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LIFE IN TWO YANKEE

Es el relato de un Sub Lieutenant RN (nombre omitido), tripulante de una fragata tipo Leander durante el conflicto de Malvinas.

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Life in Two Yankee

(The following article is a personal account of what life onboard a frigate was like during the recent Falklands crisis. It does not attempt to deal with the engagements and resulting consequences, but solely with the ship's day-to-day routine during the period of hostilities. The ship concerned is a modernised Leander-class frigate and the author an officer under training—Editor.)

Preparing for Two Yankee

THE Falklands crisis produced the need for ships to move into a permanent condition of NBCD State Two condition Yankee. This is what is required to produce a Defence Watch system and increase the ships' watertight integrity. It is a peculiar environment to live in and changes the day-to-day life of the ship considerably. It raises many problems but none that cannot be effectively dealt with. Above all it had the desired effect of turning the ship into a more effective unit, which recent events have proved to be very necessary.

Moving on to a permanent State of Two Yankee takes time. It can be done in under an hour in normal circumstances, but with additional war preparations it takes longer. It is best to effect the change slowly but carefully, it took my ship several days to fully complete the change. The ships who came to the South Atlantic after us had more time and took weeks in dockyard hands to prepare themselves. In Two Yankee the whole outlook of the ship changes. Preparations include the landing of much gear; some ships who were at sea and unable to do this, just ditched theirs. The ship must not only be secured for sea, but, secured for action as well, a subtle difference.

To achieve this, all loose fittings and furnishings must be removed. All mirrors (if not removed) and light coverings must be taped up to prevent shattering. Where possible woodwork is replaced by steel. On a personal note, all unnecessary kit must be landed and one must prepare for a more

spartan existence. Everything else must be properly secured, stowed, or lashed down. Failure to do this can prove fatal in action, as even the most insignificant object can become a lethal missile with blast.

When the ship eventually closes up in Two Yankee it effectively means a two-watch system and an increased watertight integrity. The entire ship's company now finds itself working a twelve-hour day. The exception to this are the dayworkers, many of whom because of their specialist jobs found themselves working all hours. We split our watches into two bouts of seven hours covering the night hours and two bouts of five hours covering the daylight and twilight hours. This ensured the ship was in a round-the-clock state of readiness with all sensors and weapon systems manned. It proved to be a very effective system if somewhat tiring at first. It took a few days to adjust one's system to it. To compensate for this the ship went into Defence Watches upon leaving Ascension Island. Although already in the War Zone it was some days before the expected threat. During the whole time we were in Defence Watches, the off-watch personnel were left alone. Evolutions such as Replenishments were handled entirely by the watch closed up, thus enabling everybody to get an equal share of rest and relaxation.

The watertight integrity is taken care of by going to Condition Yankee. This ensures all Yankee openings are kept permanently closed, providing the ship with a much more effective watertight integrity than normal. It also saves a great deal of time in closing down to condition Zulu when faced with the prospect of action. In Two Yankee the NBCD is controlled from HQ 1 and Damage Control posts are always manned. One of the lessons learned from the tragedy of HMS *Sheffield* is that smoke can spread more quickly than the Damage Control Parties can close down. To counter this, we rigged heavy canvas smoke curtains at each bulkhead doorway along the ship's main

passageway. Although all of this made movement more difficult, it made the ship's Damage Control organisation far more effective.

Clothing

One of the major changes of life in Two Yankee was the whole ship's company change of rig. Very early on it was realised that the normal issue action-working rig was an unviable proposition. This was due to it being made from man-made fibres which melt in the heat from an explosion and cause lethal burns. Therefore a new rig was introduced, colloquially known in my ship as 'Falklands Fighting Order' or simply 'FFO'. This consisted of a set of flame-resistant overalls, anti-flash hood and gloves, and steaming boots. All of this continually worn over the top of warm clothing, made up the rig. In fact during the period of hostilities it was never taken off, and one even had to sleep in it. At all times one had to carry a lifejacket and a once-only survival suit. Most of us also found it worth while to carry extras such as a torch and a seaman's knife. Everybody also had to wear an identification tally around the neck and carry a Geneva Convention Identification Card. After the initial sinking of ships, an optional extra was introduced, the personal survival kit, this was a kit in a handy container, consisting of a change of underclothes, toothbrush, razor, and other extras one required. All in all we were rigged and ready for any contingency.

Domestic routine

In Two Yankee our domestic routine was very much altered. As previously mentioned we had to wear 'FFO' at all times and this made personal hygiene more of a problem. The way round this was to take showers during the times when the threat was at its lowest, and this was generally speaking in the middle of the night hours; day and night ceased to have any real meaning in respects other than the threat. One had to take one's wash kit to the showers, undress, wash quickly, then dress again. A shower under these conditions

however, always seemed to feel that much better than normal. It is worth noting that we all had to shave as well, because we had been ordered to remove beards as a standard wartime safety precaution.

Laundry was another problem. Our Chinese Laundry Crew disembarked at Ascension Island, therefore laundry had to be kept to a bare minimum and one found oneself dhobying socks and underwear with regular monotony. Getting them dried was also a problem, as no loose gear could be left sculling. The rigging of wash lines in all the bathrooms solved this. A member of the Damage Control party was detailed off to remove all articles drying when action stations was sounded off. In fact all loose gear was a problem that had to be dealt with. Each messdeck usually appointed one member who, when action stations was piped went around checking and securing loose items. Fortunately gash was no problem, as the submarine threat was very low, the only restriction on ditching it was at flying stations.

A challenge for the First Lieutenant was the general cleanliness of the ship. He was able to deal with this by appointing two Chief Petty Officers as Defence Watch coordinators. They organised the regular cleaning of passageways and compartments. To do this they took personnel from around the ship who could best be spared and assigned them cleaning jobs. Also once a week at the change of watch there was a 'Clean Ship period' involving everybody. That this system worked is proved by the fact that the cleanliness of the ship never deteriorated whilst in Two Yankee.

An order from the Commander of the Task Force decreed that the ship's heating should be off at all times. This was so that personnel would be forced to wear plenty of warm clothing and also become accustomed to the climate. In the antarctic conditions of a South Atlantic winter the first rationale was valid, I feel however, that only an Eskimo could ever become fully acclimatised. The reason behind this was that had we been forced to abandon ship we would have been well insulated against the

cold, which would not have come as such a shock. For personnel whose place of work was normally on the upper deck, arctic clothing was issued and in certain positions such as the gun direction platform, heated oversuits were provided.

The other major domestic upheaval was eating. Because of the two watch organisation, meals had to be staggered, thus food was served on the half hour either side of the watch change. During the period of hostilities we remained in Zulu time which was four hours different to Zone time. Therefore one could find oneself eating dinner in the early hours of the morning and breakfast at midday. Meals were also of a smaller quantity than usual. This was to ensure there was always a reserve stock in case for any reason we were unable to replenish. The midday meal was always cold, this was because it was

considered unwise to cook during daylight hours when the threat of attack was at its highest.

In conclusion

Although not the most comfortable way to live, life in Two Yankee was effective. This is how it should be, it made the ship far more ready and alert for any threat. It also ensured all personnel were in all respects ready to deal with that threat in a quick reaction time. The minimal casualties inflicted on the Royal Navy and the relatively small loss of ships in the Falklands crisis illustrates this. Although I will not pretend I enjoyed the experience, I would not have missed it.

In a war environment, the only sensible way to live is in Two Yankee.

SUB-LIEUTENANT RN