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HMS COVENTRY

Es el relato del Lieutenant A. G. Moon, controlador aéreo a bordo de la Coventry, de los momentos posteriores al ataque el 25MAY.

A efectos de preservarlo como documento histórico para el caso en que el archivo original o el sitio que lo contiene no figurasen más en internet, a continuación se ha realizado una copia.

THE NAVAL REVIEW

HMS *Coventry*

Introduction

THESE events commenced at 18.20 on the 25 May 1982. HMS *Coventry* had been operating around the West Falkland for a number of days and had been involved in many attacks by the Argentinian Air Force. Though this was the first attack in which the ship, in company with HMS *Broadsword*, was the main objective of the raid, the ship had seen action already that day and had shot down two, possibly three, Skyhawk aircraft during the afternoon. The build up to the attack and the attack itself are well documented and I have confined my writing to my personal recollections of the actual abandoning of HMS *Coventry* from the time at which she was hit by Argentinian bombs.

HMS *Coventry* is hit

I turned the CAP into a hard starboard orbit to avoid the Sea Dart line of fire and about 30 seconds later the hostile aircraft entered the radar overhead. Intending to roll CAP out on a westerly heading to try and intercept the opening hostiles after their attack . . . large flash in Operations Room coming from my left, the port side, radar screen disintegrates in front of me (must have imploded as I'm not cut). Turn face and body away from blast. No recollection of sound of explosion but obviously dazed as it is 2 or 3 seconds before I move. Smoke billowing around me and make first panic dash for door. Meet large crush of people with same idea, all trying to get out, and start to think again. Return to consol to collect AGR lifejacket and 'once only suit' which were hanging over consol at time of hit. Sound of screaming coming from somewhere but people moving past me in hurry to leave (not surprised) and no one is obviously injured.

No lights on in Ops Room, consol power and radio circuits are dead. Small fires on signal pads and GOP provide some light. Personnel trying to push out of starboard door so shout instructions to stop pushing,

calm down, etc., and everyone will get out alright. Acrid smoke is becoming a problem, hard to breathe. Everyone I can see, now just a grey shape in an anti-flash hood, is moving towards the door so decide to go to bridge where I can pass on Sitrep to Damage Control teams and Bridge Crew. About two thirds of the Ops Room personnel have left so make my way to door. Passageway blocked with people and in near darkness so climb broken ladder to cabin flat. A lot of smoke around but can just see by emergency lighting and climb up two more ladders to bridge. Last ladder is difficult as ship heeling away from ladder.

Push open hatch to bridge and am helped up by Navigating Officer who leads me towards bridgewing and fresh air. The ship is now listing 10 – 15°. Personnel on bridge are still trying telephones and broadcasts with no success. NO turns to me and says 'We're bloody sinking mate'.

Personnel now pouring onto upper deck so move along starboard bridgewing and assess chances of lowering the seaboat. As Boats Officer this is my responsibility. Too late, the ship is listing too far already and the boat would not clear the deck edge if lowered. Use cross passage to portside and look at motor boat. Boat deck is inaccessible due to damaged metal from engine uptakes blocking the ladder. Academic point anyway as motor boat has holes in it from flying uptake grills. Start moving forward to port bridgewing but footing is now becoming difficult as ship is listing about 25°. Fortunately the sea is calm and but for recent events it would be a beautiful day. Thick black smoke is now pouring from the bridge and UHF office flat door. Smoke certainly too dense to enter without breathing apparatus and wonder whether to close door but decide not to in case anyone is trying to get out.

Return to starboard bridgewing to find that life rafts are being put into the water. I re-enter the bridge to find out if we are abandoning ship and meet the Operations

Officer coming out. His anti-flash hood has been badly scorched and his face and hands appear burnt. He tells me that he has been unconscious in the Ops Room under a consol since we were hit. He was missed during the evacuation because of the darkness and the smoke but the Ops Room is now clear as he was the last one out. Two or three members of the Ops Room crew standing nearby with various burns and decide I was lucky not to be burnt.

Abandon ship

Personnel are now being ushered into the water from the fo'c'stle and it is obvious that the order to abandon has been given though main broadcast is out of action. I inform the radio operation on the portside and tell them to put on their 'once only suits'. It is now ten minutes since the bombs came onboard. The ship is turning over fairly quickly and now has a 30–35° list.

Lif jackets are now being passed round to those without and as I have a 'once only suit' I decide to put it on. The angle of the deck is now too steep to accomplish this standing up so I sit down. As soon as my 'suit' is half on I toboggan through the cross passage to the portside. Bless the maker of guardrails which stop me going straight over the side and finish putting on 'suit' and lifejacket before moving.

Decide not to jump off the portside with the ship heeling over on top of me. This is stupid as I can easily swim clear before she turns over but all the liferafts seem to be on the starboard side so struggle back up through the cross passage and down the superstructure to main deck level. The two liferafts I can see are almost full already and it is time to leave home for good. Half a dozen people are with me, all debating whether to jump or slide down the ship's side. The stabilisers and bilge keel are now at water level so I decide to jump clear of them. Prepare to jump as someone grabs my arm. No idea who it is but he shouts 'Come on, Sir', and together we jump into the water.

Postscript

To continue the story in the same vein up until the point that I climbed aboard HMS *Broadsword* would take many pages of writing and would be difficult and tedious to read. Nine helicopters, HMS *Broadsword* and her boats were all involved in one rescue. The badly injured were flown straight ashore or to the hospital ship, the rest of us were collected onboard *Broadsword* where we were looked after in a most professional manner. Within two hours of being hit the rescue was complete but for the shuffling of personnel from ship to ship on our way home.

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