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COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FLEET

**LOSS OF HMS COVENTRY
BOARD OF INQUIRY
(parte 1)**

unclass/NPM



Annex B to
12-12-2006-123020-CC6
dated 25 March 2007

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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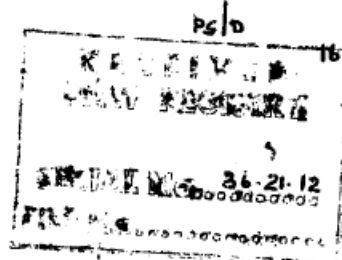
(Switchboard) 01-218 9000

From: A R M JAFFRAY CB., Deputy Under-Secretary of State (Navy)

Ref: 14/2/35(484)

21 December 1982

Commander-in-Chief Fleet
Northwood
Middlesex HA6 3HP



Sir

BOARD OF INQUIRY - REPORT INTO THE LOSS OF HMS COVENTRY

Reference: 520/239L dated 22 September 1982

1. I am commanded by the Admiralty Board of the Defence Council to inform you that they have taken note of your report and the Board of Inquiry proceedings forwarded under the reference.
2. The Admiralty Board made the following observations:
 - a. HMS COVENTRY's role on 25 May required acceptance of risk from low air attack, and her equipment characteristics made detection of raids approaching from landward difficult. A combination of tactical decisions, understandable in the circumstances, and equipment failures led to the final raids not being engaged. The damage suffered was catastrophic and no damage control measures could have saved the ship. The ship's company behaved well.
 - b. Modifications to improve GWS 30 reaction time are being considered for introduction post 1985. Both material improvements in close range AAW capability and training in their effective use, especially when operating inshore, are of high priority. The lessons of this engagement are applicable to operations in the NATO area.
 - c. Recommendations as they apply to the Ship and Weapon Departments together with the recommendations of the Marine Technology Board are under active consideration.
 - d. Recommendations regarding training in damage control, ship stability and survival are supported.

unclass/NPM

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e. A review of OPS and TPS for GWS 30 may indicate the need to upgrade the complement, with possible implications on ship accommodation and on ratings structure.

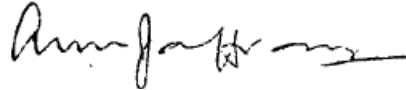
f. The provision of onboard training equipment for both existing and future ships is being actively pursued by the Naval Systems Training Group.

g. Survival training will to some extent be facilitated by the use of the mobile survival classroom which is due in service shortly. A review of survival training and training aids is being undertaken.

h. Those Damage Control aspects which have a bearing on the distribution of personnel (and thus the Quarter Bills) are being reviewed.

3. Your report and the Proceedings have been taken into account in the "Lessons Learnt" studies in the Navy Department. The detailed lessons in both your report and the Proceedings are also being followed up by the staffs responsible. The Admiralty Board may wish to make further observations when all the lessons from Operation CORPORATE and from the Reports and Boards of Inquiry into other ship losses have been fully examined.

I am, Sir
Your obedient Servant



Copy to: The Flag Officer, First Flotilla

Internal: Sec/1SL
Sec/2SL
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DGST(N)
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HMS NELSON
Portsmouth
Hants

00520/5.X

The Commander-in-Chief Fleet
Northwood
Middlesex

9 August 1982

Sir,

REPORT INTO THE LOSS OF HMS COVENTRY

1. We have the honour to present our report on the loss of HMS COVENTRY on 25th May 1982.
2. The Board convened at HMS NELSON on Monday 28 June 1982. All the facilities and support we required were willingly and efficiently provided both by NELSON and all the many authorities who provided expert advice.
3. The witnesses were, to a man, open, frank and helpful in spite of the obvious strain of reliving painful memories. This applies particularly to ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ who was in attendance for most of the Inquiry. We were all struck by the difference between those who suffered shock and injury and those who did not, particularly the way in which this affected their ability to recall details of events on the day of the loss (and before).
4. The picture which emerged from our investigations was often confusing and in some areas our version of events is open to question on points of detail. However we are confident that sound conclusions can be drawn in all critical areas. Our recommendations include some which result from the distillations of fragments of evidence and impressions gained by the Board.
5. We are conscious that we have not answered all the questions posed in our directive. That is because some subjects did not loom as large in practice as one might have expected; other apparently trivial matters assumed considerable importance.
6. We have tried to catch the mood and feeling of Operation Corporate in our narrative in order to counter balance the clarity of hindsight. The fog of war was often present. Many situations were completely new to those concerned; systems were being used in situations for which they were not designed. Unconventional and untried methods were not uncommon. Expensive failures were to be expected.
7. At 1820 on 25th May a routine air raid suddenly developed into a three minute fight for survival. It was the first direct attack on COVENTRY. The speed of events, equipment and procedural failures and bad luck overcame them. The battle-hardened BROADSWORD fared little better. It was fortunate that so many men survived.

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8. We see no need for any censures or disciplinary action; on the contrary we have endorsed the Commanding Officer's recommendations for meritorious service and added some of our own.

We have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient Servants

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XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
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Captain Royal Navy

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Surgeon Commander Royal Navy

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REFERENCES CONSULTED

Distribution:

Commander-in-Chief Fleet (Original plus 20 copies - all sections and annexes

* Wessex V was making a final search. The last survivors reached BROADSWORD at about 2000, some 1½ hours after entering the water.

17. COVENTRY subsequently sank although this was not seen by BROADSWORD, who left the upturned hull still afloat as darkness fell. The hull has since been relocated.

SECTION II - PREPARATION FOR WARBUILD AND EARLY PROGRAMME

18. HMS COVENTRY, the fourth Type 42 destroyer, was laid down in 1973 and launched at the Birkenhead Yard of Cammell Laird on 21 June 1974. The ship was accepted into Service at Portsmouth in October 1978 and commissioned on 10 November 1978. Part IV trials lasted some 10 months and the ship became operational on 17 August 1979. After undergoing BOST at Portland between September and November 1979 and taking part in JMC 793 the ship returned to Portsmouth for Christmas leave and AMP.

1980 PROGRAMME

19. The early months of 1980 were spent in a series of trials, minor exercises and weapon training periods and the ship deployed to the Middle and Far East with Task Group 318.0 in mid-May 1980. After several exercises in the Indian Ocean and an AMP in Hong Kong in early August, COVENTRY visited Shanghai and then Tokyo in company with other ships of the Task Group. At the end of September, Operation ARMILLA began and COVENTRY operated for 4 weeks on patrol in the Gulf of Oman. She returned to the Group early in November for the homeward passage reaching Portsmouth on 9 December.

1981 PROGRAMME

20. Between January and April 1981 the ship underwent a DED/AMP at Portsmouth. A satisfactory standard was achieved, the major item of work having been repairs to the port Controllable Pitch Propeller (CPP) system. Command Team Training for one team was also completed and during this period some 6 officers and 139 ratings in complement billets were relieved.

21. A 2 week COST at Portland began on 5 May 1981 following post DED sea trials in late April. FOST reported that the ship arrived in a hurry and was ill-prepared for her work-up with many safety items and OPDEFs outstanding. However the performance of the warfare department in particular was reported to be most encouraging and a general enthusiasm and willingness to learn led to steady improvement being noted. Continuing defects with the 909 radars, IFF, 4.5 gun and UAA1 caused considerable frustration. On departure, COVENTRY had achieved a satisfactory standard but it was noted that much effort would be required to get the UAA1 and 909 radars fully operational. AAW remained a weak area with GSA1 not proved in AA or NGS and GWS 30 drills were still well below standard.

22. After several port visits, COVENTRY took part in a two week JMOTS sponsored exercise (ROEBUCK) which followed the pattern of a traditional JMC and then returned to Portsmouth for an AMP which began at the end of June 1981.

23. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX Royal Navy took command of COVENTRY on 30 June 1981. The ship remained in harbour for the combined leave and AMP period (6 weeks) and sailed for various trials and a shakedown before finally leaving for a planned 3½ months away from the east port. Exercise OCEAN VENTURE which followed provided many good training opportunities thereby preparing the ship for joining STANAVFORLANT on 1 September 1981 and launching immediately into exercise MAGIC SWORD NORTH. This exercise gave COVENTRY some valuable experience in offshore barrier operations near the coast of Norway when enemy patrol boats attacked carrier forces. Weather conditions encountered were similar to those the ship was to meet some 6 months later in the South Atlantic.

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for GWS 30/GSA1 system checks but with SPRINGTRAIN and earlier exercise opportunities behind them, this situation did not unduly worry the Command. At this stage, heavy emphasis was placed on surface procedures as the surface threat from the Argentinian Exocet armed vessels was seen to be dominant. NBCD exercises were conducted regularly and long term securing-for-action measures were set in train. The ship's company also began to make the necessary mental adjustments, putting aside thoughts of the planned return home for Easter leave and coming to terms with the challenge that faced them. Individuals were affected in different ways and, in a general mood of expectancy, everyone kept a close watch on the news as diplomatic manoeuvring continued. Overall, COVENTRY was a confident ship; men were quietly confident in their own ability to fight and generally could not conceive that theirs' was to be a one-way voyage.

30. On arrival at Ascension on 11 April there began a further and intensive storing period; the ship was painted in her war colours; essential maintenance was carried out and further practices and exercises took place. Although it was COVENTRY's aim to complete storing before proceeding further south, this was in the event not possible. Orders were received on 15 April to proceed with despatch in company with BRILLIANT (CTU), SHEFFIELD, GLASGOW, ARROW and APPLELEAF southwest towards the Falkland Islands to enforce the Total Exclusion Zone (TEZ) which was to come into force on 1 May. COVENTRY therefore left Ascension still short of several important items of spares for weapons systems and once again was concerned to ensure that these were obtained before action was joined.

31. This second stage of the passage south took COVENTRY's Task Unit in a totally silent posture to a waiting position equidistant about 1000 NM from South Georgia, the Falklands and Buenos Aires where again the ships remained silent. Exercise opportunities in this phase were particularly limited and the absence of targets and the restrictive EMCON policy dictated that full overall systems checks were impossible to achieve. Additionally, preparations were hampered by a period of particularly adverse weather in the vicinity of 40° S. Emphasis was therefore placed on those practices which could be completed within the limitations of the situation; NGS was exercised; NBCD was exhaustively pursued and final steps were taken to secure the ships for action. COVENTRY's overriding requirement at that time was to rejoin the main Task Force which was in an overt posture and thus to gain the benefit of target tracking opportunities against Sea Harriers. In particular COVENTRY wanted to be free of the EMCON silence restrictions and to exercise co-ordinated air defence drills: it was now over 3 weeks since the High Seas Firings, the last opportunity to prove the ship's main armament. Within the constraints of what was possible in the prevailing operational circumstances, most practices followed established tactical procedures and, with minor exceptions no new or special drills were developed. The Type 42/22 combination which was to be so extensively used later was not specifically exercised at this stage. Ships remained in this holding position for several days until the main Task Force arrived when final preparations began for the entry into the TEZ on 1 May. COVENTRY in particular welcomed this change of status as the opportunity to radiate on sensors and complete outstanding weapons systems checks.

32. COVENTRY was therefore now ready to go to war. There is no doubt that the ship had, during the preceding 6 months, experienced a good programme for this purpose and, with the possible exception of lingering mechanical worries, was well prepared for what lay ahead.

SECTION III - INSHORE AIR DEFENCE OPERATIONSEARLY OPERATIONS

33. The war began in earnest for COVENTRY on 1 May when the Task Force entered the 200 mile TEZ and was strongly opposed by the Argentinian Air Force. Hostile aircraft were held at arms length by Sea Harriers and COVENTRY took a key and successful part in controlling these aircraft into position to attack Mirage and Skyhawk raids. At this stage, and in the subsequent few days, COVENTRY was stationed some 20 miles west of the carrier group which itself was about 80 miles east of Stanley.

34. During these early days many CAP engagements took place well to the west of the force, often over land on the Falklands: whilst enemy aircraft remained at high altitude, the land posed little problem to Task Force radars. However, the nature of Argentinian operations was such that many of their aircraft went low over the Islands and the resultant loss of radar contact served to heighten apprehension that air attack on the Task Force was imminent. Air launched Exocet was seen as a prime threat and COVENTRY has commented on the frequent and early use of chaff by most ships in this period.

35. Area Air Co-ordination was employed from the outset and appears to have given rise to few problems, although friendly aircraft safety remained a prime concern in COVENTRY. The absence of non-military air tracks served to clarify the air picture and the combination of IFF/SIF and identification manoeuvres seems to have met all requirements for air safety. In this phase COVENTRY had no opportunity to engage hostile targets with Sea Dart, but was content that area air defence was working well and was satisfied that the Type 42 was being employed fruitfully in a position that met the requirements of the main weapon system.

36. During the night of 2 May a surface contact was detected approximately 50 miles north of the force and COVENTRY's Lynx helicopter was despatched to investigate. In the subsequent action the contact was identified as a hostile patrol boat and was attacked and sunk by 2 Sea Skua missiles. This historic engagement marked the first firing of Sea Skua in anger and that in a highly successful operation. Later that week, on 4 May, HMS SHEFFIELD was crippled during an Exocet attack by Argentinian Super Etendard aircraft, however COVENTRY took no part in that action as she was patrolling a sector on the opposite side of the formation to SHEFFIELD.

INSHORE OPERATIONS 6-9 MAY

37. Task Force operations took a more hostile turn during early May when ships began night time bombardments of Argentinian positions in the vicinity of Stanley. COVENTRY's first turn at NGS came on 6 May when, in company with BROADSWORD who was to provide point air defence cover and ASW support, overnight bombardment took place on a gun line to the south of Cape Pembroke (Annex A Appendix 1). Navigational constraints, including the Argentinian declared minefield, and tactical considerations of air defence and vulnerability to attack from shore emplacements dictated that the ships stood off to seaward during intervals between bombardment runs. Difficulties were encountered with COVENTRY's 4.5 Mk 8 mounting during this first night inshore and this caused the action to be terminated prematurely.

38. COVENTRY was again in action with BROADSWORD for shore bombardment on the night of 8 May. Although the mechanical defect in the 4.5 mounting had been rectified on the previous day, there was a recurrence of the same problem

