

Obstruction Halts Newcastle

HMAS Newcastle's Ship's Dive Team has earned a 'Bravo Zulu' from the Commander Joint Task Force 633 (CJTf633) while in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO), for conducting a complex underwater evolution to remove an obstruction from the Ship's main propeller shaft.

At sunset on 8 July, Newcastle unknowingly steamed over a submerged, free floating wire while conducting a counter terrorism patrol in the Red Sea. The wire subsequently wrapped around the Ship's main propeller shaft, sending a wave of vibrations through the Ship



*Able Seaman Marco Valensise and Able Seaman Michael McGuinness
remove wire from HMAS Newcastle's main propeller shaft.*

Able Seaman Clearance Diver Marco Valensise was one of the team members tasked with inspecting the shaft and making an initial assessment on the cause of the vibrations.

"I conducted a night dive and discovered that a wire, about two to three millimetres in diameter, had slipped in, underneath the rope guard, and was tightly wound around the propeller shaft more than 20 times," ABCD Valensise said.

Armed with underwater photographs taken by ABCD Valensise, and additional information from a second dive conducted at first light, a team of subject matter experts formulated a plan to remove the obstruction.

"We decided to use chain blocks to remove the 67 kilogram rope guard, so that we could untangle the wire underneath it. It was a little bit like the way you would lift an engine out of a car," said ABCD Valensize. "In the end, it seemed like the best way to get the job done."

The evolution was executed by Newcastle's four Clearance Divers: Petty Officers Joshua Drennan, Brenton Walters and Able Seamen Valensize and Michael McGuinness. Three other scuba-qualified personnel, Able Seaman Boatswains Mate James Whisson, Able Seaman Marine Technician Aaron Braid and Lieutenant Michael Forsythe, also rendered assistance. The group collectively spent eight hours in the water to accomplish the mission.

"It was challenging because despite being experts in underwater rigging, none of us had ever removed a rope guard before," AB McGuinness said. "However, a good plan was laid down and everyone knew what their role was, so it worked really well."

AB Valensize said that the success of the evolution was a testament to the meticulous planning that had been done before it got underway.

"It was a hard task, because there were so many things that could have gone wrong. But, in fact, it actually went really smoothly. Working dives rarely ever go that smoothly. It was a good plan," he said.

Newcastle's Commanding Officer, Commander Paul O'Grady praised the Ship's Dive Team for their efforts.

"The successful removal of the obstruction demonstrated the true value of having a robust diving capability while deployed on operations," said CMDR O'Grady. "In the Red Sea off Eritrea and Yemen, rectifying the issue with our own resources was a key factor in getting back to the mission as soon as possible. I was extremely impressed with how the team went about identifying the problem, generating solutions, and then executing the tasks safely and effectively. They showed themselves to be consummate professionals".

With the obstruction removed and the rope guard resecured, Newcastle continued counter terrorism operations in the Red Sea.

Newcastle is in the MEAO assigned to Operation SLIPPER - Australia's military contribution to the international campaign against terrorism, promotion of maritime security in the MEAO and countering piracy in the Gulf of Aden..

Newcastle's current deployment is the 55th rotation of an Australian warship to the MEAO since 1990.