be towed by ships of the Fleet. This would impose restrictions on the speed of the Fleet and consequently increase the vulnerability of its units to submarine attack. This disadvantage was planned to be overcome by keeping the ships on the move.

As regards the submarine threat, it was known that the only submarine capable of operating in the Bay of Bengal was the Ghazi. The three Daphne class submarines, with their limitations in endurance and logistic facilities, would therefore, be confined to the Arabian Sea and were known to have been deployed in the Western Fleet's area of operations. The Daphnes were among the most modern conventional submarines in the world at that time and posed a serious threat to the Indian ships. Pitted as it was against probably the best conventional underwater attacker at that time, the Indian Navy still decided that the risk was well worth taking. The missile would be its main surface weapon as it would enable

the Indian Navy's task force to rout the enemy in the high seas or off his harbour with little risk of damage to its bigger ships. Guns, which had been the main armament of warships so far, would only play a supporting role in this war.

When the Fleet was about 210 nautical miles south of Karachi on the evening of 3 December 1971, three Pak reconnaissance aircraft appeared and commenced shadowing the Fleet from different sectors while remaining outside the ship's gun range(18). As the ships started tracking the aircraft visually, a signal was received informing the Fleet of the outbreak of hostilities with Pakistan and of the pre-emptive strike made by PAF aircraft on some of the Indian airfields. Since the arrival of Pak reconnaissance aircraft over the Western Fleet coincided with the outbreak of hostilities, it was feared that in all probability Pakistan had advance information on the position and movement of the Fleet and that the PAF either planned to carry out an air strike that evening or at dawn the next morning, or that the Daphne class submarines, capable of moving at high speed on the surface, would be guided to the Fleet to carry out a strike that night or the following day.

No air strike had, however, materialised by sunset. But the shadowing by Pak aircraft continued during the dark hours of the 3/4 December night. In order to shake off the shadowing aircraft and forestall an air or submarine strike on the Fleet at the very commencement of hostilities, the ships were split into two divergent groups under cover of darkness to confuse the enemy. The two forces would regroup the following day and proceed north-westward once again, having ensured that the position, course and speed of the Fleet were not compromised. Besides, this manoeuvre would not only increase the distance from the enemy air bases and possible submarine waiting areas but also divert the enemy from another operation. Operation Trident, which was to become a 'seamark' in the history of naval operations, was being launched at that time to strike Karachi. The diversion produced the desired result and at about 0200 hrs on 4 December 1971, the last of the shadowing aircraft disappeared from the radar screens of the ships of both groups.

On the morning of 4 December 1971, while the two groups of the Fleet were proceeding to rejoin two ships gained firm submarine contact on their sonar (sound ranging device for the detection of underwater objects). The ships continued to seek and attack the elusive submarine for 11 hrs till 2230 hrs that night. The submarine, however, escaped and even the extent of damage suffered by her could not be ascertained as

it had become too dark to look for any tell-tale evidence of damage such as an oil slick, debris or any other flotsam.

The two groups joined up on the evening of 4 December 1971 but INS Kuthar became a 'hors de combat' due to an explosion in her engine room and, as ill-luck would have it, one of the missile boats, INS Vijeta, also became unserviceable(19). The Fleet could ill-afford the loss of a valuable anti-submarine escort and a missile platform at this early stage of the war, but there was no alternative to sending the disabled ships back to Bombay. Five ships had, therefore, to be detached from the Fleet - INS Kirpan and INS Sagardeep to tow the two lame ducks, and INS Khukri, another anti-submarine frigate, to escort the group back through submarine-infested waters.

Sending the Khukri to escort the four ships proved fortunate, as she gained a submarine contact on the morning of 5 December 1971. After a series of attacks by her, a loud reverberating underwater explosion was heard following which the contact was lost. Even if the submarine was not sunk, Khukri had undoubtedly thwarted an attack on the Indian ships.

But even as the main fleet of the Western Naval Command was steaming towards the enemy, the little missile boats had already struck the first resounding blow at the home base of the Pakistan Navy at Karachi.

OPERATION TRIDENT - THE FIRST ATTACK ON KARACHI(20)

Operation Trident, the missile attack on Karachi on the night of 4/5 December 1971, was an exploit to be recorded in the annals of India's naval history in letters of gold. In this operation, for the first time in their history, the tiny missile boats, boldly attacked a heavily defended enemy naval base after a long passage through submarine-infested waters covered by enemy's aerial reconnaissance and strike capability. The very novelty of the concept took the Pak naval authorities by complete surprise, and its success so demoralised them that all their plans for launching offensive naval operations were aborted, and their fleet was bottled up inside Karachi harbour throughout the period of the war.

Since the danger from the PAF was much more serious in daylight than during the dark hours, the attacking Indian warships were planned to remain outside the air strike range of Karachi upto dusk during the approach and, after the attack, the force was to withdraw at high speed so as to be again outside the strike range by dawn. To divert the PAF and to curtail its freedom of action, IAF strikes on

Karachi airfields were to take place at dusk and dawn on the night of the attack. Besides, in order to draw PAF attention away from the strike force operating from Saurashtra, the main Indian Fleet was to carry out suitable manoeuvres.

The task group that was responsible for this operation comprised two Petya class frigates, Kiltan and Katchall, and three missile boats, INS Veer, Nirghat and Nipat. INS Kiltan, and the two missile boats, INS Nipat and INS Veer had sailed from Bombay on the morning of 3 December 1971 and joined INS Katchall and INS Nirghat off Dwarka at 1300 hrs on 4 December. This task group then took evasive action and set off for Karachi at high speed after ensuring that they remained outside the PAF air strike range of 150 nautical miles until nightfall. The measures adopted by them proved completely successful, and at sunset of 4 December, enemy reconnaissance aircraft had still not detected the force.

Sunset that day was at 1812 hrs and soon darkness shrouded the area, further reducing the chances of detection. The high speed of advance itself provided the task force with a substantial degree of anti-submarine defence as no Pak submarine could chase it. Morale was high, anticipation of carrying out a successful strike mounted, and a quiet confidence pervaded the ships. Each missile boat was armed with four missiles, out of which three were to be fired on selected targets, and the fourth was to be kept in reserve to counter any Pak retaliatory action after the attack.

Before the rendezvous, INS Kiltan obtained an underwater contact at a depth of 30 fathoms between Mangrol and Navibandar, but the contact was soon lost.

Earlier, a ship had been picked up on radar at 1600 hrs and was considered to be the PNS Zulfiqar, a survey ship which was moving at an estimated speed of 21 knots. Some more radar contacts were picked up before sunset but no action was taken.

As it neared Karachi, the task group detected its first target at 2105 hrs at a range of 41 nautical miles while the group was heading northwards. A second contact was picked up about an hour later at a range of 44.5 nautical miles. Both were moving at high speed and zigzagging frequently, revealing their hostile intentions. At 2241 hrs the second contact altered course and started moving towards the task force, presumably for interception and investigation.

This ship continued coming towards the task force and was quickly reducing the distance. So, at

2313 hrs, INS Nirghat, the first missile boat, was ordered to fire a missile at her at a range of 19 nautical miles. The missile was observed to score a direct hit, causing a loud explosion. The stricken ship, however, opened up with her guns. A second missile was fired a few moments later at a range of 17 nautical miles. It also scored a direct hit, and within six minutes, the radar contact disappeared from the screen.

INS Nipat, the second missile boat, was ordered to take on the second radar contact. She fired her first missile at 2317 hrs at a range of 17.5 nautical miles. Again a direct hit was scored. Her second missile fired at this target at a range of 15 nautical miles, made another direct hit, causing a huge explosion. This ship too soon disappeared from the radar screen.

Just as these two contacts had been dealt with a third contact was detected to the north at 2326 hrs and was appreciated to be steering a southerly course at 24 knots. The task Force Commander ordered a third missile boat, INS Veer, to deal with this contact. Veer fired a missile at 0009 hrs on 5 December at a range of 16 nautical miles, hitting the target and setting it ablaze.

A few minutes earlier, at 0001 hrs on 5 December, INS Nipat had fired a missile towards Cape Monze, a prominent feature of Karachi harbour. This missile blasted a target inside the harbour and caused a major conflagration.

Having achieved his objective, at 0019 hrs, the Force Commander signalled to the units of his Force that the attack had been successfully completed and the Group was to withdraw southwards at high speed.

The Pak Air Force was expected to carry out a strike on the Force at dawn on 5 December, and hence IAF air cover for the daytime passage of the Force through the areas within the striking range of the Pak Air Force had been arranged. But the PAF made no such attempt, and the Task Force returned home without sustaining any loss or damage.

It was ascertained later that the ships sunk by the missile attack were the 'Battle Class' destroyer, PNS Khaibar, a coastal minesweeper and a Liberian merchant ship, SS Venus Challenger.

Interception of Pak signal traffic indicated that the attack caused utter confusion in Karachi. It was first thought that an air attack had taken place, and hence air raid warnings were sounded. Panic was clear from the signals intercepted, because they gave away the disposition and identity of Pak naval ships. And a desperate plea from the Pak Navy for emergency air support was turned down by the PAF, which declared it had no aircraft available. On the night of 5/6 December, when the Indian ships were nowhere in the vicinity, Pak naval ships conducting rescue operations 'detected' some Indian missile boats and opened fire and again asked for emergency air support, which was once again refused. On the morning of 6 December the PAF launched an F-86 Sabre to investigate reports of some ships at sea. This aircraft mistook a Pakistani patrol craft outside Karachi harbour to be an Indian missile boat, and sank it.

The Pakistani Air Force continued its efforts to search for and attack the Indian missile boats. Okha and the waters off the Saurashtra coast were kept under surveillance. Two air attacks were also carried out on Okha and some fuel tanks were set ablaze, thereby denying the missile boats any further use of this port as a forward base. This was, however, overcome by replenishing the boats at sea further south.

By all accounts, the brilliant and novel missile boat tactics adopted for 'Operation Trident' produced profound results. Two warships destroyed within a few minutes at the very doorsteps of their home base and within 30 hours of the start of the war, stunned the Pakistan Navy and Government. The impudent attackers' successful withdrawal without suffering any loss added insult to injury. The crippling blow suffered by the Pak Navy at the very commencement of hostilities affected its deployment so adversely and shattered its morale so completely that it eschewed all thoughts of launching offensive operations during the entire period of hostilities.

THE MAIN FLEET - SECOND ATTACK ON KARACHI

An IAF superconstellation maritime reconnaissance (MR) aircraft, which was providing MR cover to the Fleet, reported sighting a Pak merchant ship steaming northwards towards the Fleet on the evening of 4 December. The lame ducks and their towing ships and escort had by then been detached from the Fleet and sailed to Bombay. INS Mysore, the flagship of the Fleet, was then ordered to proceed towards the quarry at full speed in the hope of making a quick capture. The search, however, proved unsuccessful and since the allotted tasks were more important, the quest for the merchant ship was abandoned and the Fleet proceeded northwards once again. By the afternoon on 5 December, the residual

Fleet of eight ships had regrouped, refuelled and was proceeding towards Karachi, with the remaining missile boat as the spearhead. By midnight on 5 December, the Fleet was split into three forces and deployed for simultaneous strikes on Karachi and the Makran Coast and interception of merchant ships, to be carried out on the night of 6/7 December. The Karachi strike force comprised two frigates, INS Trishul and INS Talwar, one Petya class frigate, INS Kadmatt, and one missile boat, INS Vinash. These were all fast ships capable of sustained speeds of 25 to 30 knots and had effective anti-aircraft defence. The tanker, INS Deepak, and two escorts were deployed 300 miles off Karachi for the interception of merchant shipping and the cruiser, INS Mysore, was to carry out a strike on the Makran Coast as a diversionary measure.

The situation was reviewed on the afternoon of 6 December and the strike was called off because, it is claimed, the IAF had other pressing commitments and was not able to mount a diversionary attack on Karachi on 6 December, or to provide air cover to the Indian ships while they were returning after the attack on Karachi(21). In order to enable a second missile boat to join the Fleet from Saurashtra, the three forces were asked to regroup on the afternoon of 7 December(22). Enemy aircraft were however, shadowing the Saurashtra group of ships and it was reported that a Pak strike force of six aircraft was airborne, presumably heading for this group. As the position of the Saurashtra strike force had been compromised, the rendezvous of the forces was called off by Headquarters Western Naval Command.

By now, Pak aircraft were insistently flying over the Saurashtra coast, and the approaches to Karachi from the south had been placed under heavy air surveillance. Operation Trident having already taken place on 4 December, any further attacks on Karachi from the south or southeast was not likely to achieve the surprise so essential to an operation of this nature. It was, therefore, decided to launch the next attack from the extreme south-west and the Fleet was moved to wait for an opportune moment to carry out the attack.

Unfortunately, by the time all groups of the Fleet rejoined and refuelled on 7 December, the weather deteriorated, making it imprudent to undertake a high-speed offensive operation. The Fleet thereafter continued to steer west or north-west, and waited for the weather to improve. By the morning of 8 December, the weather considerably improved and the forces, after being refuelled, separated for the attack on Karachi and the diversionary attack on the Makran Coast on the night of 8/9 December.

The Karachi group, which comprised two fast frigates, one anti-submarine vessel and a missile boat, had been briefed that it was not likely to encounter any Pak warship outside Karachi harbour as the morale of the Pak Navy had been shattered by the earlier missile attack on the night of 4/5 December. It was reported that some merchant ships in Karachi had been anchored off Hawkes Bay, and the attacking force was ordered, therefore, to attack these ships and to fire any missile remaining unused into the harbour over the low-lying area.

As the Karachi group headed towards the Pak Navy's citadel, some radio transmissions from a source close to it were heard. A mechanised show was soon sighted in the direction from which the transmissions had been coming. It was already known that the Pak Navy was using mechanised dhows as advance scouts for reporting the approach of Indian Naval forces. The ships, therefore, opened fire on the dhow. Some petrol drums stored on her deck were set ablaze and exploded and the dhow was soon reduced to a burning hulk and disappeared from view.

Soon the zero hour approached and the attack on Karachi harbour went off as planned. The missile boat, INS Vinash, fired its full arsenal of four missiles, each one of which caused a major explosion which could both be seen and heard by the ships of the attacking force. The last missile travelled a long distance after it was launched, continued to zoom inland and finally, caused a very loud explosion and conflagration, a pillar of flame rising hundreds of feet into the night sky. When the Indian ships retired from the area, they could see these flames up to a distance of 60 nautical miles. The pilots of the IAF aircraft which went in to bomb and strafe Karachi harbour installations on the following morning, reported that the conflagration was the Kiamari oil installation which had been converted into "the biggest bloody bonfire in ASIA"(23). As reported by eye witnesses later, this fire raged "for 7 days and 7 nights, enveloping the whole of Karachi in a thick pall of smoke shutting out the sunlight for a full 3 days"(24).

The destruction of the Kiamari oil installations considerably reduced Pakistan's fuel reserves and its capacity to continue the war on land, sea or in the air. It was later learnt that, while the fourth missile destroyed the Kiamari oil installations, the first two hit merchant ships and the third hit the Pakistan Navy tanker PNS Dacca, which had been anchored close to the merchant ships. PNS Dacca was later drydocked for a considerable period for the repair of the damage suffered.

While the Karachi group was covering itself with glory, the Makran group was not lagging behind. While patrolling the area off the Makran coast on the evening of 8 December, this group rather unexpectedly encountered, south of Jiwani, the Pakistani merchant ship Madhumati masquerading as a Philippine vessel. Immediately on sighting the Indian warships, the ship altered course and broke radio silence, frantically calling Karachi and reporting the presence of the enemy. A warning broadside was then fired across the bows of Madhumati, which had the desired effect. The ship was captured, taken as prize and later brought to Bombay.

The episode saw one of those dramatic moments produced by war. When the Master of the Madhumati was produced before the Fleet Commander, Rear Admiral E.C. Kuruvila, the two immediately recognised each other and greeted each other warmly. The Pakistani had served as a sailor under Kuruvila in the Royal Indian Navy before the partition.

At 2040 hrs on the same day, about three hours after the capture of the Madhumati, two slow-flying aircraft were seen shadowing the Makran group outside its gun range. This seemed to confirm that the diversionary tactics adopted by the Fleet had worked, and the attention of the enemy had been successfully drawn away from the Karachi group.

The same night, a darkened dhow was encountered by the frigate INS Kadmat which was looking for Pak ships and was challenged. The dhow was stopped and was boarded. On being questioned, the Master stated that the dhow was coming from Dubai and was bound for Karachi, and that its entire crew was Pakistani. A search of the dhow revealed gold worth Rs.6,500,000, which had not been entered in her cargo manifest. As the ship was bound for Karachi, the gold consignment was considered contraband and was seized. The dhow, however, was released and allowed to proceed. Later, when the Fleet returned to Bombay, it did not keep the gold as war booty but handed it over to the Western Naval Command, which turned it over to the Bombay Mint for safe custody. Soon after the war, the Government of India returned the gold to the ruler of Dubai as a gesture of goodwill, thus bringing to a grand finale the 'golden' episode of the Western Fleet operations.

By the evening of 9 December, all groups of the Western Fleet had rejoined and were replenished. By the morning of 10 December, the Fleet had been continuously at sea for nine days, and some of the ships required repairs to be carried out at Bombay. Before the Fleet was redeployed for further

operations, it was decided to return to Bombay for two days of intensive defect rectification. This would also enable the Fleet to tow two rearmed missile boats for the next strike at Karachi. This was considered necessary, as it was felt that some more attacks from the southwest were called for to divert Pakistan's concentrated air activity over the southern and south-eastern approaches to Karachi.

Having sent back five ships to Bombay on 4 December, the Fleet had run short of anti-submarine frigates, and hence it was necessary to adopt some evasive measures to steer clear of the Pak submarines which were believed to have been deployed in the westward approaches to Karachi. It was, therefore, decided to maintain complete radio silence, return to the Maharashtra Coast by making landfall well south of Bombay, and reach Bombay by hugging the coast, i.e., by sailing through waters about three miles offshore where the sea was too shallow for the Pak submarines to operate.

This manoeuvre was successfully carried out and the Fleet arrived at Bombay on 13 December. The ships were quickly repaired and replenished. But by the time the Fleet was ready for the next operation, it was known that 'ceasefire was imminent and all plans for her further deployment were held in abeyance.

A unique phenomenon was witnessed after the second missile attack on Karachi on the night of 8/9 December. Neutral ships in Karachi started seeking the permission of the Government of India in Delhi for "grace and favour"(25) to leave Karachi. Besides, within a week of the commencement of hostilities, i.e., by 10 December, "all Pakistani merchant ships had put into the nearest neutral harbours, and dared not ply the high seas. All neutral ships gave Karachi a very wide berth. The Freedom of the seas was guaranteed to our shipping who went about their business without fear and when the war ended we had not lost one single merchant ship. The enemy Fleet lay bottled up and totally helpless in Karachi and dared not venture out"(26).

By now the whole of the Arabian Sea, from the Persian Gulf to Goa, was under the sway of the Western Fleet, and the blockade of the entire Pak coast was total. The Western Fleet of the Indian Navy completely and totally dominated the whole of the Arabian Sea, including the section that washed Pakistan's shores. For the first time in centuries, India truly ruled the waves, though of a comparatively restricted area. What was achieved by the Western Fleet with the limited resources at its command was a true projection of Admiral Mahan's concept of sea power.

OPERATION FALCON AGAINST THE PAK SUBMARINES (27)

An analysis of signal intercepts from the sea area northwest of Bombay before and immediately following the commencement of hostilities confirmed the deployment of Pak submarines flanking the Indian Navy's approaches to the Saurashtra coast. As already related, five ships of the Western Fleet, the Sagardeep, a tanker, Vijeta, Kirpan and Kuthar had been sent back from the operational area and had arrived at Bombay on 6 December. It was decided to clear the area by using the anti-submarine frigates to hunt down and destroy the Pak submarines.

Out of the three anti-submarine frigates, INS Khukri and INS Kirpan left Bombay on 8 December for seeking and destroying the Pak submarines to provide flank anti-submarine support to the withdrawing Trident force. Though maritime reconnaissance aircraft and Seaking anti-submarine helicopters were deployed in support of these ships, they were too few to provide continuous air cover.

On the night of 9/10 December, INS Khukri was torpedoed 35 nautical miles south-west of Diu Head. Three torpedoes hit the ship in quick succession, and it sank within minutes, taking down with her 18 officers and 176 men, including the Commanding Officer, Captain Mahendra Nath Mullah. INS Kirpan, which was in company, also heard the noise of approaching torpedoes, opened up with her anti-submarine mortars as a torpedo countermeasure, and thus avoided being struck by them.

On receiving a flash message on the sinking of the Khukri, the Western Naval Command Headquarters sailed all available ships to pick up the survivors and to hunt for the Pak submarine.

The Petya class frigate INS Katchall, which was at Jaffarabad in Saurashtra preparing for another missile attack on Karachi, joined INS Kirpan in her search for the enemy. The third anti-submarine frigate INS Kuthar, was sailed from Bombay. All available maritime reconnaissance aircraft were sent to the area in order to force the submarine to remain submerged, exhaust her batteries and eventually surface. Alize aircraft and Seaking helicopters were moved up to the Saurashtra Coast to seek and destroy the submarine. Operation Falcon, the hunt for the killer of INS Khukri was on.

The deeper waters to the south and south-west of Diu were searched immediately, as it was appreciated that the submarine would pass through this area before heading for Karachi(28). Since the destruction of the submarine had assumed priority, the Force Commander decided to carry out a search for it for the remaining hours of the night before picking up the survivors of Khukri. The search proved unsuccessful and 67 survivors of Khukri, 6 officers and 61 sailors, were picked up by INS Katchall and INS Kirpan on the morning of 10 December. While the ships were still picking up survivors, an aircraft patrolling the area picked up a disappearing radar contact which was attacked by an Alize aircraft with depth charges. Several such radar contacts were made during the long and extensive search and were attacked repeatedly with rockets, depth-charges and anti-submarine mortars. But the lucky sub appears to have escaped.

The search continued till the evening of 13 December, when all hope of finding the Pak submarine was lost, and the search was abandoned.

On 10 December, an Alize aircraft of the Indian Navy, which was on a tactical mission off Jakhau on the West Coast, was lost. This was the only aircraft lost by the Navy's air arm during the entire course of the war.

REGULATION OF MARITIME MOVEMENT

In naval warfare, the overall objective has traditionally been to deny to the enemy all the advantages of access to the sea, and to ensure for one's own side the safe and uninterrupted use of the seas for commercial as well as war purposes. Such control of the seas was the result of naval superiority, and also its visible manifestation. It involved complicated administrative regulations concerning all shipping in the area - whether enemy or neutral or one's own - and elaborate arrangements to ensure the safety of ports. The regulations of one's own shipping and the safeguarding of ports is generally called "naval control of shipping", and the regulation of enemy and neutral shipping is classed under "contraband control".

Naval Control of Shipping(29)

In exercising naval control of shipping, the Western Naval Command was charged with the task of controlling about 250 Indian merchant ships and ten times that number of sailing vessels dotting the seven seas, in order to ensure their safety during the operations.

Immediately before the commencement of hostilities, naval control of shipping was enforced and traffic to the Gujarat ports and the Persian Gulf was suspended. Ships entering the Arabian Sea were ordered to report their position, course, speed and destination and to obey routing and other instructions issued by the Command. When hostilities actually commenced, there were 38 Indian merchant ships in the Arabian Sea, six ships in Gujarat ports and 92 ships in other Indian ports on the West Coast. Some of the instructions issued to the ships were: Indian ships on passage off the Indian and Sri Lanka coasts were to proceed to the nearest Indian major port; Indian ships proceeding to foreign ports were permitted to continue their voyage; homeward bound Indian ships in the Arabian Sea were given routing instructions to avoid threatened areas; ships of all countries were prohibited from approaching within 40 nautical miles of all Indian major ports during the hours of darkness; the control of ships outside the area of influence of the Command was to be exercised through Indian missions and trade representatives abroad.

These arrangements required extensive liaison with shipowners, state and port authorities, the Director General of Shipping, the Customs, Excise and Fisheries authorities, and the Director General of Posts and Telegraphs who controlled the commercial radio stations on the coast. They also required the master, radio officers and the crew of the merchant ships and sailing vessels to be briefed and trained in damage control, fire fighting, wireless communication with naval authorities, security, etc. Suitable guidelines were issued to the masters of Indian merchant ships which incorporated detailed instructions on security measures to be adopted for the prevention of sabotage, safety precautions to be taken whilst in harbour and action to be taken at sea when attacked by Pakistani ship, aircraft or submarine.

Harbour security committees were formed at all major ports and suitable security measures instituted in accordance with the advice of naval authorities. In order to ensure continuity of operations of ports in the event of damage or sabotage, emergency operating schemes were prepared in consultation with the Navy. A 'shipping cell' was set up at Naval Headquarters which kept track of all Indian ship movements and maintained liaison with the various civil authorities. A Naval Control of Shipping Officer was positioned at Bombay for the purpose.

The only occasion when Pakistan attacked Indian merchant shipping was on 5 December 1971 when the PAF carried out an air strike on Okha. After the attack, which did no cause any damage, ships in this port were sailed to safer areas in the south.

Control of Indian shipping by the Navy and the Civil authorities was so effective that not a single ship suffered any damage throughout the war. What is more, within 7 days of the commencement of hostilities, Indian merchantmen were freely plying the seas without let or hindrance. In fact, sailing of Indian merchantmen was resumed on 9 December 1971, and ships were permitted to sail from all Indian ports except those north of Bombay. Sailing to the Persian Gulf and Gujarat ports, however, remained suspended. The effectiveness of Indian control of shipping vis-a-vis that of Pakistan is evident from the fact that on 9 December 1971, when restrictions on Indian merchantmen were lifted, there was not a single Pakistani merchantman to be found in the seas around and even neutral merchantmen in Karachi were seeking safe passage from the Government in New Delhi.

Naval control of shipping was continued till 20 December 1971, when restrictions on ships approaching ports during hours of darkness and movements of ships to Gujarat ports, except Porbandar and Veraval, were withdrawn. On 21 December 1971, traffic to the Persian Gulf and Gujarat ports was also resumed. By the end of December 1971, naval control of shipping was removed in order to enable ships to resume peacetime routines and schedules.

Contraband Control(30)

While naval control of shipping ensures safety of the country's ships and merchandise carried in these ships' Contraband Control ensures prevention of such supplies from reaching enemy ports. Reinforcements of arms, supplies and personnel to the Pakistani forces in the then East Pakistan were moved largely by sea and it was considered vital to sever this sea link between the two wings of Pakistan at the very commencement of hostilities. It was also necessary to prevent supplies essential for the Pak war effort from reaching Karachi and other ports of Pakistan.

It was appreciated that in the event of hostilities breaking out, Pakistan might change her shipping routes, disguise her merchantmen and resort to use of neutral shipping. Institution of contraband control would also prevent use of neutral shipping by the enemy. Imposing a total blockade of the entire Pak coast to isolate her from the seas would solve all the problems. The legal aspects of contraband control

and blockade were examined and plans were prepared to adopt suitable measures at short notice. Government notifications in consonance with the requirements of International Law were also prepared. An Examination Service for examination of Pak and neutral ships apprehended or intercepted was planned out in detail.

Immediately on the outbreak of hostilities, contraband control was enforced and paid rich dividends. At 0900 hrs on 4 December 1971, INS Godavari, which was patrolling an area west of the southern tip of India across the route from Colombo to the 8° and 9° Channels, had a radar contact 12 nautical miles from her position(31). The contact became visible at a range of 10 miles. Godavari had already been alerted earlier in the morning that Pak merchantman Pasni might pass through the area being patrolled by her and INS Ganga, and hence when the contact closed to 7 miles, Godavari fired a warning shot and ordered the ship to stop. Instead of stopping, the ship altered course and increased speed. A second warning shot had to be fired before the ship stopped her engines 210 miles away from Cochin, and surrendered. It was indeed the Pakistani ship Pasni. The crew was ordered to abandon the ship. Pasni's boat with the entire crew of 31 then came alongside. A boarding party of three officers and 20 men was embarked in the Pasni's boat, together with four crew members selected from the Pasni's crew, and returned to Pasni. The boarding party steamed the ship to Cochin, arriving there at 1030 hrs on 5 December, Godavari and Ganga then resumed their patrol.

Maqbool Baksh, another merchant ship, was located by Indian maritime reconnaissance (MR) aircraft on 4 December, about 350 miles south-west of Bombay. INS Krishna was sent to intercept her(32). But on the following night, the shadowing aircraft lost her, and all efforts throughout 5 December failed to locate her. Krishna was, therefore, called back and the search abandoned.

On 7 December, it was calculated that Pak merchant ship Madhumati, which had sailed from Karachi on 5 December, would be passing through the area being patrolled by the Western Fleet(33). The ship was captured on the evening of 8 December, south of the Pak port of Jiwani as already described.

Five other merchant ships were intercepted at sea. The Atlas Navigator, a Panamanian merchant ship carrying rice and bound for Karachi, was intercepted on 4 December by INS Amba which was patrolling east of the Little Basses across the usual sea-route into the Bay of Bengal. Amba did not capture the Panamanian

ship, as contraband control was yet to be enforced, and by the time that was done, the ship had taken refuge at Colombo. Some units of the Western Fleet intercepted the Swedish ship Thai off the coast of Saurashtra on 6 December. She was, however, not carrying any contraband and was released with due courtesies and allowed to proceed. On 6 December, information was received that a Norwegian ship, Toronto, was carrying contraband(34). An air search launched from Goa located and identified the ship. INS Ganga was sailed from Cochin on 7 December and intercepted the ship on 8 December. Since, however, it was found that the ship was bound for Colombo and was not carrying any contraband, she was also to proceed. Athenian, a Cyprus merchant ship, was intercepted off Bombay by units of the Western Fleet. She was carrying contraband and hence was escorted to Bombay.

A Panamanian ship Successful Day, which was carrying contraband, was intercepted by INS Katchall off Diu on 7 December and escorted to Bombay. It proved to be a most unsuccessful day for the ship.

Three neutral merchant ships, which were in Indian harbours at the time of the commencement of hostilities, were found carrying contraband. These ships were the American merchant ship Lafayette, the British merchant ship Sindhana and the Czechoslovak merchant ship Republica, and were detained at Bombay. The Contraband carried by the ships was off-loaded and all ships were released by 14 December 1971. The cargo off-loaded included 52 tons of engineering goods, 1374 tons of chemicals and medicines, 222.6 tons of food stuff, 292.38 tons of machinery, 10,819 tons of pig iron, 30.56 tons of personal effects, 0.28 ton of general cargo and 4,699 tons of wheat.

CONCLUSION

Careful preparation and coordination of plans, precise threat perception and analysis, appreciation of Pak strategy before the war and timely deployment of the Indian naval forces paid rich dividends. Offensive use of missile boats which were basically designed for defensive operations near the coast, achieved and desired element of surprise and shattered the morale of the Pak naval personnel(35). Units of the Western Fleet ran the gauntlet of the Pak Air Force, and yet not one ship was attacked from the air. The three modern Daphne class submarines of the Pak Navy which were patrolling the seas could attack only one single IN Ship. Relentless attack on every underwater contact kept the Pak submarines at bay.

The Primary task of the Western Fleet, which was to establish effective naval supremacy in the Arabian Sea, was achieved in full measure as the Pak Navy remained bottled up in the sanctuary of Karachi harbour for the entire duration of the war. The complete blockade of Karachi, the destruction of the Kiamari oil installations, the capture of Pak merchant ships right under its Navy's nose and the paralysis of its merchant shipping achieved the Western Fleet's objectives to a degree that was remarkable in the annals of naval warfare. Some of the headlines in the Lloyds Daily Bulletins during the period were(36):-

- "India has tightened the Naval noose around Pakistanis"
- "The Indian Navy is now in full control of all sea approaches to Karachi"
- "Karachi's off-shore defence have been pierced and large oil installations at Ke'amari set on fire"
- "A spokesman said that foreign vessels wanting to get out of the area of conflict should make contact with Indian Naval Units which would give them safe conduct after 'proper scrutiny'"

The outer and inner defences of Bombay harbour and other Indian ports on the West Coast succeeded in preventing penetration by Pak midget submarines or chariots. Except for a few minor targets at Okha, the entire Western seaboard remained free from Pak air attacks.

As a senior naval officer in charge of the operations put it, "while the spectacular attacks on Karachi, the sinking of the Pakistani warships and the loss of the gallant Khukri captured the nations' imagination, the real success of the naval war in the west lies in the projection of sea power across the West Arabian Sea despite our limited and over-stretched resources in the face of a most credible air, surface and underwater enemy threat".

The most important factor that contributed to the grand success of the Western Fleet was the high morale of its personnel. "Our men went into battle with gusto and covered themselves with glory. Partly this was due to the high morale resulting from the justness of the cause, partly due to the fortunes of war, partly due to the mistakes of the enemy and partly (due) to the thoroughness of our preparations(37).

The operations in the Arabian Sea earned the Navy three Maha Vir Chakras. Two of the recipients were Commander K.P. Gopal Rao, Commanding Officer of INS Kiltan, and Commander B.B. Yadav, Squadron Commander of the Missile Boats Squadron, honoured for valour displayed while leading the attacks on Karachi. The third was Captain M.N. Mulla, Commanding Officer of the Khukri, who went down with the ship after saving the lives of many of his sailors, in true naval tradition.

The Indian Navy had had few achievements to show in the post-independence operations till then. It was unleashed for the first time in the 1971 war. In its very first round, it set up a bench-mark of performance which would be difficult for it to beat, or for others to equal.

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