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# U.S. Navy Mobile Training Team Deployment to Saudi Arabia

By

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Whiting Field has long provided the foundation for professional training of U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard aviators. The Whiting Field professionals also train international flight students under international government contracts. The pilots of the Royal Saudi Naval Forces, Air Department, for example, have trained at Whiting Field since 1983.

That professionalism reached out even further when five instructor pilots from Whiting Field deployed to Saudi Arabia to help set up a training program there.

This article takes the reader on an international adventure of the land, the people, the mission, and liberty call in Saudi Arabia.

## THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

Saudi Arabia is a vast desert, 1,400 miles long and almost as wide, about the size of the United States east of the Mississippi River. It occupies about four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula. From the mountains near the Red Sea the land slopes eastward toward the Arabian Gulf, known to Americans as the Persian Gulf. During the summer the heat frequently exceeds 120 degrees in the shade, with high humidity along the coast. In winter, temperatures sometimes drop below freezing in the central and northern areas, but snow is uncommon.

According to a 1985 count, the population of Saudi Arabia is about 9.6 million. Saudi Arabians are technically Arabs, with some mixtures of Turks, Iranians, Indonesians, Indians, and Africans. Almost half the population is resident foreigners as there are large numbers of expatriate workers from North America, Europe, South Asia, and the Far East.

Saudi Arabia, dotted with the traces of impressive and forgotten dynasties, is located on ancient trade routes. The ancestors of the Saudi Arabians were in contact with many civilizations. The Bedouins were desert dwellers who raised horses and camels. They lived a nomadic life in fiercely loyal family oriented tribal groups.

An early center of Saudi Arabia was Mecca, birthplace of the prophet Mohammed in 569 AD. His book the *Koran*, is the basis for religious faith for every Muslim. It is also the foundation on which the Arabic language and Arabic culture is based.

The history of modern Saudi Arabia begins with Abul Aziz Al-Saud. He was proclaimed King in 1902 after he recaptured and reunified the country following its invasion by the Turks in the late 19th century. The country's name, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was adopted in 1932.

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Until the 1930's camel caravans traversed the Arabian Peninsula and sailing vessels traded at seaports. Pearl fishing, dates, and Bedouin camels and goats were the main sources of income.

The discovery of oil in 1938 had a dramatic impact on economic, social, and political conditions. Today Saudi Arabia is one of the world's largest producers and the biggest exporter of oil, and a major exporter of natural gas liquids. Saudi Arabia has about 15 oil fields and the country's total recoverable oil reserves are the largest in the world.

## **INTERNATIONAL RAPPORT**

Saudi Arabia and the U.S. have maintained ties since 1933 when diplomatic relations were first established with the signing of a "Provisional Agreement in Regard to Diplomatic and Consular Representation, Juridicial Protection, Commerce, and Navigation." Since 1933, the Saudi government has turned to the United States and private firms for technical expertise and assistance in developing its resources, both human and mineral. In the 1980s about 10,000 Saudi students were studying in the United States and over 45,000 American were living and working in Saudi Arabia.

The two countries established a technical assistance agreement in 1975. Under the guidance of the Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation, coordination has grown between the two countries in technical training and education, agriculture, science and technology, transportation, government administration, industrialization, and solar energy research. Additionally, the long-standing security relationship continues to be important.

The United States has sold aircraft, air-to-sea missiles, air defense weapons, military vehicles, and other defense equipment to Saudi Arabia. A U.S. military training mission, established in 1953, provides support in the use of these weapons and other security-related services to the Royal Saudi Armed Forces.

Whiting Field and its personnel continue to play a big part in U.S.-Saudi relations through the training conducted here of Saudi aviators.

The U.S. Navy has provided quality training to RSNF personnel since the 1970s, and at Whiting Field since 1983. When the need came for aviation advisors, the RSNF turning to Whiting Field and the RSNF seeks to improve their Squadrons' performance to attain the level of U.S. Navy squadrons.

## **WHITING MOBILE TRAINING TEAM**

In the Summer of 1988, the Chief of Naval Education and Training deployed a Mobile Training Team from NAS Whiting Field to Saudi Arabia. This team was the second to deploy to Saudi Arabia from the Whiting Area. The first team deployed during October and November 1987 to evaluate the status of RSNF squadrons and identify the requirements needed to raise the performance levels of the helicopter squadrons at Jeddah and Jubail, Saudi Arabia.

The 1988 team included 11 personnel from the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard stationed at Whiting Field, NAS Pensacola, NAS North Island, California and Norfolk, Virginia. Whiting Field team members included Commander Ken Metejka, Lieutenant Commander Bruce Watson, Lieutenant Bob Vendrasco, Lieutenant Tom Bailey, Captain Fred Wenger, Captain Kevin Weidel, and Master Chief Andy Hetzel.

The team's areas of expertise covered aviation maintenance, supply and safety, squadron operations, and standardization training. Their qualifications included over 180 years and 12,500 flight hours of combined naval aviation experience.

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Their specific mission was to advise and assist the RSNF in developing the internal structure, organization, and management systems of the Air Department and helicopter squadrons to function more productively.

Before departing, all team members attended the Middle East Orientation course at the Air Force Special Operations School at nearby Hurlburt Field. Designed to prepare personnel for dealing with and living in a foreign culture, the course covered the political, religious, economic, and social aspects of Saudi Arabia. This proved of great value as the team started its work in the kingdom. The team also attended a microcomputer course at the Navy Regional Data Automation Center at NAS Pensacola. This course in the basics of computer operation was necessary because five lap-top computers were a foundation for the deployment. The team was to operate in three separate locations in Saudi Arabia, and the computers and computer modems would allow them to work across the kingdom via the telephone and pass the documents the team would create at a very quick rate. The computers provided the communication system that allowed the team to tackle their large task.

The team departed October 17, 1988, and after a two-day layover in London, England, arrived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on October 20. After an RSNF headquarters staff briefing, the team members arrived at the Jeddah and Jubail Squadrons on October 23.

The team reviewed the squadrons' current organization and procedures, and became acquainted with squadron personnel. In all areas of the squadrons, the RSNF officers were enthusiastic about their jobs and desired only to be given written guidance and training for their positions. The MTT conducted an in-depth look into operations and training standardization, maintenance and supply, and aviation safety.

In the RSNF operation and training standardization departments, it was noted that some pilots were flying regularly, but not all were getting sufficient flight time to stay operationally current. The squadrons also needed an update on the type and amount of training publications they required.

The American team developed a squadron organizational manual, a RSNF NATOPS General flight and operation instruction, and an airport operating procedure manual. A helicopter aircraft commander, helicopter second pilot, helicopter recurrent training syllabus, and numerous preflight, in-flight, and post-flight checklists were written by the team in order to provide a structured approach for standardized training.

In addition, an instrument ground school syllabus was developed to cover both basic instrument and radio instrument flight procedures. A flight training instruction maneuver description guide for VFR flight maneuvers was also created.

In the aviation safety department the RSNF personnel were familiar with the principles of safety related to an operational squadron. What they lacked was the documentation and training necessary to establish and operate an effective program. Accordingly, the MTT wrote operating procedures for the RSNF air wing and squadrons' safety departments. Also, an aircraft mishap plan and safety survey checklist were developed and implemented. As the documents were written, training was conducted to teach the RSNF personnel how to follow the instructions and work together to make their safety program work.

The highlights of the deployment came during March 1981, when safety surveys were conducted at both squadrons with the assistance of personnel from the Office of the RSNF Director of Safety.

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The squadrons' maintenance departments were not organized like those of a U.S. Navy squadron. They were hampered by a duplication of effort and problems in tracking aircraft maintenance. The MTT quickly recognized the need for a complete restructuring of the maintenance departments, including establishing a maintenance control and a quality assurance division which could work together to schedule and monitor the squadron's maintenance efforts. The MTT implemented the visual identification display system for maintenance management. Numerous maintenance instructions were drafted, and procedures for the Navy Supply Center and squadron aviation supply divisions were established.

The main effort of the team centered on developing and writing the programs and instructions necessary to improve the internal structure and organization of the RSNF squadrons. The team's mission was a complete success. Of the 63 goals originally set, 61 were completed by the time the team departed and the ground work was in place for completing the remaining two. Because of the work completed, future MTTs will be able to fully utilize and implement the programs that were established and adopted by the RSNF

### LIBERTY CALL AT SAUDI ARABIA

One may sit and ponder what there was for U.S. Navy personnel to do during off-duty hours in Saudi Arabia. Actually, there was more to do than what one may suspect.

One of the major pastimes, especially near the commercial seaport of Jeddah, was shopping. Jeddah was amassed with thousands of shops of all kinds. Anything and everything from old treasures like gold, frankincense, and myrrh, to new, modern, state-of-the-art electronics could be purchased at reasonable prices.

The primary way of purchasing was through bargaining with the local shop merchant over the price. No prices were ever listed on shop items, so one had to deal directly with the merchant himself in order to buy. The art of bargaining is easily learned, and a skillful bargainer would walk away saving a good deal of money.

After a hard day of living up to the motto, "shop till you drop," most people would relax by sitting down at one of the many outdoor cafes and enjoy a *schwarma* (similar to a *gyro*) and a mixed fruit drink while watching the many bargain hunters pass by. There were many good buys on gold, brass and silver, jewelry and perfumes. Shopping for high-quality handwoven rugs of wool and silk was one of the more popular pursuits.

Another way to pass the time was to engage in some of the local water sports. Water-skiing, jet-skiing, and scuba diving were very popular. As may experienced scuba divers know, the Red Sea off Saudi offers some of the most beautiful diving in the world. The warm waters are filled with many beautifully colored fish and live coral reefs.

For the athletically inclined, many of the living compound facilities had some sort of workout center. Some had everything from basketball, tennis and racquetball courts, to free weights, nautilus equipment, saunas, and bowling alleys. Running clubs and softball teams were other favorite ways to pass the time and stay fit.

Soccer is the most popular competition sport among the Saudis. Watching soccer games is as popular among the Saudis as watching the Superbowl is in America.

The largest sporting event in the kingdom is the annual King's Cup Camel Race which is held each April in Riyadh. The race includes a one-week period of short distance races as a preliminary to the final 20 kilometer championship race. This race draws the best camel drivers from all over the kingdom to compete. The King's Cup draws international attention, and the

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results are shown on ESPN television. The races draw a big crowd each day. Seating is available to see the entire track, although a dust cloud is about all that can be seen on the backstretch. The best seats are on the VIP bus that follows the lead camels around the track so spectators can view the entire race from close range. Prizes for the riders include cash up to about \$25,000 and a huge water truck for the winner to take home to supply water in the desert.

Functions at foreign embassies and consulates are a very big part of the expatriate's social calendar. Many of the functions are by invitation-only, but several times each year there are open-house parties.

At the U.S. Consulate in Jeddah, the Marine Corps Birthday Ball was the social event of the season. The ball drew a big crowd of Western and Saudi officials. The security detachment asked all former Marines present to pose for a group photograph and nearly 70 former Marines emerged from the crowd.

Christmas and New Years were favorite times for Westerners to get together. The consulates were open to the public for church services and parties. This allowed the American training team members to join in and feel like they were still in touch with their traditions.

There is much for Westerners to do in the kingdom. This discovery for the MTT was that entertainment and adventure weren't going to track them down. "We had to make it happen," said Captain Wenger. "We had to get out and experience the culture of the local areas and find other people to share this with us."