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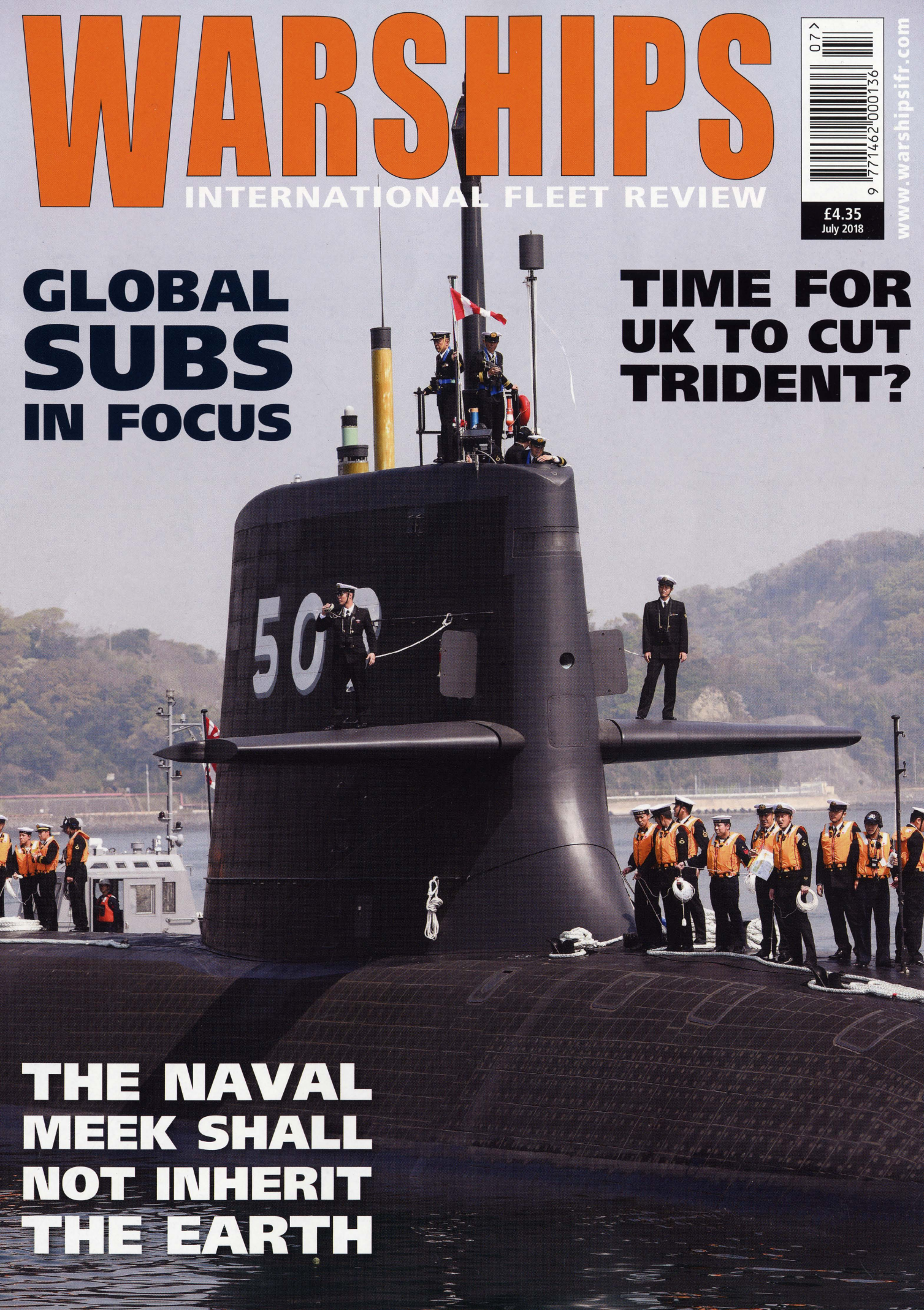


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# DANISH SUBMARINE FORCE'S FINAL MOMENT OF GLORY

FOR MANY DECADES THE ROYAL DANISH NAVY WAS ONE OF EUROPE'S LEADING EXPONENTS OF SUBMARINE OPERATIONS. THIS HAS PERHAPS BEEN FORGOTTEN SINCE THE DANES DISCARDED THEIR ENTIRE SUBMARINE FORCE IN 2004. HERE **SOREN NORBY** OF THE ROYAL DANISH DEFENCE COLLEGE TAKES A LOOK AT RECENTLY RELEASED DETAILS OF THE RDN SUBMARINE FORCE'S SWANSONG.

Manama, Bahrain, June 11, 2003: The Royal Danish Navy submarine HDMS Saelen is lifted aboard the German heavy-lift vessel Grietje. She was transported back to Denmark inside the Grietje. Photo: Lt Rick Naystätt/US Navy. Right: Saelen departs Naval Base Frederikshavn on June 10, 2002. Photo: J. Kole.







Many Danes could not hide a smile when Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's government in 2003 chose to support the US-led war against Iraq with the Danish submarine Saelen. How could one old submarine contribute to a war that - according to the television reports - would be almost exclusively fought in the Iraqi desert, far from the sea? It did not help that the details about the submarine's missions during the war were (and largely remain) classified, so the public could not learn the full story. Today - 15 years after the end of the war - some of the general details have, however, been made public. When, in the spring of 2003, President G.W. Bush decided to conduct a so-called preventive attack on Iraq, Saelen was already positioned far from Denmark. The boat had left Naval Base Frederikshavn and deployed to the eastern Mediterranean in the summer of 2002, where she participated in NATO's Operation Active Endeavour. That mission was a child of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. It aimed at preventing terrorists from using the Mediterranean to transport weapons, people and/or drugs from North Africa and into southern Europe. Operating from the Turkish naval base of Aksaz, Saelen had completed six missions in the eastern Mediterranean. The boat's intelligence-gathering equipment and the crew's long-standing experience of similar missions in the Baltic Sea during the Cold War helped produce good results. The submarine's crew expected to return to Denmark in January 2003, but instead Saelen was ordered to set course for the Gulf. While Saelen sailed towards the Gulf, the Danish Parliament decided on March 21 to place the submarine, along with the corvette Olfert Fischer - which had also participated in the 1990-1991 Gulf War - and a medical team at

the disposal of the US-led coalition. The decision to take part in what the USA called Operation Iraqi Freedom meant that Denmark was at war with another country for the first time since 1864. The Danish government's goal of sending Saelen and Olfert Fischer was to convey that it supported the American campaign against Iraq. At the same time, however, the choice of the two naval vessels was also due to a political wish to keep both the risk of loss of Danish soldiers and the price of the Danish participation to a minimum. Once in the Gulf, Saelen was tasked with keeping an eye on the Iranian navy, which had at its disposal four Russian-built Kilo Class diesel-electric submarines. There was concern in the US Navy that the Iranians would use one or more of these to attack coalition ships in the Gulf to either harm the country's old enemy, the USA, or try and create a situation Iran could exploit to occupy land areas in Iraq. Thanks to the small size of Saelen, she could operate undiscovered close to Bandar Abbas where the Iranian submarines were based. However, the Iranian Kilo remained in port throughout the war and after a cruise lasting from March 21 to April 17, Saelen returned to Bahrain. Numerous challenges had been anticipated for Saelen when it came to keeping on station. By 2003 the boat was an old lady of 38 years, but thanks to the crew's efforts and good logistic support from the Navy Material Command, technical status was generally satisfactory. On the way back to Bahrain, Saelen was, however, hit by a loss of one of her two generators. These recharged the submarine's batteries when she snorkelled or sailed on the surface with the diesel engine running. With only one working generator it would take twice as long to recharge

### HDM Saelen Stats

The submarine was built in Germany during the mid-1960s and served until 1990 in the Royal Norwegian Navy (RNoN) under the name Uthaug. She was commissioned into the RDN on August 10, 1993.

**Class:** Tumleren. Other active boats in the same class were Tumleren and Springer. **Constructor:** Rhein Stahl-Nordseewerke.

**Laid down:** May 31, 1965. **Launched:** October 3, 1965.

**Commissioned into the Danish Navy:**

October 10, 1990. **Decommissioned:** December 21, 2004.

**Displacement:** 370 tons (surfaced); 435 tons (submerged).

**Length:** 47.2 metres. **Width:** 4.7 metres. **Draught:** 3.8 metres.

**Machinery:** Two MTU 1.100 hp diesel engines, one 1.700 hp electric engine. **Maximum speed:** 10 knots (19 km/h) surfaced; 17 knots (31 km/h) submerged. **Crew:** 24. **Torpedoes:** 8 x 533mm wire-guided.

the batteries and the replacement was therefore unavoidable.

The submarine was docked in Bahrain and it was decided to replace both generators. The repairs took three weeks, and Saelen was in dock when President Bush officially declared the end of the war against Iraq on May 1, 2003.

Despite this, following replacement of the generators, Saelen was deployed again. This time it was in the northern part of the Gulf, where the submarine carried out a 14-day patrol near the Iranian port city of Bushehr. The common feature for this and the previous patrol was that only a small submarine like Saelen could accomplish the surveillance task at hand. Most of the water in the patrol area had a depth of 40 metres or less and the significantly larger and noisier American and British nuclear-powered submarines were not suited to operations in such shallow waters. Following the second patrol, it was time for Saelen to return to Denmark. The RDN had, even before the breakdown of the generator, decided that the submarine was not to sail the 13,000 km home under her own power.

Such a cruise would take between 60 and 70 days and so, in order to save time and money, the RDN chose to engage the heavy-lift ship Grietje from the German shipping company SAL. That vessel could do the trip in just 18 days with Saelen placed

securely in the cargo hold. This solution meant that the RDN saved more than five million Danish kroner, and most of the crew could return home to Denmark and their families weeks earlier than otherwise possible. Grietje arrived at Frederikshavn on June 30, and Saelen was returned to her proper element. The following day she sailed the last few hundred yards to Naval Station Frederikshavn, where the submarine and her crew - 385 days after their departure in 2002 - were received with a beautiful parade. The welcome committee included both the acting defence chief, Rear Admiral Tim Sloth Jorgensen and the head of the Danish Navy, Rear Admiral Kurt B. Jensen. The crew and the rest of the Submarine Squadron received praise from both admirals and Rear Admiral Jensen stated: "With the efforts in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf the need for continuation of the Danish submarine force is evident."

Despite such praise, less than a year later Danish politicians decided to disband their nation's submarine force. It was a sad, and somewhat surprising, conclusion to the story, arguably leaving the Iraq War deployment of 2002/03 as the Danish submarine force's finest hour. Saelen has since 2005 been a museum boat at the Royal Dockyard (Nyholm) in Copenhagen, once more out of the water, this time for good.