

BEIRA PATROL

By Sam185

OVERVIEW

Following a referendum in 1964 in which Rhodesian voters had overwhelmingly backed independence, the Prime Minister of Rhodesia, Ian Smith, Unilaterally Declared Independence (UDI) from the United Kingdom on 11th November 1965.

The day after the UDI, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 216 condemning it as a declaration of independence "made by a racist minority." The United Kingdom moved to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions on what they now regarded as a rebel colony.

Following the reports of Rhodesia defying the oil embargo by sea, Britain felt pressure to take action and thus prove their commitment to sanctions. On 1st March 1966, the Royal Navy established the BEIRA PATROL and stationed HMS LOWESTOFT off Beira, directing it to prepare for intercept operations starting on 4th March. On the 6th, early warning aircraft from HMS ARK ROYAL began search operations in the Mozambique Channel. HMS RHYL and a logistical support ship were soon added.

The patrol lasted until 25th June 1975. At any time, two frigates or destroyers, with the support of land and carrier-based surveillance aircraft and auxiliary vessels, were committed to the patrol. Various British warships cruised the Mozambique Channel 20-40 miles from Beira, checking on oil tankers heading for the port.

Initially, the RN ships were to shadow and question Beira-bound tankers, and were only allowed to forcibly divert a tanker away after Britain obtained permission from its flag state. However, in the event that permission was granted, the warship was only allowed to demand it change course in the name of its flag state and fire a shot across the bow if it did not comply. The use of force was not authorised, and if the tanker refused to comply, the warship could take no more action and only follow it to within Mozambique's six-mile territorial limit. This meant that the tanker would be allowed to proceed unhindered to port.

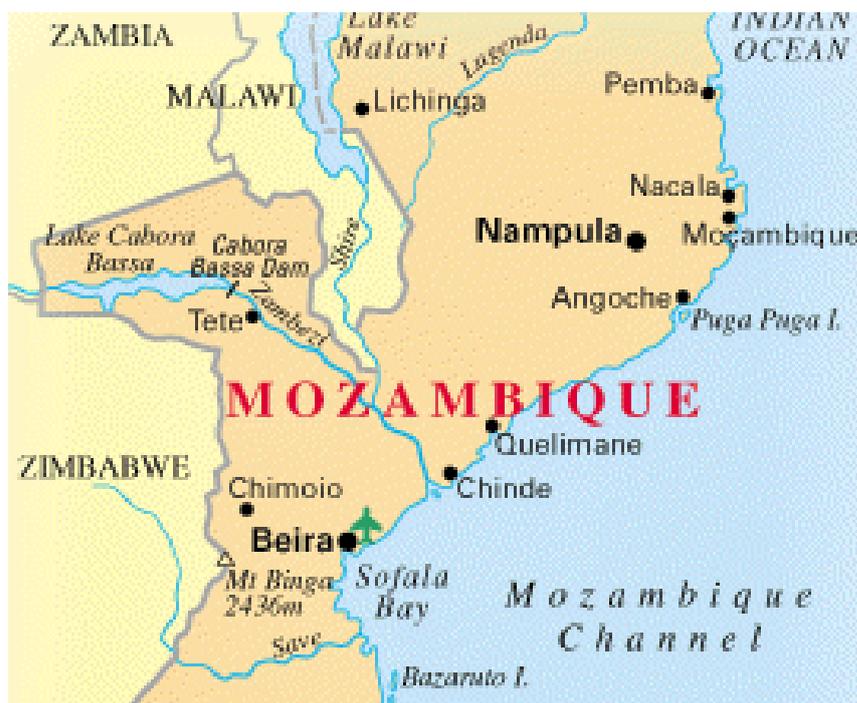
After an incident where the Greek tanker *Joanna V* freely sailed into Beira after Greece refused to grant permission, the British lobbied for UN authority to use force. The UN Security Council subsequently passed Resolution 221. However, the resolution confined the blockade to Beira and authorised only the RN to use force. As a result, the RN had to enforce the blockade without assistance, and tankers with oil for Rhodesia could freely dock at other Mozambican ports. The resolution also empowered the British to seize the *Joanna V* upon its departure from Beira if it had discharged its oil cargo there.

The rules of engagement were subsequently liberalised, but use of force was limited "to the very minimum", and MOD approval was required for the diversion of vessels. British warships also had to remain outside Mozambique's territorial waters. After an embarrassing incident involving the French tanker *Artois*, the rules of engagement were further modified, allowing the use of disabling fire.

Britain never managed to obtain UN authority allowing other navies to participate. As well as lacking UN permission, the British judged it outside their capabilities to blockade other Mozambican ports. South Africa was also capable of transporting oil to Beira by keeping having tankers cruise through South African and then Mozambican territorial waters, providing legal immunity from interception. As a result, Rhodesia continued to receive oil shipments. Rhodesia was also able to withstand the blockade by strictly rationing oil. In September 1966, it was estimated that Rhodesia received 220,000 gallons of oil daily, when it needed only 200,000 a day under its rationing policy.

The patrol was gradually reduced in several stages. In March 1971, Prime Minister Edward Heath allowed the Royal Navy to commit one warship at a time, rather than two. Three months later, the patrol lost its air component when the Malagasy Republic asked the RAF to eliminate its detachment at Majunga. After an overall drop in the number of frigates in the fleet, the Royal Navy was allowed to make the patrol intermittent. The patrol was finally eliminated on 25th June 1975, when Mozambique gained independence from Portugal and assured Britain that it would not allow transship oil to Rhodesia.

The operation had cost an estimated £100m and 76 Royal Navy ships took part in the operation. 47 oil tankers were intercepted, of which 42 were allowed to proceed. HMS SALISBURY was the last of the 76 RN ships that had supported the patrol.



Beira and the Mozambique Channel

INCIDENTS

With thanks to Geoff Dykes

Whilst the vast majority of the 76 ship patrols were uneventful, there were two in particular which WERE eventful.

HMS PLYMOUTH and *Joanna V*

On the 5th April 1966, PLYMOUTH was involved in a highly embarrassing incident played out in front of the international media. She had intercepted a Greek tanker, The *Joanna V* and under the then rules of engagement, had ordered the master to go to a port other than Beira. The Greek Government refused to turn the ship and the *Joanna V* repeatedly ignored the command and sailed on. Unable to do anything but order a diversion, PLYMOUTH eventually escorted the Greek ship into Beira itself.

After lobbying in the UN, the British eventually managed to elicit a change of the rules of engagement for subsequent interceptions. The new rules also empowered the British to arrest the *Joanna V* on leaving Beira if it could be proved that she had off loaded the crude oil cargo into the Rhodesian pipeline system. It couldn't and she wasn't

HMS MINERVA and *Artois*

On 19th December 1967, MINERVA challenged the French-flag tanker *Artois* as it made for Beira. *Artois* was not on the "innocent list," so MINERVA requested the MOD to clarify its status. Meanwhile, the tanker continued to approach Beira. MINERVA signalled "Stop or I will open fire"; *Artois* refused. By the time London finally notified the frigate that *Artois* could legitimately enter Beira, "because it was not carrying oil destined for Rhodesia," MINERVA had already fired warning shots; the tanker had ignored them and entered Mozambican territorial waters where British warships could not enter.

As a consequence the rules of engagement were changed yet again but this time, they were given teeth. If the tanker did not stop, the frigate or destroyer would take a series of escalating measures: firing across the bow with small-arms tracers, 20 or 40 mm shells, or a 4.5"/4" round; then, approaching to point-blank range and warning that it would open fire; and finally, firing non-high-explosive ammunition at the ship's funnel. If these successive measures did not stop the tanker, the ship would fire a series of anti-submarine mortar bombs set shallow about 200-yards astern of the ship. Finally, if all that failed, the unit was to open fire with 4.5"/4" service ammunition at either the bridge or the engine room or both and continue until the ship did stop.

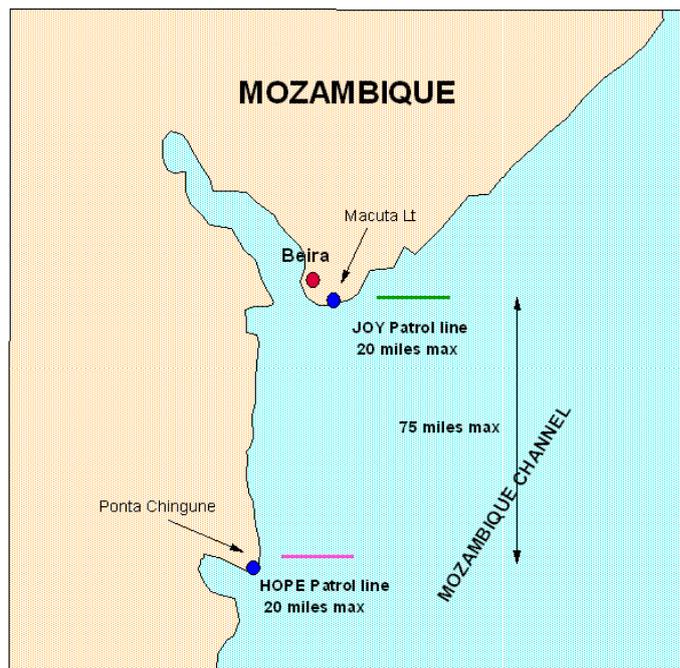
The British Delegation at the UN warned all nations of the instructions given to its warships. The new rules of engagement were apparently sufficient. After the *Artois* incident there were no more attempts to disregard the Royal Navy blockade of Beira and no further major revisions to the rules of engagement.

LIFE ON PATROL

Subsequent to the *Artois* incident, and when arriving on Beira Patrol for the first time, each Royal Navy ship exercised stopping and boarding vessels. One of the ships leaving patrol, or an RFA, would play the part of the 'baddy' in a 'resisted boarding' exercise. In the true self-deprecating style of the RN, this was known as EXERCISE ARTOIS...

Apart from Incidents previously mentioned above, life for the crews of ships on Beira Patrol was a pretty hum-drum and boring affair. Certainly in the first rush of Beira Patrol, there may well have been enough ships to patrol each line of a 'box' within the Mozambique Channel opposite Beira itself. We can assume each line was given a name and it isn't difficult to push the boundaries of imagination too much to assume these lines were called FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY and JOY.

However, by 1968 there were only two frigates or destroyers paired up on patrol and only two patrol lines. HOPE patrol lay to the South of Beira and JOY to the North and each patrol line was no more than 20 miles long.



At a guess, I imagine the westerly North-South line was originally called FAITH and the easterly South-North line was called CHARITY....

Even at a leisurely 4 knots it would take less than 5 hours for an East-West or West-East run so you would have patrolled your line at least twice each way, each day. To relieve the boredom, each ship would then have a high-speed dash north or south to swop patrol lines.

And then start again.

Apart from when your ship was relieved on patrol, which was looked forward to with much relish, there were three major events which relieved the boredom to a greater or lesser degree.

Firstly, there was the rendezvous, or RAS, with an RFA to refuel or take on stores.

Secondly was the inter-ship 'sports' competition between the two ships on patrol for The Beira Bucket. This trophy was made from a galvanised metal bucket and was decorated with the names and crests of the ships which competed in a variety of events to win this much cherished prize.



The Beira Bucket is now in the Royal Navy Museum in Portsmouth

Thirdly, and by FAR, THE most important event was The Mail Drop.

At the outset of the Beira Patrol 'conflict' the RAF had taken over an airstrip in Majunga in Northern Madagascar from where they flew Shackleton maritime patrol aircraft along the Mozambique Channel. As an aside to the patrol duties, the 'Shacks' would frequently do a low pass of one of the patrol ships and drop canisters of very welcome mail.



Shackleton Mail Drop

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