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LEADERSHIP IN THE FALKLANDS CAMPAIGN

Relato del Capitán del Intrepid durante el conflicto de Malvinas.

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THE NAVAL REVIEW

Leadership in the Falklands Campaign

(Members will remember various articles on leadership that have appeared in recent years. How did the principles and qualities discussed stand up to battle conditions? One view is printed below. It is the text of presentation given at the request of the German Navy. The author asks me to beg your indulgence for what is only one ship's experience and he feels that there are many other valuable lessons of leadership to be learned from others who were in Operation Corporate. I hope that we shall hear them following this article—Editor.)

I WILL FIRST outline the principles of leadership we were teaching and practising before the Falklands Campaign; I shall then describe the preparation of *Intrepid* from reserve, our deployment to Ascension Island where we joined the rest of the Amphibious Force, the landings on the Islands and our time under enemy attack. I make no apologies for my various quotations, since it is impossible to speak about leadership without culling flowers from the gardens of great thinkers and leaders.

Principles of leadership

The principal aim of the leader must be to create a climate of confidence and respect, so that his decisions will be accepted willingly and he will be able to command the instant, unquestioning, and whole-hearted response of his ship's company as the circumstances may demand. He *must* dominate events which encompass him; once events get the better of him men will lose their confidence in him, and when that happens he ceases to have any value as a leader.

He must understand that bottled up in men are great emotional forces which have to be given an outlet in a way which is positive and constructive, and which warms the heart and excites the imagination. If the approach to leadership is cold and impersonal, he will achieve little; if he can gain

the trust and confidence of his men, and they feel their best interests are safe in his hands, then he has in his possession a priceless asset and great achievements become possible.

How does he achieve this? First he must be a master of his profession. He must always be thinking ahead; he must think continually and deeply about his profession. Thus any apparently instant, sometimes unconventional decisions are based on deep study and understanding of the issues that face him. Genius is said to be one per cent inspiration and ninety-nine per cent perspiration. I believe that good leaders are made rather than born, and that no officer will reach higher rank without prolonged study.

Second the most ancient and time-honoured requirement of a leader of any fighting men is courage, both physical and moral. Moral courage will enable the leader to take decisions regardless of personal consequences or opinions of others. But a word of caution — perhaps the most difficult thing is to distinguish between moral courage that gives resolution especially in adversity, and obstinacy in holding to a course of action when it would be more courageous to admit error. Only the leader can make that distinction, and to make it correctly demands complete honesty with oneself. As Napoleon said 'I have very rarely met with courage at two o'clock in the morning — by that I mean unprepared courage,' emphasising that without preparation and training moral courage is almost unattainable.

Many other qualities are also required:

Commonsense: that natural capacity for seeing things as they are without illusion or bias, combined with the capability to draw the correct conclusion and take the correct action.

Tenacity: the firmness of purpose and persistence which sees a thing through to the end; and the fortitude to endure physical pain, fatigue, or adversity.

Sense of duty: a leader must accept he is always on duty and there are no set hours and conditions.

Sense of humour: the capacity to laugh at oneself has a close affinity with the ability to remain calm and clear-headed in times of stress and danger. This will enable the leader to see the funny side of even the most intolerable conditions.

Loyalty and sympathy: this works both ways up and down. A leader should give untiring attention to his responsibilities toward any subordinates and deal promptly and fairly with everything that affects their interests. The leader who displays both these qualities inevitably attracts them to himself.

Faith: a firm religious faith provided it is not taken to extremes can provide the leader with great and enduring inner strength which will be invaluable when the going gets tough or he is faced with difficult decisions. Of the person who says he has no need of faith or religion I would ask whether he believed his intellectual judgement superior to all the outstanding thinkers of Christendom from St Augustine to T. S. Eliot; and more importantly whether he is prepared to face *alone* the suffering and sacrifice with which he will inevitably at some time be faced.

Manners and humility: Good manners and consideration for others should colour his dealing with all his fellow men — there is no incompatibility between the exercise of command and the practice of humility.

Example: setting an example is one of the primary means of communicating with your men.

The need to delegate: it is essential for the training and development of subordinates — who will be the next generation to command — and it helps to create a sense of responsibility.

Discipline and morale

But these personal requirements must be backed by discipline. The aim of discipline is the conquest of fear. As Socrates said 'A disorderly mob is no more an enemy than a heap of building materials is a house.' The

factor which changes a group of people is intelligent discipline. In the Navy the basis of discipline is never obedience for its own sake, but obedience for the sake of the ship and crew and the common well-being; it is the sacrifice of a man's comfort, inclination, safety, and even life, for others, and for something greater than himself; it is the refusal to be the weak link that snaps under strain. It is not automatic obedience to orders we seek to instil but the active habit and spirit of discipline — not the mechanical performance of duty but the instinctive resolution to do one's duty on all occasions.

With the use of intelligent discipline and the other qualities mentioned above he will then be in a position within his ship to achieve high morale. Morale is essentially a state of mind. The main quality to instil into men is pride, pride in themselves both individually and as a group, pride in their leaders, their ship, and their Navy. Their morale is improved if they are informed of what is going on. Every man must feel that he himself and his work are important. I believe morale to be the greatest single factor in war. A high morale is based on discipline, self-respect, and confidence of the sailor in his command, in his weapons, and in himself. Without high morale there can be no success.

I do not believe that the qualities required from today's leaders are any different from those required over the centuries. Research into the Navy's great leaders shows that they were always thinking about their men, and won their hearts by showing their own. It was their unspoken pride to honour their words, to be gentle to the weak, to be loyal to their comrades, to do their duty. British naval tradition is based not upon administrative machinery but upon humanity, which at its highest level is a constant reminder that man is not only body but a spirit. When the chips are down and you are facing uncertainty your men need something more than rationalist stuffing. You cannot programme men to their deaths, they have to be led.

In particular we must be careful that we do not create for ourselves a false sense of security and believe that when combat begins we will have time to change our ways; we will have to fight with the result of our peacetime leadership.

The test of war

How did these principles that I had been brought up with over twenty-nine years stand the test of war.

Intrepid lay in Portsmouth Dockyard having just run down to reserve after a three-year commission leaving a care and maintenance crew of some 200. On Saturday 3 April she was ordered to prepare for sea. Ten days later everybody of the original crew except two officers and twenty men had been recalled from all over UK and abroad. Ten days later we sailed completely stored, ammunitioned, and fuelled for war. This incredible achievement was only possible because of the group identity of the ship's company. It was like coming home for most people, seeing familiar trusted faces, who had in the past trained together, lived socially, and run ashore together — morale of the highest level had been recreated overnight. That morale was based on mutual trust between colleagues, a cause which we believed in, namely the freedom of the individual, and most importantly knowing that our country was behind us.

We then went to Portland after a most emotional farewell from our families for a four-day work-up. There is no doubt that the threat provided incredible incentive for all on board. We left the UK for Ascension Island on 26 April, with tons of extra stores. Amongst these items were land drain pipes for the airfield extension; even this small item gave confidence in the foresight that had been shown in our original war planning and also confidence that we would eventually need them, as did our 110 days supplies of food for 900 men.

This feeling of confidence expressed by a leader or leaders I believe was of considerable importance. As I sailed with my ship's company I was confident that we

would do well, but that we had an enormous amount of training to do. On our way south we escorted a North Sea Ferry the *Norland* who had 900 paratroopers of 2 Para Bn on board. For the next nine days it was practise, practise of every conceivable drill. Action stations, defence stations, abandon ship drills, damage control drills at all times of day and night, so that by the time we arrived at Ascension we were I believed ready for war. In particular I was reminded of the saying that peace is the incubation period of war, the type of war makes no difference. In practice the war is usually won by the nations and commanders who most determinedly prepare for it in peace.

Then two important events occurred, the sinking of *Belgrano*, and the landing and capture of South Georgia. They gave a very tremendous boost to our confidence — almost a dangerous boost; for almost immediately the *Sheffield* was sunk. This stunned the ship totally, myself included. It was one of our newest ships, and we had not lost a ship through enemy action since 1945; clearly the battles ahead were going to be no walk-over. Within a few hours we were back to normal and our training continued with renewed vigour. I made the point clearly to the ship's company that in no way was this going to deter us, only make us more determined to see a successful end of the campaign and to see that the deaths in *Sheffield* were not in vain.

We then joined the rest of the amphibious ships and merchant shipping at Ascension Island and sailed south towards the Falklands. We had at this stage some 600 over complement of the normal wartime load.

As the risk of enemy attack increased, communications between command and the ship became even more vital. It is most important that those who are keeping the ship's company informed should have the whole picture and be capable of fluent delivery. Each night the Commander would sum up the day's activities, hopefully predict tomorrow's, and also comment on

the overall strategic and tactical picture. As he had done this every night for the last two years it was nothing out of the ordinary. The need to maintain the feeling of normality should be emphasised. Our living conditions were not unexpected, nor our role as we had rehearsed it time and time again in Norway and the Baltic in recent NATO exercises.

Our dress now was action working dress; we slept in clothes, antirash hood around the neck, gloves, gasmask, lifejacket and once-only suit around our waists. Reality was at hand all the time, Bear Deltas overflying us, attempts by a Boeing 707 to locate us, and regular conferences by Commodore Amphibious Warfare on board *Fearless*.

On 19 May just under 200 miles, and within refuelled-*Etendard* range, from the Falklands we stopped with *Fearless* and *Canberra* to transfer 965 Paratroops and 800 Commandos respectively. I don't think I have ever felt more vulnerable, docked down maximum speed 5 knots and my landing craft shuttling between the two ships. A sense of humour was the most valuable weapon at this stage.

I now had 1,900 people on board, literally sleeping everywhere, in every passageway. While they were of many mixed units, to me they were all *Intrepid's* ship's company and I had direct responsibility for their safety. A very strong sense of purpose filled the ship.

At this stage came one of the most testing moments in my life, as at the same time I embarked from *Hermes* and *Invincible* men of the SAS and SBS and all their war stores. This transfer took from 11.00 to 14.00 the following morning, four to six Sea Kings conducting the transfer most of the time. About 22.00 I was on the bridge when we suddenly heard the sound of a Sabre air distress beacon over the distress frequency. It could only mean that one of the helicopters had ditched. We soon realised it was the one with twenty-nine people on board; only seven survived. At that moment I was vividly reminded of Field Marshal Slim's words describing the

ultimate test on a leader. Suddenly, he said, everybody will stop what they are doing, look at you, no one will speak and they will only ask for leadership — you will never be more alone in your life. Their courage is ebbing and you just make it flow back. It was also at that moment that one of the qualities of leadership not often discussed was necessary — the ruthlessness to see the task finished to the end at no matter what personal cost to yourself. I hope that I provided the calmness and objectivity required at that moment, impossible without faith in something much greater than yourself. Had I not believed in God and His will, moments such as those would have been most difficult to survive.

We then sailed on and by the morning of the 20th (D-1) we were to the north east of the Falklands, in poor visibility and surrounded by all the ships of the task force. It was at about 15.00 that a rumour swept through the ships that there had been a settlement, based on some news reports on the BBC. The feeling of relief was plain for all to see, everyone thought — we won't have to fight; not because we were afraid but because no one wanted to see human blood spilled unnecessarily. Half an hour later I was handed an exclusive signal from the Commander-in-Chief to all Commanding Officers saying that the negotiations with the Argentinians had failed and the landing would take place as planned the next day, the 21st, at 01.30. I don't think I have had a more unpleasant duty than having to tell the ship's company and paratroopers that we were going to fight and in a few hours time. Fortunately everybody took the news calmly; they put their previous elation to one side, and busied themselves in their own way for what the morrow would bring.

I will digress for a moment to discuss a most important decision. That was to confirm the whereabouts of the Command. Since sailing from Ascension Island I had not left the vicinity of the Bridge or the Operations Room; time in an Exocet attack is too short. I left the individual chatting and visiting of the ship's company

to my second-in-command. Delegation in the past now began to bear fruit. The second problem was where I was going to be in situations under threat. I believed that when under attack, at anchor or under way (except in extreme navigational hazards), my place was the Operations Room, the centre of all information and more importantly the area with probably the best communications to the rear of the ship. So we decided my PWO should be on the GDP as visual Gun Direction Officer and that while at anchor in San Carlos he should after an initial blanket approval from me have the authority to open fire — I would only exercise a power of veto, likewise the PWO who remained in the Operations Room should have the authority to open fire and fire chaff in my absence if in his opinion the circumstances warranted it. None of this was a departure from our peacetime practice.

The attack from the air

At 01.30 on 21 May we entered the Channel between the East and West Falklands and proceeded to anchor and disembark our troops. All was remarkably quiet, limited opposition having been taken care of by SBS we had landed ashore. Shortly before sunrise we reanchored at the head of San Carlos water. Thirty minutes later the first air attack commenced. On that day seventy-two aircraft attacked the ships in the sound, and at least twenty-five aircraft passed through our envelope of fire. It was our supreme test. I had done all I could, delegated authority to the lowest level I deemed prudent, trained and trained the ship's company and above all kept them informed.

The air attacks did not surprise us, but their ferocity did. Bombs were falling all around us, but none hit. We fired at anything with everything. One of our worse moments was when a pattern of bombs had dropped 100 feet on the port bow, and another aircraft, a Mirage, appeared out of nowhere coming over the hill and closing fast. My PWO succumbed to his feelings that the aircraft could not possibly fail and that time was literally standing still;

however, the starboard Sea Cat aimer had kept his head when all activity was on the other side of the ship, and at the right moment fired. Delegation again worked. While he didn't hit the Mirage, the enemy aircraft turned away — literally falling down behind a hill and ditching his bomb-load.

Throughout the raids I had the ship's main broadcast in my hand and as events occurred I relayed them to the ship's company. I continued to do this while under attack until the end of hostilities some twenty-four days later. I know that we formed an unbreakable bond, they knew my voice, knew that they were going to be told the truth and also, importantly, the gossip. I would when possible indicate the threatened side of the ship so that they were prepared in every way.

I was fortunate enough to have two Chaplains on board, one of whom was usually ashore with the landing forces. I asked the other to wander round the ship the whole time — requiring from the men acts of bravery especially in the more confined areas. On one occasion I said over the broadcast 'Air raid warning red'. Several decks below, the padre and the group he was with hit the deck, and as they did, he said in a clear voice 'Good Lord protect us' and stopped. At which one of the sailors next to him gave him a smart jab and said 'For God's sake don't stop praying now!' so he resumed his prayers aloud.

In spite of the ship's personal success we had suffered a number of losses. Within the force *Ardent* was sunk, *Antrim* and *Argonaut* hit, and there were bombs in one of the LSLs. But we had achieved our objective — we were ashore. Now we were taking the brunt of every attack and shooting down their aircraft — in the tradition of years of our history. So at the end of the day I reminded the ship's company of the words of Admiral Cunningham after we had suffered very bad losses in the Mediterranean, 'It takes three hundred years to build a tradition but only three to build a ship'. I told my ship's company that in my opinion they were now part of that tradition.

Intrepid stayed in San Carlos for the next twenty-five days, sailing at night to carry out insertions of SAS/SBS and later making trips to the south in the area of Fitzroy. On another occasion we went out to join the carrier group and were only ten miles from *Hermes* during an Exocet attack — after this the ship's company was very divided between the merits of 'Exocet Country', as the Total Exclusion Zone was known, or 'Bomb Alley' as San Carlos Water had become known.

On 24 May I had to exercise a different form of leadership since I believe that unless the leader is in sympathy with the feelings of his ship's company he will fail. It was the third day in San Carlos, air attacks had left bombs in two LSLs, *Fearless* and *Norland* had been hit by cannon fire, we heard the news of *Coventry* being sunk. It was a very low moment for us all; and, when I felt we could hardly be any lower, I received a signal saying that *Atlantic Conveyor* had been sunk. At that moment I felt that the ship's company could not take another loss so quickly. I therefore withheld the information for about an hour to allow them to digest and come to terms with the bad news they already had. About an hour later I allowed the loss to be more widely known, and the ship's company accepted it without comment.

Soon the land forces commenced their rapid progress towards Port Stanley. Nothing I saw indicated that the qualities of leadership required ashore differed in any way from those required afloat.

On 5 June *Intrepid* sailed on the first five deployments in support of the land forces ashore. Leaving San Carlos at sunset we sailed at 18 knots down through Falkland Sound and Eagle Passage and launched the landing craft for *Fitzroy*. We immediately recovered those landing craft we had dropped the night before, and steamed back to San Carlos at 18 knots — if we were not back by sunrise we could expect to be attacked by enemy aircraft. On this occasion I had to leave the Operations Room because of the navigation hazards. These night runs demonstrated again the

burden of command in terms of fatigue. In one period I was not to go to bed for seventy-two hours, for as soon as we completed our night insertion, we had to be ready to face air attacks in San Carlos; my Navigator also had to face the problem of fatigue. My Commander, who was so essential in maintaining the overall morale of the ship and ensuring the ship was able to cope with many conflicting requirements while in San Carlos ranging from casualties to bomb disposal, could not provide relief if he was to carry out his own duties properly. His only wish was 'that the Captain and Navigator don't both fall asleep at the same time'.

Our last test was to be on the 14 June the day before the surrender. During the night insertion I had just reached the open sea south of East Falkland when an incoming raid was detected at 134 miles closing at 500 knots. The raid was on a steady bearing, only at the last moment altering course, passing three miles astern. This was followed by another similar raid. I quickly closed the coast and was fortunate enough to be able to find a snow storm, in which I circled and circled until the aircraft were well clear. I then closed the coast and dropped my landing craft. That same night about ten miles away from us *Glamorgan* was hit by an Exocet fired from the shore.

The following day the Argentinians surrendered. A great feeling of relief, swept through the ship.

Intrepid was to stay in the Falklands until 24 June. We evacuated 800 prisoners from Port Howard, then 900 from Fox Bay. I then had the task of restoring all the settlements outside Stanley to normality; this involved visiting some thirty-five settlements by helicopter each with a team of experts ranging from shipwrights to medical assistants and with an armed escort as there still remained the possibility that not all the Argentinians had heard of the surrender.

This task enabled those of the ship's company who had previously been operating below decks to play a more visible role. It was one of the most satisfying

moments for the ship's company to see the visible effects of the restoration of the islanders' individual freedom. Our aim had been achieved, and the deaths in our sea and land forces had not been in vain.

In conclusion

Let me now conclude by referring back to the principles of leadership I discussed at the beginning. All the qualities I have described were found to be necessary, but I believe they have a long incubation period and need to be practised by the leader from the moment he first comes into contact with his ship's company — there is no short cut that will enable the effect to be achieved in the last days prior to battles. You and your men will act in an emergency as you have trained yourself to act. The seeds of success in leadership are sown long before the first shot is fired.

But there are certain aspects of leadership that stand out very clearly. The first quality of command is a cool head and enormous stamina and resistance to fatigue. Even under the most favourable circumstances command is an exhausting test. A leader must be a clear thinker, able to sort out the essentials from the mass of lesser factors which bear on every problem and this will lead to an element of ruthlessness on occasions.

I believe that in time of war there are few men who do not have their secret battle with fear. Fortunately when it comes to combat, the battle with fear was generally forgotten in the heat of the moment. The strain of combat has an immediate impact: everybody is keyed up and more emotional, and the example set by the leaders has an astonishing effect. Tiredness, fear, appalling conditions, great privations, the possibility of wounds, even death — all will be faced by the fighting man if he knows what he is fighting for and has confidence

in his officers and comrades. That comradeship makes a man feel warm and courageous despite the fact that all his instincts tend to make him cold and afraid.

Leadership is based on a spiritual quality and the power to inspire others to follow. We should not underestimate the value of tradition which I define as a standard of conduct laid down for you by those who have gone before and below which you should never fall. It is a handrail to guide you in steep places. You must know your men and they must know you; I believe that in spite of all the modern technology that surrounds us, it is the spirit of the ship's company that is going to win or lose our particular battles.

In effect under these circumstances the leader has clear guidelines. He must place the honour and the interest of his Queen and country first, that of his ship next, the security and well-being of his men after that. If he does this and has practised his leadership in the manner we have already discussed then, I submit, his men will follow him anywhere.

I believe I can best sum up my views by some words from Admiral Cunningham.

First there will be fortitude, the power of enduring when hope has gone, the power of taking on oneself a desperate responsibility and daring all. There must be self-forgetfulness to let wordly interests and even reputation and honour perish if only the task be accomplished. The man who is concerned with his own reputation will never move mountains. There must be patience, supreme patience under misunderstanding and setbacks and the muddles and interference of others. There must be resilience in defeat, a manly optimism which looks at all the facts in all their bleakness and yet dares to hope. There must be a sense of the eternal continuity of a great cause so that failure will not seem the end, and as a man sees himself as only a part in a predestined purpose. Leadership then depends primarily on moral endowments.

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