



“...Preserve us from the dangers of the sea and of the air and from the violence of the enemy...”

On 7 May, southwest of Ascension, we said goodbye to our faithful tanker *Tidespring* and she continued north with the 200 prisoners. We met the heavily laden Landing Ships Logistic (LSLs) and escorted them south to meet the Task Force northeast of the Falklands.

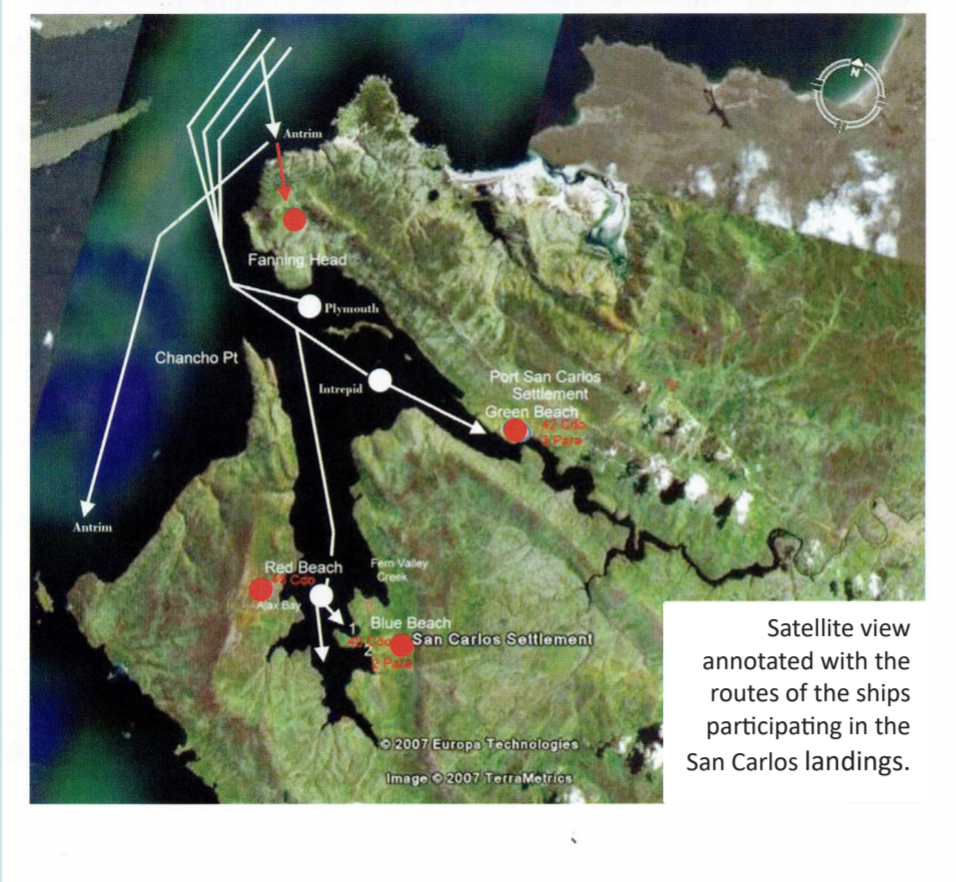
During these long passages we trained, practised, and refined. We invented a new role for our Seaslug missile called GASH – Give Argies the SH**s (a big fright). The aim was to fire the missile ‘blind’ towards incoming aircraft; this would cause the pilot to pull up violently and abort his attack.



Considerable ‘cross-decking’ (transfer of stores and personnel by helicopter) was conducted.



Falkland Sound on a quiet day



Satellite view annotated with the routes of the ships participating in the San Carlos landings.



Map of San Carlos Bay

‘The British Army should be a projectile to be fired by the British Navy.’ Viscount Grey

On 20 May the amphibious force moved in. *Antrim* and *Ardent* (later to be sunk) were detached early for bombardment duties. It was a darkening afternoon, the wind and sea were strong from the SW; the sea and sky were grey and merged, there was no horizon. Ships were steaming at 24 knots, the spray and waves breaking over the bows. We were going to war. This was it! Our thoughts narrowed to encompass our immediate surroundings; we could not worry about anything else; home, family, the future did not exist. What will be, will be; tomorrow we might be dead – and some of us in other ships were.

Overnight, *Antrim* landed Naval Gunfire Support (NGS) spotters onto Fanning Head, a high, bluff headland overlooking Falkland Sound where Argentine troops were dug in.

Dawn broke, cloudless and sunny. Ideal air attack weather.

As it became light, we received a ‘call for fire’ (see Panel 7 ‘The Team’) from the spotter who had a target for us. We fired two ranging salvos followed by ‘50 rounds, fire for effect!’ Bang on target; no corrections necessary.

Later that morning the air attacks started and lasted for most of the day. *Antrim’s* station was in the middle of the Sound, which left us in full view of the incoming aircraft, and a prime target. We were therefore ideally placed to ‘Draw the teeth of the Argentine Airforce’ as the Admiral had ordered. For ten hours we were subject to numerous attacks.

However, by singling out the warships for attention rather than the troops on the beaches and the large shapes of *Canberra* and other support ships, it ensured that not one single marine or soldier was killed or wounded that day.

It was a day full of conflicting emotions, and these depended on where one’s action station was. The Bridge team was fighting the ship, which was manoeuvring hard and moving fast; the Ops Room were coordinating air defence of the entire area and were glued to radar screens directing Sea Harrier fighters; in the machinery control room and engine spaces they were nursing the engines and watching gauges, worried that the violent demands for power might cause a failure somewhere; the upper deck close-range weapons team were putting as much lead into the sky as they could; the 4.5” gun was pumping out shells, fed by the teams deep in the magazine; the damage control parties sat and waited for the ship to be hit, when they would deal with the damage; and many, many others were about their business, shut in below watertight hatches, not able to see what was going on, suffering their own brand of claustrophobia and over-active imagination. It was a huge team effort by 450 men determined to inflict damage on the enemy and to defend themselves.

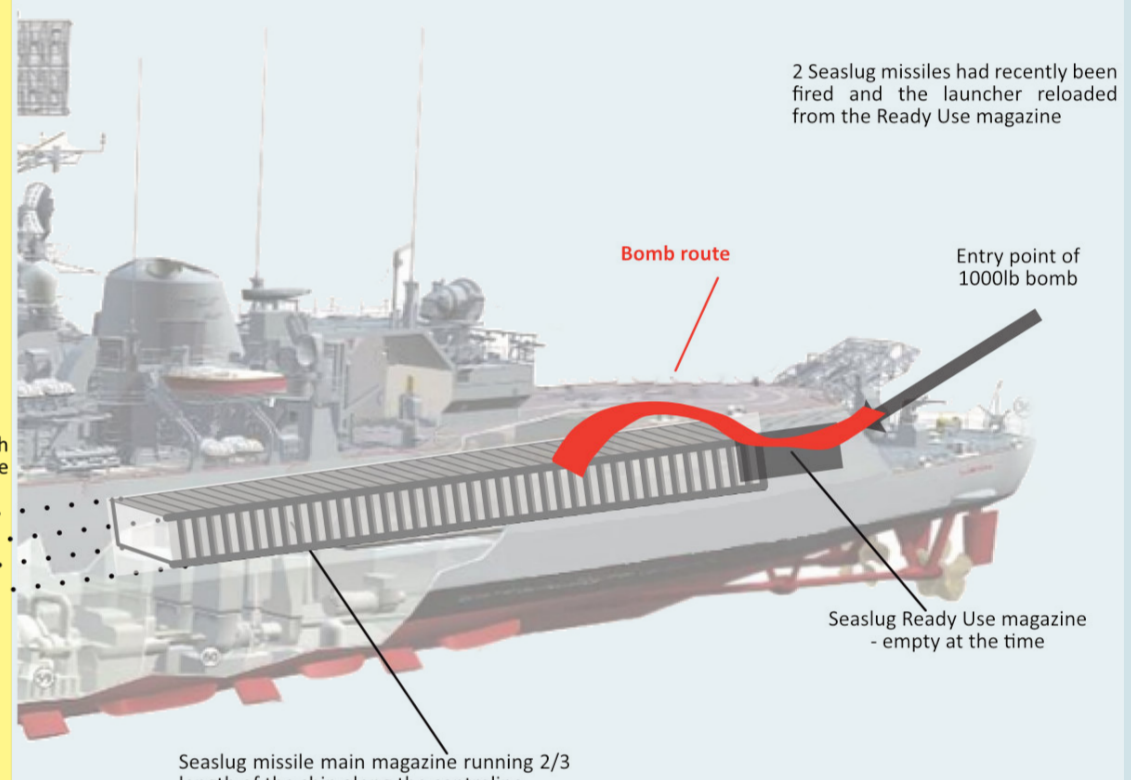
‘Oh Lord, thou knowest how busy I must be this day; if I forget thee, do not thou forget me.’
Sir Jacob Astley’s prayer before the Battle of Edgehill 1642 said it all



Bomb Alley



We fired two Seaslug in the GASH mode, hit nothing but the aircraft disappeared fast. The launcher was quickly reloaded from the Ready Use magazine just forward of it; that magazine was therefore empty **when it happened!** A Mirage V aircraft came from astern and put his bomb straight through the flash doors of the empty Ready Use magazine. It burst through the next bulkhead travelling upwards, came up under the Flight Deck, bulged that deck but was diverted downwards, damaged a pyrotechnic locker, before bursting through into the after Heads (lavatories) and coming to rest in ‘trap’ number three! It was a British 1,000lb bomb (500 kg) and did not explode.



Bomb Entry through Flash Door



Foam covered Flight Deck



Damage Control parties investigated; foam was spread across the Flight Deck to prevent fire from a combination of the burning pyrotechnic locker and fuel being spilt by Humphrey which had received splinter damage.

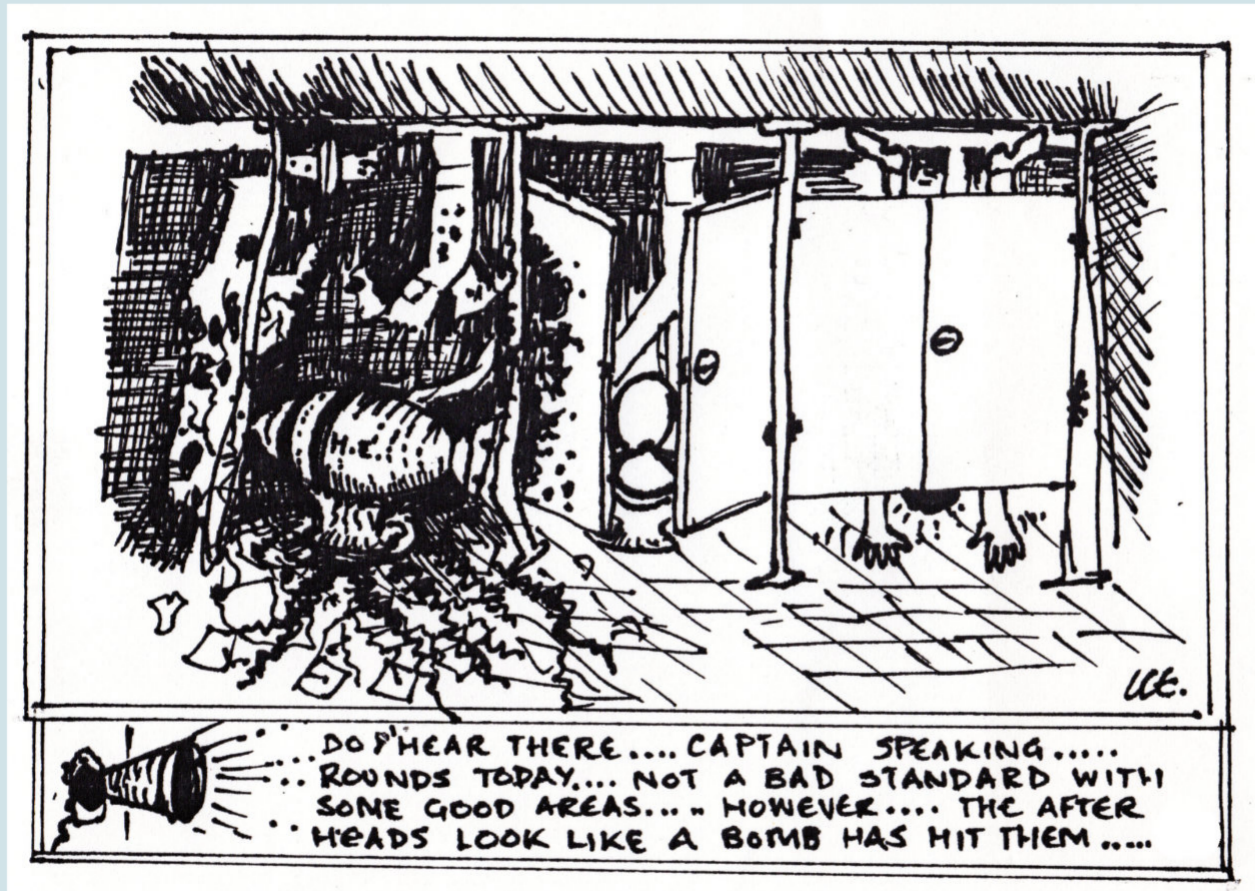
We needed a Bomb Disposal officer! Enter Fleet Chief Petty Officer Diver (Warrant Officer) **Mick Fellows** dangling on a winch wire under a Wessex helicopter from RFA *Sir Tristram*. **Fellows** was perhaps the most experienced Clearance Diver – those who do bomb and mine disposal - in the Navy. He first steadied the bomb which was rolling around on the tiled deck as the ship heeled. Two sailors, with their backs to the bulkheads (walls) and their feet on the bomb achieved that. The fuze was mangled and unreachable. How far had it wound down (see glass display cabinet)? Was it even now ticking its way through the 28-minute delay? Was it safe to move? **Fellows** spoke to London on the satellite ‘phone. They couldn’t help; ‘Sorry, but good luck’. **Fellows** decided to cut a hole through the Flight Deck and rig a sheerlegs (a ‘crane’ tripod made of available timber). He gently inched the bomb aft by about 1 ft and winched it up onto the deck – all this while the ship was under air attack and manoeuvring violently.

The bomb was consigned to the deep later that night as we left Falkland Sound, our fingers crossed that it wouldn’t blow our stern off.

Fellows was assisted by *Antrim’s* ship’s company, all of whom had to overcome their fear of immediate annihilation. This was the first occasion that an unexploded bomb had been dealt with successfully in a British warship. **Fellows** remains the most highly decorated Warrant Officer in any of the three Services with an MBE, DSC, BEM*. **Margaret Thatcher** said, ‘Who is this man and where did we find him?’ on hearing about his exploits.



This is what happens to a ship when the magazine explodes

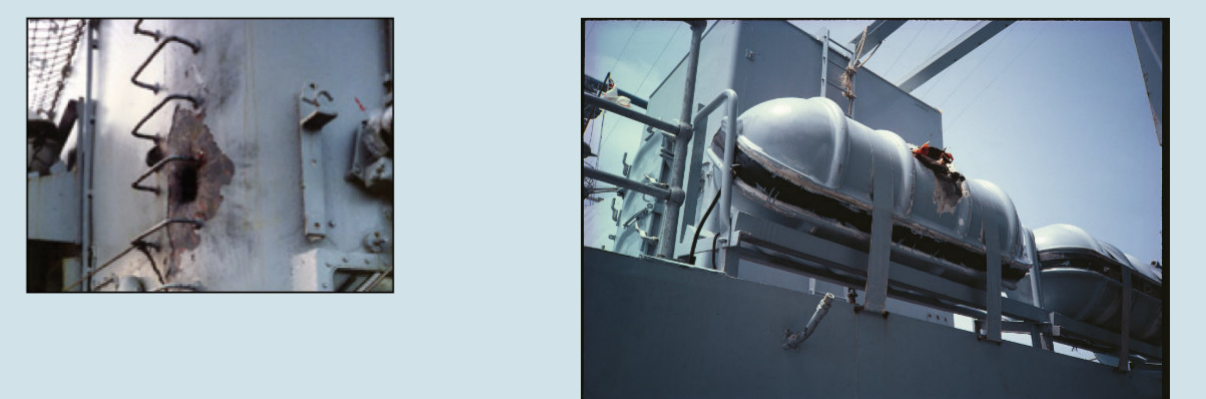


DO HEAR THERE... CAPTAIN SPEAKING... SOUNDS TODAY... NOT A BAD STANDARD WITH SOME GOOD AREAS... HOWEVER... THE AFTER HEADS LOOK LIKE A BOMB HAS HIT THEM...



It was a long day for all of us, and it showed

Antrim left Falkland Sound that night, no longer an effective fighting unit. We had suffered from the bomb and cannon shells in numerous places. But our people had been damaged also: a Chief Petty Officer had been blinded, and several other Upper Deck ratings had severe and lesser wounds. Our Doctor and Dentist, Surgeon Lts **MacLean** and **Rhimes** respectively, and the Chaplain, Rev **Richard Sigrist**, together with the sailors who made up the First Aid parties, were working like Trojans. Many owe their quick recovery to those men.



SAN CARLOS