



THE TEAM

Rules of Engagement (ROE)

Politicians control the conduct of an operation through Rules of Engagement (ROE). They might limit when and where fighting may take place and what weapons may or may not be used in what circumstances. ROE for a particular campaign distil the Laws of War and concepts of a fair or "Just War" to limit escalation, protect civilians and preserve diplomatic options. Different ROE applied inside the "Total Exclusion Zone" around the Falkland Islands to elsewhere. Commanders can apply to change overly restrictive ROE if they entail too great a risk to friendly forces. After an Argentine civilian airliner shadowed the Antrim group for some days, Captain Young sought and received a change of ROE to allow it to be engaged with Seaslug missiles.

Navigation

In 1982, satellite navigation was in its infancy with few satellites providing intermittent coverage. Antrim sailed without it, navigating by the stars and sun using a sextant and watch as in the 1600s. When ordered to retake South Georgia, HMS Sheffield transferred her satnav. The other navigational challenges were operating silently in ice and close to land, with no shore lights or navigational marks, without using our radars and relying on charts based on old surveys.

Communications

Forty years on it is difficult to believe a major warship could be incommunicado for long periods. Bouncing HF signals off the ionosphere 8000 miles to Northwood HQ was only possible at certain times of the day so even "flash" signals could wait for hours. Fortunately some bright engineers realised that an old satellite which had run out of fuel over the Indian Ocean was drifting towards the South Atlantic. Antrim was able to use it to talk directly to Northwood.

Royal Marine Detachment

The permanent detachment of a Sergeant Major and 9 marines were Antrim's "sea soldiers", trained to fight ashore, but also manning close range weapons and upper deck lookout stations at sea. Apart from the Captain who had flown at Suez, the marines and aircrew were likely to have been the only ones on board to have had operational experience (in Northern Ireland). The Sgt Maj was severely wounded by shrapnel in San Carlos.



Medical

Antrim had a Surgeon Lieutenant as the MO, a Surg Lt Cdr Dentist (all RN doctors are called "surgeon") a Petty Officer and a Medical Assistant. They were supported by first aid parties - stewards, cooks, writers, stores and catering assistants who trained hard and enthusiastically on the way south. They dealt with: frostbite and hypothermia; an Argentine whose leg had been blown off; a Senior Rating who received life-changing injuries; and many shrapnel wounds. However, the unseen wound, was what we now call PTSD (Post Trauma Stress Disorder). Known for 3,000 years and only properly recognised in 1980 it had a lasting effect on some officers' careers, and at a 2019 reunion some men were reporting that they were still suffering mental issues, sleep disturbance and physical reactions to the events that they experienced in Antrim.



Marine Engineering

In the 17 weeks - 119 days - between leaving and returning to UK, the ship's engines had been turning, or at very short notice to turn for about 108 days; we had steamed 32,767 miles, 1.3 times round the world. It was impossible to shut down any of the engines for deep maintenance, so all the systems required careful tending to ensure maximum performance and availability.

We had problems with our two evaporators, which make fresh water. Both are necessary to provide feed water for the boilers and fresh water for the ship's company. For a period in the higher equatorial seawater temperatures their performance was significantly reduced and drinking water was rationed. Another problem was the ingestion of krill into the condensers and the only solution was to open the tops to clear the krill, trusting in only one rather leaky valve to keep the sea from flooding in and engulfing the boiler room. Add to these worries the extra strains put on the engines by sudden demands for full power when under air attack, and the pressures on the engine room department can be imagined. They never failed to meet their commitments.

Supply

In normal times the Supply & Secretariat Department of a warship would deal with stores, correspondence, catering, personnel, legal matters, finance, pay and cash. During the Falklands campaign most of these activities were displaced by the need to ready the ship for war and then active hostile engagements. The overriding priority for the department became keeping the ship supplied with food - 450 sailors take a lot of feeding. The uncertain availability of support ships required some imaginative use of whatever was in the fridges and store cupboards by the ever inventive chefs; for much of the time lunch was soup and rolls - the latter quickly became known as "bergy bits" in a tribute to our environment. But we never went hungry despite long periods at action stations or in defence watches.

Naval Gunfire Support (NGS)

The bombardment of shore targets from seaward in support of land forces. In 1982 this was a complex exercise for Antrim. The ship was to fire at a land target which was often not visible to the ship, nor could it be identified on radar. The only way to aim at the target was to calculate the range and bearing of the target from the ship, feed that into the gun's fire control system and let a whirring mass of cogs and gears make further corrections and spew out the necessary information. The additional corrections considered: barometric pressure; the percentage wear inside the gun barrels; the wind speed and direction; the rotation of the earth (Coriolis); own ship's course and speed, pitch and roll; and others. The targets were identified by military 'spotters' ashore who 'called for fire' from the ship. They passed details of the target (hard or soft - which affected the sensitivity of the fuze in the shell), its position as a Grid Reference, and whether there were friendly troops in the close vicinity who would be in danger from misplaced shells. The ship would fire two salvos and the spotter would pass corrections back to the ship 'up/down, left/right' until he was satisfied the shells were landing in the right place. He then called for 'xx rounds, fire for effect'. It all required a lot of teamwork.

Unusual cargo

Antrim was a peace-time ship which had been told to go to war immediately and at no notice. Understandably, we were carrying items which we would not have planned to do had we known the future.

The Wardroom silver, and one of the ship's bells, also solid silver, were obvious items. However, the Doctor had embarked a washing machine and tumble dryer in Gibraltar for passage home - they made it safely eventually. The Navigator had embarked a suitcase full of a friend's family silver, and two oil portraits which the friend did not want to trust to the removal van. These were stored in the Navigator's cabin and he wrote to his friend's insurance company telling them that he had those items onboard and that, in the event of the ship sinking, they could be found subsequently by divers in his hanging cupboard!

Flying Operations

Most warships carry helicopters with nicknames. Although "Humphrey", Antrim's Wessex III was an old, single engine aluminium machine vulnerable to the salt-laden atmosphere and flying in extreme weather with no shore engineering support, it was the hero of Operation Paraquet in South Georgia. It looked over the horizon, attacked submarines, and rescued people from the sea and mountains. Remarkably its maintainers removed the anti-submarine kit to convert it to a troop-carrier, and then back again after the trooping task - each role change taking 13-16 hours. This dedicated team also managed an engine-change at sea, miraculously having identified an impending and potentially disastrous oil leak. Deservedly Humphrey lives on in the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovilton.



Personal Preparations and Reactions

Exercise Springtrain ended abruptly on 2 April, when Antrim became the Flagship of the Operation Corporate Task Group tasked to recover the Falkland Islands.

Extra ammunition, stores and food were embarked on HMS Ariadne and letters sent home with her. We lacked winter clothing for our destination and tropical gear for crossing the tropics. Wills were hurriedly written or updated for dispatch from Ascension Island.

We practised Damage Control and securing the ship for Action. It was important to keep everyone informed about events on the home and international fronts. We steamed south in radar silence without lights, into the weather and the unknown.

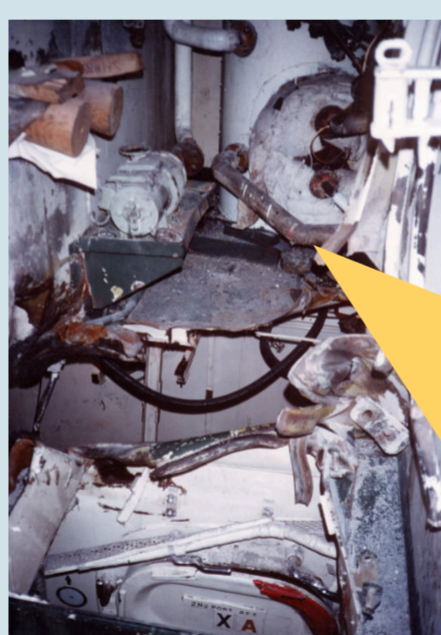
The 40 or so members of the SAS integrated well and mutual respect prevailed. Each of us wondered how we would behave in action or if seriously wounded. We were all worried and some talked of their fears, but many didn't. Attendance at our church services increased steadily. The Archbishop of Canterbury's declaration that this would be a 'just' war was helpful for some; and we knew there was overwhelming support from home. The officers walked round the ship talking to their men, and Senior Ratings led by example.

Beer had to be rationed, but red wine 'liberated' from S Georgia was sold in aid of Guide Dogs for the Blind.

The sinking of the ARA Belgrano on 3rd May followed by the loss of HMS Sheffield was a profound shock that made people ponder. Damage Control assumed greater relevance.

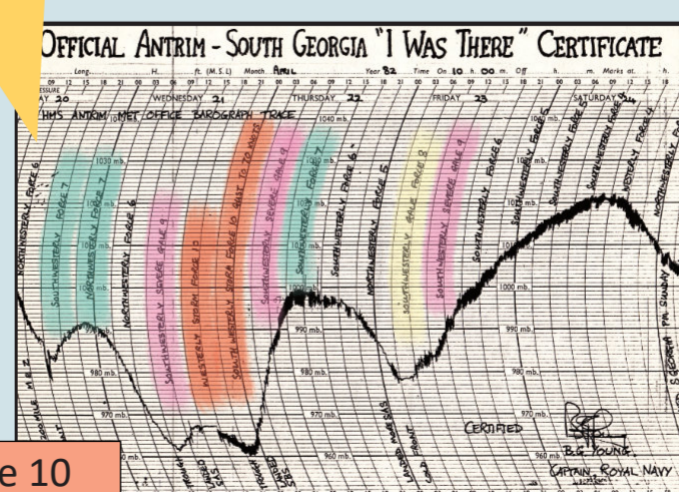
The BBC World Service occasionally speculated unhelpfully and we resented the release of gratuitous information. Attitudes to some of the British press coverage became jaundiced.

Antrim's morale was tested by heavy air attacks throughout the 21st May when a 1000lb bomb arrived. The ship's company was magnificent and, when the bomb was dropped overboard about 2345, we fell out from Action Stations in the knowledge of a job well done. We had faced a very powerful air force and had not been found wanting.



Damage Control

Warships have to float, move and fight. Damage sustained in action must be repaired as soon as possible by Damage Control (DC) parties trained in leak-stopping, firefighting, pumping, electrical supplies and first aid. The state of damage, fires, floods etc. is monitored and prioritised centrally by specialist officers and senior ratings in HQ. After 'first aid' repairs, they can work on more permanent solutions. Antrim's DC teams prevented a fire in the large Seaslug magazine, stopped leaks inflicted by aircraft canon fire and re-ran electric cables damaged by the bomb, enabling Antrim to fight on while under air attack.



Weather

Antrim carried a Met and Oceanography Officer who used information transmitted from UK, but this was sparse. The Argentines stopped transmitting weather details and we then relied on our own, single observer, weather forecasting techniques. Books in the Meteorological office onboard showed climatological information based on statistics over one hundred years old!

Forecasting accurately became difficult and briefing the aircrew before they took troops onto Fortuna Glacier was near impossible. The weather was atrocious, Katabatic Winds†, reinforced by south-westerlies produced storm force speeds with severe blizzard conditions.

Icebergs were another danger. There were several around S Georgia, together with low lying 'growlers'. En route to rendezvous with QEII at night and under radar silence, doing 27 knots, we used sporadic radar sweeps to identify them. Luckily, we did not hit anything but as dawn broke there were several icebergs near us!

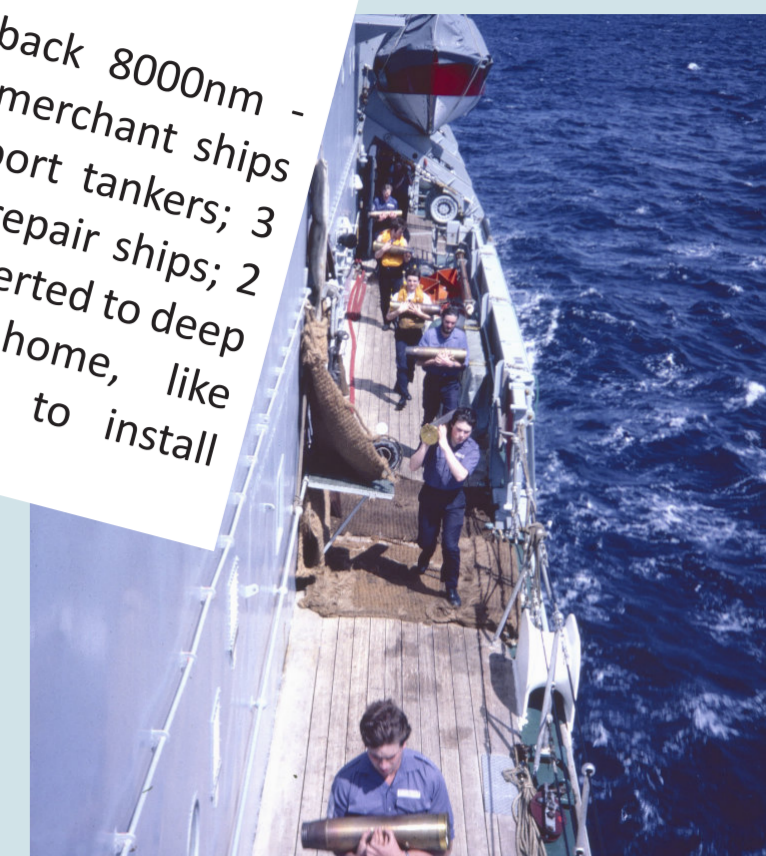
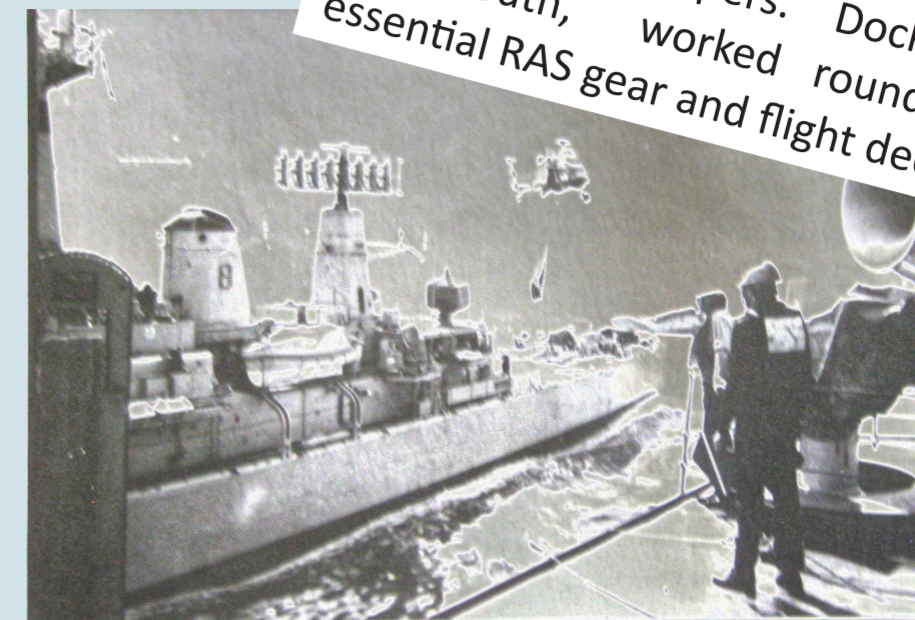
We experienced some atrocious weather, fully arisen seas and up to 75 knots of wind, but 'normal' for the South Atlantic season.

The weather 'drove' the timetable for the war. Winter was closing in.

† Katabatic winds, also called downslope wind, or gravity wind, is wind that blows down a slope because of gravity. They are most commonly found blowing out from the large and elevated ice sheets of Antarctica and Greenland. The buildup of high density cold air over the ice sheets and the elevation of the ice sheets brings into play enormous gravitational energy.



Logistics
Operation Corporate rested on the Fleet's ability to replenish supplies at sea (RAS) - food, stores, ammunition, fuel, spares - day or night. At full speed Antrim's tanks would be empty after 2 days, so we kept the tanker RFA Tidespring close. RFA Fort Austin carried food, stores and ammunition and key spares including spare helicopter engines and gun spares including R/V often and so for lengthy periods our food was rationed to one main meal a day. The supply chain to UK stretched back 8000nm - beyond aircraft range - and included merchant ships taken up from trade (STUFT): 14 support tankers; 3 food-carrying ships; 7 troop carriers, 3 repair tankers; 3 aircraft ferry ships; 5 tugs; 5 trawlers converted to deep water minesweepers. Dockyards at home, like Portsmouth, worked round the clock to install essential RAS gear and flight decks.

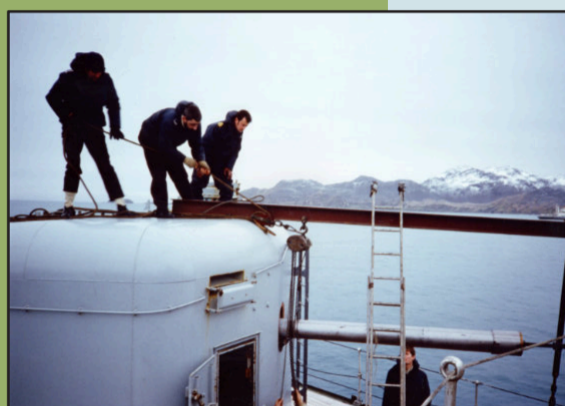


Weapon Engineering

The WE department, comprising about a quarter of the ship's company, is responsible for the performance of all the weapons systems, radars and sensors, all communications, the main computer, and the efficient functioning of all weapons, guns and missiles, together with the integrity of the 10 magazines containing all ammunition.

A small number of spares were carried but the ravages of the weather and continuous operations took its toll. Nevertheless, everything worked when we needed it, and the action damage to the radar and

half the Seaslug missile launching system were quickly rectified. Whilst at anchor in Grytviken, we also replaced the two 4.5" gun barrels which had been worn out during the previous actions. This task normally takes a week in a dockyard, Antrim managed it in 46 hours using spare barrels carried by the RFA and 'Humphrey' to lift them. The department never let us down.



Morale

Antrim's wartime morale was usually high, but it had peaks and troughs. High when success beckoned in retaking South Georgia, on crippling the Santa Fe, and on returning to Ascension with prisoners. Low points occurred when we were told to return to the Falklands for a period after that. We were the last of the original Ex Springtrain ships to be ordered home. Those who were younger, unmarried, or had an action station which kept them busy or firing weapons fared better.

The Commander, in his Hagar the Horrible helmet and beloved of the Ship's Company, kept us informed of events over the ship's TV system.

The ability to send and receive mail was a fundamental factor in morale - a letter was the only means of communication with home. Mail was brought down in ships, or - rarely - dropped by aircraft. Antrim went 3 weeks without mail on one occasion. It was also about 3 weeks before our families heard from us, or knew where we were, or what we were doing.

