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HMS INVINCIBLE: SOME INDIVIDUAL RECOLLECTIONS

Es el relato de varios tripulantes del Invencible durante el conflicto de Malvinas.

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THE
NAVAL
REVIEW

HMS *Invincible*: Some individual recollections

(The following collection of experiences and comments was written shortly after HMS Invincible's return from the Falklands. The names of individual authors are given at the end of the relevant sections—Editor.)

OPERATION CORPORATE: AN AIR OPERATIONS OFFICER'S EXPERIENCES

'AIR OPS'—the phrase has been uttered many a time from the lips of exasperated Air Engineers, Squadron Commanders, and Navigators, to name but a few. For in Air Ops one finds oneself communicating with the whole cross-section of the ship's company in the course of the busy working day. Air Ops is the name given to a friendly, considerate group of chaps who try to achieve the Herculean task of co-ordinating all the various flying activities on HMS *Invincible*. It is impossible to please all the people all of the time and on occasions it is a case of displeasing people as little as possible as a hectic ship's programme conflicts with an equally hectic flying programme.

The Air Ops team

The Operations team consists of the following members:

OPS: the ship's operations officer, a Lieutenant Commander Observer who guides the ship's programme after liaising with the various Heads of Department.

OPS 2: another Lieutenant Commander Observer, who constructs the daily flying programme from the Command and Squadron requirements, and then sees to it that the programme is adhered to as closely as possible. OPS 2 is also Mail Officer, responsible for the despatch and collection of mail from ashore, an unenviable job considering the importance the ship's company place on getting letters from home.

OPS 3: a Fleet Chief Airman who deals with aeronautical charts, flight information publications, and air intelligence, and who also briefs aircrew before they go flying, and gives radar talkdowns to the Sea Harriers when required.

Myself, actually an Air Traffic Controller by trade, the latest addition to the Air Ops set up. I assist OPS 2 with the running of the flying programme, prepare and give briefs to the aircrew, and give radar talkdowns to Sea Harriers recovering to the ship at night or in bad weather.

Last but not least are two Naval Airmen, who deliver flying programmes, work vugraph machines for briefings, and generally help out in the office.

Operation Corporate

When we sailed with the South Atlantic Task Force in April 1982 the ship was already well worked up, having spent the previous two and a half months doing a Joint Maritime Course in the North Sea, and an amphibious exercise taking Royal Marines over to Norway. This had given the ship and its Air Wing valuable experience in operating in rough seas and sub-zero temperatures, conditions which would be all too common in the South Atlantic.

Now it was for real, and all aspects of flying were practised in earnest with live weapons adorning the aircraft. As we headed south there were extensive periods of deck-landing practice, weapon firings, anti-submarine operations, and air intercepts. Instead of our normal complement of nine Sea Kings and five Sea Harriers, we had eleven and eight respectively; a Lynx helicopter joined us later. In addition to flying training many Helicopter Delivery Service (HDS) flights were made, including a mammoth effort at Ascension Island, helping to make the airstrip there the busiest in the world for a day.

The sequence of events leading up to the capture of Port Stanley on 14 June 1982 are known worldwide so I will give an account of the routine on board *Invincible*, which involved keeping two or more Sea Kings airborne almost constantly for two months and providing Sea Harriers for airborne or deck alert in conjunction with the Flag Ship HMS *Hermes*.

In Air Ops we worked eight hours on watch and eight off, changing over at noon, eight in the evening and four in the morning. We were split into two watches; OPS 2 and myself working together, and OPS 3 working with an aircrew officer seconded from 820 squadron.

If I was going on watch at 04.00 I would wake at 03.30, go for a quick shower, don my overalls and anti-flash gear, and take over on the hour in the Air Ops office where my opposite number would give me a brief on what was happening, what should be happening but wasn't, and what was happening when it shouldn't have been. Signals would be read and sorted, and OPS 2 would set to work on the next twelve hours flying programme based on tasking from the Admiral's staff in HMS *Hermes*. The overall requirements for aircraft would be sent by a signal known as the Opgen 'C', which outlined the numbers and type of aircraft needed to counter the expected threat. The exact timings, weapon loads, and callsigns were all included in another signal, the Opgen 'F'. Despite a myriad of signals winging their way between ships, it very often became necessary to speak to the Admiral's staff on an encrypted radio circuit known as the 'bubble phone'. Many potential problems and unexpected changes of plans were sorted out by OPS 2 getting on the 'bubble phone' and 'discussing' the problems with varying degrees of vehemence.

Preparation for the pre-flight briefs would involve writing out a set of vugraph sheets including all the relevant tactical information such as: ship's expected position at launch time, the direction of advance of the force, the position of ships in company, radio frequencies, other

air activity, codewords, callsigns, and restrictions on radio and radar emissions. The Sea Harrier aircrew would also need briefing on the air threat, altitudes and routes to be flown when joining or leaving the Force, and the patrol areas.

All this information would be gleaned from the relevant signals and information boards in the ops room and transcribed on to vugraphs in the Air Ops office, with regular interruptions when the phone or intercom required answering. Questions, queries, commands, and complaints would be directed at the Air Ops office in varying quantities, depending on the time of day and by how much the flying programme was going wrong. Lieutenant Commander (Flying) in the flying control position (Flyco), the Navigator on the bridge, the Squadron duty officers from the briefing rooms, and the warfare officers in the ops room would all have virtually instant access to the Air Ops office via their telephones and intercoms and at times it would seem that there was a conspiracy to totally overwhelm us with calls. There was always a whole host of problems which could affect the carefully planned flying programme and result in an instant and wide-ranging rehash. The vagaries of the weather would always be an unknown factor despite the efforts of the Meteorological office on board, and the wind could become too strong or a dense fog could engulf us with very little warning. The requirements for the ship to steam downwind to replenish while the aircraft required to launch or recover into wind was a never ending cause for deep and meaningful discussions between the Navigator and Flyco.

Then there would be the problems of the flight deck, where we would find ourselves with more aircraft airborne than we had deck space for, because some unknown helicopter had just deposited some unknown load in the middle of the flight deck. On one memorable occasion a number of Sea Kings from the *Atlantic Causeway* were transiting inshore from a couple of hundred miles out and were due

to refuel *en route* on HMS *Hermes*. At the critical moment *Hermes*' refuelling system became unserviceable and so several very thirsty helicopters came over to us looking for fuel. There were more of them than we had space on deck for and some had to spend some very anxious minutes holding off while we refuelled the most desperate ones first. As it was, aircraft were landing on with as little as five minutes of fuel remaining. Eventually, after much hectic effort from the flight deck crew, and mind bending crisis management from Flyco and Air Ops they were sent happily on their way.

Other problems that came along to keep us occupied were such things as aircraft unserviceable on deck, a temporarily broken lift which would prevent aircraft being moved from the hangar to the flight deck, visiting aircraft, aircraft coming back late and short of fuel, personnel trying to get to a ship that was miles away, and stores people ranting about some vital spare part which was urgently required and could only be obtained by helicopter from some ship without a flight deck. All this and more would contribute to making an Air Ops Officer's day.

In between bouts of phone-answering and note-scribbling, I would be leaping up three decks to the briefing rooms to impart some pearls of wisdom to somewhat less than fascinated aircrew. The brief would start with a time check followed by a weather brief from the duty forecaster. I would then run through the ops brief to be followed by a barrage of questions or complaints, and when that was finished, the Squadron Duty Officer would explain the catering arrangements for those going flying and any snags likely to be encountered with the aircraft.

While the conflict was in full swing the ship would go to Action Stations when it became light, which, due to the fact that the Task Force were keeping Greenwich rather than local time, was around 11.00. Once at Action Stations all doors and hatches were closed, which made movement around the ship hard work and time consuming, so I

would position myself in the briefing room and obtain the information for my briefs by phone.

If I had come on watch at 04.00 I would hand over at 12.00 and go for lunch, before reading a three-week-old newspaper, maybe writing a letter home, and then climbing into my bunk to 'rack out' for a few hours before going on watch at 20.00 that evening. And so the routine continued for just under eight weeks until the Argentine surrender, during which time 602 Sea Harrier and 1,146 Sea King sorties were flown.

Hostilities are ended

After the conflict *Invincible* stayed around the Falklands, providing Sea Harriers to supplement the RAF Harriers at the newly opened Port Stanley airfield, while acting as the mainstay of the Naval Task Force. The pace of life slowed somewhat and our main task in Air Ops became the organising of the daily HDS flights between the Task Force and the Islands, as well as planning the whole group's daily flying programme.

A daily 'round robin' helicopter flight around the force was run, and this would collect and deliver mail and stores which would be deposited on *Invincible* for sorting and onward routing. We would plan the daily flight of two Sea Kings into Port Stanley, which was the only logistics link that the ships at sea had with land, and was therefore of great importance. *Invincible* provided a sort of combined courier, postal, and bus service to the ships in company. Requirements would be passed to us and a proposed order of collection would be planned. The Sea Kings could take a maximum of ten passengers, plus mail, stores, and anything else that could be squeezed in. After going round the Task Force they would fly into Port Stanley, drop off passengers for the daily Hercules flight to Ascension, and then proceed around the Islands transferring mail, stores, and people as required by the Army authorities ashore. In the afternoon the aircraft would join up at Port Stanley, collect anything for the Task Force which

had arrived in the Hercules, and transit back to *Invincible*. Of course all our carefully prepared brief for this operation would have to be changed several times due to unforeseen circumstances and 'events beyond our control', but at least it kept us on our toes. And so it continued through the winter months in the South Atlantic until the most welcome appearance of HMS *Illustrious*, who relieved us at the end of August.

Homeward bound at last and a long-awaited chance to relax slightly. We actually achieved some non-flying days and the Flight Deck was used in its secondary (but very popular role) of sports field and sun deck. At times hundreds of sailors could be spied hurling their bodies around in an attempt to return home looking like a bronzed Adonis.

The only major events for Air Ops on the way home were at Ascension Island, where 200 personnel going on advance leave were ferried off by helicopter, and at Culdrose, where the final mammoth HDS was carried out in a blanket of Cornish fog which prevented us seeing England until the day we arrived in Portsmouth. Friday 17 September was an unforgettable day, and an incredible finale to 166 days away from home.

LIEUTENANT T. D. CAIRNS, RN

OPERATION CORPORATE: AN AIRCRAFT CONTROLLER'S VIEW **Exercises**

The build-up for our Falklands 'excursion' could not have been better planned. The first three months of 1982 had consisted of a major air exercise with RAF squadrons and then a fascinating Joint Maritime Course (JMC) in February. Both the air exercise and the JMC had created a great deal of work for the ACs and in particular the air tracking teams so by the time we entered a major NATO amphibious exercise in Norwegian waters we felt reasonably confident in our ability to meet incoming raids with success.

It is paradoxical that our part in the NATO amphibious exercise as an

amphibious unit created a bit of unease as it became clear that in the close confines of a Norwegian fjord attacking aircraft could appear without warning by our sensors. It was however comforting to know that a unit such as a CVS would be unlikely to enter such restricted areas in times of conflict but 2½ months later the amphibious units of the Task Force faced much the same problem with little warning of air attack.

Our recall early in April and the possibility of conflict with the Argentine armed forces created a problem as so little was known of them. Our only initial intelligence was gleaned from *Jane's Fighting Aircraft* and similar publications. This is indicative of the surprise which faced the MoD and the British Government.

The work-up phase

On sailing on 5 April with *Hermes* my unflinching recollection is of the level of seriousness and purposefulness which descended on the ship, in particular the operations room. The air tracking teams, for instance, improved their detection times and the co-operation and smoothness when contacts were handed from one radar display to another was indeed remarkable. It would, however, not be unfair to say that the standard of air tracking had always been good but with the impetus of approaching action it improved dramatically and remained so throughout the conflict.

Similarly the aircrew became more demanding of the aircraft controllers. More information than previously thought necessary needed to be passed. Security considerations leading to an unwillingness to pass certain pieces of information provided the Ops room and the squadron with food for thought. Differences also arose during the work-up phase and indeed during the conflict itself over differing perceptions held by the aircraft and by the command of tactical employment. This, by and large, put the AC in the delicate position of being in the middle between

the Anti-Air Warfare Officer and Pilot. Nevertheless a close working relationship soon developed. Indeed it was enhanced by the prospect of action, and the pilots preferred to be controlled by voices they knew and trusted.

The work-up phase continued and gradually the ACs fell into a two-watch system which we stayed in once Defence Watches were inaugurated. With three ACs in each watch plus one HC a strong team spirit was fostered and it was this teamwork which became the main morale booster throughout the campaign.

Into action

Once the action had been opened on 1 May many events and incidents were memorable, however the general atmosphere of ops room life is difficult to recapture after five months. I aim to pick out a few incidents as a general indication of how the operations room team operated. Prime examples of several features were shown on 1 May.

Firstly the raid by the Vulcan on Stanley airfield: the majority of the ops room were unaware of the raid and were only given the particular code words to listen out for. This 'playing it close to the chest' by the command put air trackers and controllers in a difficult position so they did not know how to react to the various contacts. Similarly troop incursions were equally not taken about to the air teams until experience over several nights proved to them what was going on. Hoarding of information was the criticism levelled at the warfare officers by the air team but in fairness the dissemination of information was exceptional.

1 May also brought home to all in the Ops Room what action stations for real is like, and for the first time all our techniques of fighter control were used in earnest culminating in the shooting down of two Canberras by a dead-reckoning intercept. Sadly this was the last time our talents were used to achieve intercepts. Only on the 30 May did we get near to intercepting the Super Etendards — possibly the most

exhilarating experience I've had, trying to get them with two Sea Harriers.

The controllers on *Invincible* and *Hermes* throughout the conflict were tasked with co-ordinating air assets in the role of a Force Marshalling team, one controller taking them out and one bringing them back. Taxing work but not with the exhilaration of air intercepts. It is perhaps this type of air co-ordination which staved off boredom but even so life when not at action stations was sometimes tedious.

Lastly the team of ACs became increasingly involved in suggesting and deciding how air co-ordination was to be organised, the system of gates, etc. It was this improvisation and the thought-provoking situation we were in which professionally was so important. All of us began to consider tactics more deeply and several good ideas emerged.

LIEUTENANT P. G. KING, RN

ON THE BRIDGE

The bridge of a carrier is an exciting place during fixed-wing operations. While some of the older hands sigh nostalgically for the days of the Phantom and Buccaneer and say 'things ain't what they used to be', in fact the present day 'mini' carrier's deck still retains an air of excitement and apprehension as fast jets take off and land. Deck operations are probably more complicated as the ASW Sea Kings have these days to be given as much importance as the Harriers, and make for almost continuous action instead of the rigid formalised operating cycles of yore.

With the Captain firmly in the Operations Room as the Force Anti-Air Warfare Commander, the Navigating Officer is left much to his own devices on the bridge to conduct the ship. Considerations that have to be taken continuously are those of flying course versus MLA, remaining in the designated sector to provide such a high-value unit's ASW and anti-missile protection as well as problems associated with replenishment at sea and basic ship safety.

Lack of self protection also means a 'Goalkeeping' escort is in very close proximity, not as the traditional plane guard, but to provide point defence and the two bridges must work with almost one mind to give protection, the least inconvenience to flying operations, and to prevent collision.

There were no 'blue on blue' collisions in the Carrier Battle Group throughout Corporate which says a lot for the standards of seamanship in all the ships there, some of whom, such as the STUFT, were operating in total radar silence, often in poor weather and visibility, and in situations some Officers of the Watch had never seen before and without benefit of any sort of AIO for collision avoidance.

The message here must surely be that there is not a lot wrong with our junior officers, RN, RFA, and MM, many of whom had extraordinary responsibilities thrust on them.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER
D. J. R. WILMOT-SMITH, MBE, RN

EXTRACTS FROM THE JOURNAL OF A SUPPLY OFFICER, MARCH/APRIL 1982

22 March

Returned to Portsmouth from Exercise Alloy Express off Norway.

23 March

Chaired meeting with FOF3 staff to discuss stores for our September deployment to the Far East.

26 March

Started Easter leave.

27 March

Negotiated for new house. Hard-headed vendor!

29 March

The Queen's Private Secretary came to lunch on board to discuss HM's visit to the ship at sea on 20 April. Heavily involved as Liaison Officer.

30 March

Withdrew deposit from building society for new house.

1 April

Our first baby due. No signs of arrival.

2 April (Friday)

07.30 Recalled to the ship. Notice for sea reduced to 4 hours. Falkland Islands crisis. Stored up all day. Fortunately we are due to go to the Mediterranean on 19 April for 2 months without a stores RFA, so all our provision demands already in — a fortnight's storing compressed into a few hours.

Cash — took £100,000 offered by BSO and US \$100,000 sent down from Northwood. No prospect of a visit to the USA, but US dollars always useful in the western hemisphere.

Ship's company pouring back on board all day. Advise the Captain that the earliest we could be ready is noon tomorrow. Later in the day we hear that sailing time is a.m. Monday. A relief.

Home at night — still no sign of the baby.

3 April (Saturday)

My birthday. Early a.m. baby realised that if she wanted to see her father before we sail she had better arrive soon. Dropped wife at the hospital on the way in to the ship.

Massive storing continues — provisions, naval stores, air stores, fuel, armaments, spare gear, extreme cold weather clothing, etc., etc. Required endurance not known, assumed to be maximum. Replenishment prospects — unknown.

Decision required — land trophies, all except the silver toastrack that fought with the ship at the last Battle of the Falklands in 1914. Should bring us luck.

Another decision — landed pay accounts plus two writers to BSO. Prospect of mail very uncertain. No wish to clutter busy nets with pay signals. Better contact with NOK. With over 1,000 men we are the largest afloat tender to HMS *Nelson*.

Counted vehicle queue on the jetty — 18 of all varieties at one time during the forenoon. Armaments arriving by barge outboard, including many Sea Dart missiles to replenish Type 42 destroyers ex Springtrain. RFA *Invincible*?

Late p.m. to the hospital. Baby girl born at 23.15. What better birthday present could a wife give her husband?

4 April (Sunday)

Storing continues. Everyone involved, not least the Padré and the aircrew. Most heart-warming to see the tremendous efforts to help being made on board — and by those supplying ashore.

More aircraft arrive to supplement our air group. Even with *Hermes* and her augmented air group, our numbers are very small. 'We few, we happy few. . .'

Champagne RPC to wet the baby's head.

5 April (Monday)

Stores arriving right up to the last minute. At 10.03 given personal delivery at the gangway of an electronic item 'robbed' from HMS *Bristol* only minutes earlier, the last store to reach us before we sailed.

Sailed from Portsmouth with HMS *Hermes* at 10.15 to cheering and waving crowds — a spectacular departure. The ship's company at Procedure Alpha standing still. How to respond to the enthusiasm of the crowds? The Captain sent the AEO and me up to the bridge roof to form a waving party, taking charge of those there. All Portsmouth, half Hampshire and most of the South of England seemed there on the shore to see us off. What an unforgettable sight!

Hands to flying stations as we cleared the Nab. Live ordnance used by the aircraft. We mean business.

p.m. Settled down to draft instructions on economy in the use and consumption of stores.

SAs still sorting mammoth pile of stores in R&D (receipt and despatch). Set in hand an 'Endurance Record', a set of graphs to indicate stock levels of 20 key commodities (including breadmaking flour, potatoes, beer, teleprinter rolls — and lavatory rolls!).

6 April

Pace of life a little slower today.

Ship off Culdrose, collecting what was alleged to be the last of our stores. A message, subsequently found to be spurious, arrived saying there were 75 tons of stores

coming to us by vertrep in half an hour.

Very long HODs' discussion of preparations for war. Carpets, cushions, curtains, mirrors, aerosols, action dress all discussed in great detail. The difficulty is to determine how long the 'action' might be. A short, fierce engagement and return to the UK would justify very austere measures. A long 'Beira Patrol type' blockade would require retention of many of the comforts of life. Reminded of Samuel Butler: 'Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premisses.'

The Captain addressed us on closed circuit television. Realistic and encouraging in the face of uncertainty.

7 April

Walked round crammed catering and naval store rooms. Impossible to sort the fridges out until we eat more out of them.

Continued HODs' discussion of State 2 arrangements and manpower allocation. Normally this would be DHODs' business, but life is not normal. Agreed to make 12 stewards available in State 2 (and State 1) as air armament weapon loaders.

Ship crossing the Bay of Biscay. Fairly rough but not quite the 'mountainous seas' reported by the BBC. Strange to have the weather as front page news. Held a Supply Officers' meeting. Discuss our preparations. Difficult for us to know what to expect with diplomacy still continuing. All cheerful to be doing the job we have been trained for, but some apprehension inevitable.

8 April

Still steaming south at good speed. Passed the coasts of Spain and Portugal well offshore.

Another long HODs' meeting to discuss material preparations for war and manpower in State 2. Compromise on the material preparations — carpets remain if fixed, curtains remove and stow, cushions (flammable foam, giving off toxic gases when burning) to the Quarterdeck, mirrors remove and stow, aerosols and lighter fuel ditch. Preparations to be progressive and completed over the next 10 days.

Addressed my senior rates. Most in good heart, but some apprehension here too.

The greatest enemy at present is the unknown. All, I suspect, grateful for the rigorous training at Portland in the past.

9 April

Good Friday. Went to action stations at 09.00, then to defence watches for 24 hours to prove the system. As Support Commander took over the internal organisation of the ship from the Commander, now in 2 watches with the Captain. Signed Daily Orders. All reasonably smooth going except the contribution of hands by departments to an all-ship cleaning party. The system needs longer than 24 hours to settle down.

Good Friday service in the chapel. Well attended.

10 April

Reverted to cruising watches.

Noticeably warmer today.

Excellent briefing of all officers in the Wardroom by the Intelligence Officer. Behind closed doors. Subject — the threat. Very well attended. Conditions of service for NAAFI personnel during hostilities causing concern. They are to be given the option of leaving at Ascension Island, but, according to MoD, will be expected to pay their own passage home. Consider this inequitable and say so to the Captain. He agrees. Discuss on VHF with Supply Officer *Hermes*. His men happy to stay. Challenge MoD decision.

11 April

Easter Day. A massive turnout, particularly of aircrew, for the Padre's service on the Quarterdeck, including Communion. A very moving occasion. Padre preached with great effect.

First day in whites.

Captain approved my proposals for beer rationing to conserve stocks — officers and senior rates limited to 2 pints a day, junior rates to 2 cans. Announced this on CCTV. Sober reality generally accepted. Have to explain the rationale in more detail to the pressmen on board, particularly to the man from the *Sun* who is ready to suspect either that someone has blundered and we are about to run out or that this is a move by

authority to deprive the sailor of his true entitlement. He takes some convincing.

12 April

Major NBCDX and action messing. All the Portland exercises now starting to pay off. Action messing went well.

MoD revoked decision about NAAFI people paying for their flights home. NAAFI opt to stay — to be paid RN rates of pay south of Ascension and to be engaged in the RN and wear uniform during period of active service.

13 April

Walked round dispersed provision stores. Seven different spaces in use, all well separated within the ship.

Attended first aid and damage control lectures with the department. 100 per cent attendance and maximum attention by all. Both lectures very good value. Brief Captain on provisions endurance. He is curious why *Hermes* have potatoes on the Quarterdeck and we do not. Explain the intricacies of frozen, fresh, and dry endurances and the different storing arrangements in *Hermes*. Glad we did a paper exercise on maximum extension of endurance only last November.

15 April

Crossed the Line. King Neptune (the FCSA) and his court embarked. Receive a summons to attend, despite having crossed the Line before. It now appears to make no difference! Have a cake baked as a propitiatory offering to King Neptune. Prepare a suitable speech. Arrange a bugler and some burly attendants to accompany me — and the cake — up the after list on to the flight deck. The 'Police' respect only the cake. Remainder of us are ducked, but not before I have declaimed most of my doggerel speech. First tropical evening RPC on the Quarterdeck. Well up to carrier standards, but an air of unreality pervades the occasion — summer 1914 on a smaller scale.

16 April

Join N-Trust. This seems the right occasion.

Ship arrived Ascension Island. High, brown, volcanic — and singular. Our last chance to embark stores from the UK. 27 pallets arrived by helicopter while we were at anchor. *Hermes*, *Glamorgan*, and *Broadsword*, amongst others, all in the anchorage, also customers for vertrep stores from ashore.

17 April

Signal arrived giving operation Corporate special rate of LOA — £1 a day for all. Unlike LOA it is not graded by rank or rate. Much disappointment because it is a lot less than the African rate of LOA which we had expected to receive. Broadcast the news to the ship's company. Not popular. Our resident pressmen seize on to the story and grill me about it. They also gather a lot of unfavourable comment around the ship.

18 April

Had an unexpected visitation of loads of stores and ammunition just before we were due to sail south, many of them for other ships! The Captain none too pleased.

The air was alive with a swarm of helicopters like worker bees bringing us their loads. We hear that Wideawake airfield was the busiest in the world today — more movements than Chicago O'Hara.

As we sailed, another Hercules landed at Ascension with yet more loads, but too late. We could not wait.

19 April

Was our deployment to the Med date.

Vertreped 81 loads of stores and ammunition to RFA *Resource*. Went with the Captain and other COs to *Hermes*, the flagship. Discussed logistics with the GLOGO, Supply Officer *Hermes* and STO(N) *Resource*. A lot to talk about.

20 April

The Queen should have visited today. Our special cake for her is stowed away below.

Secured for action and held major NBCDX. Everyone taking it seriously.

21 April

Para-drop of high priority stores by RAF Hercules from Ascension. Our position

about 19 South. Most welcome arrival alongside of very urgent item for 909 radar, weighing 1,500 lbs. Well done the RAF.

Surveillance by Argentine 707. General feeling in the ship that the Argentines will not withdraw from the Falklands peacefully and will have to be ejected by force.

Did rounds of the department checking securing for action.

23 April

St George's Day. A pity this is not Day 1 of the action. Ship at 28 S, 26 W, still going south. Morphine issued. Finished securing my cabin.

Very good briefing by the Captain on CCTV. Most inspiring.

RAS(L), then increased speed southward.

Went to action stations, then to State 2 — indefinitely.

24 April

Long swell today — much more motion on the ship.

Political situation worse — little hope of a solution.

25 April

Battle of South Georgia. *Antrim*, *Brilliant*, and *Endurance* recapture the island. Hear exciting snippets of the action from intercepted signals. Great boost to morale.

26 April

Big RAS day. Ship at 40 S, 35 W. Weather worse.

Our RAS(S) and (A) with RFA *Resource* started at 11.00, finished at 20.10. Over 200 loads, including 67 for other ships. *Resource* had to send us the latter in order to clear space for our own loads. Completed RAS by vertrep. A very long day on the bridge, but rewarding.

Weather deteriorated further late in the evening. Now in the Roaring Forties. RAS only just in time.

28 April

Back-RAS'd 12 Sea Dart to *Resource*. A relief to see them go.

The government declared Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ) round the Falklands.

This is it.

29 April

Weather very misty and wet, though not rough.

Supervised vertrep to *Glamorgan*, *Sheffield*, and *Coventry* of loads received from *Resource* at RAS on 26 April. A long business with ships so far apart. One load of rope flown 12 miles to a ship which refused to take it and would not unhook. In *Flyco* we awarded her the Ropy Trophy of the South Atlantic.

Ship crossed latitude 50 South.

30 April

Last day before we attack. Weather surprisingly fine.

Department doing its final securing. The Wardroom a sorry sight, with the tables in a central square and surplus chairs coralled within. Walked round the department to check the securing. All cheerful. Tomorrow — into battle. Re-read Henry V before Agincourt:

And gentlemen in England now a-bed
 Shall think themselves accurs'd they were
 not here
 And hold their manhoods cheap while any
 speaks
 That fought with us upon St Crispin's day.

FELIX IN UNDIS