

NPS DELIVERS "BIG PICTURE" TO THE FLEET

By Barbara Honegger



PHC Daniel Smith

On 7 October 2001, the Navy aircrews catapulted from *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70) made history, twice over. First, they provided America's opening response to the terrorist attacks of 11 September in the first wave of Operation Enduring Freedom. They also streaked into Afghanistan with a "big picture" overview of the history, culture and politics of the Middle East and southern Asia, made possible by the Naval Postgraduate School's (NPS) Regional Security Education Program (RSEP). Through RSEP, officer leadership from the carrier battle group to the squadron level can now get the real-time, real-world context of their missions and operating areas via "live" on-board



Top, as *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70) steamed toward the Arabian Gulf in July 2001, the Regional Security Education Program provided underway briefs on the political climate of the region. Above, the first RSEP briefing team prepared the crew of *Constellation* (CV 64) for a gulf deployment in April 2001.

lectures by NPS faculty experts.

"Every port visit is a forward engagement in diplomacy, and we've always encouraged our men and women to be good overseas ambassadors," commented retired Vice Admiral Phil Quast, RSEP strategic advisor. "But after the *Cole* [DDG 67] bombing, we've got to do more. We've got to push out to them the timely information they need to be good

ambassadors, and realistically prepare them for the regions and ports they're going into."

The first week-long round of briefs were held in April 2001 on board *Constellation* (CV 64) off the coast of Australia, before the battle group deployed to the Arabian Sea. The briefing team included NPS Assistant Professor

of National Security Affairs Peter Lavoy, who focused on asymmetric conflict—involving creative, low-cost threats by terrorists and other nonstate actors against conventionally armed states—and the threat and potential responses to use of weapons of mass destruction. NPS National Security Affairs Senior Adjunct Professor Ahmad Ghoreishi gave briefs on the history, culture and internal and external threats of the gulf states. Major Bruce Oswald, Deputy Director of International Law for the Australian Defence Force, briefed on his experiences with humanitarian operations.

“The timing was almost perfect,” said *Connie’s* battle group commander Rear Admiral David Hart. “Conducting the program during an en route transit may be ideal. All personnel are present and can immediately benefit, and the audience is motivated to help shape the discussion.

This program complements and supplements the operational and tactical considerations of the battle groups, and does not detract from fleet functions.”

While en route to the Middle East later in the year, the *Carl Vinson* (CVN 70) battle group received underway briefs covering the Arabian Gulf area, the threat to the U.S. from asymmetric conflict, and terrorism and counterterrorism. Five weeks later, hijacked planes struck the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, transforming what had begun as a routine mission into a historic one. One squadron skipper aboard *Vinson* stated, “I wish I’d had this type of brief 10 years ago as a young JO. I honestly believe this exposure will benefit us in our upcoming deployment. I’m thankful, as the CO, that my wardroom got an opportunity to better understand the culture and political focus at play in the region.”

“On-board strategic situational awareness briefs are completely new and one of the most important things the Naval Postgraduate School has done to extend our

knowledge to the fleet,” Prof. Ghoreishi explained. “This is critical because despite the U.S. being the sole superpower in the Arabian Gulf today, many officers and enlisted personnel don’t know why they’re there or why the region is so important to the United States and the West. When they learn that the gulf has an estimated one trillion barrels of oil and gas reserves, and supplies 70 percent of China’s energy needs, it’s a real eye opener for

them. Because of this, the enthusiasm of our audience was obvious right from the beginning—from the admirals on down.” In addition, the NPS professors left with a greater appreciation for the at-sea environment in which their officer students operate.

An RSEP team has also briefed the *John C. Stennis* (CVN 74) and *Nimitz* (CVN 68) battle groups, as well as the *Bonhomme Richard* (LHD 6) amphibious ready group and 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special

Operations Capable).

In the future, RSEP could be expanded from the Arabian Gulf focus to include Northeast and Southeast Asia. Web-based courses are also being planned to capitalize on the interest generated by the on-board briefs, on topics such as operations other than war.

Vinson battle group commander RAdm. Tom Zelibor summed up, “RSEP

was extremely valuable to the battle group. They are the right lectures, with the right focus, at the right time.”

For more information about the Regional Security Education Program, visit www.ccc.nps.navy.mil, or contact RSEP codirectors Prof. Peter Lavoy at plavoy@nps.navy.mil or RAdm. Steve Loeffler, USN (Ret.), at steve-loeffler@cox.net. For more information about the Naval Postgraduate School, visit www.nps.navy.mil/. 



Above, left to right, RSEP team members retired VAdm. Phil Quast and Prof. Ahmad Ghoreishi meet with CO Capt. Kelley on *Constellation’s* bridge. Below, Navy and Marine Corps officers attend a brief on Arabian Gulf threats on board *Bonhomme Richard*.



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