

THWARTED

MELBOURNE DETERS PIRATES

Navy frigate HMAS Melbourne helped thwart a pirate attack on Merchant Vessel CPO China in the Arabian Sea in January.



CPO China had been boarded by pirates at about 1.45pm local time and had issued a distress call. HMAS Melbourne responded to the call and closed the 267km gap between the two vessels in just over six hours.

While still in transit, Melbourne's Seahawk helicopter launched, bringing a military presence overhead the tanker much sooner.

In the mean time, the crew of CPO China had successfully secured themselves in the ship's citadel (an anti-pirate stronghold) from where they could maintain satellite communications and control the ship while waiting for help to arrive.

Melbourne's imminent arrival, the helicopter overhead and the tanker's own defences were enough to deter the pirates taking control. They aborted the attack as the Melbourne arrived on the scene – escaping to try another day.

"This is a terrific example of how Australia's maritime contribution to the Middle East Area of Operations provides another layer of security for the region and to the conduct of trade and suppression of criminal activities," then Commander of Australia's Joint Task Force 633 Major General John Cantwell said.

"One of our objectives for operations in the Middle East is to assist the efforts of the international community in reducing acts of piracy.

"Our men and women aboard HMAS Melbourne deserve recognition for their role in providing maritime security and countering piracy in the Arabian Sea.

"This is one of those occasions where their efforts have become highly visible – and rightly so," he said.

Major General Cantwell has been succeeded as Commander of Australian forces in the Middle East Area of Operations by Major General Angus Campbell – an officer with an impressive CV, including troop and squadron commands in the Special Air Service Regiment.

HMAS Melbourne is one of the Royal Australian Navy's four Adelaide-class guided missile frigates. The ship is a long-range escort, capable of area air defence, surface and undersea warfare, surveillance, reconnaissance and interdiction. The ship can counter simultaneous threats from aircraft, surface vessels and submarines.



Melbourne and her sister ships were the first RAN ships to be powered by gas turbines (jet engines). This, combined with a modern repair-by-replacement policy, has allowed both a reduced complement and a high availability for sea duty.

She has two forward-mounted retractable auxiliary propulsion units to provide a secondary means of propulsion plus excellent manoeuvrability in confined waters.

The ship is also equipped with a sophisticated computer-based command and control system and a comprehensive sensor package including the Mulloka medium-range sonar for submarine detection.

Melbourne is the lead ship for the Nulka Active Missile Decoy System, designed and manufactured in Australia. Aboriginal for 'be quick', Nulka is an expendable decoy, which hovers nearby, sending out an electronic signal that, to an incoming missile, looks like a more attractive target. This 'ghost ship' lures the missile away, thus protecting the real thing. Nulka is Australia's most successful military export.

HMAS Melbourne (Commander Michael Harris) departed Sydney for Operation Slipper, Rotation 24, in August 2010.

She conducted maritime security operations in support of Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 against illegal smuggling of weapons, drugs and human trafficking in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) and was later assigned to CTF-151 to conduct counter-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden and Somali Basin.

Commander Harris said the change in operational focus to the counter-piracy mission presented new challenges to Melbourne's crew.

Melbourne has provided an overt presence close to shore to actively deter piracy and conduct vital reconnaissance

missions of areas of high pirate activity. She has an enhanced boarding team kept at a high level of readiness to respond to acts of piracy.

The remote location of CTF-151 operations creates unique challenges for ship communications and logistics. Resupply ports are often a considerable distance from patrol areas and alternate methods of re-supply have had to be used with Melbourne being provided essential stores by a RAAF AP-3C airdrop.

Melbourne was replaced on patrol by HMAS Stewart in January.

Note: These pics are of counter-piracy exercises onboard CPO China in the days following the intervention described in the story – not actual operations against the pirates, who had long gone.

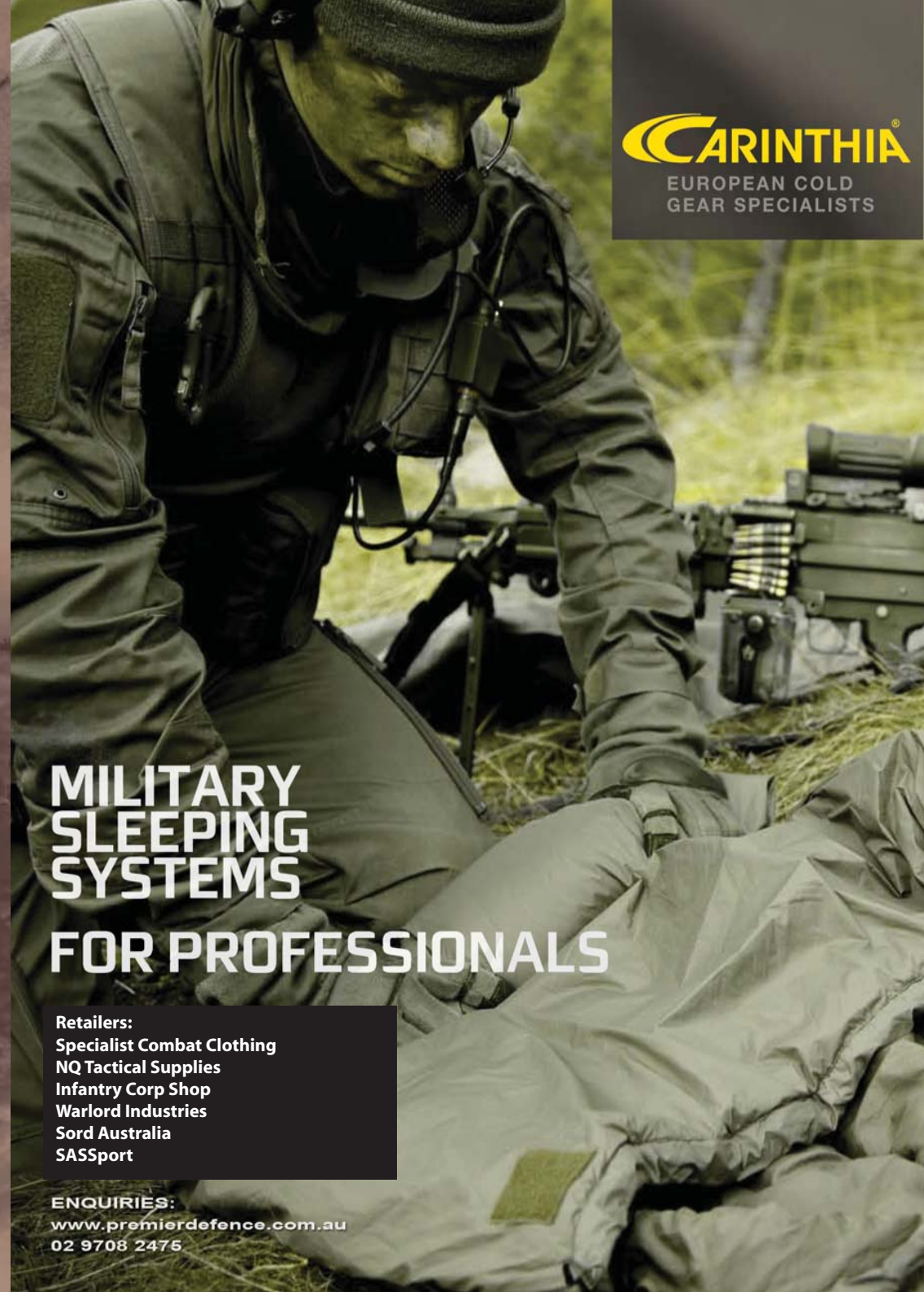




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