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COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF FLEET

**LOSS OF HMS COVENTRY
BOARD OF INQUIRY
(parte 2)**

86. Within 10-15 minutes of the bombs exploding in the ship there was major flooding in G, H, J, K and L sections, the ship heeled to Port in the loll condition at about 15°. After 20-25 minutes the deck edge (heel now 25°) was immersed allowing the sea to enter 2 deck passageway from the second bomb hole in the Port waist at 1H and, at the same time, water was flooding 2 deck in K section from below via the blown hatch in the Forward Engine Room. The loll condition increased to 90° and the ship finally capsized and sank some time later.

FOURTH BOMB

87. A fourth bomb was observed to clear the ship diagonally from Port to Starboard over the Flight Deck landing astern of the ship but there are no reports of it landing nor any evidence that it exploded either on or near the ship.

DAMAGE CONTROL AND FIREFIGHTING

DAMAGE CONTROL

88. Due to the rapid development of heel caused by the flooding of 5 compartments from the Port side, no attempt to contain flooding or repair damage was made. It is also now clear that in the circumstances any attempts of this sort would have been futile and could have led to further loss of life when DC parties might have been trapped below as the ship rolled over.

FIREFIGHTING

89. In the immediate wake of the attack attempts were made to survey and then to contain outbreaks of fire, in particular those visible from the upper deck and that in the Operations Room. However these were short lived as the list rapidly developed and as with damage control attempts, were prudently abandoned when it became clear that the end was nigh.

SUMMARY

90. With 2 deck breached in 1H, 2H and 2K and with free flooding below in 5 sections of the ship it was inevitable that flood water would be transmitted along 2 deck at least between G and M sections and if 2E/G and 3M/N doors were left open the flooding would have extended throughout the ship. In this condition, a massive capsizing moment was established, the reaction being that the ship rolled on its beam ends. From this position without a watertight superstructure the ship steadily deepened and finally capsized in a state of uncontrollable loll. Eventually sinking was then purely a function of the rate of dispersal of residual buoyancy as air was forced out of the ship. It is sobering to note that this critical condition in a Type 42, which in this case was caused by massive bomb damage, could be encountered in peacetime in a serious collision and would lead to the same disastrous and inevitable end.

Survival suits however posed different problems and attracted much adverse comment from survivors. Only 35% of the 276 survivors managed to don the suit correctly; even amongst these men, many suffered ingress of water and later found difficulty with rescue when the 'Michelin Man' effect complicated the problems both of entering liferafts and then climbing scrambling nets on reaching BROADSWORD. Over half either did not attempt to put on the suit or failed to do so properly before entering the water. Again there was a variety of reasons but list of the ship, loss of the suit below decks and reluctance to remove the lifejacket all figures prominently amongst these.

100. As with other phases of the abandon ship operation, no general order to slip the liferafts could be given. Launching of the rafts was therefore undertaken on the initiative of individual officers and senior ratings when the ship was already listing some 10° to port several minutes after the attack. No attempt was made to launch the port set of rafts due to the apparent danger of capsizing. All 8 starboard side rafts were slipped and all inflated correctly. Considerable difficulty was experienced in actually manhandling these rafts over the side out of their stowages as the list to port increased.

101. Men entered the rafts wherever they found them and, as a result, uneven loading took place. With only 8 rafts in the water some ended up seriously overcrowded with as many as 47 men counted in one raft (88% overload) and some men still outside in the water clinging to the grab ropes. There were considerable problems when attempts were made to propel laden liferafts away from the ship's side. Rafts from the after group eventually drifted astern and clear of the ship downwind. However, some of the forward rafts drifted around the bow and back close under the port side, becoming entangled with obstructions as the ship steadily rolled over. One raft was eventually punctured by the antennae of an unfired Sea Dart missile still on the launcher and eventually sank causing the occupants to take to the water again.

RESCUE

102. Rescue was effected swiftly by means of BROADSWORD's boats (whaler, Cheverton and 2 Geminis) plus about 10 helicopters from RFA FORT AUSTIN. The majority of men were deposited in BROADSWORD but some of the worst injured were flown directly ashore to a field hospital. All men were recovered from the water by about 2000Z and the search was called off at dusk when it was clear that no more survivors could be found.

103. BROADSWORD transferred the fit survivors to other ships in San Carlos later that night and sent the remainder of the wounded to the hospital ship UGANDA.

SUMMARY

104. In general the evacuation of the ship and subsequent abandonment went well. The comparatively small number of deaths and injuries is to some extent a result of the speed and efficiency with which this was carried out. There was however a considerable degree of luck: the weather was clear and calm; darkness had not fallen; the enemy did not make another attack; BROADSWORD and numerous large helicopters were close at hand. It is not difficult to envisage other circumstances in a South Atlantic winter battle when luck might not have been so much in evidence and the consequences for all concerned would have been serious.

105. The Board has noted and reported separately on a number of instances of heroism during this period following the attack. Several men totally disregarded their own safety to assist others who were in difficulty both onboard the ship and subsequently in the water. The general absence of panic and cool manner in which the ships company behaved are a credit to their underlying sound organisation and good discipline.

Q9 Was evacuation properly conducted?

A Yes but in a hasty and apprehensive manner as the ship's list rapidly increased.

Q10 Was survival equipment adequate?

- A
- a. Lifejackets - Yes.
 - b. Liferrafts - Yes in spite of being heavily overloaded.
 - c. Once Only Suits - Yes when put on properly.

Q11 Did rescue operations go well?

A Yes.

Q12 Should anyone be censured?

A No.

Q13 What major issues need to be resolved?

- A
- a. Should a Type 42 be able to defend herself against the low level short range/pop-up attack by manned aircraft/missiles?
 - b. If yes - to what extent should SEA DART be improved and/or other CIWS be fitted?
 - c. What tactical development and training effort should be devoted to close range defence?
 - d. Decide what types of major damage a Type 42 should be able to survive. Then, if necessary, modify the ships and their training accordingly.

SECTION VIII - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONSINTRODUCTION

107. For ease of reading the conclusions and recommendations have been divided into the following main sections:

- a. General Considerations.
- b. Operations.
- c. Weapons Engineering.
- d. Damage and Damage Control.
- e. Escape/Survival/Rescue.
- f. First Aid and Casualties.
- g. Clothing and Burns.

CONCLUSIONSGENERAL CONSIDERATIONS108. Preparations for War

a. COVENTRY's programme from August 1981 to April 1982 provided (paragraphs 25-27) an ideal preparation for Operation CORPORATE. The ship had been well reported on during Command Team Training in February 1982. By the end of April 1982 the ship was well prepared for war except that:

- (1) There were some outstanding ME defects.
- (2) Sea Dart remained unproven.
- (3) The ship had little experience of inshore AAW.

b. En route to the TEZ there were few opportunities to exercise (paragraphs 29-31) AAW procedures and weapons systems due to restrictive EMCON and lack of targets. Surface warfare, NGS and NBCD training were given priority. The ship's company adjusted themselves to the thought of war and were quietly confident of their abilities.

OPERATIONS109. Early Operations

a. COVENTRY gained useful CAP control and Area Air coordination experience with the Carrier Group XXXXXXXXXXXXX 1-5 May.

SE
SA
Para 33-35

b. Early NGS operations were not successful owing to gun defects. These were rectified and the gun gave no further problems.

Para 38

DAMAGE AND DAMAGE CONTROL117. Preparations

- a. Damage Control Parties were correctly closed up before the attacks began. Annex F
Paras 1-5
- b. 'Take Cover' drill was not exercised prior to being used operationally. Annex F
Paras 4-5

118. Damage

- a. The precise weapon load of each attacking aircraft is not known. Para 70
Annex F,
Appendix 1
- b. COVENTRY was hit by 30mm cannon fire and 3 bombs (probably 1000lb). Two exploded. Para 71
Annex F,
Appendix 1
- c. 30mm cannon fire split the ship's side (5'x8") allowing the Forward Auxiliary Machinery Room (3,4,5J) to flood as the ship heeled. The diesel generators were undamaged and continued to run. Para 72
Annex F,
Appendix 1
- d. Two bombs, one of which exploded, flooded 3, 4G and 3, 4H. Paras 75-77
Annex F,
Appendix 1
- e. One bomb flooded the Forward and After Engine Rooms. Paras 77-81
Annex F,
Appendix 1
- f. The Computer Room (3H), Operations Room (2G), Senior Ratings Dining Hall (2K), HQ1/MCR 2L were devastated by blast. Paras 75,79 & 80
Annex F,
Appendix 1
- g. 2 deck passageway distributed water throughout the ship as she lolled to port and deepened. Capsize was then inevitable. Paras 80-82, 80
Annex F,
Appendix 1

119. Recovery from the Attack. HQ1 and other DC teams evacuated the HQ1/MCR/Technical Office complex soon after damage and attempted to take control of DC operations from the Aft Section Base.

Annex F
Paras 8-10

120. Damage Appreciation

- a. No single out-station knew the total extent of damage. Annex F
Paras 12-16
- b. All DC communications had failed. Annex F
Paras 12-16
- c. The Forward Section Base did not know that HQ1 had been evacuated. Annex F
Paras 12-16

121. The After DC Base

a. The huge search and rescue potential of the After DC Base was never used XXXXX to establish contact forward
XX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Annex F 538
SN4
Paras 18-21

b. The normal reaction and logic of the XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX were numbed by the shock of actually being
hit and seeing casualties.

Annex F 538
Paras 18-21 SN4
040

c. There was acute awareness of the heel and fear of being
trapped between decks.

Annex F
Paras 18-21

122. The Forward DC Base. The Forward DC Party was distracted
from its primary task when faced with a flood of injured and
shocked men evacuating the Operations Room. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XX

Annex F
Paras 23-28

538
SN4
040

123. Stability After Damage

a. COVENTRY heeled some 16° to Port when flooded to 2 deck
in several sections of the ship.

Annex F
Para 34

b. The angle of heel developed to 45° + as flooding
gradually caused deck edge immersion.

Annex F
Para 35

c. Final resistance to capsize was lost as heel approached
45°.

Annex F
Para 35

124. Watertight Integrity of 2 Deck Passageway

a. Although 2 deck is subdivided from G to N Section
only 3 bulkheads are fully watertight.

Annex F
Para 36

b. Some bulkheads are fitted with watertight doors but
are not watertight overall because of unsealed pipe
penetrations.

Annex F
Para 36

c. These bulkheads can be made watertight by A+A action
but other modifications to ventilation arrangements then
become necessary.

Annex F
Para 36

125. Stability Documentation

The information in the NBCD Class Book is inadequate.

Annex F
Para 37

ESCAPE/SURVIVAL/RESCUE

126. Organisation and Training. With the exception of 2 points
(unpacking, checking and restowing each survival suit and briefing
on dangerous areas for leaving the ship) all reasonable preparations
had been made before entering the war zone.

Annex G
Paras 2-4

127. Evacuation of the Ship

- a. Due to the loss of the main broadcast, there was no general order to abandon ship. Annex G
Para 5
- b. There were few serious problems with evacuation, although 28% of survivors had some degree of difficulty. (A detailed breakdown of problems is at Annex G, Appendix 1). Annex G
Para 6

128. Assembly at Abandon Ship Stations. Assembly was orderly but actual positions were dictated by ~~mens~~ choice of escape route, what they had done on the way there and the difficulty in maintaining a foothold on the rapidly listing deck. Annex G
Paras 7-8

129. Leaving the Ship

- a. In the absence of main and upperdeck broadcasts no general order could be given to leave the ship. Annex G
Para 9
- b. Men became reluctant to leave the ship as underwater obstructions broke surface when the list reached 25-30 degrees. Annex G
Para 9
- c. Although a number of men sustained minor cuts and bruises whilst leaving the ship there was (with the exception of the XX
XXXX no serious injury. Annex G
338
SN4

130. Personal Survival. Despite the cold weather conditions personal survival did not pose many serious problems. Annex G
Para 12

131. Time in the Water

- a. All survivors spent some time in the water (minimum 15 seconds, maximum 90 minutes, average 15 minutes). Annex G
Para 13
- b. Cold was a problem but its effects were mainly limited to discomfort. Some men displayed symptoms of exhaustion whilst attempting to reach liferafts. Annex G
Para 13

132. Survival Suits

- a. Only 35% of the survivors managed to dress correctly in the survival suit. Many subsequently suffered from the effects of ingress of water. Annex G
Para 14
- b. About 53% of survivors did not attempt to dress in the survival suit due to a variety of reasons (loss of the suit below decks; deliberate decision in belief that capsize was imminent; various 'finger troubles'). Annex G
Para 15

133. Lifejackets. About 90% of survivors wore their lifejackets and few problems were encountered. Annex G
Para 17

134. Liferafts

- a. No general order to launch rafts was given. Annex G
Para 18
- b. No attempt was made to launch port side rafts due to increasing list of the ship. These rafts did not appear on the surface when the ship capsized. Annex G
Para 19
- c. All 8 starboard side rafts were released but with increasing difficulty as the list to port increased. Annex G
Para 20
- d. Liferafts in the water were heavily overladen (up to 47 men in one raft). Annex G
Para 21
- e. Laden liferafts were difficult to propel from the ship's side. Some became trapped and one sank after being punctured. Annex G
Para 22

135. Rescue. Rescue was swiftly and effectively carried out by BROADSWORD's boats and 10 helicopters from RFA FORT AUSTIN.

FIRST AID AND CASUALTIES136. Training

- a. It is doubtful whether every member of the ships had adequate knowledge of BR 25 (First Aid in the Royal Navy). Annex H
Para 3
- b. Although key First Aid personnel had received a good training this had not included work with real wounded. It is clear that familiarity with the problems of facing and dealing with wounded speeds up the response to the problem and promotes a calmer, more rational atmosphere. Annex H
Para 5
- c. The Forward DC party appears to have been made less effective by the flood of wounded from the Operations Room area, none of whom was seriously injured. Annex H
Para 22
- d. No cold water for the treatment of burns was stored in baths, basins or in any containers that could be pressed into use. Annex H
Para 22
- e. Only the MO was able to set up an intravenous saline infusion. This can be lifesaving in serious burns cases and must be considered as a First Aid measure. Annex H
Para 23
- f. Two men died, one indirectly, and one was quite seriously injured through adopting an incorrect posture at 'Take-Cover'. Annex H
Para 32a

CLOTHING AND BURNS137. Protection Afforded by Clothing

- a. There is no evidence to prove a difference between the protective qualities of cotton and man made fibre clothing as supplied in the RN.

148. Sea Dart Launching/Handling

- a. Upper Flash Door locking bolt arrangements should be redesigned, trialled and fitted as a matter of urgency.
- b. Procedures must be developed which allow use of the system, even in a degraded mode, if minor features of the engagement sequence fail.

149. GWS 30 System. A lethality prediction process should be included in the software.

150. GSA 1

- a. Software should be provided which controls gun sectoring.
- b. Ships should be reminded that binoculars are not to be lashed on to the LAS without proper authority.

DAMAGE AND DAMAGE CONTROL**151. Training**

- a. Take Cover drill must be introduced to ships NBCD training.
- b. DC team training should impress the need for men to keep their station until directed otherwise by the leader.

152. Equipment. Typical heel angles at various levels of underwater damage should be displayed on Section Base state boards.

153. Construction

- a. Type 42s currently deployed should make the non-watertight bulk-heads watertight by self help or with the assistance of support vessels.
- b. Similarly, Type 42s in the UK should be modified and examined by their Admin Authority before re-deployment.

154. Documentation. An immediate update on Type 42 stability behaviour should be forwarded to ships and training establishments for insertion in the NBCD class book.

NOTE: A number of other minor recommendations are incorporated into 'Damage Control - Lessons Learnt' - Annex F Appendix 8.

ESCAPE/SURVIVAL/RESCUE**155. Training**

- a. More emphasis should be placed on Sea Survival and Raftsmanship Courses for ships as run by HMS DAEDALUS.
- b. Periodic drills should be carried out to familiarise men with the technique for dressing in and wearing the survival suit.

156. Equipment Design and Provision

- a. Some system of distinctive deck edge or guardrail marking should be investigated which highlights those areas where underwater obstructions make abandon ship dangerous.

- b. The design of the survival suit should be re-examined to determine whether drain plugs could be re-incorporated into the feet.
- c. Liferaft stowages should be modified to ensure that rafts can be released without lifting even when the ship is listing.
- d. The number of liferafts carried should be increased so that there is sufficient on each side of the ship for all of the ship's company.
- e. The design and equipment fit of the liferafts should be re-examined to establish whether better towing fixtures could be provided and whether the provision of some form of paddle is necessary.

FIRST AID AND CASUALTIES

157. Training

- a. Individual training should be re-examined to increase the emphasis on first aid, in particular familiarity with BR 25 (First Aid in the Royal Navy).
- b. Key members of both first aid and damage control teams should receive some training involving work with real wounded/injured.
- c. The importance of storing cold water for treatment of burns at Action Stations should be re-emphasised in ships' NBCD training.
- d. Training in intravenous saline infusion should be given to key members of first aid parties.
- e. The correct position for "Taking Cover" should be taught and enforced.

CLOTHING/BURNS

158. Equipment

- a. At Action Stations in addition to the basic rig of No 8's, underwear, wool socks, DMS Boots and Antiflash Gear, a HWJ should be added as an absolute minimum. As many layers as possible should be worn.
- b. Each officer and rating should be issued with "Battle Clothing". This would consist of an overall with attached hood and instep straps, bulky enough to cover other clothing, made of a modern man-made fire retardant cloth such as 'Nomex'. Two suits of this clothing would be issued but only used in real war and emergencies such as fires in ships etc. Exercises would be done using standard cotton overalls.
- c. All headsets should be entirely without flammable materials in exposed parts.