

## **NAVAL SQUADRON RETURN TO BACK PEACE PROCESS IN IRAQ**

845 Naval Air Squadron, has returned to Iraq to support the stabilisation and peace process within the Country after two years, following their part in the successful invasion in 2003, leading the amphibious assault on Al Faw peninsula.

Based in Basrah, the Squadrons' primary role is to support the Multinational Forces in the South Eastern area of Iraq which includes conducting troop moves, reconnaissance, and road convoy protection. A regular task is to carryout a tactic known as Eagle Vehicle Control Points.

This involves the insertion troops onto a roadside, normally at night, during which time they search for illegal activity, including the trafficking of weapons, as well as providing a deterrent. They also provide a helicopter for Incident Response Tasking (IRT).

The main role of IRT is to respond to medical emergencies, transporting casualties to the local army field hospital, the speed in which the IRT aircraft can be on the scene of an accident has already led to several lives being saved.

Fifty personnel are deployed to support four aircraft, which include aircrew, maintainers and support staff. They operate as part of the Joint Helicopter Force (Iraq), together with Army Lynx and RAF Chinook and Puma aircraft. 845 Squadron, will be in theatre until May, when they hand over to their sister Squadron, 846 NAS.

Lt Punch, one of the pilots, says it is an exciting time to be in Iraq: "It was obviously hard to be away from friends and family over the Christmas period, but we are also fortunate to be in Iraq at such a significant time. The elections in January should prove momentous for the people of this country, and our primary task during the forthcoming weeks is to assist in their smooth running."

It has been a successful time in Iraq for 845 Squadron so far. During the first seven weeks in theatre we have flown approximately 250 hours, which is about twice what we would normally achieve in the UK. The engineers have worked hard to produce impressive serviceability and to date we have achieved every flight we have been asked to perform.

The area of operation for British forces covers approximately 20 000 sq miles, so we have been lucky to see and operate over a large portion of the country. From what we have seen so far the general population in this area are happy with us being here.

Lt Cdr Whitfield the Detachment Commander concluded: "Due to the nature of the ground and the operational environment, helicopters have an important part to play in the overall success of the mission, and I am proud of what 845 NAS is contributing to the overall effort during these challenging times in Iraq."