

# Special force clears the way

**OPERATIONAL READINESS TEAM** | Maersk Drilling has established a special unit which aims to secure the smooth preparation of rig operations.

*Philip Thomas, drilling superintendent: "I have been working onshore and offshore, primarily in drilling, but with this job I also have to work with HR, finance and legal."*

BY TOMMY BRANDI KROG

► I reach Philip Thomas on his mobile in Ghana, where he is waiting for a visa to Angola – as he has been for several weeks. But he'd better get used to it, since securing visas – and waiting on local bureaucracy – at least in some countries, will be a central part of his new job as member of the Maersk Drilling Operational Readiness Team.

Thomas will be setting up Maersk Drilling's onshore base in Angola in time for the arrival of an ultra-deepwater semi-submersible rig in early summer. The task will include renting offices and accommodation, making contracts with local service providers, hiring local employees and expats and ensuring that business lives up to a myriad of rules.

"Local regulations which vary widely across countries are a major task. In Nigeria there are strict laws on using local supplies, whereas Angola requires up to 70% local manpower. It's a tough task in a country still affected by the civil war that ended 10 years ago. But as Maersk Drilling sees great potential in Angola we consider this to be a permanent set-up," Thomas says. "And with support from Group Procurement and other A.P. Moller - Maersk entities already established in the area, it is much easier to succeed," he continues.

## Nothing like James Bond

The Operational Readiness Team was established on 1 February 2012 with the aim of basically clearing the way for new drilling operations. Right now the team consists of five people with plans to increase to 18 by year-end. The team is divided into two groups; one handling the preparation of the start-up of new-buildings and another handling the preparation for the start-up of rigs moving from one continental shelf to another.

The Operational Readiness Team may conjure up images



Photo: Ricky John Molloy



*Peter Roland Larsen, drilling superintendent: "My job is to be the interface between the customer and the team working hard to finish the new building in due time."*

of special forces and James Bond look-alikes flying around the world to save Queen and country. But it isn't like that at all: "If we have to respond to a new case with just a few hours' notice, it actually means we have messed up. This job will be slightly tedious because we aim to plan months ahead and operate in very predictable ways," explains Jacob Odgaard, head of the new team.

Philip Thomas, having spent weeks just to gain access to Angola, recognises the need for planning:

"It's imperative that you work in a structured manner and know how to engage people. We will have to ask all different parts of the business for help – people who already have a full time job and are not reporting to us directly," Thomas says, elaborating:

"Actually this is a major change in my career. I have been working onshore and offshore, primarily in drilling, but with this job I also have to work with HR, finance and legal. I believe my background, the awareness of time and working with contingency plans and back-up plans will be a valuable help."

### **Time is a key factor**

Peter Roland Larsen is another member of the team working out of Denmark. As Operational Readiness Superintendent, Roland Larsen and his group works as an interface between the yard delivering the new rig and the team responsible for the first drilling operations.

"As soon as a contract has been signed, the customer quite naturally is restive to move, often sending out 10-15 specialists to prepare for operations. Our job is to facilitate this process and be the interface between the customer and the team working hard

to finish the newbuilding in due time," Peter Roland Larsen says. He predicts that the greatest challenge to the Operational Readiness Team will be time:

"The current newbuildings are constructed at such a speed that the time we have internally risks being the scarcest resource here. We have to create and maintain momentum throughout the coming years – on recruitment, on delivery of equipment and on negotiations, if we are to keep abreast of the deliveries," he says.

With rig day rates of easily more than USD 500,000, just a few weeks saved will make the team a splendid business.

Peter Roland Larsen and Philip Thomas may have different tasks, but they share the same goals: to clear the way for smooth, safe and efficient drill operations, and to always be prepared.

### **THE OPERATIONAL READINESS TEAM**

**A special unit within Maersk Drilling with the purpose of clearing the way for new drilling operations worldwide – technically as well as with regard to administration. The team has been established as a result of the business units huge newbuilding programme, which includes two harsh environment jack-up rigs and four ultra-deepwater drillships. Established on 1 February, the team will consist of 18 employees when fully operational by the end of 2012.**