



## NURC: CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS IN OCEAN RESEARCH AND OPERATIONS

BY PETER RANELLI

# A Little History of the NATO Undersea Research Centre

In 1957, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, inspired by recent developments in the Cold War, recognized the need to develop collaborative efforts in science and technology to improve national efforts. Advances in Soviet submarine capabilities resulted in plans to form a multinational research center that would focus on new technologies for anti-submarine warfare (ASW). The Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic (SACLANT), approved the new institution in June 1958. The United States Secretary of Defense provided funding to get the institution started until NATO multinational funding could be obtained. NATO accepted Italy's offer of laboratory and other facilities within the La Spezia naval base, and the SACLANT ASW Research Centre was commissioned on May 2, 1959, to provide scientific and technical advice in the field of anti-submarine warfare and to respond to the needs of NATO nations and maritime commands. The "Centre" has been providing this support continuously to NATO and member nations for the last 50 years.

The research program followed a unique approach from the very beginning. Partnering among nations and interdisciplinary efforts (less frequent then) have resulted in a remarkable

number of significant contributions in  
ASW as well as in other areas  
of the marine

sciences—especially for a relatively small organization. The research program evolved into a combination of strong oceanographic and environmental acoustics research, with sonar studies in a specific geographic area. These activities were supplemented with operations research studies and testing in operational NATO exercises. Today, interdisciplinary programs are common as the difficulty and expense of conducting marine science research is better recognized.

The original SACLANT ASW research center evolved as the world changed and NATO updated its responsibilities. The name has changed to reflect new areas of scientific interest, becoming the SACLANT Undersea Research Centre in the 1980s and the NATO Undersea Research Centre (NURC) in 2005. The research program has evolved as well. The original research focus on ASW expanded to encompass other maritime operations. The program now includes efforts in mine counter measures, port and harbor protection, and operational oceanography. The international partnerships and the interdis-

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ciplinary nature of the work are the constants in these efforts.

The accomplishments of the Centre may not be universally well known; due to the confidential nature of the work, its early research and many contributions were not well publicized. The articles in this issue were selected to illustrate the work and output from the Centre for people who are not familiar with it. The early days of the Centre are covered in the first articles. The major contributions to the Cold War are contained in the articles on sonar developments. The final articles provide examples of program changes over the last 10 years and a glimpse of our ongoing efforts.

Numerous contributions and outstanding achievements from the Centre over the past 50 years are due to the outstanding dedication of a highly competent, expert, international scientific staff, strong leadership, and a committed technical and support staff. The work described in this issue's articles would not have been possible

without their efforts and commitment. The Centre's research vessels have also been key to these accomplishments: the converted freighter *Aragonese* (chartered from a private Italian company from 1960–1964), *Maria Paolina G.* (also a charter, from 1964–1987), and today's *Alliance*, newly built for research and delivered in 1988 as the Centre's first NATO-owned ship.

Many people have served at the Centre, but no one exemplifies the spirit and hope more than US Navy physicist Ralph Goodman, the longest serving Centre Director, whose tenure extended from 1981 to 1987. His strong leadership and scientific mentoring touched everyone who met him, and he is still enormously revered at the Centre. Unfortunately, Ralph passed away in April 2008. This issue is dedicated to his memory and his many contributions to the marine sciences. ☞

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