# FAMILIES

I dreaded the Nine o'clock news but had to watch. The Defence Spokesman spoke in a 'Dalek-type' voice but his words were chilling 'One of our ships has been sunk….' On the married patch we recognised the car carrying the Naval padre and an officer, who called to tell families the bad news.

FAMILIES SPECIAL

Navy News

MAY 1982

Falklands Task Force

Our aim – to keep you informed

YOUR LINK WITH THE SHIPS

Agony of the waiting hours

Wren Lucy Finch checks details being passed from Portsmouth to the Portland Naval Information Centre for CPO Dave Kane, who answers a query for a family.

IN OTHER PAGES

PAY NEWS — PAGE 7

No one to talk to or to help when the washing machine broke, or the car failed its MOT….

THE WIVES WHO WAIT

Falklands Task Force

Tom gets it taped

TAPED messages from wives, families and sweethearts are being sent to sailors in the Task Force. The first, for HMS Hermes, were recorded at Shilo Church Centre, Rowner, Gosport, by Mr Tom Pearse, staff public relations officer at Chatham.

Mr Pearse is pictured (top left) with Mrs Angie Hewitt, whose husband is a leading cook. Left: Mrs Jan Thompson and son Christopher. Jan's husband is a leading medical assistant.

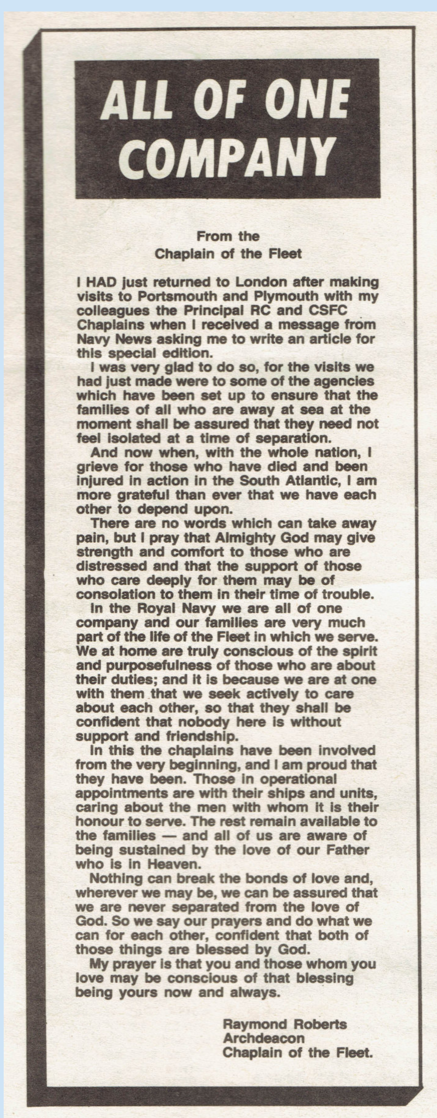
Pictures by LWren (Phot) Tracey Howe.

THE NUMBERS TO RING . . .

**Recollections from those at home…..**

That morning in March was another fairly normal one, the only difference was that when I kissed my husband Jim goodbye, I said 'See you in three weeks' instead of the more normal 'see you this evening'. Antrim was sailing that day for the Gibraltar areas for Exercise Springtrain. I had been a naval wife for 18 years, and three weeks was not a long time to be apart by any means. The news that Argentina had invaded the Falklands came as a shock to us all, and then came the realisation that Jim might become involved. Silence from the Admiralty and then – joy – a letter which said 'We're off, can't say where, you can guess'. Nothing more for three weeks….. [A Senior Rate's wife].

I was visiting my mother in Suffolk when the news of the invasion came. Somehow, I knew, just knew, that my husband was involved. My mother said 'Stay with me until we hear news' but I wanted more than anything to get home. Home is where the news would come, home is where he expects me to be, home is where I will be close to other Naval families…..


ALL OF ONE COMPANY

From the Chaplain of the Fleet

I HAD just returned to London after making visits to Portsmouth and Plymouth with my colleagues the Principal RC and CSFC Chaplains when I received a message from Navy News asking me to write an article for this special edition.

I was very glad to do so, for the visits we had just made were to some of the agencies which have been set up to ensure that the families of all who are away at sea at the moment shall be assured that they need not feel isolated at a time of separation.

And now when, with the whole nation, I grieve for those who have died and been injured in action in the South Atlantic, I am more grateful than ever that we have each other to depend upon.

There are no words which can take away pain, but I pray that Almighty God may give strength and comfort to those who are distressed and that the support of those who care deeply for them may be of consolation to them in their time of trouble.

In the Royal Navy we are all of one company and our families are very much part of the life of the Fleet in which we serve. We at home are truly conscious of the spirit and purposefulness of those who are about their duties; and it is because we are at one with them that we seek actively to care about each other, so that they shall be confident that nobody here is without support and friendship.

In this the chaplains have been involved from the very beginning, and I am proud that they have been. Those in operational appointments are with their ships and units, caring about the men with whom it is their honour to serve. The rest remain available to the families — and all of us are aware of being sustained by the love of our Father who is in Heaven.

Nothing can break the bonds of love and, wherever we may be, we can be assured that we are never separated from the love of God. So we say our prayers and do what we can for each other, confident that both of those things are blessed by God.

My prayer is that you and those whom you love may be conscious of that blessing being yours now and always.

Raymond Roberts
Archdeacon
Chaplain of the Fleet.

I knew that they had done South Georgia and that they had returned to the Falklands area, but that was all. On the night of 20 May I was restless and had a feeling that something was happening down south. I slept badly and the next day I was tense and distracted. I visited a friend. She had heard that her husband's ship had been damaged, but nothing more. She was ironing a tea-towel, and just kept ironing the same one, turning it over and over, for the next few hours.

This was not the first time he had disappeared at short notice…. The first time, instead of his being with me when our second was born, he was in the West Indies. The second time he left me to move house from Scotland to Emsworth….but the Falklands was the worst occasion. We just didn't know where they were, alive?, afloat?, sunk?, wounded?

There was all the excitement in the country as the Task Force was readied to sail within three days!! What a feat of organisation – unbelievable – but no news as to where *Antrim* was. They seem to have disappeared off the face of the earth….

*Antrim* anchored at Spithead on the evening of 16 July. I went down to Southsea to see the ship. Safe, lucky, and now home. We were all so proud of her and our men. [many wives had similar stories]

MUMS MOVE IN SUPPORT

MARGARET ELLERBY of Newcastle is one of the many "extra Mums" who are appearing overnight in naval and Royal Marines married quarters and estates from Rosyth to Plymouth.

On hearing that her son, POMEM Richard Ellerby, was sailing in HMS Hermes for the Falklands, she downed tools and headed for Portsmouth to give her daughter-in-law and grandchildren what support she could.

Having their father go to sea at such short notice was a blow for the Ellerby children, Mike (13), Julie (12), and six-year-old twins Karen and Katrina.

As he left on the eve of the twins' birthday it was a particular disappointment for them, even though he managed to give them their presents before he sailed.

The sudden arrival of their grandmother was a bonus they had not expected.

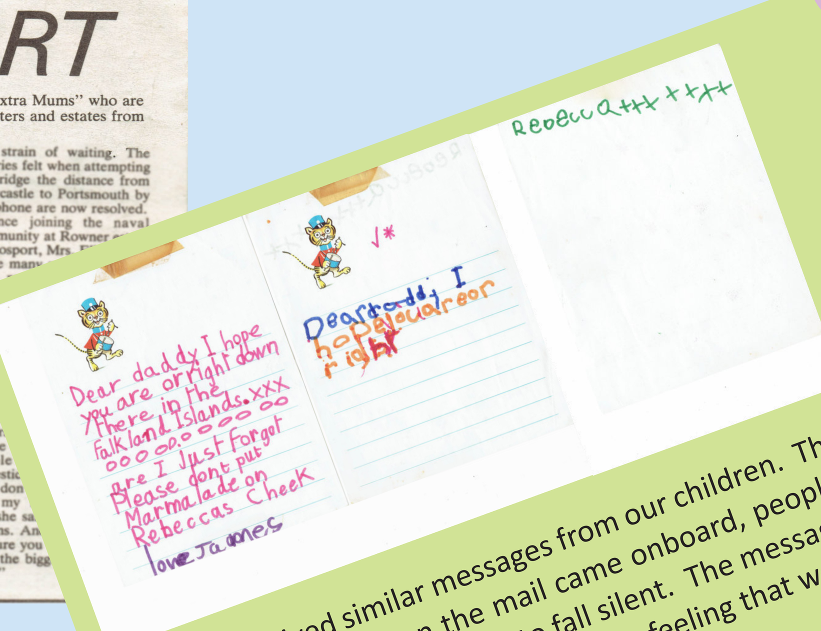
For Mrs. Ellerby the decision to join daughter-in-law Josie and her grandchildren has greatly eased the strain of waiting. The worries felt when attempting to bridge the distance from Newcastle to Portsmouth by telephone are now resolved.

SSAFA's role

THE Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association has issued a reminder that, as Service personnel continue their Falkland Islands Task Force duties, SSAFA remains ready, as always, to aid and support the families left behind.

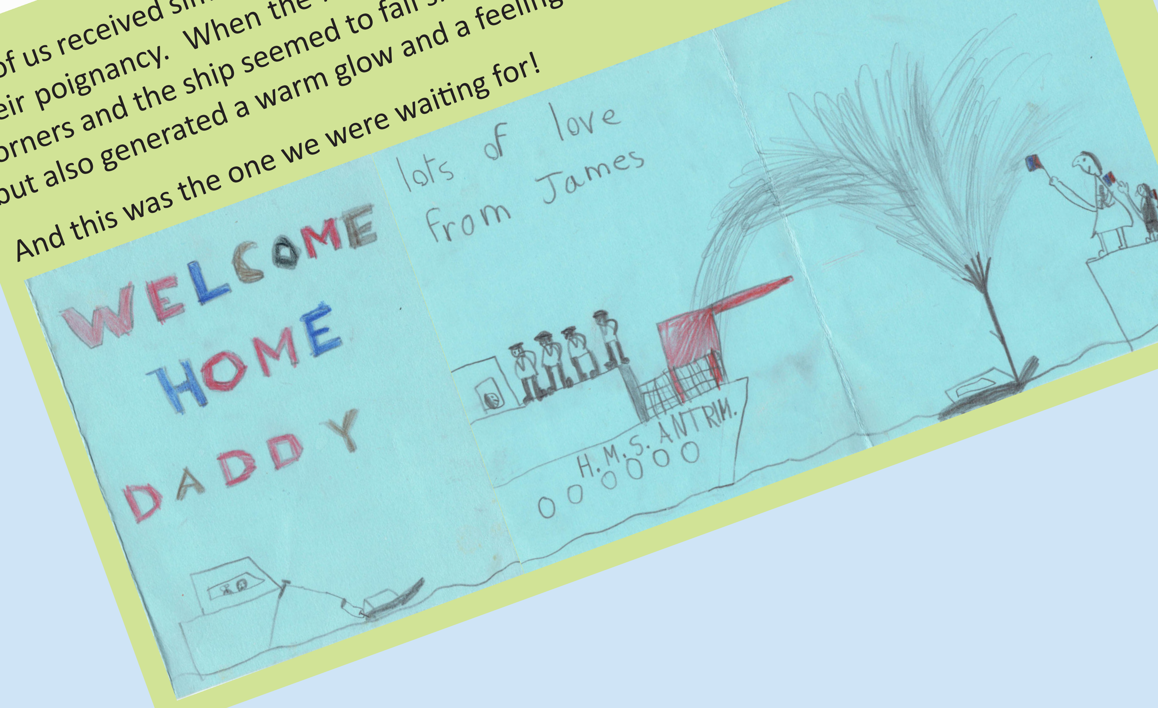
Families anxious about Service husbands or sons can always contact their local branch of SSAFA, the address of which can be found at main Post Offices or Citizens' Advice Bureaux. In addition, there is a 24-hour answering service at SSAFA Head Office in London (telephone 01-222 9221).

Luckily we had a joint bank account into which his pay went. I had no money worries.




All of us received similar messages from our children. They were almost unbearable in their poignancy. When the mail came onboard, people took themselves off to quiet corners and the ship seemed to fall silent. The messages were unsettling in their way, but also generated a warm glow and a feeling that we were not alone.

And this was the one we were waiting for!




We were given the chance to record messages which would go to the ship on a tape. It made me feel close to him, but we couldn't get our children to speak to a Daddy they couldn't see.

**The Press and Media**

It is important to realise that there was no social media in 1982. All information for those at home had to be gleaned from the Press or the TV/ Radio media.

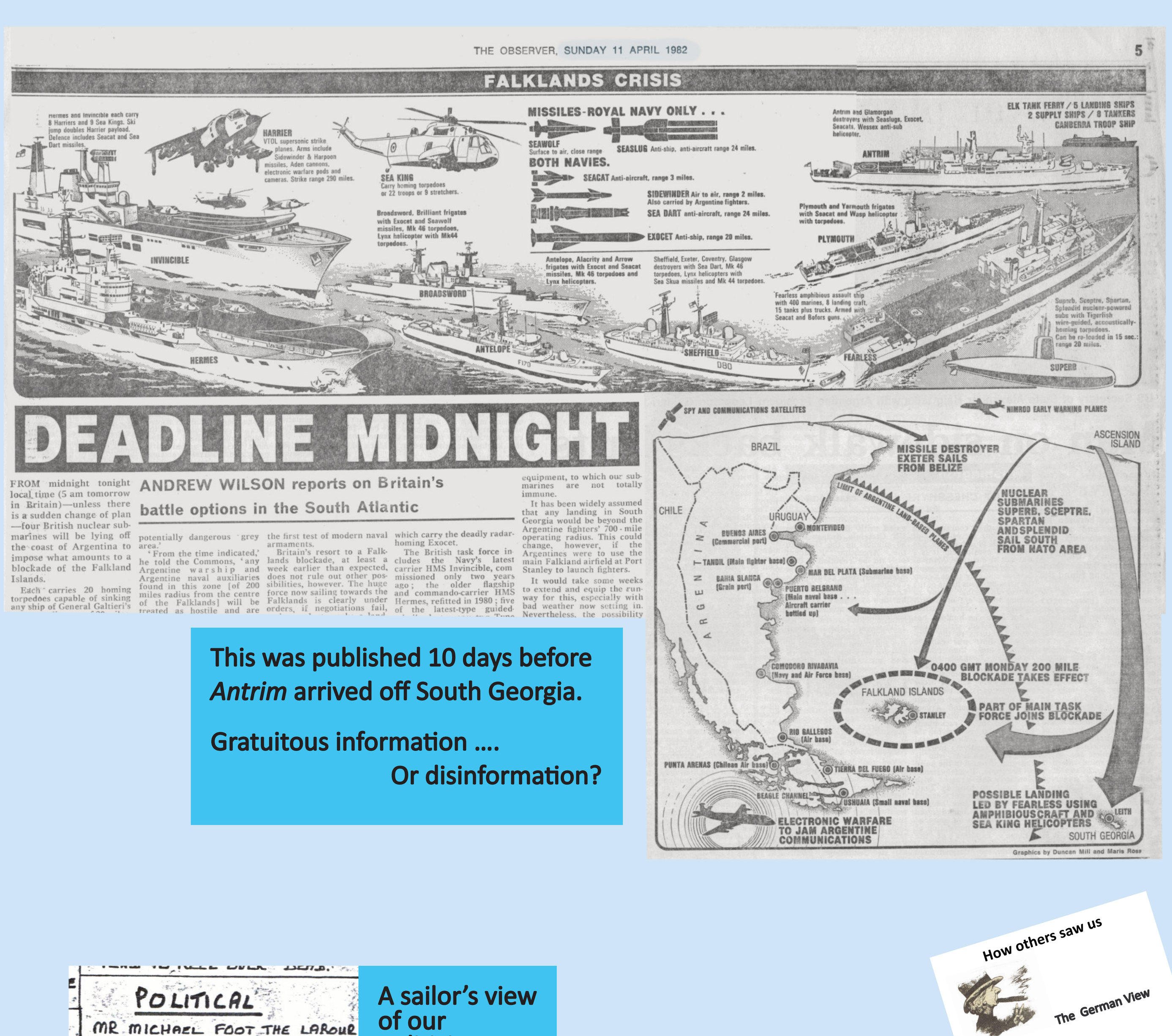
The relations between the Press and the Government in general, and the Navy in particular, were strained from the beginning. Commanding Officers did not want Press onboard but were overruled by the Prime Minister. Eventually, 40 reporters were embarked in HMS *Invincible*, *Hermes* and *Canberra*, accompanied by 'minders'.

The tension between the embarked Press and the Navy was caused by their respective irreconcilable needs. The Navy faced a lengthy passage into hostile waters close to an enemy coast, a long way from shore support, and therefore wanted as much kept secret as possible. The Press wanted to tell the story as 'fearlessly' as possible and were frustrated that they were unable to clear their copy to UK quickly because the Naval communications channels were full of war traffic.

There were spectacular 'leaks' caused by Press speculation. The BBC told the world that *Antrim* and group has arrived off S Georgia. We were then 3000 miles from the rest of the Fleet off Ascension and only 1200 miles from the Argentine fleet. Not comfortable!

A further 'leak' informed the world that the reason the bomb did not explode (in *Antrim*) was because the pilots were flying too low for the bomb to arm itself. The next day they adjusted their attack profiles accordingly!

Examples of Press reports of the day are below and right:


THE OBSERVER, SUNDAY 11 APRIL 1982

FALKLANDS CRISIS

MISSILES-ROYAL NAVY ONLY . . .

BOTH NAVIES.

DEADLINE MIDNIGHT

ANDREW WILSON reports on Britain's battle options in the South Atlantic



This was published 10 days before *Antrim* arrived off South Georgia.

Gratuitous information ….
Or disinformation?

LARGEST SELLING NEWSPAPER IN AUSTRALIA

The Sunday Telegraph

SUNDAY, APRIL 4, 1982

IT'S WAR!

British fleet mobilises as islands fall

THATCHER FACES CENSURE IN COMMONS

$3million BID FOR MARSCAY FAILS

The Sun

BRITISH WARSHIP SUNK BY ARGIES

MAY 5

The Sun

GOTCHA

Our lads sink gunboat and hole cruiser

UNION BOYCOTTS WAR

MAY 4

The Sun

MARINES SWOOP
NO BRITISH DEAD
ARGIES SURRENDER

VICTORY

'Be pleased to inform Her Majesty that the White Ensign flies beside the Union Jack in South Georgia. God save the Queen'

APRIL 26

The Daily

LONDON, MONDAY, APRIL 26, 1982

'Cockleshell heroes' of Special Boat Squad

MARINES CAPTURE SOUTH GEORGIA

Argentine garrison surrenders: no British casualties

ROYAL Marines, landing from helicopters last night recaptured South Georgia, the British South Atlantic island invaded by Argentina three weeks ago. Mr Nott, Defence Secretary, announced that the Argentine garrison had surrendered after limited resistance. There were no British casualties in the two hour operation.

Mr Nott said: "The commander of the operation has sent the following message: 'Be pleased to inform Her Majesty that the White Ensign flies alongside the Union Jack in South Georgia. God Save the Queen.'"

The Daily Telegraph

LONDON, WEDNESDAY, MAY 5, 1982

Crew abandon ship, 30 sailors feared dead, as fire engulfs destroyer Sheffield

BRITISH WARSHIP SUNK BY MISSILE

Sea Harrier shot down and pilot killed in Falkland airstrip raid

Argentina rescues 680 men

First ship lost for 37 years

NOW THE GLOVES ARE OFF

Ministers shaken by 'great tragedy'

DISMAY IN HOME PORT




A sailor's view of our politicians…