

The Search for Saddam's Weapons: RAAF Inspectors with UNSCOM in the 1990s

During the first two months of 1991 an international coalition expelled Iraqi forces which had invaded the neighbouring state of Kuwait the previous August. As part of the formal ceasefire which marked the end of this First Gulf War, the United Nations (UN) Security Council laid down mandatory conditions requiring that Iraq account for, and eliminate, all its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles with a range greater than 150 kilometres, together with related items and production facilities. The United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) was set up to implement the non-nuclear provisions of Security Council Resolution 687, and to assist the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the nuclear areas.

To head UNSCOM, the UN Secretary-General appointed Ambassador Rolf Ekeus of Sweden as Executive Chairman. On 1 May the Secretary-General also appointed 20 countries—including Australia—as members of the Commission. Ekeus was replaced in July 1997 by Richard Butler of Australia, but when Butler completed his two-year term in June 1999, a successor was not appointed. Instead, the Deputy Executive Chairman (Charles Duelfer of the United States) served as officer-in-charge until the end of 1999. At that time UNSCOM was replaced by the UN Monitoring Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC).



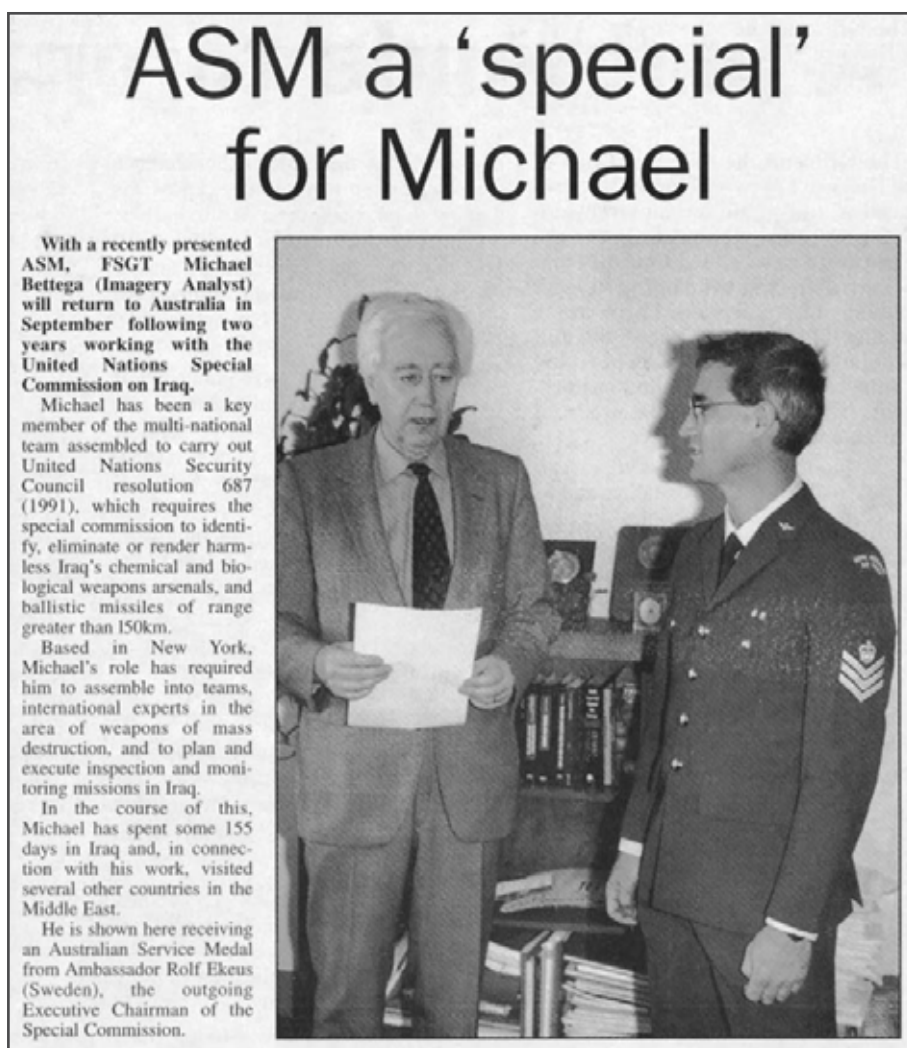
Ekeus on visit to Muthana, Iraq

Throughout the period that UNSCOM was active, Iraq attempted to thwart UNSCOM inspection teams in their efforts to ensure its compliance with UN Resolution 687 (1991). Measures taken included the harassment of UNSCOM staff and threats against the safety and security of personnel and aerial surveillance flights. The Iraqis then refused to allow UNSCOM to use its own aircraft to fly into Iraq. As late as 1997, the government of Iraq continued to block access to sites it declared to be 'sensitive', and attempted to expel American personnel working for UNSCOM. By late 1998 the Iraqis refused to allow further access by international inspectors, and the stage had been set for a Second Gulf War—the US-led invasion in 2003 which overthrew the regime of Saddam Hussein.

During the period of UNSCOM's existence, its operations were planned and managed under the direction of the Executive Chairman in New York. The staff there included technical experts and analysts, as well as political/diplomatic and administrative support personnel. An office was maintained in Bahrain which served as the assembly and training point for inspection teams proceeding into Iraq, as well as a logistics and supply point, while an office in Baghdad provided the required communications and logistical support in the field. The Baghdad office, the Baghdad Monitoring and Verification Centre (BMVC), was responsible for operating and maintaining the

monitoring system, and also housed Baghdad-based inspection teams who rotated through the centre for six months at a time.

Inspectors were selected on the basis of their technical qualifications and expertise, and were drawn from as many Member States of the UN as possible within the range of available capabilities and experience. By the end of 1999, more than 1000 individuals from over 40 countries had served on inspection teams. About 125 Australian personnel served with various UNSCOM inspection missions between 1991 and 2000, as part of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) Operation *Blazer*. ADF staff came from a variety of backgrounds and positions, including armaments, intelligence and medical. For many ADF members, including Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), it provided a unique opportunity to participate in UN operations of a different nature as well as rare insight into complex political and diplomatic issues. By the time that UNSCOM activities came to an end, the ADF had only one person still assigned to the organisation—a flight sergeant imagery analyst posted to New York.



Article from *RAAF News*, August 1997

The Office of Air Force History (OAFH) has conducted oral history interviews with several RAAF participants in UNSCOM activities. Two were imagery analysts, Flight Sergeant D. G. Glerean and Flight Sergeant G. Turrell, who were assigned to UNSCOM and deployed to Iraq as part of the aerial inspection team during 1994-95. The third was Flight Lieutenant G. M. Weller, the Australian Liaison Officer for UNSCOM who was based in Bahrain but also took part in a number of inspection visits to

Iraq during the second half of 1997. Following are edited extracts from the interviews conducted with these individuals. The full transcripts are held by OAFH and can be made available to researchers with a legitimate interest in the subject.

INTERVIEW: Squadron Leader David Glerean, 20 March 2009

I arrived in New York to take up my six-month appointment as an inspector on 26 June 1994. The next day I was taken to the UN building and introduced to the people working for UNSCOM, including the big boss heading the organisation who gave me the usual welcome brief. When I deployed into Iraq I found that the team consisted of a Canadian who was the Chief Aerial Inspector, a British photographer (Royal Navy), a German photographic interpreter, and me. The Canadian was leaving soon, so really the team was just the three of us. We also had another photographer based back in Bahrain who would pass on our reports to New York.

Going into Iraq we would always land at Habbaniya airfield, which is about an hour's drive west of Baghdad. There was an international airport at Baghdad, but Saddam Hussein was playing games with UNSCOM and he didn't want to make it too easy for the inspectors, so we landed at Habbaniya. We'd get off the aircraft and the Iraqis would be there videoing everybody with a camera. They'd take our passports, record all our details and provide us with an entry stamp. Habbaniya was a very interesting place, because the base had been attacked during the Gulf War and there were wrecked aircraft and shelters everywhere, and electronics sites full of Russian radars.

The bus drive into Baghdad was along a very nice freeway, passing surface-to-air missile and other AAA [anti-aircraft artillery] sites along the way. The UN at that time worked out of the Canal Hotel, which was later blown up in a suicide bombing. We stayed in town, at a normal commercial hotel called the Al Hyat. Our three-man team was all in this same hotel, so in the morning we'd all meet at a certain time, go to our vehicle, drive off to the Canal Hotel and begin operations. At the Canal we would pick up the camera equipment and whatever details we needed for the mission.

Then we'd go out to Rasheed Air Base, meet up with the crew of the CH-53G helicopter operated by the German Army, and discuss the mission. The helicopter crew already knew where we were going and would have submitted a flight plan with the Iraqis, so that they would close down the air defence for the areas we were flying through. The Iraqis divided up the country into different zones, but because we didn't want them to really know where we were going, we just told them we would be visiting a particular zone without specifying a place.

Once we'd spoken with the Germans we'd go out to the aircraft, get fitted with a safety harness which was attached to the floor, and then take off. We would fly at around 2000–3000 feet until we arrived at our target site. Normally we'd



German helicopter used by aerial inspectors

start off at high level, so we could do an overall shot of the facility from different angles. Then we'd go to a lower level to take sectional shots along each of the boundaries, all the way around. Then we'd go lower, around 500 feet, and start taking detailed photos of the installation, picking out any buildings and equipment that looked of real interest. Once we'd got all the photos we wanted, we'd transit back to Rasheed.

The sorties could be anywhere from Quaim, which was the furthest west that we went, all the way up north to Mosul, way down south to places like Umm Qasr, on the border—all over the place really. It could be a morning sortie or a whole day sortie, just depending on where the target was. Next we'd drive back to the Canal and send a fax to New York with brief information on how the sortie went. The photographer would develop the film and we would get the proof sheets. If it had been a full day sortie, we'd go in the next day to write up the report. It would be a case of working out the flow for the facility and anything unusual, anything that might have seemed out of place or have contravened any of the Security Council resolutions.



Work-wise we got into a good routine, but a few things stuck in my memory from the six months that I was there. I recall the time we were travelling up the Tigris River at low level in the helicopter, and I was struck by the fantastic scenery below of ancient cultivation and next thing we were flying over surface-to-air missile sites and things like that. But I think my most nerve racking experience was the time I travelled from Bahrain up to Baghdad and we were intercepted by American F-14s. Just before I arrived, the Americans had shot down a Blackhawk helicopter up north which had UN people onboard, so everyone was a bit concerned that the Americans might shoot us down as well, but that didn't happen.

One time we landed at An Nasiriyah to refuel because we were on our way to look at a site near Umm Qasr. While refuelling was in progress, I took a walk off the tarmac area and found an old shell which took my interest, and then I saw sitting nearby an old cluster bomb unit which had opened up. I was looking at that when I noticed one of the Iraqi minders travelling with us waving at me. I waved back at him, but he was becoming more and more frantic. So I called to him, 'What is it?' and he said, 'Mr. David, there are mines!' My mind immediately reverted back to the mine awareness training I'd received before I left, and I carefully picked my steps out of the minefield that I had walked into.

It was great to get out and about. Sometimes we would land at sites and were able to walk around and actually poke at things, have a look in through windows and see what these places looked like. Every flight we went on, we'd have Iraqi minders. There'd be one person sitting in the cockpit with the pilots—he'd be handling the radios and talking to the Iraqi air defence or their air command—and then in the back with us there'd be another one. We had one minder who was an ex-engineer, and this was the only job that he could find. Then we had another minder who was always air sick. The poor fellow just waved at us, as he'd be lying down on the seat trying not to throw up.

Whenever we went around town the Iraqis would have people watching us. Fridays was our day off, so if we were planning to have a look at some historical site in Baghdad we would find out from one of our minders who was looking after us on that day. Then we would say to that person, 'Look, instead of following us around, we want to go here. If we pick you up from somewhere, you can show us how to get there. We'll give you lunch and then drop you off again, and we'll go home.' They appreciated that approach as they could do their job and even received a meal, and we had a local guide for sightseeing. These guys would do that for us and it was a great arrangement.

At work, if we had to go to a sensitive area—especially anything around the airport, or parts of Baghdad where Saddam had some of his palaces—we'd get a very nervous Iraqi general come out and meet with us. The General and his staff wanted to bargain with us, the Aerial Inspection Team (AIT) and the German helicopter crew, to get us to tell him where we were going on the next sortie. Our usual practice was not to tell the minder in the helicopter of our destination until we were a couple of minutes out from the target, as we aimed to give the people on the ground as little opportunity as possible to hide things from us.

After I moved up to become Chief Aerial Inspector, I agreed on one occasion, after much discussion, to give the coordinates to where we were going as we were taking off. I did not think that this was too much of a problem, as the target was only five minutes flying time from Rasheed. You could see the relief coming over the General's face because we were doing this, but once you gave them an inch they tried to take a mile. The next time they would say, 'Oh, but last time you gave it to us the day before,' and we would have to counter that 'No, this is what we did.' With the Iraqis it was always a case of pushing the limits and it became a bit of a game.

My position was quite interesting, because although I was a NCO in the RAAF back home, there I was in charge of the AIT. I answered to the Land Commander back in Australia, who was then Major General Arnison, and then I had my own chain to the UN. At the same time, I was also operating with Iraqi generals and working in the Baghdad environment. It was a hell of an experience and certainly a big step up. But, of course, I wasn't there as a Flight Sergeant—I was there as a UN person, and there wasn't any rank. None of us were in uniform either; we wore civilian attire at all times so nobody knew what rank we were. I think that was a good thing, because we were judged on our performance and how we behaved.

Every month we would come out of Iraq for a long weekend of R&R [rest and recreation]. UNSCOM had a fairly good service of flights operating from Bahrain to Baghdad and then back again, employing a German Air Force Transall C-160. There was also a flight that went to Cyprus, which I think it was an Antonov 24 or 26. We could go on either of these, but we kept going back to Bahrain because there was a small community of expatriate Australians that we could tap into and who looked after us very well. Bahrain was a breath of fresh air after Baghdad. The first thing we'd do after we landed in Bahrain was get some Kentucky Fried and some ice cream, because those things just weren't available in Iraq.



We found that we really needed the break, because when you came back into Iraq it was obvious how the job was affecting people. You could see people who had been there too long, especially in how their temperament had changed. We arrived back refreshed after only about three or four days away, but it was important to get your team to regain their perspective and balance. The big thing that I learnt was to treat everyone as you would like to be treated yourself. That really came out, especially with the Iraqis. It was no good playing games if somebody's going to die. In fact, if you treated them with respect they could make things easier for you to do your job. The other big lesson was that the Iraqi people were just trying to survive as well.

INTERVIEW: Mr Greg Turrell, 9 April 2009

I was sent to Iraq in December of 1994, replacing David Glerean. Like him, I was given acting rank of Flight Sergeant for the duration of my posting. The position was based in Baghdad and I was appointed as the Chief Aerial Inspector. I had a team of two other people in Baghdad, a British photographer and a Canadian imagery analyst. I also had a US civilian who was based in Bahrain and did a lot of our photographic processing for us. For the first three months I was in Baghdad I had this split-team arrangement, but then I negotiated with UNSCOM in New York to move the guy in Bahrain to Baghdad so that we had everyone co-located. They finally agreed to that, so from around February 1995 we had the whole team in one place.

We worked at a place called the Canal Hotel, which was on the eastern side of Baghdad. There were several other UN groups in there as well as UNSCOM, and it was a secure compound which gave us a nice easy feel about the situation. We actually lived on the other side of town, on the western side of Baghdad near the 17th of July Bridge. That was a great location, because within a few minutes walk you had the Tigris River and you could overlook the presidential compounds of Saddam Hussein—and it was only about a 25 minute drive from there to the Canal Hotel. UNSCOM had its people dispersed in a few locations. A lot were in the Hyat Hotel in the middle of town, but some people broke away from there and went elsewhere. The Iraqis didn't like that, because the UNSCOM representatives were constantly followed and the dispersion just spread their minders thinner.

By the time I arrived, there was a reasonably well established list of about 60 sites around the country that the UN required to be monitored. My role as Chief Aerial Inspector was to visit those sites regularly to check for any changes in their status, and that could be anything from once a week to once a month, once a quarter or once a year. Many of these were the normal sort of places that would excite suspicion, such as military establishments, but others were unusual facilities like



The Canal Hotel

fertiliser plants although it became obvious pretty quickly what the issues were there. The one that was of most interest to me when I first arrived was up in Mosul. It was a refrigerator company, and the

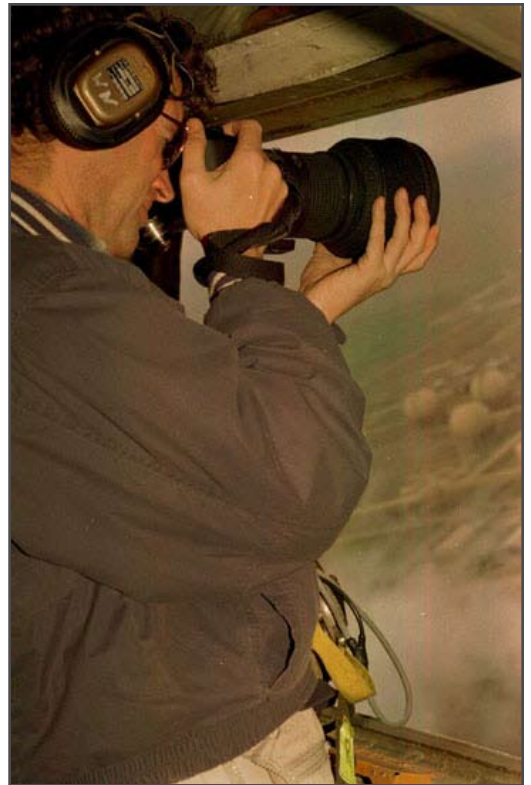
reason it became of interest was because it was producing O-rings that were also used in ballistic missile systems.

When we made an inspection visit, the whole team went—well, three of the four team members went. We flew in a German-crewed CH-53 helicopter, and the usual practice was for us to fly from Rasheed Air Base to whatever location had been decided on, and there the team would take operational control of the helicopter, through the air crew, and direct the aircraft over the site as we deemed necessary. It was a fairly routine process that was followed, bearing in mind UNSCOM had been in place for about three or four years by that stage. We'd always start high, getting overview shots, then come down to get the detail. The two photo interpreters onboard would point out to the photographer specific things that we wanted captured, either for further analysis or to demonstrate what had been going on at the facility.

One of the frustrations we faced was that, in planning an inspection, I found that we had to declare our hand to the Iraqis no less than 24 hours in advance of starting of the mission. Clearly a lot of concessions had been made to the Iraqis over the years, about how UNSCOM would conduct its inspections. The main argument the Iraqis provided was that, because there were still tensions with Iran, Iraq's air defence capability was still very active. The threat was that if we weren't expected in places that we went to, we risked being shot down. That meant we had to declare our intended flight routes and destination, at least in terms of a box of territory. As soon as we stated which box we would be going to, it often meant they could guess which facility was going to be our target. When you go out west towards the Syrian border, there was only one facility that could be inspected, so every time we went out there it was always closed for the day and there were no operations going on at all. So there were a lot of challenges in doing what we were supposed to be doing.

Onboard our helicopter we would have an Iraqi minder who sat with the air crew and listened to communications, and we had Iraqi minders in the back of the aircraft who were there to really just observe. They had no real influence once we got inside the box we had declared, and they had no way of knowing which of the sites we planned to do. Often we could do two or three sites within a box, but sometimes we'd just do one and then fly to other boxes, because frequently we'd have multiple boxes planned as well. Depending on what we wanted to achieve, we might have multiple boxes planned but not actually fly into some of them, or even any of them. It really was very much a cat and mouse game that we had to play, if we hoped to achieve anything. I might just mention that, apart from the two Iraqi minders we carried on board, we were also continually shadowed by an Iraqi helicopter.

I would say that of the three or four minders that we consistently had on the aircraft, we got to know two of them reasonably well. It was interesting to see the background of these people. A lot of them took these jobs because industry had shut down in Iraq because of the war and the sanctions. Some were public servants whose jobs had just gone. One of them was an engineer from Iraq's national airline which no longer flew, the entire industry having just dried up overnight. One of them—I can't remember his background—had a horrible fear of flying, and every day was a challenge for him to get in the aircraft and fly around with us. He just did not enjoy it but it was the only job he could get. It obviously was very tough and your heart went out to them. But while we could understand the plight they were in, of course we also had to keep our game hat on and follow through with our business.



On occasion, we'd also team up with UNSCOM ground inspectors. Of course, they faced similar constraints on the ground as we did in the air. They had to identify where they were going, often involving travel over quite extensive distances by car, and they had to take minders. Even if they had multiple sites to go to, once they got onto a particular road the Iraqis knew where they were going and had plenty of time to shut the place down or hide anything that might need hiding. Because the CH53 was large enough, we would carry landrovers in the back of the helicopter, along with a ground team, and fly out to a destination together. As an aerial inspection team, we were not authorised to land within a compound, but we would land as close as possible to a site and drop off the ground team. Then we would do aerial surveillance of the facility, while they were doing the ground inspection.



A combined air and ground inspection visit underway at a suspect Iraqi facility

It was less common when I was there, but it did still occur that as the ground teams were coming in the front door of some of these known facilities, all the Iraqis were bolting out through the back door. Bearing in mind that some facilities were huge—they could have a perimeter fence a couple of kilometres by a couple of kilometres, with dispersed buildings—the opportunity to get out the back door was quite easy. That was why we would drop off the ground team and then fly to the location in advance of their arrival. We would then monitor the environment, and use our air-to-ground communications to talk the ground teams through what we were able to see. So, a joint operation was quite an effective methodology, when required.

All the activity reports that the Aerial Inspection Team produced were sent back to UN Headquarters in New York. Although we operated from the Baghdad Monitoring and Verification Centre (the BMVC as it was called) at the Canal Hotel, the head of mission there simply provided the administrative support that enabled each of the separate teams to function. As Chief Aerial Inspector, I had no real responsibility to report directly back to the BMVC—it was



straight back to New York. I was a UN representative. We were not declared as military or intelligence or anything like that, although every second person, or probably three out of every four, was military and intelligence based. That was primarily because that was where the required skill sets came from

to do some of these things, but it was all an undeclared civilian-type environment, so there were no uniforms and no weapons. It was a pretty benign sort of environment for us, although the threat environment within Baghdad varied from time to time.

While my team was split between Baghdad and Bahrain (this was for the first three months of my tour), it was my practice to visit Bahrain every six weeks, for up to two days at a time, just to see how things were tracking down there with the other member of the AIT. I'd keep him advised of our negotiations to get him into Baghdad and make sure he was being looked after as well as we were. Of course, he was being looked after very well, because he was in Bahrain, but we kept up that routine of out-of-city visits about every six weeks for most



Baghdad Monitoring and Verification Centre

inspectors—simply so people could get a sense of humour back. It was amazing how it crept up on you that Baghdad was actually a very stressful environment. Bahrain not only had everything that Baghdad lacked, like fast food and clean hotels, but you could feel your stress levels diminish as soon as you got there.

Because we were in Iraq under the UN banner, we had to sign declarations that we wouldn't conduct intelligence operations while we were in country and we wouldn't report intelligence issues back to our homelands. While I was deployed I was under the direction of Major General Arnison, the Land Commander back in Australia, so I sent back situational reports on a weekly basis. This required a bit of a balancing act between providing enough information to say that this is a valid position to be in, and that our contribution is valued by the UN, and overstepping the mark of providing too much information. A lot of it was purely generic, reporting that we might have visited ten sites in the previous week and conducted six helicopter operations over seven days and flown nine hours or twelve hours—only those generic sort of things, plus of course our own health and well being, which they said they were interested in.

INTERVIEW: Wing Commander Greg Weller, 7 April 2009

I was the Australian Liaison Officer (AUSLO) for UNSCOM from June through to December 1997 and in this period I completed four inspections into Iraq, each lasting one or two weeks. I was part of the 'GATEWAY' multi-national organisation set up in Bahrain to provide support for UNSCOM during its Iraq operations. The AUSLO position was rotated between military members and civilians from the International Policy Division of the Defence Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It wasn't a military position *per se*, and we weren't there in a military capacity. I didn't wear uniform, but stayed in civvies for the whole time.

GATEWAY comprised a small team of 10-15 people located in a couple of villas in the Bahrain suburbs. It was co-ordinated by the US State Department and formally recognised as an annex of the American Embassy in Bahrain, but for all that we were essentially UN personnel. Inspection teams would form and conduct their operational planning for missions into Iraq with us at GATEWAY. We

had in the facility, specific equipment, maps, imagery, cameras and things like that that they would need to use on their deployment. During the time they were in Bahrain, normally about four days, we would provide them with briefings and specialist advice and support.

Inevitably there would be new people going on these inspections, because the teams changed their composition every six months. People were coming in from a variety of different nationalities, such as Russia, Egypt, Europe, Asia—all over the place—and they would need to be briefed-in on what UNSCOM was and what its purpose was, the situation in Iraq and so forth. They lived in the same Holiday Inn that we did, so we'd escort them around Bahrain and just look after them prior to their deployment—take them to restaurants and for sightseeing, socialise with them, help them shop for gifts and souvenirs—basically, lots of networking and facilitating. We would also do this when they came back out a couple of weeks later, and also debrief them and provide whatever support they required to complete their inspection reports.

We also provided support to inspectors who were living in Bagdad for, say, up to six months at a time, as part of the small forward deployed team for UNSCOM. These people really needed to get out of Iraq periodically, because of the stresses of being in Baghdad. These guys were always under surveillance, and regularly being confronted or harassed by minders. They were also living with just basic amenities, and had to get used to seeing and working with the Iraqi people who were enduring significant hardship. When they came down to Bahrain, they just wanted a little bit of normal lifestyle, so we'd take them down to a local McDonalds, sightseeing, shopping, to the beach, or simply talk to them—they often just needed normal company.

Depending on how well the AUSLO worked with people, and what skills and knowledge they had, it was usually possible to get onto an inspection team going into Iraq—subject to Australian Government and UNSCOM approval. My predecessor was able to deploy several times, and I was lucky enough to get in on four teams, which was quite high considering we were only there for about six months. It was very advantageous for us to be able to go from the AUSLO position in Bahrain, because the Americans weren't allowed to. And while I was there, the UK guy also wasn't able to go, due to national restrictions. During my time there, it meant that the AUSLO was the only member of GATEWAY with a solid degree of in-country knowledge to then put back into the system, which was actually quite important.

Like all such organisations, UNSCOM worked best based on the personalities within it and how well they were able to adapt and network with the others. It was a real mishmash of people, and some were strange ones. As AUSLO I got to meet and work with all types. I remember meeting Richard Butler in Canberra, before he took over the reins at UNSCOM from Rolf Ekeus. He was already being talked about in public, even then, particularly by the Iraqis who saw him as an American collaborator. I actually asked him about this aspect and whether he expected it would



Dr David Kelly (at left) with inspection team en route by air

complicate his time as Chairman of UNSCOM. He agreed it was probably inevitable that he would be seen in that light, but he seemed to think he could fix it and get it resolved. It was interesting seeing

him later on in Bahrain, where he was very easy-going and always wanting to come and see how the AUSLO was getting along.

We had incredible access to the other inspectors. I ran into Scott Ritter a number of times and supported his inspection team when they transited Bahrain. Scott was the one who became prominent up in the mid-2000s for saying that UNSCOM was spying on Iraq. He was an intriguing character, and very much a cowboy in his approach. There was also David Kelly, the British inspector who later committed suicide. He was a lovely person, with a beautiful soft Welsh accent, and very professional—a man of the utmost integrity. I had the highest regard for him, and he was a great person to work for. I didn't go on an inspection with him or anything like that, but he always looked after us and we always looked after him. Very sad to see how that ended up.

I was there during an interesting period when the Iraqis were becoming increasingly frustrated with UNSCOM. The Commission had a significant amount of information that suggested there remained unusual issues which prevented it from agreeing that the Baghdad regime was 100 per cent compliant in declaring and disposing of all its WMDs (weapons of mass destruction). The Iraqis couldn't understand what the problem was, and that became very evident to our people going into the country. We didn't have direct or outright confrontations—no guns in the face or stuff like that, which others had in UNSCOM's early days. I never felt in danger while in Iraq, but what we did have was constant monitoring and constant obstruction, often just intended to piss you off.

For example, one of the inspections I was with was led by a Lieutenant Colonel from the German Army, who was one of the Chief Inspectors based in New York. She was a veterinarian and really knew her business. I went along as the report writer, and was travelling with her in the lead vehicle. We were at a biological site near Abu Graib, just across from the prison, and we were having lunch in the vehicles. The team was being escorted by about a dozen Iraqi minders, and they'd actually gone off to have lunch separately, to give us room. It was only when lunch finished and something was said by the chief minder that it became very evident that the Iraqis had been listening into the conversation in our vehicle. It was a deliberate attempt to see what her reaction was and just provoke and test her.

Security was a real pain in the neck over there, because we were constantly under threat. I well remember that when we were in Iraq we stayed in the Hyat Hotel, which wasn't a Hyatt hotel. 'Hyat' in Arabic means life but, unfortunately, it wasn't a very live hotel either. It was actually a very dark, dingy, dead hotel—one and a half stars at most! One day, we were meeting in the hotel foyer before heading off on an inspection, and I realised on the way downstairs to meet the others that I'd forgotten something and had to go back to my room. I opened my door and already there's a guy in there opening my bag and going through my stuff. He sees me and off he goes, just walks off. No apology, that's all there was to it. Even the Canal Hotel, where the UNSCOM was based, reportedly had its security problems. The cleaners were believed to be Iraqi security intelligence people, and there was nowhere safe to speak without fear of listening devices.



Iraqi 'minders' accompanying an UNSCOM ground inspection team

Although locks and safes existed, there was no trusting anywhere as secure. The hotel had a safe where supposedly you could leave everything valuable, but we just carried everything with us. We each had a backpack and we carted everything we owned in that for the entire two weeks, or whatever time in theatre that the inspection took, and we made sure we didn't leave anything lying around. Frankly, it was a real pain in the neck, because we were carrying around an



awful lot. The exchange rate on the Iraqi Dina was something like 4000 for one US dollar, so when we went out to a restaurant to get dinner, for example, we literally carried this huge swath of money to hand over.

Even if we were just doing something social at night, like going to a restaurant, we still had to be careful because there was often minders there watching you. We never had any respite from them, and never knew for sure how they would be testing us. At other times the minders were generally quite collegiate, and there was, I suppose, this strange sort of mutual respect. We didn't eat with them, never did anything like that, but we got to know some of them. When I first went in, they were very interested in who I was, and other team members let me know that the minders were asking about me. I suspect they knew I was from GATEWAY. I never said which country I was from, never passed on personal details. There was always some degree of concern whether they had some apparatus to investigate us further.

I had some wonderful times and experiences. I remember I was with a convoy of four or five UN vehicles driving from Bagdad down to Basra for an inspection. When we got to Basra, we went to inspect an ammunition dump, which was obviously in poor condition and not very well run. In one of the bunkers we found 122 millimetre shells, previously declared as having been used for chemical warfare, lying all around the place. They were scattered about and piled up against the walls of this narrow bunker, half falling out of their boxes, and we were just walking through them. It turned out this was the place where there'd been a massive explosion back in the early 1990s, and I could understand why.



FLTLT Weller with R400 bombs ready for disposal

Somewhere around Nasiriyah, I think it was, we came across a weapons range where there was a small quantity of R400 bombs. The R400 had been developed for biological warfare delivery, and our mission was to do a final inspection of these and destroy them. After we did that bit, we went for a drive around the remainder of the range and I can remember we pulled the vehicle up at the top of this Tel, or small hill, where the Iraqis had built a dummy AAA site, and got out. While we were walking around there, I picked up a piece of clay and said to my British companion, 'This looks like pottery'. He says, 'Greg, that belongs in a museum. Its probably Assyrian pottery from several thousand years ago.' That was typical of what we saw throughout the country.