

Conduct Briefings and De-briefings



Photo courtesy of US Coastguard

This workbook is intended for Trainees seeking to attain competency as required by the NSW State Rescue Board Minimum Training Requirements for Marine Rescue Personnel (v 4 2005). It should be studied with reference to the accompanying text "The Bare Facts of Marine SAR" and the assessment documents provided by your chosen assessor.

LOG BOOKS

Trainees should maintain a Log where practical activities and experience should be recorded and witnessed. When you feel confident ask your Trainer to arrange an assessment at your squad or other suitable location. Your assessors will provide feedback on your assessment.

The Author acknowledges references to material published by the Australian National Training Authority, the NATSAR Manual 2003, NSW SRB Policy and AVCGA. All content is supplied on the understanding that users exercise their own skill and care with respect to its use. Before relying on the material in any important matter users should carefully evaluate the completeness and relevance of the information for their purposes.

Ranger Hope © 2006

Conduct Briefing and De-briefing

CONTENTS	COMPETENCY PUAOPE004A
Introduction	
Prepare for the brief/debrief	<p>Element 1</p> <p>1.1 A briefing/debriefing is planned and prepared in accordance with organization’s policy and procedures.</p> <p>1.2 Relevant personnel involved in the activity are identified and informed of debriefing requirements.</p> <p>1.3 Briefing/debriefing meeting is scheduled as soon as possible following the incident.</p> <p>1.4 An appropriate location for the brief/debrief is selected.</p> <p>1.5 Appropriate incident information is collected.</p>
Conduct the brief/debrief	<p>Element 2</p> <p>2.1 Purpose and structure of the brief/debrief is outlined to incident personnel.</p> <p>2.2 Discussion, analyses and evaluation by personnel of their anticipated or actual roles in the activity are encouraged.</p> <p>2.3 Contributions from personnel during the brief/debrief are continually sought, encouraged and valued.</p> <p>2.4 Review of the activity against the policies, practices and training of the organisation is undertaken to identify any discrepancies.</p> <p>2.5 Brief/debrief is conducted in accordance with the organisation's policies and procedures.</p>
Conclude the brief/debrief	<p>Element 3</p> <p>3.1 Contributions of personnel are acknowledged in a positive way.</p> <p>3.2 Brief/debrief follow-up actions are identified and acted upon in a timely manner.</p> <p>3.3 Brief/debrief findings are summarised and recorded if appropriate in a format suitable for subsequent action by the appropriate personnel.</p> <p>3.4 Reports are prepared for presentation to appropriate personnel as required.</p>
Appendix	NSW SRB SOP's 4-9

Introduction

Luck and daring have pulled off some dramatic rescues, and lack of it has ended in total disaster. The formulation of a plan improves the odds for success; the more participants, the greater the need to plan a concerted effort. In SAR callouts many rescuers become involved; the Rescue Vessel skipper and crew (emergency response), the SARCC staff (communications and administration) and officers from other emergency service agencies depending on the nature and gravity of the situation. This workbook draws from the National Search and Rescue Manual 2003 (NATSAR) and the NSW State Rescue Board Policy (SRB) and its accompanying NSW SRB Standing Operating Procedures (2002).

NATSAR Manual details the need for response crews to receive a briefing before departure to a marine incident. This requirement may be extended to all operational participants. On completion of the operation, the SRB Policy requires that time be put aside for a de-briefing to review the outcomes.

Incidents worthy of debrief may include those where:

- lives have been lost unexpectedly.
- large and complex searches have been conducted.
- multi agency involvement occurred.
- coordination, communication or response challenges occurred during the incident.

This list is not exhaustive and the conduct of a post incident, multi-agency debrief is at the discretion of the SAR Authority in overall coordination of the incident with mutual agreement of other SAR Authorities and agencies involved.

The importance of de-brief is often misunderstood especially where there is loss of life. It is not to apportion blame, but to recognize what went right, what went wrong and where the resources, planning and execution were inadequate. The aim is to record the outcomes, good or bad, in order to improve similar operations in the future. It is to “establish opportunities for improvement in the operation of the national SAR system.”
(NATSAR 2003)

1. Prepare for the brief/debrief

Purpose and methodology

1.1 A briefing/debriefing is planned and prepared in accordance with organisation's policy and procedures.

Overview:

In an SAR situation where lives may be at risk, a disorganised attitude to briefing would reap disorganized results. Planning is required.

The planning for a briefing (or a de-briefing) should focus on the:

Purpose.
Methodology.
Participation.
Location.
Timing.
Subject matter.

Purpose:

Much information has to be gathered and collated for presentation by the person coordinating the search. In a marine search this person will normally be a specially trained officer known as the SARMC and his methodology for the task will be based on NATSAR and NSW SRB SOP's supported by local police procedures.

At the start of an operation a brief is used to inform participants of all the available facts of the incident (**Task Information**) and the logistics (**Operational Information**) in fulfilling the **Operational Plan**. The operation controller will deliver the brief and the recipients should implement its strategies in executing the operation.

At the finish of the operation, successful or otherwise, those involved should be offered the opportunity to be part of the de-brief and present their views. This is done to highlight the problems and weaknesses of the brief and to enable those dissatisfied to have their say, air their discontentment and get it put on record.

Briefings and de-briefings are not exclusive to SAR operations, but apply to other group activities. In summary, a briefing is required:

- Before undertaking rescue operations to a marine incident.
- When significant changes are anticipated at the incident.
- Before undertaking training.
- Before undertaking group projects or other related activities.

Search and rescue operations- The skipper needs to know all details of the operation to plan for the safety of the crew and those in need of assistance. He/she must also ensure that the duty crew is aware of what they are about to undertake. Crew members are entitled to withdraw if they feel that the operation is beyond their capabilities.

In a routine “assist” situations SARCC operators need to know what is expected of them and the crew of a RV need to know where they are going, how long it will take and what weather conditions they can expect.

In a “fast response” for a person in the water, the usual full pre-departure briefing may have to be given while underway. Even in the more relaxed former case, rescue is a fast changing dynamic situation and the briefing continues to be reviewed as the need arises. RV and SARCC will advise the Operation Controller who will adjust the operation and search parameters to reflect the changes. However it is the prerogative of the skipper to assess the new information and implement as appropriate if the safety of his vessel and his crew is threatened.

Group activities- Briefing can be applied to many situations including tasks such as working bees, organizing fundraising or delivering training. Any task requiring coordination of the involving participants will benefit from a briefing.

For the successful conduct of a training program there is a need to recruit a qualified trainer. The trainer must develop a lesson plan, assembled the necessary teaching aids, source a lecture area, and inform the trainees of the arrangements made. In short, the trainer has prepared a brief for the activity and at the training session will brief them on how the course will run. There should also be a de-brief at the end (feedback).

Methodology:

There is nothing worse than getting to a meeting of and finding out that the arrangements made were disorganized; vital participants uninvited, relevant documentation missing, sufficient working copies unavailable and the brief or debrief a waste of time. Planning checklist forms are a convenient way to organize meeting agendas.

A minimum requirement for brief or de-brief would be the:

- An agenda.
- Notified time and venue at which is to be held.
- Copies of the updated Operational Plan.
- Copies of the updated Incident Report.
- Copies of the relevant chart/s.
- Copies of the Communications Log.
- Any other relevant information / reports

The documentation should be limited to the relevant. The information should be:

- **Clear**
- **Concise**
- **Factual**

SAR Authorities that participate in the debrief will meet their own attendance costs, unless otherwise agreed by the participants. (NATSAR)

Participation

1.2 Relevant personnel involved in the action are identified and informed of the de-briefing arrangements.

The calling of a de-briefing session is the prerogative of the controller of the operation. In a major SAR operation this would usually be the SARMC (a Police expert appointed in accordance with the NSW Marine Area Command procedures), or in minor rescue operations the senior MRU officer. It is very unusual for a de-brief not to be called after a serious injury or fatality, or when there has been noted failure or bravery, but other priorities may push this element of an operation onto the back burner. However, it should be viewed as a safety valve for participants to voice their concerns and a professional means of closing the operation that is always sound insurance in case the matter later comes before the courts.

A list of personnel involved and appropriate attend a de-brief could include the:

- SARMC and/or appointed SARCC OIC, OSC.
- Squad Commander.
- RV Skipper and Crew.
- SARCC operators.
- Squad training and maintenance officers.
- Members of any Statutory Authority involved.
- Other specialist such as police, ambulance, fire officers, etc.

Friends and relatives of the deceased or injured may have been participants in the rescue and wish to attend. The risks that a general concern for their sensibilities will inhibit frank discussion or the likelihood that they will misinterpret the de-brief as a pre-coronial inquest must be balanced against their rights. Participation at debriefs may be restricted to particular SAR Authorities and agencies depending on the issues that are likely to arise and would be a decision for the SAR Authority with overall coordination for the incident.



(Photo courtesy of S.E.S.)

Timing of a meeting is scheduled

1.3 Briefing/debriefing meeting is scheduled as soon as possible following the incident.

The vital but time consuming preliminaries of briefing must start early on and, when possible, in good time before departure. Some personnel engaged for search operations are untrained or inexperienced in the search role. Personnel should therefore be given every opportunity to familiarise themselves with the details of the distress. The briefing officer must have thorough understanding of the overall plan and individual unit tasks.

The phrase, “as soon as possible following the incident” must be qualified by considering the purposes of briefing and de-briefing; that they must be effective.

Timing a brief- The performance criteria for briefing is that it must provide the fullest account of the known task information and sufficient operational information for the response team to be effective in their completion of the operational plan.

When possible the OIC will prefer response to be preplanned enabling events to be tracked and progress monitored. But in a situation of rapid response the SARCC operators will be hard pressed gathering all the Task Information quickly enough so the RV may have to be briefed after departure. This is not ideal, as the potential for errors in radio communication to a fast moving noisy RV are high. Such briefs must be simple, clear and elicit confirmation by the RV to ensure their comprehension.



In less imminent response the briefings may be given in several parts, reflecting the stages of certainty in gathering the Task Information. A simplistic example of such staged briefs may be:

- Incerfa-** SARCC calls RV skipper to warn crew that they may be required.
- Alertfa-** General callout to standby and brief of known task information.
- Detresfa-** Full brief and operational instructions for the mission.

When several organisations are cooperating it is advantageous that a time is scheduled so all participants are able to attend simultaneously. This is the best opportunity to test intended communication frequencies and compatibility of equipment to be jointly used.

Timing a de-brief- The simpler the operation, the less chance there is for problems and the simpler the debrief. Sometimes operational problems arise during “assists” such as the casualty giving the wrong position, not anchored but drifting, not responding to their radio or mobile phone. These are not inadequacies of the brief but people problems and there are lessons to be learnt from them. The debrief may merely be a bitching session after close of duty; the outcome not warranting recording but to be remembered if ever a similar incident arises.

Minor de-briefs can follow on after a training session or during a smoke break when the participants are on duty but relaxed. A de-brief can be called any time provided it is not just dropped on every one, all involved in the incident are present and the manner of its conduct is not counterproductive.

A formal de-briefing should commence as soon as the participants are stood down, the operation is over and all involved are able to attend, so enabling the whole picture to be obtained. If the operation has been difficult or protracted, time to rest may be needed so that contributors can think and respond clearly. However, if it is left for too long then details may become hazy, and concerns of the participants may fester.

The time to plan a de-brief is:

- When personnel attending a Marine Incident have been relieved.
- Immediately after the incident.
- When personnel return to their home base.
- At a convenient time after the incident.
- After a meeting, a training session or an event.

The debrief exercise aims to consider the full information coming out of the conduct of the operation and stacks this up against the intent of the initial brief. What went right and what went wrong. Mistakes are noted for future operations.

Location is selected

1.4 An appropriate location for the briefing / de briefing is selected.

The headquarters of the operational squad is the natural location for a meeting, unless your squad is assisting with another organisation using their base and operating procedures. The greater proportion of those who were involved in the incident will be more comfortable in familiar surroundings. For most, travel would be reduced and those involved have an intimate knowledge of where the records are and what-ever facilities, including refreshments, are required and called for during the debrief. Either venue must have available the appropriate charts, communications, trained personnel and the search vessels or vehicles.

However there are times when the proximity to the incident, the logistics of attendance and the required facilities are more appropriately serviced elsewhere.

A venue for briefing will be selected considering the:

- Capacity and security for the expected attendance.
- Convenience of communication and operational planning.
- Convenience to the dispatch of units attending the incident activity.

A venue for de-briefing will be selected considering the:

- Capacity and security for the operational team and others that could have been involved in the incident.
- Copying, communications and display facilities to disseminate reports and provide displays the activities.
- Privacy and security of information discussed.
- Rest and refreshment facilities that promote a comfortable atmosphere conducive to meaningful discussion to gain the most from such meetings.

Information is collected

1.5 Appropriate incident information is collected

All the available facts of the incident (*Task Information*) and the logistics (*Operational Information*) in fulfilling the *Operational Plan* have been examined in the prerequisite workbooks “Participate in marine rescue operations “ and “The bare facts of SAR.”

Task information- The situation, the resources (assets) available, the expected weather and tide are some of the many questions that need to be resolved. Are we looking for a vessel or persons/bodies in the water? Are they injured? When is the best time to commence the operation? Is night approaching and the search area distant? The information concerning the nature of the incident can be summed up as:

Who- Vessel description, persons on board, sex and age.
Where- Known details of position or the proposed voyage.
When- Time of departure, estimated return time, when was the matter reported.
What- Details of possible sights, communication facilities carried.
How- Detail of vessel structure, capacity, history.
Why- Detail of weather, tides & seas, situation reports.

Operational information - The briefing would then address the resources (*assets*) tasks for the search including aircraft, marine units, other vessels and land based facilities and manpower. The period of the initial search segment would be discussed and the assets capable of participating would be determined. Perhaps a backup a plan “B” will be developed.

From this information the briefing can roughly estimate the distance to the incident, fuel requirements, travel time and the most convenient point of departure. The briefing ought

to cover weather conditions likely over the period of the incident, tidal information if this is relevant, sea conditions as a likely result of changes in the weather and hazards both en route and at the scene of the incident. Sea travel is subject to many variables and although an estimate of ETA at the incident scene and an ETA for return should not be regarded as estimates.

Distance to go - This will allow the calculation of fuel requirements to the incident.

Departure point- Relevant to trailer mounted craft.

Sea conditions - En route / at scene including traffic and nearby vessels.

Forecast - For the expected duration of the operation.

Tides - Times, heights, range and bar conditions.

Daylight - Projected arrival at the incident scene.

Hazards - Routing information to avoid dangers and ensure safe passage.

The procedure for land, sea and air search briefing is similar. However the SARMC, in marine search is not necessarily near the scene and may be directing SAR assets in distant locations with limited communications. The comprehension of the situation by the SARMC will rely totally on the information he is given. The relevance of information that is unique to the distant locality (rips, smoke, traffic) will not necessarily be asked for, so it must be volunteered. Additionally, the potential for error in transmission of distant briefings cannot be discounted while planning a delivery method. Fortunately in a marine SAR the original call for help is usually received by the local squad which has the assets required and the briefing can take place locally and in person with minimal delay.

Details of the completed briefing should then be recorded and made available for reference at debrief. What-ever eventuates needs to be recorded in the most appropriate form as required under your SOP's. It may be using a "Routine Assist form" or an entry in the "SARCC log" or an "Operational Plan form".



Written Activity- Prepare for the brief/debrief

Question 1 (4 Marks) 1.1

What is the purpose of a brief?

What is the purpose of a de-brief?

Question 2 (10 Marks) 1.2

List five areas of task or operational information that should be included in a brief?

List five officers that may be required at a briefing?

Question 3 (3Marks) 1.3

Describe three circumstances where de-briefings should not necessarily be held as soon the operation is concluded.

Question 4 (3 Marks) 1.4

Explain the factors in selecting an appropriate venue for a de-brief.



Practical Activity- Prepare for the brief/debrief

Your Skipper will provide as many opportunities as possible to practice the previous skills during simulated rescue operations or “on the job training”. Practice activities for this element of competency include:

Use the headings below to design a “brief check list form” and a “de-brief check list form” that facilitates the planning process.

- Timing, location, participants, purpose, method.
- Damage to the incident vessel, fatalities, Injuries.
- Control, command, communications, supporting organisations.
- Incident response and assessment of response strategy.
- Resources, equipment and plant committed to the incident
- First aid, medical, Welfare, Stress
- Strategies to improve response
- Adequacy of initial briefing and analysis of performance against objectives.

Discuss as a team. Read the accompanying workbook, “The bare facts of Marine SAR.” Remember to complete your log book.

2. Conduct the brief/debrief

Structure is outlined

2.1 Purpose and structure of the brief/debrief is outlined to incident personnel.

Briefing: *(extracts from the NATSAR Manual)*

A SMC should be satisfied that the briefings are well prepared, and the venue is suitable for the purpose. Briefings for marine units will cover similar topics to those given to air and land units, but there may be less opportunity for face-to-face briefing contact. Briefing Officers should be aware of the difficulties inherent in briefing indirectly and the increased potential for misunderstanding.

In a briefing the participants are to be made aware, in very clear terms, of the purpose of the briefing such as:

“a vessel is reported as overdue and an air and sea search is to be undertaken”.

Participants need to be fully informed as to the total search area, the area allocated to them, the available information is and its reliability and currency.

Search Area Description- In selecting the many ways of describing search patterns and the boundaries of search areas the RCC staff must consider the SAR knowledge of the recipients and the method to be used for the transmission of the information.

Geographical Coordinates- This is the generally accepted method of designating an area, the corners of a search area being defined by latitude and longitude. To avoid confusion, the positions should be listed in a clockwise sequence, ending with a repeat of the initial coordinates. The disadvantages of this system are the possibilities of error in measurement and transmission.

Universal Grid Reference-The Universal Grid is overprinted on all charts of the JOG series and is also shown on the majority of larger scale maps. Not used for marine search.

Track Line- A track line search may be designated by stating relevant points along the track together with the width of coverage, for example:

***"Fly a track 4 NM each side of a line between
16° 20' S 135° 15' E and 17° 50' S 137° 28' E."***

Landmarks- Care must be taken to be precise. Vague descriptions such as "7 NM SSW of..." shall not be used. Proper direction in this case would be by way of positive bearing and distance, i.e:

"bearing 202° (T) from Dixon Island at 7 NM".

Maritime Search Crews- When maritime units are used for search operations, staff of other SAR authorities, i.e. police and military, may brief the search crews. The coordinating SAR authority shall require copies of briefing forms issued on its behalf to ensure that personnel capable of carrying out the operation safely in the prevailing and forecast sea and weather conditions in the area.

All search preparations should be completed before the surface units enter the search area including the establishment of communication with the agency coordinating the surface search and other units (surface or air). Search crews should be briefed on:

- SAR frequencies and homing equipment monitored.
- observers positioned.
- rescue gear made ready.

De-briefing: *(extracts from the NATSAR Manual)*

The operative personnel from the operations centre should arrange access to all of the communication logs and charts utilised during the operation to be available at the debrief. Those involved in the actual search at sea have an interest to see that all their records and communication logs are also available. Ancillary operators, providing support services, are also in a similar position and should take steps to have their records available.

Local issues may also need to be reviewed before undertaking the debriefing session as they establish a benchmark against which to measure how the search process was handled.

- Interaction with the SAR authority.
- The chain of command and associated responsibilities.
- Preparation of the SARCC and RV and manning levels.
- The units operational authority when activated.
- Effectiveness of communications.

Discussions, analysis and evaluation

2.2 Discussions, analyses and evaluation by personnel of their anticipated or actual role in the activity are encouraged.

From the crew's point of view, they are ordered to carry out the controllers brief and have to suffer the action and grief of any inadequacy. Therefore, cross flow of information is useful to ensure that the expectations of the briefing are achievable and the crews remain in control of their situation.

- Are they comfortable with the proposition, or is too much being asked of them?
- Are they familiar with the communication practice and equipment?
- Are they confident that the equipment is up to the proposed task?
- Does each of the participants understand their role as set out in the briefing?
- How do they feel about the briefing, is it adequate?
- Are there any further observations or comments?

At the same time, certain boundaries have to affect a timely response and draw up mutually recognised rules of operating. Techniques for this are considered in section 2.3.

Though an authorised officer may give an interim statement to the media, no opinion can be made on the operation until a de-briefing has established a consensus of the facts. It is not generally approved that unofficial photos should be taken at incident sites (particularly

involving death) and photos are regarded as the property of the Police. Trainees and crewmen are asked not to publicly discuss the matters arising from a de-briefing and should refer those requesting information to their Media Officer.

Contributions sought and valued

2.3 Contributions from personnel during the briefing/debriefing are continually sought and valued.

The mannerisms and attitude of those in charge will impact on the crews. An inept SAR controller delivering his brief/debrief may give participants the view that he knows all and others are there to comply to his/her orders. He/she may put people down rather than reason or argue the issue. The participants in the operation know local conditions and hazards better than any chart. Do not dismiss local knowledge but weight it against established data.

An open mind is a good start in bringing out the best in contributions from the crews, but targeted use of communication techniques can be very effective. Reward pertinent comments. Don't knock any contribution; they stimulate discussion from others. Don't dismiss contributions a little wide of the mark as these, hopefully, may be matters of concern to the contributor and others. The Sighting & Hearing Techniques from the NATSAR Manual appendix H (see the accompanying workbook Bare Facts of Marine SAR) is useful in defining interview and briefing skills.

The physical layout of brief and de-brief meetings will set the tone and facilitate the intentions of the meeting.



The directional format of Briefing.



The round table format of De-briefing.

The Briefing is most naturally set up focused directionally at the relevant information. This

keeps the conduct crisp and the contributions concise. The briefing officer should be aware that this advantage is matched with the disadvantage that participants can hide in the crowd will be more reluctant to speak up. They may even have to be wooed into contributing.

Such an arrangement is unproductive for the de-brief. The round table layout ensures that all feel on an equal footing to present their unique perspective. Diametrically opposed viewpoints, heated argument and gas bags are all the territory so a procedural structure in a larger or potentially contentious meetings is essential. The chairperson should explain the procedure to participants. Key officers should present their factual reports. The participants should one by one, around the table, be asked for their observations and be given an opportunity for clarification of detail in the reports. Comments can become emotional and will need skillful and sympathetic handling. If an individual is unwilling to give up the floor when they have nothing new to say then a time limit for further discussion should be imposed.

The chair person should make a point of thanking individuals for their particular contributions and ensure that it is noted in the records.

Discrepancies identified

2.4 Review of the activity against the policies, practices and training of the organisation is undertaken to identify any discrepancies.

The de-brief reviews the physical aspects of the operation and the adequacy of operating procedures of the units involved. Various questions need to be asked:

- Were crew put in a situation beyond their training standard?
- Was the equipment available and adequate for the tasks?
- Was damage suffered accidental or from deviation from procedures?
- Were crews over stressed or traumatized? Is counseling available?
- Were communication facilities satisfactory?
- Was the briefing adequate?

Not all matters of concern are related to and recorded in the logs maintained in relation to the incident; matters of stress, poor communication conditions and service, break-downs in procedures, departures from prescribed procedures, analysis of planning and the adequacy of the briefing. Matters of a mechanical nature, where these impacted on the operation, may or not have been recorded. The adequacy of first aid training and services may warrant mentioning.

The NATSAR Manual recommends the use of case studies to highlight deficiencies

Case studies:

Case studies may be conducted at the direction of the SAR Authority. IAMSAR provides guidance on case studies as follows.

“Sometimes a SAR case has a surprise ending, as when the survivors are found by someone not involved in the search effort in a location outside the search area, or they are

found, alive and well, in the search area after the search effort has been suspended. There are also occasions when there seems to have been an unusual number of problems in spite of the best efforts of the SAR personnel. Finally, there may be important and valuable lessons to learn from a SAR incident and the subsequent response of the SAR system that would be revealed only by a careful after-the-fact review.

A SAR case study is an appropriate method for addressing those aspects of an incident that are of particular interest. Individual aspects of interest could include problems with communications, assumptions made, scenario development, search planning, or international co-ordination. SAR case studies or incident reviews provide opportunities to analyse survivor experiences and lifesaving equipment performance. Survival in hostile environments is affected by many variables, including the physical condition of survivors, survivor actions, reinforcement given by rescue forces prior to rescue, and effectiveness of safety or survival equipment. Knowing more about these factors can help the SAR system become more effective.

When used to review and evaluate all aspects of a response to an incident, SAR case studies are one of the most valuable and effective tools for improving SAR system performance. Therefore, SAR case studies or reviews should be performed periodically even when no problems are apparent. There is almost always room for improvement, especially in large, complex cases. The most important outcome, however, is that early detection and correction of apparently small problems or potential problems will prevent them from growing into serious deficiencies later.

To get a balanced view, more than one person should conduct SAR case studies; the case study team should include recognized experts in those aspects of the case being reviewed. To achieve maximum effectiveness, case studies should not assign blame, but rather, should make constructive suggestions for change where analysis shows that such change will improve future performance.”



(Photo courtesy of RN)

Conduct of Brief/debrief

2.5 Brief/debrief is conducted in accordance with the organisation's policies and procedures

NATSAR Crew Briefing:

"Full and proper de-briefing of search units is as important as the briefing process. Included in the briefing shall be instructions on the de-briefing procedure to be followed on completion of the search task. When possible, blank debriefing forms will be given to the aircrew. A careful interrogation and evaluation of each search crew's effort is essential for intelligent forward planning. Where a FCP is established, pilots, observer leaders, surface search unit leaders and others shall be instructed to attend after their sortie for de-briefing".

Although these were formulated for aircraft searches the underlying principles in their proper context apply equally to marine SAR.

When a Squad has been "activated" for an SAR activity it would be unusual for the "Authorities" to relinquish control of the operation even if they exercise remote control. Therefore, opportunities for Squad personnel to provide the overall de-briefing is restricted even though statistics indicate that in excess of 70% of the work that Squad RV will undertake will fall into the "self activated" category.

There is, and always will be the necessity to evaluate our own performance and adjust our policies, procedures and training to enable us to be more efficient, whether engaged in the mundane or major operations.

A fouled-up operation which results in death, loss of property or injury may end up the subject of a Coroner's inquiry or legal litigation. The acts of providing an adequate brief and recording it, providing situation updates as the exercise continues and then having a full debrief (with this recorded) will serve to underline your professionalism.

Whether you have procedures other than those set out in the National SAR Manual, or in the State Police or Water Police SAR Manuals, the conduct of SAR operations should adhere to the overall guidelines contain in these documents.



Written Activity- Conduct the brief/debrief

Question 5 (10 Marks) 2.1

Prepare a fictional Briefing / De-Briefing for a search and rescue for a 6 metre white tinny that fails to log back in at the scheduled time of 12:00 from a fishing trip 0.5 nm offshore. Use an additional piece of paper for your point form plans.

Question 6 (3 Marks) 2.2

How would you ensure that all parties at de-briefing were able to contribute without being intimidated but be so talkative as to be unproductive?

Question 7 (3 Marks) 2.3

What reports should be requested for a de-brief, and who should introduce them.

Question 9 (5 Marks) 2.4

List 10 items that need to be reviewed against policies, practices and training provided by your Squad for future SAR Operations.



Practical Activity- Conduct the brief/debrief

Your Skipper will provide as many opportunities as possible to practice the previous skills during simulated rescue operations or “on the job training”. Practice activities for this element of competency include:

- Brief and De-brief the crew for a training session.

Discuss as a team. Read the accompanying workbook, “The bare facts of Marine SAR.” Remember to complete your log book.

3: Conclude the brief/de-brief

SAR Operations enter the conclusion stage when:

- the target is located and the survivors are rescued.
- emergency beacon is located, survivors rescued, beacon has been turned off.
- information is received that the target is no longer in distress.
- all persons are accounted for, or there is no longer a chance of survival.
- the SAR Authority determines that further searching has no significant chance of succeeding and either suspend or terminate the search.

When the target has been located and the survivors rescued, the RCC shall ensure:

- all people and organisations involved in the SAR action are stood down;
- all appropriate agencies are notified;
- next of kin are fully informed;
- shipping is advised of any hazard caused by abandoned vessels etc;
- arrangements are made for the recovery of dropped survival equipment
- the collection and filing of all records in chronological order.
- that administrative and financial procedures are completed.

Suspension of a search when the target is not found

The decision to suspend a search shall not be made until a thorough review of the search is conducted. The review will focus on the probability of there being survivors from the initial incident, the probability of survival after the incident, the probability that the survivors were in the search area, and the effectiveness of the search. The review should:

- examine decisions, ensuring proper assumptions and reasonable plans were made
- confirm the certainty of initial position and factors used in determining search areas
- re-evaluate any significant clues and leads
- examine datum computations and data calculations
- confirm that all reasonable means of obtaining information have been exhausted
- review all intelligence material to ensure no information had been overlooked

Contributions are acknowledged

3.1 Contributions of personnel are acknowledged in a positive manner.

Just as proper preparation of information and data is important for the delivery of a briefing or a debriefing so is the active participation of personnel attending. Their delivery of local knowledge and consideration of alternatives/options serve to enhance the quality of the briefing and therefore the likely outcome.

However it is in the shake down of the operation at the debriefing session that the involved personnel can have a major contribution, because:

- They were at the “coal face.”
- They worked through the deficiencies of the briefing and problems that developed.
- They suffered the sea and weather conditions.
- They willingly gave up their time to assist someone they probably never knew.

A meaningful acknowledgement at the debrief of the participants efforts never goes astray. It does not matter if the debrief runs a congenial course or it gets a little heated, the input from participating personnel has to be valued and recognised.

Apart from recognition it is important that the recommendations of the debrief are made available to them for scrutiny and they are informed of the action being taken to address the issues identified. Recommendations are of little use unless they are acted upon or, if the consensus of opinion is other wise, they are dropped.

Until this aspect is finalised, the exercise is not finished. This may require changes to local procedures such as SOP's, or it may require revision of the State or National Manuals. More often it is the local operating procedures which will be changed.

As a result of these proposals:

- Operating procedures may require revision,
- Training needs may require re-assessment
- Vessel equipment needs may have to be re-assessed
- It may require a review of vessel crewing levels.

What-ever the final outcomes the changes need to be conveyed to all concern and action taken periodically to verify that the changes have in fact been effected and very importantly the parties involved are kept informed as to what is going on and why.



Follow up actions are identified

3.2 Brief/debrief follow up actions are identified and acted upon in a timely manner

Let us have a look at these final outcomes arising out of the final debriefing session. What actions have to be addressed and what follow-up actions are required .

The matters which would normally attract the most attention at a debrief would relate to:-

- Was the operation executed as planned and directed at the briefing session.
- Were there inadequacies in the physical resources committed to the operation, such as equipment failures and mechanical problems due to poor maintenance.
- Was too much asked of those engaged in the operation resulting in stress and accidents .
- Were the crews adequately trained.
- Were there too few human resources.
- Was the weather information off the mark and up dates were not pursued regularly.
- Were procedures adequate for the operation,
- Were legislation aspects governing the operation adequate and relevant.

There is always a lesson to be learnt from these activities but the lesson cannot be effective and worthwhile until and unless they are recorded and acted upon. Some can be put in place quickly as they fall within the authority of the Squad.

On the other hand the matter may be one for the State body, having wider ramifications affecting state training needs.

The changes recommended are to be disseminated direct to those with appropriate responsibilities for their implementation and or consideration.

Brief/ debrief findings are summarised and recorded

3.3 Brief/ debrief findings are summarised and recorded if appropriate in a format suitable for subsequent action to the appropriate personnel

The operational records- Records relating to search and rescue operations, including air searches on behalf of other organisations, shall be retained for periods as required under the relevant legislation and regulation.

When a search has been terminated without locating a missing aircraft or its occupants, all records, charts etc. shall be retained and be accessible to SAR staff to allow easy resumption of search activity should further intelligence be received. Reports on SAR actions shall be generated as required for Coroners Inquiries, Management purposes and for training requirements.

Reports are required on anything that search teams consider pertinent, and may include:

- Report on actual weather conditions.

- Positions at which sighting investigations were made.
- Descriptions of items which were investigated.
- Areas searched and not searched and the effectiveness of the search.
- Results of monitoring of radio frequencies.
- Any operational difficulties encountered.
- Observer debrief forms when available and completed.

(The NATSAR Manual)

Recording briefing and debriefing sessions- A briefing or de-briefing planning form is useful in the fluid environment of free discussion. This document may be in a suitable form to be used in the subsequent sessions of working groups to consider recommendations and to implement them.

Depending on the seriousness of the matter that the working groups is considering, their reports may be:

- Facilitator led.
- Collaborative in intent.
- Problem based.
- Descriptive and illustrative.

Whatever the method is decided upon, it is essential that the resulting presentation be unambiguous, appropriate to the subject and the audience to which it is directed and represent the agreed position of the majority.

Having got this far, identify the person who has the responsibility and authority for incorporating the recommendations in the enterprise's procedures and ensure that they have the correct documentation to work with.

Finally follow the matter up to ensure, as far as is possible, that the recommendations have been put in place and implemented in practice.

Reports are prepared

3.4 Reports are prepared for presentation to appropriate personnel as required

In some cases no report is called for because of the small scale of the incident and the manner in which the exercise was executed. In another, all the documentation may end up under the intense scrutiny of a coroner's court. This may not be as a result of the immediate operation, but rather to examine the professional standards that prevail in the rescue squad's routine operations.

The NATSAR Manual particularly notes the importance of Performance improvement:

“Constant improvement in the performance of the SAR system should be a clearly stated goal of SAR managers. One method to encourage performance improvement is to set up goals whose degree of attainment can be measured by key performance data. This data should be collected, analysed, and published on a routine basis so that individuals can see how the system as a whole is doing, and how their performance is contributing to the achievement of the established goals. Routine reports from the SMCs to the SAR managers can be used for monitoring system performance and highlighting areas where

improvement is possible through changes in policies, procedures, or resource allocation.”

Reports should reflect a consensus view or agreed position. It should need no further explanation than the recommendations to be implemented, and be brought to the attention of the appropriate officers, that may include:

- Appropriate Statutory Authority (or SARMC.)
- The Squad Commander (Operations Manager).
- The Squad Duty officers.
- RV Skipper.
- Rescue liaison officer.
- Media officer.

The final report can now be prepared and this should get to the point without wasting words and should be:

- **Clear**
- **Concise**
- **Factual**

This action should have regard to the lines of command within the organisation. The most appropriate approach would be to seek advice from your Operations Manager and then follow up at a later date to determine if the changes recommended were in fact acted upon.



Written Activity- Prepare for the brief/debrief

Question 10 (2 Marks) 3.1

How would you acknowledge the contribution of participants in a search and rescue operation?

Question 11 (3 Marks) 3.2

At the de-brief a number of inadequacies were identified in several areas. How would you ensure that this did not happen again?

Equipment inadequacies:

Personnel inadequacies:

Organisational inadequacies:

Question 13 (3 Marks) 3.3

Design a standard planning agenda for use in de-brief sessions.

Question 14 (1 Marks) 3.4

How will the de-brief be broadcast to the appropriate personnel?



Practical Activity- Prepare for the brief/debrief

Your Skipper will provide as many opportunities as possible to practice the previous skills during simulated rescue operations or “on the job training”. Practice activities for this element of competency include:

- Gather the documentation from a previous SAR operation of your squad and write a specimen report with your recommendations.

Discuss as a team. Read the accompanying workbook, "The bare facts of Marine SAR." Remember to complete your log book.

Appendix 1

SOP 04

MAINTAINING RECORDS AT A CENTRE

All forms used in a MRB or SARcc are important as they provide a record of data and actions taken. These records may well provide vital information should an investigation be required. It is essential therefore that all records compiled are done so in a manner that will allow a full and accurate account of what occurred to be extrapolated if required. Accordingly, records are to be maintained in the fashion as described below.

Requirements for filling out forms

All forms should be written in black or blue ballpoint pen. There should be no errors. Should an incorrect entry be made, a neat line is to be made through the original entry and the correct entry placed neatly immediately above or below the incorrect entry and the operators initial placed immediately after the entry. Under no circumstances are incorrect entries to be erased or original entries made illegible.

Log keeping

A log is to be maintained in the form of a running sheet of times of occurrences and calls made and received both by radio and telephone. Times are to be in the '24 hours' clock format. When using a typewriter or computer, all written notes are to be retained and filed.

Recording of facsimiles

Facsimiles should be filed in the same manner as other correspondence for later reference.

Filing

At the end of the day, all tracking sheets, running sheets, communications logs, and any other routine administrative paperwork must be checked for correctness and completeness before being filed. Of particular importance is ensuring that each vessel that has been 'logged-on' has either been 'logged-off' or is positively accounted for.

Statute of Limitations

All records should be kept in accordance with the Statute of Limitations.

SOP 05

RESPONSIBILITIES OF DUTY OPERATORS

A reference in these procedures to the Duty Operator refers to either the Radio Operator or Watch Keeper (as appropriate) unless otherwise specified.

The Duty Operator will:

- Keep a record of **ALL** communications into and out of the centre, whether by radio, telephone, facsimile or in person, on the communications log. A sample log showing the minimum required information is at Annex A.
- Ensure all times recorded in Logs are in 24hr format.
- Ensure all written entries in Logs are made in blue or black ball point pen.
- Ensure that any errors made in Logs **ARE NOT** rubbed out or over written so as to obscure the entry, but have one line passed through the entry / word so it is legible, with the new entry / word inserted.
- Record on the Communications Log the shift commencement time and name of Duty Operator
- Keep a separate record of each vessel's nominated return time showing the vessel name or number against the return time. A sample 'Log of Nominated Return Times' is at Annex B.
- At regular intervals (at least hourly) during the shift / watch, at change of Duty Operator and immediately prior to closing the centre, check the 'Communications Log' and 'Log of Nominated Return Times' to ensure:
 - all vessels are entered on the Return Log;
 - there are no outstanding matters; and
 - there are no overdue or missing vessels.
- Ensure that at the end of each day, ALL logs, weather reports/forecasts, incoming and outgoing facsimilies, incident reports and all other relevant paperwork are filed together and indexed under the date reference to enable it to be used at a later date for an inquiry or Coronial matter. Records should be kept in accordance with the Statute of Limitations.

It is suggested that each vessel that has logged on with a nominated return time be contacted fifteen (15) minutes before that nominated time as a reminder.

End of Shift or Change of Duty Operator

A verbal handover '*sitrep*' must be given by the operator being relieved. Whenever possible, but in **all cases where an incident has occurred, the operator being relieved must prepare a written 'sitrep'**. The written '*sitrep*' is to be placed with the 'running sheet'. A suggested format for a SITREP form is at Annex E. At changeover of Duty Operator, following a briefing by the outgoing Duty Operator, the incoming Duty Operator will make an entry in the Communications Log detailing the time of changeover and the name of the new Duty Operator.

SOP 06

INCIDENTS THAT MUST BE REPORTED TO POLICE

The Duty Operator must notify the NSW Police **immediately** whenever:

- A MAYDAY is received; or
- A request for assistance is received from AUSSAR; or
- A person involved in an incident has died or sustained a possible life threatening injury; or
- Advice is received that a person is in a life threatening situation; or
- Advice is received that a vessel has or is in serious danger of sinking; or
- A vessel is seriously disabled.

The Duty Operator must notify the NSW Police **as soon as possible** in all other incidents where there is no immediate threat to life or property but where the incident involves a significant injury or if collateral damage has or is likely to be sustained to a vessel, facility or the environment.

SOP 07
PROCEDURE FOR PERSON OR VESSEL IN DISTRESS
(Actual or imminent threat to life or property)

If a SARcc or MRB receives a “Distress” or “Urgency” call from a vessel or advice of a vessel or persons in distress on the water the Duty Operator will immediately:

- Maintain contact with the vessel;
- Alert all other vessels in the area;
- Respond the appropriate accredited Rescue Vessel. If the appropriate MRU is a Police Launch, or if the nearest appropriate rescue vessel is not accredited, request is to be made through the NSW Police;
- Inform the NSW Police of the situation and actions taken;
- Call additional staff for SARcc;
- Maintain liaison with the NSW Police, as well as with both the vessel in distress and rescue vessel; and
- Complete “Incident Report” (see Annex F) and fax to NSW Police within three (3) hours of completion of the incident.

The Skipper of the responding Rescue Vessel will:

- Respond as directed / requested and provide necessary information to Duty Operator for completion of “Incident Report”; and
- Notify the SARcc or MRB of completion, injuries, damage or matters that may require Police attention .

SOP 08
PROCEDURE FOR VESSEL REQUIRING ASSISTANCE
(No immediate threat to life or property)

If a SARcc or MRB receives a request for assistance from a vessel NOT involving injury to persons, damage to vessels or the need for search and/or rescue, and where there is NO immediate danger to the vessel or its occupants:

The Duty Operator will:

- Respond appropriate accredited Rescue Vessel;
- If the appropriate Rescue Vessel is a Police Launch or is not an accredited vessel, the request is to be made through the NSW Police;
- Fax an incident form to Police within 3 hours (see Annex F).

The Skipper of the Rescue Vessel will:

- Respond as directed / requested and provide necessary information to Duty Operator for entry in the 'Communications Log' (see Annex A).

Note:

If the situation changes to indicate a threat to life or property, the procedures in "SOP 07 - Procedure for Persons or Vessels in Distress" are to be followed.

SOP 09

DECISION TO PROCEED TO SEA

The decision for a vessel to proceed to sea should be based on:

- The decision to proceed to sea is the sole responsibility of the master of the accredited rescue vessel taking into consideration:
- The safety of the vessel and crew over all other considerations;
- Existing or expected weather;
- Sea conditions;
- The capabilities / capacity / level of accreditation of the rescue vessel;
- Crew availability and level of training;
- Type and size of vessel to be rescued;
- The necessity for immediate response; and
- Consideration of more appropriate resources, such as aircraft or commercial vessels.

The Skipper of the rescue vessel will:

- Maintain communication with the Duty Operator, the Water Police (if involved) and other rescue vessels; and
- Keep a comprehensive log of all actions, courses, positions and areas searched.

Accreditation Limits

Volunteer rescue vessels should not exceed the limits of their accreditation without good reason and only after due consideration of the danger this may place on the crew, the vessel and the risk to those persons requiring assistance. A decision to proceed beyond accreditation limits would need careful consideration by the master of the vessel and wherever possible with Police concurrence.