



"This is me and LEUT Mat Bradley. We had transferred CJLOG (MAJGEN Haddad) and COMAST (RADM Bonser) to Khor Az Ubayr Heliport Facility (which was at the centre of a large ammunition storage and assembly centre. The CDT3 team were conducting EOD - there were tonnes and tonnes of ordnance lying around and the facility had been ransacked by the locals looking for building materials (took the wood, wire and sheet metal and left the ammo!). Mat and I were just hanging out waiting for the VIPs to return.

As the VIPs appeared on the horizon heading back to us (around 1330-ish), we kicked to old girl into life, except the number one ECU wouldn't start. Lots of whirr but no clack-clack. It was clear to me that the High Energy Igniter Unit (HEIU) or the igniter lead was broken.

Feeling the pressure of the impending arrival of the VIPs and their onwards program, along with the fact that this was a particularly unwise place to break down... I decided to climb up and give the requisite parts a technical tap with a large piece of torn apart 76mm shell (what was I thinking). Clearly this had no effect on the start - we were stuck!. But as I was tapping away on the top of the aircraft, two USMC CH-46s flew past at low level. The lead aircraft swung around and landed alongside us. I climbed down and greeted the ACM/Mech who asked if we needed any assistance. I told him about my engine problem and he said he was a hydraulics guy and was willing to have a look. I said thank very much and asked him just how much he knew about gas turbine engines - he said "nothing, I'm a hydraulics guy, but I can ask my Captain". I said thanks very much...

A few moments passed and he returns and says there's not much they can do about the helicopter but asked if there was anything else they could help with. I look across at the two VIPs now asking lots of questions about why the aircraft wasn't running, and I said, "Sure, I've got two VIP 2 stars that need to get to Camp Doha in Kuwait City". He said that they were going to Camp Doha. He then raced off to his Captain to check - when the ACMN/Mech returns he said "We can do that sir, but what's in it for us...?". I gave him the look and then said just wait here. I turned around and I walked over to Jeff Weber (my Aircrewman) and told him to go to the bag of Iraqi weapons we had in the back of the aircraft and get the rustiest, banged up one we had. Jeff returned with the worst looking AK-47 you could imagine. I handed it to the USMC chap with a big smile and he was ecstatic!. At this point I realised that the two VIPs were watching the entire transaction take place. I walked over to them and explained that we had worked out

an excellent alternative arrangement for their trip to Kuwait. They smiled, knowingly, yet grateful to be back on schedule.

Before he left, I asked the SCMN/Mech what made his Captain turn around and land. He said "Well Sir, as we went past we looked down and saw your ass hanging out the top of that helo and my Captain said, 'that's not right', and he turned around and landed". Turns out the Captain had completed an exchange tour with the RN flying Mk4 Junglies a couple of years earlier and had recognised the nature of the predicament.

Sadly, I didn't get the names of either the Captain or the ACMN/Mech... but I think of them very fondly - legends that saved the VIP part of the day - and who demonstrated the bond of service and connection among aviators.

Once the VIPs were gone I then had to call the RN Mk4 SQN working at Basra International Airport. I was put through to the Senior Pilot. I told him about our problem and he reverted to A grade Senior Pilot - "How do you know you have a HEIU problem?, he said almost indignantly. To this I broke into, how shall I say, no nonsense Aussie straight forwardness - "Listen mate, I'm a 3000hour Sea King pilot, and Maintenance Test Pilot and a B Cat QHl. I know what the hell I'm talking about!". He responds, very pleasantly, "Oh, in that case, right-o old chap, leave it with me." He got some more details about our location and off he went.

About 40 minutes later a couple of RAF land Rovers roll into the site with some ADGs and a RAF Engineer. We had been using SATCOM for our calls, and this young FLTLT pulls out a Nokia 3310 mobile phone. We look at him like he's talking into a rock (don't you know this a war zone!?). He sees our look and says - "Hey, they weren't dumb enough to take down the mobile phone network!" We were amazed having just assumed that our mobiles would be useless on the ground in Iraq. The FLTLT coordinated some support with the CDs and then left. He did leave me with the mobile phone which proved useful for me to contact our platform engineer back in Nowra to seek the approval for the RN maintainers to work on the aircraft.

A short while later a Mk4 Sea King arrived and dropped off two maintainers with the gear to repair our aircraft. This took a number of hours and we were eventually ready to lift at around 2300 - a long day and we were now well outside our crew duty limits. We discussed the option of staying the night on the ground but the Divers were absolutely clear that that was a poor option - they clearly did not like the idea of having to babysit four RAN birdies and their aircraft for any longer than they had to! We completed a quick knee pad risk assessment, completed a brown out/IFR departure from the site (having made a pretty good assessment of the obstacles during daylight, and headed up to Basra. The RN OPS team wanted their maintainers back and had assured us that there was a T-Aid set up on the main runway.

The short trip to Basra was uneventful - there were lights on in the city - but we couldn't see any T-Aid on the runway. This is where the quality of Mat Bradleys work shone through. He stated that he could see the entire outline of all runways and taxiways on his radar - they were all on raised berms. So we cooked up a Helicopter Controlled Approach to the threshold of the main North-South Runway terminating at the five hinged foot point - where we found a beautifully laid out T-Aid... in Infra Red Cyalumes. The Brit, not inappropriately, thought we would be on Night Vision Goggles like every other western military force in theatre.... Not us! We taxied in, dropped our pax, returned the mobile phone and headed back to KANIMBLA. I then received a bollocking because I would not be able to conduct a RAS VERTREP serial the next morning due to Crew Duty limits.... But that's another story...

Paul Moggach, Flight Commander HMAS Kanimbla Flight 1.