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LE OPERAZIONI INTERFORZE E MULTINAZIONALI NELLA STORIA MILITARE
JOINT AND COMBINED OPERATIONS IN THE HISTORY OF WARFARE
LES OPÉRATIONS MULTINATIONALES ET INTERARMÉES DANS L'HISTOIRE MILITAIRE

ACTA
TOMO II

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When Danish corvette Offert Fischer joined the UN operation against Iraq in 1990-1991, it was seen as the most significant sign of the changing security situation which Denmark and the Navy were facing following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Warsaw Pact.

Much has been much written about Offert Fischer and its participation in the first Gulf War, causing the following and in many ways larger operation - the Navy's participation in the UN embargo against Serbia and Montenegro from 1993 to 1996 - to slip into the background. This is not fair as the Navy's participation in that conflict was an important step on the road from territorial defense of the Baltic Approaches to the contemporary international - global - profile of the Danish Navy.

To date, historians have been focusing on the land war in the former Yugoslavia and not much has been written about the maritime part of the UN involvement. The operation was, however, quite interesting as it is portrayed as a modern example of Combined and Joint Operations in the History of Warfare, and this paper will attempted to describe it in details.

In the summer of 1991, the process that would eventually lead to the disintegration of the communist republic of Yugoslavia started to erupt. It all began in June 1991 when Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence. Serbia, the leading country in the Yugoslav republic, refused to recognize their independence and that quickly resulted in what was to become the bloodiest war in Europe since 1945.1

The conflict placed the rest of the world in a dilemma. The war was characterized by several instances of ethnic cleansing and massacres and it soon became difficult for both the neighboring countries and the rest of the world to stand idly by while this was happening. But at the same time, no one wanted to interfere in a war where the peacemaking effort would require a lot of resources and probably loss of own troops. The dilemma

1 The civil war in the former Yugoslavia was a highly complex conflict; here, I will "only" focus on those aspects of the conflict that are relevant to Operations MARITIME MONITOR / SHARP GUARD.
The outbreak of the civil war in Yugoslavia was overshadowed by Iraq's occupation of neighboring Kuwait. It was not until the U.S. led operation to liberate Kuwait was over in the spring of 1991 that the civil war in Yugoslavia moved to the front of the world's newspapers. When the Yugoslav civil war broke out, the Danish corvette Olaf Fischer was in the Persian Gulf participating in the multinational force enforcing the UN embargo against Iraq. Much of the know-how that the officers and crews of Olaf Fischer had gathered during their time in the Persian Gulf was employed when the three corvettes later joined the embargo against Yugoslavia. Here Olaf Fischer returns to Naval Station Holmen on September 15, 1991.

However, Resolution 713 was not supported by military force and did not stop the fighting. On May 30, 1992, the UN adopted a new resolution on the war in Yugoslavia (before the civil war was over, the UN would adopt more than 100 resolutions on the war). This new resolution, number 757, imposed a total embargo on the FRY (which by then consisted of the two countries Serbia and Montenegro) and prohibited the import and export of all goods except humanitarian aid. On paper this was a significant strengthening of the UN’s attempt to force the warring parties to stop fighting and instead seek a solution at the negotiation table. But it had little or no effect as the embargo still was not being actively enforced and until July 16, 1992, the UN had to be passive bystanders while the embargo was being broken in at least 53 cases.

The pressure on the UN to do more to stop the war increased and on June 15, 1992, the world organization took the unprecedented step of asking NATO for assistance. This led to a situation where NATO - for the first time in their history - joined an operation that probably would result in actual combat missions.

The following day, i.e. June 16, 1992, the NATO Standing Naval Force Mediterranean (STANAVFORMED) arrived in the Adriatic Sea and began an operation named MARITIME MONITOR. As the name implied, the mission was to monitor the Yugoslav coastline and ensure that UN resolutions nos. 713 and 757 were observed. Alongside Maritime Monitor, a similar operation named SHARP VIGILANCE was launched by the Western European Union (WEU). At this point in time, France was not part of the military partnership in NATO and was attempting to make the WEU a European counterpart to NATO - which is why the WEU ought to be present in the Adriatic Sea alongside NATO.

The Danish corvette Niels Juel in the Adriatic Sea with Operation Sharp Guard in the summer of 1995. The threat against NATO units during Sharp Guard came from a mix of older Warsaw Pact equipment and - to a lesser extent - more modern Western equipment. The Yugoslav navy had a number of small surface vessels, coastal submarines, land-based missiles and sea mines, the Yugoslav air force had a small number of aircraft and the Yugoslav army had placed a number of artillery batteries near the coast. Add to this the fact that the area was characterized by heavy civilian sea and air traffic, so there was a lot to keep an eye on.

The task was to prevent the warring parties from receiving weapons, fuel and other things needed for the war effort by sea. Only merchant vessels carrying food and/or medication were allowed to pass. However, the warships participating in Maritime Monitor were only allowed to monitor traffic and not to board suspicious vessels in order to inspect the cargo to name an example. Following their arrival in the Adriatic Sea, the merchant ships were queried about their cargo and destination, and subsequently monitored by the warships to check whether they proceeded to the claimed destination. On the other hand, the warships did not have the mandate to intervene where a merchant deviated from the indicated destination, for example Venice, and instead headed for Dubrovnik or another place. In such cases, all the warships could do was to report it to

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2 Maddow 2012, p. 178.  
3 It was STANAVFORMED's first operation since its establishment on April 30, 1992.  
the UN which would then submit a formal protest to the relevant Serbian, Bosnian or Croatian authorities.

In September 1992, the STANAVFORMED force was relieved by NATO's Standing Naval Force Atlantic (STANAVFORLANT) for three weeks and since Danish corvette Niels Juel was part of this force at the time, it naturally became part of the MARITIME MONITOR operation.

Map of Operation MARITIME MONITOR / SHARP GUARD, summer 1993. The coastline to be monitored covered the area from the Albanian port of Vlore in the south to Durres in the north and was divided into a number of patrol areas.

On 16 November 1992, the UN Security Council adopted a new resolution on the civil war in Yugoslavia. This Resolution - No. 787 - remedied some of the problems with the inability of the deployed forces to enforce the previous resolution and the Maritime Monitor units now had authorization to stop and inspect any vessel they thought might be in the process of violating Resolution No. 713 or No. 757. Consequently, MARITIME MONITOR became a genuine embargo operation and on the 22 November, the name was changed to MARITIME GUARD. The WEU mission was also renamed and became SHARP FENCE.

On 12 April 1993, the NATO mission was extended when the organization was tasked to enforce the UN's new no-fly zone over the former Yugoslavia. The NATO operation was named DENY FLIGHT and aircrafts from alliance immediately began patrolling the airspace over Yugoslavia. DENY FLIGHT did not directly impact the daily enforcement of the embargo in the Adriatic Sea, but the task of keeping an eye on the area was lessened when the SHARP GUARD units were given access to the air situation above the Adriatic Sea produced by NATO AWACS planes.

DENY FLIGHT came to demonstrate NATO's readiness to use force when six Serbian aircraft violated the no-flight ban on 28 February 1994. NATO - engaging in their first combat mission in history - shot down four of the six Serbian aircraft. The Serbian Air Force did not test the no-flight ban again.

On 17 April 1993, the embargo was further tightened with the passing of UN Security Council Resolution No. 820 which gave the MARITIME GUARD units the right to operate in Yugoslavian territorial waters should it become necessary in order to enforce the embargo. At the same time, an agreement was made with the Albanian government allowing NATO units to operate in Albanian waters.

Following the adoption of Resolution No. 820, on 8 June 1993 NATO and the WEU decided to merge operations MARITIME GUARD and SHARP FENCE into one joint operation under the name SHARP GUARD. This operation was launched on 15 June 1993 where an impressive naval force consisting of 21 STANAVFORMED units, seven STANAVFORLANT units and six WEU units sailed into the Adriatic Sea together.

NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) handed over the day-to-day operational control of SHARP GUARD to Italian Admiral Mario Angeli, the then Commander Allied Naval Forces Southern Europe (COMNAVSOEU) and as such head of NATO Task Force 440. During Operation SHARP GUARD, a number of officers from the WEU were assigned to the admiral's staff which was headquartered in Naples.

The SHARP GUARD units were split into three so-called Combined Task Groups (CTGs): a northern group, CTG 440.01, usually consisting of four ships, a southern group in the Otranto Strait, CTG 440.02, usually consisting of three ships, and CTG 440.03 which was a “harbor” group consisting of ships that were not on patrol but in Italian ports for R & R (Rest and Recreation) or at sea for exercise activities, naval visits or similar. The units normally rotated, with approx. ten patrol days at sea in groups one and two and then up to a week in group three engaging in the exercises necessary to keep the equipment working and the crew well-trained.

While the first two Task Groups were under the command of the STANAVFORLANT Commander and the STANAVFORMED Commander respectively, TG 440.03 came under the operational control of the WEU CONTINGENCY MARITIME FORCE (COMWEUCONMARFOR)².

Last, but not least, Admiral Angeli had at his disposal a number Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) based on Sicily and several Tornado type fighter bombers from the Italian air force base at Gioia del Colle.

It was also necessary to block access to the former Yugoslavian republics via the Danube river to complete the blockade and in order to reach this goal, the U.S. government among others allocated $1.45 million to strengthening control activities towards Serbia and acquired five small patrol boats for Romania and Bulgaria. The WEU also contributed an unknown amount to that end but it was insufficient to completely seal off the Danube and large amounts of oil reached the Serbs exploiting this gap in the embargo.

² For Denmark, joining the WEU mission was at first a problem in that on 2 June 1992, the Danish voters had voted No to the EC Maastricht Treaty and its provision stating that the WEU was to be the military arm of the EU. Thus, Danish warships under WEU control could be seen as going against the voters' decision. The problem was solved, however, by placing the WEU forces under NATO command.
DENY FLIGHT. A Ticonderoga class cruiser was deployed to the SHARP GUARD mission virtually during the whole 1993-1996 period. These units were very important as their advanced electronic equipment gave the SHARP GUARD forces direct access to the air situation above the Adriatic Sea which US aircraft and ships provided on an ongoing basis. A number of submarines also participated in SHARP GUARD but the large nuclear US submarines proved to be of limited value as their size meant that they could not operate too close to the coast.

During the 3-year long SHARP GUARD operation, 14 of NATO’s then 16 member states contributed ships to the force - the two countries not contributing were Luxembourg and Iceland, but both had a legitimate excuse: no naval ships.

The Danish Participation in Operations MARITIME MONITOR and SHARP GUARD

As previously mentioned, the Danish corvette Niels Juel had, briefly participated in the embargo as part of its participation in STANAVFORLANT 1992.

On 1 June 1993, Danish Defense Minister Haackerkop presented a “proposal for a parliamentary resolution on Danish participation in the international maritime embargo on the former Yugoslavia” (B 99) to the Danish parliament. The duration of the Danish contribution - a corvette - was supposed to be until the end of September 1993. The proposal was adopted with 118 votes in favor and none against.

B 99 made it clear that the corvette risked being faced with a situation where it would be necessary to use force to defend the ship, other task force units or to stop a blockade runner. Parliament gave the needed consent for this.

Once again, the first Danish corvette to join the operation after the adoption of B 99 was Niels Juel which participated from 14 June to 1 August, with Commander Henrik

Münsfeldt as commanding officer. He had been the commanding officer of Olbert Fischer when it participated in the (first) Gulf War, meaning that he had personal experience from such multinational operations.

The following three years, the three Niels Juel class corvettes partook in the joined SHARP GUARD mission seven times, each tour lasting three months.

A Danish boarding team boards an unknown civilian ship. Preferably, boardings were carried out during the day but all the participating Danish units were faced with situations where night boardings were necessary. The Danish corvettes were too small to have an onboard helicopter and this proved to be a problem, especially during boardings. Without a helicopter, the boarding teams had to use a rubber dinghy. This meant that the Danes could only do so-called “compliant boardings” where the captain of the civilian ship had to give the boarding team permission to come on board in advance. Furthermore, the lack of a helicopter meant that the Danish corvette could not do boardings when the sea was too rough.

A boarding could last several hours and was strenuous work. The 8 or 10 man high boardroom team was headed by an officer and was split into three groups: a bridge team, a guard team and a search team. The bridge team was to secure the ship’s bridge while the guard team guarded the ship’s crew were assembled on the deck while the search team examined the ship’s papers and cargo. Normally, two search teams would be dispatched to larger ships which would increase the team to ten men.

During the transfer of the boarding team from the corvette to the ship to be inspected, it was important that the corvette was positioned in such a way that its weapons systems - primarily the 20mm guns and machine guns - would cover the dinghy.

The task of monitoring ship traffic in the Adriatic Sea did not differ significantly from the maritime surveillance which the Danish Navy exercised in Danish, Faroese and Greenlandic waters. However, in the Adriatic Sea the threat level was of course somewhat higher than at home after the Cold War had ended. Also, the SHARP GUARD operation did not differ from the NATO exercises which the Danish Navy had participated in since the 1960’s. By 1993, a small navy like the Danish Navy had many years of experience with multinational cooperation, and even though SHARP GUARD was “the
real deal” and not an exercise, the day-to-day work did not differ much.

The Danish corvettes were - as usual - the smallest units in the task force and also the units with the shortest possible sea time. On the other hand, the corvettes were fully capable of executing the required tasks to everyone’s satisfaction.

For most of the crew, the daily routines aboard the ships were almost the same as they would have been had the corvettes been operating anywhere else in the world. But officers, the combat information specialists in the Operations Room and the boarding teams came to experience firsthand that they were part of a major international operation far from home. For the majority of the crew, the highlights were port visits in Italian cities such as Bari, Brindisi and Venice.

The Sharp Guard units were ordered to concentrate only on larger vessels violating the blockade of Yugoslavia and as such to turn the blind eye to the many speed boats and small vessels that, almost in regular service were smuggling refugees or goods between the Albanian and Italian coasts; stopping this traffic was a job for the Italian coastguard.

**Statistics**

Corvette Peter Tordenskiold’s participation in Operation SHARP GUARD from 26 July to 9 October 1993

| Duration of deployment: | 75 days |
| Days at sea: | 51 days (71 %) |
| Patrolling: | 26 days (45 %) |
| Deployment (incl. from/to Danmark): | 27 days (36 %) |
| Days in harbor: | 22 days (29 %) |
| Number of ships challenged: | 136 |
| Number of ships boarded: | 11 |
| Number of ships rerouted: | 1 |
| Total distance: | 15,000 nm |
| Oil consumption: | 850 m3 |
| Meals served: | 22,000 |
| Number of received signals: | 12,000 |
| Number of signals sent: | 1,000 |
| Crew complement: | 95: 18 officers, 11 NCOs and 66 privates and conscripts |

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**The Lido II-incident**

On 1 May 1994, the SHARP GUARD units became involved in the most serious attempt to circumvent the embargo when a Maltese tanker tried to violate the embargo. At 06:00 hours, the 45,000 ton tanker Lido II and its primarily Russian crew entered the Adriatic Sea and stated that it was on its way to Durres in Albania. However, the SHARP GUARD headquarters soon established that on 28 – 29 April the ship had reported that it was on the way to Rijeka in Croatia. This meant that the ship’s actual destination was unclear. At 06:15 hours, the authorities in Durres informed the SHARP GUARD headquarters that they were not expecting the Lido II. Consequently, the ship was reclassified to “suspicion vessel” and US cruiser Philippine Sea set a course for the ship’s position.

At 06:24 hours, the Lido II sent out a mayday signal and claimed that water was entering its engine room. The captain of the Lido II announced that his intention was to beach the ship on the Albanian coast as soon as possible to avoid an environmental disaster. The ship did not, however, head for the Albanian coast but instead steered directly for Montenegro and increased its speed to 14-15 knots.

At the same time, two Yugoslavian surface battle groups were operating in the area: to the north, a Koni class frigate and a Koncar class missile boat, and to the south, a Kotor class frigate and two other missile boats. When the Lido II started sending out mayday signals, the southern group headed towards the tanker, going approx. 25-30 knots. They soon moved out of Yugoslavian territorial waters which was unprecedented. At the same time, the SHARP GUARD units could hear the radio communication between the Lido II and the Yugoslavian warships.

British frigate Chatham and Dutch frigate Van Kinsbergen were ordered to intercept the Lido II as soon as possible and the tanker was repeatedly ordered to turn away and slow down. The captain of the Lido refused, claiming that any changes to course or speed would increase the risk of the ship sinking.

While US cruiser Philippine Sea headed towards the Maltese tanker, the US ship asked for permission to use “disabling fire” against the Lido II if it did not follow the order to stop. The request was granted. Immediately afterwards, the captain of the US cruiser passed the job on to Dutch frigate Van Kinsbergen which was closer to the Lido II. The problem was then, however, that in the US Navy, “disabling fire” means firing at the engine room while in the Dutch navy it means firing at the ship’s bridge – where the risk of killing and wounded crewmembers is considerably higher.

Luckily, it did not become necessary to open fire on the Lido II, but the incident showed the lack of - and need for - common NATO force guidelines.

At 07:15 hours, a helicopter from Van Kinsbergen transferred a Dutch boarding team to the Lido II, and five minutes later the boarding team had the tanker under control and changed its heading to southwest. Shortly after, a damage control team was transferred from the Chatham and the flooding was quickly stopped. It turned out that the flooding problem primarily was the result of the tanker’s crew having configured a pump to pump water into the engine room.
The Lido II, seen here a few years later, when it was renamed Amanda Miller.

At 08:09 hours, the Yugoslav frigate and two missile boats arrived in the area with the now stopped tanker. The nearby SHARP GUARD units noticed that a missile port was open on one of the missile boats, meaning that it was ready for immediate action. The situation became even more tense when the two missile boats placed themselves between the Van Kinsbergen and the Lido II and the Chatham and the Lido II, respectively, while the Yugoslavian frigate took position approx. 5 miles out. The Van Kinsbergen was repeatedly illuminated by the frigate's fire control radar and the ships guns were directed towards the Dutch frigate. At around 09:05 hours, one of the missile boats made a risky maneuver in front of the Chatham in that it tried to force the British frigate away. This maneuver almost resulted in a collision but the Chatham – which was following the rules of navigation - did not turn away and subsequently, the missile boat gave up.

At the same time, Italian fighter jets arrived at the scene to support the SHARP GUARD units which caused the Yugoslav naval units to retreat back to Yugoslav territorial waters. The incident petered out and the Lido II was later towed to Brindisi.

The Lido II incident was the first real attempt to break the embargo and it was the first time the Yugoslav Navy participated in a coordinated action, and even outside Yugoslav territorial waters. The general feeling in the SHARP GUARD force was that anything could happen now, and perhaps at very short notice. The general perception was that the Lido II incident had only been the first act and now the second act could happen anytime and anywhere.

The incident, however, turned out to be a one-off and not the start of a new and more confrontational policy on the part of the Yugoslav Navy. Enforcement of the embargo soon fell back into the previous routines with the occasional boarding, exercises and port visits as the only highlights in an almost boring everyday life.

The Dayton Peace Agreement

The western press had a very black & white approach to the civil war in the FRY and most newspaper articles portrayed the Serbs as the aggressor while the Bosnian and Croatian forces were described as if they just defended themselves against Serb attacks. This was one of the reasons behind the US government decision of 11 November 1994 to stop enforcing the arms embargo against Bosnia. This gave rise to a strange situation where the participating US ships did not inspect ships bound for Bosnia but also did not interfere when other SHARP GUARD-units inspected them. In reality, the new US policy did not influence the day-to-day handling of the embargo very much as Americans continued to participate in the part of the embargo that was directed against Serbia and Montenegro - and ships bound for Bosnia could be inspected by other SHARP GUARD units.

On 21 November 1995, a peace agreement was finally reached at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio. The peace agreement came into force on 14 December 1995 and after a period where everybody waited to see if the agreement held, the arms embargo against the former Yugoslavia was partially lifted on 13 March 1996. The SHARP GUARD units remained in place, ready to resume enforcement of the embargo if needed. This did not become necessary, however, and the embargo was finally lifted on 18 June. The next day, Operation SHARP GUARD was suspended.

On 1 October 1996, the UN lifted all sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro, meaning that Operation SHARP GUARD was officially over.

The participation of the Danish corvettes in Operation Sharp Guard got wide attention from the politicians and Secretary of Defense Haakonrupp visited the ships several times. In this photo, he is on board the Niels Juel in 1995, watching the boarding team practicing their pistol shooting skills on the aft deck.

When Operation SHARP GUARD was cancelled on 19 June 1996, the participating naval units had challenged 74,192 ships of which 5,851 were boarded - and 1,480 of these rerouted to a nearby Italian port for further inspection. The SHARP GUARD force captured 11 blockade-violators: seven carrying oil for Serbia and four with weapons for the Croatian forces.

This rather meager result hides the important conclusion that the embargo worked as the mere presence of the SHARP GUARD force caused the warring factions to desist from trying to smuggle contraband by sea - they found other and easier ways.
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Plus the "Søværnsorientering" magazine. May be downloaded at www.marinehist.dk

The mentioned UN resolutions can be found on the UN website at www.un.org

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