

WHY THE RN DOESN'T NEED A ROYAL YACHT DUTY...ASIAN TERROR FIGHT & MORE

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Ark Futura and Esbern Snare during OPRECLIB. Photo: A. Gaden. Below: OPRECLIB boss Commodore Torben Mikelsen, who was also tactical commander of OPRECSYR in 2013-2014. Photo: Forsvargalleriet.dk. Right: The Libyan chemicals being prepared for loading onto the Ark Futura. Photo: T. Hein.



REMOVING WMD FROM HARM'S WAY

SOREN NORBY OF THE ROYAL DANISH DEFENSE COLLEGE REPORTS ON THE DANISH FLEET'S MISSION TO REMOVE CHEMICAL MATERIALS FROM LIBYA.



On August 19 this year the Danish Parliament unanimously voted to deploy the Danish frigate Absalon along with the Danish Ro-Ro freighter Ark Futura to the Mediterranean. Their destination: Libya, where the vessels and their personnel were to play a vital role in the removal of the country's remaining materials for the production of chemical weapons. Libya has been working on disposing its chemical weapons since 2004, but since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, the political situation has, to put it mildly, been unstable. The internationally recognised Libyan government, which currently does not control the entire country, asked the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to assist in disposing of several tons of chemical materials currently in its hands. The move was quickly supported by the United Nations, which together with the American government asked Denmark for help. Given Danish experiences during the successful OPRECSYR (Operation Removal of Chemical Agents from Syria) in 2013-2014 the request came as no surprise to the Danish government or the Royal Danish Navy (RDN) and was quickly given a positive reply. The remaining chemical materials in Libya were not as potent as the ones removed by the OPRECSYR while the amount of material - approximately 500 tons - was smaller. There was, however, still a fear that such material in the hands of terrorists like ISIL, which has a presence in Libya, could be used in some terrible act. The ship tasked with sailing the materials out of Libya would also need an escort in the form of the well-armed HDMS Absalon. The chemicals were collected in the port of Misrata. Due to security considerations, the

identity of the harbour from which the material was to be picked up was kept secret until after it had been completed. From there it sailed to an unknown German location for final disposal. The protection of the harbour in Libya was the responsibility of local pro-government militias but Absalon and her crew were closed up and ready for action. The overall control of the mission, named OPRECLIB (Operation Removal of Chemical Agents from Libya), was coordinated by OPWC, with its HQ in the Netherlands. Tactical control was in the hands of the Danish Commodore (one-star flag officer), Torben Mikkelsen, with the RDN's ships remaining under national control for the entire mission. The Absalon has a crew of about 120, but for this mission it was reinforced with a Danish Task Group. This consisted of 20 officers and NCOs and 90 people from the Danish customs services (operating a container scanner) along with the Navy's Special Operations Forces (the Fromandskorpset) and the Danish Emergency Management Agency. The latter group was, among other things, tasked with advising officers aboard the Ark Futura and Absalon about the proper way of handling the chemical materials. They were also ready to provide assistance to the local Libyan authorities in case of a spill of the chemical material in the harbour area. The mission is expected to have cost Danish taxpayers approximately 12 million Danish Kroner. Britain supported OPRECLIB by attaching the amphibious ship RFA Mounts Bay.

• Soren Norby is author of 'ABSALON OG ESBERN SNARE: Soværnets støtteskibe af Absalon-klassen', a profile of the RDN's Absalon Class warships.