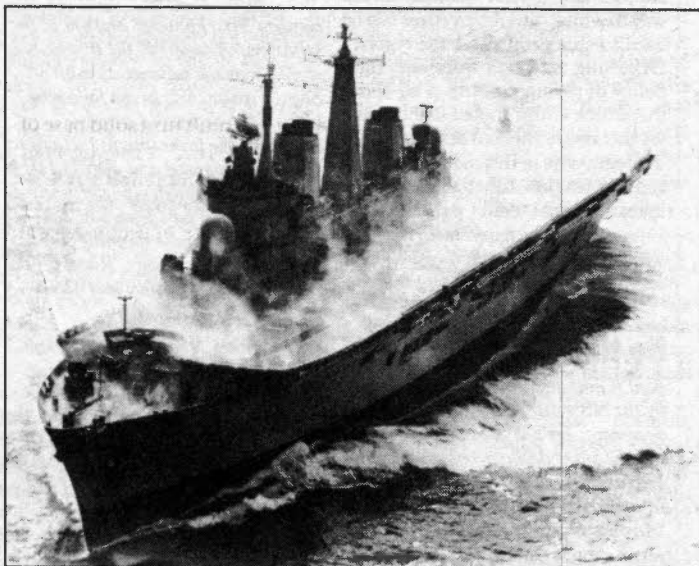


SCRUTINY

Duncan Campbell and Patrick Forbes



HMS Illustrious on the attack. But is its target nuclear-free New Zealand, sacred islands of Hawaii, or the launch of a new 'NATO' in the Pacific?

WHAT'S THE ROYAL NAVY DOING IN THE PACIFIC?

THE largest Royal Navy force to go on exercise with the Americans in the Pacific Ocean for 10 years will pass through the Panama canal early in May. British government support for US military aims at the other end of the world has now taken priority over commitments to NATO

The government has just admitted that the first mission of the Royal Navy task force, to tour the Pacific and Indian oceans from 15 April until December, will be to take part in a large US Navy exercise. A second objective of the trip, codenamed 'Global 86', is to put pressure on New Zealand's anti-nuclear government.

The US Navy exercise, RIMPAC, is the tenth in a series, but it's the first time that any nation not on the Pacific 'rim' from which it takes its name has participated.

Questioned by Labour front-bencher George Foulkes earlier this month about plans for RIMPAC, the

Defence Ministry claimed that 'the release of public information is a matter for the US Navy'.

Although information about British participation in RIMPAC was withheld until two weeks ago, full details of the British plan were leaked by Japanese Defence Ministry officials to the Tokyo newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* in October last year.

Asahi Shimbun reported that the US Navy had asked for British participation as a means of showing off a 'grand alliance against the Soviet Union' to lesser Pacific countries. The growing strength of nuclear free and pro-disarmament feelings in New Zealand and the islands of the South Pacific has fuelled the determination of some US strategists to create a formal Pacific alliance.

The US has steadily pushed Japan's so-called 'Maritime Self Defence Forces' into expanding and operating thousands of miles from the Japanese coast. RIMPAC will be joined this year by the largest-ever Japanese contingent of eight warships and a submarine.

RIMPAC's main scenario is the retaking of Hawaii, which has supposedly been occupied by hostile 'Orange' (ie, Soviet) forces. It is

widely believed that this scenario is intended to mimic an attack on bases in the Soviet Kuril Islands and Kamchatka peninsula. Such a manoeuvre would enable the US Navy to penetrate the Soviet submarine sanctuary of the Sea of Okhotsk.

The 'retaking of Hawaii' plan has also provoked international protest because of plans to bomb and shell Kaho'olawe, a Hawaiian island with a proliferation of historic sites. The island, now used by the US Navy as gunnery and bombing range, is a sacred site to native Hawaiians.

New Zealanders now fear that, after RIMPAC, there may be a provocative request by Britain for a visit to New Zealand ports by the ships of Global 86. Even if the Royal Navy avoids New Zealand, it is likely to attempt to isolate Prime Minister David Lange's anti-nuclear stance by visiting as many other South Pacific ports as possible.

Concern in New Zealand about Global 86 coincides with the visit there this week of the British Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse.

The seven ships involved in Global 86 are HMS *Illustrious*, the new aircraft carrier, a destroyer, two frigates and three support ships. During the eight-month trip, they are to visit 'the North Pacific, Far East, Australasia and Indian Ocean area.'

It was the reference in the official itinerary to 'Australasia' which caused alarm in New Zealand. According to *Asahi Shimbun*, when inviting British participation in RIMPAC it was the explicit intention of the US to apply pressure to the Lange government. Campaigners in New Zealand have since pointed out that all but one of the Global 86 ships could deploy nuclear weapons in wartime.

We have established, however, that only two of the ships are actually permitted to carry nuclear weapons in peacetime — through a process known as 'certification'. This means that both the ship and its crew must pass special tests before nuclear weapons go on board.

The only ships in the Royal Navy now certified to carry nuclear weapons in peacetime are, according to reliable defence sources, CVAs — light aircraft carriers like *Illustrious* — and Type 22 frigates, such as HMS *Beaver*.

Until the Falklands war, nuclear depth bombs were routinely carried aboard all certified ships. But as that task force sailed south in 1982 it was suddenly realised that fully three quarters of the Royal Navy's small stock of nuclear weapons were on board. These were ordered to be offloaded at Ascension Island. There was considerable alarm that the Navy had been able, under existing regulations and without further political authorisation, to carry nuclear weapons into a war zone.

Since then, even certified RN ships have seldom carried nuclear weapons. So New Zealand could

safely receive at least some of the task force ships, if asked — and thereby demonstrate that any British refusal to admit the absence of nuclear weapons on board was artificial and politically contrived. ●

Secret link intact

NEW ZEALAND is still receiving intelligence from the United States, despite refusing permission for a US Navy destroyer to enter its ports last year. In the row that ensued, the United States was widely claimed to have broken intelligence links with New Zealand.

But secret US intelligence messages sent to Australia, copies of which have been obtained by the *New Statesman*, show that intelligence information transmitted from the US Navy's Pacific headquarters in Hawaii is still available to the New Zealanders. The messages, although addressed initially to the US Navy in Canberra, were also sent to the New Zealand Navy in Wellington. The messages are dated well after cut-off was said to have occurred in April 1985.

The documents support last month's claim by Auckland University specialist Dr Peter Wills, that the alleged cut-off was more fiction than fact. Wills has obtained information about the links from the US Defence Department by using the Freedom of Information Act.

The information swapped between US and New Zealand tracking centres would have played a significant role in this week's rescue of 700 passengers from the Soviet cruise liner *Mikhail Lermontov* off the New Zealand coast. The movements of all Soviet bloc and Chinese shipping appear in international bulletins called 'OSIS Red'.

OSIS stands for the (US) Ocean Surveillance Information System, which has its headquarters near Washington and supplies Fleet Ocean Surveillance Information Centres (FOSICs) for the Pacific and Atlantic, respectively located in Hawaii and London. Separate bulletins, called OSIS White, cover all so-called 'free world' shipping movements.

In the event of an emergency like this week's sinking, the information can quickly be used to find all other shipping likely to be in the area. This appears in daily bulletins called 'CASPER'.

The messages are marked 'NOFORNEXCEPT ANZUK', which means that the information may not be passed to foreign countries other than Australia, New Zealand and the UK. It is believed that in return, New Zealand is still feeding both 'sigint' (signals intelligence) and maritime information into the Western intelligence network. ●