

Derek Rogers, Saab Australia

Dr Derek Rogers heads up Saab's Global Centre of Excellence in Autonomous Vessels which is developing technologies for control systems for unmanned ships and boats. He is also Adjunct Associate Professor with the Defence and Systems Institute (DASI) with the University of South Australia, adjunct with Adelaide University

By Tracy Pierce, DTC

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly."

An interview with South Australian football great Neil Kerley had piqued Dr Derek Rogers interest. He had just heard Kerley quote those motivational words and they offered him a moment of reflection. He looked up the quote, it was Theodore Roosevelt's "The Man in the Arena" and it was fitting to both the footballer and the engineer. Kerley was a living representation of the words, having lost four grand finals before finally experiencing the win. And many people have tried and failed to make a commercial success of what has been identified as a multi-billion dollar growth industry, Unmanned Surface Vessels (USV's). Derek was keen to change that, so he volunteered to put himself in the arena to head Saab's Global Centre of Excellence in Autonomous Vessels.

So far the centre has unveiled the Bonefish trimaran concept, considered to be a game changer in USV Mission Systems, offering reliability, flexibility and 'future-proofing'.

The centre has successfully integrated the USV Mission System with Saab's latest generation of the 9LV combat management system. Saab's 9LV is used by navies across the world on surface and subsurface vessels for anti-piracy, security and surveillance missions. However just like the open architecture of 9LV, Saab's Bonefish™ USV Mission System can also integrate with any sufficiently open Combat Management System.

Derek has taken on various roles in the project, starting as Principal Designer, designing the overall systems architecture. He then helped to form the team that performed the detailed design, development, construction and integration activities. While taking on the classic program manager role of cost scheduling, line responsibilities etc, he also performs a business development and commercialisation role, conducting market validation, identifying prospective customers and working out whether the product meets their needs, how they can adapt it to suit and identifying and bringing in partners to provide a complete solution

The innovation theme runs through this edition of SADB, and Derek has been at the forefront of technology innovation since the start of his career. Previous roles include Research Engineer with the Centre for Telecommunications Information Networking, and Product Manager with Motorola, where he worked on technologies such as location tracking and GPS systems decades before we started using them in our cars and on our Smartphones.

His foray into the defence world came when Motorola left Adelaide. He had a choice to move overseas or interstate. Having already lived and worked overseas, and wanting to stay in Adelaide, he made the decision to move to BAE Systems, as Product Development Manager. "Defence is good in terms of engineering rigour, complexity and size so the nature of the problems is good in that regard".

He is staunchly proud of the capability that we have here in Australia "If I could wave a magic wand I would give everyone a greater appreciation of what we can do in

Australia. Our people and industry are extremely capable and we should support that. Let's take stock of what we have here and utilise it".

Take the unmanned surface vessels for instance. "We've done things nobody else has done. We've accomplished things with the unmanned surface vessels that major vendors couldn't do and that is very satisfying."

Being "The Man in the Arena" in a corporate sense, trying to make an ambitious project a commercial success surely means overcoming many barriers to innovation? "Being a Corporate Intrapreneur rather than an Entrepreneur means innovation within a company, which in many respects is harder as you have to work through corporate inertia, politics, operations and access to resources. You have to have a different mindset or you'd get frustrated very quickly."

In a career sense, memorable moments are frequent, as everything is interesting and enjoyable. In a life sense obtaining a Doctor of Philosophy (Electrical and Electronic Engineering) was probably the most important achievement; accomplishing this whilst dealing with the loss of both parents

You wouldn't think that such a time consuming undertaking would leave much scope for other extracurricular activities but for Derek, it was the catalyst for a passion for photography. When he started his PhD he was invited to give a talk in Finland. He brought a camera to take pictures to share with family and friends when he got back. Of course the travel bug bit, and everywhere Derek went, so did the camera. He joined the Adelaide Camera Club to learn to improve different techniques. He got quite good at it and was invited to take part in competitions, and then went on to become a judge. "I love looking at other people's photos. I like photos that bring out emotion in people."

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Having done a PhD - what is left to conquer in terms of continuous improvement and training? "I read a lot of books, do a lot of short courses and seminars, and was fortunate to win an Industry Leaders Fund grant last year, that allowed me to go to Mt Eliza Business School to do a leadership development program. I applied for a different grant this year with a different organisation and if successful I want to do a short course in South East Asia to learn Asian Business because I think it's the future."

Whatever Derek does in the future, we know that as Roosevelt said "his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat!"



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BE ISOLATED
BEYOND THIS POINT

SAAB AUSTRALIA
Derek Rogers