



Iron Fist From The Sea: South Africa's Seaborne Raiders 1978-1988

By Douw Steyn, Arnè Söderlund

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This seminal work documents the clandestine sea borne operations undertaken by South Africa's 4 Reconnaissance Commando Regiment. It breathtakingly reveals the versatility and effectiveness of this elite unit which worked with a range of other South African and Rhodesian forces, including the Rhodesian SAS, to engage in a range of raiding and war fighting activities. These operations saw the clandestine reconnaissance of harbors, the sinking of enemy shipping and the destruction of shore installations in Angola and Mozambique. Just some of the tasks undertaken by this extraordinary maritime capability which totaled no more than 45 operators, both black and white!

With unparalleled access to previously secret material, the authors, both of whom worked to develop 4 Recce's operating capabilities, trace the origins of the Regiment back to the 1970's when the South African's determined the need for a maritime force projection capability. They relate how maritime doctrine was developed within South Africa's wider Special Forces capability and how joint operational approaches were configured with the South African Navy. This saw the development of a range of swimmer, reconnaissance, diving and boat operator training courses, along with the design of specialist raiding craft and amphibious assault platforms, which were originated to operate from the Navy's existing shipping and submarines. All of which demonstrated the immense potential of this newly emergent force and the resourcefulness of its individual operators. Required to successfully complete a grueling selection process, the operators of 4 Recce were relentlessly tested to prove their physical and mental mettle, not to mention their leadership skills and initiative.

Steyn and Söderlund's chronological analysis of the operations undertaken by 4 Recce and the South African Navy is stunning to behold. They impartially detail the secret and specialized actions which saw both success and failure. From Cabinda on the West Coast to Tanzania on the East, 4 Recce, and whose existence and capability was largely kept secret even within the South African Defence Force, conducted numerous clandestine raids. They attacked shipping and strategic targets such as oil facilities, transport infrastructure and even ANC offices. And sometimes the raids did go wrong, spectacularly so in one instance

when two operators were killed and Captain Wynand Du Toit was captured. He was later paraded in front of the world's media, much to the embarrassment of the South African government.

This is a fascinating work and one that will enthrall anyone with an interest in Special Forces operations. Profusely illustrated with many previously unpublished photographs, it stands as a testament to the author's endeavors as, respectively, the former Operations Commander of 4 Recce and the former Commander Task Group of the SA Navy - as well as the incredible operators of 4 Recce.

Explosive and compulsive, Iron Fist from the Sea takes you right to the raging surf; to the adrenaline and fear that is sea borne raiding...

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Bibliography**

- Rank: #1162502 in Books
- Published on: 2015-01-19
- Released on: 2015-02-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.10" h x 1.00" w x 6.10" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 496 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“ ... a truly fascinating piece of work ... I was really impressed by the quality of this volume ...” *Miniature (Miniature Wargames)*

“ ... This seminal work documents the clandestine seaborne operations undertaken by South Africa’s 4 Reconnaissance Commando Regiment ... This is a fascinating work and one that will enthrall anyone with an interest in Special Forces operations ... Explosive and compulsive, *Iron Fist from the Sea* takes you right to the raging surf; to the adrenalin and fear that is seaborne raiding ...” (*Scientia Militaria*)

About the Author

Lt Col Daniel Steyn, HC, SM, MMM, PSN Daniel (Douw) Steyn joined the Army in 1974 after completing high school, and was commissioned in the Corps of Engineers in 1975. His first operational deployment came later that year during Operation SAVANNAH, the South African incursion into Angola. His actions in clearing mines under fire during the fighting at 'Bridge 14' earned him the award of the Honoris Crux decoration for gallantry. He was later mentioned in dispatches for other actions during that operation. Steyn then applied to join the Special Forces, qualifying as an operator in 1977 and served 15 years as a Special Forces operator, specializing in advanced demolitions and sabotage techniques. Joining 1 Reconnaissance Commando in Durban, he led the operational Bravo Group for the next four years. The unit's most important operations during this period were Operation AMAZON, the attack on the oil facilities in Lobito, for which he was awarded the Medal for Military Merit, and Operation KERSLIG which targeted the oil refinery in Luanda, for which he was awarded the Southern Cross Medal. He was also instrumental in training the anti-communist resistance movements in Angola (UNITA) and Mozambique (RENAMO) in the use of explosives, mines and in sabotage operations. In 1981 he was appointed as the operational commander of the Raiding Group of 4 Reconnaissance Commando, the seaborne Special Forces unit based in Langebaan in the Cape Province. There he qualifying as an attack diver and saboteur and lead a number of seaborne operations to destroy strategic military targets in Angola and Mozambique. After ten years in this demanding role, he was transferred to Special Forces HQ in Pretoria as the Research and Development Officer, assisting with the development of operational tactics and of specialised equipment research. In 1995 he was appointed as the Chief of Staff of 71 Brigade in Pretoria. He retired from the Defence Force in 1996 as a Lieutenant Colonel, and joined a major South African security company as part of their senior management in Durban. Working in the private sector has given him more quality time to spend with his family. Rear Admiral (JG) Arne Soderlund, PS, SM, MMM*, SANR Born and educated in Kimberley, South Africa, where he matriculated from Christian Brothers College, he joined the SA Navy in 1966 and has served both at sea and ashore with postings to a number of other countries during his 40 years service. In 1969 he was attached to the Argentine Navy for training aboard the Sail Training Vessel ARA Libertad and on his return serviced aboard mine sweepers as First Lieutenant and Type 12 frigates as Communications and later Anti-Submarine Warfare Officer. In late 1975 after a period in command of the diving support and torpedo recovery vessel, SAS Fleur, he was appointed to the strike craft project in Israel where he commissioned the second strike craft P1562 (SAS P.W. Botha and later Shaka) as First Lieutenant and Operations Officer. In early 1980 he was appointed as the first Captain of SAS Oswald Pirow (later Rene Sethren). After serving as a DS at the Naval Staff College and later the SA Defence College as well as a four year appointment to Chief of Staff Intelligence, he was appointed Naval and Military Attaché (later Adviser) in London from 1994 to 1997. Promoted Commodore (later R Adm (JG)) in the post of standing CTG in the SAN in 1997, he took part in the transformation process, becoming Director Fleet Force Preparation on the formation of Fleet Command.

Married to Lyn for 43 years with three daughters and three granddaughters, he retired from full-time service in May 2006 and joined the SA Naval Reserves where he still serves. He has edited a number of naval and maritime publications including SA Navy News and was co-author of a definitive book on South Africa's Navy. He currently runs the Naval Museum Submarine SAS Assegai (ex Johanna van der Merwe).

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