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CORRESPONDENCE - THE FALKLANDS CAMPAIGN

Es el relato del Chief Staff Officer Engineering to the Commander in Chief Fleet P. G. Hammersley durante el conflicto de Malvinas.

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# THE NAVAL REVIEW

## Correspondence

### THE FALKLANDS CAMPAIGN

Sir,—This is my last week as Chief Staff Officer Engineering to the Commander-in-Chief Fleet and, as I look back, the last two years are dominated by the events of recent months. This letter is my view from Northwood of the operations in the South Atlantic. It has been a great privilege to have been a member of the Commander-in-Chief's staff and hence to have gained an overall view of the war. The views of those who were there will be of greater value but they will come later.

By the time that this appears in print studies by many authorities and organisations will have highlighted the many detailed lessons that emerge from Corporate. It is already clear that, on the whole, our equipment performed well. Ships will be sunk if they are hit by sufficient explosive force and they will suffer severe damage if a large missile with a lot of burning fuel starts a fire. We must go on trying to make these events less likely; but we should not conclude that our present designs are wrong because they happened.

Our weapon systems performed much as we expected. We would not have won the war had they not done so. We will now be able to improve them as a result of the lessons learned and the resources to do so must be found. Our propulsion systems did what we asked of them and were generally as reliable as we could reasonably have hoped. I believe that this operation proved the wisdom of our gas turbine propulsion policy. Although ships did not have all engines fully serviceable all of the time, the built-in redundancy of the four gas turbines per ship meant that no gas turbine ship lost all propulsion despite the length of the operation and the number of miles steamed. The performance of the steam machinery in the older ships has also been most encouraging with the only major problems arising from action damage. Diesel generators, air compressors, radars, and upperdeck equipment gave maintainers

some headaches but their continuing efforts ensured that services were maintained. A bit more redundancy would have eased some of the headaches!

Initially the supply of stores was by air to Ascension Island with supply onwards by sea. The RAF rapidly introduced an air-drop service which was extended by air-to-air refuelling until it was eventually possible to air-drop limited loads of stores to the Falklands sea areas. The RAF support was magnificent and played a vital part, but even when it became possible to use the airfield at Port Stanley, stores supply by air was still limited and the best supply time UK to Falklands was four days. The problem of spare gear supply thus encouraged a make do and mend policy within the ships. From reports I have received it is evident that great engineering skill was shown in repair work by local manufacture, by making one good component out of two or more defective ones, and by improvisation. Examples of the latter are a radar charging choke from an electric toaster element (later improved by winding one by hand), a drying oven for Sonar Type 182 cable ends from baked bean tins, and a communications jammer from an electric motor with a defective commutator. In the wake of action damage, systems were made good by the identification of redundant or less important systems to provide the materials; main service pipes replaced from pre-wet systems, diesel air start services from tool air and Agouti lines.

Our battle damage repair capability was strengthened by the chartering of two oil-rig support vessels as Forward Support Ships. *Stena Seaspread* (SNO Captain P. Badcock) was in the South Atlantic early in the campaign followed later by *Stena Inspector* (SNO Captain P. J. Stickland). They each carried over 120 technical officers and ratings, culled mainly from FMGs and were fitted out with considerable workshop machinery and tools. *Stena Seaspread* carried out major repairs, often in the open

sea, and examples of this work include major plate repairs to ships' hulls to make them watertight and fully seaworthy, rewiring of a Sea Wolf system (without detailed wiring drawings) after cannon and fire damage, recovery of 20mm Oerlikons from sunken ships, their refurbishment and mounting in other ships, and the rebuilding of the Tyne duntakes in HMS *Glasgow* — on the port side, out of wood. Two engineering firsts from this operation were the change of an Olympus gas turbine at sea by ship's staff in HMS *Invincible* and an afloat underwater change of a propeller blade in HMS *Avenger*. *Stena Inspector*, following later, carried out work in moving the Argentinian submarine *Santa Fe* at South Georgia and then relieved *Stena Seaspread* in the Falkland Islands. One of her first tasks was the successful change of a 992 aerial and pedestal in HMS *Birmingham*.

A lot of the detail of the good practical engineering that went on in the Falklands is still being collected but it is clear (from the speed with which Argentinian prize ships, transport, and machinery were repaired and recommissioned) that hard work and ingenuity supported by professional engineering was not lacking.

It is therefore my view that the main engineering lesson to be learned from the Falklands operation is that our engineering personnel performed supremely well. It was a tremendous achievement to land a large body of troops on a hostile shore in appalling weather conditions at 8,000 miles from the UK with very little preparation time. The inter-service co-operation was very good indeed and the enormous logistic problem was only solved with the help of amazing and courageous flying by the RAF. Similarly, the success of the merchant ships in support and the courage and dedication of the crews is a story in itself, as is that of the Army after the landing. But the victory would not have been won if the ships had not kept operating under battle and severe weather conditions. That they did so is not only a tribute to the design but even more to the people. Their dedication, hard work,

courage, and professionalism were clear, and these qualities were developed under naval training. Our training establishments, *Manadon*, *Collingwood*, *Sultan*, *Daedalus*, *Fisgard*, and *Caledonia* can be very proud of the people whom they produced. These establishments strive very hard to instil the highest possible professional and general qualities in their trainees. Both were clearly demonstrated to be vital and must be maintained.

I am very proud to have been a member of the Engineering Branch of the Navy and it has been a pleasure to serve for so many years with people of such quality, at every level. As I leave, I wish you all continued success in the future.

P. G. HAMMERSLEY