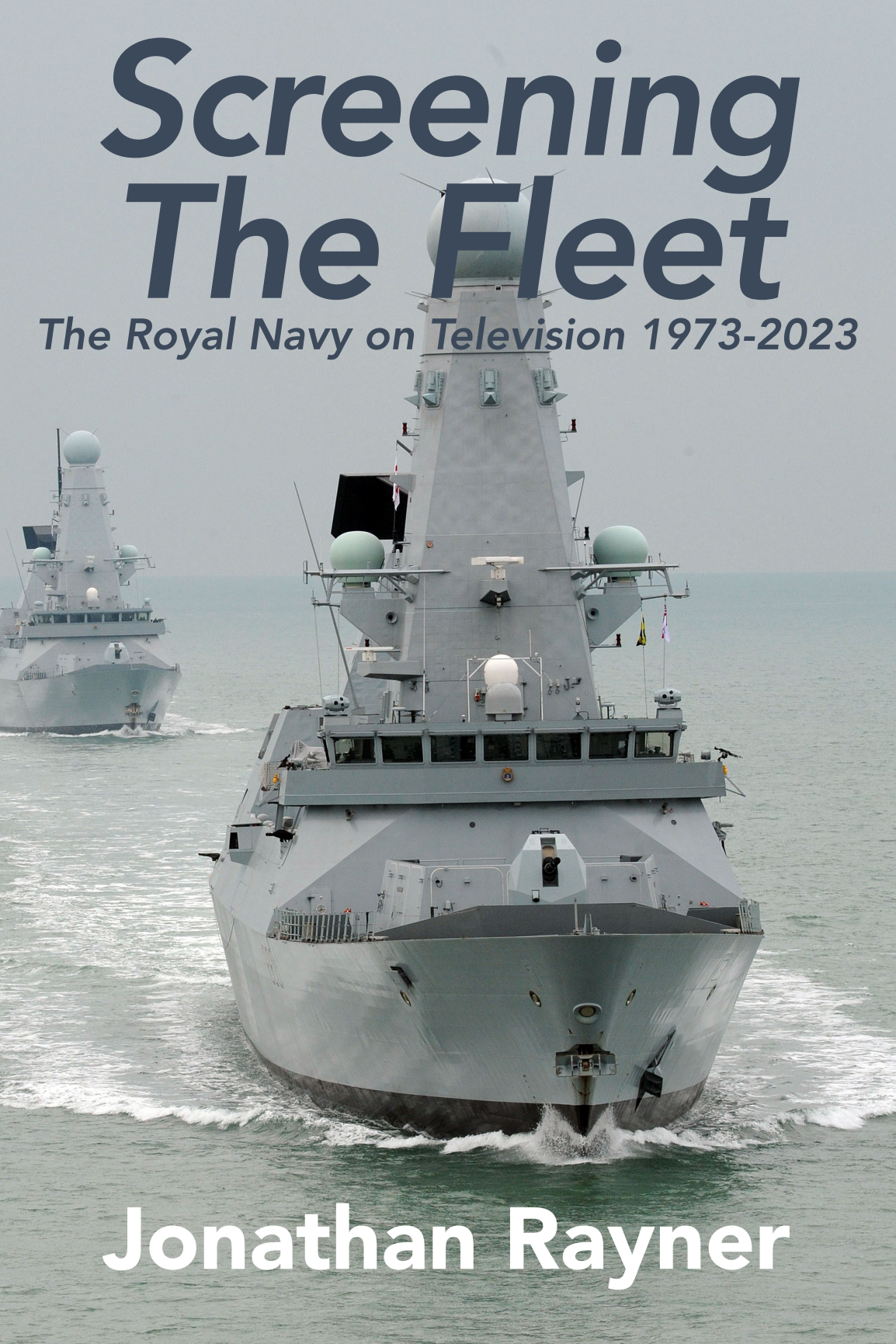
Screening The Fleet

The Royal Navy on Television 1973-2023



Jonathan Rayner

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The Royal Navy on Television 1973–2023

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This book is dedicated to
CPO Simeon George Nunn BEM (1911–38, 1939–45)
HMS *Hibernia* 1916
Danube VI 1940

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Introduction: The Royal Navy in Documentary

> Only to the degree that it has a core of reliable referentiality in its depictions can the documentary film be argued to be a key agency of modern public information.[1]

In late 2011, the Discovery Channel broadcast an eight-part documentary series filmed aboard the aircraft carrier HMS *Ark Royal*. The series had been recorded in 2010 during a lengthy overseas deployment, which had included port visits in the United States and multinational exercises in the Atlantic. While the voyage at the centre of the series represented highly appropriate televisual material, for its combination of fly-on-the-wall filming techniques used to follow individual members of the crew and infotainment-driven depictions of the ship's machinery and military hardware, political events on shore during the filming precipitated a tonal shift in the final programme's presentation, narration and reception. Before the deployment and filming had ended, it had been announced that as part of the coalition government's planned manpower and budget cuts to the Royal Navy entailed by the Strategic Defence and Security Review, *Ark Royal* (Figure i) would be decommissioned with immediate effect.[2]

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[1] John Corner, *The art of record: A critical introduction to documentary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.14.

[2] Ministry of Defence, Strategic Defence and Security Review published, 19 October 2010, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/strategic-defence-and-security-review-published--2 [accessed 1 February 2017].

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Figure i: HMS *Ark Royal*. LA(Phot) Stu Hill, 2010. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

The removal of the ship from service four years earlier than anticipated inevitably provoked widespread comment.[3] As a result, by the time of its transmission the series had become both a focus for the controversies provoked by the defence review in general and surrounding the alleged decline of the Navy in

[3] Anonymous, Defence review: Cameron unveils armed forces cuts, *BBC News*, 19 October 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11570593 [accessed 6 February 2017].

particular, and a televisual swansong for a ship the programme presented as the embodiment of the Senior Service in the eyes of the British public.

Advertisements for the series assumed an elegiac tone that combined the recognition of the national pride manifest in the ship with a melancholy perception of the country's apparently ebbing power with the passing of 'the *Ark*' into history (Figure ii). The trailer broadcast in the run-up to transmission featured a series of moving-camera shots tracking through parts of the ship's interior (control stations, instrument panels, machinery rooms and the ship's hangar deck), all poignantly depopulated. Accompanying these views of empty compartments was a layered soundtrack that juxtaposed the narrator's voice-over with excerpts of recorded orders and dialogue (deliberately altered with a post-production echo effect), and with selections from interviews with members of the crew:

> *Discovery* celebrates ('this is the best job in the world') more than just a ship ('everyone's heard of the *Ark Royal*' – 'there's definitely a sense of pride') … home to a thousand dedicated crew ('you live by pressure' – 'this is what we live for') … powerhouse of the Royal Navy ('just another day at the office') … guardian of the skies ('I mean, we're there to save people's lives' – 'it makes you realise the importance of this ship to the nation') … exclusive access to the final voyage of a national icon.

The trailer's potent combination of the voice-over's popularised version of establishment rhetoric (more than 'just a ship', *Ark Royal* is 'powerhouse', 'guardian' and 'national icon') and the understated heroism of the crew's comments endow its images of the deserted ship with a melancholy nostalgia crystallised in the final image. When the wandering camera emerges from a hatch onto the flight deck and pulls back to an artificially produced long shot, the ship is now revealed to be entombed and preserved in a bottle.

Because of the transformation in the ship's status during the period of the series' production, the tone and address of the trailer became characterised by complexities of lament and bitterness in place of a simpler and purer aura of tradition and nostalgia. The joltingly archaic rendition of the ship's appearance in the trailer (as a perfected computer-generated image located as an antique ship-in-a-bottle) came to encapsulate the paradoxes surrounding the series, the ship itself, and implicit presumptions about both the programme's subject and its inferred audience. While evincing (or perhaps attempting to assert) the relevance of the Navy to the contemporary world and viewer through its audio-visual eulogy to technology, training and tradition, the trailer also revealed and revelled in nostalgia and sentiment, in its unabashed declarations of the renown and iconic status of *Ark Royal*. For the television audience of 2011, the trailer affirms the ship's familiarity and significance, enshrined in a 25-year career including active service in the Mediterranean, Adriatic Sea and Arabian Gulf. However, the ship through her name referenced and recalled forebears stretching back to the time

Figure ii: HMS *Ark Royal* departs on her final deployment. LA(Phot) Alex Knott, 2013. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

Figure iii: HMS *Ark Royal* returns to Portsmouth for the last time. LA(Phot) Chris Mumby, 2010. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

of the Spanish Armada, in an unbroken line of service tradition, national history and (as the voice-over attests) common knowledge.

However, the trailer's assumption of a communal recognition and veneration of the ship and her name as epitome of the Navy actually implied, or perhaps actively sought to recall, a previous version of its principles, portrayal and programming in *Sailor* (BBC, 1976). This documentary series recorded a very similar overseas deployment by the previous HMS *Ark Royal*. Although controversial at the time for its untrammelled exposure of everyday life in the modern Navy, the series also became a focus for public sentiment and nostalgia. When the ship was retired in 1979, an unsuccessful public campaign was mounted to preserve *Ark Royal* as a museum.[4] An addendum to the series, *Sailor: 8 Years On* (BBC, 1984), not only interviewed serving and retired crew members from the original episodes but also included deliberately affecting scenes of the remains of the ship in the process of being scrapped. In 2011, the fifth and (to date) last *Ark Royal* (Figure iii) was the focus of similar, vain attempts to preserve the ship for the nation, in the wake of the Discovery Channel's series.

The deliberate and coincidental, textual and contextual similarities between these documentary series made 35 years apart underline the remarkable consistencies at work within the representation of the Royal Navy on British television.

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[4] Richard Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship: HMS Ark Royal IV* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), p.228.

While these documentary programmes appear to express (and exhort) keen senses of national pride in their subjects, they are also marked by overt emotion and nostalgia. Awareness and invocation of tradition are tinged with an aura of sentiment frequently descending into melancholy. This is not simply connected with the anthropomorphic investiture of ships with life, identity and history, or with a presumed, persistent public attachment: 'that jealous love the British have for their Royal Navy'.[5] The strong resemblance between the BBC's *Sailor* and Discovery's *Ark Royal* highlights the assumption or claim on the part of producers and broadcasters of the importance with which the Navy is regarded in public life in Britain. However, the contextual parallels and consequent tonal correspondence between the two series reveal an additional convergence: an abiding sense of the post-war Royal Navy as an institution at bay, endeavouring to explain its purpose and even justify its continued existence in a political-cultural moment in which its traditions, its history and its present incarnation of both appear increasingly anachronistic or irrelevant. In such a post-war era of alleged endemic 'sea-blindness' (in political as well as public circles), the visibility (especially the tele-visibility) of the Navy clearly assumes considerable significance. If the Navy's identity and purpose are open to question, so implicitly are fundamental aspects of post-imperial Britishness in national, international, ideological and cultural terms, and how these are depicted and defined in popular mass media.[6]

In examining the televisual representation of the Royal Navy, from its perceived heyday in the 1970s to a gradual return to frequent documentary treatments since 2000, this book addresses three inseparably related areas of consideration: the broadcast history of the Royal Navy as a subject of documentary, drama and documentary-drama programmes since the 1970s; the evolution of forms of documentary and factual television over this period of production in which naval representation has figured prominently and influentially; and the convergence of these analyses of both subject and textual form, in the formulations of Britishness (in terms of identifiable national realist aesthetics and in documentary treatments of national identity) coalescing in and emerging from the Navy's televisual representation. The varying 'referentiality' of depictions in documentary and drama over this period can be seen to function in both revelatory and coercive ways, to exhibit and explore the identity and purpose of the Navy as a discrete and distinguishable institution and community, which is nonetheless linked inseparably to the institutions and communities of the wider state. In this context, the 'public information', the

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[5] Caspar F. Goodrich, 'The Navy and Its Owners', *The North American Review*, 1921, 213(782), 25–35 (p.25).

[6] Jasper Gerard, Ministers accused of 'sea blindness' by Britain's most senior Royal Navy figure, *The Telegraph*, 12 June 2009, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/5517833/Ministers-accused-of-sea-blindness-by-Britains-most-senior-Royal-Navy-figure.html [accessed 9 September 2017].

'agency' of its documentation and the responsibility attendant on both its presentation and reception represent a conjunction of institutional, ideological and aesthetic priorities. Television documentaries on the Navy can represent programming based on Reithian principles of public service broadcasting, addressing and informing interested citizens and quizzical taxpayers to whom the armed services, the government and to an extent the broadcasters themselves are answerable. In this context, the presence, form and role of films publicising the Navy for the purposes of public information and recruitment can be seen to assume a pointed if not disproportionate significance.

A review of some of the films representing the Royal Navy in the post-war period made and circulated for the Ministry of Defence by the Central Office of Information helps to establish the imagistic, rhetorical and tonal consistencies of informational and recruitment materials. The characteristics of these films – and the public relations narrative they embody and construct – reflect both an introspective self-assessment and an outward-facing assertion of significance on the Navy's part. These films balance a reaffirmation of history and tradition with a declaration of continuing, contemporary relevance, to what is assumed alternately to be an indifferent and ignorant or patriotic and partisan public audience. Considering these films in detail allows the recognition and formulation of the ideological bases and representational strategies which television dramas and documentaries perpetuate in their later records and portrayals of the Royal Navy.

Following the end of World War II, numerous films made by the Central Office of Information (COI), the Ministry of Defence, and the Admiralty represented the Navy to the public in a variety of non-fiction forms, such as documentaries, public information films and recruitment materials. These films depict the Royal Navy in transition if not flux, as war-built vessels and wartime concepts are replaced by new ships and evolving operational requirements. As such these films represent the contradictions of continuing tradition and technological revolution that the service experienced in this period. They also exhibit enduring consistencies in the Navy's audio-visual portrayal, with attendant ideological significance, which connect films otherwise separated by time or form. The recurrence of familiar images of and immutable messages about the Navy reveals the existence of a common frame of historical and cultural reference (within documentary, public information or recruitment material) for British naval representation. This discernible commonality of representation in turn provides evidence of an ideological and imagistic cohesiveness, which has governed, informed, influenced and confirmed popular perceptions of the Royal Navy, up to and including its representation on television in the 21st century.

An early post-war documentary example is *The King's Navy* (Edward Eve, 1948), which portrays a navy ostensibly as unchanged by the coming of peace as it has been by six years of war. Observance of tradition is in fact celebrated as an institutional principle borne out by experience. Just as its title suggests an

unquestioned patriarchal authority, the film's images of the Navy are framed by familial and traditional imperatives. Accompanied by an authoritative voice-over, its observations of naval life are based upon ageless assumptions, obligations and notions of tradition and duty. Each distinct arm of the service is exemplified and embodied by a representative from a fictitious family with an historically relevant name: 'there's a member of the Blake family in nearly every kind of ship'. This organising principle facilitates the connection and familiarisation of the Navy's ships, roles and ranks. Appropriately, the film's paternalistic inspection of the Navy concludes with the reigning monarch reviewing 'his' fleet in a demonstration of personal and national pride.

At the centre of the film is a comparable patriarchal figure, 'Petty Officer Jim Blake', whose family members permeate the ranks. Jim's record of service introduces the varied types of ships to the audience: having served first on a destroyer, he progresses to duty aboard coastal craft, then a cruiser, and with subsequent promotions aboard a battleship and an aircraft carrier. Notably, the descriptions of these warship types are unaltered from pre-war or wartime concepts. The voice-over declares that the 'main purpose' of destroyers remains 'torpedo attack'; torpedo boats are still likened to early 20th-century 'mosquito craft'; cruisers must continue to 'patrol the trade routes to protect shipping'; and the battleship, not the carrier, is proclaimed to be the 'ultimate' manifestation of naval power, regardless of the lessons of World War II. Remarkably, the technological and tactical changes of the recent past (the pre-eminence of the carrier and the submarine, the introduction of radar and the advent of nuclear weapons) are not addressed at all in this review. The dearth of discernible change in the descriptions of ships' roles, and the lack of acknowledgement of the impending obsolescence of cruisers and battleships, epitomises the film's unremitting traditionalism. This treasuring of tradition is evident from the film's opening. The presence of HMS *Victory* in Portsmouth is said to inspire 'shades of Nelson' when Jim goes home on leave. The voice-over affirms that the history symbolised by Nelson's flagship still pervades the Navy: 'All officers and men of the Royal Naval Barracks, Portsmouth, are entered in the books of *Victory*.'

The film's combined discourses of duty and tradition are sustained through the sketches of other serving members of the Blake family: Jim's son George in training at HMS *Ganges*; his brother Robert working as an instructor at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth; and another brother, Peter, in the ranks of the Royal Marines. A sequence illustrating commando training is followed by scenes of 'the miniature marines: the cadets', who are described as 'pocket editions of their fathers and grandfathers who were in the same branch of the senior service'.

This familial unity of service is matched by what is affirmed to be a parallel, unbroken historical continuity. Jim discharges what is stated to be the 'sailor-father's responsibilities' by taking his youngest son to the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, where they view a model of the HMS *Rawalpindi*, 'sunk

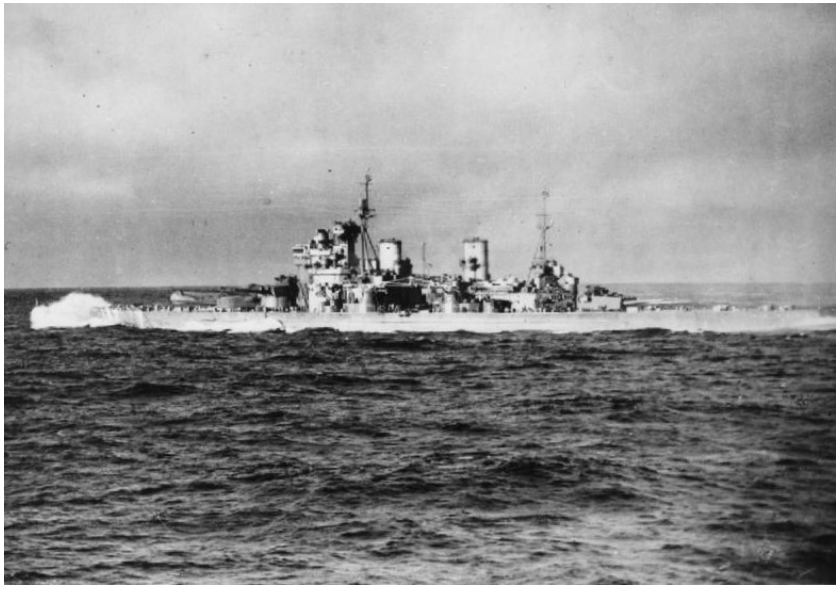

Figure iv: HMS *Duke of York* during World War II. 1942. RN official photographer, Parnall C H (Lt), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS_Duke_of_York_during_an_Arctic_convoy.jpg

off the Shetlands in the first year of the last war', and Nelson's uniforms on display. The omnipresence of naval history is re-emphasised as Jim buys a newspaper near Admiralty Arch and shows Ronnie the image of Drake's *Golden Hind* on the reverse of a halfpenny piece. This affirmation of tradition and paternal authority reaches its apogee in the final sequence, which records 'the most memorable of all peacetime naval occasions … when the King himself visits his fleet', to an accompaniment of 'Rule Britannia.' Here again it is the battleship (HMS *Duke of York*, the flagship of the Home Fleet, Figure iv) that symbolises 'the King's Navy'.

The elevation of tradition and the absence of change seen in *The King's Navy* belie the institutional and technological transformations that the post-war Navy was experiencing:

> British leaders had a firm understanding that their's [sic] was a maritime nation and that the Royal Navy was crucial to their security. Here, however, the problem was a financial one, in which the limited resources of a nation recovering from war were stretched to meet the post-war needs of an empire … The war's end prompted radical reductions in British military strength. Ships were removed from service, and were

> either retired, sold or transferred to other nations. The Navy Estimates for 1947–8 amounted to a 23 percent decrease from the previous year.[7]

Reflecting these circumstances both the *Duke of York* and the cruiser HMS *Diadem* depicted in *The King's Navy* were placed in reserve by 1950. Celebrating the Navy via its aura of institutional continuity, and elevating a heritage of service through the example of the Blake family as an admirable quality in itself, *The King's Navy* asserts an unyielding need for an unchanging Navy.[8]

The COI film *First Left Past Aden* (R. Compton Bennett, 1961) similarly obscures any alteration in the Navy in its representation despite (or arguably because of) its appearance after a particularly traumatic and transformative moment in post-war British history: the Suez Crisis.[9] The film constructs a curiously eulogising portrait of the Navy's global presence and its role in the Persian Gulf, depicting duties in far-flung regions not as the vestiges of empire but as essential, moral and national obligations:

> The system of British paramountcy [sic] in the Gulf has been seen by many as a relic of the days of gun-boat diplomacy that should have been one of the first of Britain's imperial holdings in Asia to disappear, not one of the last.[10]

Despite being made in the 1960s, this film's imagery and the poetic appeal of its voice-over (delivered by Michael Hordern) are as emblematic of previous decades as the World War II warship, HMS *Loch Lomond*, on which the narrative focuses.[11]

First Left Past Aden furnishes a sentimentalised record of day-to-day life during an extended deployment, as an isolated ship and crew patrol the Gulf and 'show the flag'. Crew members are shown to react sardonically to an officer's assertion of the importance of their task. The crew's duties and pastimes and the captain's burdens and responsibilities, shown in a montage, are simultaneously

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[7] Bruce W. Watson, *The Changing Face of the World's Navies: 1945 to the Present* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1991), pp.27–28, 49.

[8] The film's insistence on the maintenance of wartime vessels (especially battleships) for the continuation of wartime roles actually aligns closely with the Navy's plans and projections of this first post-war decade. See Eric Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident: British Naval Policy since World War II* (London: Bodley Head, 1987), pp.33–37, 55–56.

[9] Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, pp.198–201.

[10] J.C. Hurewitz, The Persian Gulf: British Withdrawal and Western Security, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1972, 401, 106–115, p.108.

[11] The deployment of outdated and unsuitable World War II-era ships to the Gulf in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in extremely uncomfortable and unhealthy conditions for crews: Iain Ballantyne, *Strike From the Sea: The Royal Navy and US Navy at War in the Middle East 1949-2003* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004), pp.28–30, 35.

ironised and celebrated as the voice-over observes reverently: 'Her Majesty's Frigate *Loch Lomond* proceeds powerfully and peacefully on her journey down the Gulf.' The commentary champions the crew's unacknowledged sacrifice during the nine-month deployment, but evinces an Orientalist view of the region redolent of the days of empire:

> The Persian Gulf and Arabian seas: what mystic thoughts are conjured in the colourful magic of the name. Caliphs and kasbahs, jewelled scimitars flashing in the sun, tall mysterious minarets and crowded carpet-begging bazaars topple over each other in the confused jumble sale of our imagination. But what is it like, Jack? What is it really like?

Notably, this outdated and clichéd conception of the Middle East is combined with the similarly traditional labelling of the emblematic British sailor as 'Jack' (Tar). Mary Conley has shown how the sentimental and celebratory characterisation of 'Jack' as a shorthand for all sailors aligned 'naval manhood' with 'imperial manliness' within the construction of 'navy, empire and society' in Victorian Britain.[12] The evocation of 'Jack' in the voice-over is thus indicative of this film's unquestioned, traditional perspective. Yet this nostalgic validation is ironically undermined by a cut to a sailor in close-up, whose rejoinder answers the voice-over's rhetorical question: 'Flipping 'orrible, mate!' The film's romanticised images of service in the tropics are replaced by a montage of scenes of shipboard activity as *Loch Lomond* receives new orders. Despite the visual inculcation of a sense of purpose, the voice-over acknowledges the paradoxical mix of irritation, discomfort, homesickness, duty and national pride motivating the crew:

> There are few who choose this corner of the world, this super-heated cul-de-sac that lies first left past Aden. But here there is a job to do, and Jack has come to do it … now a plan of action has been unfurled and allowed to flutter in the minds of those who by their rank and station are entrusted with the ruling of the waves.

Dedication to the task is unequivocally expected, just as the responsibility as much as the right to 'rule the waves' is undisputed. Scenes in the engine room, the radar office and on the bridge and with the fo'c'sle party, accompanied by the voice-over, provide further commendation of the ship's and crew's commitment and purpose: 'They have learned to live with both the climate, and the boredom. There is a meeting point and this is where they meet.' As night falls and sailors are shown off duty, eating, and playing card games, the voice-over

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[12] Mary A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870–1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p.1 (see also Chapter 6).

continues to demand recognition of both their unenviable conditions and the uniqueness of their status as a community: 'Let no one think that it is easy to live so long in such close proximity. There is a code, a way of life, a certain understanding that allows each man to live apart, yet eat and sleep and dream as one, in this house of steel which Jack built.' 'Jack's' profession is portrayed and understood as at once fundamentally different to civilian life and yet familiar to a sympathetic British audience, which is also assumed to be instinctively aware of the traditions of the Navy. The film's record of both the crew's recreations (writing letters home, and a football match ashore) and professional duties balance the voice-over's combination of comic irony and heroic understatement:

> The duty has been done: a soothing gesture in the troubled world. The Mullah has been encouraged to express his aims, and in turn will receive the help and understanding of a government at home. But for Jack, who waits to see his homeland shore, it's just another day that's gone, thank God. A little bit of history has been written, but there was nobody to note it down.

Following the ship's diplomatic mission, when the captain suddenly 'becomes an ambassador', the officers and crew enjoy a period of brief relaxation ashore. The voice-over extolls the need for this lull in the patrol with a historical allusion to tolerance as much as tradition: 'We've said it before and we'll say it again: there is a meeting point, and Nelson with an understanding smile will turn his unseeing eye towards this, the only barbecue in a thousand ocean miles.' Next the frigate is redirected to search a suspicious vessel, a dhow that could be smuggling weapons, but even the mild apprehension this arouses dissipates when the boarding party finds only fish. Yet the inconsequentiality of this episode and the irony with which the entire patrol has been observed are subverted by the film's end. The voice-over and the previously heard sailor's voice converge again to assert the value of the unnoticed enterprise far from home:

> [voice-over] Behind this languid air of Jack there is a sense of purpose running deeply in his veins. Try telling him it's all a waste of time, and just listen to him erupt like some long extinct volcano …
>
> [sailor] Ruddy important, that's what it is, and I'll fill in the next bloke what says it ain't!

These final words exemplify *First Left Past Aden*'s ironic stance, alternately mocking the mundanity and ineffectuality of the Navy's role in the Gulf region and averring its tradition and significance. The film's centring on an anachronistic war-built ship and its adoption of the diction and doctrine of a pre-war documentary corroborate the perpetuation of the Navy's regional constabulary

role, within a contemporary geopolitical context belying their apparent incongruity: in the very year of the film's production, a massive British naval effort was required to safeguard the newly independent kingdom of Kuwait from a possible Iraqi invasion.[13] Like *The King's Navy, First Left Past Aden* appears to elide the passage of time or the transformation of the post-war and post-imperial world in its representation. The Navy's roles (and apparently the ships and sailors discharging them) continue to embody both the unity and endurance of wartime and imperial tradition of global presence and policing. The film recalls interwar poetic documentary examples, depicting underrepresented areas of the British Empire via liberal, educational observation. However, following this Griersonian precedent also appears to entail nostalgic and simplistic portrayals of class, culture and race.

The changes experienced by the Navy in the 1960s, though unseen in *First Left Past Aden*, become evident in films produced later in the decade. Even as the Navy commissioned its first nuclear attack and ballistic missile submarines, its relevance was questioned and its status undermined by cuts to its budget, reductions in the size of the surface fleet and the shrinking of the carrier force. At the same time the Navy's international deployments continued unabated, despite the ascendance of the 'East of Suez' policy, and government statements that a global naval presence would not be maintained and that overseas bases would be evacuated.[14] The official position of British withdrawal and the commitment of UK forces to NATO and Europe were contradicted by the maintained presence in former imperial territories and ongoing obligations to the Commonwealth. The Navy declined materially and reputationally even as it strove to justify its existence and identify a viable role:

> The Soviet naval build-up occupies only the attention of a few strategic experts and Conservative back-benchers; the fact that France will soon have – for the first time since 1779 – a larger navy than Britain will pass generally unnoticed. In this introspective age, when domestic, social and economic problems dominate the headlines, it would be considered anachronistic to dwell too much upon the condition of British sea power.[15]

Although this period is therefore characterised by uncertainty and rationalisation, *Fourteen Hundred Zulu* (Ian K. Barnes, 1965) chooses instead to

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[13] Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, pp.246–248.

[14] Watson, *The changing face of the world's navies*, pp.102–106. See also Michael Howard, Britain's strategic problem east of Suez, *International Affairs*, 1966, 42(2), 179–183.

[15] Paul M. Kennedy, *The rise and fall of British naval mastery* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), p.349.

emphasise both development and tradition.[16] Far-reaching and rapid technological changes overtaking the fleet are epitomised by the images of brand-new and updated ships. The film's review of the Navy's worldwide training and deterrent operations foregrounds its most modern guided-missile destroyers, frigates and nuclear submarines.

Following a credits sequence that shows a frigate undertaking replenishment at sea, and an aircraft carrier operating the latest Buccaneer bombers, succeeding scenes introduce a sombre tone.[17] Inspiring views of merchant ships and bustling harbours, buoyed by 'A Life on the Ocean Wave' rising on the soundtrack, are undermined by intrusion of a stolid voice-over, which invokes the recent experience of the Battle of the Atlantic and confronts Britain's economic dependence on maritime commerce:

> Every year Britain relies on ships for foreign trade worth £7000 million … Oceans cover three quarters of the earth's surface, and without ships Britain would starve to death in fourteen days. In times of peace, merchant vessels combat natural hazards: in times of war, they are the prime targets of the enemy.

An abrupt cut showing an empty lifebelt drifting in the surf concretises the reality of the country's vulnerability. The sudden appearance of this poignant image, redolent of the existential struggle against Germany's submarines in both world wars, rhetorically links the modern and wartime navies. The present-day Navy is still tasked with defending seaborne trade, yet, in the context of nuclear conflict, a convoy war lasting months or years might seem highly improbable.[18] Striving to depict and justify the Navy's Cold War role, *Fourteen Hundred Zulu* represents the modern fleet's new capabilities and global responsibilities, but also insists upon the Navy's relevance on the basis of the experience of the recent past (as in *The King's Navy*), and enduring service heritage (after *First Left Past Aden*).

From the first sequence a cross-fade shifts the focus to the Admiralty building in London, which is styled by the voice-over as the 'nerve-centre of the

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[16] *Fourteen Hundred Zulu* is listed as released in 1960 on the BFI Film and TV Database (http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/213131 [accessed 8 May 2007]) but the film catalogue of the Imperial War Museum dates its production to 1965. The array of ships and aircraft represented suggests the film must have been made later than 1960, and could have been shot as late as 1967.

[17] This aircraft carrier could be HMS *Eagle*, which featured in a contemporary film depicting the Fleet Air Arm, *The Buccaneers* (Ian K. Barnes, 1966), another produced by Drummer Films.

[18] Protection of merchant shipping by the Royal Navy after the pattern of World War II continued to influence naval strategy from the later 1940s into the 1970s. See Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, pp.33–34, 84, 108, 200.

navy … a magnet that attracts signals from every continent'. (This description in itself suggests the film's unapologetically traditional perspective, as it ignores the abolition of the Admiralty after almost 300 years, and the concentration of authority in the 'new' Ministry of Defence, in 1964.)[19] The commentary declares that from this headquarters 'the movements of four hundred ships and 100,000 men are controlled: at this moment, at any moment, the Navy's ships encompass the globe, from the Arctic Ocean to the Ross Sea'.[20] However, the range of locations listed on the maps glimpsed in the control room (and depicted in the course of the documentary) rather reflects the last vestiges of the Empire: 'HONG KONG – MALTA – ADEN – SINGAPORE – GIBRALTAR – WEST INDIES.' The worldwide operations of ships controlled from Whitehall are portrayed in the film as taking place simultaneously, with local time zones being normalised by the Navy's timekeeping. '1400 Zulu', the particular 'moment' isolated by the title, unites all the distant vessels and their duties to suggest the Navy's omnipresence, and its operational readiness:

> At this moment, it's 1400 Zulu in Navy time, two o'clock in the afternoon in Whitehall … North of Bermuda, it's 10am as a guided missile destroyer heads west nor'west to rendezvous with a tanker … 3000 miles east, near Gibraltar, at 1400, an aircraft carrier prepares a division of Buccaneers … A further 5000 miles eastward, it's early evening off Singapore where a cruiser's attack radar scans for the echoes … It's 1400 Zulu in the North Sea, where a coastal minesweeper rolls on for her fifth sweep of the day over a World War II minefield … It's mid-afternoon southeast of Malta, and a commando ship will soon be disembarking vehicles, weapons and men … It's 5pm off Aden, where a frigate and her consort are hunting a submerged submarine.'

These widespread deployments reflect the continuance of colonial commitments, while the ships and their operations evince a combination of traditional duties and the impetus of modern technology. The work of coastal minesweepers is literally perpetuating a task from World War II. The sub-hunting frigates off Aden are described as employing 'still secret' sonar equipment applied to wartime experience, in a process described as dependent upon 'modern electronics' and 'higher mathematics' as well as 'old-fashioned luck'. The introduction of helicopters for amphibious assault and anti-submarine warfare is said to have 'changed the tactics of war', while batteries of missiles and new forms of

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[19] Edward Hampshire, *From East of Suez to the eastern Atlantic: British naval policy 1964–70* (London: Routledge, 2013), p.49.

[20] *Timepiece* (COI, 1966) similarly portrays the international operations of the contemporary RAF in Hong Kong, the Mediterranean and Cyprus, as well as numerous bases in the UK.

propulsion like gas turbines and nuclear power have transformed the Navy's ships and submarines.

The power of progress is also manifested in the most recent *County*-class guided missiles destroyers, whose leap in comparable 'performance and fire power' is claimed to be 'as advanced as the first ironclad warship over the wooden hull'. However, many of their advanced features such as air-conditioned compartments and pre-wetting systems are needed to counteract the effects of nuclear fall-out. The voice-over accompanying the depiction of underway replenishment of a destroyer by a Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker extols the skills and equipment needed to support global deployments, but also concedes that, 'in a nuclear age, the Navy accepts the destruction of its ports and shore facilities'. This stark admission of the realities of a future nuclear conflict contradicts the timelessness and continuity of the Navy's missions and operational areas stressed elsewhere in the film. If such nuclear exchanges were to take place, the tradition mission of defending trade, forwarded as the Navy's *raison d'être* at the film's opening would become irrelevant. Such a major conflict could also only be understood within NATO strategy in Europe, distinct from the disparate locations and their associated inherited duties detailed by the film. The film's often uneasy balance of technological development and historical carry-over becomes centred by its end on the acquisition of submarine-launched Polaris missiles, and the Navy's ownership of the national nuclear deterrent. *Fourteen Hundred Zulu* was made after the decision to purchase Polaris, and notably the film's ending previews this transformative development as simply a renewal of the Navy's identity as the nation's primary defence. The concluding voice-over alongside a montage of a Polaris missile launch promotes the idea that inauguration of the submarine deterrent patrols is consistent with the continuation of colonial-era commitments:

> The development goes on – weapon systems, propulsion units, strategy and tactics are changing year by year, for the Navy is ready around the world, around the clock. Day and night, from the Equator to the polar regions and a thousand feet below sea level and 50,000 above, the Navy exercises, develops and trains: trains for national security, trains for worldwide emergency, trains for the battles that may never come, because of the deterrent value of the Royal Navy.

To confirm the lineage of the modern navy and its coherence within naval history, a final title details the Articles of War from 1661: 'It is upon the Navy under the good providence of God that the Wealth, Safety and Strength of the Kingdom do chiefly depend.' This assertion of an unbroken cultural connection restates the Navy's national significance even more forcefully than the recollection of the Battle of the Atlantic at the film's opening.

This paradoxical discourse of maintained tradition and technological renewal permeates naval documentary and public information films, but is

also discernible within contemporary films produced for recruitment. *Catch Me Going Back* (COI, 1965) and *Four Men Went to Sea* (COI, 1972) offer rounded depictions of recruitment, training and life at sea as distinguished from boring or menial jobs ashore, including service aboard the latest surface ships and submarines. *Nelson's Touch* (1979), a Navy public relations film, seems to undermine a potential recruitment message by detailing the shortcomings of a hapless young sailor ironically named Harry Nelson. However, Harry is redeemed by individual instruction by the ghost of Nelson himself (who sagely intones 'it's not the Nelsons that make the Navy, it's the Harrys'), proving that a mutually beneficial place exists for modern youth within the traditional establishment.

In *Know Your Navy* (1969), the pressing need for a recognisable role for the Navy, to promote its recruitment as much as preserve its relevance, is confronted explicitly.[21] The film begins with a series of interviews with varied members of the public, soliciting their opinions of the modern Navy. Apparently speaking to camera in answer to an unseen interviewer's implied questions, their views are intercut and assembled into a scathing and sceptical montage:

> 'I think we ought to stop spending on defence altogether.'
>
> … 'Unilaterally, yes, I would disarm.'
>
> … 'Well, I believe that basically the role of the Navy is still based on outmoded strategy. I don't believe that we have such a need for a navy today as we did have when we were an empire.'
>
> … 'One of the greatest shames, really, is that the Navy, in their present recruiting campaign that they're running in the press at the moment, have a page showing the fleet as it is at the moment, and this just about, y'know, the whole fleet just about covers half the page!'
>
> … 'I think there is still some of the lure of "join the Navy and see the world", although again this is obviously much lessened now.'
>
> … 'What the devil is the Navy supposed to do, anyway?'

The superficially varied speakers provide consistently negative perspectives on the Navy's perceived reputational problems: the declining numbers of the fleet, the loss of appealing overseas postings, and overall its diminished

[21] The exact dating of the film examined here is uncertain since the Imperial War Museum's database states this title was reused for films made in 1965, 1969 and 1971: http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060020484 [accessed 10 November 2017].

relevance to a post-imperial nation. The fallacy of these opinions is immediately revealed by a voice-over, which exposes the speakers' short-sightedness (or 'sea-blindness') to the experience of history, and how this can provide lessons for the present. The interviews are replaced by a montage of newsreel images (beginning with early 20th-century street scenes and succeeded by depictions of World War I, the Great Depression, the rise of Hitler and the Cold War), alongside which the voice-over insists that the Navy's relevance in the present and future must be contextualised by a recognition of the volatility of history:

> Who in 1908 could foresee the world in 1918? Who in the trenches foresaw the unemployment of the 1920s? In 1928, who foresaw that ten years later the whole ghastly business would start all over again? And then, who foresaw the world as it would be after World War II, with the Cold War just starting, with the wind of change leading, by 1958, to the formation of countless small nations, fired anew with that old spirit of nationalism?

These concluding words are accompanied by the sight of the Union Jack being hauled down, but this epigrammatic visualisation of the end of empire links British withdrawal not with past guilt or present irrelevance but with perceived responsibility and obligation within the context of ongoing international crises. As with *The King's Navy* and *First Left Past Aden* in previous decades, *Know Your Navy* appears to assert the requirement for a modern Navy on the basis of the Navy always being needed in the past. Like many succeeding naval images (including the 21st-century documentary portrayals in this study) present and past, heritage and renewal, and youth and experience combine rather than compete in these films in their acknowledgement or avowal of the Navy's significance.

Surveying this range of post-war films, and the rhetorical strategies, historical discourses and visual emphases they evince, underlines the uniformity of treatment, material and approach displayed by official films made for public information and recruitment purposes. Although responding to differing needs and being produced over several decades, these films exhibit a textual consistency that also reflects the 'tendencies' of documentary filmmaking categorised by Michael Renov: '1. to record, reveal, or preserve; 2. to persuade or promote; 3. to analyse or interrogate; and 4. to express.'[22] Even within the establishment-controlled and institutionally motivated circumstances in which these films were produced, a concern to record, an art of persuasion, a role of promotion, a duty of analysis and a desire to express are discernible, which together assert their documentary responsibilities and qualities. While as documents they offer distinctive insights to the state and status of the post-war Navy, as documentaries they inevitably acknowledge and conform to modes of

[22] Michael Renov, 'Towards a poetics of documentary', in *Theorizing Documentary* ed. by Michael Renov (Routledge: London, 1993), 12–37 (p.21).

representation and address. They can be seen to adopt recognisable documentary methods and modes which commonly articulate complex contemporary materials. Bill Nichols has categorised five representational modes: the expository, often distinguished by directive voice-over commentary; the observational, which implies unmediated scrutiny of a subject; the interactive, which is often marked by on-camera appearances of the filmmaker as interviewer or mediator; the reflexive, which intentionally reveals its own processes of production and representation; and the performative, which is frequently overtly stylised, experimental or self-reflexive in approach.[23] In relation to the examples discussed above, public information films (e.g. *The King's Navy, Fourteen Hundred Zulu*) adopt the informative and persuasive approaches of the expository mode, while recruitment films (*Catch Me Going Back, Four Men Went to Sea*) alternate or combine this with the observational. Notably, atypical examples exhibit aspects of the reflexive and performative mode in confronting societal and generational change (e.g. *Nelson's Touch*), addressing topical, unseen or controversial aspects of the post-war Navy's operations (such as *First Left Past Aden*), and striving to justify the service's continued existence (like *Know Your Navy*). These aspects of form and technique unite naval films with the ethos and practices of British wartime and pre-war documentary filmmaking, but also crucially anticipate the later iterations of television documentary representations of the Royal Navy that constitute the focus of this book – and which are plainly susceptible to other and additional commercial factors of production and popular appeal. As records and defences of, and adverts and testimonials for, the Navy, these films occupy the same critical, formal and ideological frameworks applicable to all documentary representation. John Corner defines this understanding of documentary-making and -viewing as three emergent and related themes:

> which can be represented in the form of a couplet of tension and potential conflict. These are *art/reportage* – the status of the documentary as aesthetic artefact and as referential record: *truth/viewpoint* – the perennial question of documentary veracity in relation to the subjective dimension of its methods and discourses, and *institutions/forms* – the 'embedding' of documentary-making within different political, economic and social orders, within different landscapes of public knowledge which, though they may not be directly visible, carry implications for practices and usage.[24]

Corner's characterisation of these wider documentary emphases as key conceptual binaries in tension can also stand as a succinct summary of the span of

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[23] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp.31–75.

[24] Corner, *The art of record*, p.11.

naval documentary representation and the conflicts inherent within it. If previous informational and recruiting films such as those produced by the Admiralty and COI induced scrutiny of their truth, objectivity and participation in establishment discourses, television documentaries of the Navy must be subjected to the same critical evaluation, with an additional awareness of the influence of entertainment, commercial, subjective or partisan perspectives. However, these factors also offer the potential for more penetrating, objective observations without institutional constraint (q.v. *Sailor* and the recent documentary series produced by Channel 5 and cumulative documentary works made by Chris Terrill – see Chapters 5 and 6). In this respect television documentary can demonstrate a 'core of reliable referentiality', and an inclusive audience reach to assume an influential position of 'agency' for 'public information'.

However, Corner's last binary and its repercussive significance represent perhaps the most concentrated and apposite condensation of what is at issue in any realist representation, and which is of overarching importance for the representation of the Navy as emblematic national institution: the explicit or implicit 'embedding' of documentary with different 'orders' of political, economic or social significance. Corner's terms and definitions warn us that these might be compromised, obscured or manipulated within the 'landscapes of public knowledge', which assume critical importance in the consideration of national mass media and its pervasive, persuasive portrayals of institutions and communities.

In Chapter 1, two important productions of the 1970s are examined as progenitors of televisual naval representation. The documentary-drama series *Warship*, produced over several years by the BBC, provided entertaining stories about the contemporary Navy that popularised the service for recruitment purposes. This success has not been replicated by more recent drama productions, and its predictable fictions were overtaken by the impact of the landmark documentary series *Sailor*, shot aboard HMS *Ark Royal*. The observational precedent of *Sailor* and its strikingly candid portrayal of the Navy echo into the productions of the 21st century. In tracing the evolution of realist naval representation, Chapter 2 analyses two divergent documentary series from the 1980s. Aired just before the Falklands conflict, the partisan series *Sea Power* strove to assert the Navy's relevance in an era of cuts in defence spending. By contrast, *Submarine* represented a documentary precedent in its revelatory observational record of training and life on board Royal Navy submarines. Broadcast in the wake of the Falklands conflict, *Submarine* embodied a new sense of responsibility towards its subject and the frameworks of state violence, from which subsequent submarine-based series can be seen to diverge in their interactive and performative documentary forms.

Chapter 3 returns to the subject of the naval drama, examining Granada Television's *Making Waves* and the Australian series *Sea Patrol* in their contrasting failure and success in reaching audiences with realistic narrative depictions. In concentrating on contemporary documentary dramas alongside

factual series, this study does not consider historical naval dramas such as *Hornblower* (Meridian, 1998–2003) or fictional thrillers such as *Vigil* (BBC, 2021). Subsequent innovations in the form, address and appeal of factual television and their relevance to naval subjects form the bases of the remaining chapters. In the context of 'infotainment' and 'docusoaps', Chapter 4 looks at the documentary treatments of recent controversial naval construction programmes, while Chapter 5 examines the updating of *Sailor*'s observational record in the persuasive stylisation of Channel 5's popular *Warship: Life at Sea* series. The series of documentary maker Chris Terrill, which are distinguished by intimate access to their subjects, are examined in Chapter 6. Terrill's output has spanned and recorded several decades of cultural and sociological change in the Navy. The appeal and authenticity of his work are predicated on their incorporation of a variety of documentary practices, and its success can be gauged not just from its popularity for the television audience but by its resonance with the Navy itself.

In analysing and evaluating the many and varied televisual representations of the Royal Navy over several decades, the scope of this project is inevitably very broad. Simply considering documentary treatments of the Royal Navy since the 1970s necessitates the acknowledgement of the changes the Navy itself has undergone as a national institution over that period: the impact of the Cold War; the withdrawal from empire encapsulated in the 'East of Suez' doctrine in the 1960s; the reframing of the Navy purely within a NATO context in the 1970s; the Falklands War in the 1980s; the Gulf Wars; the Global War on Terror; and most recently a reignited confrontation with Russia. There are also the factors of recruitment and gender equality in the armed forces, the impact of technology, the status of national shipbuilding and other industrial, social and political influences affecting the service, and relevant to and finding representation within television programming. Over the same period British television and its forms of factual programming have changed even while they have returned repeatedly to the Navy as a factual subject. Over the period in question, new television channels as much as new and evolving televisual formats have altered the programmes in which the Navy appears as an indicative, unusual, familiar, sensationalised or generic element. Therefore, transformational changes of the Royal Navy as institution and as documentary subject have simultaneously accompanied (and driven) the transformation of factual television. The Navy has changed while television has changed around it and, ultimately, television can also be seen to have changed the Navy. This long and persisting relationship between the Navy and television reveals important aspects of the aesthetics, influence and responsibility of factual programming in relation to the familiar and commonplace and the atypical and remarkable in the human world, but above all offers key insight into a representative national institution and focus of national identity.

The documentary and drama series discussed in this book represent a record of evolving documentary practice indebted to examples of the past but also

devoted to a consistent subject with ties to national, cultural and representational pasts. If documentary can be said to 'mimic the canons of expository argument, the making of a case, and the call to a public rather than a private response', the case made collectively by televisual representations of the Navy is for public recognition of its significance as an emblematic British institution.[25] The Navy exists in the national interest, but appears on screen as a subject constantly re-presented *for* the nation's interest, for education and investigation, for scrutiny and support, as national mirror and cultural reflection.

[25] Nichols, *Representing Reality*, p.4.

CHAPTER 1

The 1970s: *Warship* versus *Sailor*

In relation to the development of British television documentary from the aesthetic, practical and ethical precedents of the documentary film movement, James Chapman has observed:

> A feature of television documentary that has generally been overlooked is that many landmark programmes and series that have been seen as representing particular lineages or taxonomies were often in the first place the outcome of very specific institutional and ideological conditions.[26]

This is especially pertinent to BBC series depicting the Royal Navy during the 1970s, which can be seen to act as focal points for innovation in documentary approach and in dramatisation of real-world scenarios, in addition to their recognised significance as records and representations of the Navy. The 1970s saw the broadcasting of two comparable and yet ultimately competing television series that portrayed the Navy to mass audiences, and which therefore represent an appropriate starting point for consideration of the Royal Navy's televisual presence. *Warship* (BBC, 1973–77) and *Sailor* (BBC, 1976) proved to be benchmarks in their establishment of the parameters and the popularity of the modern Navy as a television subject, in the formats of both serial drama and observational documentary series. Both were also devised and produced within a context in which public relations had become crucially important to the Admiralty, for informing television viewers of the Navy's roles, convincing them of its continued national significance, and fostering recruitment. However, these naval specificities in 'institutional and ideological conditions' were balanced by contextual factors pertaining to the production of both series by the BBC.

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[26] James Chapman, *A New History of British Documentary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), p.173.

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The gradual shrinking of the post-war fleet was accompanied, and in part driven, by the ending of conscription in the armed services, and a slump in recruitment and retention from the 1950s to the 1970s.[27] The Navy's decline exaggerated public perceptions of its increasing irrelevance to the country at large, and its ineffectuality in an era of disappearing empire, proliferating nuclear weapons and unending Cold War. In these circumstances, exploitation of the media to represent the Navy's activities more extensively and positively and heightening its profile to boost public interest and recruitment would appear to be sound institutional initiatives. However, despite the fact that both series received substantial support and required the close collaboration of the service in their production to endow them with authenticity, neither *Warship* nor *Sailor* was an officially instigated project but instead arose from individual initiatives. Their contrasting approaches can be seen to be derived from documentary film practices, and to be equally applicable and beneficial to their naval subjects:

> Television documentary was particularly suited to the adoption of *verité* techniques that gave rise to new documentary modes such as the current-affairs documentary and the observational or 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary. At the same time, however, emergence of the drama-documentary mode demonstrates some continuity with existing practices in documentary film.[28]

Despite their influence and iconic status as indicative representations of the Navy, in significant ways both series can also be considered hybrids. *Warship* bridged the categories of series drama and documentary in its factual depiction and fictional dramatisation of the Navy's varied peacetime activities, and often strayed into James Bond-like territory with tales of covert operations, political intrigue and espionage. *Sailor*'s prominent documentary principles of observation and objectivity were complemented and complicated by moments of deliberate aesthetic inflection, individual interviews and contemplative voice-overs, and both narrative and subjective editing techniques. Arguably it is these aspects of the series' multidimensional approaches and varied tonal expressions that helped to produce their contemporary impact and entertainment value, and contributed to their cultural and institutional influence. Although *Sailor* has been followed by many other observational television documentaries witnessing communities and organisations at work, and despite *Warship*'s dramatic impetus for narrative entertainment, it is the naval settings of both that unite (and distinguish) their institutional portraits of the Royal Navy.

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[27] Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, pp.125–126, 209, 264.
[28] Chapman, *A New History of British Documentary*, p.173.

Figure 1.1: *Leander*-class general-purpose frigate of the 1970s. 1976. HMS *Apollo*, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS_Apollo_1976_SMB-2008.jpg

Warship (1973–77)

The highly successful series *Warship* ran for four series (a total of 45 50-minute episodes). *Warship* was set aboard a *Leander*-class frigate (Figure 1.1), at that time a ubiquitous ship type representing a significant proportion of the total surface fleet. Although the popularity of *Warship* ensured the familiarity of the *Leander*, the class had by the 1970s gained a significant international profile due to its adoption by other navies. In addition to the 26 ships completed for the Royal Navy, additional units were built for the Royal Indian, Royal Australian, Netherlands and Chilean navies, making the *Leander* one of the most successful and numerous post-war designs.[29] The name ship was commissioned in 1963, but some survivors and derivatives of the class were still in service in 2015.

The ships were designed as general-purpose frigates, 'fast and versatile' and capable of independent operations.[30] Their global deployment and the allocation of mythological names (last used in a pre-war generation of cruisers) closely associated the ships with the Royal Navy's international presence in the

[29] G.M. Stephen, *British Warship Design since 1906* (London: Ian Allan, 1985), p.94.

[30] Watson, *The Changing Face of the World's Navies: 1945 to the Present* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1991), pp.108–109.

post-war years. Their introduction in the 1960s meant that they were employed extensively not only in the northern hemisphere but in support of the 'East of Suez' policy that underpinned the Navy's post-war purpose:

> The Admiralty successfully formulated and 'sold' a case for the Royal Navy based on its role in limited war and peacekeeping tasks in relatively distant areas of the globe. With the Soviet Union increasing its backing of new nationalist regimes in the growing, ex-colonial 'Third World', considerations of both world strategy and economic interest seemed to make it advisable for Britain to continue to play the role of a military world power in the Middle East (especially Arabia), the Indian Ocean, and South East Asia.[31]

The series' fictional HMS *Hero* was played at various points during filming by HMS *Phoebe, Juno, Danae, Dido, Diomede, Achilles, Hermione* and *Jupiter*, and (for scenes shot in Hong Kong and Singapore during 1976) by a near-sister ship belonging to the Royal Australian Navy, HMAS *Derwent*.[32] The career of HMS *Phoebe*, which was first commissioned in 1966 and was used for the filming of the original series, epitomised the myriad peacetime tasks the Royal Navy's escorts performed. The frigate was part of the force covering the British withdrawal from Aden in 1967, provided disaster relief in the Caribbean in 1971 and was involved in the 'Cod War' disputes with Iceland in 1972–73.[33] Ironically, at the time of the series' production, many of the general-purpose *Leander*s had begun to be modified with updated weapons and sensors, in order to perform a variety of increasingly specialised roles within the more narrowly, NATO-defined operations the Navy expected to assume in the 1980s.[34] Therefore, the appearance and employment of HMS *Hero* in the television series was in some ways already anachronistic. The general-purpose frigate (Figure 1.2) harked back to an epoch of presence, gunboat diplomacy and colonial responsibility different in ethos rather than practice from the 'East of Suez' deployments of the post-war era.

The name *Hero*, with its specific and fortuitous mythological association with *Leander*, was chosen by the programme's producer and the originator of the

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[31] Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, p.245.

[32] S.P. Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy: The BBC-TV series *Warship* (1973–1977), *War and Society*, 2006, 25(2), 105–122; Jim Allaway, *Leander Class Frigates* (London: HMSO, 1995), p.15; Anonymous, Memories of HMAS *Derwent* as HMS *Hero*, http://www.navy.gov.au/hmas-derwent [accessed 16 April 2015].

[33] Ben Warlow, *The Royal Navy in Focus 1970–79* (Liskeard: Maritime Books, 1998), p.122.

[34] Leo Marriott, *Royal Navy Frigates since 1945*, 2nd ed. (London: Ian Allan, 1990), pp.86–94; John Moore, *Warships of the Royal Navy* (London: Jane's, 1981), p.45.

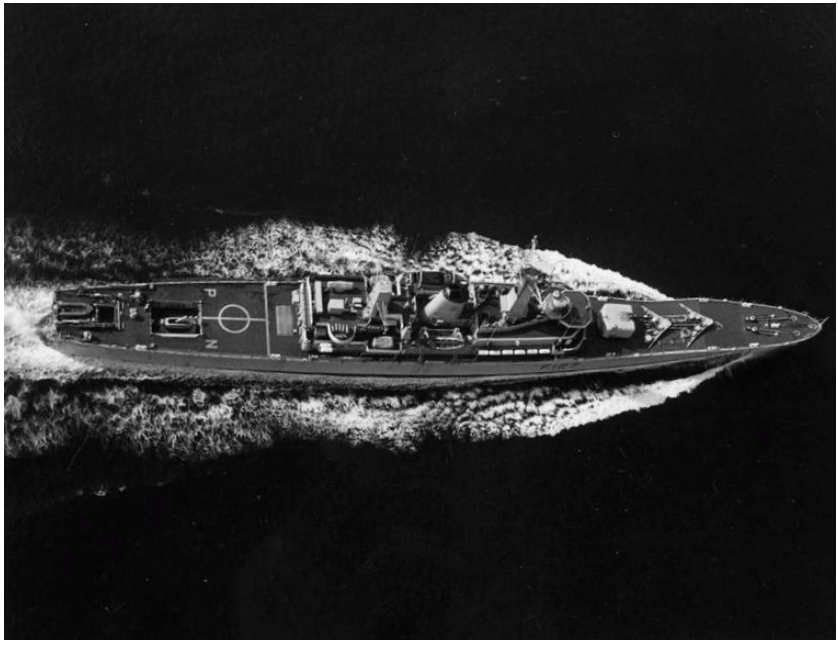

Figure 1.2: *Leander*-class frigate HMS *Penelope*. 1970. Royal Navy official photographer, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS_Penelope,_1970_(IWM).jpg

series Ian MacKintosh, himself at the time a serving naval officer.[35] Following his appointment to the Ministry of Defence's Directorate of Public Relations (Navy), MacKintosh mooted the idea for a television series designed to project 'an upbeat and contemporary image of the RN'.[36] Subsequently MacKintosh himself wrote four episodes for the first two series. In depicting the day-to-day operations of a warship, the series incorporated many varied activities and locations, including Malta, Gibraltar and Norway, as well as familiar UK naval bases such as Portsmouth and Devonport. Despite a perceived over-emphasis upon the characters of the ship's successive commanders and officers, members of the senior non-commissioned ranks and lower decks were also represented. Through its sundry storylines it also represented many other aspects and arms of the naval services, such as Royal Marines on NATO exercises. HMS *Hero* was also shown cooperating with Royal Navy submarines, exercising with aircraft from the Fleet Air Arm, and refuelling at sea from ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

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[35] Directorate of Public Relations (Royal Navy), *HMS Phoebe – HMS Hero*. (East Molesey: Kadek Press, 1973), http://homepage.ntlworld.com/r.pavely/Phoebe-Herobooklet.PDF [accessed 21 April 2010].

[36] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, p.106.

Through the fictional ship's continually busy schedule of training and deployment, and because of haphazard events at sea and on shore, the series' episodes contrived to illustrate the variety and unpredictability of naval life. The demands of narrative entertainment involved *Hero* in dramatic but far from unlikely scenarios (such as a near-fatal accident on a submarine exercise, a terrorist hijacking and the threatened seizure of the frigate by a hostile power). Such storylines foregrounded technical details (showing the ship's equipment and how it could be utilised) for both narrative and documentary effect. Behind such narrative authenticity also lay some closely related objectives and consequences of the programme's impact: the desire to show what the Navy was capable of, which could also boost recruitment and assert its continued relevance to Britain culturally and militarily, and the conviction that showing what the Navy *could* do would suggest the significance and necessity of what it (and therefore the country) *should* do, and be seen to do, across the world's oceans. The multiplicity of situations HMS *Hero* and her crew encountered asserted the necessity of a visible and capable British presence, armed but crucially as willing to moderate as intervene militarily.

Originally conceived as an affirmative dramatic depiction of the Navy to address a crisis in recruitment, *Warship* became an outstanding example of mutually beneficial cooperation between the Ministry of Defence and the BBC. MacKintosh proposed the project to both parties but their enthusiasm was tempered by practicalities of filming, the need for authenticity, and the preservation of principle on both sides:

> The navy, it became clear, was willing to lend as much technical assistance as it could in return for positive publicity when presented with the dozen episodes sketched out by MacKintosh in collaboration with producer Andrew Coburn. Andrew Osbourne, head of series drama, informed BBC-1 Controller, Paul Fox, in the summer of 1972 that 'we have been promised the exclusive use of whatever ships, helicopters, planes, submarines, merchant ships, harbour facilities [we need]' … The Controller, however, wanted a cast-iron assurance that 'there will be no editorial interference from the Ministry of Defense … even if they don't like a story.' MacKintosh fully grasped the point, and had worked hard behind the scenes to convince both the under-secretary of state for the navy, Peter Kirk, and the vice-chief of the naval staff, Terence Lewin, that in order for the series to work the BBC could not be censored.[37]

Despite the inclusion of some storylines to which the upper echelons of the Navy still objected, and some negative commentary from television critics, the series went on to become enduringly popular with British audiences.[38]

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[37] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, p.107.
[38] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, pp.109–111.

The title sequence of *Warship* (accompanied by an original soundtrack march, performed by the band of the Royal Marines) introduces HMS *Hero* in a dynamic montage. The first shot in this sequence presents a rating raising the white ensign, and the second the flag unfurled as a familiar and powerful signifier of national and service identity. Subsequent shots show sailors signalling from the ship's bridge wing using an Aldis lamp, the radar antennae rotating at the masthead, and the ship's weapons (the Limbo anti-submarine mortar and the main gun turret) training and elevating. A cut then introduces a close-up of the ship's bow, and the rising of the martial theme music on the soundtrack accompanies the appearance of the programme's title. The remainder of the opening sequence is composed of aerial views of *Hero* (in reality HMS *Phoebe*) ploughing through rough seas. This title sequence encapsulates the varied constituents and appeals of the series. While the imagery and the title of the series itself emphasise the ship and its hardware, the programme focuses on the human characters associated with the ship and the wider service and nation they represent. The apparent alertness and efficiency of both the crew members and their equipment in the title sequence underline the modernity and readiness of the Navy. At the same time, the perhaps inevitable prominence of the flag (and its raising as a symbolic initiation of the drama) stands as an evocation of history and cultural tradition into which the ship, crew and the viewer are presumed to fit. Similar views of the ship, and of the flag still flying on the quarterdeck, comprise the closing title sequence.

The titles thus underscored the presence of, and sought to inspire pride in, the Navy as a modern force and suggested its status as inheritor of a resilient historical and cultural significance. The militaristic score, with its opening drumbeats and marching tempo, provided a prominent introduction to every episode. Relatedly, the narrative of each episode strove to illustrate the contribution and significance of the ship's crew members, and their roles and relevance within the service and its missions, as part of a nationally representative institution. Considering the series' storylines and evaluating their continuities in theme, setting and resolution demonstrates *Warship*'s successful merging of the demands and benefits of dramatic entertainment, documentary practice and public relations exercise.

Series 1 (1973)

In the light of the perceived need for a positive image of the naval service for recruitment purposes and to assert the Navy's relevance to the viewing public, it is striking how the very first episode of *Warship* (entitled 'Hot Pursuit') introduces HMS *Hero* as a ship and ship's company in crisis. The incoming captain Commander Nialls (played by Donald Burton) is informed by the admiral at Gibraltar that the ship has had no captain for six weeks, and even before that his command was compromised by mental illness, and by a lack of

support from a first lieutenant afflicted by a drink problem caused by 'marital strife'. The admiral's frank admission of these problems appears paradoxical. He appears sympathetic to the individuals, and yet unyielding in the standards he expects of service personnel: his compassion does not alter the obvious conclusion that these men are no longer (or perhaps never were) equal to the tasks of command or demands of service life. Implicitly, it is these psychological and emotional pressures (entirely normal and familiar in civilian circles) outside of and in additional to professional responsibilities that Nialls is presumed, by his appointment, to be able to both correct and support in others and yet not suffer from himself – and which will form the basis of the narratives of several later episodes.

In an echo of the narrative situation of the feature film *Yangtse Incident* (Michael Anderson, 1957), Nialls's assumption of command heralds a return to normal routine and purposeful operation for the troubled ship and conduct according to regulations for the crew. The incoming captain is characterised as both a new broom and a traditional return to standards of duty and responsibility. The admiral reflects that *Hero* will be Nialls's first command 'after small ships' (minesweepers), yet in his day frigates were 'small ships'. He impresses on the young commander the responsibility and expectation his appointment carries: 'They've given you a severe test – it shouldn't be beyond you. I want that ship pulled together, Nialls.' This private interview is succeeded by scenes aboard *Hero* as the disgruntled officers anticipate their new commander's arrival while they attempt to complete the frigate's self-maintenance period. Nialls presses his officers to get the ship ready for sea ahead of schedule. While some speculate that their new first lieutenant, Lieutenant Commander Beaumont (David Savile), will want to impress Nialls since they have served together before, Lieutenant Bill Kiley, the ship's weapons officer, is bitter at being passed over for promotion and finding a younger captain put in over his head: 'a commander who's had nothing bigger than a minesweeper and his tame first lieutenant who's the son of an admiral'. Kiley's sour summary of the characters and relationship of Nialls and Beaumont in fact provides a synopsis of the series' key narratives, themes and institutional observations. Nialls's recognised ability means he is marked for accelerated promotion, but his high profile and individualism risk resentment and failure. Beaumont epitomises naval tradition but his career and personality are hostages to institutional and family history. Both officers appear as likely to succeed (or fail) as much by breaking with tradition as by upholding it.

As well as introducing the high expectations of Nialls, and his exacting demands upon his crew, the opening episode also establishes the series' amalgamation of documentary representation, public relations and drama. Its narrative concerns *Hero*'s cooperation with the police in Gibraltar in detaining Irish arms smugglers. One of the ship's crew members unwittingly uncovers the conspirators when he propositions a woman in a bar. The drunken fracas that ensues results in his appearance before Nialls the next morning, where he lets

slip the name of one of the suspects the police are seeking. The stereotype of the inebriated and libido-driven sailor on shore (to which the series resorts on several occasions) is included here to narratively significant effect. When the smugglers try to escape from port, Nialls's aggressive tactics force them to stop. A montage of the crew launching small boats flying the white ensign to shadow the ship and scrambling the Wasp helicopter provide factual detail and underline Nialls's command: the boats maintaining constant visual contact is crucial to the legality of the pursuit, while also compensating for the unproven capability of the flight crew. These measures mutually vindicate Nialls's decision-making and the ship's crew, when the helicopter launches ahead of time, and the boats' presence upholds the law of 'hot pursuit'. Kiley, who had approached Nialls privately to request reassignment and questioned the captain's unorthodox use of the ship's guns, is impressed enough to elect to stay in *Hero*.

Subsequent episodes develop these thematic threads and characterisations. In 'Nobody Said Frigate', *Hero* is involved in a clandestine operation to extract a defecting Soviet diplomat from a hostile country. Nialls objects strongly to hazarding his ship and risking an international incident, but his plan (refined by suggestions from Beaumont and Kiley) works faultlessly. Instrumental to its success is the expertise of a new sailor working in the signals branch, whose untraditional nature is lamented by his chief petty officer: 'That's the modern Navy for you. They used to come in green and ignorant. Now it's seven O-levels, half a dozen diplomas.' Intercut within the execution of the covert operation are sequences of meetings within Whitehall, acknowledging the danger and consequences of discovery. These scenes of cynical politicians and suited intelligence officers create a palpable but clichéd contrast to the professionalism and improvisation of the uniformed personnel aboard *Hero*, which is reinforced by the dubious reward for their efforts (the successful rescue of the drunken diplomat) and the admission in the epilogue that the frigate should never have been used for such an operation.

'Off Caps' features the first concerted characterisation of the lower decks, with the portrayal of clashes over discipline between Cutler (a marine engineering mechanic or 'stoker') and Slater, a chief petty officer, and domestic worries affecting a young stores attendant, 'Bunny' Rabbitts. During an exercise at sea, the conflict among the engineering crew escalates into violence and Rabbitts becomes depressed at the postponement of anticipated shore leave. When the ship's engines are sabotaged, Cutler is accused but the culprit is revealed to be Rabbitts, when his messmates discover incriminating evidence. Despite lengthy investigation, Cutler is cleared of all charges (both justified and unjustified ones), while Rabbitts is sent ashore for punishment. Family troubles also precipitate the drama of 'Funny They All Say That' (written by Ian MacKintosh), in which Petty Officer Writer Willows is tempted to copy classified documents for a blackmailer (and probable foreign agent) in return for the money he needs to clear debts incurred by his oniomaniac wife. Willows handles the ship's confidential information, and his blackmailer knows he has previously engaged in

smuggling to cope with his wife's spending sprees. On board *Hero*, evidence of Willows' debts alarms Beaumont, who immediately sees his financial difficulties as a potential security risk. Although the first lieutenant is reassured after speaking with Willows, Nialls is furious when Beaumont reveals the matter to him, asserting that they would all share the blame if Willows leaked secrets. Espionage also convolutes the cloak-and-dagger plot of the next episode in the series, 'The Drop', in which *Hero*'s crew (Nialls, Beaumont and Master-at-Arms Heron) encounter MI5 and KGB agents in Malta, when Chief Petty Officer Donovan is blackmailed into stealing secret equipment. Nialls's resentment of military intelligence ('MI5 exists because the KGB exists') is chastised by the British agent Flynn, who claims to be a Navy veteran ('the Royal Navy exists because the Soviet Navy exists!').

The dangers encountered by the *Hero*'s crew in the remainder of the series represent an intriguing balance of heightened drama and everyday duty. In 'The Prize', a boarding party investigating an abandoned cargo ship discovers a time-bomb set to sink the vessel as part of a fraudulent insurance claim. Heron and Beaumont attempt to disarm the explosives themselves because Lieutenant Parry (a junior officer on a short service commission who is trained in diving and bomb disposal) has confided to Beaumont that he intends to leave the service to get married. Parry is unable to instruct Beaumont properly via radio, so despite Parry's personal circumstances (and obvious fear) Nialls orders him to defuse the bomb. Although Parry succeeds, his experience causes him to reflect on the responsibilities of his service: 'When you sign on in peacetime you don't think of getting yourself killed, do you? At least I didn't.' When Beaumont tells Nialls of Parry's intention to leave the navy, he reveals that he would have recommended Parry for a permanent commission, yet when Beaumont says he will try to persuade Parry to stay Nialls insists he must be 'left to make his own decision'.

In 'Subsmash', two of the frigate's junior crew members who aspire to become submariners transfer temporarily to HMS *Omega*, a submarine exercising with *Hero*. Before the operation begins, Nialls meets with the sub's captain, Lieutenant Commander Aubrey: Aubrey bears a grudge for the death of his brother, a junior officer who committed suicide following Nialls's negative reports on his performance. Nialls reacts angrily, insisting his professional evaluation of Aubrey's brother was correct, and that it was 'family tradition' that killed him:

> [Nialls] You knew the only reason Patrick joined the Navy was because it was expected of him. Ten generations, a father killed in submarines, and a brother determined to carry on the tradition. He wanted to be a lawyer. He'd broken the line, ruined the proud boast. That's what killed him, wasn't it?
>
> [Aubrey] No. He was killed by a piece of paper: a quarterly report by a lieutenant who wasn't all much older than he was.

As in the case of Kiley's resentment in the series opening, Nialls's exceptionalism (particularly his rapid promotion based on leadership and perfectionism) is perceived as both a challenge to and corroboration of the naval community and its sense of tradition. Nialls's navy is therefore explicitly a meritocracy in which institutional (rather than simply familial) tradition is upheld and preserved, but not preferentially. When the submarine dives to evade the frigate, it sinks to the bottom after striking a World War II mine: Aubrey's navigator had failed to pass on the information that the area was a minefield because officially it had been swept clear. *Hero* has to initiate a rescue, with Parry as the frigate's diver effecting an underwater repair that allows the submarine to resurface.

In the penultimate episode ('A Standing and Jumping War'), Parry again takes a leading role, when *Hero* becomes embroiled in an international dispute. The frigate is held hostage in harbour in 'Hafsidia', a fictional Middle Eastern country, because of rumours of Britain supplying warships to Israel.[39] Governmental efforts to resolve the situation are unavailing, and with the threatened arrival of Soviet warships to blockade the port a British intelligence agent helps free the crew, while Parry leads divers in sabotaging the harbour boom to allow the ship to escape. This dramatic episode unites several of the first series' threads: emphasising Nialls's boldness and impatience with political circumstances (when the British consul observes that the Hafsidians 'think we're up to something devious to upset the balance of power', Nialls asks angrily, 'Are we?'); indulging plotlines incorporating daring and covert operations; and recalling the resemblance to the *Yangtse Incident* displayed by the opening episode. Crucially, however, another extended plot line is brought to a tragic conclusion, when Parry is killed by gunfire from the shore as the ship completes its escape. Parry's increasing integration in (and importance to) the ship's operations seems to suggest his conversion to a full naval career and abandonment of his stated intention to leave the service. Instead, his fateful observation of the perils of even peacetime service is confirmed in his last-minute death.

In the series' final episode, 'Shoresides and Home', personal and institutional memory are emphasised in tandem with a muted reprise of the theme, established by Parry's characterisation, of the uncomfortable possibility of leaving the Navy. Master-at-Arms Heron applies to have his service extended, and with few doubts he will be accepted he remains evasive towards his long-term partner ashore in Gibraltar, who wants him to retire and marry her. However, Heron's record is unjustly tarnished by reports from Captain Murton, an ineffectual and conniving commanding officer. Drinking with Nialls, Murton challenges *Hero* to a race back to port in England against his ship HMS *Boadicea*. Murton cheats by arranging to delay *Hero*'s departure, but Nialls counters by persuading Murton's neglected girlfriend to pull strings to have *Boadicea* given a new

[39] Controversially, German-designed submarines built in British yards were supplied to Israel in the 1970s. Watson, *The Changing Face of the World's Navies*, p.160; John Moore (ed.), *Jane's Fighting Ships 1976–77* (London: Jane's, 1976), p.249.

assignment, ensuring *Hero* arrives first. While this humorous and anodyne episode defuses the tragic tone established by 'A Standing and Jumping War', it provides a parallel to Parry's circumstances in Heron's emotional equivocation, which is itself mirrored negatively in Murton's ego-centrism. The race home ends the first series with a comic wager, rather than with the ambiguous politics and downbeat ending of the previous episode.

Series 2 (1974)

Despite some storylines (in negative portrayals of officers, lower-deck characters, and lapses in discipline) potentially problematic for the Navy, the audience response to the first series was sufficiently positive to encourage the BBC to produce another.[40] The second series begins with a two-part story ('The Raid'/'Without Just Cause') detailing a fatal incident during a NATO exercise in Norway. Royal Marine Commandos led by the inexperienced Lieutenant Palfrey are landed from *Hero* on an enemy shoreline to destroy a radar station. Palfrey's leadership is shown to be inadequate, and his group is captured. Under gruelling interrogation, Palfrey strikes and kills the enemy officer, before escaping into the open country. Only at this point in the narrative is the mission revealed to be an exercise and not part of a genuine conflict. In the second episode, Palfrey is apprehended but requests a British court martial rather than a trial on Norwegian soil. The intricacies of the court martial procedure are explained: the orientation of Palfrey's sword on the judges' table indicates their verdict (the hilt facing him means he is innocent, while the tip of blade turned towards him signifies his guilt). Flashbacks from the previous episode, including the interrogation scene are replayed to portray Palfrey's fear of failure under the psychological pressure of both command and family tradition (his father was a decorated hero in World War II). The court martial, like the enemy interrogation, probes his naivety, bad judgement and glory-seeking, which are shown to lead inevitably to violence. However, the difference between exercise and combat – the distinction that the conduct of the operation and the narrative treatment of the first episode had deliberately blurred to dramatic effect – is central to Palfrey's case. The defence attorney calls Nialls as character witness, and his sympathetic testimony is crucial in mitigating the sentence despite a guilty verdict.

In 'Who Run Across The Sea' (an episode written by Ian MacKintosh), Nialls's idealistic qualities again alloy the commander's rigid professionalism when *Hero* is involved in a terrorist hijacking. An auxiliary ship, the RFA *Reliant*, rescues a life raft of passengers from an airliner apparently destroyed in mid-air by a bomb. Once on board, the 'survivors' reveal themselves to be members

[40] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, pp.109–111.

of a Middle Eastern terrorist group intent on seizing the ship's cargo of Polaris nuclear warheads. Suspicions are raised when *Reliant* fails to supply correct code words in radio communications. *Hero*, having been diverted to search for the airliner, is ordered to intercept *Reliant*. Nialls tries to negotiate for the safety of the missiles and the ship's civilian crew, but the terrorists' leader, Zardi, refuses to stop the ship for Nialls to transfer by boat, suspecting correctly that Nialls will have divers attempt to place explosive charges to immobilise the *Reliant*. Zardi is British university-educated (his quotation from the Roman poet Horace provides the episode's title), and Nialls expresses admiration for his courage and commitment. When a struggle on board *Reliant* leads to the fatal shooting of Zardi and *Reliant*'s second officer, a zealous female terrorist takes over and plans to drive *Reliant* into Lisbon harbour before blowing the ship up. The Portuguese government insists it will sink *Reliant* if the UK government does not act. Nialls is therefore ordered to sink *Reliant* by gunfire but delays as long as possible to give the terrorists a chance to surrender, and instead uses *Hero*'s Limbo mortar to scare them into surrender. While expressing admiration for Zardi (but notably exhibiting no sympathy for his fanatical female follower), Nialls displays his determination to follow orders and sink *Reliant* if there is no alternative, and explains his actions (and his ultimate responsibility) to *Hero*'s crew.

One of the series' primary motivations, the exploration of the relevance of the modern Navy, is confronted in 'The Immortal Memory' (also written by MacKintosh). Timothy Penn, *Hero*'s new electronics officer, starts his service following a Navy-funded university degree. He immediately provokes Beaumont with his refusal to conform to regulations in dress and conduct. He questions all aspects of ship's routine, particularly those (such as Procedure Alpha, with the crew on deck in Number 1 dress uniform for leaving harbour) that are leftovers from history. Beaumont complains to Nialls: he suspects that Penn is trying deliberately to get himself dismissed as unfit for service, as if he resigns willingly he will be forced to repay the full costs of his Navy bursary. Nialls tells Beaumont to try to reach Penn, to show him what the Navy is, because the modern fleet will increasingly need university-educated personnel. When the ship is sent to Gibraltar, Beaumont plans to delay arrival by one day in order to hold the Trafalgar mess dinner on the spot of the battle ('169 years to the day'). Penn asks Heron how men in his division might complain about the loss of leave. Heron advises him not to incite complaints, pointing out that the men will not object since they will get an extra 'make and mend' day of half-duties (another tradition of which Penn is contemptuous). At the mess dinner, Beaumont asks Penn to speak about what Trafalgar means to him. He is eloquently and viciously dismissive of its relevance and that of the Navy as an institution. He claims that the men around the table live on a glorious past because they inhabit an empty and futile present; that they hunger for war when it would be preferable to change the world for the better. Nialls conciliates, comparing Penn's alternative view to Nelson's own impatience with convention, while

preserving principles of patriotism, duty and service. However, Penn repeatedly interrupts Nialls until Beaumont angrily dismisses him from the wardroom. Afterwards Beaumont and Nialls argue in the captain's cabin: Nialls alleges Beaumont set Penn up, but Beaumont maintains Penn will not change. Nialls has a meeting with the flag officer at Gibraltar, where he insists that there are two sides: the Navy needs men like Penn and must change to find common ground with them, as much as induct and instruct them in the needs and benefits of the service. Nialls has one last interview with Penn, who asserts that his university-educated generation will change the world from the top down, leaving Nialls no option but to deem him unfit for service.

In contrast to this acute engagement with the Navy's contemporary image, the next episode ('One of Those Days', also written by MacKintosh) assumes a tone of arch comedy. When *Hero* is delayed in her departure for exercises, Heron's assistant, Leading Regulator Fuller, is discovered to have not returned from leave. Heron covers up for him, and when Fuller rejoins the ship he claims he is being pursued by a dockyard policeman after being caught with the man's wife. The woman is a local barmaid, apparently known to several members of *Hero*'s crew, but the husband is unaware of her previous infidelities. During the same night ashore, the ship's navigator, Lieutenant Last (calling himself 'First Lieutenant Beaumont'), invites a dubious female acquaintance to lunch aboard ship, assuming that with *Hero* departing in the morning his invitation could not be taken up. Simultaneously, the commander of the frigate flotilla, a gourmet and stickler for procedure, comes to inspect *Hero* and invites himself to lunch. All the cooks have to hand is frozen pheasant of uncertain quality. While Heron and Last try to decoy the constable, a party of young sea cadets arrives for a noisy tour of the ship. The constable loiters on the jetty, unsatisfied by Heron's and Last's excuses and threatening to tell the commander about the conduct of *Hero*'s crew. Last's guest arrives: fortunately, not the mature stripper he invited but her attractive daughter, who is welcomed to the wardroom dinner, where the pheasant gains approval. Seeing the constable still in evidence, Last cancels the commander's car and offers to send him back to his ship by *Hero*'s launch but commits a final gaff by asking him if wishes to be piped off the ship. Nialls admonishes Last, then finally hears about Fuller's predicament, and decides to see the constable with Fuller present to defuse the situation. The constable is satisfied with Nialls's sentimental (and fictional) exculpatory account but still punches Fuller to the deck.

The remainder of series two's episodes continue to explore established narrative and thematic territories. Nialls's attitudes to terrorism are tested again in 'The Man from the Sea', in which *Hero* picks up survivors from a downed airliner including a severely injured stewardess.[41] *Hero* receives a doctor by helicopter to assist with the injured. The ship proceeds to Stornoway at top speed

[41] This episode shares aspects of its plot with Ian MacKintosh's first *Warship*-inspired novel.

with the survivors but is delayed as the Foreign Office demands information on a South American revolutionary believed to have been the target of the bomb. 'The Man' is identified among the survivors, and Nialls converses with him. The doctor is forced to perform an emergency operation on the stewardess. Nialls is instructed to stop to allow two Foreign Office representatives aboard but orders the ship back to full speed when they arrive so the survivors can receive medical attention. The representatives direct him to stop again, so that they can take the man ashore. Nialls tries to protect him when he realises the representatives are intelligence officers, and one is actually a CIA agent who knows the revolutionary personally. Nialls is told the stewardess has died of her injuries. Privately, Nialls reminds the man of his promise that no harm would come to him aboard *Hero*. As a test of the man's morals, he asks that, though Nialls will not force him, if he will leave the ship willingly, he will allow Nialls to return to top speed to save the stewardess. The man refuses, so Nialls angrily tells the agents to 'get him off my ship!'.

The pressure of family history and naval tradition upon Beaumont's future in the Navy is explored in 'Nothing to Starboard'. While the first lieutenant is tempted by employment and romantic life beyond the navy, in the same episode Nialls is disappointed when the divorcee he is attracted to tells him she can no longer put up with the unpredictability of his shore leave. This episode begins with Nialls embarrassing Beaumont by relieving him of control of the ship on entering harbour, but ends with Beaumont's judgement, and therefore his suitability for command and commitment to his career, being reaffirmed when Nialls falls ill during a replenishment at sea. Tensions on the lower deck reminiscent of 'Off Caps' flare in 'Away Seaboat's Crew', and while on fishery protection duty a boarding party from *Hero* intervene compassionately in a mutiny aboard a trawler in 'Distant Waters'. The second series ends on a peculiar note with 'Echoes of Battle', in which Nialls is forced to accept a West German diplomat aboard as a guest during an exercise that pits *Hero* against a Bundesmarine submarine. The politician is afflicted by nightmares (marking his traumatic recollection of wartime U-boat service, rendered in flashbacks via black-and-white documentary footage). He insists on addressing German and British officers (transformed in his mind's eye into his Kriegsmarine comrades) at a briefing, assuring them of the importance of their duty, of belief in their service and of the need for preparedness to prevent war. Nialls receives a message explaining that the politician was the commander of *U-98*. The submarine attempted to surrender to a Royal Navy destroyer that had depth-charged him to the surface, but the British commander claimed not to have seen the signals and opened fire, meaning that the commander was the sole survivor. During the exercise *Hero* defeats the German submarine; appearing to relive the loss of his own boat, the diplomat collapses and is taken to Nialls's cabin. He explains how men of his generation suffer from recollections of war experiences and apologises for attempting to use his time on *Hero* as a form of exorcism. This

story's exploration of trauma revives the psychological themes of the series' opening, with all three episodes being written by screenwriter Allan Prior (best known for his work on the police drama series *Z-Cars* and *Softly, Softly* during the 1960s and 1970s).

Warship's first two series blend disparate materials in their combination of documentary, observation, realist narrative and dramatic entertainment. While most emphasis in characterisation remains fixed upon officers with authority and agency, examples of junior officers, senior ratings and ordinary sailors appear across the series as examples (or stereotypes) of classes, regions and service experience. The environment and contemporary male attitudes are illustrated by nude pinups seen in the radio room and crews' mess, and officers' wardroom conversations about sexual conquests (the intense grudge between Cutler and Slater in 'Off Caps' is sparked by sexual rivalry). By comparison, the officers' apparent fixation with female company is treated to ironic effect when the revealingly dressed guest they pursue in 'The Drop' is discovered to be a Soviet scientist. Lust and infidelity during shore leave receive a comedy treatment comparable to radio series *The Navy Lark* (BBC 1959–77), *Up the Creek* (Val Guest, 1958) or the *Carry On* film cycle in 'One of Those Days', while conventional domesticity and marriage (as seen in 'Off Caps', 'Funny They All Say That', 'Shoresides and Home' and 'Nothing to Starboard') are always associated with distraction, disappointment and difficulty. Family, defined as inescapable inheritance and imprisoning expectation, afflicts officers from higher class backgrounds (Beaumont, Aubrey and Palfrey) in 'The Raid', 'Without Just Cause', 'Nothing to Starboard' and 'Subsmash'.

Service routine and jargon are integrated with varying effect. In asserting the Navy's preparedness and the cutting-edge nature of its hardware, *Hero* is shown to be engaged in readiness exercises involving high-technology equipment. Anti-submarine techniques involving sonar detection beneath bathy-thermal layers are explained for the viewers' benefit in 'Funny They All Say That': by comparison, the reference to stringing a 'light from the bedstead' (i.e. the Type 965 radar antenna) in 'Nobody Said Frigate', to hide the ship's identity, appears quite opaque. The series' convergence with recruitment and public information films is seen in 'Funny They All Say That', where *Hero*'s replenishment at sea and exercise with F-4 jets are represented by footage from the COI public information film *Frigate* (1974), which starred another *Leander*, HMS *Sirius*. The most dramatic or even hyperbolic episodes ('Hot Pursuit', 'The Prize', 'A Standing and Jumping War', 'Nobody Said Frigate', 'The Drop' and 'Who Run Across the Sea'), while outstripping the mundanity of the majority of naval service, satisfy the demands of narrative entertainment and provide an exciting and realistic spectacle. The frequent inclusion of storylines featuring espionage, and the conscientious distinction drawn between principled naval service (incarnated by Nialls) and pragmatic political machinations (embodied in shady intelligence officers and equivocating Whitehall functionaries) is notable

in its assertion of an ethical, institutional Royal Navy identity.[42] Paradoxically the Navy is seen as a preserve of traditionally lauded national qualities and yet as being frequently at odds with the contemporary political establishment it serves. *Warship*'s negotiation of its dramatic, representational and recruitment-driven agendas is reflected in the varying emphases of its episodes, which balance, or perhaps veer between, realism and escapist entertainment. While its portrayal of personnel (both officers and ratings) is often highly conventional and conservative, the series not only acknowledges but often champions qualities of tolerance, open-mindedness and the necessity of change. This is evinced by Nialls's explicit admiration for the principles of terrorists and recognition of the shifting background, qualifications and expectations of recruits (such as Parry and Penn). The principles and actions of *Hero*'s later captains extended this complex characterisation, which, while serving dramatic purposes and devoted to the sympathetic treatment of the series' starring role, also created a multifaceted portrait of naval, and British, identity. Such crafting of a national and institutional portrait within a dramatic format distinguished *Warship* from its observational documentary peer, *Sailor*.

Sailor

Although perceived at the time and retrospectively as a realistic corrective to the conventional characterisation and dramatic implausibilities of *Warship, Sailor* arose from a similar cooperative arrangement between the BBC and the Admiralty but also inflected its observational approach with dramatic technique. The 10-part series (followed in 1984 by a one-off programme, *8 Years On*, which tracked down former members of the crew and filmed the remains of the scrapped *Ark Royal* herself) offered a penetrating but empathetic record of the lives of a large and varied ship's company on a lengthy overseas deployment:

> It was this series which helped secure *Ark Royal*'s place in the hearts of the British public and generate the climate for serious consideration to be given to her preservation when she was finally decommissioned … The most immediate effect of the series was that at the Navy Days held in Devonport that year *Ark Royal* was unquestionably the star attraction.[43]

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[42] This feature is more remarkable given MacKintosh's creation and authorship of the Cold War spy series *The Sandbaggers* (Yorkshire Television, 1978–80), and his own alleged connections to espionage: Robert G. Folsom, *The Life and Mysterious Death of Ian MacKintosh* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2012).

[43] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship: HMS Ark Royal IV* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), pp.179, 190.

Figure 1.3: HMS *Ark Royal* in the late 1970s. 1976. Isaac Newton, CC BY-SA 2.5, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:17_HMS_Ark_Royal_North_Atlantic_July_76.jpg

Where the entity of HMS *Hero* offered a hybridised representation of the contemporary Navy, in which fictional characters constituted the focuses of audience identification and ideological articulation, HMS *Ark Royal* (Figure 1.3) acquired a character of equal or even predominant importance in comparison to the documented crew (whose everyman status was encapsulated by the specific but anonymous identity of the series title).

After making a documentary series following the day-to-day life of the American ambassador in London, producer John Purdie was inspired to make a documentary series based on an aircraft carrier following a visit to HMS *Bulwark*. Purdie recalled:

> Prior to that documentary everything was set up and it was almost prescripted [sic]. You told everyone what you were trying to do and they re-enacted their lifestyles. However, this was the start of a new era when you tried to do it first take for real. You asked people to ignore the camera … [*Bulwark*'s commander] said, 'You've got to make a film about how the Navy really is' … 'The "Rusty B" is a miracle. If the guys back at Whitehall knew how we kept this going, we'd all get medals.' After lunch he took me on a guided tour of the ship and it gradually began to sink in that this is a major job to keep one of these things going. It had been

> impressed upon me that it was a way of life and that each of these carriers is a small town.[44]

Unfortunately, the deteriorating state of the 'Rusty B' and the candour of her crew that Purdie wished to portray did not meet with the Ministry of Defence's approval as documentary subjects, who offered instead an opportunity to film aboard HMS *Hermes* during NATO exercises in Norway. However, when Purdie visited *Hermes* 'everything I had seen in the Mediterranean on board the *Bulwark* had vaporised. Everyone was being very proper and terribly polite, etc.' A compromise was reached in the decision to film aboard *Ark Royal* instead, which coincidently had recently been the subject of a short documentary, *The Iron Village* (Richard Marquand, 1973).[45] Purdie sought Captain Wilfred Graham's permission to document 'everything within reason [and] to film first and discuss later': while Graham's consent was given, that of Commander David Cowling, responsible for the operation of the ship, proved harder to gain. Therefore, though the series' primary motivation was to create an unexpurgated record, its approach would be to represent a community and chronology creatively and selectively in line with contemporary Corporation practice:

> A BBC training manual from the early 1970s states that 'even the purest piece of "ciné vérite" can never be – and indeed should never be – totally free of the day-to-day business of directing.' The director's role was to interpret the raw material – yet another variation of [John Grierson's documentary creed] 'the creative treatment of actuality.'[46]

What Purdie had felt was 'missing' from *The Iron Village* was 'the people': an emphasis upon the ship and its operations, though suitable for public information films, failed in his estimation to fully document the shipboard community.[47] Instead, *Sailor* would contextualise and accentuate the stories of typical but selected groups on board.

Opening with drunken scenes of the night before departure (in 'Last Run Ashore') and ending with the return of *Ark Royal* and crew to Devonport (in 'Back Home'), the half-hour episodes encompassed the experiences and observations of an entire cross-section of the ship's crew, including senior and junior officers, flight crews, younger and older ratings, engineers and pilots. The filming style of the programme was markedly analytical and dispassionate: while some episodes were introduced by a brief informative voice-over, filmed

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[44] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, p.179.

[45] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, p.180.

[46] Chapman, *A New History of British Documentary*, p.181.

[47] HMS *Ark Royal* was also depicted operating aircraft and helicopters in company with other vessels in *Med Patrol* (COI, 1971), which placed similar stress on observing ships and operational activities rather than individual crew members.

sequences were shown without any accompanying gloss or explanation. However, voice-over commentaries drawn from interviews with participants were added to numerous scenes. Divergences from this format, such as isolated subjective sequences and the addition of musical accompaniment to some scenes, were thus even more prominent within the flow of the series. However, its unadulterated observational stance was its predominant characteristic and key selling point. As such, all the series' incidents and their positive and negative aspects (relaxation and drunkenness ashore, disciplinary hearings on board, aerial training exercises, a comical concert party and a dramatic sea rescue) were allowed to stand in their own right.

The first instalment of the series is introduced by a voice-over:

> This is a story of an old ship and the young men who sail in her. Their life together is recorded frankly during a voyage that will start on the morning tide, taking them to ports and across seas which navies have known since the days of Raleigh.

The poetic and traditional evocation of life at sea (in 'the morning tide' and 'the days of Raleigh') accompanies rather than contradicts the 'frank' footage of the *Ark*'s sailors singing 'Land of Hope and Glory' in a Plymouth strip club. Scenes from the club are intercut with the officers' briefing for the departure: events that are unlikely to be simultaneous but whose visual juxtaposition establishes the series' most pervasive editing technique in creating both contrast and balance between disparities. The series' first moments, then, recognise the accommodation of differences (and the need for understanding of difference) in perspective, opinion and behaviour (between ranks, between duty at sea and freedom on shore, and implicitly between 'sailors' and non-service viewers). The sounds of drunken singing bridge these scenes and images of men in civilian clothes returning to the ship in varying states of inebriation. The conclusion of the last indulgences before sailing is intercut with the officers' concerns for the safety with young and inexperienced crew members (the commander reminds them they are 'opening a new box of baby sailors'). The possibility of leniency for behaviour transpiring from the presence of the cameras is acknowledged as, after being questioned by officers and sent down to their mess, the last sailors remark, 'We love the BBC!'

These initial binaries of responsibility and dissipation, freedom and duty are followed by a balancing of the mechanical and the human. The captain endures endless problems with the ship's engines and telegraphs as the *Ark* proceeds to sea, and the commander and Fleet Master-At-Arms Tom Wilkinson check reports from each mess to ascertain whether all the men have returned. These paralleled anxieties are resolved, in the captain's words, by the simple expedient of taking the ship and crew back out: 'The only way to get these things working is to go to sea, and to get them working once you're at sea. If you sit in harbour waiting for them, you can wait for ages.' The necessity and consequence of this

return is marked by a montage of daily chores, followed by Wilkinson's interview with a young steward. Wilkinson informs him he will be charged with returning to the ship drunk: his remark 'if you could've seen the state of yourself this morning, son' prompts a flashback that enforces another juxtaposition, between the present contrite sailor in uniform and the earlier semi-dressed drunk youth. Within the pattern of contrasts, Wilkinson is quickly established as a constant, not only in his position between crew and officers but between shore and ship, family and service, and in his resemblance to and evocation of parental authority:

> I don't know what Mum would say to you, my old flower. I've got a good idea. And I know what Dad would say. Well, it's one of the facts of life, my son. You drink a man's drink and you act like a man. It's as simple as that.

Wilkinson and the officer of the day, and eventually the commander himself, are shown dealing with the absentees and defaulters of the previous night. The sound of singing from the club returns evocatively on the soundtrack to accompany a moving-camera shot along a line of sailors waiting for their interviews, exhibiting the series' subjectivised enhancements to its observational stance. This wistful, self-reflexive trace of the previous night is the last reminder of shore as the routine of sea duty takes over.

The second programme, 'The Squadrons Are Coming', maintains the first's guiding principles of balance and opposition, in detailing the arrival of the carrier's air group (Figure 1.4), which coincides with a visit to the ship by the Second Sea Lord, whose area of responsibility is naval personnel. After a similarly brief opening statement in voice-over, the first third of the episode documents the arrival of jet aircraft. In some cases, the pilots are new to deck landings: some are Royal Air Force pilots seconded to *Ark Royal*'s squadrons because of personnel shortages due to the gradual decommissioning of the Navy's carriers.

One Buccaneer pilot is recorded making numerous approaches before a successful landing. In preparation for the sea lord's visit, the commander is shown briefing the ship's officers, telling them (ironically in view of the camera's presence) to ensure that 'warts are kept to a minimum'. Captain Graham's comments on the visit (used as a voice-over to accompany the admiral's arrival by helicopter) underline that he is visiting *Ark Royal* (like the makers of *Sailor*) not just to look 'at all of us' but also to 'sound out what's going on in the Navy today'. This serious statement of intent is immediately followed by the awkward spectacle of Graham helping the admiral out of his skin-tight immersion suit (a cutaway shows a young steward looking on with amusement) and then juxtaposed with Wilkinson and the commander discussing the case of a sailor absent without leave. As in the first episode, Wilkinson's estimation of the sailor balances and acknowledges the differences between sea- and shore-based

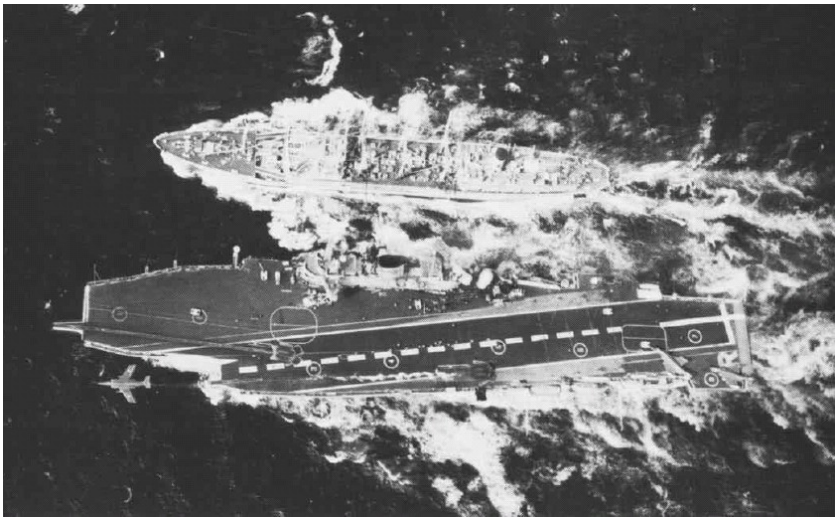

Figure 1.4: HMS *Ark Royal* launching aircraft. 1970. U.S. Navy Naval Aviation News January 1971 [1], Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ark_Royal_R09_from_top_lauch_Buc_NAN1-71.jpg

lives, while the commander's response (and subsequent footage of Captain Graham interviewing the man) emphasises shipboard discipline. The master-at-arms' holistic view is that one can benefit the other: supporting the sailor to advance and fulfil his potential on board ship will counteract his tendency for irresponsibility on shore.

In further echoes of the first episode, subsequent juxtapositions continue the (ironic) exploration of the shipboard community. Scenes of the noise of mass catering in the galley and ship's cafeteria are contrasted with images of the supply officer and his assistants counting the sterling and dollars carried for the deployment. The currency for anticipated runs ashore is as much a necessity as the day-to-day food. Members of the Marine band are shown practising: a handheld pan reveals a trumpeter to be practising in the (occupied) ship's head (toilet). The band's rendition of the Light Cavalry Overture bridges from scenes of their performance to an aerial shot of helicopters overflying the ship but is then interrupted by Wilkinson's voice reprimanding sailors assembling in the hangar for their pay. A solitary sailor is shown creating artwork in a deserted workspace, while officers in the communal wardroom enjoy board games, travel brochures and pornographic magazines.

The officers' relaxation is immediately contrasted to scenes in the engine room, accompanied by an unseen supervisor's voice-over, who notes the unglamorous and unacknowledged nature of their work:

> We've got a great many young fellas on board: 16–17 years old. Just left school, a bit starry-eyed, expecting to see a sort of *Warship* situation. They see, for a great deal of the time, hot bilges, compartments where they are stuck down, relatively inexperienced.

Not only is the junior engineering watch-keepers' experience visually contrasted with that the ship's officers; it is explicitly compared with portrayal of the *Warship* series that may have inspired their enlistment. This elucidation through marked contrast and juxtapositioning via editing structures the episode, with informal scenes of a junior mess deck (with discussions of venereal disease and appraisal of the young sailor's artwork seen earlier) standing alongside the introduction of the ship's officers to the Second Sea Lord. Their formal dinner is contrasted again with final scenes of the captain eating quietly alone.

The third episode, 'Happy Birthday', represents a high point in the series for its unscripted observational approach leading to the documenting of entirely unanticipated action. Instead of merely recording the marking of the ship's 21st year since commissioning (including telegrams received from the Admiralty and Buckingham Palace), the film crew become participants in the ship's involvement in a dramatic rescue at sea, when the *Ark* is called upon to airlift a sailor with appendicitis from an American nuclear submarine to the Azores for treatment. The preparations for the flight and consideration of the medical emergency are caught in a series of brief, tight close-ups of the officers planning the mission. By accompanying the *Ark*'s helicopters, the BBC cameras are present when the sailor on a stretcher and the helicopter winchman are both washed over the side of the submarine, USS *Bergall*. The detached chronicling of this dangerous moment and the subsequent heroic rescue provide a dramatic and authentic event to stand (again) in juxtaposition to the series' otherwise wry observation of the ship's community.[48] In fact, the extraordinary capturing of the US submarine on film led to the Royal Navy personnel having to assist Purdie in avoiding American attempts to seize the footage when the helicopters landed in the Azores.[49] The episode subsequently received a BAFTA award in 1977 for best factual programme.

The fourth episode's title, 'Thoughts of Home', re-establishes the emphasis upon shipboard life yet diverges from the tone of homesickness discernible in episodes one and two. Instead, the paradoxical title recognises the varying perception and status of the ship as 'home'. The first part of the episode centres on a search-and-rescue helicopter pilot engaged in airlifting stores from RFA *Lyness*, an accompanying auxiliary ship. His voice-over accompanies

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[48] Although Purdie had placed cameras aboard both helicopters, in the final edit he used footage from only one since he felt that cutting between two perspectives 'would have looked like it was faked for a feature film': Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, p.183.

[49] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, p.183.

a five-minute sequence detailing his work. With berths free on board *Lyness* the pilot has arranged an 'indulgence passage' for his wife during the deployment. One other pilot's wife is also aboard *Lyness* but he acknowledges that there are 250 other officers in *Ark*'s wardroom at sea without their wives. The second half of the episode introduces 'Little Wilf', a ventriloquist's dummy who stars in a bawdy show broadcast on the ship's television service. Named in (dis) honour of 'Big Wilf' Captain Graham, Wilf acts as conduit and surrogate for the crew's voice, viewpoint and grievances, as one interviewed officer explains: 'He personifies, possibly the lower echelon of thought processes on board, and I don't mean that in a class-conscious way at all.' On camera the commander remarks, 'Put it this way: they'll believe Wilf before they'll believe me.' In interview, Wilf's assistant and creator of 'The Wilf Show', John Pooley, is conscious of the puppet's role for the crew:

> Most of the material I use is what the lads generally think of life on board the ship, and what they'd like to say themselves but obviously they'd get in trouble if they did … the Captain definitely must be a good sport to put up with what we push out, to see his officers slandered.[50]

Wilf is shown conversing with the captain on the bridge (and even occupying his chair), before the broadcasting of his scurrilous Saturday-night show. (Another interlude in a junior mess captured in this episode shows a sailor pretending to be an officer wearing a shirt 'borrowed' from the laundry.) The understanding of the sailors' 'home' granted by the forbearance shown to Wilf stands (again) in stark contrast to the earlier, cumulative scenes of disciplinary action, and emphasises the licence as well as law aboard ship.

A more conventional form of liberty is seen in the next episode ('Puerto Rican Banyan'), when permission is granted for a beach party. This public display of release from regulations is paralleled by Bernard Marshall, the ship's chaplain (known as 'The Bish'), offering individual counselling to seamen with personal problems. Interviewed after having been filmed laughing at the vulgar 'Wilf Show' in episode four, the *Ark*'s chaplain offers a revealing insight into his understanding of his role in the ship's heterogeneous community. His comments (in voice-over over scenes of a communion service on board) characterise rather than castigate the sailors' social milieu and the peculiarity of their way of life:

> I think that saying that the clergy ashore often come across as being very professional and almost pious and constrained, and that the naval chaplain is less pious, more extrovert, ebullient, a sort of drinking,

[50] Wilf apparently continues to serve 30 years after his appearances in *Sailor*: Anonymous, TV Dummy makes comeback to star on *Daring, Navy News*, 1 February 2013, https://navynews.co.uk/archive/news/item/6955 [accessed 22 February 2018].

> rooting, tooting, swearing Christian, if there is such a thing, has a grain of truth in it, for two reasons. The priest ashore is in a set environment and tends to project the image which his parishioners expect of him, and the constraint that shore side parishioners place upon their clergy is pretty considerable. A chaplain who is ministering to sailors as they really are, and making no bones about it, could find himself in a difficult situation, because the captain, then, rather than expecting him to be a sailors' chaplain, which is what he's really come on for, could want him to be the preacher of establishment type standards and conventional morality. Jesus Christ consorted with sinners and was friends with prostitutes. I am the one person on the ship who is rank-less, and I am situated amidships.

Marshall insists that neither he nor anyone else should restrict sailors' 'idiomatic language' since without it their 'true emotional state will never properly register'. He distinguishes forcefully between 'bad language', which he views as intrinsic, meaningless and therefore inoffensive, and blasphemy, which he roundly condemns, but defends the stereotypical sailor's immorality as simply a greater 'honesty' than that of the civilian:

> I don't think the Navy is any more immoral than people living in England. I think the opportunities are greater when we're ashore but bear in mind *we* are deprived for much longer periods of time than the average male in the UK.

Using 'we' to include himself in the sailors' conduct is his clearest indication of broad-mindedness. This sequence is succeeded by the chaplain's own television show being used to discuss venereal disease, not just in advance of the shore leave in Puerto Rico but also as a follow-on to his previous programme's debate on marital fidelity. Seen watching the show in a lower-deck mess, sailors joke that the chaplain obviously needs to know more about VD for his own benefit. As the carrier enters harbour, the camera focuses in on a female American sailor on the dockside: intercutting between her and the sailors lining *Ark*'s deck constructs a candid, communal point-of-view shot redolent of the unspoken desire to which the chaplain referred. Marshall's appearances in the series and in *Sailor: 8 Years On* initiated the televisual presence of the eccentric naval chaplain, which has been a recurrent feature of later series such as *Shipmates* (2005) (see Chapter 6).[51]

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[51] The navy's chaplains, as commissioned officers who are nevertheless rankless and outside of the service hierarchy and command structure, embody a unique role and history which television documentary series have importantly brought to light. See Mike Farquharson-Roberts, *Royal Naval Officers from War to War, 1918–1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.36.

The beach party is represented in a lengthy sequence, mostly covered by non-diegetic music, during which Leading Airman Powell gets to know a local woman. Powell has been seen previously, describing his parental role towards younger sailors within his mess in episode four. Powell's commentary previews the chaplain's frankness and acceptance in episode five, in relation to needing to know about venereal infections in the shared living space: 'Everybody's got secrets, but personal secrets are nothing in this man's navy.' After scenes of a formal evening event hosting US Navy officers and their spouses, a montage of night-time streets and neon signs introduces the return of drunken sailors (accompanied on the soundtrack by a rendition of 'Spanish Ladies') to the ship, the brig or the sick bay. When Wilkinson again assembles the defaulters before the commander, Powell is seen in the line, and a subjective cross-fade reintroduces a shot of him on the beach with the woman. After Powell's punishment, the episode ends with another sailor's voice-over as he writes a letter home from the sickbay.

Episode six, 'Officer Territory', opens with the 'furore' attending a report of a man overboard in rough seas. Although it proves to be a false alarm, the incident serves as a reminder of the hazardous environment (the handheld camera accompanies sailors with safety lines rigged as they traverse the pitching and flooded quarterdeck).[52] The ship's junior officers under training are interviewed in their shared cabin, where they provide a common view that they lack responsibility and a clearly defined role and, as university graduates, they bridle at being unable to challenge criticisms levelled at them. This is followed immediately by scenes of Captain Graham on the bridge, issuing instructions and reading classified documents, while his comments in voice-over largely concur: 'No young officer who's any good at all ever feels he's got enough responsibility … I think that's a rather healthy sign.' One of the trainees, Chris Parry, is seen handing in essays in his journal, to be passed to the captain for review and signature. He sees this as 'superfluous' since, as an arts graduate himself, he wrote 'about 200 essays' while at Oxford. When we next see him being instructed in the operation of the ship's main electrical switchboard, his retrospective voice-over confesses it 'nearly sent me to sleep'. This shot cross-fades to his introduction to another engineering space, and then to a Martel missile in the ship's magazine, where his re-enthused voice-over returns. This is followed by a cut back to Graham on the bridge, still handling paperwork, but his voice-over asserts the interest and importance of this aspect of his work: on this occasion reviewing the records of ratings aspiring to become officers. While Chris is seen helping ordinary sailors with their O level English, Graham is seen changing into overalls to visit the same engineering spaces that bored the young lieutenant. After examining repairs to a sea boat, Graham descends to the engine room to meet members of his crew

[52] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, pp.183–184.

at work, where his voice-over confesses: 'I have come across one or two people who didn't recognise me at all.'

Intercut with Graham's rounds, Chris is seen talking with Tom Wilkinson, who counsels him on the benefit of locking up the drunk liberty men on their return and offering advice when they are sober to avoid the need for later charges. Chris's voice-over crystallises his respect for the fleet master-at-arms: 'I feel very humbled when he tells me things, the experiences, and the authority with which he says it as well, he's so confident. He calls me "sir" and it seems very odd … he knows so much.' Chris is then seen on the bridge in a rapidly edited sequence as a Russian intelligence-gathering ship manoeuvres close by and is warded off by a US Navy destroyer. While he acknowledges that being able to take (brief) command of the ship is more than his contemporaries could do, he still regrets having his actions overseen by senior officers. 'Officer territory', then, in this episode is not demarcated spatially in terms of accommodation or command areas: Graham's rounds of the ship to meet the crew and Wilkinson's experience define it in areas of responsibility and knowledge that are not limited by space or rank. This is summarised at the episode's end with scenes of officers' mess dinner, served by ship's stewards who are coached beforehand to 'prove to the officers' how well they know their jobs.

Graham's commitment to connecting with the crew is reiterated in episode seven ('A Theatre Workshop') when a concert to raise morale is staged before the ship reaches Florida. Marines and sailors practising with musical instruments are intercut with scenes of everyday maintenance and repairs continuing. Soundtrack piano music plays over bomb fusing and arming, and shots of flight deck preparation for bombing practice at the Vieques Range in Puerto Rico. This juxtaposition establishes the episode's thread of contrasts, as scenes of the concert (spoofs of the children's programme *The Magic Roundabout* [BBC, 1965–77] and World War II comedy series *It Ain't Half Hot Mum* [BBC 1974–81] and a closing chorus of *The Wombles*'s [BBC, 1973–75] signature tune) are intercut with shots of sailors on watch in deafening engineering spaces, including one up to his waist in the bilges working on a leaking joint.[53]

Scenes of the ship docking in Fort Lauderdale featuring a marching band in 1776 costumes for the American bicentennial are not accompanied by a voice-over but, as with the arrival in Puerto Rico in episode five, the camera appears to mimic the sailors' gaze on the majorettes. The latter half of the episode concentrates on Steward Lesley Vernon's marriage and honeymoon taking place within the ship's three-week visit. He plans to emigrate to America after leaving the Navy. The next episode ('Florida USA') records the wedding ceremony (presided over by Bernard Marshall). Before the wedding the episode is introduced

[53] See Anonymous, Ark, it sounds like the Navy!, *Navy News*, 1977, 272, 40, announcing the release of BBC Records single of HMS *Ark Royal*'s crew singing *Sailor*'s title song 'Sailing', with the B-side being a rendition of 'The Wombling Song', and posters of *Ark Royal* advertising the release in record shops.

by a series of voice-overs (from the groom, his bride, Susie, and their mothers) accompanying scenes of them relaxing by a swimming pool. The idyllic vision of the present is contrasted with Lesley's speculation about his future and Susie's frank acknowledgement of the likelihood her husband will have a 'fling' while away from her at sea. This recognition of sailors' behaviour is compared to an interview with a local policeman patrolling the surfing beaches, who, while admitting that sailors of any nation (including his own) can cause problems ashore, claims that 'the British sailor is the best ambassador for his country, bar none'. Juxtapositions of officer and lower-deck activities (similar to episode five) record the crew's run ashore and an official reception in the *Ark*'s hangar, including a performance by the Marine band in dress uniform. Poignantly, the episode ends with Vernon back in uniform and on duty, after a recording of his and Susie's vows from the wedding service is heard over a long shot of the ship leaving harbour.

The series' final two episodes record the crew's anticipation of home, the reunion of families when the ship returns to Plymouth, and the difficult readjustment to life ashore. In 'Homeward Bound', one sailor is flown home early in order to be present for the birth of his first child, while another who deserts in America to get home to his family sooner is sentenced to prison without pay when the ship reaches home port. Shots of his incarceration are juxtaposed immediately with scenes of the captain awarding long service and good conduct medals. Graham comments that service is 'pretty unfashionable today', yet remarks that, in his estimation, 'one of the finest things that man can do to man is to render him good service'. This reward of merit is in turn followed by a sequence detailing a last night of noisy, heavy drinking in the wardroom.

In a telling alteration of perspective, the ship's appearance in harbour is viewed from the shore, where a hotel receptionist briefly describes the 'floating town' and her five-month voyage to guests. While this change privileges the shoreside view of the ship that the waiting families occupy, the superficiality of the receptionist's statistical commentary underlines the truthful intimacy of the shipboard perspective the series has given its viewers. The final episode, 'Back Home', is, unlike previous ones, permeated by an expository voice-over that reprises the tone of the series' opening, in exalting the return of the historically named ship to 'Drake's country'. The narration assumes a deterministic stance towards the images it accompanies (for example, articulating the frustrations of the undifferentiated relatives awaiting the crew). The uncomfortably hierarchic nature of this perspective, which appears remarkably inconsistent with the balanced and unmediated perspective of the preceding episodes, is epitomised by the filming of the captain's wife and son (whom the narrator reveals has ambitions to join the Navy) being given preferential treatment, boarding the ship immediately to be reunited with Wilfred Graham.

After passing through customs inspection, the narrator marks the crew's release: 'Moments ago, *Ark* was a single family encased in a steel hull. Now, as the ship empties, 2,600 separate lives begin.' The narrator notes Wilfred

Graham's promotion to rear admiral and a command position at Portsmouth, whereas with 'appropriate symbolism' Tom Wilkinson is due to retire and the carrier herself will be decommissioned and scrapped by 1979. Their parallel retirement is described as 'the end of an era. In a navy where technology reigns, there's little room for ships and characters that are larger than life.' This sentimental tone (extended by Leading Seaman Powell's parting observation that being a sailor is all about 'goodbyes') looks forward to the series' epilogue in *8 Years On*. Notably, the final episode's last images (presented without additional commentary), showing one sailor reunited with his family and the son born in his absence, are reused as the opening scenes of *8 Years On*.

Despite the historical detail with which *Ark Royal*'s deployment is represented, *Sailor* endures as a record and has influenced subsequent naval documentaries because of its emphasis upon human observation. As the ship's commander, Captain Wilfred Graham, remarks, the majority of his time is spent on the crew rather than the ship: 'People are always interesting. Human relations is the most important part of the job: happiness and well-being – is really my major requirement.' In this regard, one of the key figures of the series (besides the captain himself, and the pervasive, patriarchal figure of Tom Wilkinson) is Bernard Marshall. While stating his objection to profane language disrespectful of his faith, his acceptance of the crew's day-to-day swearing as a normal function of this community and environment represented a key example of explicit shipboard tolerance, as the balance to depictions of naval discipline. (In editing out expletives from his material for the BBC but arguing strongly for the retention of Marshall's 'profound statement' on the validity of the sailors' language, Purdie noted the resulting irony that 'the only swearing within the whole series came from the Padre'.)[54] This focus on the (eccentric) naval chaplain has been repeated in more recent documentaries (e.g. Channel 5's *Warship*, the BBC's *Shipmates* and Quest's *Devonport: Inside the Royal Navy*). The presence and activities of naval chaplains (as both religious and non-denominational counsellors aboard ship, as morale leaders and givers of spiritual support in disaster relief operations ashore) appear to bridge or confound distinctions between the traditional nature and contemporaneity of the Navy's tasks and culture.

While reiterating the view that *Ark Royal* as a sentimental symbol of the post-war Navy reached her 'apotheosis as the subject' of *Sailor*, Jim Allaway also emphasises the series' true merit in its forthright, non-conformist and yet affirmative recording:

> Though scenes of sailors letting off steam during a last night ashore raised eyebrows among the Naval Establishment, the fact that they were set alongside episodes of solid professionalism – as in a dramatic rescue of an American sailor suffering from appendicitis who was washed off a

[54] Johnstone-Bryden, *Britain's Greatest Warship*, p.189.

> submarine by a large wave while waiting to be lifted off by helicopter – only served to concentrate public interest in what was obviously not just another run-of-the-mill propaganda exercise.[55]

The relevance of *Sailor* was also reflected in the production of the retrospective addendum to the series, *8 Years On*. In addition to tracing the later lives and experiences of some of the series' most conspicuous participants (Leslie Conway's marriage lasted less than three years; Wilfred Graham became director of the RNLI; John Pooley and Little Wilf joined the Coast Guard after receiving the British Empire Medal for 'services to morale'; Chris Parry, still serving in the Navy, saw action in the Falklands War, and would eventually retire as a rear admiral), this film also reflected directly on the resonance of the original series itself. Several incidents are referred to and reinterpreted directly, in recognition of their impact. Alan Gibson, the pilot shown experiencing difficulties with his first carrier landing in the second programme, reveals that the 'patronising debrief' by squadron commander Keith Somerville-Jones with the cameras present was followed by 'the real debrief [which] bore not much resemblance to the nice, pleasant avuncular chat' included in the programme. In interview, Somerville-Jones defends this economy with the truth in asserting the programme's overall authenticity. His remark – 'The series was remarkably honest, but then it was almost "an everyday story of country folk." It was life as 2500 men aboard a ship happen to live' – ironically compares *Sailor* to the BBC serial radio drama *The Archers* as an equally convincing depiction of contemporary Britishness. The ship's doctor, Philip Jones, and helicopter crewman Roy Rothwell recall their involvement in the submarine rescue. Jones (shown reviewing the footage of the rescue in a hospital staff room) affirms the importance of this event because the rescue was not just dramatic but '*seen* to be dramatic, as an insight to what actually occurs very often'. Rothwell (filmed on the day he leaves the Navy) remembers the incident with modest understatement as not a rescue, 'just a transfer that went wrong'.

The controversial aspects of the series are also confronted in *8 Years On*. The interviews with former crew members consist of voice-overs or comments to character without the interviewer's prompts or questions being heard: this suggests both the spontaneity of their views and the unstated recognition of the criticisms the series received. In his interview Philip Jones responds to the controversies the series provoked within the MoD by upholding its authenticity:

> My argument to that is, well, the secret of that particular series' success was the naturalness of the people. And there was no way should we have altered our behaviour or our way of life to make it look better, because that would be wrong.

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[55] Jim Allaway, *The Navy in the News 1954–1991* (London: HMSO, 1993), p.50.

Bernard Marshall, now chaplain of HMS *Drake* ashore, reflects on the negative reception of his comments on naval language and culture. Despite what he sees as the essential veracity of the representation and the honesty of his own comments, he believes there was 'perhaps regret that so much was committed to celluloid … a slight feeling of singed fingers'. However, most evocatively, the film begins and ends with Tom Wilkinson's emotional return to the *Ark* in the breakers' yard. The former fleet master-at-arms is reduced to tears by the sight of the unrecognisable remains of the carrier after scrapping. His untrammelled emotion (at the ship's ignominious end as an injustice to the memory of her and her sailors' service to the nation) deflects or revalues the criticisms of *Sailor*'s unexpurgated coverage by providing the series' epilogue with a final, authentic portrait of personal and national sentiment. Notably, *8 Years On* assumes a structure and style akin to that of the series in simply observing its subject and not privileging the atypical and dominating voice-over of the series' final episode. In this way, though the integration of footage from the series functions as 'flashback' for both the interviewees and the audience, the narrational principle of the series (in enforcing acknowledgement and accommodation of difference in perspective and experience via often drastic juxtaposition and contrast) is maintained to contemplative and evaluative effect. This impression is sustained to the very end as, unlike the scrapyard worker who accompanies Tom Wilkinson, we are affected by his unreserved expression of emotion for the memories the ship inspires.

Conclusion

This chapter's title suggests an antagonistic difference between these two crucial contributions to naval representation in the 1970s. However, given the documentary filming and recruitment emphasis underpinning *Warship* and the dramatic, narrativising techniques distinguishing key moments of *Sailor*, the two series should be seen as more complementary than competitive in their relationship to their naval subjects. Although the audience perceptions and tastes of the time certainly appeared to privilege *Sailor* over *Warship*, it might be argued that the long-term presence and popularity of *Warship* created the media environment in which *Sailor* could be conceived and produced, and generated the audience for naval representation upon which *Sailor* was able to capitalise. Above all, the drama series was also deemed to have fulfilled its key role and vindicated its conception by raising the Navy's profile:

> Even before the first series aired in the spring of 1973, the Department of Naval Recruiting was planning to use stills from *Warship* in recruiting office window displays … Whatever the truth about recruiting, the perception among senior figures in the MoD was that the series had been a 'good thing' for the Royal Navy. *Warship* seems to have provided

> thereby the basic precedent for how the MoD in general and the Royal Navy in particular handled subsequent forays into the world of TV series drama.[56]

Warship retained its popularity during its first three years (and even spawned three novels), but eventually fell victim to the popularity and apparent veracity of *Sailor*, a public relations event of an entirely different ilk.[57] Subsequently, the fourth season of *Warship* suffered in comparison with *Sailor*'s observational immediacy. While the Navy's own publication *Navy News* heralded the broadcasting of the fourth series (and filming in the Far East with HMS *Danae* and HMS *Diomede*), its letters pages also printed complaints from serving sailors about factual inaccuracies which spoiled the series for informed viewers.[58] Although navy recruitment had appeared to improve during the series' lifetime, the programme was not recommissioned, and the format of the naval drama languished until the new millennium and the appearance of Granada Television's *Making Waves* in 2004 (see Chapter 3). Ironically, the cooperation of the Royal Australian Navy in the filming of *Warship*, and the popularity of the BBC series when broadcast by the ABC, led to a comparable Australian series, *Patrol Boat* (ABC, 1979–83). *Squadron*, a BBC series based on a fictional unit in the modern Royal Air Force, which sought to represent the different

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[56] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, p.108, 121.

[57] Ian MacKintosh wrote three novels to accompany the series. *Warship* (Arrow, 1973) reuses motifs of the series in its story of *Hero*'s rescue of survivors from an air liner brought down by terrorists, and forceful intervention in a fictional, newly independent Caribbean country's tumultuous political climate. *HMS Hero* (Futura, 1976) portrays Nialls's successor Commander Glenn courting controversy in his handling of a Soviet submarine's intrusion into British territorial waters. *Holt RN* (Arthur Barker Ltd., 1977) features *Hero*'s last commander Captain Holt, in a story adapted from the first episode of the fourth series, 'Wind Song'. This narrative featured environmental protest against French nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean, in a fictionalised treatment of the life of David McTaggart, one of the founders of Greenpeace. The sympathetic attitude towards anti-nuclear protest attributed to Holt (who ironically is described as a former Polaris submarine officer) reflects a shift in tone as well as content across the novels (from latter-day colonial intervention in *Warship*, to an impromptu 'League of Nations' mid-ocean when Glenn meets his Russian counterpart in *HMS Hero*, to deliberate contravention of orders in the vicinity of French nuclear testing in *Holt RN*). MacKintosh acknowledged the change in his own views, in the light of his own departure from the Navy in *Holt RN* ('Author's Note', p.8). Ironically HMNZS *Otago* and HMNZS *Canterbury* (sister ships to the Royal Navy's *Leanders*) were sent by the New Zealand government to disrupt French nuclear testing in 'probably the first ever use of modern military hardware for peaceful protest': Michael Brown and John May, *The Greenpeace Story* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 1989), p.26.

[58] Anonymous, *Hero* returns – with some new stars, *Navy News*, 1977, 271, 40; Letters, 'Who are they trying to fool?' *Navy News*, 1977, 272, 6.

roles undertaken and aircraft types operated by the RAF (such as the Harrier jet and Puma helicopter), lasted only one season in 1982. However, the outstanding success of *Soldier Soldier* (produced by Central Television for ITV between 1991 and 1997), which lasted for seven series and over 80 episodes, eventually provided both a model and the impetus for the reincarnation of the naval drama series, with the short-lived *Making Waves*. The failure of this series to find a prime-time British audience is all the more noteworthy given the success of another long-running Australian equivalent, *Sea Patrol* (Nine Network, 2007–11). While the concept of the naval drama series seems no longer viable (in the UK at least), despite controversies comparable to those of the 1970s about the Navy's role, relevance and recruitment needs in the 21st century, the benchmark of the embedded, observational documentary established by *Sailor* remains both pertinent and popular, as recent examples (such as the series created by Chris Terrill) have substantiated.

CHAPTER 2

Image and Identity: *Sea Power* and *Submarine*

Following a significant gap after the completion of *Sailor*, the BBC produced and broadcast two factual series representing the Royal Navy in substantially differing ways. These series adopted divergent documentary techniques, yet both functioned to represent and respond to the altered political and military climate of the 1980s. *Submarine* (1985) provided revealing insights to the training and operations of the Navy's conventional, nuclear and deterrent submarines, with both observational and more journalistic techniques applied to these previously undocumented areas of the service. By contrast, *Sea Power* (1981) adopted an historical-educational structure, resembling a sequence of cohesive, illustrated lectures on the past, present and future of national power at sea. Although its scope encompassed international fleets and conflicts at sea throughout history, its overriding Anglo-American focus reflected the historical-political realities of the Royal Navy's decline from pre-eminence during the 20th century, the rise of the US Navy in its stead, and the climate of the Cold War. Similarly, despite its aesthetic resemblance to *Sailor, Submarine* also depicted fundamental changes to the Navy's composition and role. Nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarines (or SSNs) were acknowledged and highlighted as the Navy's new 'capital ships' bearing the names of former battleships, while the first detailed representation of the nuclear deterrent on television with filming on board a Polaris ballistic missile submarine (or SSBN) on patrol confronted audiences with the day-to-day realities and the political and ethical dimensions of national defence.[59]

[59] Duncan Redford, The 'Hallmark of a First-Class Navy': The Nuclear-Powered Submarine in the Royal Navy 1960–77, *Contemporary British History*, 2009, 23(2), 181–197, p.182.

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The series' deviating solutions to the issue of representing the Navy reflect their differing documentary auspices, *Submarine* being a chronologically, institutionally and physically constrained portrait of the present and *Sea Power* claiming an historically comprehensive and nationally significant perspective upon naval culture and tradition. Where *Sailor*'s documentary techniques established shipboard life on *Ark Royal* as an observable and ultimately familiar norm, *Submarine* challenged audiences with previously unseen environments and elites – submariners of all ranks, commanders in training, and officers and crews entrusted with the nation's most destructive weapons – witnessed in ways that underscored distinctions from the everyday. *Sea Power* sought to persuade as much as inform its audience of the national dimension of naval history and its abiding, communal importance into the present. Rather than simply documenting and recording, both series can therefore be seen to be polemical, dedicated to providing unique insight but endeavouring more to provoke debate. The broadcasting of *Sea Power* and *Submarine* respectively before and after the Falklands War emphasises their combined relevance to contemporary controversies about the composition, size, role, responsibility and capability of the Navy under the conditions of the Cold War, the administration of the then Conservative government and the anticipation, and experience, of armed conflict. Andrew Doorman notes that Margaret Thatcher's premiership and the defence policies and reviews enacted under it highlight the significance of the period, covering as it did the heightening of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as widespread privatisation, trade union reform and unemployment in the UK:

> Within this context of both international upheaval and domestic change British defence policy emerged from its traditional post-war position of relative inconsequence to become one of the key issues of the 1983 and 1987 general elections. The resurgence of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), the decision to acquire the Trident missile system, the Falklands War, the deployment of ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) at Greenham Common and Molesworth, the Westland saga and the Nimrod AEW3 cancellation were just some of the more memorable issues associated with Conservative defence policy.[60]

Although these series from the 1980s are less renowned than their drama and documentary precedents of the 1970s, they illustrate a significant juncture in the Navy's history and characterise a crucial era of national political and cultural life, during which competing concepts of British identity exerted considerable sway.

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[60] Andrew M. Doorman, *Defence Under Thatcher* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.1.

Sea Power

Sea Power presented an historical overview of naval warfare via case studies of warship types and their roles, employment and evolution. Its producer John Dekker collaborated with the Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Peter Hill-Norton, who acted as the presenter and narrator of all the programmes, though the precise origins of the project are unclear.[61] Its seven themed episodes ('Battleship', 'Carrier', 'Gunboat', 'Commando', 'Cruiser', 'Submarine' and 'Destroyer') were broadcast in February and March 1981, just over a year before the beginning of the Falklands War. If the documentary series *Sailor* had assumed an elegiac aspect, with the retirement of HMS *Ark Royal* against a backdrop of continuing cutbacks in defence, then *Sea Power* embodied a potent combination of retrospection and rhetoric in charting the history, lamenting the decline and stressing the unchanged significance of the Royal Navy.

John Dekker had been involved throughout the 1970s as an editor, producer and director for numerous BBC factual and current affairs programmes, working on *Campaign Report* during the 1970 general election, on several series of *The Money Programme*, and on *Parliamentarians* (in which Robin Day interviewed prominent political figures including Michael Foot, Jo Grimond, Francis Pym and Enoch Powell). Hill-Norton (as stressed repeatedly in the series) had been a lifetime career sailor, entering the Navy during the 1920s and serving throughout the Second World War in the Atlantic, Arctic and Pacific. After the war and involvement in the Suez Crisis, he became Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff, then Second and subsequently First Sea Lord, before being promoted to Admiral of the Fleet and Chief of the Defence Staff in the 1970s.[62] In these roles Hill-Norton participated extensively in meetings with NATO allies, was involved in decisions relating to the maintenance of the British independent nuclear deterrent, and clashed frequently with representatives of the Conservative governments of the period over cuts to defence.

Hill-Norton's tenure in various senior positions within the defence establishment coincided with a period in which fundamental changes to the role, perception and size of the Navy took place. The extents to which these changes

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[61] Amongst Lord Hill-Norton's extensive papers ('The Papers of Peter Hill-Norton, Baron Hill Norton' GBR/0014/HLNN) in the Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, no correspondence exists detailing the origins or development of the *Sea Power* television series. It is therefore impossible to determine if the idea for the series came from Dekker following Hill-Norton's other appearances on the BBC, or whether Hill-Norton instigated the project himself to broadcast the views on the future of the Navy and the NATO alliance which he promoted in speeches, lectures and his previous publication *No Soft Options: The Politico-Military Realities of NATO* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1978).

[62] Thomas A. Heathcote, *The British Admirals of the Fleet 1734–1995: A Biographical Dictionary* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2002), p.107.

were economically unavoidable, politically expedient and resisted or welcomed by the service itself continue to be subjects of debate. Between the beginning of the 1960s and the start of the 1980s (at which point the Nott defence cuts were first mooted), successive British governments wrestled unsuccessfully with the varying and often incompatible demands of the national economy, increasing but unaffordable defence spending, NATO membership and cooperation with the United States, the gradual disintegration of the British Empire and irresolution about the withdrawal from 'East of Suez'. The Labour government under Prime Minister Harold Wilson (and Defence Minister Denis Healey) drastically transformed the Navy's future plans with the cancellation of a new generation of aircraft carriers in 1966.[63] The judgement not to proceed with new aircraft carriers was linked to the eventual, official pronouncement of a renunciation of Britain's role 'East of Suez' and a reframing of the UK's land, sea and air forces to concentrate on NATO commitments in Europe. Ironically, the 1974–75 defence review that instigated more cuts and savings on this basis actually secured the Navy's funding, in order to placate NATO allies about a decline in capabilities and to protect UK employment through the maintenance of the shipbuilding programme. [64] However, in Bruce Watson's view the inconclusiveness of the withdrawal and the apparently unchanged and ongoing British obligation to distant operations on grounds of political influence and moral responsibility created an untenable present and uncertain future:

> In one sense, Britain's east of Suez policy was a failure of her leaders to see the importance of sea power. The policy was not clear cut because, instead of a total withdrawal, it was revised to allow for keeping some distant territories. British defense [sic] policy, however, was in accord with the original policy, producing a navy that was appropriate for London's regional NATO role, but not providing the force projection necessary to defend the distant territories. This left such possessions vulnerable to regional intrigues and to attack by nations that would never have challenged the strong Britain of years past. Just such a set of events occurred in the Falklands.[65]

The policies of previous decades, driven by economic realities and political decisions affecting the country's present and future identity, thereby created a Navy with both resource and identity crises, attempting to balance expectations, capabilities and contingencies. In the continuation of its international

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[63] Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, pp.272–277. See also Hampshire, *From East of Suez*, pp.107–140; Michael Howard, Britain's Strategic Problem East of Suez, *International Affairs*, 1966, 42(2), 179–183; Hugh Hanning, Britain East of Suez: Facts and Figures, *International Affairs*, 1966, 42(2), 253–260.

[64] Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, pp.320–322.

[65] Watson, *The Changing Face of the World's Navies*, p.182.

role, Eric Grove equally identifies the role played by the Navy's own traditions and practices, which may also have served as leverage for wider consideration, and greater funding, of its responsibilities:

> Despite its primary Atlantic role the Royal Navy was loath to give up the capacity to operate worldwide. British imperial nostalgia could be legitimised by the requirement to demonstrate the 'general capability' to operate outside the NATO area, a capacity that reflected the residual interests and commitments the United Kingdom retained around the globe. The Royal Navy itself, unhappy with a future that limited it to cold, grey, northern seas, and with centuries of experience in colonial and post-colonial peacekeeping duties in more congenial warmer climes, encouraged as much as possible an emphasis on these worldwide commitments.[66]

Hill-Norton's Admiralty appointments overlapped with this tumultuous period of the Navy's history. After participating in the decisions taken in the context of the Labour government's defence white papers of the 1960s and 1970s, he went on to become a vocal critic of the Conservative government's statements on defence both before and after the Falklands War. Writing in 1983, he dismissed the defence policy contained in white papers in 1981 and 1982 as 'demonstrable rubbish [that] flies in the face of history … and would serve neither our national interests, nor those of the [NATO] Alliance, best'.[67] His contribution to, or even instigation of, the production of the *Sea Power* series therefore stands as historical, not simply as an embodiment of the Navy's and his own personal record but as a reflection of an historic period of the Navy's post-war development.

Sea Power's dedication of episodes to particular ship types rather than eras or national fleets provided a framework for the examination of varied instances of their successful and unsuccessful uses in the past. However, implicitly this approach articulated an urgent concern for the application of historical lessons to the Navy's circumstances in the present. In providing tactical and strategic analysis based on the precedents of experience (above all his own, in the course of a long naval career), Hill-Norton sought to extrapolate from and guide viewers through the lessons of history towards the pressing problems of the present, pursuing a relentless rhetorical aim:

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[66] Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, p.336. Given that recruitment and retention remained abiding problems for Royal Navy manpower throughout the period, First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Varyl Begg was keen to stress that the 'Eastlant' Navy still offered opportunities for foreign travel and overseas deployments. Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, p.339.

[67] Lord Hill-Norton, Return to a National Strategy, in *Alternative Approaches to British Defence Policy* ed. by John Baylis (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), 117–137, p.117.

> The idea of sea power has seldom been taken very seriously, even in a maritime nation such as Britain. It is true that most people vaguely believe in British sea power rather as they do in Christianity … The Royal Navy has always stood high in the public regard, while few people ever bother to ask what the Navy is *for*, what it is expected to *do*, and, more important, what it *can* do.[68]

Hill-Norton's concentration upon the 'size and shape' of navies through history belied his overriding concern for the 'right shape' and size for the British navy of the future.[69] His naval narrative was therefore crafted to accommodate both the exigencies of the Navy's present NATO role confronting the Soviet Union, and the archetypes of its contributions to national and imperial history. What he judged to be the misconception as much as underestimation of threats in the past provided the cautionary exemplars for present-day leaders responsible for national sea power:

> It is reasonable to suppose that since misjudgement (and even folly) were not the prerogatives of our ancestors alone, it is at least possible that similar misconceptions of danger may exist in present-day navies and Governments. A later generation will doubtless be better placed to explain the muddled thinking that has led to some of the errors committed by today's admirals and politicians in London, Washington and Moscow.[70]

The first episode opens with a pre-credit sequence shot in the highly traditional surroundings of Greenwich Royal Naval college, which, Hill-Norton's voice-over asserts, 'for centuries … has been the centre of a maritime world, the Navy's university' and 'the cradle of sea power'. The narrator is then presented in full uniform, speaking directly to camera: 'In my own family the connection to the Navy has been unbroken for three hundred years. I've been a naval officer for half a century.' A title on screen then introduces the series: 'Admiral of the Fleet, The Lord Hill-Norton G.C.B presents …' A similar traditional emphasis dictates the first programme's concentration on the history of the battleship. As concrete illustration of a vanished warship type, Hill-Norton visits a preserved battleship (the museum ship USS *Alabama*), relating

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[68] Lord Hill-Norton and John Dekker, *Sea Power* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p.18.

[69] Hill-Norton adopted similar vocabulary and analogy in comparing the 'shapes', capabilities, uses and intentions of the Royal and Soviet Navies and the need for conventional as well as nuclear deterrence in a lecture in 1983. Lord Hill-Norton, 'Maritime Affairs – The Royal and Merchant Navies', *Journal of the Royal Society of the Arts*, 1983, 31(5326), 604–615.

[70] Hill-Norton and Dekker, *Sea Power*, p.19.

his own experience of service on board British ships (HMS *Ramillies, Rodney, Malaya* and *Howe*) as he leads camera and viewer around the 'floating town' with its 'miles of streets, and separate neighbourhoods'. While navigating the functional environment of mess decks, magazines and machinery spaces, he describes the community and existence of the battleship as human and naval entity, with its strict discipline, 'law' and 'ceremonial' demands, all devoted to 'delivering the punch' of sea power. The organisation of the battleship's crew is described in the terms of a conservative industrialised hierarchy, as 'very advanced heavy industry … with nearly the entire workforce engaged in the manufacture of one product: continuous heavy gunfire'. As the 'backbone of every great navy', Hill-Norton avers that 'battleships were the most technically advanced machines the world had ever seen … in their time as terrifying as nuclear missiles are today'. Leaving the narrator on USS *Alabama*'s deck, the following animated sequence charts the development of the 'line-of-battle-ship' from the wooden ships of the Nelsonian era to the armoured dreadnoughts of the world wars, with illustrated pages turning to depict the evolution of protection, propulsion and armament.[71] Rhetorical and folkloric diction marks the narration, as the replacement of cannon balls with explosive shells is said to reduce the three-deck ship of the line to 'just so much firewood', and the revolutionary HMS *Dreadnought* is championed as having been built in 'a year and a day'. Hill-Norton also recalls the treaties of his days as a cadet in the 1920s, which strove to constrain capital ship numbers like the efforts to limit strategic nuclear weapons in the present. In narrating but also interpreting the demise of the battleship, the episode encourages the recognition of abiding and relevant concepts instead: the inactive British battlefleet of World War I should be better understood as an effective 'deterrent' rather than a fighting unit.

In detailing the story of the aircraft carrier, the ship type destined to displace the battleship within the naval hierarchy, Hill-Norton concentrates on the innovations and controversies of the history of Britain's Fleet Air Arm, with illustration provided by extensive archive footage. His orthodox narrative of the passing of the mantle of naval supremacy from battleship to carrier is entwined with the parallel fall of the Royal Navy and rise of the US Navy to prominence, with the carrier facilitating America's ascendency during and after World War II. This acknowledgement of historical inevitability in the demise of both Britain and the battleship as manifestations of naval dominance does not pass without other affirmations of importance. In leading the development of naval aviation between the world wars, Hill-Norton asserts that 'Britain was ahead of the world in everything – except the aircraft', thus highlighting the

[71] A much later series, *Combat Ships* (Woodcut Media, 2017–23), frequently features museum ships or vessels undergoing restoration in order to illustrate types of warship through history, alongside historians' insights and archive footage. Without *Sea Power*'s national focus and lacking thematic or historical coherence, the series epitomises 'popular documentary' and 'factual entertainment' (see Chapter 4).

perceived malign influence of inter-service rivalry between the Navy and Royal Air Force (which had been instrumental in the cancellation of the Navy's carriers in the 1960s).[72] The admiral's view of the harmful effects of RAF control of aviation at sea and its dominance of aircraft development underpins his subsequent valorisation of the quaint, obsolete Swordfish aircraft famed for its role in the sinking of the German battleship *Bismarck*. Narrating over archive footage of the war in the Pacific, Hill-Norton relates the advantages conferred on American and Japanese admirals from their having (unlike British ones) full control of their ship- and shore-based aircraft but is also quick to point out the presence of five Royal Navy fleet carriers in the Pacific by the war's end. In advocating the primacy of the aircraft carrier, Hill-Norton's personal commentary acknowledges the waning in British sea power, asserts the consequences of the decision not to build new British carriers, and also reveals his views on the Navy's eventual stopgap solution in the introduction of the vertical take-off Sea Harrier aircraft operated from smaller ships. Even as he asserts that 'every naval commander must have his own planes: the ocean is so vast, there is no substitute', he recognises that, while the US Navy deployed over a hundred carriers by the end of World War II, 'there are only twenty in the whole world today'. From the American super-carrier USS *Forrestal* operating at sea, the image cuts to the forlorn image of HMS *Ark Royal* (which Hill-Norton himself had commanded in the 1960s), inert, decommissioned and anchored, with the narrator himself in the foreground looking on, his back to the camera to hide his expression. His voice-over intones the economic truth ('But to build a new fleet carrier today would cost a thousand million pounds, and Britain can't afford them any longer'), and, while the advent of 'a new kind of carrier – the *Invincible* class' (Figure 2.1), sporting the British inventions of the Harrier and the ski-jump – is celebrated as a development which the Russians and Americans may copy, the admiral affirms that there is 'still no substitute for the big carrier'.[73]

Having ended the 'Carrier' episode upholding the reputation of aircraft carriers as the 'supreme embodiment of sea power for forty years, the latter-day ships of the line' that will last as long in service as HMS *Victory*, Hill-Norton devotes the 'Gunboat' episode to ships at the opposite end of scale and apparent importance. He visits HMS *Anglesey* on fishery protection duty, patrolling British waters in defence of fishing grounds, which he labels a vital manifestation of 'sea power in practice all the year round'. If the 'Battleship' and 'Carrier'

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[72] For a comprehensive analysis of the complex circumstances of the Royal Navy's aviation in the interwar period, see James P. Levy, The Development of British Naval Aviation: Preparing the Fleet Air Arm for War, 1934–1939, *Global War Studies*, 2012, 9(2), 6–38.

[73] Despite the loss of new conventional carrier construction, Grove notes that Hill-Norton was amongst those who opposed the building of the *Invincible*-class 'through-deck cruisers' in the late 1960s as an expedient alternative. Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, p.317.

Figure 2.1: HMS *Invincible* returns to Portsmouth following the end of the Falklands War. Royal Navy, 1982. Crown Copyright: Open Government Licence.

programmes elegise aspects of British naval culture that had passed into history, the 'Gunboat' episode purposefully illustrates under-appreciated present-day political and economic realities, yet with historical dimensions. The constabulary and national roles he describes ('Fishery protection may look simple, but it's one of the trickiest jobs the Royal Navy has to do … hemmed in by treaties and restrictions') expand without apology to acknowledge an imperial history of worldwide presence and policing. The beleaguered nature of British maritime culture figures in his delivery through an implicit criticism of European fishing controls (bemoaning fishermen watching 'their very livelihoods vanish'), contextualised by wider trends in the shrinkage of Britain's merchant navy ('eighty years ago the British fishing fleet, like the Royal Navy, was the biggest in the world'). A cross-fade from the present to black-and-white footage of Victorian-era fishing vessels seamlessly introduces further archive images of 19th-century gunboats regulating the empire, 'on the river Tigris, showing the flag and showing who was boss'. Similar footage of the Yangtse prompts Hill-Norton to mention his own great-great-grandfather's service on a gunboat during the Opium Wars. The danger (and justification) of Western powers' embroilment in China is illustrated by the famous stories of USS *Panay* and HMS *Amethyst*. A cut from footage of HMS *Amethyst*'s escape to

Hill-Norton on HMS *Anglesey*'s bridge underpins his reflection on a history of responsibility and obligation. Although 'gunboat diplomacy' has now become 'a term of contempt', he claims that the putting down of the African slave trade is 'one of the finest chapters in history of the Royal Navy'. By comparison, more recent humiliation in the 'Cod Wars' with Iceland emphasises for the admiral the need for constant and multifaceted embodiments of British maritime influence. The absurd spectacle of 'frigates playing bumper cars' with Icelandic gunboats means, in a decisive deduction, that 'not just a Cod War but even a Cold War underlines the fact that it requires several sorts of warship to make up a whole navy … in the exercise of sea power'.

The discussion of the next example of sea power to supplant the battleship and the carrier, 'Submarine', provides Hill-Norton with similar scope for the recognition of a glorious past and the regret for a guarantee-less present. The history of the Royal Navy's struggle against the submarine in both world wars offered examples of endurance and the opportunity to moralise upon its underhandedness as a weapon inimical to British concepts of sea power and warfare. Paradoxically, the post-war technological maturation of the submarine with nuclear power, and its transformation (by Britain and other countries) into an instrument of deterrence with nuclear weapons and therefore the most powerful demonstration of sea power in history, are largely dismissed by Hill-Norton within his traditionalist view. For nuclear-powered fleet boats, as for ballistic missile submarines, he argues that 'there are no rungs on the ladder of escalation of underwater conflict'. While the Soviet Union's submarine fleet is argued to represent as existential a threat to the West as Donitz's U-boats in World War II, ballistic missile submarines can 'threaten only Armageddon, nothing less', and in contrast to the usefulness of traditional surface ships, risk becoming 'militarily insignificant'.[74] Similar defences of the flexibility (and necessary scale) of traditional forces permeate *Sea Power*'s presentation. For example, the exploration of the evolution of amphibious warfare and the changing role of Britain's Royal Marines in 'Commando' pointedly recognises the repeated post-war threats to the Corps' continued existence.

The epilogue to the book published to accompany the television series is a transcript of the speech Hill-Norton gave in the House of Lords in July 1981, in response to the government's white paper for United Kingdom defence ('The Way Forward').[75] The book's inclusion of this concerted individual assault on the Conservative government's defence programme ('faulty in reasoning, incomplete in strategy and totally mysterious in arithmetic') renders explicit the agenda behind the previously broadcast series. The climax of Hill-Norton's speech and the coda to it, which the book adds, encapsulate not only the admiral's choleric political convictions but also the auspices and the message, more widely propagated than the House of Lords, which the television series promoted:

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[74] Hill-Norton and Dekker, *Sea Power*, p.153.
[75] Hill-Norton and Dekker, *Sea Power*, pp.182–188.

> 'To conclude, I regard these savage cuts in the Royal Navy as a highly dangerous gamble with our national security. They flow from a misunderstanding of the threat, ignorance of the best means to counter it, disregard for the combined capability of the Alliance, a mistaken assessment of priorities and a total neglect of history.'
>
> After fifty-three years in the Royal Navy, I could have said much more – but could hardly have said less.[76]

However, the orthodoxy of *Sea Power*'s arguments and claims for the maintenance or recovery of British naval standing, though ironically borne out by the outbreak of the Falklands War barely a year later, stand in marked contrast to *Submarine*. The divergent perspective and contemporary portrait it provides offered viewers insight into a previously underrepresented arm of the Navy but also delivered a more open, discursive documentary treatment to inspire the renewed consciousness and debate that *Sea Power* had sought.

Submarine

The six-part series (shot during 1983 but broadcast in 1985) devotes two episodes to three illustrative events: the submarine command course ('The Perisher') conducted aboard HMS *Oracle*; HMS *Warspite*'s participation in the NATO 'Ocean Safari' exercise in the North Atlantic; and HMS *Repulse* preparing for and undertaking a deterrent patrol. In addition to opening the relatively secretive world of submarine operations to a television audience, the series also addresses the status of the nuclear submarine as national and naval symbol of the Cold War:

> There is absolutely no doubt that by embarking early on a programme of nuclear-powered submarines, the Royal Navy kept itself in the front rank of maritime fighting powers. It is not chance that confines that front rank to the five nations that are also possessors of nuclear weapons and are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.[77]

The series answers the same need established by Duncan Redford, in his recognition of the requirement to identify and understand the significance of the

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[76] Hill-Norton and Dekker, *Sea Power*, p.188. Hill-Norton spoke repeatedly in the Lords on naval cuts proposed before the Falklands War, and on defence policy in its aftermath, denying that his criticisms sprang solely from 'dark blue nostalgia'. Hansards, The Defence Estimates 1982, House of Lords Debate 27 July 1982 434/149-220, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1982/jul/27/the-defence-estimates-1982-1#S5LV0434P0_19820727_HOL_172 [accessed 22 February 2022].

[77] J.R. Hill, *British Sea Power in the 1980s* (London: Ian Allan, 1985), pp.21–22.

nuclear submarine within the Royal Navy's 'culture' (and additionally how public perceptions of the submarine and therefore of the service are also formed or influenced).[78] The transformation of the submarine (as much as its escalating cost) during the Cold War underlined its magnified importance, the secrecy surrounding its design and operation, and its aura of technological and military ascendency, but with particular significance for Britain, as Redford observes:

> This change in the perception of the submarine from one that threatened the Navy's heavy units, such as aircraft carriers, to one that gave them the freedom to operate effectively was significant. The submarine was now a means of achieving naval supremacy not destroying it, helping to preserve the idea of the British naval superiority, global power, status and identity.[79]

Redford notes the combination of both historical evocation and technological innovation encapsulated in the christening of the first British nuclear submarine, HMS *Dreadnought*, as well as the conscious selection of names associated with World War II battleships.[80] By contrast, he suggests that the selection of the 'R' class names for Britain's first Polaris missile submarines (even though these also evoked capital ships of the past) was inflected by concerns about civilian perceptions (i.e. sensitivity over naming a deterrent submarine HMS *Revenge*). It is noteworthy that the names eventually selected pointedly eschewed associations with famous and (within the service, at least) familiar submarines from World War II, though names such as *Upholder* and *Turbulent* came to be reused in the 1980s.[81] Where the episodes centred on HMS *Warspite* and on the deterrent patrol concretised the nuclear-powered (and -armed) submarine's contemporary significance, those depicting the 'Perisher' course represented elitism alloyed with tradition.

The title sequence announces the series' emphases upon warfare, secrecy and high technology. The programme title scrolls vertically across the frame, periodically illuminated as if by the sound waves of a sonar system on a detection screen. Shots of a submarine included in the sequence are intriguing and fragmentary, giving views of the deck as it surfaces, a single diving plane cutting through the waves, the submarine's bow, and a long shot of the boat leaving a powerful wake as it rushes past the camera. The 'radiophonic' theme music, reminiscent of a contemporary Vangelis electronic score, underlines both the other worldliness and modernity of these images. In the first episode ('Million Pound Captains'), this sequence cuts directly and dramatically to a shot of a speeding warship at sea level. The accompanying voice-over (by actor

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[78] Redford, The 'Hallmark of a First-Class Navy', pp.181–197.
[79] Redford, The 'Hallmark of a First-Class Navy', pp.183–184.
[80] Redford, The 'Hallmark of a first-class navy', pp.185–186.
[81] Redford, The 'Hallmark of a first-class navy', p.187.

John Nettles) only partially explains the dangerous situation: '30 miles outside Glasgow, a Royal Naval frigate is charging straight towards a Royal Naval submarine.' The expansive shots of warships on the surface contrast strikingly with limited periscope views and the constricted handheld camera perspective inside the submerged submarine as trainee captains are confronted with steadily increasing pressure and complexity in the command course's tests. The course's instructor and examiner ('Teacher'), Commander Dai Evans, is introduced first by his words inserted over shots inside the submarine and the students in the midst of their tests, and then by a cut to him being interviewed ashore, summarising the 'Perisher' in principle and in practice:

> In order to be able to test someone, and in order to prove someone fully capable of taking the responsibility of commanding, it's important that you actually take them to the limits and that's what we do. We actually create situations which take the student to the limits. The idea is that at the end of the Perisher course the student – by that stage an embryo commanding officer – should be able to take his submarine to war.

Despite the acknowledgement of the ruthless professional environment of the course (success means becoming a submarine captain, failure immediate expulsion from the service), the 'Perisher' episodes recall the focus of *Sailor* in dwelling on the human dimensions of its demands.[82] Evans's four students are introduced by name, with explanation of their varied backgrounds and personalities. The intricacies and dangers of the successive exercises are detailed for audience comprehension via diagrammatic computer animations, yet the inevitably claustrophobic shooting and terse voice-over document the human difficulty. In a directly documenting role, an extended, unbroken point-of-view shot tracking and panning through the cramped compartments from bow to stern illustrates the voice-over's informative commentary:

> The design of these submarines dates from the 1950s. They're not much bigger than the U-boats Germany was sending to sea at the end of the Second World War. The single galley feeds the crew of 70. Patrol for these submarines can last for many weeks. The seven officers work, eat and sleep in the tiny wardroom. These small quiet submarines can be used for all kinds of covert operations, but they are uncomfortable places to live.

[82] An earlier BBC series recording the three-year training course for RAF pilots, *Fighter Pilot* (1981), similarly stressed the personal challenges, disappointments and emotional demands of military training. In contrast to John Nettles's nuanced and emotive voice-over for *Submarine*, the formal and informative narration of *Fighter Pilot* appears more overtly recruitment-driven.

Figure 2.2: HMS *Warspite*. 1970. Isaac Newton, CC BY-SA 2.5, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:49_HMS_Warspite_entering_Gibraltar_Feb1970.jpg

As the course continues, sympathetic scrutiny of the struggling students' tribulations outweighs any sensationalisation of success. While the camera observes his trial, the voice-over reveals that the escalating demands are 'making [student] Simon Bevington feel physically ill with nerves'. Conversely, the failure of another student ('Tiny' Lister) is registered entirely through 'Teacher's' regretful reaction. Shots of Evans and his words in interview are intercut to accompany long shots of the submarine surfacing in the dark for Lister's departure: 'He was absolutely marvellous about it. He took it with tremendous dignity, really – it's a day that I loathe.' In contrast to the immediacy of the series' record of the course, its extended schedule facilitates this introspective posture, as the unsuccessful students are interviewed after having left the submarine service. Their reflections (Gavin McLaren, who resigns 'just five days before the end of a four-month course', compares his feelings to those of 'bereavement') are intercut with Evans pouring champagne for the successful candidates. The final images show Lister walking alone on the seashore. In addition to the poignancy of this juxtaposition of success and failure, the temporal and spatial disruption of this concluding sequence ironically enforces a void between the failed students and their peers akin to the distance the series has documented (and striven to overcome) between submariners and the civilian audience.

Continuing the 'Perisher's' emphasis on command, the episodes following HMS *Warspite*'s (Figure 2.2) participation in a major NATO exercise ('Ocean Safari: The Hunt' and 'The Kill') above all portray the response of the submarine's captain to (mock) combat. The extraordinary record of the preparation of the submarine and crew for the exercise and the conduct of extended

wargames in the North Atlantic anticipating conflict with the Warsaw Pact also encompasses a further appreciation of everyday life on board, extending the study of the 'Perisher' programmes. However, in line with the command course's acknowledged preparation for war, the exercise's spectacle of simulated combat provokes reflection on the potential future global war for which the submarine and crew are training, and on the actual conflict that took place in the Falklands.

In interview, Commander Jonathan Cooke admits he relishes the prospect of the exercise in which his HMS *Warspite* will assume the role of a Russian submarine: 'playing the bad guys' will be more satisfying than a recent lengthy patrol in the South Atlantic. In the exercise his submarine will be attacking merchant ships just like U-boats in World War II: Cooke discusses the perceived 'underhandedness' of the submarine and the description of them as 'un-English' but stresses that the role of the Royal Navy's submarines is not anti-shipping but anti-submarine, and 'anti-Soviet submarine principally'. He admits that the submarine 'may look extremely sinister to a layman' and that submariners 'are conscious of the image we portray, and perhaps don't discourage it'. The camera records and provides its own comment on the seriousness with which the exercise is viewed. Cooke's strenuous efforts to manoeuvre and evade detection from opposing helicopters and ships as in a real war situation, and the enthusiasm with which he attacks his targets are juxtaposed with his officers playing the board game *Risk* in the wardroom.

The ordinary crew members evince no interest in the exercise, which to them simply represents more work. Their briefing dissolves in laughter when the speaker struggles to pronounce the name of the French aircraft carrier *Foch*. Their impromptu remarks or comments in interview span jokes about radiation ('Can you still have babies after being on nuclear submarines?' – 'Well, I've never had one!' – 'Do you glow in the dark?'), thoughts on the 'money-trap' of extra pay for submarine service, and domestic difficulties caused by being out of communication for weeks or months at a time. One sailor confides more seriously that wives do not want to hear about the problems of their patrols when they return, because they have experienced problems of their own in their absence. Therefore domestic life is made light of in mess conversations, because sailors do not want to think about wives at home on their own. Earlier, the camera impassively observes younger crew members being instructed in the use of escape equipment by a senior rating: one asks anxiously about their real chances in an emergency and is told that, if escape were not possible, 'we wouldn't go to the expense of all this equipment'.

Overcoming technical difficulties and the opposing forces, *Warspite* completes 'Ocean Safari' with great success. Cooke reckons they have attacked and sunk 12 warships, four replenishment ships and 13 ships of the convoys, a total of about 300,000 tons of merchant shipping. The implications of this for national or European defence (since *Warspite* has been playing the role of the enemy) are neglected in favour of confronting the personal consequences. When he

confesses that such 'exercise carnage' would weigh on his conscience if it were real, there is a sudden cut to an extreme close-up of *The Sun*'s 'GOTCHA' headline, announcing the sinking of the Argentinian warship *General Belgrano* by *Warspite*'s sister ship HMS *Conqueror*.[83] Confronting the viewer and the captain with the continuing controversy surrounding this action in the Falklands, the programme interweaves the captain's comments ('we being in the trade so to speak were aware for instance of the prevalent weather conditions down there and the likely water temperatures'), a photograph of the skull and crossbones flag flown by *Conqueror* on her return to the UK, and Cooke's personal views:

> Well, if I'd been that commanding officer, if *Warspite* had been in the same position, I'd have done exactly the same. I only hope I'd have done it with as much technical proficiency as he did. But I'd have done it because that was what was required to win the war. I don't think I'd have taken much pleasure in doing so.

While it is tempting to see crystallised in the story of the sinking of the *Belgrano* every aspect of Britain's historical, ambiguous relationship with the submarine and the morality of its use in war, *Submarine*'s choice to end its episodes on the new 'battleship' on this ethical conundrum (for the documentary subject and its audience) underlines the series' maturity, responsibility and openness.

This tendency to challenge the documentary subject in order to inform and confront the audience becomes even more noticeable in the final parts of the series portraying the Polaris submarine HMS *Repulse*. The controversy and cost associated with the acquisition of an independent nuclear deterrent in the 1960s focused attention, like the building of nuclear submarines in general, on Britain's military influence, naval standing, political allegiances and economic resilience. Arguing that Britain's strategic security was in any case assured by America's nuclear deterrent, Bruce Watson has asserted that the 'prestige' conferred by being one of only five nations to possess SSBNs was acquired at the cost of resources and units needed for 'a more substantial presence East of Suez'.[84] Conversely, even more so than the more visible and prestigious

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[83] Questions of military necessity, underlying political machinations and debate on the ethics of combat have always surrounded the attack on the *Belgrano*. Its sinking has been perceived to be 'unsporting, discreditable, even perfidious' ('Canopus', A Personal View of the Falklands Campaign, *The Naval Review*, 1983, 71(1), 19–23, p.21), but suggestions of its political motivation and a subsequent cover-up of its circumstances reflect wider suspicions about the government's pursuit of military resolution to the conflict. See Paul Rogers, A Necessary War? *Political Studies Review*, 2007, 5(1), 25–31. Criticism of *Conqueror*'s flying of the skull and crossbones overlooked or ignored the tradition of this practice for submarines returning from active service. Jim Allaway, *The Navy in the News 1954–1991* (London: HMSO, 1993), pp.68–69.

[84] Watson, *The Changing Face of the World's Navies*, p.135

SSNs, Ken Young has argued that the construction of Polaris submarines for the nuclear deterrent was deliberately sought to cement the Navy's significance within national defence debates following the decline of the surface fleet.[85] Although nearly 20 years of continuous at sea deterrent patrols had been completed by the time of *Submarine*'s broadcast, the pertinence and topicality of its timing is discernible from the controversy surrounding the renewal of Britain's deterrent (with negotiations on the purchase of the American Trident system in 1980–82 provoking a rise in UK membership of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament).[86]

Although they introduce the most secret and least understood aspect of the submarine service and the Navy with comparable candour and revelatory detail, the episodes devoted to HMS *Repulse*'s preparation and departure ('Taking the Black Pig to Sea' and 'Polaris Patrol') differ from the series' earlier portraits in privileging the shoreside civilian families supporting the sailors at sea. While the difficulties of separation (on both sides) described here pertain equally to the submarines and crews portrayed elsewhere in the series, the exploration of the domestic impact of naval and submarine service in these parts of the series gains significance from the weight of responsibility deterrent duty entails. The paradoxical, acknowledged but repressed logic of the men's lives is that they perform roles dedicated to the defence of nation and family, which if carried to their conclusion would occasion the annihilation of both. The introduction to HMS *Repulse* emphasises its aura of secrecy as much as its national significance. Return from patrol necessitates a replacement of the crew and a replenishment of stores so that the submarine can depart again as soon as possible. A brief edited sequence follows her new commander, Captain Mike Hawke, being driven wordlessly to the quayside. The camera pans over the full length of the submarine as it docks and sailors raise the jackstaff, with the shot coming to rest on the carved crown at its top. Shots of anonymous hands depict couriers delivering sealed orders to Captain Hawke. The voice-over describes the unchanging routine:

> For the next six weeks, *Repulse* will be checked, tested, maintained, painted and stored. Then she will leave the Clyde submarine base at Faslane, and Hawke will take her back to sea for another patrol. For eight weeks at a time, *Repulse* and its nuclear missiles can represent the sum-total of the nation's independent deterrent.

The portentousness of this opening is immediately contrasted with the handheld camera mimicking the confusion of new crew members attempting

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[85] Ken Young, The Royal Navy's Polaris Lobby, 1955–62, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2010, 25(3), 56–86.

[86] Anthony Eames, The Trident Sales Agreement and Cold War Diplomacy, *Journal of Military History*, 2017, 81, 163–186.

to navigate the 'maze' of the submarine's passageways. This is followed by discomforting shots of faces perusing official documents, as the voice-over describes a necessary but appalling formality to rival the enormity of the deterrent captain's orders:

> For the new crew, there's a difficult decision to make: once the submarine leaves for patrol, they're stuck underwater for at least eight weeks, so most decide not to be told of any domestic tragedy until the end of the patrol. The frustration of knowing that a child had died, for instance, yet not being able to return home could drive a man insane.

A close-up of the form's options for receiving news – 'AT ONCE? ON RETURN TO HARBOUR? OR WHEN (Give details)' – sets out the imponderable choice. Similarly unthinkable circumstances are explored in interview with Surgeon Lieutenant Robert Garth. The Polaris submarines are described as unique in carrying qualified doctors, since medical emergencies must not interrupt the deterrent's operations. Although an operation would be possible if there were no alternative, he admits that with only one doctor acting as both surgeon and anaesthetist it would have to be done under local anaesthetic, an 'unpleasant procedure', and 'if things go wrong there is no back-up'. Unusually within the series' approach, this prompts the voice-over to frame a direct question: 'So if someone became too ill for the doctor to treat, would Hawke abort the patrol and leave Britain without its deterrent?' A cut to the captain in interview provides (or fails to provide) the answer: 'Well, I'm afraid I'm going to have to dodge that question and say that I can't answer it. There are rules laid down for me to react to certain conditions. I'm afraid I must say no more than that.'

If the conditions of the deterrent patrol are shown to precipitate unthinkable circumstances and unanswerable questions, these appear as at once exaggerated versions of the 'normal' experience of submarine service, and as small-scale, individual manifestations of the overarching inconceivability of nuclear war. The irony of these analogies and connections is encapsulated in the programme's record of 'family day', when family members are welcomed aboard HMS *Repulse*. This temporary staged convergence of the submarine's contrasted communities is followed by franker comments in the pub. One spouse comments simply on the submarine's appearance ('it's an evil looking thing, I think'), while her husband reflects on the 'hard work' of the last weeks at home before sailing, conscious of the days slipping away before 'you've got to be taking that black pig to sea' … 'and suddenly that time's upon you when you've got to say goodbye'. With the submarine's departure concluding the first half of this segment, the second probes the consequences for family and crew members. On board the camera observes the monotony. The voice-over makes clear: 'when a patrol's definition of success is that nothing happens for eight weeks, the enemy is not the Soviet Union, but boredom'. With their scrutiny of

every crew member every day, the chefs reveal their insight (illustrated by the camera's shallow focus observation of faces in the mess) to the gradually shifting mindset on board:

> It starts off unsettled for the first week, until everyone gets into their routine. But then about week 5 they start getting a little bit edgy, because they've all done enough. Then about week 6 it all starts to happen. They start thinking about home and go into what we call a glaze … They'll sit there and eat half their meal, and then they'll just stare at the bulkhead.

The effects of separation on families ashore reveal similar signs of apprehension, withdrawal and individual coping strategies. The careful composition of weekly 40-word 'family-grams' is shown to require circumspection or obfuscation of any detail that could distract or distress the sailors. The sequence showing their reception on board (crew members scanning the brief messages while their spouses or their own voices read the words aloud, secreting the print outs in pockets or using them as bookmarks) ends with a sudden cut to the call to action, when the voice-over announces that 'the signal has arrived from London to fire *Repulse*'s sixteen Polaris missiles'.

After the domestic and personal insights provided by inclusion of the families' experiences and messages, the sequence following the missile launch procedure returns to the distant documentary observation of this alien subject. The restrained voice-over merely accompanies and explains the concise images: introducing Mike Reeves, the submarine's weapons officer, the process of authenticating the orders to fire, and the truncheon hanging over the safe containing the missile trigger, to be used in the event of an unauthorised attempt to fire the nuclear weapons. Although 'everyone knows it's only an exercise', the implications of the procedure enforce acknowledgement of the submarine's purpose. The accumulation of painful personal choices that the programmes have recorded for the deterrent crews and their families therefore reaches its apogee with the consideration of the decision underlying the existence of the submarine and its attendant community: the resolution to use nuclear weapons in the nation's defence. It is notable that, where in previous episodes the interviewee's words enjoyed similar status to the voice-over narration and the interviewer's questions went unheard, in the Polaris episodes the filmmaker's enquiries are included to render the deterrent debate explicit for the audience:

> [Captain Hawke] To carry the nation's deterrent is an exceedingly responsible job and must be taken terribly seriously – from my own point of view I would be being very silly if I didn't believe in doing the job I'm doing now but my own personal views of the actual morality of the deterrent or the wisdom of the deterrent I'm afraid I keep personally to myself. I very seldom discuss it with anybody other than my own immediate family.

> [off-screen] And does it ever keep you awake at night when you're on patrol?
>
> [Captain Hawke] No, not at all, not one moment.
>
> [off-screen] So it doesn't weigh on your mind?
>
> [Captain Hawke] No, it does not.

The captain's apparent conviction and impervious preservation of the official line is contrasted with more thoughtful, spontaneous and fearful responses from Reeves himself ('I don't think you should dwell on it too much, but obviously we've got something here that's quite dreadful and it's unthinkable to use it') and from a group of junior sailors:

> No one would hesitate but they would think about it afterwards. I don't think anybody would think about the consequences now.
>
> … When a firing signal arrives on patrol, I mean it's just automatic, I mean they sound the alarm and everybody just does their job. For all we know it might not be an exercise.
>
> … It's just a job, and a few minutes later they're all gone and then I think then you'd sit down and start thinking about it and then you'd sort of say 'well, what we were here for we obviously failed to do.'
>
> … You could surface four or five weeks later and there's absolutely nothing left. The reason we're doing it is to protect our families and friends at home and when you think about it, that we've done our part of it but it's still done us no good because there'll be nothing left at home.

The crew's unmediated comments conclude this climactic confrontation with the nature of the national nuclear deterrent. The mention of home draws the episode to an abrupt close, without further comment or voice-over accompaniment, by a cut to a child's painting of the black submarine with the message 'Welcome Home, Daddy'. HMS *Repulse* is seen completing its patrol, with the returning crew greeted on the dockside by family members. Introducing the modern nuclear submarine and its role as subjects for documentary, *Submarine* evinced the stylistic influence of *Sailor* but was itself influential in suggesting the distinctiveness and drama of the submarine environment for televisual consumption. Subsequent treatments (the BBC's own *HMS Splendid* and a plethora of series and individual programmes broadcast on Channel 5) attest to the perceived popularity of the submarine as setting and subject for factual programming, but these examples can also

be seen to extend and adapt the precedent of *Submarine* to different decades and discourses.

HMS Splendid (1999)

The BBC's three-part series *HMS Splendid* (Figure 2.3) strongly recalls the format and approach of *Submarine*, in favouring an actorly voice-over (by David Suchet) over an overt interview format. As in the earlier series, members of the submarine crew speak to camera responding to unheard questions as they explain personal and professional aspects of life on board. Where *Submarine* revealed three distinct aspects of the service, *HMS Splendid* concentrates on a specific but again contemporarily illustrative mission: the titular submarine's selection and preparation to be the first Royal Navy warship to carry the American Tomahawk cruise missile system, and the successful completion of the first firing at a testing range in California in 1998. Used operationally by the US Navy during the Gulf War of 1991, and fired by the Royal Navy (from HMS

Figure 2.3: HMS *Splendid*. 1995. LA (Phot) Richard Harvey/Ministry of Defence, Open Government Licence v1.0, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMS_Splendid_S106.jpeg

Splendid) for the first time in 1999 against targets in Kosovo, Tomahawk has been a controversial weapon since the first appearance of strategic, nuclear-armed land-based variants in Europe in the 1980s.[87] In addition to confronting the implications of Britain's adoption of this missile – precise in principle but often indiscriminate in effect – in a comparable fashion to *Submarine*'s discussion of the nuclear deterrent, *HMS Splendid* revisits the depiction of everyday life on board, featuring interviews with specific crew members and their families on shore, and showing the stresses of the 'Perisher' course portrayed in the previous series.[88]

The submarine's general mission and its particular task are initiated by both the voice-over and introduction to *Splendid*'s captain, Commander Ian Corder. Alongside irised periscope views of warships exercising with the submarine off Scotland, the captain's careful understatement of the conceptual threat (and its attendant advantages) created by operating submarines ('the uncertainty that a submarine generates in any military situation is one of its great assets. You don't actually have to deploy it, you just have to have the ability to deploy it and declare a possible intention to deploy it') previews the augmentation of these capabilities that Tomahawk will impart ('as we saw in the Gulf, it really is a question of not which building are we trying to hit, it's which window are we trying to fly the missile through'). Before *Splendid* can undertake Tomahawk testing, a new second-in-command must be appointed. The candidates for this post as well as their own commands are shown undergoing the 'Perisher', and (in spite of a more focused concentration on a small selection of specific crew members) the series' resemblance to *Submarine* is also discernible in interviews with their families. A close-up of a tattooed upper-arm (with the voice-over's observation that 'even on a modern submarine some of the oldest naval traditions survive') introduces Petty Officer Chef Lee Goodhill. In a staged interview at home, the wife of Commander Bob Mansergh, the 'Teacher' of this 'Perisher' course, comments judiciously on the 'independence' the spouse of a submariner must display, and the ability to be 'patient' with the things they have missed in their family's and children's lives while they have been away. In contrast, another wife, speaking as she peels potatoes, exhibits if not disloyalty a weary disinterest in her husband's employment:

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[87] John Roberts, *Safeguarding the Nation: The Story of the Modern Royal Navy* (Barnsley: Seaforth, 2009), p.270; Kate Sopev and Alison Assitev, Greenham Common: An Exchange, *Radical Philosophy*, 1983, 34, 21–24.

[88] Dr David Owen, former Labour Navy minister and later leader of the Social Democrat Party, foresaw the adoption of Tomahawk in proposing its purchase as a cheaper and more flexible alternative to the construction of new deterrent submarines for the Trident missile system, supported by both major political parties in the later 1980s. David Owen, 'Towpath Papers' bode ill for the Royal Navy', in *Jane's Naval Review*, 6th ed. by John Moore (London: Jane's 1987), 18–24 (p.24). See also Grove, *From Vanguard to Trident*, pp.348–349.

> I'm married to Jason, who is the DWEO, which is the Deputy Weapons Engineer Officer. He looks after the missiles. Well, he's the deputy that looks after the missiles. I'm not sure really what he does. He just does an awful lot of paperwork that's unnecessary, and – spends a lot of time away from home. [laughs] That's kind of what his job is. I'm not awfully, overly interested in it, because it's the thing that always takes him away.

Before the 'Perisher' begins, Bob Mansergh is interviewed in an office ashore (with a painting of a 19th-century naval battle on the wall behind him). He observes that 'these officers could be commanding the nation's strategic deterrent or a fully armed attack submarine at the age of 35'. Unlike *Submarine*'s portrayal of the command course and perhaps in recognition of the added responsibility that the adoption of Tomahawk entails, Mansergh confronts the candidates at once with whether they have thought about their responsibility for taking decisions to sink ships and take lives. He insists they need to know that they 'can face it, the horror of it, and still be able to do it … because if you can't, then you're no use to the Navy, okay?' The four students offer their varying responses. Lieutenant Commander Nick Hibberd states unhesitatingly that he has 'no qualms' about acting in the moment, with the proviso that he would reflect after the event. Nick Hine, wishing to become *Splendid*'s second-in-command, reflects uncomfortably but euphemistically on the implications of using Tomahawk, which had killed civilians in Iraq: 'while it's a discriminate weapon, it's not necessarily a completely anti-military weapon.'[89]

Despite its explicit focus on the Tomahawk acquisition and test, the series provides as rounded, shrewd and critical a perspective on the submarine service as its predecessor. In a lull during the 'Perisher', Nick Hibberd reflects ruefully on the 'structured routine' of life on board: 'The luxuries of life – fresh vegetables, sunlight, wide open spaces, clean air, family, the ability to do what you want, the ability to go to sleep when you want – No, you don't miss much at all really.' As the crew clean HMS *Splendid* intensively for days before a flag officer inspection, the complaints of Radio Operator Jason McKee ('It's something they don't tell you about when you go to join up, you know? And you really don't have a choice in the matter. You've just got to do it or you get a bollocking') contrast with Ian Corder's upbeat appraisal ('the sailors appreciate what we're trying to achieve, and they will be proud of their submarine'). Similarly, the Scottish chefs in the galley comment wryly on the flag signal ('England expects') reproduced on the celebratory cake for Trafalgar Night on board, and

[89] After commanding HMS *Westminster* Nick Hine was decorated by the President of the United States for service in Iraq and occupied numerous senior posts within the Navy before being promoted to Vice Admiral and becoming Second Sea Lord in 2019. Anonymous, Royal Navy appoints new Second Sea Lord, *Royal Navy: News*, 26 April 2019, https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2019/april/26/190426-new-second-sea-lord [accessed 22 April 2022].

Donald 'Smudge' Smith remarks to camera: 'there's a high retention problem in the submarine service – well, lack of retention, should I say'. When a voice off camera asks why, he explains, 'It's – it's not the best job in the world. And I won't go any further than that.' The introduction of Lee Goodhill's wife, Roz, at home is immediately contrasted with Lee explaining the galley arrangements for feeding over a hundred men: 'All the housewives at home, take note. If you think you're hard done by at home, ladies, try coming on here.' Later Lee points out that the allowance for feeding the guard dogs at Faslane is larger than the budget for feeding the submarine's crew, £2.21 per man per day.

Having passed harbour inspection at the Clyde naval base, and successfully completing 'OPEX' (a four-day 'operational exercise' simulating combat against warships, aircraft and helicopters) and BOST (Basic Operational Sea Training), HMS *Splendid* embarks on the transatlantic voyage to San Diego via the Panama Canal to undertake the Tomahawk trials. At home Zoe Hine remarks, 'The baby's seven months old now … and Nick's only actually seen her for about three weeks of her life.' Lee receives Roz's letter ('I'll read this time and time and time again, see if there's any little words in there I missed. Because that's all, you've got nothing else to do'). Following cuts to Roz in her garden and to Lee's daughter Leah recording a taped message, a cut back to Lee listening to it reveals him answering her as if they are in a conversation. This marking of familial separation (and continuity) produces and is articulated by the same spatio-temporal dislocation within the documentary diegesis seen in *Submarine*. This focused consideration works with reciprocal balance later, when Lee reveals that he hopes his family understands that he does the job to support and to provide for them, and a cut to Roz provides her frank and rationalised response: 'The Navy give us a wage, and a lifestyle, but we've given the Navy something belonging to us that they can … no pension can make up for that. There's nothing you can do to get that back.'

As with *Submarine*'s continual connection of families to the mundane practicality of submarine operation and the enormity of the Polaris deterrent, HMS *Splendid*'s role and the series culminate with the Tomahawk test firing and the chance for family members to visit their loved ones in San Diego. This coincidental benefit provokes a moment of contemplation, which, the voice-over states, 'for some of the crew … has a sobering effect.' Having already decided to leave the Navy as he no longer wishes to be separated from his family, Jason Reid is interviewed before the test firing. Jason, who has been seen earlier conducting church services on board and claims there is no 'contradiction between me being a weapons engineer on submarines and being a Christian', reflects at length on what the use of Tomahawk (Figure 2.4) 'in anger' will mean for British submariners:

> I think people will be a lot more challenged about why they do this job than they are at the moment. Which I think for some people would be very good. It would be good to wake them up a bit and make them

Figure 2.4: TLAM (Tomahawk Land Attack Missile) launch. ROYAL NAVY IMAGE, 2010. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

> realise what HMS *Splendid* is really about, and that's a weapon of war. It's not if it hits the target, because, you know, we're sailors, so if it hits the target that's all right, that's fine, because they're bad guys, we've been told to do it. And they deserve it. However, you always think about the scenario if it goes wrong, or if they've chosen the target wrongly, if it does hit the hospital or the school or whatever … so what you have to do is make sure your part of this big organisation is correct.

Following scenes record the loading of missiles. The voice-over encroaches to reiterate the seriousness of the test, and what is represents: 'One American Tomahawk missile costs $1 million, and Britain wants to buy sixty-five … The firing is only a test, but the missile is real and armed.' In contrast to Reid's doubts, Captain Ian Corder observes guardedly that the missile's capabilities simply give 'a lot of options to the people who take decisions in high places'. The crew and missile perform flawlessly, the test is a success, and watching dignitaries are shown clapping while sound clips of American and British news reports mark the event.

The predictable final images of the crews' eventual return to their families in the UK both mark a documentary continuity, recognising the unchanging

service routine for personnel and families in its echoing of previous series, and imply a new status quo under which the Navy's capabilities and responsibilities have been invisibly transformed. The analogies to *Submarine*'s depiction of the mundanities of submarine life, war-simulating exercises and polemical scrutiny of the nuclear deterrent are discernible in the topicality, generality and specificity of the treatment of HMS *Splendid*'s mission.

Conclusion: crisis and identity

In 1979, an article in the *Naval Review* (a quarterly publication promoting debate on contemporary issues within the naval community) highlighted public ignorance and indifference towards naval matters and called for more active media engagement to improve the Senior Service's 'image'. Although it acknowledged some 'doubts' about allowing the use of ships for the filming of the BBC drama series *Warship*, it recognised the 'false anxieties' occasioned by the frank factual depiction of *Sailor* and called for more such documentary productions which could bring the Royal Navy 'to the attention of the public in an overwhelmingly favourable light'.[90] If *Submarine* answers the perceived need for further in-depth documentary treatment of a different service branch, then *Sea Power* stands as a conscious and conspicuous corrective to the 'inertia, ignorance and apathy' the article's author feared was dominating public and political attitudes towards the relevance of the Navy and the likelihood of conflict at sea.[91]

Lord Hill-Norton's historical series appears as an anomaly within naval representation on television in this period (and within this book), in comparison with the repeated resort to the Navy as a subject of realist documentary. It also stands in contrast to more recent trends in historical documentary television that have increasingly been presented by academics.[92] However, any apparent stylistic inconsistency with present-day documentary subjects belies the deliberate and overt political contemporaneity of *Sea Power*'s didactic naval discourse, emphasising historical permanence, identifying pertinent lessons from the past and demanding recognition of what it asserts is a communal and abidingly relevant inheritance. In continually stressing the effects of change (in ship design, in maritime conflict, and in geopolitical realities), Hill-Norton's edifying naval narrative equally insists upon unaltering necessities and continuities in national survival as much as status. The partisan nature of his series' perspective, in seeking to protect and preserve the institution to which his life has been dedicated, is as undeniable as its appearance as a professional riposte

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[90] J.B. Drake-Wilkes, Improving the Image of the Royal Navy, *The Naval Review*, 1979, 67(1), 44–50, p.47.

[91] Drake-Wilkes, Improving the Image of the Royal Navy, p.44.

[92] N.C. Fleming, Echoes of Britannia: Television History, Empire and the Critical Public Sphere, *Contemporary British History*, 2010, 24(1), 1–22.

to the political mindset driving contemporary defence cuts. Reviewing the publication of the *Sea Power* book in 1982 as the Falklands War was in progress, Anthony Watts acknowledged that the conflict had ironically vindicated those who had vociferously opposed the naval cuts:

> As far as the Royal Navy in particular is concerned this sorry episode, which should never have occurred in the first place, could not have come at a better time. Ever since Mr Nott began his cost-cutting exercises, voices have been raised in support of the Navy, arguing against any further cuts in the Navy vote or in naval strength. Much that has happened during the Falklands campaign has not only strengthened those arguments against cuts, but in a number of cases proved their protagonists to be absolutely right in their opinions.[93]

Eric Grove's analysis of the effects of the Falklands War on the future of the Royal Navy in general and the size of the surface fleet in particular underlines the contradictory impact of the conflict on British defence spending overall. Despite nominal increases to the defence budget to replace lost ships and fund the defensive garrisoning of the islands and pressure from America for the Navy to retain its naval aviation and amphibious capabilities, within the decade available surface ship numbers had indeed shrunk to levels at or even below John Nott's originally intended cuts.[94] By contrast, Andrew Doorman has argued that 'the navy had, by the time of the outbreak of the Falklands War, managed to circumvent the original force levels set out and retained its belief in a balanced fleet, albeit somewhat smaller than before'.[95] The apparently timeless historical narrative of sea power and naval history that Hill-Norton's series offers is therefore better understood as a targeted rhetorical exercise embedded in and epitomising a critical naval institutional, political and (in its narrator's view) national context.

Key to the same period, and precipitating the documentary treatment of *Submarine*, was the reorientation of notions of naval power and national status triggered by the building of nuclear submarines and the operation of the independent nuclear deterrent. Duncan Redford notes the prominence of submarines (both nuclear and conventional) in the lines of ships arrayed for the Silver Jubilee Fleet Review in 1977, and the conspicuous coverage fleet and deterrent submarines also received in the accompanying official souvenir programme:

> By shoring up pretensions to great power status that could by 1977 no longer be justified by economic, imperial or other forms of naval power,

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[93] Anthony Watts, A Maritime Nation, *RUSI Journal*, 1982, 127(4), 61–63, p.61.

[94] Eric Grove, The Falklands War and British Defence Policy, *Defence and Security Analysis*, 2002, 18(4), 307–317.

[95] Doorman, *Defence Under Thatcher*, p.156.

> the status conferred by SSNs and SSBNs now played an important part in supporting the British identity.[96]

The apparent contradictions between and incompatibility of an unending 'East of Suez' role for the Royal Navy and a political, economic and military pivot towards Europe and the Atlantic were paradoxically evaded and answered by the acquisition of a new generation of 'capital ships': 'only the nuclear-powered and sometimes nuclear-armed submarine offered the prestige that could support ideas regarding the role that the Royal Navy played within Britain's great power status from the 1960s onwards'.[97] If *Submarine* marked the secrecy, elitism and dubiety of the submarine in war via its portrayal of the 'Perisher' and HMS *Warspite*'s NATO exercise, it confronted more directly the contemporary controversies of national life and identity contained in the maintenance (and recently confirmed replacement) of the submarine-based nuclear deterrent, and the Navy's part in the conduct of the war in the South Atlantic. The gravity of these subjects and the seriousness (and openness to interpretation) of their handling in *Submarine* found their parallels in the documentary treatment of *HMS Splendid*.

The contrast that these series represent with depictions of Royal Navy submarines in subsequent decades underlines significant changes in documentary style and broadcasting ethos as much as in national and geopolitical circumstances. The 'Perisher' course and nuclear submarines on patrol have been the subject of the Channel 5 series *Submarine School* (2011) and *Royal Navy: Submarine Mission* (2011). A similar two-part series following the operation of HMS *Trenchant* (*Submarine: Life Beneath the Waves*), made by Artlab Films, was broadcast on Channel 5 in 2021. A single documentary programme by the same production company, entitled *On Board Britain's Nuclear Submarine: Trident* (Channel 5, 2020), was filmed aboard a second-generation deterrent submarine. The stylistic continuity between these productions also extends to Artlab's recurrent *Warship: Life at Sea* (2018–22) productions for Channel 5 (see Chapter 5). The proliferation of these series, alongside but distinct from the consistency of documentary maker Chris Terrill's programmes and series for the BBC (see Chapter 6), suggests a new prevailing popular orthodoxy of both naval representation and factual television aesthetics.

Various common strategies and textual features set these series apart from the precedents of *Sailor* and *Submarine* and their contemporaries such as *Royal*

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[96] Redford, The 'Hallmark of a First-Class Navy', pp.191–192. In his introduction to the souvenir programme, Admiral Sir Henry Leach addresses the intended public audience of the event: 'I wish you and your families a happy time amongst *your* fleet and *your* sailors helping to celebrate Her Majesty's Silver Jubilee' [original emphasis]. John Winton, *Silver Jubilee Fleet Review Official Souvenir Programme* (Portsmouth: Gerald Lee, 1977), p.1.

[97] Redford, The 'Hallmark of a First-Class Navy', p.189.

Navy Caribbean Patrol (Channel 5, 2011) and *Britain's Biggest Warship* (BBC, 2018–19). Although *Submarine School*'s subject is the same command course covered in *Submarine* (with four episodes devoted to the course's four weeks), its treatment displays numerous enhancements (dramatic music, rapid editing, freeze-frames) quite distant from the earlier documentary series. A hyperbolic voice-over (by actor Peter Capaldi) injects and maintains a heightened level of tension. The setting and its participants are described as 'one £500 million nuclear-powered submarine [HMS *Triumph*]: stealthy, silent and deadly; five elite submariners, hungry for command; and one no-nonsense examiner'. The 'Teacher' and each candidate are introduced by a red-tinted freeze-frame portrait giving their name and title. Each episode receives an overstated subtitle: 'For Your Eyes Only', 'Lurking in the Shadows', 'Total War' and 'The Final Reckoning'. The first days' exercises with surface ships are described exaggeratedly as 'Russian roulette' and 'playing chicken with charging warships'. A training exercise to pick up and transport special forces is amplified with Bond-thriller theme music. At the conclusion of each programme, and at advertising breaks, the voice-over similarly intervenes to fabricate cliff-hanging crises: 'a looming emergency could be about to put the whole course in jeopardy!'; 'the question now, with so many mistakes already, is whether all the students will survive the final exercises of the first week'; 'who will be next to fall foul of the Perisher?' While computer graphics are employed to render images of the submarine's interior and its operation submerged, these offer little documentary explanation: voice-over accompaniment to brief archive footage of submarine warfare in World War II describes the campaign in terms of the U-boats' activities: 'spying, laying mines and setting ambushes'. Yet, against this intensified background and the concentration upon students' errors and shortcomings, all the candidates (whose backgrounds, personalities and aspirations are only partially explored) eventually pass the course.

Royal Navy Submarine Mission follows this stylistic precedent, introducing crew members with the same tinted freeze-frame, and imposing tone via an intrusive, affective soundtrack. It insinuates secrecy and exclusivity in accessing its subject, being 'the first ever' record of a Royal Navy *Trafalgar*-class submarine (Figure 2.5) ('HMS *Turbulent*: part submerged spy, part deadly weapon') on active patrol.[98] *Submarine: Life Beneath the Waves* is similarly trumpeted as the first filming of a hunter-killer protecting a Trident submarine.

HMS *Turbulent*'s mission (transit via the Mediterranean to the Red Sea and Arabian Gulf) is introduced by a flurry of short soundbites from crew, interspersed with the provocative voice-over (by actor Bill Paterson) in a rapid montage. When 'Turbs' is diverted to join the 'UN mission in Libya', the voice-over notes how the crew prepares the 'devastatingly accurate' Tomahawk missiles for

[98] HMS *Turbulent* also featured in an episode of *Heston's Mission Impossible* (Channel 4, 2011) in which chef Heston Blumenthal attempted to transform submarine cooking and catering.

Figure 2.5: *Trafalgar*-class submarine. LA(Phot) Dan Rosenbaum, 2012. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

launching with 'quiet methodical efficiency'. This episode ends with the skyline of the Libyan capital, Tripoli, seen on the horizon, now 'in their periscope sights'. (This emotional peak, which has been manufactured without the need for Tomahawk launches (or their potential consequences) being addressed or articulated, dissipates anticlimactically in the next episode as the orders to fire are quietly rescinded.) Again, in contrast to the ambivalence of crew members towards Tomahawk in *HMS Splendid*, the 'mixed feelings' about its use noted amongst *Turbulent*'s crew are represented as not 'mixed' at all: some sailors express understandable excitement and a desire to do what the submarine is, after all, designed to do, and what they have trained to do, if they are called upon to fire. Nonetheless, the distance and significance of the submarine's deployment encapsulate the conflicts and Navy commitments of the new millennium. HMS *Turbulent*'s captain notes that his boat is 'the only Tomahawk shooter East of Suez' and applauds the Navy's capabilities and presence when a distant rendezvous takes place: 'Gulf of Aden: British submarine, British helicopter, doing their jobs – quite incredible.' When operational demands require the film crew to depart as *Turbulent* reaches the Arabian Sea, the voice-over pronounces: 'our cameras may be leaving, but for Britain's submariners, the mission never stops.'

Given that the extremities of the 'Perisher' and demands of sea service were evident in *Submarine* without formal exaggeration, the divergence in visual technique and verbal accompaniment in these later series bespeak a reliance on and presumed need for stylisation of the documentary subject. Although these

Figure 2.6: *Vanguard*-class Trident missile submarine. CPOA(Phot) Thomas McDonald, 2014. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

series do take note of details of service life (in disciplinary proceedings and the humorous and mundane experiences on board), they represent a diminished and de-emphasised proportion of the programmes in comparison to the duration and stylisation devoted to documenting (or manufacturing) action, tension and crises. In addition to prominent style, a renewed but distinct sociopolitical emphasis is obvious in their (and the *Warship* series') overt concentration on present operations, distant deployments and tangible threats to British ships and Britain itself. The distance from the static dread of the Cold War in *Submarine* to the newly heightened confrontations of the 21st century in political and televisual terms is demonstrated by the differences exhibited by *On Board Britain's Nuclear Submarine: Trident* (Figure 2.6).

This documentary programme is presented by Rob Bell, a familiar narrator and presenter from many factual series such as *Abandoned Engineering* (Yesterday, 2016–), *Secret Nazi Bases* (Go Button Media, 2019) and *The Buildings That Fought Hitler* (UKTV, 2021). Rather than providing informative documentary, the presenter's presence offers vicarious affective experience, as Bell describes being vetted in order to enter Faslane, is coached in the use of HMS *Vengeance*'s sonar, struggles to climb 'the longest ladder on board' to the top of the fin, looks nervously around the control room as the submarine dives, and gives his 'first impressions' to camera. Rather than representing the focus or climax, the testing of the Trident system occurs in the middle of the programme,

Figure 2.7: HMS *Vanguard* at Faslane. CPO Phot Nick Tryon, 2017. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

with little exploration of the personal views of the crew. Despite the camera's apparent freedom on board, the presenter's presence inhibits the grasp or directs the understanding of the subject. Bell's response to the experience of witnessing the deterrent in operation at the programme's end appears to substitute for, or even seek to direct, the viewer's own:

> For me, HMS *Vengeance* is a real paradox. As an engineering masterpiece, it is one of the most complex technical creations mankind has ever accomplished, and it's certainly thrilling. But at the same time, it is the deadliest of weapons. And if it were ever called into use, it would likely represent the end of life as we know it. Either way, it does exist and I can't imagine it being in better hands. The people I met down on HMS *Vengeance* are amongst the most capable I've ever met. And if we are to have this kind of weapon for the next 50 years, these are exactly the kind of people to run it.[99]

[99] The programme maker's views on the existence, ethics and possible use of the nuclear deterrent are, by contrast, reserved for the end of the book accompanying the *Submarine* series. Jonathan Crane, *Submarine* (London: BBC, 1984), pp.202–203.

While HMS *Vengeance* appears as a subject not dissimilar to one of the presenter's other subjects (at one stage, Bell compares the submarine to the International Space Station), the specificity of its national role is both grasped and celebrated in national terms (in addition to providing a brief history of submarines during the world wars, the programme includes reference to the new generation of deterrent submarines (Figure 2.7) and an artist's impression of the next HMS *Dreadnought*, already under construction). The programme's shorthand history of submarine warfare does not serve as an extended justification or argument for sea power to rival Hill-Norton's didacticism, yet its subjective summary of the deterrent's existence and value nonetheless restricts debate and informs a limited nationalistic view, not least in comparison with *Submarine*'s portrait of Polaris patrol. The political, cultural and national topicality of Britain's naval power and identity in the 1980s, asserted by *Sea Power*, debated by *Submarine* and re-examined in *HMS Splendid*, is matched by comparable discourses of national identity and political realities in the submarine-centred series of the 21st century. However, as much as these series reveal significant shifts in documentary style and address, they also evince reorientations in national identity within British and international politics. They mobilise the Navy as documentary subject and as representative image to promulgate specific, persuasive but unquestioned views of contemporary British sea power.

CHAPTER 3

The Naval Drama Series: *Making Waves*

A new *Warship*?

After a gap of over 30 years since the first appearance of the BBC's *Warship*, a new naval drama series was aired on British television. *Making Waves* (Carlton Television, 2004) reintroduced the Royal Navy as a distinctive entertainment subject within an established televisual genre. The soap-operatic tenor and widespread appeal of other uniformed serial dramas broadcast by ITV such as *The Bill* (Thames Television, 1983–2010), portraying the Metropolitan Police, *London's Burning* (London Weekend Television, 1986–2002), which followed the lives of members of the London Fire Service, and *Soldier Soldier* (Central Television, 1991–1997), which depicted life in the modern British Army, may have been influential in the decision to develop a comparable naval drama series.[100] In an interview for *Navy News*, the series' project leader for the director of corporate communications (Navy) revealed that:

> A concerted effort had been made to build up the Navy's profile following a survey by the Central Office of Information (C.O.I.) which found that the public perception of the Navy was that it was the least relevant of the three Armed Services.[101]

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[100] Although *Making Waves* was commissioned in 2002, former Director of Programmes David Liddiment commented that the idea had first been pitched to ITV 'some years earlier'. David Liddiment, The story of a sunken drama, *The Guardian*, 2 August 2004, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/aug/02/mondaymediasection2 [accessed 18 June 2015].

[101] Anonymous, Royal Navy on the small – and big – screen, *Navy News*, 3 September 2002, http://www.navynews.co.uk/articles/2002/0209/0002090301.asp [accessed 12 August 2003].

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Set aboard a fictional Type 23 *Duke*-class frigate, HMS *Suffolk* (with filming taking place aboard HMS *Grafton*), the series featured characters from all ranks, and also incorporated female characters at sea in the form of the ship's executive officer, Lieutenant Commander Jenny Howard (played by Emily Hamilton), Leading Regulator Liz Wilson (Diane Beck), Leading Medical Assistant Anita Cook (Angel Coulby) and new recruit Operator Mechanic Rosie Bowen (Joanna Page).[102] Several key roles were in fact filled by actors with experience from television and radio soap operas, including Alex Ferns from *EastEnders* (playing the ship's captain, Commander Martin Brooke), Lee Boardman from *Coronation Street* (Granada Television, 1960–present) as ship's cook Art Francis, and Stephen Kennedy from *The Archers* (BBC, 1951–present) and *Ballykissangel* (BBC, 1996–2001) in the role of Lieutenant Commander James Maguire. Other cast members had also appeared in *Coronation Street, London's Burning* and *The Bill* or comparable series such as *Casualty* (BBC, 1986–present) and *Holby City* (BBC, 1999–2021).

Despite levels of cooperation comparable to *Warship* between the MoD and the production company to provide the ships and settings and to ensure visual authenticity, these casting choices underline the positioning of *Making Waves* as more of a staple televisual narrative series, rather than primarily a naval depiction. These selections, and the series' attempt to balance the same competing representational and entertainment demands as *Warship* in the 1970s, provide some insight into the auspices, aspirations and objectives of *Making Waves*, especially in view of the possibility of its becoming a BBC, not ITV, production during its development. Former ITV director of programmes David Liddiment alleged that the channel's ambivalence towards the project was ultimately overturned by the prospect of a '*Soldier Soldier*-scale hit' gravitating to a rival.[103] However, over the period of *Making Waves*'s development and airing, the BBC had also created (and axed) its own costly and low-rated military-detective drama series, *Redcap* (BBC, 2001–04).[104]

The choice of a Type 23 (Figure 3.1) as the setting for the series represented a logical parallel to the selection of the *Leander*-class frigate as the centrepiece of *Warship*. By the new millennium, the Type 23, originally designed as a

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[102] Although there was no HMS *Suffolk* in commission when *Making Waves* was produced, the transformation of HMS *Grafton* (appropriately affiliated with the Suffolk port town of Ipswich) for the series included the creation of cap tallies and a ship's crest: Anonymous, Soap star on board for HMS *Suffolk* drama, *East Anglian Daily Times*, 28 May 2003, https://www.eadt.co.uk/news/soap-star-on-board-for-hms-suffolk-drama-1-60204 [accessed 12 September 2012]. The recreation of the real HMS *Suffolk*'s list of battle honours (including Barfleur in the 17th century, Velez in the 18th, and action against the German battleship *Bismarck* and in Burma in World War II) is visible outside the XO's cabin in episode two.

[103] Liddiment, The story of a sunken drama.

[104] The producer and writer of *Redcap* Patrick Harbinson had also previously worked on *Soldier Soldier*.

Figure 3.1: Type 23 frigate. LPhot Rory Arnold. UK MOD. © Crown copyright 2020: Open Government Licence.

highly specialised Cold War anti-submarine escort for the North Atlantic, had become, by virtue of its numbers (16 having been completed by 2002) and its employment in myriad worldwide tasks, a similarly ubiquitous and general-purpose Royal Navy representative.[105]

As of 2022, though slated for replacement by the Type 26 frigate (or 'Global Combat Ship'), the Type 23 remains the Royal Navy's most numerous major warship type, and continues in many international and 'East of Suez' operations like the *Leanders*.[106] Ironically, although the Type 23 served exclusively in the Royal Navy (until retired vessels were transferred to the Chilean Navy), its successor, the Type 26, has proved a successful design for export and like the Type

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[105] Norman Friedman, *British Destroyers and Frigates: The Second World War and After* (Barnsley: Seaforth, 2017), pp.305–309; Leo Marriott, *Royal Navy Frigates Since 1945*, 2nd ed. (London: Ian Allan, 1990), pp.129–136.

[106] Anonymous, Fact Sheet 3, *Ministry of Defence SDSR 2015 Defence Fact Sheets* (Crown Copyright 2016), p.10, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/492800/20150118-SDSR_Factsheets_1_to_17_ver_13.pdf [accessed 25 August 2019]. Notably, the *Leander* name was deliberately reinvoked with nationalistic as well as nostalgic connotations in the competition to design new general-purpose frigates for the Royal Navy and for export. Publicity for the Cammell Laird bid for construction contracts included their *Leander* design in a Union Jack 'dazzle' camouflage scheme. Anonymous, Cammell Laird and BAE Systems Showcase Leander Type 31e Frigate, *Ocean News*, 26 February 2018, https://www.oceannews.com/news/defense/cammell-laird-and-bae-systems-showcase-leander-type-31e-frigate [accessed 4 March 2018].

12/*Leander* will be incorporated into the Australian and Canadian navies in the 21st century.[107] *Making Waves*'s portrait of the Navy in the new millennium was rounded out with location shooting at the Portsmouth naval base (including scenes aboard HMS *Victory* in episode two) and appearances of numerous other ship types, including the aircraft carrier HMS *Invincible*, the destroyers HMS *Gloucester, Newcastle* and *Bristol*, frigate HMS *Sutherland* and patrol ship HMS *Lindisfarne*.

Making Waves underwent an extended gestation period. The idea for the programme had originated from Ted Childs, who had produced some of ITV's most successful long-running entertainment series, such as the medical drama *Peak Practice* (Central/Carlton Television, 1993–2002), courtroom drama *Kavanagh QC* (Central Television, 1995–2001), and police detective series *Inspector Morse* (Central/Carlton Television, 1987–93), in addition to the highly successful *Soldier Soldier*. At the same time, lobbying from the naval establishment for more concerted televisual representation had also taken place:

> The MoD is all too aware that beyond its heartlands, the navy is often misunderstood by the public and has spent more than two years trying to persuade TV companies to produce a prime-time drama series.[108]

However, the project was held to have 'an old-fashioned feel to it that was out of sync with the new generation of ITV drama', perhaps because of its perceived resemblance to *Warship*.[109] As with the earlier series, any controversial subject matter was vetted rather than simply vetoed. Lieutenant Commander Kevin Fincher, who acted as principal adviser to the series, was instrumental in agreeing the terms under which the series could be made and broadcast, for the programme makers as much as for the Navy:

> First and foremost the agreement had to cover what the RN was willing to allow them to depict and what it was not and the editorial role the RN would play. This was actually quite easy and certainly took Carlton by surprise, in that the RN was willing to allow them to depict whatever

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[107] George Allison, BAE Systems Type 26 Frigate wins Australian frigate bid, *UK Defence Journal*, 28 June 2018, https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/bae-systems-type-26-frigate-wins-australian-frigate-bid/ [accessed 25 August 2019]; Jon Rosamund, Canada Confirms Type 26 Design for Surface Combatant Programme After Legal Tussle, *USNI News*, 11 February 2019, https://news.usni.org/2019/02/11/canada-confirms-type-26-design-surface-combatant-program-legal-tussle [accessed 25 August 2019].

[108] Anonymous, Navy is set to rule airwaves, *The News – Portsmouth Today*, 1 August 2002, http://www.portsmouth.co.uk/spare445/Navy-is-set-to-rule.249001.jp [accessed 14 April 2010].

[109] Liddiment, The story of a sunken drama.

> they wanted, as long as they also depicted the way in which the RN would deal with that given situation. With regard to the editorial role, although legally no editorial control could be given and hence none was sought, the RN negotiated a robust right of consultation, which was very effective throughout the production.[110]

Fincher estimated that, in addition to the involvement of numerous other ships, over a thousand naval personnel supported or served as extras during the production. Despite an inevitable 'clash of cultures' between the different parties involved, the complexities and costs of realistic shooting at sea were eventually accommodated, with the film crew taking over accommodation vacated by part of HMS *Grafton*'s company.[111] Given the track record of those involved and the precedent of *Warship*'s popularity, there was good reason to expect a successful and enduring series would result from this cooperative process. Storylines for a second series were supposedly in preparation following the completion of filming, with expectations that blocks of 13 episodes would be needed for the United States market and that DVDs, books, T-shirts, merchandising and a website for the series would follow.[112]

The series was therefore expected to fulfil the role of informing the public about the Navy and driving recruitment that the short films and presentations of the 1960s and '70s had performed. The particular role of drama (as opposed to documentary) in representing the Navy therefore requires scrutiny, since expectations of extremity and excitement within entertainment stand in contrast to the observation of the quotidian and coincidental, and the recognition of the real, in factual television. While unanticipated events may produce moments of spectacle (such as the unexpected helicopter rescue on HMS *Ark Royal*'s 'birthday' in *Sailor*), which may be heightened (or not) by conspicuous stylisation, the contrived crises of drama are framed by (and audience enjoyment derives from) the responses of crafted characters. To refine the Navy's self-protective position towards the representation of potentially controversial situations in *Making Waves* (anything might be depicted, as long as the Navy's official response was also made plain), it is worth acknowledging that the (fictional) characters and actors chosen to portray them therefore embody a publicly accessible and putatively authentic institutional identity. For public relations purposes, the creation of diverse, credible and recognisable characters is necessary to underpin the representativeness of the Navy itself of and for the watching nation: for future recruits to 'see themselves' before they decide to

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[110] Kevin Fincher, The Making of *Making Waves*, http://webarchive.org/web/20040818185425/www.royal-navy.mod.uk/static/pages/7030.html [accessed14 April 2010].

[111] Fincher, The Making of *Making Waves*.

[112] Fincher, The Making of *Making Waves*; Anonymous, Royal Navy on the small – and big – screen.

join. Therefore representativeness, realism and recognition appear crucial to the identity of (and individual and institutional identities depicted in) a uniformed service drama like *Making Waves* and require accommodation within the demands of popular entertainment.

Plots and prerequisites

Each programme of the six-part series contained multiple plot lines pursued at a frenetic pace (for example, the first programme began with a fatal error during a wire transfer at sea, showed sailors going AWOL and missing *Suffolk*'s sailing, and the frigate and its helicopter intercepting a shipload of Albanian immigrants who needed to be rescued when their vessel began to sink, and introduced a fateful narrative thread in a professional disagreement about the state of the warship's engines). However, all this current affairs and service-related content framed a dominant and more soap-operatic storyline. During this first episode it was revealed that Leading Marine Engineering Artificer Dave Finnan (Paul Chequer) was responsible for Charge Chief Marine Engineering Artificer Andy Fellows's (Steve Speirs) unmarried daughter, Teresa (Chloe Howman), becoming pregnant. This plotline punctuated the action of the series, working to connect the shipboard and shore-based communities, and reflecting *Making Waves*'s intended status as a prime-time entertainment series with quotidian as well as extraordinary content. This domestic, shore-based dimension was augmented by scenes involving Brooke's wife and stepson and the female executive officer Jenny Howard and her fiancé, exploring the pressures of balancing family connections with a life, more than simply a career, in the Navy and at sea.

In comparison with the male-oriented and officer-dominated environment of *Warship*, the greatest visible alteration to characterisation and dramatic construction in *Making Waves* was related to the presence of female personnel at sea.[113] A separate Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS, known colloquially as the 'Wrens') existed in both world wars, albeit mostly in shore-based support roles, but falling recruitment necessitated the incorporation of females into ships' companies in 1990, and full integration of the Navy (and therefore the disbanding of the WRNS as a separate service) took place in 1993.[114] Although

[113] The timeliness and relevance of reviewing rather than introducing the subject of women within the Navy and serving at sea within *Making Waves* was highlighted by the 'Women at Sea: 25 years and Counting' symposium held in 2003 and reviewed by the USNI *Proceedings* magazine in 2004. Lori Lyn Bogle, Women at Sea: 'It's All about Leadership', *USNI Proceedings*, March 2004, http://www.usni.org/proceedings/Articles04/PRO03bogle.htm [accessed 17 March 2005].

[114] Anonymous, History, *The Association of Wrens and Women of the Royal Naval Services*, https://wrens.org.uk/history/ [accessed 25 August 2019]. The first female volunteers for operational service went to sea in HMS *Brilliant* (see Chapter 6).

the depiction of mixed crews clearly provided different and additional dramatic potentials (in romantic, not inevitably heterosexual, and taboo relationships given their forbidden-ness between crew members at sea), in contrast to *Warship*, the inclusion of female crew members was also a prerequisite for a timely, relevant and appropriate portrayal of the 'new' Navy (though the characters portrayed remained, with the exception of LMA Cook, overwhelmingly white). The additional potential complexity of relationships aboard therefore vied in *Making Waves*'s plotting and character arcs with a more predictable staple of naval dramas, the balancing of life aboard with relationships ashore. Consequently, in terms of sympathy and screen time, the 'XO', Jenny Howard, was arguably more central to the series than the (comparatively distant and one-dimensional) figure of the ship's captain.[115] Key narrative incidents related to the ship's operational roles (such as escorting a ship carrying nuclear waste, diplomatic visits, disciplinary issues and taking part in training and exercises) were frequently integrated through Jenny's difficulties in reconciling her career with her life outside the Navy. At the same time, the beginning of an inappropriate relationship on board ship between Lieutenant Commander Sam Quatermaine (Adam Rayner) and Medical Assistant Anita Cook highlighted or perhaps exploited the predictable controversies of the integrated service within the public's perception. In episode two, a visit to Portsmouth by an Argentinian admiral and his female staff officer precipitated expressions of sympathy and solidarity between veterans of both sides of the Falklands War, and between female sailors from both navies forging careers within male-dominated environments. In another echo of *Warship*, episode three portrayed environmental concerns about the transport by sea of nuclear waste, but also connected this issue with blunt male and female gender stereotyping, and with a cynical portrayal of pragmatic naval justice. Within its frequent depictions of professional and disciplinary problems, *Making Waves* also encompassed suggestions of incompetence and corruption in naval officers, and a court martial process and imprisonment for Dave Finnan for striking a superior (*Warship*'s third episode, 'Off Caps', had addressed a similar conflict between junior and senior engineers).

Like *Warship*, these individual character concerns were fitted within the pattern of the central ship's missions (although, with only six episodes, these were considerably curtailed in comparison with HMS *Hero*'s very varied commissions). The principal concentration lay upon HMS *Suffolk*'s return to readiness following the opening fatal accident, with intensive training and exercises (and a succession of missions at sea) building towards the ship and crew being subjected to FOST (Flag Officer Sea Training) testing and inspection. The

[115] As part of her preparation for the role, Emily Hamilton shadowed the executive officer of HMS *Kent*, at that stage the only female XO in the Navy. Ian Wylie, Telly Talk: Why my rear got a cheer, *Manchester Evening News*, 19 February 2007, https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/film-and-tv/telly-talk-why-my-rear-got-a-cheer-1116161 [accessed 27 November 2018].

extensive cooperation offered by the Navy at sea and on shore was recorded in the service's own news reporting, and the series was eagerly anticipated by its participants and the Navy community as a whole.[116] However, rather than constituting the climax, the FOST scenes (which required the greatest concentration of filming at sea, with multiple ships involved) occupied episode four. Ironically, this episode was pulled from the schedules on the day it was due to be broadcast because of the series' poor ratings to date and the rest of the series was never aired, much to the Navy's chagrin.[117]

Making Waves: the aired and unaired episodes

Where *Warship* began with the inactive HMS *Hero* under a cloud, *Making Waves* initiates the story of HMS *Suffolk* with tragedy: a fatal accident occasioned not by misfortune but by incompetence. The pre-credit sequence of the opening episode, accompanied by an ominously tolling bell on the soundtrack, features a rapid montage of aerial and moving shots of two Type 23s steaming in parallel, conducting the wire transfer. Initially overseeing the operation from the bridge wing, *Suffolk*'s captain becomes ill and hands control to the ship's executive officer. The Principal Warfare Officer, Lieutenant MacGuire, then alerts the XO to a nearby merchant ship on a collision course, necessitating a complex staged turn by both ships to maintain the connecting lines. Inexplicably the XO hesitates in his command for the manoeuvre, disastrously compromising the wire transfer. On the bridge, Jenny Howard observes the impending disaster dispassionately, intoning fatalistically: '*Wessex* has started her turn … we've left it too late.' When the lines between the two ships are pulled apart, the female officer being transferred is flung against the side of the frigate before falling into the sea. The emotionless treatment of this incident is completed when a rescue boat approaches the body in the water, and after inspection a crew member signals a bleak thumbs down.

The credit sequence then follows the new captain Commander Brooke, a former naval pilot, and new rating Rosie Bowen as they arrive at the ship together. Rosie is established as naïve comic relief by her inexperience, her breaking of regulations and her prominent Welsh regional accent, yet Brooke's tolerance of her mistakes is contrasted with his uncompromising ('sink or swim') attitude towards Jenny Howard, who is not 'a fully-qualified XO'. *Suffolk*'s outgoing captain, who has resigned following the court martial of the previous XO, nonetheless says Jenny is 'smart and capable' and reminds Brooke that she is 'old Navy':

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[116] Anonymous, Groundbreaking filming for TV's Making Waves, *Navy News*, 2003, 587, 11.

[117] Tom Newton Dunn, Fury of ITV Chop for the Navy, *The Sun*, 28 July 2004, http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/92316/Fury-of-ITV-chop-for-Navy.html [accessed 18 June 2015].

her father is a serving admiral. The initiation of Jenny's testing follows (in a parallel to *Warship*'s opening episode) with the captain's introduction to his sceptical officers. Lieutenant Commander Lewis (Ian Bartholomew), the chief engineer (who opines that Brooke's background in flying makes him unsuitable to be a ship captain and dismisses Fellows's concerns about the main engines as 'neurotic tinkering'), assures the captain that the 'operational deficiencies' are 'all routine problems … nothing we're not used to in this ship'. In return, Brooke insists that *Suffolk*'s performance must improve in all departments: 'Flag Officer Sea Training won't want to hear excuses about one of our front-line ships – neither will I.' In private immediately after his briefing, Brooke remarks on knowing Jenny's father: she raises the issue of her inexperience but Brooke points out that her previous captain had full confidence in her. She states her intention of completing the necessary qualification to become XO, for which she will need his recommendation. Jenny's challenges at the top of the frigate's hierarchy are immediately contrasted with Rosie's, in simply finding her way around the ship. Rather than offering help, the Leading Chef, Art Francis, instead starts a sweepstake, inviting bets on 'who cocks up first', the new rating or the new captain. In another later scene, the captain uses the same phrase to his wife Cathy (Hilary Brooke) as they move into their new home, confessing he 'doesn't want to cock it up'. The series' assertion of the synergy of home and professional life, and Cathy's value and loyalty as traditional service wife, are encapsulated in her assurance that he has not done that with his stepson. Having established the ship- and shoreside threads involving Fellows, Finnan and Brooke, the opening episode also expands on Jenny's circumstances and multiplies her dilemmas by introducing her fiancé's request for her to leave the Navy and join him with his new job posting in New York. Reassuringly, Rosie is taken under the wing of Liz Wilson. Liz is plainly attracted to Rosie, and when they share a drink later Rosie defends the honour of her new ship from the insults and assaults of crew members of the *Wessex*.

The domestic and personal emphases rapidly established in this first episode appear to significantly and narratively outweigh the professional content, though the professional and emotional challenges are (as in the brief scene featuring the captain's wife, but above all in the case of Jenny's characterisation) shown to be intimately linked to the naval setting. The concentration upon relationships explored in the pub environment (Rosie's integration and association with Liz, and Andy's ironic confiding in Dave about his feelings and his daughter's circumstances) is furthered by this being the setting for Steward 'Scouse' Phillips (Darren Morfitt) and Operator Mechanic Mickey Sobanski (Lee Turnbull) picking up some local girls, getting drunk, going AWOL aboard their yacht and missing *Suffolk*'s departure. What could become a simple and self-destructive disciplinary issue instead mushrooms into an improbably calamitous situation, when the yacht is hijacked and the sailors are confined aboard a ship carrying illegal immigrants. When the people smugglers' ship collides with a merchant vessel and starts to flood, Sobanski broadcasts an SOS

and tries to save the passengers. The *Suffolk* responds to the mayday message but is immobilised by a main engine failure, confirming Fellows's fears. As the ship begins to sink and before Rosie arrives in a rescue boat, Sobanski loses his nerve and proves unable to save a drowning child. Having reprimanded the chief engineer, Brooke lessens the punishment for Scouse and Sobanski in view of their courage in putting civilian lives before their own.

Numerous plotlines commenced in the opening instalment persist and interconnect in subsequent episodes to furnish the series with a soap-operatic consistency, which therefore departs markedly from the discrete episodic narrative format of *Warship*. This serial drama approach subsequently foregrounds Sobanski's struggles with guilt over his inability to save the immigrant child, Jenny's experiences of prejudice and questioning of her future inside or outside the Navy, and the acrimonious family arrangements of Andy, Teresa and Dave. However, the pacing and resolution of these threads act curiously to close down certain areas of potential drama within this representation of service life. The origins of Sobanski's guilt in his wilful misconduct become obscured in the support and counselling the receives to overcome his trauma through episodes two and three. In addition to exhibiting further erratic and aggressive behaviour, he fails a 'DRIU' (Damage Repair Instructional Unit) tank test where he must work to control flooding because of the fear he experienced on the refugee ship. The psychologist he visits assures him that his fears of being dismissed as unfit for service are unfounded: 'This isn't the seventeenth century: the Navy doesn't throw its wounded over the side.' He must retake the DRIU test to remain in the Navy, and it is Rosie's support and encouragement (after he reveals the truth to her) that actually enables him to pass.[118]

Jenny's apparently difficult choice between her fiancé and the Navy is by the end of the second episode decided definitively in favour of her career. The captain has stated his support for her application for the sea command qualification and encouraged her to take a leading role in the ship's preparation for FOST after a failed action drill forming the opening sequence of episode two. Her fiancé Alex's inability to comprehend her decision does, however, provide an opportunity to question her attitude. Putting her emotional life into perspective, she tells him that, from the day her dad brought her to Portsmouth when she was five, she 'fell in love with' the Navy. She insists her job is 'not like a gap year' that she can 'pick up again where she left off'. His angry response is to denigrate wider, vaguer and unspoken motivations rather than address

[118] Negative perceptions and stigmatisation of mental health problems within the armed services, and their impact on efficiency, promotion and community culture, are therefore left unexplored within the series in what might otherwise have provided a serious dramatic and innovative representation: see Victoria Langston, Neil Greenberg, Nicola Fear, Amy Iversen, Claire French and Simon Wessely, Stigma and mental health in the Royal Navy: A mixed methods paper, *Journal of Mental Health*, 2010, 19(1), 8–16.

her personal wishes: 'What's it for, Jen? Who's it for? Is it Queen and Country? You think anyone really cares?' The balance or distinction between personal fulfilment and patriotic duty in her decision is perhaps deliberately not made clear but it is notable that the series elects to address the perceived significance of a Navy career through the preferences of its most prominent female cast member. As the only character for whom the choice and value of a Navy career are directly questioned or articulated, Jenny's positioning within *Making Waves* becomes markedly more important because of this scene.

Jenny's positioning within a Navy marked by transition and tradition is explored further in episode two by the *Suffolk*'s crew welcoming a delegation of Argentinian naval officers to Portsmouth. The need for *Suffolk*'s successful diplomacy is attributed entirely to the maintenance of 'trading partners' and 'keeping the coffers full'. The arrival of Admiral Esquivel (Arturo Venegas) and his female flag lieutenant, Elisa Balzani (Ilaria D'Elia), prompts potentially divisive recollections of the Falklands War but also contemporary kinship in the common work experience of the female officers. Elisa mocks the preservation of tradition when given a tour of HMS *Victory* ('So charming this old-fashioned history, from when you were once a great power'), to which Jenny responds with conservatism and restraint ('We take pride in our history: pride in everything we do'). Although the majority of the crew are too young to have experienced the conflict, Brooke asks his steward what he thinks of entertaining 'the old enemy': 'Off the record, sir, lives were lost in the Falklands, but that said most of our crew weren't even born then. So, I suppose you move on but you should never forget.' Without offering his own view, the captain deems this opinion 'suitable for public relations'. Ironically, while agreeing with Jenny in her views on male colleagues and masculine leadership, Elisa advises her to accept her fiancé's proposal and leave the Navy, not to 'settle down' but to 'have fun'. Equally unexpectedly, Andy Fellows (the only Falklands veteran aboard) is recognised by the admiral (a survivor of the *Santa Fe*) because of his medal ribbon, and the 'brothers of war' bond by swapping family photos and stories. The legacy of the Falklands returns briefly with stock footage of the conflict accompanying the reading of Andy's will, written aboard HMS *Hermes*. A similar ignorance of the Navy's past is exhibited by the younger crew members in episode three, when Brooke seeks to mark 'Taranto Night' with a celebration aboard ship, with a speech honouring *Suffolk*'s namesake in World War II and the history of the Fleet Air Arm. Brooke's wife is also comically confused about the 'Tarantino Dinner' but is exemplarily supportive in saving the galley's special cake when it is accidentally ruined by Scouse and Sobanski.

These attempts to provide informative reminders of the Navy's history and significance stand alongside other plot points that show the service in less flattering lights. In episode two, Quatermaine accompanies Scouse and Sobanski to the local radio station for a well-spun public relations interview about the people-smuggling incident, saying nothing about their going AWOL and instead stressing that 'You two are a credit to the Navy' and 'not even our Royal

Navy heroes could prevent the tragic death of little 8-year-old Tomas'. Episode three centres on *Suffolk*'s escorting of a ship carrying nuclear waste, which is intercepted by the *Emerald Light*, a tug crewed by the 'Sea Sisters', a feminist ecology group. The group refuses to communicate with anyone aboard the frigate except Jenny (MacGuire observes that an all-female crew 'has to mean trouble') but when the *Emerald Light* suffers a hydraulic failure Brooke senses the opportunity for positive public relations in helping the group. Instead, the 'Buffer' (Geoff Bell) leading the boarding party is accused of assaulting one of the women. The captain investigates the incident (described by one of his superiors as the 'run-in with bearded ladies'), which 'makes the Navy look like a bunch of fascist boot boys' and the local paper's headlines condemn the misconduct of 'Navy thugs'. He questions Rosie and the Buffer (who is rumoured to have a history of domestic abuse) but the allegations made by the captain of the 'Sea Sisters' eventually prove to be unfounded. If discipline is portrayed as questionable within lower ranks, then the portrayal of officers suggests a cultural environment of failure and dishonesty, from the opening sequence's fatal accident onwards. The captain worries about the appraisal of HMS *Suffolk*'s performance in FOST since the assessing officer bears a personal grudge: Brooke had an affair with the officer's late wife while they were both stationed at Yeovilton.[119] Sam Quatermaine is judged to both break rules and abuse his position in his relationship with the lower-ranked Anita Cook. Above all, the condemnatory characterisation of Lewis established in the series opening and exacerbated in episodes four and five provides the most negative embodiment of authority. Lewis is responsible for the mechanical breakdown during the rescue, for another (real) engine failure after the faults simulated as part of FOST, and his decision to activate the BTM fire-suppressant system precipitates Andy's death. Jenny's discovery of Lewis's doctoring of the ship's maintenance documents ultimately vindicates Dave Finnan's accusation against and his (punishable) assault on his superior officer. Although Brooke's intervention when the truth is revealed leads to a lessening of Finnan's sentence and Lewis's departure from the ship, Jenny points out with some justification that the captain's action is inconsistent with the service's standards and sets a dangerous precedent for future breaches of discipline: 'I spent my entire career trying to persuade people I got where I am on my own merits – most of all you, sir.'

The treatment that Sam Quatermaine and Anita Cook's relationship receives, across the episodes in which it begins, is pursued and then terminated, is also ambiguous. Where prejudicial perceptions of female sailors' suitability, competence and staying power are addressed seriously via the XO's characterisation, Sam is repeatedly sexually objectified. When he first comes on board, Anita and Rosie jokingly compare him to a costumed male 'stripper-gram': despite him being 'gorgeous', Anita warns Rosie that as an officer 'he can't share his

[119] This subplot echoes an episode from *Warship*'s third series, 'They Also Serve' from 1976.

bunk with you'. Later female sailors watch Sam shirtless, performing tai chi on the helicopter deck, but Anita is dismissive: 'He's not my type … he's much too pleased with himself.' Sam is objectified again when he is revealed to be the scantily dressed figure carrying the round boards at Rosie's female boxing match. This repeated privileging of a female voyeuristic gaze in these instances complicates the responsibility and motivation for the developing relationship. Anita seems to pursue Sam, yet when the couple are observed in a hotel by MacGuire he accuses the male officer of abusing his rank. When the situation is revealed to the captain, Sam's defence is that it is not just an affair and that he and Anita have plans for marriage – which Anita denies in her separate interview with the XO. These inconsistencies lead to Sam as the senior officer suffering the more severe punishment: both of them are put off the ship immediately (incongruously on 'Families' Day', when *Suffolk* is hosting crew members' spouses and children), but after training due to take place ashore Anita will have the chance to return. The final irony is that Sam observes Sobanski and Rosie kissing as he departs, advising them to 'take it ashore'.[120] Although there might be narrative inevitability and soap-operatic satisfaction in a relationship developing across the series between Rosie and Sobanski, this is hardly less transgressive in service terms than Sam and Anita's. Notably it is Jenny who responds punctiliously to naïve observations from the captain's wife about the inevitable results of 'all these twenty-somethings cooped up' on a ship and advises the captain that Sam deserves severer treatment, though she regrets that it means 'two careers ruined'.[121] In terms of Fincher's description of the original conditions for the drama – being prepared to depict controversial situations, while also depicting the Navy's proper response – the ambiguities in motivation displayed in Sam and Anita's relationship are perhaps less important (though dissatisfying dramatically) than portrayal of the regulation punishment. However, this appears inconsistent with Rosie and Sobanski's characterisation. While acknowledging the separation of the crew from loved ones as *Suffolk*

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[120] Although Rosie is the newest recruit on board, she archly offers to show Sobanski 'the golden rivet'.

[121] Unsurprisingly, in the years since female sailors first went to sea as part of ships' companies and gained officer and command billets, the press has repeatedly reported on breaches of conduct and their disciplinary consequences, including the dismissal of the first woman to command a Royal Navy warship for having an affair with a married male subordinate: Jane Merrick, If we want true gender equality, Commander Sarah West must be treated the same as any man. And that means no concessions for wrongdoing, *The Independent*, 30 July 2014, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/if-we-want-true-gender-equality-commander-sarah-west-must-be-treated-the-same-as-any-man-9638026.html [accessed 22 January 2018]. See also Rosemary Bennett, Captain's Mistress gave mock orders to submarine crew, *The Times*, 16 October 2017, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/captains-mistress-gave-mock-orders-to-submarine-crew-pzrgpkgrq [accessed 26 November 2019].

leaves Portsmouth, episode six ends on the promise of a Caribbean deployment and the continuation of Rosie's and Sobanski's relationship.

Despite this excess of incident and the inclusive spectrum of characters, *Making Waves* failed to gain an audience and only the first three of the six completed episodes were aired before the series was shelved, with the rest of the episodes remaining un-broadcast. The programme's audience fell drastically over its truncated run, and critical commentary was almost universally negative:

> The show looks like it was made in 1978 … But the biggest problem, a problem that even the most talented bunch of writers and actors would struggle to overcome, is this simple truth: Unless it's set in wartime, a drama about what goes on in the Navy is always going to be pretty dull.[122]

This verdict overlooks the plethora of dramatic situations (fires, floods, accidents, scandals and breaches of discipline) which *Making Waves* contains, albeit that the series' spectacle of major exercises (the FOST 'Thursday War') was never aired. The series' failure to find and retain an audience might be attributable to the overhanging pall of failure, disunity, unpreparedness and inexperience established by the opening episode and embodied by individual characters subsequently. Refreshingly, however, within this pattern the most consistently positive character remains the female XO, with the female contingent in authority on board *Suffolk* bolstered further by Charge Chief 'Eddie' Worthy (Sian Reeves), the replacement for Andy Fellows, joining the ship in the final episode.

In retrospect, the failure of *Making Waves* has been attributed to its scheduling as much as to its content and cast. Perhaps, as the perceived need for publicity for the Navy behind the creation of the series suggests, it is the service that has an old-fashioned image, which the serial drama format reinforced rather than overcame. However, this failure needs to be seen against the background of the many comparable popular precedents on British television, and also in contrast to popular military-based drama series in other countries.

Sea Patrol: the most successful naval drama

In the United States, the hybrid naval/legal investigative drama *JAG* (Paramount/CBS/NBC, 1995–2005) and its spin-off US Navy- and US Marine Corps-related detective series *NCIS* (CBS, 2003–11) enjoyed considerable and widespread success over the same period as *Making Waves*'s troubled and abortive development. In Australia, following the popularity of the BBC's *Warship*

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[122] Ian Hyland, Drowned at Berth, *The Sunday Mirror*, 25 July 2004, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4161/is_20040725/ai_n12900173/ [accessed 14 April 2010].

and a locally produced series, *Patrol Boat* (ABC, 1979–83), naval drama was successfully reintroduced to Australian television in the form of *Sea Patrol* (Nine Network, 2007–11), which ran for five seasons and 68 episodes. Film and television producers Hal and Di McElroy acknowledged the successful precedent of the original series, but, given the significant changes to the RAN and its role over the intervening years (with mixed crews and the tackling of immigration, drug-trafficking, terrorism and environmental issues), a new approach was needed. Yet the seriousness and topicality of these themes did not preclude a deliberately embedded positive, entertaining and nationalistic ethos:

> 'Today, the tasking of the patrol boat service is very difficult and necessarily, therefore, our stories are very different. Frankly, they are much more dramatic than they were back in the earlier days. Not surprisingly, the series will deal with issues such as illegal fishing and immigration, boat people, drug-running, people-smuggling and a whole range of other issues' … 'We thought that the series should be about a small "family"', Mrs McElroy said. 'The important thing for me is seeing how this 'family' of people operates on a patrol boat.' … It's all about the Navy's heroes; not about flawed heroes with feet of clay', Mr McElroy added. 'We really want to show audiences what it's like to live and work on one of these boats, in extremely arduous conditions on a small platform of 42 metres and 24 people, in the tropics, 24/7, in any weather. Our stories will show good young honest Navy people doing a dangerous, difficult, very tough job, not getting paid fabulous money, but loving it.'[123]

Although these series are not explicitly related, *Patrol Boat* exhibited a strong resemblance to *Warship*, and *Patrol Boat* and the first season of *Sea Patrol* were set aboard the same *Fremantle*-class patrol craft tasked with safeguarding Australia's coastal waters, repeating the same episodic, crew character-based format.[124] By the time the series' fifth season appeared in 2011, *Screen Australia*'s online summary encapsulated how the formula of dramatic action, frenetic pacing and purposefully patriotic flavour had established its popularity:

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[123] Barry Rollings, Navy's Starring Role, *Navy News*, 5 October 2006, http://www.defence.gov.au/news/navynews/editions/4918/topstoroes/story02.htm [accessed 5 May 2015].

[124] Four *Fremantle*-class ships appeared in *Patrol Boat* (HMAS *Launceston, Townsville, Warrnambool, Whyalla* and *Woollongong*) and HMAS *Ipswich* portrayed HMAS *Hammersley* in *Sea Patrol* before being replaced by the *Armidale*-class boats HMAS *Broome* and *Launceston*. Anonymous, Farewell to the Fremantle Class, *Semaphore*, 2005, 17; Michael Idato, All ship shape, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 March 2008, https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/all-ship-shape-20080331-gds7ch.html?page=2 [accessed 30 July 2017]. During the series' run, *Hammersley* is also seen to operate with other RAN ships including HMAS *Melbourne* and HMAS *Manoora*.

> Young Australians battling the elements to defend Australia's borders and enforce its economic zone, providing security, surveillance, protection, support and relief for the world's longest coastline. Our heroes are the officers and crew of Australian Naval patrol boat, *Hammersley*. Together, they share in the adversity, self-sacrifice and rewards that come with Naval service. Explosive action and monumental stillness. Blue skies and throbbing motors. Mysterious events and deadly consequences. These are the things that characterise SEA PATROL. Everyday heroes doing an extraordinary job.[125]

The series therefore overtly signals and celebrates the challenges and opportunities of naval service, championing mutually supportive positive personal and institutional identities in ways which echo the Australian government's aspirational statements:

> The Australian Defence Force (ADF) reflects the kind of country we are, the role we seek to play in the world, and the way we see ourselves. The sense of security that our armed forces give us underpins our optimistic outlook and the confidence with which we engage the region.[126]

Sea Patrol's success, as (at the time of its making) the most expensive production on Australian television, throws the failure of *Making Waves* into sharper relief.[127] It also prompts an in-depth consideration of the series' differences and similarities, their objectives and achievements as service-based (and service-supported) productions, and their characteristics as television dramas that balance entertainment values, recruitment potentials and realist representation. As a sustained serial drama, *Sea Patrol* exhibits a similar soap-operatic emphasis on long-running emotional and relational storylines, with many themes and incidents echoing the treatments of *Warship* (and indeed *Making Waves*). The drastically divergent receptions of these series given their strong superficial resemblances warrant detailed consideration.

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[125] Anonymous, *Sea Patrol* series 5 – Damage Control (2011) – The Screen Guide. *Screen Australia*, https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/the-screen-guide/c/sea-patrol-productions-(mini-series-5)-pty-ltd/16291/ [accessed 9 September 2019].

[126] Australian Government, Department of Defence, Defence 2000: Our Future Defence Force (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2000), p.iii, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1516/DefendAust/2000 [accessed 9 September 2019].

[127] Robert Fidgeon, Testing the Waters, *Herald Sun*, 4 July 2007, https://www.heraldsun.com.au/entertainment/television/testing-the-waters/news-story/7957296c9a278d80b0dad11c039382a6?sv=82c89a7dc819008f95d0bfb6f79d2a5d [accessed 9 September 2019].

Figure 3.2: HMAS *Launceston*, which appeared in *Sea Patrol* as HMAS *Hammersley*. 2009. Brendan OhUiginn, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:HMASLaunceston.jpg

The setting of *Sea Patrol* aboard the *Fremantle* and *Armidale* classes of coastal craft rather than a frigate-sized warship represents an adept accommodation of the needs of televisual drama and nationally specific naval representation (Figure 3.2). The boat's smaller crew provided the opportunity for a limited and consistent cast of characters and the roving brief and multifarious tasks of Australia's patrol craft presented the scope for varied but contained plots for individual episodes.[128] However, in addition to the consistency of crew characters providing enduring and evolving plotlines, each season also featured a single underlying narrative (the 'Bright Island Mystery' in the first season; the coup attempt in the fictitious 'Samaru Islands' in the second), explored through and eventually concluded within its run of 13 episodes. This format was a criteria of *Sea Patrol*'s support from the Australian Film Finance Corporation and underlined

[128] In actuality, the *Armidale*-class units are not assigned permanent crews, but personnel rotate between boats within operational groups to maximise availability and crew relief. Julian Kerr, Plain sailing: Australia's Armidales prove fit for task, *Jane's Navy International*, 2008, 113(1).

the commercial aspiration for overseas sales of FFC-funded miniseries.[129] The composition of HMAS *Hammersley*'s crew, in both engendering the series' soap-operatic interactions and dramas and articulating its messages of self-fulfilment, professionalism and devotion to duty, bears comparison with the casting of *Making Waves*. *Sea Patrol* gives similar prominence to female crew members, and, though all its significant recurring characters are white, the series seeks to represent the multicultural nature of contemporary Australia through their varied immigrant backgrounds.[130]

As in the Carlton production, perhaps the most significant character is the female XO Kate McGregor, played by the series' most well-known star, Lisa McCune. Although the commanding officer is again male (Captain Mike Flynn, played by Ian Stenslake), the ship's other regular officer character is the navigator Lieutenant Nikki Caetano (Saskia Burmeister). The only additional consistent female crew member in the earlier series is Rebecca 'Bomber' Brown (Kirsty Lee Allan), the ship's cook, initially a disruptive influence on board because of her bad temper and secretiveness about her family. In later seasons she is replaced by Jessica 'Gap Girl' Bird (Danielle Horvat), a high school student taking advantage of a gap-year placement on the *Hammersley*. Notably, like HMS *Suffolk*'s senior female XO, Kate is an ambitious career officer, but her professional conduct is repeatedly undermined by her previous, and rekindled, relationship with *Hammersley*'s captain. Similarly, Nikki engages in an elicit and forbidden relationship with a male subordinate, Leading Seaman Josh Holiday (David Lyons). While Nikki's and Josh's relationship runs through the first two seasons (and is ended by Josh's death), Kate's complex entanglement with her CO, awareness of the incompatibility of her position, rank and feelings, and Mike's continual failure to commit to a relationship with her in favour of his naval career permeate all five. This abiding dramatic dilemma is eventually resolved by Kate and Mike marrying at the conclusion of the final season. However, after frequent disappointments in her attempts to gain promotion and a command of her own, it is left tellingly unclear whether Kate is able to continue in the Navy at all, while Mike is seen to be rewarded and promoted to fleet headquarters. Therefore, despite a similar significant emphasis upon the professional development and personal dilemmas particularly affecting the most senior female character, *Sea Patrol* appears more conservative than *Making Waves* in the definition by, and reward or punishment of, its female characters on the basis of their emotions, even where these prove crucial to the successful completion of the ship's missions. The concentration on female characters and

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[129] Idato, All Ship Shape.

[130] The paradoxical mixture of representation of youth and espousal of multiculturalism with conservative ideology and circumscribed gender portrayals is traceable in Australia's most successful soap operas. See Lesleyanne Hawthorne, Soap Opera in Multicultural Australia: Home and Away v Heartbreak High, *Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research Bulletin*, 1995, 15, 32–35.

their narrative and thematic threads in *Sea Patrol* (and *Making Waves*) might appear to suggest a melodramatic attunement of the series towards a female audience. However, the vagaries of *Making Waves*'s changing scheduling aside, both series were broadcast as early-evening dramas, not daytime soap operas.

The basing of the Armidale boats at Darwin in Northern Territory and at Cairns in Queensland underlines their tasking in policing the periphery of Australian sea space. If another obstacle to the success of *Making Waves* was the lack of clear purpose and specific direction for HMS *Suffolk* and her crew within the modern Royal Navy, the setting and format of *Sea Patrol* are by comparison actively focused on the contemporary Royal Australian Navy's explicit responsibility for national defence and regional stability, as defined in the Australian government's official statements: 'We cannot effectively protect Australia if we do not have a secure nearer region, encompassing maritime South-East Asia and South Pacific (comprising Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Pacific Island countries).'[131] However, as with *Making Waves, Sea Patrol* was conceived within a competitive commercial context for serial drama, and many of the cast also appeared in similarly successful and long-running series on Australian television: the police series *Blue Heelers* (Seven Network, 1994–2006), and *Water Rats* (Nine Network, 1996–2001), on both of which Hal McElroy had worked as producer in the 1990s, the hospital-based drama *All Saints* (Seven Network, 1998–2009), and the widely exported soap operas *Neighbours* (Seven Network, 1985–2022) and *Home and Away* (Seven Network, 1988–present).[132] Since it is impossible to review the entirety of the content of *Sea Patrol*, the following provides an analysis of significant themes, characterisations and incidents from episodes selected from several seasons that evidence the programme's interweaving of the patrol boat's duties, the Navy's responsibilities and the crew's problematic relationships.

The fourth episode of the first season (entitled 'Irukandji') has several crew members being stung by jellyfish while rescuing a family of immigrants from a sinking fishing boat. The migrants had sought help from (drunk) Australian male fishermen, who fired flares at the 'pirates' to drive them away. 'Buffer' (Boatswain) Pete Tomaszewski (played by Jeremy Lindsay Taylor) befriends the only English-speaker in the group. Knowing that the family will be interned if they reach Australia, Buffer appeals to the captain, saying

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[131] Australian Government, Department of Defence, Defence White Paper 2016 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016), p.33, https://www.defence.gov.au/about/strategic-planning/2016-defence-white-paper [accessed 9 March 2022].

[132] The popular success of *Sea Patrol* as a series can be gauged from the fact that individual episodes and the first two entire series appear five times in the list of the top 20 audience-rating Australian television programmes from 2001 to 2009. Anonymous, All-Time Top-Rating Australian Mini-series on Television, 1978–2009, *Screen Australia*, https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/fact-finders/television/australian-content/in-the-archive/top-mini-series-of-all-time [accessed 9 March 2022].

the fishermen should be charged with assault. Buffer also reflects on his own family, who entered Australia without papers and have gone on to contribute to the life of the country, but who now would be treated as 'illegals.' (Prejudices towards the immigrants the *Hammersley* encounters recur in episode six of the first season.) The arbitrariness of such values and fates is underlined when one of the affected crew members (about to propose to his girlfriend) recovers from the venom but the other dies. In the fifth episode ('Under the Radar'), the *Hammersley* tackles illegal shark fishermen. Nikki and Josh express their sympathies with green issues and environmentalist groups, but when the *Hammersley* tries to apprehend the fishermen's mother ship, 'eco-militants' interfere with their policing action. Two eco-militants have to be rescued after the mother ship fires upon them as they try to disable it with cables around the propellers, but Captain Flynn receives no gratitude for their assistance. Flynn then sets up a secret operation to catch the rest of the eco-militant group by leaving the XO and small party aboard the mother ship, tempting them to return and get arrested. Although he is subsequently reprimanded by his superior officer, Commander Marshall (Steve Bisley), for making his crew act like 'undercover cops', boatswain's mate 'Spider' Webb (Jay Ryan) visits Flynn in his cabin to express his support for the captain's actions. Although he was considering changing his career after their shipmate's death, he is now convinced that the Navy is the 'best job'.

The relationships aboard the *Hammersley* receive constant and occasionally ironic acknowledgement. The consciousness of family connections resurfaces in the eighth episode of the second season as 'Spider' Webb and 'Bomber' fall overboard when 'Bomber' nearly loses a bracelet she received as a birthday present from her estranged mother. Tomaszewski as officer of the watch fails to notice their disappearance as he is distracted by a phone call about his own terminally ill mother. In the first season's seventh episode, both Kate and Nikki become jealous of the attention given to Claire Watts (Nadia Townsend), a young, solitary yachtswoman who claims to have been attacked by pirates. Nikki makes a mistake during an interception of illegal fishermen, which is interrupted by another mayday from Claire, but redeems herself navigating coral reefs to Claire's last position in uncharted waters. In the last episode of the first season, Tomaszewski admits to Kate that he is attracted to a female federal agent on board. When he asks the XO if she knows if she's single, Kate warns him that she's a 'uni type', leading Buffer to finish her sentence for her: 'so she wouldn't be interested in an uneducated Popeye like me?'

The increasing complexity of relationships aboard dominates the second season. Although Nikki and Josh try to obey the rules and evade censure by Josh accepting a shore posting, he is forced to return to the *Hammersley*, renewing the complications of their proximity. When both partners are endangered their feelings for each other are inevitably revealed to the CO. This occurs in a fraught episode (disingenuously entitled 'Birds') involving investigations into illegal fishing and Asian bird flu and marked by the admission of

other distracting relationships: Kate's and Mike's mutual jealousy when she is attracted to an army officer and he pursues a relationship with a marine biologist. In the fourth episode of the fourth season (entitled 'Ransom'), Kate challenges the captain over his lack of commitment and her desire for marriage and family, while she and the rest of the crew negotiate a faked kidnapping, rescuing a stepdaughter from her criminal father. Against the background of the ongoing but unspoken relationship between the captain and XO, in the fifth episode of the fourth season ('Paradise Lost') the radio operator 'RO' Dixon (Kristian Schmid) scrupulously reports himself to Flynn, because of his 'non-regulation fraternisation' with Bomber. RO's commitment to the Navy is later questioned in season two's fifth episode ('Giving Up the Dead'), when he appears drunk on duty and is suspected of illegal drug use. As he reflects on the likelihood of losing his career, a Navy poster (with the tagline 'INTEGRITY') is visible in his cabin (from the third series onwards, the Navy's stated values – Honour, Honesty, Courage, Integrity, Loyalty – appeared on screen during the opening credits). Similarly, the nature of Kate's commitment to her own career, to the Navy or to the captain comes into question. At the end of the second season as the *Hammersley* is instrumental in preventing the coup attempt in the Samaru Islands (analogous to the RAN's intervention in the Solomon Islands in 2003), Kate receives a tacit promotion when she takes command of the ship in Flynn's absence.[133] Yet she is presented with an emotional dilemma when both the captain and his rival for her affections, SAS captain Jim Roth (Ditch Davey), are both brought back aboard wounded. While they are treated in *Hammersley*'s wardroom, Roth (thought to be unconscious following a concussion) overhears Kate whispering 'please don't die' to Flynn. He reveals that he knows and bids her farewell, apparently tying her fate conclusively to Flynn and the *Hammersley*. Although Kate's and other crew members' commitment to the ship and the captain are frequently restated (as with the transition from *Fremantle*- to *Armidale*-class vessels at the end of the first season), it is the soap-operatic uncertainty of the tension and collaboration, disruptiveness and partnership of the captain's and XO's relationship that permeates the series and provides its melodramatic continuity.

Conclusion: barely a ripple

After the sustained success of *Warship*, the perceived disaster of *Making Waves* stands as a failure of both commercial television production and Royal Navy public relations. Although critical responses to the series were relatively sparse, the contemporary and retrospective reactions to *Making Waves* have agreed in

[133] Anonymous, The Royal Australian Navy and the Restoration of Stability in the Solomon Islands, *Semaphore*, 2005, 13, https://www.navy.gov.au/media-room/publications/semaphore-13-05 [accessed 18 June 2015].

disparaging the project, and itemising and explaining its failure in terms of both accidental and deliberate mistakes in its conception, creation and delivery:

> Unfortunately, despite its comparatively high production values, *Making Waves* suffered from serious scripting and other problems. ITV's lack of faith in the end product was reflected in its decision to hold off broadcasting until the middle of the summer when many people would be away on holiday. *Making Waves* then generated both disappointing reviews and poor audience figures, prompting ITV to withdraw the series from its schedule after only 3 episodes had been broadcast.[134]

Discussing this 'debacle', producer Ted Childs ascribed the series' demise to its delayed and altered scheduling and its denial of adequate promotion and publicity, and to its inability to gain (rather than capacity to lose) viewers when placed in competition with stronger, audience-pleasing programmes (reality television series such as *Supernanny*, broadcast by Channel 4, and *The Long Firm*, an equally expensive but successful BBC2 drama series).[135] If the misfortune of *Making Waves* offers particular insight into both the processes of production and the vagaries of broadcasting for costly commercial television drama projects seeking large and predictable (and potentially international) audiences, it also illuminates retrospectively the accomplishment of *Warship* in reconciling entertainment and recruitment as successfully within the demands of the television and service establishments. S.P. Mackenzie, as one of very few scholars to address either of these series, has produced this verdict on their different features, and fates:

> The success of *Warship*, whether as a recruiting tool or as a means of heightening general public awareness of what the senior service of the 1970s was like, was due in part to the ships and men provided by the Royal Navy. Ultimately, however, audiences were drawn to stories in which hardware featured rather than to the hardware itself … *Warship* had succeeded where *Making Waves* failed because those involved – the multi-talented Ian MacKintosh above all – managed to create varied and interesting characters and plots in which RN frigates and other vessels served as useful backdrops for the action. *Warship*, in short, helped the Royal Navy through a combination of competent writing, acting and direction rather than through simply using its equipment as a showcase. As the *Making Waves* debacle showed, hardware alone, no matter how impressive, could not draw in audiences on a significant scale.[136]

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[134] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, p.121.

[135] Ted Childs, Lost with all hands, *The Guardian*, 16 August 2004, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/aug/16/mondaymediasection8 [accessed 18 June 2015].

[136] Mackenzie, Broadcasting the New Navy, p.121.

Such criticism seems less justifiable when a certain level of visible hardware was clearly necessary for the realism and appeal of the series, and notably the segment most reliant on images of ships at sea (episode four) was never broadcast. Inadequacies of plotting and characterisation, rather than an alleged over-reliance on spectacle and hardware, are isolated as *Making Waves*'s flaws.[137] Although unfortunately Mackenzie's analysis of these British examples does not extend to comparisons with *Sea Patrol*, it is tempting to attribute the Australian series' obvious success to an efficient writing and acting combined with topical storylines, equivalent to *Warship*'s accomplishment in the 1970s despite its clearly different national, commercial and aesthetic contexts. *Sea Patrol* went on to be widely syndicated abroad while *Making Waves* failed to gain a home audience, let alone an international one.[138]

Given the duration and success of Childs's *Soldier Soldier* (seven seasons and 82 episodes over a period of six years), the disappointment of *Making Waves* appears difficult to fathom and easy to ascribe to its specifically naval subject matter, in contrast to the repeatedly successful serial narrative depictions of other uniformed and dutiful communities. It is noticeable that many of the dramatic elements of *Making Waves* are in themselves palpably downbeat, let alone in comparison with the hectic action, emotional intensity but constantly affirming narratives of *Sea Patrol*. Equally, the final episode of what must have been assumed to be just the first series of *Making Waves* ends on the promise of an apparently positive relationship between Rosie and Sobanski unaffected by rank (but still forbidden aboard ship) and the prospect of visually appealing, potentially recruitment-oriented episodes portraying overseas deployment. *Warship* concentrated predominantly on officers, and overwhelmingly on the key relationship of HMS *Hero*'s captain and first lieutenant. Oddly perhaps, in deliberately framing an egalitarian emphasis upon other characters and ranks, *Making Waves* rendered the figure of the captain remote and peripheral to the personal crises, entering only as arbitrator in their final resolution. Whereas in *Warship* lower ranks drove dramatic episodes in terms of below-decks conflicts and confrontations with authority, discipline and efficiency, non-officer characters in *Making Waves* provided the longest and most heightened soap-operatic storylines (in the relationships between Rosie and Sobanski, between Andy and Teresa Fellows and Dave Finnan, in Andy's death, and Dave's imprisonment and release). *Warship*'s conflicts in 'officer country' sprang from the contradictions of service and tradition – Beaumont's family connections, Nialls's command style and Timothy Penn's political and ideological opposition to the Navy as culture and community. By contrast, the potentially radical figure of Jenny

[137] Hyland, Drowned at Berth.

[138] Anonymous, Nine Network's Sea Patrol Snapped Up by Hallmark Channel to Air in Over 100 Territories Throughout the World, *Nine Network Media Release*, 19 April 2007, https://www.pblmedia.com.au/Images/pblmediaimages/Document/Sea_Patrol_Broadcast_Deal_Media_Release.pdf [accessed 14 April 2010].

Howard performs an additional conservative function in embodying the family traditions of a naval career. By comparison, the other male officer characters remain only partially developed: Lewis is an incompetent martinet and Quatermaine's motivations in his relationship with Anita Cook are never adequately explained. Overall, and (almost) entirely positively, it is the female characters that dominate *Making Waves*, registering the importance of significant change within the Navy's personnel. The series therefore importantly extends in dramatic form the representation (and controversy) of women in the Navy and at sea, which received documentary treatment in *HMS Brilliant* (BBC, 1995) (see Chapter 6).

Despite its strong resemblances to *Warship* (as in starting the series, establishing the frigate as setting and introducing the new captain as an ambitious figure by presenting the *Suffolk* as a ship to be fixed), *Making Waves* differs in tone from *Warship* (and indeed *Sea Patrol*). All three present service life for all ranks and for male and female personnel as riven with contradictions and difficulties, and all three series share a necessarily narrow focus on a select few crew members, but whereas (from a 21st-century perspective) the outdated and conservative class- and gender-cohesion of *Warship*'s male officers nonetheless manages to acknowledge a service in active and positive transition, the crew of HMS *Suffolk* appears to embody a range of dramatically fertile but often pessimistically presented differences. However, in terms of *Making Waves*'s failure these aspects are not noticeably inconsistent with the emotional and professional crises portrayed in other successful serial uniformed dramas. This communal and environmental difference is all the more marked in comparison with the (albeit conspicuously circumscribed) diversity of the Australian Navy crew in *Sea Patrol*. Aboard HMAS *Hammersley*, interpersonal and heterosexual relationships and individual problems are abidingly successfully resolved alongside each episode's iteration of the ship's national duty. The inevitable dramatic involvement of the crew members in the individual episodes' drivers (ecological concerns, border protection and immigration, disaster relief, criminal investigations, and terrorism) is redeemed (often like the characters themselves) by their participation in the resolution of these personal and professional drivers (for example, explicitly in episodes such as 'Through the Storm' and 'Giving Up the Dead'). However, perhaps the success of *Sea Patrol* is most straightforwardly attributable to its accomplished integration of the demands and expectations of popular television drama with the specificities of its naval subject, and vice versa. The necessary emphasis upon the incarnations of personal and cultural identity in these drama series' representations of national institutions can be compared with Alexandria Innes's interpretation of British soap operas' conscious concretisation of topical debates on ethnicity, cultural diversity and immigration.[139] In comparison with *Making Waves, Sea*

[139] Alexandria J. Innes, Everyday Ontological Security: Emotion and Migration in British Soaps, *International Political Sociology*, 2017, 11, 380–397.

Patrol appears particularly successful in this regard, mitigating conservative national immigration policy with humane crew responses to such storylines. Similarly, seen as a soap opera, *Sea Patrol* evinces the successful combination of the emotionally universal and the nationally specific that Graeme Turner attributes to Australian serial dramas.[140] Its overt nationalistic and celebratory tone does not need to make concessions to sea-blindness or lack of knowledge about the armed services in its audience, in contrast to *Making Waves*'s conspicuous insertion of Falklands history and Fleet Air Arm heritage within the context of the fictional crew's own ignorance. In the long term, the impact of the *Making Waves* may be felt not so much in the lack of any similar naval drama since its premature demise but in the comparative proliferation of naval documentaries in the same period.

[140] Graeme Turner, Cultural Diversity, Soap Narrative, and Reality TV, *Television and New Media*, 2005, 6(4), 415–422, p.417.

CHAPTER 4

Techno-documentaries of the New Navy

The consideration of naval representation within factual television and drama has so far concentrated on the production, reception and detail of sustained series. This chapter addresses different examples of televisual coverage of current naval issues, with one stand-alone documentary – *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* (Channel 4, 2010) – and one episode within a wider defence- and technology-oriented series devoted to a naval subject, *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine* (BBC2, 2010). In these examples, the emphasis upon people and crews in naval documentary is balanced against the concentration on and celebration of the Navy's most up-to-date hardware. However, negative publicity associated with the newest additions to the fleet appears to have inspired or required a remedial form of documentary, combining the technological focus with the human story of overcoming difficulties in a televisual diary format. After nearly a decade of reappraisal of the role and viability of Britain's armed forces, and in the tense climate of the 2010 Strategic Defence Review, two of the Navy's most important and expensive construction programmes gained prominent televisual representation in this hybrid documentary form. The design, building and testing of the new Type 45 *Daring*-class destroyers (Figure 4.1) and *Astute*-class submarines were revealed to the public with considerable candour in these two programmes.

The goal of public relations was served in these examples by adopting the form of revelatory documentaries, shot over lengthy periods of time as the projects progressed, in order to divulge both the difficulties and their solutions behind tabloid accusations of endless delay and spiralling cost.[141] Although

[141] The Ministry of Defence's own data on both projects recorded their 'variances' from original plans and estimates. The Type 45 exhibited a 29% variance (i.e. increase) in price and a 42-month variance (i.e. delay) in time. The *Astute* displayed 48% price and 47-month variances. The National Audit Office, Ministry of Defence Major Projects Report 2008 (London: HMSO, 2008), pp.26–28.

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Figure 4.1: HMS *Daring*. PO PHOT Ray Jones, 2016. UK MOD © Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

both projects had begun several years earlier, by the time of the television programmes' airing in 2010, debates about defence spending and controversies over reductions in the size of the Navy had become topical again with the ongoing Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR 2010).[142]

Although they spotlight specifically naval and topical matters, these programmes converge with contemporary factual television in style and subject. Where some contemporary and more recent series giving concerted coverage of naval subjects can be seen to occupy some of the overlapping textual, ideological and entertainment territories in popular culture, labelled as 'reality TV' or 'docusoap' (see Chapters 5 and 6), science- and technology-based documentaries summarising and visualising challenges of design, engineering and construction reflect the rise of hybrid 'infotainment' in global commercial television. As a term, 'infotainment' ('a portmanteau word of "information" and "entertainment"'[143]) refers to an 'explicit genre-mix' in news and current affairs programming.[144] Therefore, though the term has been related

[142] HM Government, Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review (London: HMSO, 2010).

[143] Lukas Otto, Isabella Glogger and Mark Boukes, The Softening of Journalistic Political Communication: A Comprehensive Framework Model of Sensationalism, Soft News, Infotainment, and Tabloidization, *Communication Theory*, 2017, 27, 136–155, p.144.

[144] Daya Kishan Thussu, *News as Entertainment: The Rise of Global Infotainment* (London: Sage, 2007), p.7.

most frequently to simplified or sensationalised news coverage, it has also been very broadly defined and applied across a scale or spectrum of current affairs and entertainment programming (including talk shows or coverage of celebrities and lifestyles).[145] A highly formulaic, globalised and hybrid form of documentary for which the infotainment neologism is especially apt is popular science or engineering series. These provide a combination of untaxing and entertaining factual treatments for lay audiences, explicatory voice-overs and/or expert or celebrity presenters, illustrative animations and computer graphics, and reality television techniques in observing modern workplaces. Such series (for example, *World's Biggest Shipbuilders*, Discovery Channel, 2013) function as a commercialisation of previous generations of public information programming, with their depiction of globalised industries and multinational corporations matching their international syndication. In Richard Kilborn's appraisal of generic categorisation and increasing hybridisation of programme types within factual television, this form of 'popular documentary' is grouped with 'infotainment' on the basis of its 'engagement with real-life subjects' being 'kept at quite a superficial level'.[146] The criticism implied in Kilborn's description, suggesting that an emphasis on entertainment leads to diminution of documentary inquiry into a given subject, represents more than elitist expectation for popular television. The rise of infotainment in news and current affairs coverage and the perceived consequences for public access to comprehensive and reliable information hold relevance for the robustness of representative democracies. The spread of infotainment from America to Europe in the late 1990s has been linked with changes in broadcasting legislation and with 'the level of political knowledge and participation in and, more generally, with the quality of the democratic system'.[147] However, in its displacing of traditional documentary and representing a burgeoning majority of popular factual programming, 'supporters of popular communications paradigms have tended to valorise the rise of infotainment, suggesting it expands and democratises the public sphere'.[148] The role and the format of 'infotainment' within a varied but over-populated reality television environment, where more traditional documentary forms have been absorbed, adapted or perhaps usurped, therefore require examination.

Numerous versions of the popular 'infotainment' programme or series provide comparisons for *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* and *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine*, on the basis of their long-term scrutiny

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[145] Kees Brants and Peter Niejens, The Infotainment of Politics, *Political Communication*, 1998, 15, 149–164.

[146] Richard Kilborn, *Staging the real: Factual TV programming in the age of Big Brother* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.11.

[147] Kees Brants, Who's Afraid of Infotainment, *European Journal of Communication*, 1998, 13(3), 315–335, p.317.

[148] Thussu, *News as Entertainment*, p.7.

and narrativisation of extraordinary design and engineering challenges. The occurrence of these two closely contemporary and specifically British naval-focused examples, charting and explaining the progress of landmark national projects central to the future of the Royal Navy, prompts analysis of their representation and address within this context of hybrid factual entertainment. For comparison of style and subject matter, *Impossible Engineering* (2015–20) is an international co-production involving five companies in Europe and North America, broadcast by Discovery Television in the United States and Yesterday in the UK. In total the series has run to nearly 50 episodes across seven seasons addressing the engineering and technical challenges of constructing bridges, ships, airports, skyscrapers, tunnels, airliners, spacecraft, trains, dams, stadiums, canals, oil rigs and record-breaking vehicles.[149] One of the earliest episodes in the first season addressed warship construction with the story of the building of the Royal Navy's latest and largest aircraft carrier. *Impossible Engineering: Ultimate Warship HMS Queen Elizabeth* (2015) epitomises the series' formulaic approach. Location shooting of the construction process (Figure 4.2) is supplemented by computer graphics and archive footage.

Simplified demonstrations (provided by scientists, engineers or academics) or diagrammatic representations of scientific problems and principles, are punctuated by a voice-over narration replete with superlatives and hyperbole. The ship is described breathlessly as 'not only the largest warship ever produced in the UK. It's also one of the most innovative in the world'; 'a ship of record-breaking proportions'; and 'a giant piece of impossible engineering' with 'an on board power station generating enough electricity to power the equivalent of a large town'. A frequently repeated animation segmenting each episode shows a computer graphic rendering of the programme's subject being continually assembled and disassembled, to explain the function and lineage of each scientific or engineering innovation. An accompanying ticking clock counts years backwards and forwards through the history of development, providing a progressive, predestinate link between previous inventions and present obstacles. Archive footage presented by a diagrammatic frame reminiscent of an engineering design or blueprint structures this 'inspiration from the past' as the basis for new application and innovation.

In order to explain the new ship as both a natural progression from the past and a futuristic marvel, *Queen Elizabeth*'s lineage is established within a brief history of naval aviation. The voice-over explains: 'It's now more than a century since man [sic] took his first tentative, pioneering steps towards creating the phenomena [sic] of the aircraft carrier.' Archive footage identifies the World War I ancestor HMS *Argus* with uninterrupted flight deck, and the World War II precedent of the mass-produced American *Essex* class: by comparison

[149] Two spin-off series of *Impossible Trains* (2018–19) add another 12 episodes.

Figure 4.2: HMS *Queen Elizabeth* under construction. Photo copyright Chris Terrill. Used with permission.

with *Argus,* '*Queen Elizabeth* is twice as long and three times as wide'. However, the present-day challenges of building the Royal Navy's new carriers require the verbal transformation (and obfuscation) of inhibiting industrial realities into an exceptional technological solution. Engineer Stuart Justice admits in interview: 'No one company within the UK had the capability to be able to actually design and construct the aircraft carrier.' The voice-over therefore poses its own rhetorical question: 'So how could this monster feat of impossible engineering actually be accomplished? The solution: three different companies would form a ground-breaking collaboration.' Without investigation of the repercussions (in delays, inefficiencies and costs) that this arrangement entails (and which *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* and *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine* probe in their records of similar projects), *Impossible Engineering* in this case merely celebrates this 'unique method of construction'. (*Impossible Engineering: Ford Class Aircraft Carrier* from series four similarly bypasses the major

technological obstacles encountered in the development and construction of the world's most expensive warship.)[150]

Subsequent episodes of *Impossible Engineering* portraying naval construction follow this congratulatory pattern. In an episode from series three in 2018, both variants of the US Navy's highly unusual (and controversial) littoral combat ships are depicted. Emphasising the unprecedented aspects of their design as well as celebrating their technological innovations again allows the programme to sidestep the controversies of these vessels' procurement, cost, employment and functional effectiveness.[151] In series two, *Impossible Engineering: US Navy's Super Submarine* (2016) follows the building of the *Virginia*-class USS *Colorado*. This vessel is hailed as a 'technological titan as long as 26 family cars', displacing '7,800 tonnes, equivalent to forty blue whales'. This episode provides a similar potted history of the submarine, with time-lapse sequences of the sectional modular construction and launch of the newest nuclear submarine juxtaposed with comical cell animations of the earliest submarine experiments. A rapid and varied assembly of lessons and examples from the past are interspersed in this narrative: Bushnell's *Turtle* is examined at the Gosport Submarine Museum in the UK; experts at the Webb Institute of Marine Engineering in New York explain the 'teardrop' hull shape of USS *Albacore*; filming at the Royal Navy's hyperbaric test unit in Portsmouth exposes the problem of maintaining a breathable atmosphere. At the episode's conclusion, a renewed chorus of overstatement cements the submarine's technological triumph: the voice-over trumpets the 'super-flexible maritime marvel … pushing nautical boundaries'. Again, in celebrating new manifestations of scientific and engineering prowess, it repeatedly stresses that 'none would have been possible without the groundbreaking innovators of the past'. The series' refrain echoed at the conclusion of each programme reinforces its positivist technological narrative with a rhetorical flourish: 'the engineers, designers and workers constructing the *Virginia* class are making history. They've succeeded in making the impossible, possible.'

The *Impossible Engineering* model epitomises the hybrid factual entertainment format, providing a diverting and informative amalgam of documentary and simplified popular science and engineering. Although experts and participants in the represented projects are portrayed, their roles are limited to circumscribed and positivist cause-and-effect (or problem-and-solution)

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[150] Elizabeth Elizalde, Navy's $13.2 billion aircraft carrier still experiencing problems, *New York Post*, 10 January 2021, https://www.nypost.com/2021/01/10/uss-gerald-r-ford-still-experiencing-problems/ [accessed 26 April 2022].

[151] Christopher P. Cavas, LCS: Quick Swap Concept Dead, *Defense News*, 14 July 2012, http://www.defensenews.com/article/20120714/DEFREG02/307140001/LCS-Quick-Swap-Concept-Dead [accessed 6 May 2022]; Tony Capaccio, Littoral combat ships see new delivery delays, Navy says, *Stars and Stripes*, 9 May 2013, http://www.stripes.com/littoral-combat-ships-see-new-delivery-delays-navy-says-1.220267 [accessed 6 May 2022].

explanations of circumstances, innovations and applications that overcome the allegedly insuperable obstacles. The auspices under which the projects being documented began, the needs or interests they serve, alternatives that might have been explored or tried unsuccessfully and their impact over a lifetime remain largely unaddressed once the problems have been overcome and the projects completed. Occasionally the connection presented between problem and solution may seem conceptual or even tenuous: inventor Isaac Peral's development of lead-acid battery power as a form of propulsion not requiring air for combustion is linked to the development of nuclear propulsion for submarine before being associated with USS *Gerald R. Ford*'s reactors; the innovation of afterburning in jet engines predates by decades the requirement of *Ford*'s aircraft for additional thrust for take-off. The brisk tour each programme undertakes in charting the obstacles to and solutions for scientific and engineering advancement creates an illustrated magazine of miniature case studies, cumulatively answering each streamlined question within the larger 'impossible' project. Human involvement in these projects is limited to privileging exceptional individuals (past inventors and present-day project leaders and architects) and experts, presenters or academics acting effectively as teachers or demonstrators.

By contrast, the Canadian Discovery Channel series *Mighty Ships* (2008–present) combines illustrated explicatory portraits of technologically advanced or unusual vessels with focused documentary records of ships' crews and their work environments, in a splicing of concentrated docusoap and popular documentary. Over a current total of 10 series and 62 episodes, the series' infotainment package has documented ships and shipboard communities at work, depicting civilian and military ships, their design aspects and day-to-day operations. The series utilises extensive location shooting supported by computer graphics but also explicitly narrativises events with foregrounded (or even manufactured) time pressures, and stressing dangers, tests and obstacles that crews must face with additional music and conspicuous editing. In total the series has covered a multitude of international seafaring subjects, including freighters, icebreakers, cable layers, container ships, car and livestock carriers, diving and research ships.[152]

Portraits of naval ships and Coast Guard vessels have composed only nine episodes, with seven of these being American. The first warship subjects appear in the second season, with the fourth episode following the aircraft carrier USS *Nimitz* returning to service after refit and nuclear refuelling and preparing for active deployment to the war in Afghanistan, and the fifth portraying the Danish warship HDMS *Absalon* leading the international anti-piracy patrol off the coast of Somalia. In the third season, the Trident missile submarine

[152] The '*Mighty*' franchise also includes series documenting other types of transport and technology in operation, including four seasons of *Mighty Planes* (2012–17) and four of *Mighty Trains* (2016–21).

USS *Kentucky* is recorded at sea on deterrent patrol, and in the fifth season the *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyer USS *Gravely* is filmed on trials soon after completion. In keeping with the series' manufactured aura of 'high stakes, high seas, high drama', *Mighty Ships* creates tension and advertising-break cliffhangers through stress upon obstacles, deadlines and difficulties that the ships' crews have to overcome.[153] With the warship subjects, these spectacles are provided by accompanying the subjects during intensified training (including live-firing of weapons), as seen in the episodes depicting USS *Nimitz*, USS *Gravely*, HDMS *Peter Willemoes* and USS *New York*. Aside from commanding officers, crew members with varying tasks and ranks are also interviewed to provide the necessary but limited insight into the ships' roles and functions. However, the series' tendency to instead resemble reality television or docusoap in its exploitation of minor crises is most discernible in its depiction of the travails of cruise ships' companies and their passengers, spawning the spin-off series *Mighty Cruise Ships* (2014).

While *Impossible Engineering* and *Mighty Ships* provide analogies to the subject coverage of *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* and *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine*, the comparisons between these versions of contemporary documentary reveal important divergences. As part of a themed series, *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine* provides an unusually multifaceted examination of the naval, industrial and social communities involved in the construction of the *Astute* class, rather than simply the technical challenges the programme presents. As a stand-alone documentary, *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* provides a sustained scrutiny of technical, personal and political circumstances that also encompasses a broader consideration of the Royal Navy's culture and history.

Daring to bare: *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship*

Building Britain's Ultimate Warship follows the lead ship HMS *Daring* (Figure 4.3) through design, construction, launching, trials and acceptance into service, compressing several years' work and filming into a 90-minute slot. It is an ITN Factual production written and directed by Jeremy Llewellyn-Jones, who has worked on many factual, historical and current affairs programmes since the 1970s.[154] These included acting as director or producer of episodes of *Nova* for PBS in the United States, *Equinox* and *Cutting Edge* for Channel 4,

[153] Anonymous, Seventh Heaven! Discovery's Worldwide Hit MIGHTY SHIPS Drops Anchor for Season 7, Nov 10, *Bell News Media*, 18 October 2013, https://www.bellmedia.ca/the-lede/press/seventh-heaven-discoverys-worldwide-hit-mighty-ships-drops-anchor-for-season-7-nov-10/ [accessed 21 April 2022].

[154] Since no narrator is credited for *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship*, it is possible the voice-over may have been provided by Jeremy Llewelyn-Jones himself.

Figure 4.3: HMS *Daring*, the first Type 45 destroyer. PO PHOT Ray Jones, 2016. © Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

and *QED* and *Forty Minutes* for the BBC. He also contributed to the technologically focused construction series *Megastructures* (National Geographic, 2004–present) and acted as series producer for military documentaries featuring veteran interviews alongside historical re-enactments such as *D-Day to Victory* (Impossible Pictures/Entertainment One, 2011) and *World War II: The Last Heroes* (Impossible Pictures, 2011). For *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship*, interviews with *Daring*'s designers, commanders and complement are integrated with historical details (such as the mixed fates of previous bearers of the name *Daring*), operational factors (the necessary enhancement to the fleet's capabilities that the Type 45 represents) and institutional concerns (the controversies associated with the budgeting and scheduling of the programme and taking untried technology to sea).[155]

Underlying the programme is a recognition of the tension between tradition and innovation, between previous certainties and present circumstances affecting the Navy, which become distilled in its voice-over commentary. Opening the programme, a sequence of white capitalised titles on a funereal black background (and accompanied by almost melancholy music) establishes this tone: 'THE ROYAL NAVY IS ONE OF BRITAIN'S OLDEST INSTITUTIONS … IT'S STEEPED IN HISTORY … BATTLE HONOURS … TRADITION … NOW IT'S CREATING A NEW DESTROYER, BUILT TO BE THE WORLD'S BEST.' Introducing aerial views of the new ship at sea, the voice-over continues to strike a cautious rather than celebratory note on both modern technological advancement and the influence of long-standing national and naval culture:

> This is HMS *Daring*, the first new destroyer built in Britain since 1985. *Daring* is one of six new destroyers that are a quantum leap forward in naval technology. As an island nation, Britain emerged as a world power by taming and controlling the seas. Britain's role in the world is diminished, but the Royal Navy still feels it can influence the four corners of the globe. With old and outmoded ships standing guard over our shores, the Navy needs defence for the twenty-first century, with a ship that's new, with technology that's never been to sea. How will this ancient institution adjust to the modern world?

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[155] For official statements on the origins, costs, delays and outcomes of the *Daring* construction programme, see National Audit Office, Providing Anti-Air Warfare Capability: the Type 45 Destroyer (London: HMSO, 2009); House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, Ministry of Defence: Type 45 Destroyer (London: HMSO, 2009). The reduction of the Type 45 programme from 12 (as specified in the Strategic Defence Review 1998) to eight, to finally just six ships raised questions about cost and overall capability even within the government itself: House of Commons Defence Committee, Defence Equipment 2010 (London: HMSO, 2010), pp.27–29.

A more atypical introduction to a popular documentary, eschewing the expected technological positivism and foregrounding doubt in the present and the burden of the past, is difficult to imagine. The uneasy emphasis placed on tradition and transition at this and other points within *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* contrasts with the celebration of institutional history in an American production documenting the construction of the US Navy's analogous *Arleigh Burke*-class ships. *Destroyer: Forged in Steel* (Discovery, 2004) (broadcast in re-edited form in the UK as *Building a 21st Century Warship*) presents a narrative of construction, delivery and testing comparable to the Channel 4 documentary. It portrays a history of both tradition and advancement in the *Burke* destroyer programme (contrasting today's computer-assisted design process with the original hand-drawn blueprints of the first ship, launched in the 1980s), as well as the cultural history of the shipbuilders themselves (Bath Iron Works in Maine 'on the Kennebec river, and a rocky coast steeped in maritime history', where new ships sail past the Civil War-era Fort Popham on their way to the sea). Echoing *Mighty Ships* and *Impossible Engineering*, the programme describes the *Burke*-class destroyers as 'one of the most advanced and lethal warships ever … a modern engineering marvel and an heir to a hundred years of shipbuilding heritage'. The high technology facilitating and incorporated into the long-running construction programme is contrasted with highly traditional skills and job titles (blacksmiths, anglesmiths and shipfitters), with each ship being described as 'hand-built … by the sweat and skill of an expert team of shipbuilders, through four years of back-breaking work'. Although (solvable) problems do emerge on the trials of USS *Chafee*, the *Burke* and Bath Iron Works are therefore championed as proud fusions of tradition and modernity.

Past, present and future are not so seamlessly melded in the case of the *Daring*. Throughout *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship*, the affirmation of progress is counterbalanced by emphasis upon tradition, resulting in an ironic recognition of the Navy's history of technical innovation: 'More than 70% of the key equipment in *Daring* and the other Type 45 destroyers is completely new. The Navy thinks they are as groundbreaking as the evolution from sail to steam.' However, the celebration of the ships' construction remains inseparable from their contemporary context. This is noted during a later sequence detailing a port visit to Liverpool in 2009 that reemphasises the economic and political moment of such a high-profile defence programme. This is introduced sceptically by the voice-over as 'all part of a PR exercise to let the public see how the defence budget is spent. The £6 billion total [for all six ships] represents a fraction of the cost of bailing out British banks, but the Navy still thinks it should explain where the money's gone.' In parallel to this constant consciousness of present justification more than explanation within the documentary address, the programme's observation of the project's progress maintains awareness of potential technological fallibility as well as the mixed blessing of cultural inheritance. In an extended exposition, the programme first establishes its own observational credentials in following *Daring*'s construction with narration

('Since 2004 we've had special access to watch and analyse the whole process, as the Royal Navy overturns tradition to embrace the computer generation') and image (screens showing the computer-assisted design and a CGI-simulation of the new ships escorting future aircraft carriers). These give way to long shots of shipyard cranes and workers at dawn and the verbal assurance that 'we'll watch the shipbuilders come to terms with building a modern warship, new skills alongside traditional jobs.' The soundtrack assumes a more martial and triumphal tone to accompany images of *Daring*'s crew parading on joining their ship, before the exposition ends with a tantalising foretaste of the documentary's final spectacle: 'We'll watch as the captain leads his crew into action stations, the reality of life in the Navy, and war … It's the closest thing to real battle.' Dramatic shots of the ship engaged in realistic exercises precede a fade to black. The voice-over's adoption of the plural first person pronoun in this exposition is notable. It could suggest that the 'we' that observes specifies the documentary makers' interrogative gaze, which is subsequently gifted to the audience, or that the 'we' encompasses the audience too from the outset, uniting responsible viewer and committed maker in scrutiny of a publicly significant project. Either interpretation underlines a journalistic imperative more than the provision of spectacle, despite the promise and preview of climactic action.

The fade-up from this opening therefore positions the remainder of the documentary essentially as a flashback that then progresses towards the ship's completion. This narrative organisation is signalled explicitly by the voice-over: 'Our story in *Daring*'s life starts in March 2003.' The programme's representation of *Daring*'s building process does not entirely avoid contemporary tendencies towards accessibility and simplification: the complex modular programme spread over several sites is described as involving 'over 10,000 contractors' in 'the ultimate in mega-Lego construction', while time-lapse sequences depict the assembly of the massive sub-structures deck by deck and section by section. However, as with *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine*, a sustained emphasis is placed upon recalling a cultural history of British shipbuilding. *Daring* is noted (somewhat anxiously, given the physical constraints of the Clyde) to be the largest ship ever launched at the Scotstoun yard, which, nonetheless, as 'the spiritual home of shipbuilding' is celebrated as 'a fitting birthplace'. Shots of the iconic (and markedly no longer used) shipbuilding cranes on the Clyde are contrasted with massive sheds at Portsmouth and Scotstoun where the Type 45's component modules are built and assembled. The modular process is illustrated with an extended time-lapse sequence. While the verbal description of this modern construction method is intensified to match the visual stylisation ('Giant steel boxes are hoisted into position and welded together to make up the thirteen deck layers. It takes six hundred men and women working in shifts day and night to keep the construction on schedule'), the individualisation of this process reintroduces the emphasis upon continuities of tradition and community. Before he is identified by an official title – 'Ross McClure BAE Systems' – this specific participant is distinguished for other reasons by the voice-over:

'Some things in shipbuilding never change. Generation following generation into the yards. Like his brother, Ross McClure has worked on the Clyde since he was a 16-year-old apprentice. His sons are following in his footsteps.' This explicit insertion of local and familial heritage accompanies an unprecedented technological and engineering challenge: the installation of *Daring*'s unique electric motors, which test the limits of the shed's cranes.

The presentation of *Daring*'s 'integrated electric propulsion system' resembles the informative approach of less demanding popular documentary. The ship's chief engineer, Lieutenant Commander Julian Lowe, is compared to 'Scotty from *Star Trek*'. The ship's generating power of 46 megawatts is 'scaled' for the audience's comprehension as sufficient to 'keep the lights on in Coventry or Leicester'. Lowe explains, 'it's a large power station, essentially'. In contrast to the uncertainty with which *Daring*'s innovations are noted elsewhere in the documentary, the marine engineering officer is a confident advocate of the Navy's history of technological advancement:

> The Royal Navy's always been on the front foot, it's always been introducing new technologies, and this is just another example of where we're leading the world, really. If you think back: ironclads, introduction of steam propulsion at sea – the point is we've always been world leaders.

The voice-over still manages to strike an equivocal note: 'Gone are the days of soot-covered stokers shovelling coal. This is the clean environment of modern gas turbines and electric motors – but it's still deafening.' Similarly, Commander David Shutts, the first naval representative aboard *Daring* during her fitting out, explains to camera the excitement of being assigned to this revolutionary vessel:

> It's a once in a career opportunity … To get the first of class, to get HMS *Daring* is simply the icing on this particular cake for me. The technical problems associated with a brand-new ship are technical problems – they will be resolved – but to be part of that first crew, to set that ethos, and that tone, and that fighting spirit that will underpin this warship …!

As crew members come aboard and remark on the extra space in passageways and the 'airier' environment compared to the 'dank' old Type 42 destroyers, the change from the past is again reluctantly welcomed by the voice-over. The recognition of the differences ('It's as if sailors' living conditions have been taken seriously for the first time. No more 50 or 75-man messes: all the rates inhabit 6-person berthing compartments') is followed by a stark shot of and wry comment on an uninhabited berthing space: 'Things must have been pretty bad on previous ships if they think these cabins are spacious.'

This critical perspective on the Navy's cultures of tradition and innovation is explored concertedly in an earlier sequence which invokes *Daring*'s

predecessors in order to contextualise (if not necessarily justify) the need for the new ships. Shots of the fleet's surviving Type 42 destroyers in Portsmouth, described as 'showing their age', but which 'evolved from the best technology of their time' are followed by a cut to an unmistakable symbol of naval identity: the white ensign. Through the subsequent summary of the Navy's own past (accompanying shots of the modern *Daring* at sea), the tone of the voice-over fluctuates, by turns assuming a celebratory, elegiac and critical phrasing in charting the role of the Navy in war and empire in previous centuries, and voicing doubts about capability or relevance in the present:

> For hundreds of years the Royal Navy has sailed the world's oceans, protecting British interests abroad. The Navy was crucial to building the only truly global empire and establishing colonies in all four corners of the world. Until the Second World War, the Royal Navy was the biggest, best equipped and most capable on the high seas.

Following commentary on the Royal Navy's supremacy from the 17th to the 20th centuries, the apotheosis of its power during the Napoleonic Wars and its subordination to the US Navy in World War II, the voice-over ushers in a more specific naval history with a reiteration of loss and doubt: 'Naval victories like Trafalgar might be written into the legend of great sea battles, but more recent history reveals a catalogue of uncertainty in committing to new technology at sea.' The discourse of risk in both technology and conflict is wedded to a simultaneously melancholy and celebratory treatment of tradition with the following illustrated timeline showing the six previous HMS *Daring*s.[156] These ships embody a representative (and apparently inseparable) history of technical invention and human loss. The first *Daring* 'ran aground off west Africa in 1813' and 'was scuttled to prevent capture by the French'; the second served in the Atlantic and Caribbean for more than 20 years; the third, serving in China and the Pacific, combined steam and sail and an iron hull sheathed in teak and copper; the fourth, an early destroyer, was built in London and 'briefly hailed as the fastest ship ever'; the fifth was the first destroyer sunk by a U-boat in World War II, and 'almost all of her crew perished'; the sixth is remembered for humanitarian work following a Greek earthquake in 1953. From this catalogue of global commitment (which appears to stress sacrifice and danger rather than valorising underlying national or imperial history), the present *Daring* is reintroduced by a cut before the detailing of the most recent history inspiring the design of the Type 45 – the performance of the preceding Type 42s in the Gulf Wars (and losses in the Falklands) – underlines the definition and requirement

[156] This narrative of the previous ships to bear the name *Daring* is paralleled by a brief illustrated 'Unit history' of HMS *Daring* on the Navy's own website. Anonymous, HMS *Daring* (D32), *Royal Navy*, https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/our-organisation/the-fighting-arms/surface-fleet/destroyers/hms-daring [accessed 9 May 2022].

for the new class's capabilities. The replacements for Navy's previous destroyers (described as 'designed before the internet and the mobile phone') must be conceived 'with the computer generation in mind'.

Just as its earlier use of the first person plural implied communal investigative scrutiny, the voice-over's wary attribution of motive or mindset to the institutional subject ('The Navy still thinks…', 'The Navy needs…', 'The Navy feels…') suggests a persisting doubtful distance towards the construction project and the wider national objectives it allegedly serves. A similar need for examination and evidence registers in the voice-over's description of the public relations exercise the Navy must address in convincing its own sailors. Interviewed on the bridge as the ship heads through rough weather to replenish at sea, Captain Paddy McAlpine explains the needs of the 21st-century recruit:

> The young sailor that joins the Navy today is a higher calibre than those that have gone in the past. I think they're more educated, a great many of them have done higher education. There are a number of able seamen on board with degrees, and they need better management, better leadership … They need to understand what they're doing and why they're doing it. They need to understand why the Navy needs a Type 45 and why the UK needs to have a Royal Navy.

This articulation of the Navy's apparent consciousness of the need to educate its own personnel as much as inform the public (and in parallel justify its roles, costs and existence to both) is voiced just before the new ship engages in its most exacting tests. The war simulation that serves as the documentary's climax highlights the vulnerability of the ship's new technology but also provides a compensatory vindication of traditional skills and values. In the operations room as the exercise begins, a montage of shots shows the radar picture compilers, and sudden zooms-in on the displays as the voice-over describes the environment ironically in the language of the contemporary 'computer generation': 'On a quiet day it's like a call centre: today it's more end-of-pier arcade, packed with people huddled around dozens of screens.' Yet it is precisely the new technology, the 'computer power that's a radical step forward', which is seen to let the ship down:

> Just at the crucial moment, the computer-controlled command and combat management system crashes and screens freeze. Suddenly the ship has no ears and eyes. The crew reverts to old technology that would make Nelson proud: binoculars out of the bridge windows. The computer crash isn't a simulation – it's for real.[157]

[157] In subsequent years of service, power outages and propulsion failures have frequently affected the *Daring*-class destroyers, and required extensive and costly remedial work; Ben Farmer, £1bn HMS Dauntless abandons training exercise after technical

Figure 4.4: HMS *Daring* manoeuvres at speed. 2009. Royal Navy. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

Following this moment of both failure and success on exercise, the documentary ends in maintaining its mixed and equivocal observations on innovation and tradition, the Navy's painful past and the country's uncertain future. Alongside scenes of *Daring*'s crew disembarking and forming ranks on the quayside, the voice-over affirms that: 'history and tradition stand comfortably alongside the new technology that dominates most people's lives' but also recalls that: 'the loss of so many ships and men in the Falklands war haunts the Royal Navy. At last, it thinks it has the ship that should make sure it never pays such a heavy price again' (Figure 4.4). Interspersed with conclusive interview comments from Captain McAlpine, still averring the positive, revolutionary potential of the Type 45 for the Navy, the final images of *Daring* at sea frame some final, fundamental, but ultimately unanswerable questions of the construction programme and of national defence itself:

trouble, *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 February 2014, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/defence/10656958/1bn-HMS-Dauntless-abandons-training-exercise-after-power-trouble.html [accessed 9 May 2022]; Jonathan Beale, Type 45 destroyers: UK's £1bn warships face engine refit, *BBC News*, 29 January 2016, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-35432341 [accessed 9 May 2022]; Anonymous, Royal Navy warship heads for repairs after four years in port, *BBC News*, 15 September 2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-58571232 [accessed 9 May 2022].

> While some feel spending on defence is wasteful, the Navy thinks its new ships are needed more than ever because our world is changing so quickly. No one can know for certain if these ships are a hangover from outdated Cold War thinking or will be more relevant than anyone dare contemplate.

(Learning again) *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine* (BBC2, 2010)

How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine was aired as the first in a three-part series of technological exposés. Given the mystique and secrecy attached to virtually all aspects of the construction and capabilities of nuclear submarines, the programme's subject would appear to offer substantial scope for exaggeration and hyperbole. However, the documentary also emphasises more mundane realities of the building programme (and the importance of its continuation in the lives of shipyard employees) and other unexpected challenges (the need to repair the channel and sea gate that the new submarine would have to negotiate after launching). While the second programme in the series centres on civilian aviation (*How to Build… a Jumbo Jet Engine*), the final programme (*Britain's Secret Engineers*) concentrates on another controversial military project: the preparation of Chinook helicopters for operations in Afghanistan by the defence contractor QinetiQ. The programme's record of the complex overhaul and improvement of the aircraft, following engineers working within a highly demanding schedule, obscures (or rather omits to clarify) the impetus for the project in the first place. The helicopters involved are eight RAF Chinook aircraft held in storage, which require rapid and extensive modification and upgrading (referred to euphemistically as 'reversion') in order to be able meet the 'demanding operational needs' of deployment to Afghanistan.[158] Given shortages in aircraft following losses of helicopters in accidents and in combat, and the need for air transport for British ground forces to avoid roadside IEDs, the unserviceability of part of the RAF's fleet of Chinooks represents both a danger and an embarrassment.[159] While stressing the urgent need for the helicopters, this episode celebrates the technicians' efforts and highlights the extraordinary capabilities the aircraft would possess.

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[158] Madonna Walsh, Modified Boeing Chinook Mk3 Successfully Completes 1st Test Flight, *Boeing Defence UK Communications*, 7 July 2009, https://boeing.mediaroom.com/2009-07-07-Modified-Boeing-Chinook-Mk3-Successfully-Completes-1st-Test-Flight [accessed 8 March 2022].

[159] Mark Tran, UK Troops blow up damaged helicopter in Afghanistan, *The Guardian*, 30 August 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/aug/30/chinook-helicopter-destroyed-afghanistan [accessed 28 February 2022.

This apparent, unacknowledged focus on topical headlined stories (delayed submarines and unusable helicopters) means that the motivation as well as the form of the programmes veers from an investigation of to an apologia for unproven high technology, runaway costs and tardy projects within the defence establishment. As a result, *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine* strives to balance several conflicting tones and threads in the narrative of the *Astute* class's design and development: national pride in the project, verbal embellishment of its secrecy and technological difficulty, and consciousness of its social and political consequences, evinced in the voice-over narration as well as in critical responses to the television programme itself: 'So how to build a nuclear submarine? Well, very slowly. And expensively. Four years late, and £800m over budget. But at least a lot of people in Barrow-in-Furness still have jobs.'[160] Even more than in relation to the *Daring* construction programme, and even more than in terms of cost, the employment context for the building of the *Astute* submarines was at the forefront of contemporary commentary. Rear Admiral Simon Lister, director of submarines, overseeing the *Astute* programme, was quoted in official government statements:

> To see *Astute* commissioned is momentous not only for the Royal Navy, who have been eagerly anticipating this quantum leap in capability, but for the thousands of people around the country who have been involved in this most challenging of engineering projects.[161]

In recognition of the wide regional, industrial participation in the project, the government report listed BAE Systems in Barrow, Rolls-Royce in Derby, and Thales UK and Babcock, Strachan and Henshaw in Bristol as the most significant contractors.[162] Nonetheless, as with the Type 45s, controversy had followed the initiative, with the BBC reporting at the first submarine's launch that the '£3.5bn programme was dogged with delays and budget overruns'.[163] By the time HMS *Astute* (Figure 4.5) was accepted into service (and just before she would make the news again by running aground off the Isle of Skye), the impact of the programme on jobs, the local economy and the national defence budget was also reported with concern:

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[160] Sam Wollaston, Doctor Who and How to Build a Nuclear Submarine, *The Guardian*, 28 June 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/jun/28/docto-who-nuclear-submarine [accessed 20 April 2022].

[161] Ministry of Defence, UK's most powerful submarine joins the Navy, *Ministry of Defence*, 27 August 2010, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uks-most-powerful-submarine-joins-the-navy [accessed 8 March 2022].

[162] Ministry of Defence, UK's most powerful submarine joins the Navy.

[163] Anonymous, New UK nuclear submarine launched, *BBC News*, 8 June 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6733777.stm [accessed 8 March 2022].

Figure 4.5: HMS *Astute*. LA(Phot) J Massey, 2009. UK MOD © Crown copyright 2021: Open Government Licence.

> HMS *Astute* is the first of four in its class, with the initial three now expected to cost £3.9bn, a hefty chunk of the annual £38bn defence budget … four years late and more than £1bn over the original budget, although the work on the four submarines currently guarantees almost 6000 UK jobs.[164]

Although part of a comparable series, *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine* exhibits different emphases from the infotainment models of *Impossible Engineering* or *Mighty Ships*, but also diverges from *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* in exploring the commercial and social landscape of 21st-century British shipbuilding as much as the technical challenges. Within the documentary, the culture of submarine construction at Barrow-in-Furness overlaps with discourses of industry and high technology, allowing in a politics of employment as much as a dogma of defence.

The programme's introductory sequence (as with the other episodes) provides a rapid sequence of anticipatory images and interview sound bites,

[164] Caroline Wyatt, New submarine in a class of its own, *BBC News*, 3 September 2010, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11173266 [accessed 8 March 2022].

condensing the narrative that follows into a tantalising, affective collage of secrecy and revelation, deadlines and time pressures, technology and complexity. At first, green titles resembling computer text scroll enigmatically across the screen: 'She is one of Britain's biggest and most secretive engineering projects … costing over £1bn.' A cross-fade to radiation warning signs, with an alarm sounding on the soundtrack, is followed by a computer graphic of the submarine submerged, and a cut to an engineer, who opines: 'the submarine's huge, it's 100 metres long, it's three decks deep. There is no inch of the submarine that's similar to another inch of it. I would definitely put it in the same league as the Space Shuttle or projects of that size.' Sound and image transform again to provide a time-lapse sequence of the submarine's incomplete bow section moving across the construction hall, and a cut to a senior naval officer (Rear Admiral Simon Lister), who remarks: 'To my mind this is a 7000-ton Swiss watch.' Further cuts follow, between the computer rendering of the submarine and cuts back to Lister ('There are stages when it's like blacksmithing and there are stages when it's like brain surgery'), before the green computer text returns: 'And it took more than 5000 people 14 years to build her.' Additional excerpts from interviews and visual effects that merge the computer graphic with the real submarine under construction introduce a clip of a board meeting, in which Simon Lister spells out the demands of the programme: 'I'm in charge of purchasing submarines for the Ministry of Defence and it's my job to make sure that the programmes that we're hearing from the company are sensible and real and we're getting value for money out of them.' A rapid series of shots introduces the problem of the sea gate, which could prevent the finished vessel from leaving Barrow. The sequence ends with the series *How to Build* logo, before the green titles identify the starting point in 'November 2009'. A fade in on a long shot of the shipyard, and shots of mustering crew members and tugs are accompanied by the voice-over (by actor Gerard Fletcher) setting the tone of excitement and awe:

> It's a wet and windy weekend in the middle of November, and the first new British submarine to be built for ten years is now preparing to sail out into the open sea for the very first time. Fourteen years in the making and costing over £1billion, she is one of the most technologically advanced machines in the world … This is the story of how one of the world's most complicated machines is built. And the people that build it.

Finally, with the insertion of the additional jeopardy of stormy weather affecting the launch, the specific episode's title, in green text, appears on a black screen.

Occupying nearly three minutes of the episode's 60, this opening's emphases on high technology (in and through conspicuous visual effects), complexity and controversy (via interview comments) and insertion of dramatic cliffhangers (in the preview of the 'crisis' of the sea gate) appear to fit the structure, address and deterministic approach of popular documentary. Later sequences

employ the same collaging of visual and editing effects (vertical wipes accompanied by the sound of a cutting saw blade) alongside more predictable observation of work and interviews on site. Other segments depicting the computer-aided design process (championed as 'one of the largest concentrations of such expertise in the world') and the submarine's density and complexity (it 'packs in three times more machinery and equipment than any surface ship' and has 'a quarter of a million miles' worth of cable on board') strongly resemble the enhanced visualisation and hyperbolic descriptions of equivalent infotainment examples. However, this introduction also gives prominence to the workforce and the workplace as important components of the narrative. Akin to *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship*, alongside the related threads of the Navy's pressing technological needs and the designers' and technicians' technical challenges, *How to Build…* stresses a regional heritage distinguishing submarine building at Barrow. (The second programme in the series, *How to Build… a Jumbo Jet Engine*, similarly highlights the centrality of Rolls-Royce to the identity of and employment in Derby.) A significant part of the 'how' is consumed with identifying *who* does the building of Britain's submarines.

Succeeding the extending introduction is a sequence showing the assembly of those involved in the construction, and their positioning in naval and regional communities. A young woman (later identified by green text as apprentice electrician Erin Browne) exits her home with a bicycle, intercut with shots of a naval officer (Commander Paul Knight, with 30 years' service and 'literally fifteen years underwater') leaving home on his motorbike. An older man (subsequently introduced as John Hudson, 'MD BAE Systems Submarine Solutions') is glimpsed in his office. The conclusion of the varied journeys to work marks what the voice-over describes, with understatement nonetheless suggesting the extraordinary, as 'the start of a typical working day for the people who build Britain's nuclear submarines'. Within this segment an unidentified woman working in a café stresses the inseparability of the town's business from common social connections: in addition to her husband, sister-in-law, brother, and brother-in-law, 'every family that I know, at least one or two people actually work in the yard'. Having isolated specific individuals, the programme's images evoke universalities, with cross-fades from the town centre to the town hall and to a view of the shoreline. This is followed by a cut to shots of a local statue representing shipbuilders, accompanied by the voice-over's observations: 'Barrow in Furness is a town of 62,000 people on the edge of the English Lake District. The town has an amazing history of building submarines, launching its first in 1887.' A shot of the Albion's pub sign (bearing a painting of a ship) frames a yard crane in the background. As Erin clocks in, the voice-over confirms the constant cycle: 'And generations of the same families from all around the area still build them today.'

However, the documentary's isolation of Erin, contrasting and celebrating a new generation joining an established tradition, tacitly admits how vulnerable this cycle has become. The 10-year gap between the *Astute* building programme

and the construction of the last submarine at Barrow (the *Vanguard*-class Trident submarines, the last of which was delivered in the late 1990s) led to a cessation of apprenticeships and threatened the yard's future. At least some of the delays and costs afflicting the programme can be attributed to this state of affairs. During a later sequence showing her at work, the voice-over places Erin's employment within a more generalised economic and industrial context, while recognising the specific local relevance:

> Erin is one of 500 apprentices and graduates working in the shipyard. Apprentice schemes all over Britain are now being reintroduced to stop the decline of traditional skills. And this is especially essential for the survival of Barrow.

Erin's personal progress towards full qualification as an electrician will parallel the *Astute* programme, each being utterly dependent on the other for the Royal Navy's and the yard's future. In another brief interview, Erin's team leader, Nigel Moore, reinforces the impact of the gap in orders, the lack of apprenticeships and the loss of skills. While admitting this crucial situation, the programme nonetheless skirts a more overt or provocative probing and criticism of the historical circumstances that precipitated it.

However, as with *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship, How to Build…* is prepared to recognise the controversy of the submarine programme itself. Scenes involving John Hudson, both in interview and framing board meetings recorded with Admiral Lister (previewed in the introduction), foreground the role and responsibility of BAE Systems. The introduction of John Hudson follows and extends the expository images and commentary upon the town. The voice-over's remarks are accompanied by images emphasising the inseparability of the town from its signature industry – a time-lapse long shot of the huge facility with clouds scudding overhead, with a cut to shot of the streets below from the top of church steeple, and a cross-fade to an aerial shot of narrow terraced houses:

> The current owner of the shipyard is British defence company BAE Systems. The business employs over 35000 people across the UK, with around 5000 of them in Barrow alone. BAE Systems is not without its critics. But in this town the company forms the very backbone of the local economy.

As Hudson is identified by green text on screen, his comments in interview reassert the company's relevance and responsibility ('The business has a real family feel to it … We play a vital part in the community') alongside further aerial views of terraces stretching towards the towering construction hall, and a shot at street level of a pub with the yard's buildings immediately behind. As further cuts juxtapose the town in long shot and the submarine in close-up in the Devonshire dock, the voice-over guardedly acknowledges the debates

inspired by the submarine project, while espousing only the obvious economic need the construction programme serves:

> Britain's need for submarines splits opinion. Some think they're critical for defence, others that they're a waste of taxpayers' money. But with a potential order book of seven *Astute* submarines, Barrow depends on them to prosper into the next decade and beyond.

The opposite perspective, of the town's population, is offered in a notably brief sequence summarising the responses to the submarines' nuclear propulsion. In a working men's club, interviewed patrons reflect wryly on their acceptance of this factor ('the things are totally safe. Hopefully, touch wood. It's a bit of a strange thing to be used to, obviously…'). The treatment of this exceptional aspect to the town's industry presents a problem of representation to the documentary, in sensationalisation of the threat in its opening, by stylised images of radiation warnings and sound effects, and diminution of it through the locals' nonchalance (at the club a man jokes, 'we're all doomed, sir!'). When John Hudson reappears after sequences articulating the design and construction process, he offers the company's perspective as the representative of the builder in relation to Simon Lister as the Royal Navy 'customer'. Lister's concerns about delays and 'defects' unearthed on his visits are articulated via cuts between his questions in the meeting (which the voice-over has warned ominously will last 'late into the night') and Hudson's responses while he inspects the dockyard. This discontinuity may reflect the sensitivity of information in his replies during the meeting, but the separation of criticism and justification appears to validate Lister's enquiries (on the taxpayer's as much as the Navy's behalf) and undermine Hudson's indirect replies:

> We've had no fundamental issues, but we have had some minor teething troubles and difficulties. Nothing major but a few obstacles that we've had to overcome … Yeah, the word 'defects' is something we've debated. In the construction industry I think they use the word 'snagging.' I know in the US they use the word 'unsats' – 'unsatisfactories.' We use the word defects. It's anything that doesn't comply with the requirements or the specification. So the vast majority of defects are pretty modest … It's hugely frustrating, not just for me but for the whole company. We really do want to see *Astute* go to sea.

Following this indirect apologia from the managing director, the voice-over offers its own exculpation by restating that the *Astute* is 'almost four years late on its delivery and estimated to be overspent by around £800 million' but claiming that BAE 'inherited' problems with the loss of skills, demise of apprenticeships, and design and contractual issues when it took over the Barrow complex in 1999. As if to confirm this view of the past and vindicate the yard's future, the

Figure 4.6: HMS *Astute* arrives at Faslane. WO(Phot) Ian Arthur, 2009. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

sequence concludes with a shot of Erin leaving work. Although questioned, the eventual completion, activation and successful departure of HMS *Astute* (in defiance of the anticipated, narrativised impediment of the sea gate) therefore appear assured (Figure 4.6).

Where *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* frequently confronts the inseparable questions (and justifications) of cost, capability and delay, *How to Build…* therefore offers a mixed approach to the exorbitant technical and specific social circumstances of Britain's nuclear submarines. Both these aspects receive treatment reminiscent of other popular documentaries. The hyperbole devoted to the technology, the observation of the workforce, and the dramatisation of challenges all recall *Impossible Engineering* and *Mighty Ships*. By contrast, the national specificities and controversies of the *Astute* programme receive, like the similar questions accruing around the Type 45, an albeit limited articulation comparable to the political consciousness discernible in *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship*. Produced in an era of increasingly hybridised factual television, in which forms of reality television, docusoap and infotainment are seen to overlap, these two programmes both reflect contemporary stylistic enhancement but still evince the persistence of journalistic, investigative, observational and informative documentary.

Conclusion

> It is only by building ships that we will once again become good at building ships.[165]

While they appear to fit a current vogue for popular documentaries that focus on high-technology and engineering challenges (for example, in their coverage of the intricacies simply of launching both *Daring* and *Astute*), these cognate programmes articulate differing views on two of the major construction projects that define the current and future Royal Navy. Where *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine* eschews criticism of delays and costs in celebrating the technological triumph and communal benefit of submarine building in Barrow, *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* continually acknowledges the need for accountability, transparency and justifiability, yet without explicitly undermining its subject. Although they therefore assume different documentary positions towards what are topics of national importance and debate, both programmes provoke and inform wider consideration of these particular naval, politicised and British construction projects than their superficial parallels to *Mighty Ships, Impossible Engineering* or *Destroyer: Forged in Steel* might suggest.

Despite their controversies, the arguments accruing around these problematic design and construction projects should be seen in a context in which virtually all 21st-century defence procurement, let alone naval construction programmes, are subject to scrutiny and plagued by controversy surrounding their expenditures and inefficiencies. The designing and building of the US Navy's latest surface ships (the futuristic DDG-1000 *Zumwalt*-class destroyers and the *Freedom*- and *Independence*-class littoral combat ships) have been pilloried for endless material, technological and conceptual failures.[166] An AU$8 billion programme to provide the Royal Australian Navy with new air-defence destroyers comparable with the *Daring*s encountered similar technological and

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[165] Ministry of Defence, National Shipbuilding Strategy: The Future of Naval Shipbuilding in the UK (London: HMSO, 2017), p.6.

[166] Problems identified with the ill-starred LCS units included questions over their combat survivability, hull cracking, engine defects and failures to provide the mission modules required for them to perform different roles: Ronald O'Rourke, Congressional Research Service Report: Navy Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) Program: Background, Issues, and Options for Congress (Washington DC: CRS, 2012). The curtailing of the DDG-1000 programme from 32 ships down to three drove individual unit cost to increase by more than 550% over the prolonged period of design and construction: United States Government Accountability Office, Report to Congressional Committees: Defense Acquisitions – Assessment of Selected Weapons Programs (Washington DC: GAO, 2015), p.73.

engineering problems, and was accused of being disorganised, overpriced and needlessly prolonged.[167] In Europe, design and engineering problems have similarly afflicted prestigious defence projects within NATO navies, such as Germany's F-125 frigates and the Spanish Navy's *Isaac Peral*-class submarines.[168]

In these examples, the emphasis placed on shipbuilding as factual focus and cultural reflection – a subject with a documentary history stretching back to *Shipyard* (Paul Rotha, 1935), which also portrayed Barrow – marks their difference from the hyperbolic spectacles and problem-and-solution formats of *Impossible Engineering*. The stress placed upon and uncomplicated celebration of continuity and tradition in family and community connections to shipbuilding in both programmes obscures recent and longer-term factors affecting the sociopolitical history of the industry, which are themselves inseparable from the difficulties and delays the depicted construction projects are seen to suffer. While the locations of Barrow and the Clyde embody strong regional and national connotations of heavy industry, which *How to Build…* and *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* certainly recognise, the programmes do not probe the reasons for (or effects of) delays in government decisions hinted at by the 'ten-year' gap in orders for submarines mentioned at *Astute*'s launch, or the 20 years between generations of naval destroyers observed but not explained alongside the advances *Daring* represents. While *How to Build…* does remark on the reinstitution of apprenticeships as a necessity for the *Astute* programme, the difficulties and delays BAE representatives note in reviving and embedding continuity in a skilled labour force equally skirt the issue of how apprenticeships came to vanish in the first place. Despite the aura of journalistic investigation around *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship*'s lengthy observation of the Type 45

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[167] Cameron Stewart, $8bn navy flagship founders after construction bungle, *The Australian*, 26 October 2010, http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/bn-navy-flagship-founders-after-construction-bungle/story-fn59niix-1225943475303 [accessed 5 January 2016]; Ian Phedran, Destroyer project now three years behind schedule, *News.com.au*, 1 May 2015, http://www.news.com.au/national/destroyer-project-now-three-years-behind-schedule/story-fncynjr2-1227330086648 [accessed 26 June 2017]; Andrew Greene, Companies building multi-billion-dollar warships feared defects would damage their reputations, leaked documents show, *ABC Radio Australia*, 9 May 2015, http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/2015-05-09/companies-building-multibilliondollar-warships-feared-defects-would-damage-their-reputations-leaked-/1445454 [accessed 26 June 2017].

[168] Steve Nolan, Spain's £1.75billion submarine programme is torpedoed after realising near-complete vessel is 70 tonnes too heavy because engineer put decimal point in the wrong place, *The Daily Mail*, 6 June 2013, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2336953/Spains-1-75bn-submarine-programme-torpedoed-realising- [accessed 18 April 2022]; Anonymous, Germany returns lead F125 frigate to builder, report, *Naval Today.com*, 22 December 2017, https://www.navaltoday.com/2017/12/22/germany-returns-lead-f125-frigate-to-builder-report/ [accessed 18 April 2022].

programme, and *How to Build…*'s recognition of the importance of renewed submarine construction at Barrow, neither programme reveals how BAE's ownership of both Barrow and the Clyde represents a virtual monopoly on British naval construction.[169] Conceding that discontinuity in orders for naval ships has afforded 'a fluctuating source of business' and recognising a withering of skilled labour and lack of competitiveness in warship exports, the National Shipbuilding Strategy inaugurated in 2017 claims to respond to and redress the institutional issues afflicting programmes like the *Astute* and Type 45, and to inspire a 'renaissance' of UK shipbuilding as a national and international enterprise epitomising a post-Brexit 'global Britain'.[170]

A superficially similar coverage, of a technologically advanced and controversial building project, occurs with *Britain's Biggest Warship* (BBC, 2018–19), Chris Terrill's linked series following the building, trials and entry into service of the new aircraft carrier HMS *Queen Elizabeth* (see Chapter 6). However, Terrill's focus (in line with his other armed service and civilian documentary projects) rests emphatically on the human crew rather than the technological or political aspects of the project. This differs from the instrumental inclusion of interview subjects within the construction and engineering narratives of *How to Build…* or *Mighty Ships*, where the human dimension is incorporated pragmatically to embody the process (and provide solutions to its problems). As such, *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine* and *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship*, despite their resemblance to contemporary series focused on engineering operational challenges, lack direct formal parallels within the catalogue of recent naval documentary. The correspondence of *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine* to episodes in series such as *Impossible Engineering* (and indeed its own placement within a comparable series) belies its difference in documenting a highly specific instance of national shipbuilding, and its admission of detail relating to its cultural and economic as much as commercial or military significance. Similarly, the comparison of *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* to the formulaic treatments of *Mighty Ships* underlines its concentrated and compellingly contextualised discussion as well as documentation of HMS *Daring*'s origins, innovations and aspirations, and the relationship between naval institutional and national cultural traditions. Both programmes acknowledge, without necessarily fully confronting or disputing, the political considerations affecting the planning, process and products of the shipbuilding they depict.

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[169] BAE Systems's website celebrates the history – 158 years of Vickers at Sheffield and Barrow, and over a hundred years of Vosper Thornycroft in Southampton and Portsmouth – which its shipbuilding arms inherited via mergers and acquisitions in the early 2000s, following the decline and closure of many British shipyards in the 1980s. BAE Systems UK, Heritage, https://www.baesystems.com/en-uk/heritage/vickers-shipbuilding; https://www.baesystems.com/en-uk/heritage/vosper-thornycroft [accessed 10 May 2022].

[170] Ministry of Defence, National Shipbuilding Strategy, pp.10–11.

Where these documentary examples address the technical and societal environment of the modern Navy and Chris Terrill's have explored the cultural and anthropological factors, the political aspects of the Navy's employment have instead received a staunch and stylised treatment in the contemporary *Warship: Life at Sea*.

CHAPTER 5

The Home Fleet: Channel 5's *Warship* Series

> To the documentary method, every manufacture, every organisation, every function, every scheme of things represents at one point or another the fulfilment of a human interest [but] Daily jobs, no matter how well described by rhetoric of camera and intimacy of microphone, are not documentary material in themselves. They must be related to the wider purposes of the community. [171]

The rise to prominence of Channel 5 in recent years, and the frequency with which it has commissioned and broadcast naval documentaries, represent striking coincidences with the gathering popularity, commercial success and increasingly variegated form of contemporary factual television. Launched in 1997 as an additional broadcaster alongside ITV and Channel 4, Channel 5 currently stands as the UK's third largest commercial channel, with a monthly viewership of 40 million and with the largest growth in viewer numbers of any public service broadcaster since 2020.[172] Although the channel has experienced

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[171] Paul Rotha, *Documentary Film* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), pp.132–133.

[172] Anonymous, Channel 5 allows advertisers access to Britain's fifth terrestrial channel and its great content, *Sky Media UK*, https://www.skymedia.co.uk/channels/channel-5/#:~:text=Channel%205%20is%20the%20UK's,spanning%20a%20of%20genres [accessed 13 April 2022]. Channel 4 was placed fourth (ahead of ITV and behind BBC1, Channel 4 and BBC 2) in quarterly UK viewing figures in 2019. Anonymous, Quarterly reach of the leading 20 TV channels in the United Kingdom (UK) as of 3rd quarter 2019, *Statista.com*, https://www.statista.com/statistics/269807/leading-tv-channels-in-the-uk-by-reach [accessed 13 April 2022]. In February 2020, *Warship: Life At Sea* was Channel 5's eighth most popular programme, with an audience of over 2.3 million. Julia Stoll, Most-watched Channel 5 programs in the United

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several changes of ownership, its programming has been dominated by popular imported American drama series and reality television formats, alongside its statutory expectations as a public service broadcaster to provide original British content.[173] In 2022, Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries drew attention to Channel 5's record of supporting smaller regional and independent production companies, which exceeded the requirements of its Ofcom quotas and also overtook the similar investments of all other terrestrial broadcasters.[174]

In the past, Channel 5 has attracted criticism for its controversial content, including receiving complaints about erotic and exploitative programming.[175] Subsequently, the channel gained greater audience shares from imported soap operas, and more recently its popularity and ratings have been sustained by quantities of reality television, docusoap and anodyne drama, often with a specific British regional bias.[176] Therefore, Channel 5's first two *Warship* documentary series (the first concentrating on a deployment by HMS *Illustrious*, the second following a major international overseas exercise involving HMS *Bulwark* and HMS *Ocean*) occupy intriguing positions in a commissioning and broadcasting environment defined by popular commercial imperatives and public service commitments. These series would appear to largely take up where the BBC's *Sailor* left off in the 1970s, and to anticipate the ITV factual series based on HMS *Ark Royal* (2013). On the announcement of the commissioning of the first *Warship* series in 2008:

Kingdom (UK) 2020, *Statista.com*, https://www.statista.com/statistics/486560/most-watched-channel-5-programs-in-the-uk/#statisticContainer [accessed 13 April 2022].

173 Phil Ramsey, Commercial Public Service Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Public Service Television, Regulation and the Market, *Television and New Media*, 2017, 18(7), 639–654.

174 Heather Fallon, Nadine Dorries hails Channel 5 as the 'levelling up' broadcaster, *Broadcast*, 24 March 2022, https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/channel-5/dorries-hails-c5-as-the-levelling-up-broadcaster/5168972.article [accessed 13 April 2022]. The same article notes that, in 2020, the proportion of the BBC's investment in small independent production was 37%, or nearly three times that of Channel 5.

175 Janine Gibson, Get your kit on, *The Guardian*, 8 June 1999, https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/1999/jun/08/features11.g22 [accessed 18 May 2022]; Anonymous, Soft porn warning from TV watchdog, *BBC News*, 28 January 1999, https://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/264466.stm [accessed 18 May 2022].

176 Anonymous, Home and Away boosts ratings, *BBC News*, 17 July 2001, https://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/1443511.stm [accessed 18 May 2022]; Jim Waterson, Channel 5 says it will not make any more shows about Yorkshire, *The Guardian*, 24 August 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/aug/24/channel-5-says-it-will-not-make-any-more-shows-about-yorkshire [accessed 18 May 2022]; Heidi Blake, Richard Desmond wants X Factor and Big Brother for Channel 5, *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 February 2011, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/mediatechnologyandtelecoms/7907824/Richard-Desmond-wants-X-Factor-and-Big-Brother-for-channel-Five.html [accessed 18 May 2022].

> Five's Senior Programme Controller, Chris Shaw, said: 'HMS *Illustrious* is an enormous floating community where citizens are training for warfare. It's a very intense and claustrophobic environment and will make a fascinating television series.'[177]

In line with Chris Shaw's summation of the series' appeals, observations of the shipboard community (now obviously also including female crew members) form the basis of the programme's episodes, set against both planned and arbitrary daily incidents. In series one, *Illustrious* is seen to suffer engine troubles reminiscent of HMS *Ark Royal*'s in *Sailor*. In series two, sailors exercise in cooperation with the Bangladeshi Navy, and Royal Marines practise amphibious warfare tactics in fetid marshlands (described colloquially by one Royal Marine as 'honking'). Consistent elements include the recording of Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) inspections in both *Warship* series and also in *Ice Patrol*, which ships must pass before deployment. Alongside the interviews and observations, the series use computer graphics to locate action and crew members on specific decks and in specialised spaces, in order to reveal aspects of the ships' features. In this way, the documentaries function as both exciting public relations tools (highlighting and extoling the size, power and weaponry of the Navy's ships) and introduce elements of peril (depicting the damage to *Illustrious*'s propeller shaft and the near-fatal damage and flooding experienced aboard HMS *Endurance* in *Ice Patrol*).

Although comparable to factual observation, the series' implied, inquisitive view of the shipboard environment and community suggests the aura of reality television rather than documentary. On transmission, Channel 5's factual naval series have been embedded within programming schedules which epitomise the channel's popular appeals but also reflect the primacy of reality television. For example, *Submarine School* (2011) was broadcast in a mid-evening reality television slot labelled '8 o'clock Heroes' (other trailed examples including *Danger: Diggers at Work*, a reality show following demolition crews). The series was followed in the mid-week schedules by American crime drama series such as *NCIS, Castle* and *CSI*, and its advertising breaks carried trailers for indicative Channel 5 staples such as the controversial chat show *The Wright Stuff*, lesbian docusoap *Candy Bar Girls* and confrontational reality show *Cowboy Builders*. *Royal Navy Submarine Mission* (2011) was followed in its mid-evening slot by a reality series recording real-life policing, *Soho Blues*. Similarly, episodes of *Warship: Life at Sea* (2022) were followed by *Casualty 24/7*, a factual series filmed in a Yorkshire accident and emergency department. This concentration of factual series (variously categorisable as reality television, docusoap or popular documentary) in scheduling and the frequent resort to 'A & E' formats portraying the police, real-life accidents or the work of emergency services reflects

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[177] Anonymous, Five Commissions New OB-doc Aboard HMS *Illustrious*, 28 February 2008, https://www.tvthrong.co.uk/new/five-commissions-new-ob-doc-aboard-hms-illustrious [accessed 22 February 2011].

a catering to or manipulation of viewing taste for formulaic entertainment. Richard Kilborn has noted and interpreted these tendencies:

> The constant desire to extract maximum commercial potential from these formats is also evidenced in how they are scheduled. Mindful of their general popularity with viewers, schedulers will sometimes group individual reality programmes to form a solid 'reality wall.'[178]

Therefore, in terms of form, scheduling and audience, Channel 5 appears to equate the Royal Navy as spectacle, institution and community with any other reality television subject, no less and actually more than a 'daily job'. While accepting it can be 'difficult to provide an account of how genre categories operate outside the bounds of the text', the preponderance of these programmes within Channel 5's output is symptomatic of the changes to factual television and its place within commercial broadcasting in the period preceding its launch.[179]

Annette Hill has described and differentiated the strands of reality television programming, specifying 'infotainment' (or 'tabloid TV', a term suggestive of its likeness to lurid and populist journalism) as a trend and term adopted from American production practice in a 'first wave' of change during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the 'docusoap' as representative of a subsequent 'second wave' of observational popular television and lifestyle programming (see Chapter 6).[180] Hill's definitions, in associating infotainment more specifically with news or current affairs rather than documentary, therefore suggest a far wider and more varied category of reality and documentary under the 'docusoap' heading. Where British examples of the 'A & E' format such as *999* (BBC, 1992–2003), featuring both interviews with real-life participants in emergencies and making extensive use of re-enactment, readily fit in the first category, documentary series such as *Airport* (BBC, 1996–2008), which observed mundane and dramatic events at Heathrow Airport and made stars of consistently appearing employees, arguably straddle these definitions even if they occupy indistinguishable roles (and timings) in scheduling. Such series have gained significant audiences from mid-week, mid-evening time slots on major broadcast channels.[181] Their relationship with the expectations of previous generations of

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[178] Kilborn, *Staging the real*, p.57.

[179] Jason Mittell, A Cultural Approach to Television Genre Theory, *Cinema Journal*, 2001, 40(3), 3–24, p.10.

[180] Annette Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.24.

[181] Hill, *Reality TV*, p.36. Hill also notes that these discrete categories, formats and specific terms are not necessarily used, or used consistently, by television audiences which might collate and equate varying programmes and series in their viewing: Hill, *Reality TV*, pp.50–53.

documentary television and the demands of present commercial circumstances is complex, as Kilborn explains:

> Since the 1990s the most discernible pressure was to develop formats that would attract the attention of a wider public than would have tuned in to traditional documentary … Though some of the new formats carry echoes of more serious categories of work (the observational documentary, the investigative report), the feature that is common to all these newly devised formats is their entertainment orientation.[182]

Where examples of these series exhibit marked narrativisations of the realities they record (in consciously structuring and editing for suspense, and climaxes around advertising breaks and across episodes and series), this can be interpreted as both reflective of the hybridisation affecting forms of reality television, and of the manipulation of reality this entails. Docusoaps seek to replicate the soap opera audience's emotional investment by presenting ordinary people as characters within a narrative, and to similarly craft reality into a narrative, by imposing structure, chronology, crises and resolutions.[183] Hill notes the apparently contradictory (or alternatively comprehensive) viewing appeals of such programmes, with 'self-contained, short segments and/or serialised stories with strong identifiable characters' proving accessible and satisfying for occasional viewers, while the regular and repeated watching of ordinary people of the docusoap appears to fulfil the narrative familiarity and investment of the soap opera.[184]

The creation of these series within an avowedly popular and commercial environment for factual television production therefore meets Paul Rotha's longstanding condition of a 'human interest' for documentary observers, practices and audiences. As in the cases of Channel 5's contemporary submarine series (see Chapter 2), formulaic popular appeal might appear to demand the stylisation of the subject to produce both 'intimacy' and 'rhetoric'. More importantly, in recognition of Channel 5's increasing pre-eminence as the populist rather than simply popular broadcaster and not only on the basis of their being surrounded in the schedules by examples of reality television, the *Warship* series and the very recent and highly remarked *Warship: Life at Sea* relate the Royal Navy 'to the wider purposes of the community' formally, representationally and polemically. In readily comparing and likening the Navy as a community to similar, relatable subjects in wider examples of reality television, Channel 5's series bring the 'fleet' into the 'home' in ways that diverge from documentary

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[182] Kilborn, *Staging the real*, p.9.

[183] Gail Coles, Docusoap Actuality and the Serial Format, in *Frames and Fictions on Television: The politics of identity within drama* ed. by Bruce Carson and Margaret Llewellyn-Jones (Exeter: Intellect, 2000), 27–39, pp.30–33.

[184] Hill, *Reality TV*, p.52.

precedents such as *Sailor* or *HMS Splendid* but which respond to contemporary media currents, and to contemporary viewership trends.

Warship series 1 and 2 (2008–09)

Warship series one was filmed aboard HMS *Illustrious* (Figure 5.1) during a lengthy overseas deployment in 2008 and was broadcast soon afterwards in a 9pm Monday evening slot in May and June 2008.

Figure 5.1: HMS *Illustrious*, with Harrier aircraft on deck, 1997. CPO Phot Rob Harding. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

Series two recorded the involvement of both HMS *Bulwark* and HMS *Ocean* in the 'Taurus 2009' deployment to the Indian Ocean and South East Asia and was broadcast in the same weekly slot in August and September 2009. These Granada television programmes followed other reality television series placed earlier in Channel 5's schedules because of their unedited language and adult innuendo.[185] Amidst the first episode's rapid opening montage of the ship, her aircraft and close-ups of weapons, HMS *Illustrious* is introduced by a voice-over (provided by actor Dexter Fletcher) in hyperbolical terms as: '£1billion's worth of military muscle. Weighing in at 22,000 tons, she's home to nearly 1000 sailors who are about to embark upon a phenomenal mission, half-way around the world.' The on-board production promises 'to access all areas as she embarks on her four-month adventure'.

Members of the crew who will be consistently followed as characters through the series are introduced at the beginning of the voyage: the trainee female warfare officer, 23-year-old Milly Harridean, and twins Rachel and Michael 'Shiner' Wright, who embark the day after their shared 19th birthday. The rapidity of the exposition means that the momentary melancholy registered at Shiner's girlfriend being left behind is immediately and wryly undone as the voice-over introduces a sailor's wife ('But there is a plus side for some') who comments to camera, 'I only ever decorate when he's away, 'cos then he can't argue.' The frenetic pace is maintained as the entire series is previewed with a computer graphic map charting *Illustrious*'s progress to Gibraltar, Malta, Suez and the Indian Ocean and flashes forward to future events. This itinerary is summarised in sensational terms, as 'a mission fraught with danger' because '*Illustrious* is an obvious terrorist target', but the ship is forced to return to Portsmouth immediately by a fault with its freezers. As the ship undergoes hasty repairs, the hectic pace and hyperbolic language of the series are ironically contrasted with the unwelcome newspaper coverage of the breakdown, with close-ups of tabloid newspaper headlines: 'Rusty Lusty'; 'dodgy freezer halts carrier'. The ageing *Illustrious*'s mechanical difficulties facilitate the foregrounding of another significant figure, senior engineering officer Lieutenant Commander Helen Ashworth, who is frequently interviewed in the course of her vital repair work. Although her selection for consistent appearances provides an affirmative female role model, the series more often assumes a simplistic and exploitative approach to the environment of the mixed crew. Another rapid montage defines the differences between male and female accommodation, juxtaposing images of pink dressing gowns, and a quiet female mess area accompanied with sedate music, with pinups, video games and raucous laughter in the male mess. The voice-over observes leadingly that 'men and women have to live in close confines in the modern navy' before

[185] Other programmes trailed in *Warship*'s advertising breaks included *Brits Who Made the Modern World*, *Brighton Beach Patrol* (an 'A & E'-style reality series), *Kidnapped Abroad* (a reality series featuring re-enactments), Australian soap opera *Neighbours* and a one-off documentary entitled *Viagra: Ten Years on the Rise*.

Milly opines in interview that, despite the 'no touching at sea' rules, relationships will inevitably develop: 'it's human nature'.

The majority of episode one concerns the ship's undergoing 'Thursday War' exercises and tests as part of FOST training prior to deployment. When the ship fails FOST, crew members receive the consolation of a night of shore leave in Plymouth. As she disembarks, the voice-over observes archly, 'yes, this is Rachel in civvies!' The series' briskness therefore allows no crisis or disappointment to linger, though each advertisement break and the end of each episode provides an opportunity for the voice-over to reintroduce tension and peril: for example, 'After the break, the whole deployment's in jeopardy, as Lusty's bad luck just won't run out!' The vocabulary and tone of the voice-over throughout the series strive to connect the audience with its documentary subject by the evocation of associations and connotations of the everyday. The visually established contrast between the captain's individual meals and the crew's mass catering leads to the narrator describing the galley staff as 'bracing themselves for the usual whingeing'. A sequence of rapidly edited soundbites from crew members sums up the food as: 'onions in everything'; 'hot potatoes, cold potatoes or burnt potatoes'; and conclusively as 'shocking!' The ship's NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institute) store is described as doing 'a roaring trade' in the extra treats and conveniences the crew needs ('so far, they've sold 55,000 cans of lager, 22,000 cans of cider and 6,000 pot noodles'). This extraordinary itemisation of the crew's mundane consumption introduces an operational parallel for the viewer's comprehension. The NAAFI, originating in 1921 but now run by Spar supermarkets, provides an idiomatic parallel to the ship's resupply needs being furnished by the auxiliary ship *Fort Austin*, described as a 'floating supermarket' ready to receive 'Lusty's ten-ton shopping list'. Similarly, in series two an accessible analogy serves to illustrate HMS *Bulwark*'s replenishment at sea with diesel fuel: 'going by today's prices at the pumps to fill her up would cost £700,000'. When engaged in flight operations, 'Lusty' is compared to 'a mini-Heathrow', and then to the 'Costa del Sol' when sailors sunbathe on the flight deck. Hosing down and cleaning the Harriers is dubbed 'the ultimate jet-wash!' When 'Hands to Bathe' is piped in the Indian Ocean, the voice-over draws attention to how this 'exposes another naval tradition', the camera then providing close-ups of the varied tattoos on display. The absurd aspects of military mundanity are also accommodated with observation of the ship's boarding parties training for searching suspect vessels. Editing imbues this sequence with the bathetic comedy of cumulative institutional chaos as radio batteries are found to be dead, call signs get confused, and problems with lifejackets mean that boat drills have to be cancelled.

Throughout the series, considerable emphasis is placed on the three female sailors introduced in episode one. Their recurrent appearances provide realistic positive and negative portrayals of service experience. Helen Ashworth's engineering team successfully complete an exchange of the ship's gas turbine engines while at sea (seen first in an abbreviated time-lapse sequence before an

advertising break) as well as overcoming numerous defects. Her reflections in interview validate gender equality in service life:

> One of the biggest compliments you can get is that the guys have forgotten that you're a girl, and you don't really appreciate it until you dress up to go out and people that speak to you day in and day out just walk past you. Even my deputy did it to me, and he's known me for ten years.

After her introduction in episode one Milly only reappears in episode four, when the voice-over contrasts her 'high hopes of day one' with 'serious doubts' eight weeks later. Bored with her training, she seeks a transfer to logistics but her personnel officer informs her that, while there is a shortage of female warfare officers, the Navy already has too many female logistics officers. Without waiting for official notification of her transfer being refused, Milly resigns, 'abandoning ship and the Navy' after 18 months and £60,000 of training. By contrast, Helen's status as role model as a female officer is reinforced by Rachel's desire to change trades to become an engineer, yet Rachel's appearances within the series are more frequently connected to an entirely different gender narrative. In episode four Rachel begins a relationship with engineer Dave Smith, even though the voice-over reminds the audience she has a boyfriend at home. She discusses her views on relationships with the interviewer off-screen, ending with a serial drama cliffhanger: 'Watch this space!' During episode five, when Helen's marine engineers are introduced (in a rapid montage of dials, gauges, pipework, warning signs and archive footage from the days of steam to explain why they are referred to as 'stokers'), Rachel's wish for a week's work experience before requesting her branch change is qualified by the voice-over as 'not just because her new boyfriend's a stoker'. Later the couple is seen chatting on deck, ironically sitting next to a locker marked 'Danger – Explosive'. By episode six (in which shots of them together from previous episodes are repeated as flashbacks and they are questioning individually on whether they are now a 'couple'), Dave and Rachel are described by the voice-over as 'finding the Navy's strict no touching rule increasingly difficult'. When the ship reaches India and shore leave is permitted, the voice-over observes wryly: 'now they're docked in Goa, the no touching rule doesn't apply'.

In contrast to this established quotidian docusoap focus, episode two introduces recognition of *Illustrious*'s affiliation with the island of Malta (Figure 5.2). The ship's visit to Valletta prompts a brief history lesson on World War II in the Mediterranean, noting the historic attack on the Italian fleet at Taranto and the Luftwaffe's 'revenge' attacks on the ship's namesake at sea and again in harbour, which killed over a hundred sailors and many Maltese civilians.

Crew members perform a wreath-laying commemorating the bombing of Malta, while others undertake community work on the island. (A comparable 'sombre ceremony' occurs in series two aboard HMS *Ocean* when she reaches the area in which HMS *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were sunk in 1941). The

Figure 5.2: HMS *Illustrious* at Malta 1995. PO(Phot) 'Kenny' Everitt. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

recollection of past conflict and the maintenance of the ship's international relationships in the present are marked soberly by the voice-over: 'HMS *Illustrious* makes her way into Valletta Harbour, just as she did sixty-seven years ago.' When Helen Ashworth takes the chance to visit HMS *Trafalgar* (since at that time women were still not allowed to serve on submarines), a brief summary of the story of the *Kursk* disaster is somewhat incongruously included. This bleak tone sits uneasily alongside the heightened description of the ship's passage to the Gulf past 'the war-torn states of the Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia, a failed state harbouring terrorists'. As boarding parties train aboard, dramatic music and news footage reminds viewers of the story of HMS *Cornwall*'s sailors taken prisoner by the Iranian Republican Guard 'last year in the Persian Gulf'.[186] In distinction from dangers and losses of life in the more distant past,

[186] This incident became a notable public relations disaster when Royal Navy sailors were paraded before television cameras by their Iranian captors and several members of HMS *Cornwall*'s crew subsequently sold their stories to the media. Anonymous, Naval captives can sell stories, *BBC News*, 8 April 2007, https://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6536203.stm [accessed 21 April 2010]; Matthew Hickley, Top brass escape disciplinary action as the Iran hostages fiasco ends in a whitewash, *The Daily*

the roles of the ship and her aircraft in present conflicts are confronted frankly but uncomplicatedly.

In episode five, *Illustrious*'s Harriers train at sea before deploying to support ground forces in Afghanistan. The air group leader, Lieutenant Commander Toby Everitt, who gives a guided tour of the Harrier's cockpit, is understatedly described as having been 'flying helicopters and Harriers in war zones for 16 years'. In interview, Harrier Maintenance Engineer Rob 'Chainsaw' Hunt summarises his contribution in terms of professional detachment and satisfaction: 'We love it. Twenty odd years' worth of training and now I'm allowed to do it for real. I have no qualms, Afghanistan's a war. Simple as that. We're out there killing people.' As he speaks, cuts between blue-painted practice weapons on deck and bomb mission markings on the Harrier's side concretise the connection between the supposedly everyday environment of the ship and the ongoing war over the horizon. While these segments certainly stress and connect the audience with the circumstances of the unending War on Terror and the commitment of British service personnel to it, their brevity allows the viewer no more political insight into or opportunity to question the conflict than the sailors and pilots evince themselves. Elsewhere, the ship and its military capability (including 'the deadly Harrier GR.9') are sensationally described in triumphant technological and patriotic terms. Episode five's opening voice-over and montage of shots of the task force's ships at sea encapsulates the unquestioning celebration of *Illustrious*'s mission:

> Thirteen battleships, 2,500 sailors on a journey half-way around the world. And leading the flotilla, Her Majesty's finest: aircraft carrier HMS *Illustrious*. Her mission: to show off Britain's military power in the Middle East and to train the naval strike wing to reach their full fighting potential.

Series two makes similar patriotic claims for the ships and crews at its centre. HMS *Bulwark* is described as leading 12 NATO warships in the Navy's 'most ambitious deployment in a decade: Their task: to prove they can carry out a seaborne military invasion, thousands of miles from home.' The voice-over asserts that HMS *Ocean* (Figure 5.3) is exercising in the Indian Ocean 'to prove the Royal Navy is still the best in the world'.

Mail, 20 June 2007, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-463057/Top-brass-escape-disciplinary-action-Iran-hostages-fiasco-ends-whitewash.html [accessed 21 April 2010]. The British sailors' capitulation was unfavourably compared to the more robust response of the Royal Australian Navy in similar circumstances: Richard Shears, F*** off, mate! How the Aussies repelled Iranian gunboats (unlike our own hapless sailors), *The Daily Mail*, 22 June 2007, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-463690/F---mate-How-Aussies-repelled-Iranian-gunboats-unlike-hapless-sailors.html [accessed 21 April 2010].

Figure 5.3: HMS *Ocean*. LPhot Kyle Heller, 2017. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

As with series one, computer graphics illustrate the layout, systems and capabilities of the landing craft, vehicles and helicopter deck. During the Taurus deployment the British vessels cooperate with ships from 17 other nations and visit India, Bangladesh and Singapore. Royal Marines from *Bulwark* and *Ocean* conduct exercises at Chittagong and in the Malaysian jungle. While these international operations illustrate the Navy's continuing commitments 'East of Suez', the series occasionally betrays a conservative, orientalist or even imperialist perspective visually and verbally. The 1971 Five Power Defence Agreement is briefly mentioned as the basis for exercises conducted with the cosignatories Malaysia, Australia, Singapore and New Zealand, whose cooperation with the UK represents 'a show of force in a region of unpredictable regimes'.[187] When the fleet reaches Singapore, the island nation is described as 'one of the world's most important seaports, and once a key part of the British Empire'. Gazing at the anchored warships, a sailor observes to camera: 'A lot of Royal Navy real estate in one place'. Later in the series, initial sea training of cadets is depicted aboard *Ocean*, with this year's group being entirely international, and mostly composed of officers from the navies of Kuwait, Iraq, Qatar, Jordan and Yemen. The voice-over explains that: 'each junior officer's government pays for this prestigious chance to train with the Royal Navy and the Navy sees it as a way of building international relations'. Bangladesh is succinctly categorised by the voice-over as 'a stable Muslim country with close ties to the UK'. Its navy operates second-hand British ships and 'to be trained by the Royal Navy is seen as a great privilege', but when the marines stage a landing before bemused Bangladeshi villagers, the voice-over boasts: 'the locals don't know what's hit them'. The poverty and over-population of the exercise area off the Ganges delta are noted only in terms of their effects upon ship and crew. Bangladesh's landscape is described as:

> perfect for the Marines to practice attacking from the sea … it's one of the wettest countries on earth. It's also one of the most densely populated: over 160 million people live by the rivers, and all their waste is washed out to sea.

This creates a recognised health hazard for marines wading in the surf, and also disables *Bulwark*'s freshwater production as waste clogs the system's filters in hours. Members of the ship's crew who volunteer to play the role of the marines' terrorist enemy are warned about the dangers of the area's anacondas, pythons, vampire bats, mosquitoes and crocodiles. With the announcement of

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[187] Cooperative exercises as part of the Five Power Defence Agreement had also been a feature of HMS *Illustrious*'s 2008 deployment not represented in the earlier *Warship* series. John Roberts, *Safeguarding the Nation: The Story of the Modern Royal Navy* (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2009), pp.328–330.

Commodore Peter Hudson's promotion to rear admiral, a gourmet dinner prepared to celebrate the event is juxtaposed heavy-handedly with Marine survival training, in which they learn to kill and fillet snakes.

The concentration upon the marines provides the series with the spectacle of their training on land, but also unexpectedly candid insights from their dissatisfaction on board ship. The marines of 40 Commando are identified as a mix of 'new recruits' and veterans of Afghanistan whose training (like that of *Illustrious*'s Harriers) precedes active deployment in combat. Recruit Dean Medhurst is followed through the series, with dedicated sequences (which reappear as reminding flashbacks) when he fails during a live-firing exercise and redeems himself abseiling successfully from a hovering helicopter. The marines are labelled 'a tight-knit bunch': their distance from and competitiveness with the ship's crew emerges when a physical instructor organises a ship-wide 'testosterone-fueled sports event on the flight deck'. However, some of the marines identified and interviewed during earlier episodes deliberately absent themselves from the games and barbecue on the flightdeck. They are vocal in their criticism of the expenditures of the deployment in comparison with the costs of vital equipment that is needed but not available in Afghanistan. While the cameras follow the marines below deck to discover their grievances, their comments to camera are not glossed by the voice-over or overtly prompted by interview questions. Their contempt for being on a 'shit cruise liner' with 'matelots who don't understand' rather than in-theatre with their comrades is simply noted, prompting revaluation of the previous portrayals of trivial tensions between sailors and marines. This unexpected and unqualified moment (similar to the candid observation of the practical, emotional and moral difficulties the ship's medics encounter when called upon to recover an unidentified and decomposing human body from the sea) represents a frank and uninflected documentary interlude within the series' otherwise fragmentary yet manipulative flow. In these cases, the undemonstrative and unmediated recording of authentic, disruptive incidents validates the film crew's presence, but inevitably also highlights the prevailing brevity, levity and populism of the series' approach. The potential inconsistencies between observation and structuration that *Warship* exhibits become even more exaggerated in the next Channel 5 series to be broadcast.

Ice Patrol (2010): tedium, trivia, tragedy

Although made by a different production company (Spiderlight Films) and commissioned for broadcast by both Channel 5 and National Geographic, *Ice Patrol* shares features with the *Warship* format.[188] It was aired in a 9pm weekday

[188] Producer Martin Kemp formed Spiderlight specifically for the production of *Ice Patrol*. The series was filmed with a small embedded team during HMS Endurance's

Figure 5.4: HMS *Endurance* in the Antarctic in 2007. LA(Phot) Kelly Whybrow. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

slot and parallels previous naval series in detailing day-to-day events aboard ship. However, the uniqueness of the vessel at its centre (the ice patrol ship HMS *Endurance*, Figure 5.4) and of the environment in which it operates (the Southern Ocean and Antarctic territories) gave a superficial distinction to the series' emphasis upon the ecological and climatic study of the area. As a Royal Navy ship with research and constabulary rather than combatant roles, HMS *Endurance* presents a less obviously militarised and more popularised scientific subject for documentary coverage. The series makes no mention of the involvement of the previous vessel of this name in the Falklands conflict (despite the islands serving as the ship's base of operations), yet frequently comments on the present *Endurance*'s origins as a commercially constructed vessel and her inheritance of the name of polar explorer Ernest Shackleton's ship. Additionally, the ship's Royal Marine contingent is followed attempting the 'Shackleton Walk', paralleling the journey made by survivors of the original *Endurance*'s wreck across South Georgia.

Unlike the other *Warship* series, the uniqueness of the ship and the Antarctic environment, and the range of subjects included in *Ice Patrol* offer both greater specificity and variety. The ship's crew, Navy divers, meteorologists, adventuring

Antarctic Patrol in late 2008. Martin Kemp, *Ice Patrol*, https://www.martinkemp.tv/icepatrol [accessed 9 June 2022].

school parties and civilian photographers and climate scientists are seen and interviewed during their activities spanning several months. In common with other series, *Endurance*'s crew is observed undergoing FOST inspection before proceeding to operations. Computer graphics are used to map the ship's progress and explain special design features for icebreaking. Yet this diversified coverage struggles to produce a focus or provide compelling interest. Reviewing the transmission of the first episode, Sam Wollaston sardonically described *Ice Patrol* as 'possibly one of the least exciting documentaries ever':

> To be honest, absolutely nothing happens. Well, there is a personal tragedy for a crew member, who has to fly home. And the ship's bow thruster breaks down, which makes parking a little more difficult; sorry, which means the captain and crew have to pull off 'a remarkable piece of seamanship'. They do some safety drills, then there is a problem in the engine room. 'One of Endurance's two engines has suddenly started spitting out highly flammable fuel,' says Bernard Hill, narrating, trying to inject some drama. Hmm, to me it looks like a fairly minor leak of diesel, which isn't very flammable at all, but what do I know?[189]

Endurance is seen to suffer numerous mechanical defects before and during the patrol, as outgoing captain Bob Tarrant prepares to hand over to a new commanding officer arriving from the UK. The accompanying voice-over's aggrandisement of the ship's engine problems (which could leave her 'trapped in the ice') sits uneasily alongside the comedic treatment of other incidents. When Captain Tarrant goes ashore, in order to give his executive officer more command experience before the arrival of the new captain, the camera follows him through ship's cafeteria, and the voice-over observes: 'but on his way out there's one final emergency to deal with: burning breakfast'. Smoke from a toaster threatens to set off alarms. The camera follows Tarrant as he intervenes with the stewards, ordering them to tell the bridge, turn off the toaster, 'get the toast out of there' and open the porthole to let out the smoke. The humorous observation of this authentic, bathetic 'emergency' is more conspicuous given the portentous tone struck by the voice-over in the opening credits.

During a montage sequence previewing many forthcoming aspects of the series (*Endurance* seen from the air, isolated in fields of ice (Figure 5.5); helicopter flights; diving operations; views of the ship's bows breaking through pack ice; Marine skiers encountering seals), the voice-over asserts the ship's and environment's exceptionalness:

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[189] Sam Wollaston, Ice Patrol: It's about ships, ice and the sea – who cares if it's possibly one of the least exciting documentaries ever? *The Guardian*, 9 April 2010 https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2010/apr/09/tv-review-ice-patrol-sam-wollaston [accessed 2 May 2022].

Figure 5.5: HMS *Endurance* in pack ice. LA(Phot) Kelly Whybrow, 2007. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

> There is only one Royal Navy ship capable of breaking into the icy wastes of Antarctica. HMS *Endurance*'s mission is to explore, survey and watch over the British Antarctic Territory: to reach parts of the frozen continent that no other ship can reach. For the 120 men and women aboard, these are voyages of risk and discovery.

This introductory embellishment is, however, ominously undercut by the first of several intimations of a forthcoming calamity. As the voice-over continues, additional elements on the soundtrack (alarm bells, the rasping of breathing apparatus, and an unidentified voice on the ship's tannoy stating 'the priority is safety of life … the vessel is taking on water …') accompany chaotic hand-held camera views of an unspecified emergency: 'And this year, waiting for them at journey's end, is a disaster that could take *Endurance* and their very lives.' The remainder of the first episode depicts mundane and serious events, described alternately in ironic, grave or exaggerated terms, which distract from this opening in quotidian observation even where cliffhanger commentary ('in just a few days' time there will be an even bigger engine failure, and this time it could mean the end of *Endurance*') is positioned purposefully before advertisement breaks. However, the voice-over reinforces the fatalistic tone in the final

moments: 'what the crew cannot know as the ice breaks beneath them is that before the year ends, a major tragedy will see them fight to save their ship and their very lives.'

Against the documentary content which subsequently occupies episodes two and three, this oppressive atmosphere is repeatedly reinserted via the omniscient and prophetic voice-over, leading to significant tonal inconsistency. The dangers of the environment are frequently recalled. The crew's 'boat camp' for surveying the hydrography and wildlife of the South Shetlands Islands is overtaken by a damaging storm. In addition to references to (and an archive photograph of) Shackleton's *Endurance* being 'crushed by the ice', the grounding of the cruise ship *Nordkapp* and sinking of the Canadian *Explorer* are also cited as cautionary examples. When *Endurance* visits Deception Island, the geographical aspect and appeal of the series are emphasised by the observation that this is 'one of the only places in the world where a ship can sail into the centre of a dormant volcano'. This marvel is undercut by a mundane storyline, the recurrent failure of the divers' boat's outboard engine: 'the volcano might not be dead, but Tommo's motor certainly is'. Episode two concludes with another ominous reflection, as for the captain and a sailor returning to the UK on disciplinary charges 'the *Endurance* they return to a month from now will be a very different ship from the one they leave behind'. In episode three, banality and levity (logistics officer Craig Hasting's observation that 'sausages are key for breakfasts') vie with further intimations of future disaster. A man-overboard drill is badly mishandled, provoking the voice-over to disclose: 'three weeks from now *Endurance* will face disaster in the Southern Ocean. The crew's very survival will depend on knowing how to act in an emergency.' The fragility of the marines undertaking the 'Shackleton Walk', reduced to minute figures on the glaciers of South Georgia, is tellingly juxtaposed with British scientists' study of sediment cores: the analysis and carbon dating of the microscopic life they contain will be vital for understanding global climate change. The surveying of resurgent seal populations (hunted to near extinction in the 19th century), the successful completion of the marines' expedition, and the prospect of Christmas in the Chilean port of Valparaiso are not permitted to conclude this segment on a positive note, as the final episode is previewed forebodingly: '*Endurance* and her crew will never reach their destination, because a few days from now, somewhere in the Southern Ocean, disaster will strike.'

Episode four begins with observation of light-hearted moments on board (a beard-growing competition and a 'pub night' for the whole crew) before the long-awaited catastrophe takes place. However, another advertisement break and cliffhanger comment from the voice-over still intervene. Despite the series' anticipation of this event, the incident – sudden and unstoppable flooding in the engine room during 'routine maintenance' – is understandably incompletely represented by actual footage, and is instead related via interviews with key members of the crew. Slow-motion scenes (which may be shot at the time or re-enactments) accompany the retrospective commentary, while

computer graphics represent the flooding and near capsizing of the ship. With the addition of heightened narration from the voice-over ('if the flood can't be stopped, it'll be the end of *Endurance* … the engineers are fighting a losing battle'), the final episode of *Ice Patrol* therefore shifts into reality television in 'A & E' mode. 'Against all odds' and with 'incredible luck', the ship is saved, towed into Punta Arenas, and eventually returned to the UK for repair. After evincing several conspicuous shifts in tone, from presaging the disaster to reviewing the traumatic events in fragmentary flashback, the series ends on an inconclusive but optimistic note, anticipating that the crew's effort to save the ship will be rewarded by its repair and return to service.[190] Because of the unenvisaged events that overtook its filming, *Ice Patrol* therefore emerges not only as a peculiar entry in Channel 5's naval-oriented series but also as a conspicuous example of the interaction of the pro-filmic and filmic in documentary: in capturing an unprecedented event on film, and also restructuring and blatantly narrativising the resultant series around it.

Warship: Life at Sea series 1–3 (2018–22)

The more recent successive series of *Warship: Life at Sea*, produced by Artlab Films, can be seen to develop the observational templates established by the earlier *Warship* and by *Royal Navy Caribbean Patrol* (2011), made for Channel 5 by Chris Terrill's Uppercut Films. The first series, filmed aboard HMS *Duncan* in the Mediterranean, aired in November and December 2018. The second, following *Duncan* to the Arabian Gulf, was broadcast between February and March 2020 and the third series in January and February 2022. Maintaining the established Monday 9pm slot, *Warship: Life at Sea* has remained a popular focus within Channel 5's schedules, with the opening episode of series two rating ahead of direct competition from Channel 4's *999: What's Your Emergency?* and outperforming the first episode of series one, with 1.4 million viewers, or

[190] In actuality HMS *Endurance* was scrapped after being deemed uneconomical to repair and was replaced with another ex-merchant vessel acquired in 2011 and renamed HMS *Protector*: Anonymous, HMS Endurance: Former ice patrol ship to be scrapped, *BBC News*, 7 October 2013, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hampshire-24436594 [accessed 2 May 2022]. The enquiry into the flooding of *Endurance* noted the damage control response of the ship's company, but concluded that inadequate risk assessment and mitigation, 'poor system knowledge' and 'manpower constraints' contributed to the accident and nearly caused the ship's loss. HM Government, Service Enquiry into the Flooding of HMS Endurance 16 December 2008, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/27150/service_enquiry_flooding_hms_endurance.pdf [accessed 2 May 2022].

8% of the audience.[191] Although these series maintain the recording of everyday activities, roles and relationships aboard ship seen in the earlier versions of *Warship*, they have also notably captured more unexpected, tense and evolving situations involving Royal Navy ships in near-conflict, for example HMS *Duncan* being approached by Russian aircraft and warships while transiting the Black Sea. During the second series, the Artlab production team was present to record HMS *Duncan*'s confrontation with the naval forces of Iran following the seizure of a British-flagged merchant ship in the Straits of Hormuz. Executive producer Mark Tattersall's description of their unenvisaged involvement in the unfolding crisis suggests the transformation of their filming project from documentary to current affairs television:

> What compelled us most as a team at this time was the ability to capture a story like this in real time from the people at the very heart of it. As news organisations around the world reported on HMS *Duncan*'s arrival in the Gulf, on board there was a far more nuanced attitude that was hugely intriguing. Our team had a front-row seat to history in the making.[192]

The first two series' setting aboard the Type 45 destroyer HMS *Duncan* (Figure 5.6) provides operational postscripts to the documentary depiction of the *Daring* class's design and construction (see Chapter 4).

The opening of the first episode's record of *Duncan*'s deployment from January to June 2018, in keeping with the sensationalising montages of earlier series, stresses the ship's capabilities and the threatening environment in which it operates. The voice-over (provided by radio presenter Loz Guest) accompanies a hectic audio-visual sequence, including blaring alarms, dramatic music, rapid editing, zooms and pans within the operations room: 'This is the story of the most advanced warship of its kind in the world at the most dramatic time in its short history, but this state-of-the-art ship is also home to 280 men and women.' The series' predictable weft of reality television coverage (sailors taking selfies, enjoying birthday celebrations or facing disciplinary charges) is contrasted in this rapid kaleidoscopic introduction with the warp of anticipated incident. The voice-over's assurances of authenticity and hints of conflict ('our cameras have been given unprecedented access to *Duncan*'s dramatic seven-month mission as they come face-to-face with Russian forces') are reinforced by a fleeting soundbite from Commodore Mike Utley, the senior

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[191] Stephen Price, C5's Warship sinks rivals, *Broadcast*, 21 February 2020, https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/channel-overview/c5s-warship-sinks-rivals/5147409.article [accessed 13 April 2022].

[192] Mark Tattersall, Warship: Life at Sea, Channel 5 – a front-row seat to history, *Broadcast*, 7 February 2020, https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/channel-5/warship-life-at-sea-channel-5-a-front-row-seat-to-history/5146985.article [accessed 18 May 2022].

Figure 5.6: HMS *Duncan*, pictured in the Gulf in 2019. LPhot Rory Arnold. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

NATO commander leading the deployment ('There is a challenge from Russia at the moment'). Another inference of action to come ('and the crew find themselves on the front line as missiles rain down on Syria') closes the title sequence, before *Duncan* is introduced in Portsmouth with a close-up of the Union Jack.

The depiction of specific crew members serves positive as well as illustrative purposes against this constructed background of conflict. Most notable amongst them is Captain Eleanor Stack (Figure 5.7), who personifies a new,

Figure 5.7: Captain Eleanor Stack. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

different and inclusive service. She recalls how, growing up in Glasgow with no naval background, a school visit to HMS *Argyle* inspired her to join the Navy in 2000.

Other interviewees include chef Liam Fletcher, *Duncan*'s youngest sailor, 18-year-old Owen Clements, who is unsure how he will cope with the lengthy deployment, and 26-year veteran Executive Warrant Officer Martin Watson. Medic Rhiann Dilmore, who is shown dealing with a suspected heart attack on board and acting as the 'condom fairy' in preparation for shore leave, is proud of the variety in her job: 'I couldn't think of a better career, to be honest.' Principal Warfare Officer James Smith states he wanted 'a job that made a difference' and navigator Ryan Greig admits that, 'since I was nine years old, I never wanted to do anything else'. The series' portrait of a navy as varied community and fulfilling career therefore exceeds simple docusoap observation to become a positive recruitment image. This observational element is contextualised but also constrained by the conspicuous emphasis upon the international events in which the ship becomes embroiled.

As *Duncan* heads to the Mediterranean, a computer graphic map charts the ship's course to rendezvous with Spanish, Turkish and German warships and 'and lead them into the Black Sea – one of the most sensitive areas in the world' (Figure 5.8). Leading up to the first advertisement break, Captain Stack reflects: 'You never quite know what's going to happen when we get into the Black Sea, and what our presence there will provoke from other nations', and

Figure 5.8: HMS *Duncan* in the Black Sea. L(Phot) Paul Hall, 2017. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

this intimation of threat is exaggerated by the voice-over: 'Going to the Black Sea puts *Duncan* on a potential collision course with the Russians and no-one knows how they'll react.' When Commodore Utley joins *Duncan* and addresses the crew, the voice-over insists his 'first job is to explain why they're going into the Black Sea' but the programme itself prefaces his remarks to provide this same message graphically to the audience.

An animated map represents growing Russian influence as a spreading expanse of red over the Crimea as the voice-over describes the region as 'fraught with tension since Russian forces moved into Crimea in 2014'. Sailors are filmed listening to Commodore Utley's briefing ('let's not be under any doubt, that we do not have normal relations with Russia') and their reactions are also sought. Rhiann calls his words 'inspiring', and Owen expresses confidence in the crew's abilities. Inserted in a separate interview with the commodore is a cut to a quotation painted above a hatch: '"The name of Duncan will never be forgot by Britain and in particular by its Navy" – Admiral Lord Nelson, October 1804.' Although not explicitly addressed (viewers will recognise the allusion to Nelson, but not necessarily Admiral Duncan), the tradition associated with the name of HMS *Duncan* is therefore silently associated with the present putative crisis, which the voice-over seeks to intensify before the next advertisement break: 'The commodore is taking the fleet deep into the most tense regions of the Black Sea. *Duncan* is heading straight into the lion's den.' Ominous soundtrack music is introduced as *Duncan* passes under the

last bridge on the Bosphorus and enters the Black Sea, and, after a port visit in Romania where shipboard guests discuss Russian aggression in the region, the opening episode ends with the first encounters with Russian aircraft and the voice-over's tantalisation: 'the arrival of the Russian jet is an escalation – the question now is, what will happen next?'

Duncan's confrontation with fighter aircraft in the Black Sea consumes episode two, as the ship approaches within 30 miles of the coast.[193] The launching of the ship's helicopter for reconnaissance is not construed on board as 'escalatory', though the voice-over states that 'no Royal Navy ship has been this close to Crimea since Russia occupied it in 2014'. The arrival of a Russian intelligence-gathering ship is noted with satisfaction as proof that '*Duncan* has the attention of Russia.' Captain Stack announces to her crew that what they are doing in the Black Sea is 'resonating across Whitehall'. Commentary on the unfolding situation alternates between heightening the crisis and dismissing the threat. With 'swarms of aircraft' approaching, the voice-over speculates 'are they here to attack, or intimidate?', whereas Commodore Utley calls their tactics 'naïve: what they don't know is how capable this ship is'. After the planes withdraw without incident, a brief interlude sees the ship dock at Catania, with crew members visiting a war cemetery to recall the invasion of Sicily in 1943. *Duncan*'s chaplain leads a service of remembrance with contemporary relevance, reminding the congregation of 'what the purpose of being in the military is' and reflecting that 'the world in which we live seems to have suddenly started to ramp up into a more dangerous world again'. This respite from tension is brief, however, as the voice-over anticipates episode three's events: 'This is the last chance Duncan's crew have to reflect on the past, because they're about to be thrust into one of the most dangerous missions of their lives … a chemical weapons attack in Syria gives *Duncan* a new mission.'

Although ordinary shipboard events continue to receive representation, with junior officer Will de la Mare undergoing his Fleet Board examination (which the voice-over introduces with predictable amplification: 'the next three hours will determine if Will stays in the Navy…'), episode three parallels the previous instalment in detailing another heightened confrontation with Russian forces. An excerpt of news footage of Theresa May's announcement of the poisoning of the Skripals in Salisbury and other comments by President Trump on the 'brutal' Syrian regime are included to contextualise the joint American, British and French missile strikes which HMS *Duncan* supports. However, the series' portrayal of these events seems at variance with their historical sequence.[194]

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[193] Meetings, mutual curiosity, aggressive manoeuvres and even collisions between Russian and Western forces at sea were not infrequent occurrences during the Cold War. Bryan Ranft and Geoffrey Till, *The Sea in Soviet Strategy*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp.61–62, 231.

[194] The series' representation of events appears altered from their chronological sequence, in that the poisoning in Salisbury took place in March 2018, the strikes

With the series being broadcast six months after the events it portrays, the voice-over's immediacy ('a chemical weapon has been used on the streets of Britain') and the recognition of relevance of these incidents to the documentary subject (Commodore Utley remarks: 'linking Salisbury to HMS *Duncan* might seem like a bit of a leap, but we need to be out there ensuring UK interests are looked after') underline *Warship: Life at Sea*'s reiteration of national, political and naval discourses within popular televisual form. *Duncan*'s arrival to support other ships and aircraft striking targets in Syria precipitates further encounters with Russian warships, since Russia has stated it will act to defend Syria from external aggression. The voice-over summarises the political situation in simplistic, aggressive terms ('Russia's threat to defend their Syrian ally raises the stakes'), while titles specifying the date and time strive to enhance the immediacy and authenticity of the danger. The call to action stations occasions dramatic music and rapid cuts and pans as crew members don anti-flash clothing and move to their positions in the operations room. As Russian ships approach, the voice-over declares: 'the battle lines are being drawn: this is what Duncan was designed for, but it's the first time the crew have done it for real. Should they fire back, the UK could find itself at war with Russia.' The inflammatory if nonsensical nature of this commentary (watching in December 2018, the audience knows war did not break out in April) underlines the series' habitual embellishment of events despite their basis in observed reality. The effect of such overdetermination was not lost on contemporary reviewers:

> Episode three of Channel 5's *Warship: Life at Sea* again made me wonder whether, unsuspected by millions of us at home, Britain really is teetering on the brink of all-out war with Russia. Or whether compressing nine months of unusually busy time at sea into four hour-long episodes might give a slightly overheated impression of reality.[195]

Unfortunately the series' stylisation has undermined faith in the 'for real'. A comparable moment in the final episode when a Russian helicopter approaches the ship ('*Duncan* is on a knife edge: one wrong move could cause either side to open fire') similarly passes without incident: the helicopter merely takes photographs, as HMS *Northumberland*'s aircraft does when tracking a Russian submarine in series three. The voice-over's exultation ('Duncan's crew held their

against Syria were conducted in April, and *Duncan*'s transit of the Black Sea occurred in May. HMS *Duncan*'s transit of the Black Sea may have appeared more provocative, and the Russian reaction less unexpected, if seen *after* the encounter with Russian ships off Syria rather than before.

[195] Gerard Donovan, *Warship: Life at Sea* review: let's hope this is exaggerated – else we're on the brink of all-out war with Russia, *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 December 2018, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/tv/2018/12/10/warship-life-sea-review-hope-exaggerated-else-brink-all-out/ [accessed 20 December 2018].

nerve') is reinforced by the inclusion of Theresa May's official recognition of the involvement of UK personnel: 'My thoughts are with our brave British servicemen and women who are carrying out their duty with the greatest professionalism.' The series' conclusion with the ship's arrival back in Portsmouth, accompanied by a rapid flashback summary of the series' events, is made suitably patriotic and circular with a final view of the Union Jack.

Series two's treatment of *Duncan*'s operations in the Gulf under new captain Tom Trent replicates the combination of observational record and heightened rhetoric that characterised series one. A similarly breakneck opening credit sequence of more than 70 shots in less than two minutes introduces the ship and its exceptional systems, but also incorporates more levity (seen on the bridge, female watch officer Jo Peacock remarks: 'I don't want to freak anyone out but what is that in front of us?'). *Duncan*'s confrontations with Russian and Iranian vessels receive comparably heightened and stylised treatment through editing techniques, prominent soundtrack music and a similarly hyperbolical voice-over, provided by producer Mark Tattersall:

> With exclusive access, our cameras have been invited back for *Duncan*'s dramatic new seven-month deployment, as the crew join the fight to eradicate Isis in Iraq and Syria and they find themselves at the heart of an international crisis.

Duncan screens the French aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* from the attention of Russian warships while operating in the Eastern Mediterranean (in the voice-over's words 'to eradicate the last remnants of Isis'). Ensuring 10 miles of sea room for flight operations against Isis targets means the destroyer must be interposed between the carrier and the shadowers, the *Admiral Essen* and the *Severomorsk*. The voice-over both colloquialises and exaggerates the danger of these manoeuvres: 'Playing a game of chicken with the Russians in a £1 billion warship is a risky tactic, but could be their best option.' A visit to Odessa to support regional alliances sees the ship play host to President Zelensky. In interview, Captain Trent describes their activities as part of a 'huge strategic game going on here with Russia … it's not about antagonising Russia but it is about showing strength.' *Duncan* is subsequently dispatched to the Gulf to protect shipping after the British-flagged tanker *Stena Impero* is boarded: 'news reaches the ship that Iran has made good on their threat'. As *Duncan* successfully escorts ships through the Gulf (Figure 5.9), the audience is reminded of the significance of the Navy's presence, not simply to protect British sailors. Lieutenant Jack Mercer points out that, 'if the Straits of Hormuz are shut, the lights go out in the UK'.

Using the ship's helicopter as 'five tons of pretty loud violence' to drive away Iranian speed boats without resorting to weapons satisfies Captain Trent, who reflects: 'It's quite nice now and again to tease them, for a change.' Comparable statements encapsulate the attitudes towards both Iranian and Russian

Figure 5.9: HMS *Duncan* escorting merchant ships in the Straits of Hormuz. POPhot Jay Allen. ©UK Ministry of Defence CROWN COPYRIGHT, 2019: Open Government Licence.

activities to dominate regional waters. Captain Trent says it is 'critical' that NATO allies 'remind Russia that they can't dominate this space as they want to'. Likewise in interview he maintains: 'The Iranians are trying to assert authority over the region, but the point is that we don't recognize that that is acceptable.' The assertiveness of these comments (seen in both series in response to the actions of other states' military forces) purport to justify if not fully explain the Navy's presence in areas of the world where British interests are apparently at risk. The vested right to free trade in the Gulf to 'keep the lights on' appears unproblematically equated with arbitrary rights of navigation in the Black Sea.

Despite these prominent visual and verbal elements of *Warship: Life at Sea* that emphasise external threats and vindicate British responses, the series also provide documentary portraits of the Navy and its contemporary community. While there is relatively little probing and profiling of interviewed crew members beyond their introduction in series one, fewer incidents for illustration or exaggeration in series two allow for more significant representation of individuals. Young engineer Kieran Witty, first observed getting a severe haircut, comes to prominence when he is given responsibility for a 'mission critical repair' to the ship's navigation radar. He receives promotion for his work and states his intention to rise from enlisted to officer status and gain a degree through his naval career. The recognition he receives for enthusiasm and ambition makes Witty an exemplary recruiting role model. He comments to camera:

Figure 5.10: HMS *Northumberland*. LPhot Bill Spurr. UK MOD. © Crown copyright 2022: Open Government Licence.

'The job completely suits me in every respect. The Navy gives you the chance to work and get qualifications and learn.' When fire breaks out in the engine room, 20-year-old technician James Bradbury is labelled a hero and personally thanked by Captain Trent for spotting the emergency on his rounds and preventing loss of the ship's power: 'Bradbury has saved the day.' Lieutenant Megan Mackley-Heath (whom the voice-over describes as 'at just 27 she's the second most senior engineer on board') also features in several sequences. Although somewhat salaciously introduced in the credit sequence commenting on her relationship with her 'deployment husband' Pete Howell ('like a married couple but with no benefits whatsoever'), Megan is seen leading her male team, overcoming breakdowns and difficulties and also passing her command board to become a chief engineer.

The relative rebalancing of documentary elements, intentions and appeals of *Warship: Life at Sea* in its second series is largely reversed by the augmentation of its polemical treatment and political content in its third. Although the series' depiction of life on board the Type 23 frigate HMS *Northumberland* (Figure 5.10) provides occasional consideration of individual circumstances (such as trainee officer Olivia Titmuss's first experiences at sea, the isolation felt by chef Sauhil James, recruited straight from school in St Vincent, who is supported by the 'ship's daddy' and oldest crew member, Executive Warrant Officer Darren Wollington, and 20-year-old Phoebe Stead's enthusiasm for the ship's primary anti-submarine mission), these cameos struggle for screen time amid the

representation of burgeoning crisis and confrontation. Events on camera are constantly accompanied by soundtrack music that shifts rapidly from martial to whimsical to ominous. *Northumberland*'s operations in the North Sea and around the UK (portrayed by the voice-over as 'a secret four-month deployment at a time of unprecedented pressure from the Russian military') are repeatedly framed in terms of imminent danger. In the first episode the frigate is interposed between Russian intelligence gatherers and HMS *Queen Elizabeth* as the new aircraft carrier exercises in the North Sea. Russian warships and submarines appear on a computer-animated map as anonymous red symbols: 'Russia's intentions are unclear, but their warships are advancing. It's *Northumberland*'s job to stop them.' Having joined 'one of the most powerful naval fleets Britain has ever assembled', the frigate is next dispatched to meet a new threat, which is referred to obliquely in episode two:

> The new intelligence suggests the Russians are heading towards sensitive waters in the Arctic. Downing Street has been notified and has ordered *Northumberland* to head north immediately. If the captain doesn't get his ship to the Arctic first, vital British interests there could be under threat.

The nature of this threat, and the 'British interests' in the Arctic, are subsequently revealed to be attempts by specially equipped Russian submarines to interfere with, cut or tap communications cables on the seabed. *Northumberland*'s captain, Commander Tom Hobbs, is shown watching a news report (actually from 2017) of an announcement by 'Britain's most senior military officer' of this new menace to national security.[196] Hobbs describes the danger such operations pose in apocalyptic terms, which also compare present circumstances with the Navy's most traditional roles:

> Russia will take care of the UK not by lobbing nuclear missiles into us. They will take care of us by disconnecting us from the rest of the world. And so that can't happen, and we have to react. We need to protect our cables in the same way that we used to protect ships going across the oceans.

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[196] The footage appears to be taken from a BBC report of a speech given by Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach at the Royal United Services Institute in December 2017 as then Chief of UK Defence Staff. Anonymous, Could Russia cut undersea communication cables? *BBC News*, 15 December 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-42365191 [accessed 11 March 2022]. There is no admission that British submarines similarly undertake intelligence-gathering in Arctic and Russia waters, nor any acknowledgement of similar activities by American submarines against the Soviet Union's undersea cables dating back to the 1960s: Caitlin Morris, Operation IVY BELLS: Lessons learned from an 'intelligence success', *Journal of the Australian Institute of Professional Intelligence Officers*, 2012, 20(3), 17–29.

Northumberland battles through a storm to intercept the Russian submarine, undertaking a dangerous replenishment at sea and suffering flooding in her main gun's magazine en route, the danger that the voice-over accentuates before an advertisement break: 'one short circuit could cause a spark, detonating the nearby ammunition and blowing a hole in the ship…' After this disaster is averted, several drastic tonal shifts occur, which again suggest a reordering of recorded material. A celebratory mood predominates as some crew members witness the Northern Lights inside the Arctic Circle for the first time, but Warfare Officer Lee Ellis reflects dejectedly on repeated separations from his family. His interview takes place in a cabin decorated with family pictures, and is punctuated by shots of him recording a bed-time story for his children:

> I've missed yet another anniversary, and they're six years old, my twins. I've had two solid Christmas periods with them, so yeah, I leave quite a lot behind. My kids don't understand what I'm doing, why it's important, and why other … their friends' dads go home every night and I don't. They're not quite getting it. They keep asking when I'm coming home, and why I'm not coming home.

While this segment accords with other foregrounded comments throughout the series on the duty of and sacrifices made for naval life, it is quickly overtaken by the frigate's hunt for the submarine, which is interrupted by an electrical failure disabling the sonar. By the time power is restored the contact has been lost, yet the episode ends with a further heightening of the drama by implying 'next time … a Russian submarine collides with the ship.'

The series' representation of this incident exemplifies its tendencies to manipulate or obfuscate. The 'collision' does not occur between the Russian submarine and the frigate but between the submarine and *Northumberland*'s towed sonar array. Having lost the submarine for 48 hours, contact is re-established with the ship's helicopter, which tracks and photographs the Russian vessel close to the surface. The images appear step-printed on screen to emphasise their validity and secrecy. When Hobbs manoeuvres *Northumberland* closer and into a parallel course to make it clear the submarine has been detected (the voice-over notes with satisfaction 'at this distance, the Russians are bound to hear *Northumberland* and know they've been rumbled'), the Russian vessel turns unexpectedly and impacts the towed array.[197] This is variously interpreted as

[197] The programme's dramatic depiction of this incident was matched by contemporary news reporting of it. Jerome Starkey and Natasha Clark, SEA SMASH: Royal Navy warship SMASHES into Russian 'hunter-killer' submarine after dramatic chase in icy Atlantic, *The Sun*, 7 January 2022, https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/17243613/royal-navy-warship-hits-russian-submarine-atlantic/?utm_medium=Social&utm

a deliberate and aggressive act, an accident or simply a miscalculation, but the result is damage to the sonar and loss of the contact for good. The ship's later encounters with Russian ships and aircraft are represented in similar terms, when *Northumberland* escorts an American submarine in British waters, is overflown by a 'Bear' bomber, and warns off a Russian warship that approaches the Trident submarine base on the west coast of Scotland. The captain's comments and the voice-over's enhancements strive to impress on the audience the severity of the incessant Russian menace:

> [Hobbs] They're trying to assert ownership over the ocean, and like any school yard bully if you don't stop them, they'll just take and take and take.
>
> [voice-over] This sort of mass Russian presence so close to the UK hasn't been seen for nearly 25 years.
>
> [Hobbs] I think most people don't understand that most of the time there's a Russian warship around the UK. There's always a danger.
>
> [voice-over] It's a clear attempt to provoke *Northumberland*, just a few miles off the British mainland. So close to home, this level of intimidation is almost unheard of.

Throughout series three, repetitive rhetorical weight is placed on the necessity of a response to aggression against varyingly defined British territories, interests and symbols. The defensive, reactive operations in which *Northumberland* is engaged and their geographical specificity (in contrast to the distant locations of all the other series) appear to represent a consciously different and topically selected representation. Although the episodes still function to provide a portrait of a crew, few individuals are allowed more than single, incidental appearances, and the third series' focus rests even more noticeably than that of its predecessors on the national and cursorily outlined but emphatically politicised discourses articulated on the ship, or attached to its activities. The contrast between *Warship: Life at Sea*'s documentary concentration and that of the contemporary series of *Britain's Biggest Warship* could therefore not be more stark.

Channel 5's original *Warship* series stand as latter-day reimaginings of observation of a normal navy life, depicting and celebrating if not always adequately explaining or justifying the inevitability of the Royal Navy's global presence. Although diverging increasingly from the observational mode of

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_campaign=sunmaintwitter&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1641493001 [accessed 18 August 2022].

Sailor into the (voyeuristically) revealing and politically persuasive, these aspects can be seen to reflect the tendencies and contexts of contemporary popular documentary and its hybridisation with the forms of docusoap, infotainment and reality television. However, as with the application of the term 'infotainment' to localise the rhetorical features and entertainment emphasis of simplifying but informative documentary forms (see Chapter 4), the stress upon current affairs in later series of *Warship: Life at Sea* can be identified and interpreted through the vocabulary of news media analysis. Lukas Otto, Isabella Glogger and Mark Boukes reconceptualise the often-interchangeable labels of 'soft news', 'infotainment', 'tabloidisation' and 'sensationalism' applied to political news coverage into a hierarchical, critical framework. 'Tabloidisation' as a process rather than a genre or form and defined as 'a spillover of values', topics and styles 'from the popular to traditional news media', encapsulates the evolution of *Warship: Life at Sea*.[198] The series' conspicuous production features of sound, editing and narration, and affective mode of address characterised by a vernacular that places 'emphasis on emotions', embody its tabloidisation of factual television.[199] The process of tabloidisation is discernible at the formal level through features of 'sensationalism', which Otto, Glogger and Boukes define as 'a specific kind of journalistic coverage aimed at triggering certain recipient reactions (attention, emotion) by using specific sensationalist production features'.[200] Similarly, the shift from the use of actors and personalities to the producer himself providing the coercive voice-over is redolent of 'soft news' and its use of 'the author's point of view or showing a partisan bias'.[201] At the formal level, the deliberate stylisation of *Warship: Life at Sea* (and equally prevalent in previous Channel 5 series such as *Submarine School* and *Royal Navy Submarine Mission*: see Chapter 2) is redolent of wider and longer-running trends in factual television. Such trends in technique and their potential for the rebranding of 'politics as popular culture instead of the serious business of popular discourse' suggest a stylistically distinguished and persuasively inclined path for the documentary in the post-truth era (Figure 5.11).[202]

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[198] Lukas Otto, Isabella Glogger and Mark Boukes, The Softening of Journalistic Political Communication: A Comprehensive Framework Model of Sensationalism, Soft News, Infotainment, and Tabloidization, *Communication Theory*, 2017, 27, 136–155, p.145.

[199] Otto, Glogger and Boukes, The Softening of Journalistic Political Communication, p.146.

[200] Otto, Glogger and Boukes, The Softening of Journalistic Political Communication, pp.141–142.

[201] Otto, Glogger and Boukes, The Softening of Journalistic Political Communication, p.143.

[202] Kees Brants, Who's Afraid of Infotainment, p.320.

Figure 5.11: Film crew aboard HMS *Duncan*. Crown copyright: Open Government Licence.

Conclusion: from hybridisation to tabloidisation

The ongoing success of Channel 5's naval documentaries within a television context of entertainment, public service broadcasting and public relations can be deduced from the trailer tagline used for *Submarine School* (2011), which followed the submarine command training 'Perisher' course: 'Forget *The Apprentice* … this is the world's toughest job interview.'[203] The extent to which naval involvement in such television programmes and media activities is also recognised and valued by the Navy itself can be gauged from the commendation given to HMS *Bulwark* and her crew for their 'Media Operations and Public Relations work during the year June 2008–June 2009'. In addition to the Channel 5 series accompanying the ship during the Taurus 2009 deployment to the Indian Ocean, during this period *Bulwark* had also participated in numerous television and radio features and was deemed to have achieved 'considerable successes in projecting a positive and relevant image of the RN across the

[203] Anonymous, Submarine School 'The Series' Channel 5, *Royal Navy*, https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-events/national-events/submarine_school_doc.htm [accessed 22 February 2011].

broadest media spectrums'.[204] Unlike ITV's HMS *Ark Royal, Warship* does not explicitly admit or address the strain on resources the Navy of the early 21st century has experienced. The positive and unquestioningly patriotic coverage Channel 5's series provide is therefore notable in what has been described as a period of difficulty and decline:

> By the end of the first decade of the new century, Europe's naval forces were heading into the proverbial abyss. Smaller than at any time in recent history, naval forces across Europe had lost important proficiencies and capabilities. The shortfall in naval platforms had a substantial bearing on the ability to deal effectively with the growing range of naval tasks. The modernisation of many navies has been hampered not only by shrinking budgets but by cost overruns, lengthy procurement processes, and major technical deficiencies. These problems were compounded by the fact that many armed forces across the continent have found it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain young men and women.[205]

The constant, even-handed but overarchingly positive representation of working life and job opportunities within the Navy that the series offer (particularly in relation to female crew members but not necessarily acknowledging or privileging wider diversity) is also noteworthy in this respect, though other contemporary programmes (such as Chris Terrill's series for the BBC) provide similarly celebratory and more inclusive portraits of British society aboard the Royal Navy's ships.

Channel 5's series can be considered successes in repeatedly bringing the Navy to public attention, fitting this national, institutional subject into patterns of popular representation that stress the relevant and the recognisable as much as the popular or accessible. The worldwide operations portrayed in *Warship* (and *Submarine Mission* and *Ice Patrol*) during the first decade of the 21st century and the globally capable and present Royal Navy they appear to represent constitute an affirmative and relevant depiction of British naval power for popular consumption. It is ironic that this increase in the Navy's televisual presence coincided with burgeoning (or perhaps simply continuing) consciousness of irreconcilable pressures (of dwindling ship numbers, extending deployments, postponed construction and expanding commitments) afflicting the service at the time.[206] The politics for public consideration, as much as the personal

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[204] Anonymous, *Bulwark*'s Media Efforts Recognised, *Royal Navy*, https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/operations-and-support/surface-fleet/assault-ships/albion-class/hms-bulwark/news/bulwarks-media-efforts-recognised [accessed 21 April 2010].

[205] Jeremy Stöhs, 'Into the Abyss': European Naval Power in the Post-Cold War Era, *Naval War College Review*, 2018, 71(3), 13–29, p.14.

[206] Geoffrey Till, Great Britain Gambles with the Royal Navy, *Naval War College Review*, 2010, 63(1), 33–60.

difficulties for crew members, associated with lengthy foreign deployments and potentially dangerous intervention in international events stand problematically alongside the obvious and traditional attraction of overseas service for recruitment purposes within *Warship*'s spectrum, and spectacle, of factual entertainment. However, the relative weightings of these elements raise questions for the categorisation as much as appraisal of these series when, as John Corner has noted, 'documentary formats' can become characterised by 'their subtle, illusory realisms and modes of sustained, narrativised referentiality'.[207] The shifts between decades are discernible in the differences displayed by *Warship* and *Warship: Life at Sea*, the former connected to the distant East of Suez commitments of the War on Terror yet exhibiting a predominantly wry and jocular tone, and the latter refocused on threats in European and even UK home waters represented with heightened visual and verbal rhetoric in response to 'Russia's irredentism'.[208]

In terms of the evaluation of evolving documentary styles, the variegation of the events, comments, insights and tones that the *Warship* series encompass is matched by the rapidity with which they are covered. Except for the concerted and prurient reality television-oriented treatment of (potential) romantic or sexual relationships, most occurrences receive fleeting attention: multiple advertisement breaks reduce episodes to around 45 minutes in each televised hour, with the shortest segments between breaks during the original broadcasts being less than 10 minutes. While teasing previews and crafted cliffhangers are inserted to pique and sustain viewer attention, the compartmentalisation (and transience) of each incident reduces the risks to comprehension of channel-hopping and *in*attention. Recaps ('previously…'), flashbacks and anticipatory flashforwards also impinge on running time, but enhance the resemblance to docusoap in shaping the documentary subject. At the same time, in drawing large popular audiences to naval documentary subjects, and in facilitating accessibility and familiarity with them via the visual and verbal vernacular of reality television, the *Warship* series admirably serve the purposes of broadcasting and normalising the image of the Navy and (as the concentration on female crew members in early series demonstrates) contributing positively and authentically to crucial recruitment discourses.

In an interview with the *Navy Lookout*, an independent journalistic outlet for naval news, information and analysis, Mark Tattersall recognised the difficulties in satisfying both lay and informed viewers of naval documentary, but stated that *Warship: Life at Sea*'s key focus was 'the main target audience that just wants to see plenty of action'.[209] This article celebrated the 'considerable

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[207] John Corner, Re-styling the real: British television documentary in the 1990s, *Continuum*, 1997, 11(1), 9–22, p.12.

[208] Stöhs, Into the Abyss, p.21.

[209] Anonymous, Documenting the Royal Navy in action – the making of 'Warship Life at Sea', *Navy Lookout*, 9 February 2022, https://www.navylookout.com/documenting

body of work, expertise and trust within the MoD' Tattersall and his team had built up over numerous series, and noted the unpredictability of ship deployments leading inevitably to 'an element of luck' in what series are able to observe: an unforeseen switch from HMS *Diamond* to HMS *Duncan* led to the recording of the latter's confrontation with Russian forces, and unexpectedly HMS *Northumberland*'s duties in home waters 'proved highly eventful'.[210] Corner notes the 'strong literalist force' of the captured documentary moment but also the 'implicatory level' at which an event is organised or manipulated pro-filmically (by what the camera is able or chooses to depict) and/or filmically (by stylistic intervention mediating and inflecting the event at and after the event via shooting and editing).[211] Clearly the numerous *Warship* series evince visual 'literalism' in their recording of events on board ships at sea, with observation of the life and work of crews participating in real events. However, specific selections and emphases reflect significant mediations and manipulations both pro-filmically and filmically, for example the selection of Rachel and Dave as 'characters', the reiterative stress upon their growing intimacy via narrativising editing such as flashbacks, and the eventual accompaniment of salacious and sardonic voice-over. While these representational decisions reflect the fitting of the naval subject to the focal demands and expectations of reality television and docusoap, the 'implicatory levels' discernible elsewhere suggest manipulation to other ends. In the second series of *Warship: Life at Sea* repeated cuts to the same view (or perhaps simply the same repeated shot) of the *Severomorsk* appearing to show her stopped, with no discernible bow wave or wake, undermine the narration's construction of dangerous manoeuvres and a 'game of chicken' between the warships. Detectably repeated uses of shots of HMS *Northumberland* in stormy seas, occasionally also disrupting continuity, draw attention to other strenuous verbal and visual efforts made to heighten drama and tension in the third series of *Warship: Life at Sea*. Frequent insertions of excerpted news reports and soundbites from national leaders may historically locate the documented events but serve problematically as mutually reinforcing sources for the unquestioned politico-military discourse the series propound.

Furthermore, the documentarists' presence for exceptional events may not always be coincidental. After HMS *Duncan*'s Black Sea encounter, HMS *Defender*'s (Figure 5.12) confrontation with Russian forces in 2021 followed a similar pattern of action and reaction, purportedly innocent navigation and alleged purposeful provocation. While some details of this incident remain unclear or contested, British government documents subsequently found at a bus stop in Kent appeared to verify claims that HMS *Defender*'s course was deliberate and accepted as provocative. The ship's deployment was approved at cabinet level as

-the-royal-navy-in-action-the-making-of-warship-life-at-sea/ [accessed 14 June 2022].

[210] Anonymous, Documenting the Royal Navy in action.

[211] Corner, Re-styling the real, p.16.

Figure 5.12: HMS *Defender*. LPHOT BEN CORBETT. UK MOD © Crown copyright 2022: Open Government Licence.

a display intended to underline the UK's support for Ukraine, with the stated additional benefit that embedded (BBC) journalists on board would provide 'independent verification of HMS *Defender*'s action.'[212] HMS *Defender*'s detour to the Black Sea from CSG-21's voyage to the South China Sea (itself construed as a provocation to China, in 'making trouble where there is none') therefore appears more manufactured as a potential incident ripe for record.[213] Although the incidents recorded aboard HMS *Northumberland* (Figure 5.13) took

[212] Dmitry Gorenburg, The HMS Defender Incident: What happened and What Are the Political Ramifications? *Russia Matters*, 1 July 2021, https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/hms-defender-incident-what-happened-and-what-are-the-political-ramifications [accessed 5 June 2022]; Anonymous, HMS Defender: Russian jets and ships shadow British warship, *BBC News*, 23 June 2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-57583363 [accessed 5 June 2022]; Paul Adams, Classified Ministry of Defence documents found at bus stop, *BBC News*, 27 June 2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57624942 [accessed 5 June 2022].

[213] Bill Hayton, Explainer: The Carrier Strike Group in the South China Sea, *Council on Geostrategy*, 27 July 2021, https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/the-carrier-strike-group-in-the-south-china-sea/ [accessed 14 June 2022]; George Allison, British aircraft carrier ignores Chinese warnings for a second time, *UK Defence Journal*, 4 October 2021, https://www.ukdefencejournal.org.uk/british-aircraft-carrier-ignores-chinese-warnings-for-second-time [accessed 14 June 2022].

Figure 5.13: HMS *Northumberland*. LPhot Kyle Heller, 2019. UK MOD © Crown copyright 2020: Open Government Licence.

place in 2020, the third series of *Warship: Life at Sea* was not broadcast until January 2022.[214] This produced a remarkable coincidence with news reporting (on 7 and 8 January) of Russian threats to the UK's undersea cables heralding the episodes detailing *Northumberland*'s tracking of and collision with a Russian submarine (which aired on 10 and 17 January).[215] Russia's military build-up on its borders therefore formed the current affairs background to the series, with the subsequent invasion of Ukraine taking place three weeks after its end.

This suggests a more noticeable manipulation of the timing of airing than the apparently altered sequence of events represented in series one. Irrespective of the coincidental or purposeful convergence of the programmes' transmission with these events, the consistency with which repeated *Warship: Life at Sea* series have documented recent escalating incidents at sea (not only involving Russian ships and aircraft) and the didactic techniques and heightened visual and verbal styles they espouse have created a standardised and sensationalised narrative. Channel 5's home audience for reality television has been supplied with a persistent and persuasive depiction of the Royal Navy that combines popular entertainment form with overt and opinionated political commentary in televisual 'tabloidisation'. In recognising the impact of pro-filmic and filmic manipulation on the factual image's 'epistemological claims', John Corner asserts the need for critical scrutiny of the potential ideological and socio-cultural consequences of 'current forms of institutionalisation and practice' in documentary.[216] While such stylistic and structural manipulation is clearly not limited to recent evolution in television, hybridisation of factual television's forms may entail significant 'implicatory levels' of meaning:

> The blurring of boundaries, which sounds like it should be a matter of celebration among deconstructors of convention, is not seen to be such a good thing at all, connected as it is with a further commodification of television and often with political conservatism.[217]

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[214] The *Navy Lookout* article states that 'around 1,700 hours of footage' were edited into the five episodes over a period of 'about 8 weeks'. Although the rough cut would then be subject to official scrutiny and approval, the 18-month delay until the series was broadcast is notable. Anonymous, Documenting the Royal Navy in action.

[215] Larisa Brown and Catherine Philp, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin warns of Russian threat at sea, *The Times*, 7 January 2022, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/admiral-sir-tony-radakin-warns-of-russian-threat-at-sea-kx7vf5sxv [accessed 18 January 2022]; Anonymous, 'Keep your subs away from our communication cables': New head of the armed forces Admiral Sir Tony Radakin warns Russia that severing crucial lines will be seen as act of war as tensions continue to rise, *Daily Mail*, 8 January 2022, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10380825/Sir-Tony-Radakin-warns-Russia-attempts-sever-communication-cables-seen-act-war.html [accessed 18 January 2022].

[216] Corner, Re-styling the real, p.12.

[217] Corner, Re-styling the real, p.13.

Such problems of critical definition might appear distant from the expectation, experience and entertainment of the viewing audience. The hybridity of *Warship: Life at Sea* appears to evince a gravitation from documentary and infotainment into a more directive, journalistic and 'tabloidised' treatment of current affairs. This might be occasioned by the nature of the events recorded but is certainly furthered by the filmic influences of subsequent structuring, stylisation and even the moment of transmission. Its contemporary depiction may be recorded as documentary or reality television and received as a combination of docusoap or infotainment but may be interpreted as rendering a simplified political discourse within current affairs programming. In the most negative evaluations, the spread of infotainment focuses fears that the commercialisation, simplification and sensationalism of news and current affairs are in themselves threats to the proper function of representative democracies. Inhibited access to accurate, unbiased and comprehensive information for a civically responsible and political active population may precipitate 'a crisis of communication for citizenship'.[218] Conversely, Hill suggests audiences respond more favourably to infotainment shows that, through their recording of events as they occur, 'are thought to be more accurate than television documentary'.[219] Similarly Mick Temple has argued, in contradiction to anxious and elitist views of the 'dumbing down' of politics and current affairs within progressively commercialised news coverage, that the increasing popularisation of contemporary issues within reality television succeeds in reaching, in a conducive form, a viewing public otherwise indifferent to or alienated from political debate.[220] With Channel 5's contemporary series now representing some of the most sustained and prominent television depictions of the Navy (and a fourth series of *Warship: Life at Sea* being planned at time of writing), their hybridisation of factual forms and their amalgamation of the popular and the polemical can certainly be seen to be intimately linked, and equally open to critical interpretation.

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[218] Brants, Who's Afraid of Infotainment, p.319.

[219] Hill, *Reality TV*, p.60.

[220] Mick Temple, Dumbing Down is Good for You, *British Politics*, 2006, 1, 257–273.

CHAPTER 6

Different Eyes: Chris Terrill's Naval Documentaries

> Don't think of an impersonal mass audience out there when you are making a film. Imagine you are making it for some select and trusted close family members and friends. It gives you an alternative focus and the sense of others' appreciation and perceptions – different eyes with which to view and evaluate your subject.[221]

Since the 1990s, the work of Chris Terrill (Figure 6.1) has constituted a significant contribution to both popular documentary form and factual naval and military representation. While his output of series and individual documentaries warrants in-depth study on its own, the programmes considered here represent key components of the Navy's public-facing commitment to uncompromising but abidingly positive portrayals of the service and its missions, traditions and personnel since the end of the Cold War.

Terrill's prolific programme-making has encompassed numerous series over more than 30 years, documenting aspects of the Royal Navy's and Royal Marines' establishments, communities, and experiences. Interspersed with series devoted to day-to-day life in the armed services, Terrill has made comparable programmes depicting civilian vocations and communities such as *Soho Stories* (BBC, 1997), *The Cruise* (BBC, 1998) and *Theatreland* (Sky Arts, 2009). In addition to many individual factual programmes, his series documenting the Navy and Marines include *HMS Brilliant* (BBC, 1996), *Shipmates* (BBC, 2004), *Commando: On the Frontline* (ITV, 2007), *Royal Navy Caribbean Patrol*

[221] Chris Terrill, Patrolling Paradise, *Broadcast*, 7 February 2011, https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/patrolling-paradise/5023369.article [accessed 18 May 2022].

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Figure 6.1: Chris Terrill at work. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2005. Used with permission.

(Channel 5, 2011), and *Royal Marines: Mission Afghanistan* (Channel 5, 2012). Most recently he has followed the progress of the new aircraft carrier HMS *Queen Elizabeth* from construction, training and sea trials into active service in two series of *Britain's Biggest Warship* (BBC, 2016–19). A third series, recording the carrier's historic deployment to the South China Sea in 2021, is in preparation at time of writing.

The diversity of these titles reflects a multifaceted focus on armed service communities, encompassing routine activities at home bases and at sea, phases of intensive training, deployments and shore leave, active service during conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the experiences of wounded and traumatised veterans returning to the civilian world. Terrill's series evince the immediacy and authenticity of the observational mode, balancing their intimate records of naval and shipboard communities with a reportage approach to illustrations of the Navy's demanding operational roles (such as Royal Marine training in preparation for active service in Afghanistan, disaster relief in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami in *Shipmates*, and the provision of emergency aid during hurricane season in *Royal Navy Caribbean Patrol*). At the same time, the style Terrill's films adopt – featuring much captured, immediate footage and spontaneous commentary to camera from participants – is facilitated by the working methods he has developed with civilian documentary subjects and suggested by his anthropological background. (He describes the naval communities he joins and observes positively as 'tribes' with their own distinctive

customs, ethos and language.)[222] His documentary approach and the discourses of identity, community and contemporary Britishness his series explore clearly bear comparison with the contemporary *Warship: Life at Sea* series produced for Channel 5, which entered production after the production of Terrill's *Royal Navy Caribbean Patrol* for the same channel.

Working alone, Terrill operates his own camera and sound equipment, as well as conducting live interviews and interjecting comments and observations as events unfold. This methodology of 'embedding' aims to encapsulate the spontaneous, the authentic and the mundane, alongside the extraordinary and the typically unseen aspects of operational life. The occupations and interactions that Terrill records underline the typical and unenvisaged aspects of day-to-day employment in jobs and communities at once like and unlike any others. Terrill himself describes this approach in terms of maintaining authenticity for the viewer and respect for the documentary subject, without negating or denying the obvious presence of the filmmaker:

> By immersing in a community by myself I go in on the community's terms, not my own. I have to earn my right to be there. Embedding with the military – especially on operations – requires a very sensitive approach and that is why I choose to embed for at least six months or, in some cases, for years. I try to avoid the 'them and us' trap at all costs. It is all about mutual trust. The lighter my footprint the better but, by the same token, I never pretend I am not there with my camera and avoid the approach some filmmakers adopt which is to pretend there is an invisible glass wall between camera and subject.[223]

Terrill's films therefore stand in contrast to those of contemporary British documentarists such as Nick Broomfield and Louis Theroux, who engage in superficially similar explorations of the lives of atypical individuals, communities and institutions. In comparison with Terrill's acknowledged presence out of shot, the on-screen presence of these filmmakers is conspicuously intrusive and vocalised, epitomising how Nichols's 'interactive' mode can become overstated into the distractingly 'reflexive' and 'performative'. While in all these cases the documentary makers act as observers, conduits and interlocutors on the audience's behalf, Terrill's in-world but off-screen presence eschews the performativity of Broomfield and Theroux. Their visible and opinionated manifestation of the filmmaker in the observed environment is frequently justifiable, in order to flush into the open key aspects of a subject's character and circumstances, and through them to highlight wider sociological and political concerns. However, in Broomfield's and Theroux's films this objective is reliant upon an observable,

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[222] Chris Terrill, Shooting Sailors: filmmaker reflects on his passion for Royal Navy, *Navy News*, 2022, 814, 27.

[223] Interview with the author, November 2019.

consistent filmmaking persona, whose apparently artless presence and disingenuous questioning occasionally produces comedic and/or satiric effects. This participatory approach carries with it the danger of creating a distancing mockery rather than maintaining the neutral observation of an unfamiliar situation, an unusual environment or an eccentric individual.[224] Terrill's questions to his subjects from out of frame prompt conversational responses rather than strictly factual answers. Humour, institutional observation, criticism and satire do emerge in Terrill's films from the recorded events and environments, but authentically through the actions and reflections of the individuals and communities themselves. At the same time, presence and interactivity are crucial to the authentic observation of and accessible intimacy established with the documentary subject, as Terrill explains:

> I develop personal relationships with people that often informs the way they interact with me and that can sometimes become part of the story. If I do not appear on camera myself (and I usually don't) it does not matter who I am – I am just the voice behind the camera – but if people interact with me, they are in effect interacting with the viewer.[225]

Sea soap?

Terrill's programmes vary widely in their scope. *Shipmates* is composed of a series of portraits of ship and shore-based communities and establishments, explored through the experiences of varied individuals. *HMS Brilliant* and *Royal Navy Caribbean Patrol* concentrate on active overseas deployments, during which the consistent appearances and commentaries from specific crew members become both personal and indicative portraits within a fabric of reportage (Figure 6.2).

Shipmates provides an holistic cultural study of the Navy (including new recruits at HMS *Raleigh* in Plymouth, FOST aboard HMS *Ocean*, a naval boxing competition and the field gun race at Devonport, and an Arabian Gulf patrol aboard HMS *Chatham*), whereas the other series offer observational and investigative documentary footage, edited (in the case of *Caribbean Patrol*) for tension and suggested climaxes, furnished by the participation of HMS *Manchester* and her crew in drug interdiction and disaster relief operations. The consistency of method, taken across the full range of series, produces an unbroken but nuanced record, which (in Terrill's view) must be alert and responsive to personal and institutional continuities (and differences)

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[224] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp.31–75.

[225] Interview with the author, August 2022.

Figure 6.2: Chris Terrill interviews a member of HMS *Chatham*'s crew. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2005. Used with permission.

within evolving and topical events occurring at both domestic, local and dramatic, international levels:

> The pressures on and demands made of military groups are fundamentally different from those placed on civilians. It is hardly surprising because they are not only being asked to put their own lives on the line but are themselves invested with the authority to apply lethal violence to others. This changes the ethical and moral dynamics at both individual and group level and informs everything from comradeship to attitudes to duty, loyalty, honour and even humour … One has to be very careful to recognise that the military is not a lumpen community but a very distinct collection of specialist, segmentary sub-tribes that make up the generic whole. Each is distinct in terms of purpose, culture and shared values.[226]

Therefore, Terrill's naval series furnish sensitive and humanistic studies of individuals working within institutions portrayed as operational and traditional continua. The record of the almost instantaneous shift from aggressive patrolling to anticipated relaxation to disaster relief seen in HMS *Chatham*'s

[226] Interview with the author, November 2019.

Figure 6.3: HMS *Manchester* at sunset in the Caribbean. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2010. Used with permission.

transition from Dubai to Sri Lanka in the wake of the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 provides a spontaneous and positive factual portrait of the Navy's capabilities and purpose. At the same time, Terrill's films comment, intentionally or coincidentally, on the contemporary circumstances they capture. Perhaps reflecting British military overstretch or American security concerns, in *Caribbean Patrol* HMS *Manchester* (Figure 6.3) was seen to embark a US Coast Guard boarding party rather than a Royal Marine contingent during its drug-enforcement duties. Similarly, the first episode of *Caribbean Patrol* was broadcast in the week in which it was officially admitted that such warship deployments to the region would be discontinued as an economy measure.[227] The series that documented the twilight of the ship's career (this being HMS *Manchester*'s last deployment before retirement) therefore also highlighted and implicitly commented upon the Navy's role and relevance and foregrounded questions of national pride and responsibility.

The uncompromising approach that Terrill's films adopt lends them a veracity that recalls the transparency of *Sailor*, which is reinforced rather than hindered by the viewer's awareness of the presence of the filmmaker himself

[227] Nick Hopkins and Richard Norton-Taylor, Navy forced to drop warship patrols in Caribbean through lack of funds, *The Guardian*, 7 February 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/feb/07/navy-abandons-caribbean-warship-patrols [accessed 22 February 2011].

on board ship, just out of frame and out of sight, though heard through his conversational prompts and questions. At the same time, his series are ultimately affirmative in their portraiture of the Navy as an institution, with the immediacy of their recording as the down-payment on their verisimilitude. Reflecting on the production of *Shipmates*, Terrill noted the binding sense of responsibility to both subject and audience that his approach demanded, and that the Admiralty's acquiescence facilitated:

> The degree of access I enjoyed was unprecedented, and I applaud the Admiralty for granting it even though, for them, it was always going to be 'high risk.' I think they decided to take the plunge again for two reasons. Firstly, they know they are accountable to a tax-paying public, many of whom do not really understand what the modern Navy actually does any more and secondly, I reckon, they felt pretty confident that most of what I would find would enhance their reputation before it would tarnish it.[228]

This (repeated) open-ness of the naval establishment to Terrill's approach needs to be seen in the context of his many other series depicting varied aspects of civilian life. With his output dating back to the 1980s (with work on the BBC's documentary series *40 Minutes*), Terrill has been a long-standing practitioner of observational documentary in relation to underrepresented subject matter. The participatory nature of embedding seeks to translate and impart the experience of the director/filmmaker directly to the viewing audience. Terrill's reticent coexistence with his subjects over periods of months reduces the tendencies towards a reflexive documentary mode in privileging uninflected observation. The solitary filmmaker's access to the documentary subject granted by these methods has become formally and contextually suited to the circumstances of contemporary television. James Chapman underlines the relevance of this approach to social information and engagement, but also suggests criticisms of its tendency towards superficiality and narrativisation:

> The genre is particularly suited to television in two respects: First, the intimacy of television made the 'human' element more immediate: television allows a sense of closeness to the subjects that is different from cinema. Second, the episodic format of television allowed observational documentaries to follow individuals or institutions across a longer period of time than a film: this allows more detail and more incident. Observational documentary divides commentators: for its supporters it can provide a valuable sociological experiment and insight into the

[228] Christopher Terrill, *Shipmates: Inside the Royal Navy Today* (London: Century, 2005), p.xv.

> cultural politics of institutions … while for its detractors it is often seen as little more than a soap opera.[229]

The decline of current affairs and journalistic documentary, and the subsequent emergence of the docusoap as a cheaper and markedly more popular form of factual programming, is noted by Jonathan Bignell as a symptom of production and policy change in the 1990s. For Chapman, the mixed mode of the docusoap crystallises not only the evolving environment of broadcasting for the factual and the popular (and the factual *as* popular) but also the reorientation or blurring of the public and private, and the observed and the narrativised, in the definition of documentary:

> This was a hybrid of documentary and soap opera that adopted a *vérité*-style observational mode to follow individuals or groups in their working or domestic lives. Its mode of address crossed from the traditional public space of documentary into the personal space of the soap opera.[230]

Notably, Bignell therefore draws a generic distinction between the observational documentary form of Terrill's *HMS Brilliant* and the docusoap characteristics of *The Cruise*.[231] Given the similarity in recording method, this differentiation implies other divergences of subject, value and significance separating *HMS Brilliant* and other service-based series. Similarly, John Corner asserts that the docusoap's 'nosy sociability' underlines its approach as a more 'relaxed, looser, less purposive form of observation (the incidental becoming more important than the incident)', in contrast to more committed observational documentary.[232] While acknowledging the disparagement that docusoap as a factual form has received, with some of its most popular incarnations being partially scripted and emotionally manipulative, Chapman also identifies the more reputable and influential antecedents of these techniques, such as *The Family* (BBC, 1974), seen as the prototype of the 'fly-on-the-wall' documentary, *Sailor* (BBC, 1976) (see Chapter 2), *Strangeways* (BBC, 1980), filmed inside the high-security prison in Manchester, and *Police* (BBC, 1981), a controversial series depicting day-to-day investigations in the Thames Valley force. Terrill's

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[229] James Chapman, *A New History of British Documentary*, pp.198–199.

[230] Chapman, *A New History of British Documentary*, p.211.

[231] Jonathan Bignell, 'Docudramatizing the real: Developments in British TV docudrama since 1990', *Studies in Documentary Film*, 2010, 4(3), 195–208, pp.197–198. Terrill disagrees with this distinction since the series' subjects were approached through identical methods: '*The Cruise* was dubbed a docusoap but for me it was still a closely observed doc series about a ship's company.' Interview with the author, August 2022.

[232] John Corner, What can we say about documentary? *Media, Culture and Society*, 2000, 22, 681–688, p.687.

service subjects can be seen to conform more to these precedents but seek to be records of the real rather than judgemental or journalistic exposés. Uniting anthropological method, documentary production and docusoap appeal, Terrill's work therefore sustains a tradition of institutional observation and reportage, updated and broadened in appeal (but therefore also in relevance) by the popularisation of factual programming.

HMS Brilliant (1996)

Terrill's embedding technique and diary-like coverage of quotidian duty and off-duty time combines institutional scrutiny with close observation of individuals within a variegated, institutionalised community. This is analogous to the video diary format with its aspiration towards full multicultural and niche representation.[233] Following the schedules and experiences of a few outstanding personalities within the community facilitates this approach's representation of both individuality and unity at work within the social, professional and national system. Terrill's naval and military series might therefore seem to be simply expansions and reapplications of a docusoap format seen with civilian workplace subjects. However, the sustainment of his embedding produces concentrated records of highly specific circumstances, unseen events and portraits of professionals, and accessible observations of communities at once unique and nationally representative.

The six-part series *HMS Brilliant* follows the Type 22 frigate during three months of Operation 'Sharp Guard', enforcing United Nations' Security Council resolutions for sanctions against warring parties in the former Yugoslavia.[234] The documenting of this deployment assumed historical and cultural significance after HMS *Brilliant* (Figure 6.4) became the first UK warship to have female crew members at sea, and the first to have female crew involved in conflict.[235] In view of the differences apparent in the ship and its mission that his series documented (a patrol in a war zone with female crew members

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[233] Chapman, *A New History of British Documentary*, p.210.

[234] The duration, complexities and generally overlooked successes of the Royal Navy's large-scale and politically delicate operations in the Adriatic Sea are covered in detail in Stephen Prince and Kate Brett, Royal Navy Operations off the Former Yugoslavia: Operation Sharp Guard, 1991–1996, in *You Cannot Surge Trust: Combined Naval Operations of the Royal Australian Navy, Canadian Navy, Royal Navy, and United States Navy, 1991–2003* ed. by Gary E. Weir and Sandra J. Doyle (Washington: Naval History and Heritage Command, 2013), pp. 45–82.

[235] Iain Ballantyne, *Strike from the Sea: The Royal Navy and US Navy at War in the Middle East, 1949–2003* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004), pp.110–111. The female crew on board HMS *Brilliant* were the first 20 Wrens who volunteered to go to sea in 1990. Anonymous, History, *The Association of Wrens and Women of the Royal Naval Services*, https://wrens.org.uk/history/ [accessed 25 August 2019].

Figure 6.4: HMS *Brilliant*. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 1995. Used with permission.

that also represented a new post-Cold War interventionist stance for NATO and the EU), Terrill's narrative begins with observations on the weight of tradition.

Recalling the long history of ships named *Brilliant*, he observes that 'an old name bestows on a new ship not only a ready-made reputation, but also a sense of continuity and survival'. Embracing this inheritance is also part of imparting 'a spiritual identity that belies the inanimation of wood or metal'.[236] Although as the title suggests HMS *Brilliant* is the site of observation and the home of the crew, it is the human element (albeit routinely confined and culturally defined by the ship) that absorbs interest.

The individuals from the crew with whom Terrill interacts (as with *Sailor* representing a broad cross-section of rank, experience and opinion) constitute the consistent points of contact throughout day-to-day operations. These include Leading Seaman Micky Goble, Principal Warfare Officer Bob Hawkins, Lieutenant Tracie Lovegrove (the most senior female sailor aboard, who abandoned PhD study at Edinburgh University to go to sea) and Medical Assistant Jacqui Quant, as well as Captain James Rapp. They provide insights and reveal details about themselves and their institutional and personal circumstances

[236] Christopher Terrill, *HMS Brilliant: In a Ship's Company* (London: BBC Books, 1995), pp.12–13.

that prompt scrutiny of issues of wider relevance for the audience. For example, having embarked upon an academic career, the ship's supply officer, Martin Atherton, felt driven to join the Navy after witnessing the Falklands War. He describes himself as having been struck by 'the absurdity and the fragility' of a society in which 'some people "do" and others "think"'.[237] Celebrating the unity of identity and purpose that is created among the disparate members of the crew, Atherton remarks positively and paradoxically that 'a ship like this is a model, a paradigm for the way all societies should be – and then perhaps there would be no wars and, therefore, no need for warships…'[238]

While noting the idealism and irony at work in such individual and institutional responses, Terrill's series records the honouring of tradition during *Brilliant*'s deployment. Sequences of this kind have come to characterise his and other subsequent series (q.v. the first *Warship* series following HMS *lllustrious*'s visit to Malta; see Chapter 5). Members of the frigate's crew visit the military cemetery at Souda Bay on Crete to commemorate the casualties of World War II. Without specifically addressing or connecting their current NATO role, they reflect on their forebears 'vanquishing a terrible evil in Europe'.[239] Where tradition meets present-day policies and underlying stresses is in the filming of *Brilliant*'s 'SODS' (Ship's Operatic and Drama Society) Opera', an impromptu entertainment put on by and for the ship's crew:

> The theory is that the SODS Opera provides a social pressure-release for a community with no escape from itself. By giving everybody a night of amnesty to do and say what they want old scores can be settled and the air cleared. That is the theory.[240]

This event forms the basis of the fifth episode, forming a climax to the series prior to the ship's return home.[241] Having endured insult, denigration and prejudice from some portions of the ship's male complement, *Brilliant*'s minority female sailors take the opportunity of the SODS Opera to challenge their antagonists on board. While other turns of the night ridicule other individuals and groups in the carnivalesque atmosphere, the Wrens' performance of a re-lyricised version of Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive' draws booing and heckling from angry male sailors. In recording the tensions on both sides, with divided opinions from male and female crew members on the experience of this first sea deployment, Terrill's series presents a vitally topical view of a necessary and inevitable shift in the Navy's culture. While controversial and unpopular at

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[237] Terrill, *HMS Brilliant*, p.74.
[238] Terrill, *HMS Brilliant*, p.75.
[239] Terrill, *HMS Brilliant*, p.87, 186–187.
[240] Terrill, *HMS Brilliant*, p.141.
[241] The accompanying book publication suggests a slightly different chronology, with the visit to Istanbul taking place after the SODS Opera.

the time because of the full frankness of its record, Terrill's film can be seen to serve the same purpose as the SODS Opera itself: 'not an anarchic act of mini-mutiny, but a bizarre way of actually confirming and strengthening the very order that was dismantled'.[242]

An earlier episode tracks the ship's departure from patrols in the Adriatic Sea and arrival in Istanbul. There preparations for a cocktail party for distinguished local guests and Turkish naval officers are undercut by the observations of the lower ranks, who comment wryly to Terrill on the indulgence, distraction and triviality of the occasion. Scenes of the raucous behaviour of the ship's officers in the wardroom contrast with their later efforts to entertain their guests. More significantly, these scenes are also intercut with the progress of the 'girls only' drunken and noisy Hallowe'en party taking place in the female mess (known as the 'Wrennerie'). The camera dispassionately observes these parallel official and unofficial social shipboard events. Amongst the spontaneous recording, one conspicuous and unbroken camera movement down a connecting companionway contrasts a quiet upper deck with a lower deck echoing with sounds of Wrens singing. As with the documentation of the SODS Opera, these scenes remain open to interpretation in showing enduring and emergent senses of community, unity and division, order and disharmony within the traditional and new aspects of the ship's life.

The series ends with the ship's return to Plymouth. In addition to predictably recording the reunion of families, this final episode ends with titles revealing (alongside retrospective clips) the details of the futures of those the series has observed:

> Captain James Rapp is now heading the RN Presentation Team promoting public awareness of the Navy.
>
> Lt. Tracie Lovegrove, currently with HMS *Exeter*, now has her bridge-watch keeping ticket.
>
> HMS *Brilliant* will be decommissioned in 1996 and transferred to the Brazilian Navy as part of a sales package.

Celebrating the advancing careers of the documentary's now-familiar participants is redolent of their connection (rather than 'characterisation') for the audience as real subjects. Notably, the conclusive reflection on the fate of the ship implies an equal status in emotional investment (recalling *Sailor*) and, as in the subsequent cases of *Shipmates* and *Caribbean Patrol*, passes its own comment on a wider sense of loss or decline. Documentary endorsement of the Navy on the communal and individual scales seems bound to

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[242] Terrill, *HMS Brilliant*, p.158.

wider appeals for relevance and engagement with naval issues, marked with a melancholy tinged with implied loss (of naval capacity, prestige or heritage), here embodied in the passing of *Brilliant* for the viewer, and the country. This understated promotion of the documentary subject adds 'persuasion' to the Renovian 'tendencies' to observe and record, augmenting Terrill's reportage and truth with a 'viewpoint' that focuses audience attention on Corner's concepts of 'institution' and 'order.' In distinguishing between docusoap and documentary, Jonathan Bignell asserts that it was 'interest in the central characters of docusoaps … that drove the public discourse about the programmes', in contrast to 'the insight into occupational roles, institutions and hierarchies that the settings brought with them' forming the more serious focus of documentary series.[243] Ending HMS *Brilliant* by fostering a persistence of interest in both characters *and* institutions epitomises the popularisation of documentary, or the elevation of docusoap, in Terrill's work.

Shipmates (2005)

Terrill's next naval-focused series was produced nearly a decade after the controversial observational milestone of HMS *Brilliant*. In the interim he had completed *Soho Stories, The Cruise, Jailbirds* (BBC1, 1999), a 10-part series documenting the stories of individual inmates of Newhall Women's prison, and *The Ship* (BBC2, 2002), following the crew of a replica of HMS *Endeavour* recreating the voyage of Captain Cook. While continuing to explore unusual or unprecedented factual subjects, Terrill's work over this period also reflects the refinement and convergence of popular docusoap appeal and selective and revelatory documentary observation. Under the emblematic working title of 'England Expects', *Shipmates* was commissioned by the BBC as a series to chart a year in the life of the Royal Navy to mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar.[244] After the controversies of HMS *Brilliant, Shipmates* documents an equally groundbreaking example of female Navy personnel, with one episode dedicated to petty officer and physical training instructor Natasha Pulley competing for and winning a place on the Devonport team for the naval field gun competition.

Observation of contemporary conditions leavened with the continuing significance of tradition characterises this episode. The historical background to the competition is explicated with archive footage of the Boer War and the Siege of Ladysmith. The eight-week basic training of a new intake is contrasted with the 17-year veteran Tasha's eight-week preparation for the celebrated and

[243] Jonathan Bignell, Docudramatizing the real: Developments in British TV docudrama since 1990, *Studies in Documentary Film*, 2010, 4(3), 195–208, p.199.

[244] Anonymous, BBC1 to chart a year in the Navy year to fill, *Broadcast*, 20 January 2005, https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/bbc1-to-chart-a-year-in-the-navy-year-to-fill/1018576.article [accessed 18 May 2022].

Figure 6.5: The Devonport Field Gun Squad. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2005. Used with permission.

gruelling competition. The new recruits' abrupt initiation into conformity, discipline and routine contrasts with Tasha's stated love of service tradition. Ironically, Natasha entered the Wrens when the female arm was still separate and admits to Terrill that she was never interested in service at sea, and yet seeks to join one of the most exclusive and traditionally male preserves. The unpredictability of the competition means that, despite their superlative performance throughout the heats of the competition, the Devonport team (Figure 6.5) are robbed of victory in the final by a tiny, accidental error. The drama of this moment is heightened by slow-motion and an integrated montage of the previous weeks of 'bonding and team-building', contrasting with the hectic vérité style used for the training and heats.

Other episodes are similarly devoted to allusive topics, rather than discrete narratives. Episode four ('Raising the Dead') brings together several events separated chronologically and geographically. After duty in the Gulf, HMS *Chatham* visits Alexandria and members of her crew become a ceremonial guard for the reinterment of the remains of British sailors who died during the Battle of the Nile. A week earlier, Gunner Rab Butler (Figure 6.6) had been filmed getting a special tattoo of his 'guardian angel' (his grandfather, who served in the Navy in World War II) during a run ashore in Dubai. Another week later, the ship provides an honour guard at the Turkish war memorial at

Figure 6.6: Rab Butler of HMS *Chatham*. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2005. Used with permission.

Gallipoli for the 90th anniversary of the battle in World War I. On this occasion Rab tracks down another relative, his great-grandfather, immortalised at the British and Commonwealth memorial at Helles.[245]

These poignant connections of today's sailors with their antecedents, stressing unbroken service and family traditions redolent of the series' Nelsonian commemoration, are somewhat awkwardly juxtaposed with the investigation of alleged hauntings and paranormal activity in some of the oldest buildings at Plymouth naval base. Episode five ('Theatres of War') follows HMS *Ocean*'s chaplain Mike Brotherton as he supports the rehearsals for an amateur dramatic group's revival of HMS *Pinafore* and participates in fleet exercises ('the Thursday War') (Figure 6.7). The 'Bish's' performance (comforting refugees and casualties in an imaginary conflict) and other realistic aspects of the exercise are intercut with the gently mocking vision of the Navy and its customs provided by Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera. Both 'theatres' gesture towards serious and satiric truths. The final episode concludes at a patriotic peak in the closing credits with a portrait of Nelson and his dates.

In contrast to these diffuse, reflective and episodic elements of the observed year, the series' most concentrated and enthralling sequences of both mundane

[245] Terrill, *Shipmates*, pp.254–257.

Figure 6.7: interviewing Captain Tony Johnstone-Burt on the bridge of HMS *Ocean*. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2005. Used with permission.

and extraordinary record form the core of the first two episodes. These parts both recall HMS *Brilliant* and anticipate *Caribbean Patrol* in their concerted and intimate study of life on board HMS *Chatham* on deployment, but also capture service and family life ashore. Both HMS *Chatham* and *Ocean* (and significant crew members such as gunners Rab and 'Ratz' Rackliff, the 'Bish', and chef 'Ginge' Grieveson) are introduced in the opening episode. In interview Rab and his wife Mel explain their experience of regular separation. *Chatham*'s departure for duty is intercut with the 'Bish' presiding over a naval marriage which will 'launch' another couple to, he admits, an uncertain shared future (the chaplain has previously been observed counselling sailors with relationship problems). Rackliff discovers he is about to become a father shortly before departure, whereas 'Ginge' confesses that he has missed his son's last four birthdays ('long as I'm there for his eighteenth!'). Within an hour of departure, *Chatham* suffers an engine room fire, occurring as 'Ginge' is being interviewed, so the camera immediately records the emergency response. As the danger passes, Terrill comments to Grieveson that fire must be 'just about the worst thing that could happen on a ship'. Another sailor observes, 'sinking's quite bad too', and Grieveson concludes, 'and running out of toilet roll'. Such droll observation of the momentous and the mundane is mirrored by Captain Chick's understatement of *Chatham*'s mission, a return to 'the old stomping ground' of the Gulf. While the testing of all *Chatham*'s weapons

Figure 6.8: HMS *Chatham* in Dubai at Christmas 2004. Photo copyright Chris Terrill. Used with permission.

is amplified by the soundtrack (featuring the theme music from *Where Eagles Dare* [1968]), the training of the crew to handle weapons while wearing gasmasks provides a chastening consciousness of the threats they may face.

Chatham's deployment to the Gulf (Figure 6.8) is interrupted by the occurrence of the Indian Ocean tsunami. New of this disaster comes at the end of episode one. Episode two shows the ship transiting at high speed to Sri Lanka to provide emergency aid ashore. Departing from Dubai, Rab reflects that this unexpected duty will be a chastening and formative experience for younger sailors, making them 'better people' by introducing them to places where an immediate difference can be made. These activities again produce remarkable convergences of modernity and tradition. Arriving at an orphanage in Batticaloa to assist in cleaning and repairs, Terrill's camera records how *Chatham*'s sailors receive tea in vintage cups bearing a *Players* branded picture:

> of a fully bearded British sailor, the one you see on the front of a packet of *Senior Service* cigarettes … I do not think the nuns even know the head on the cups is a British sailor, and so do not realise the irony. The sailors do.[246]

[246] Terrill, *Shipmates*, p.159.

In another wry recollection of the imperial past, Lieutenant Surgeon Alison Dewynter (on her first at-sea deployment) is questioned by a local about the Navy's descent on the island:

> 'Are you American or British?' he enquires politely.
>
> 'British, sir,' says Alison. 'Royal Navy.'
>
> 'Have you come to invade us?' he asks, looking up to the sky as we hear the sound of the returning Lynx.
>
> 'We are not invading, sir,' replies Alison gently. 'We have come to help.'
>
> 'Thank you,' says the man, 'but couldn't you invade us as well? My father used to say it was much better under the British.'
>
> 'No, sir,' laughs Alison. 'It's not what we do these days, I'm afraid.'
>
> The man turns and walks away disconsolately.[247]

The relief operation (Figure 6.9) represents a different but equally long-lived tradition of intervention and responsibility. Initially overwhelmed at the scale of the disaster, Alison prepares a plan to revive the local hospital at Kallar and provide an immediate outpatients service. A montage sequence telescopes the hours of herculean effort, combining Chaplain Tommy Goodwin leading children in songs and games, with *Chatham*'s sailors labouring to restore their community. With the hospital and hope for the community restored, Alison eschews her own efforts in celebrating the determination and humanity of her shipmates: 'Give Jack a job and he just doesn't seem to see any barriers' (Figure 6.10). Reinforcing the cultural memory evoked by the earlier *Players* image, the recollection of 'Jack' in the actions of *Chatham*'s sailors (in an historic imperial setting, albeit in a distinctly post-imperial context) provides a latter-day validation of the national ideals enshrined in 'positive depictions of naval men' since the Victorian era.[248]

Shipmates represents an unusual example of naval documentary in its combination of calendar record and spontaneous reportage. Its documentation of activity at Plymouth anticipates a similar episodic docusoap *Devonport: Inside the Royal Navy* (Discovery, 2016). Although the heart of the series was formed by following HMS *Chatham*'s wide-ranging deployment, the series

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[247] Terrill, *Shipmates*, p.166.

[248] See Mary A. Conley, *From Jack Tar to Union Jack: Representing naval manhood in the British Empire, 1870–1918* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), p.193 (see also Introduction).

Figure 6.9: HMS *Chatham*'s Lynx helicopter engaged in disaster relief operations. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2005. Used with permission.

Figure 6.10: Alison Dewynter treats local children at the reopened Kallar clinic. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2005. Used with permission.

Figure 6.11: 'The Bish' Tommy Goodwin with the children of Kallar. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2005. Used with permission.

acknowledged a cultural kaleidoscope of naval events and sub-communities. The preparation of HMS *Ocean* for active service through rigorous FOST drills contrasted poignantly with the premature decommissioning of HMS *Norfolk* as part of defence cuts. In an echo of *Brilliant*'s demise, stretching commitments and shrinking resources affecting the Navy as institution and community gain political as well as sentimental representation during Terrill's recording of this event.[249] As in the later *Building Britain's Biggest Warship*, the presence of a noticeable voice-over (provided by actor Samantha Bond) and soundtrack (dramatic music for *Chatham*'s exercising boarding teams, ominous notes for the frigate's test of weapons, 'Rule Britannia' for the start of the final episode with images of Portsmouth and HMS *Victory*) provide a more overt and facilitating narrative beyond objective images and subjective commentary. Fades to black serve to punctuate and connect the scenes at sea and those at Devonport. Although ostensibly a commemorative project, *Shipmates*'s scope provides an affecting quotidian but multifaceted portrait but also witnesses the Navy's response to a momentous, horrific event (Figure 6.11).

Royal Navy Caribbean Patrol (2011)

Terrill's next naval project more resembled HMS *Brilliant*, in his embedding for a six-month drug-enforcement patrol with HMS *Manchester*. He acknowledged

[249] Terrill, *Shipmates*, pp.213–222.

the unpredictability of events and physical and technical challenges entailed by sharing the hardships and frustrations, exertions and inactivity of the crew, albeit balanced by the observational documentarist's 'dream' of 'the hunt for the unexpected'.[250] Despite similarities to this precedent, the five-part series *Caribbean Patrol* registers some stylistic differences. From the first episode ('Bad Guys Dead Ahead'), the filmmaker's own accompanying voice-over foregrounds the ship's character and mission in dynamic terms. The deployment represents 'a last hurrah' and a 'final and extraordinary mission' for the 'ageing warship', while the Caribbean is described as:

> A haven to some of the most ruthless and determined drug smugglers in the world, and they are the enemy that the British warship must hunt down. And to make matters worse, it's all going to happen at the height of the hurricane season.

This voice-over frames observation of the voyage in terms of journalistic reportage, and other aspects of the series' techniques reflect this immediacy and anticipate to a lesser degree some of the heightened characteristics of the later Channel 5 submarine series and *Warship: Life at Sea*, for which *Caribbean Patrol* appears to act as model and precedent. A sequence of voice clips and close-ups introduce the crew members the series will follow: the captain Rex Cox, Air Warfare Officer Jim Thompson, Leading Seaman Paul Bailey and Able Seaman Kelly Hamon. By contrast, the faces of members of the Coast Guard detachment are obscured to protect their identities. Illustrative maps, identifying titles and time notations track the ship's progress from island to island in response to intelligence leads.

However, to undermine any sense of overt or false narrativisation of the mission, the opening episode's account of the ship's first interception subverts such techniques. At first, permission to board the suspect vessel is delayed. Commander Cox reflects wistfully to camera on the darkened bridge: 'We must tick all the legal boxes … we can't just go willy-nilly boarding anything because we feel like it.' When authorisation is received, the ship closes on a suspicious object dumped overboard by the suspect vessel:

> The warship edges towards the gleaming object: Marijuana? Heroin? Cocaine? No. The 5000-ton destroyer is bearing down on nothing more than a lone, drifting and entirely innocent coconut.

The bathetic conclusion to the dramatically edited and musically accompanied sequence is realistically deflationary. The suspect ship is searched for hours and cleared; Rex Cox notes the need for 'Coconut recognition'; Paul Bailey at his console in the operations room jokes to camera: 'No drugs, just one coconut – what the fuck is all that about?'

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[250] Terrill, Patrolling Paradise.

Following this failure, a fuller introduction to the shipboard community establishes more mundane detail. Introduced by an on-screen title, Weapons Engineering Officer Rich Scott explains the layout and hierarchy of accommodation. The junior rates occupy 3-deck, Senior rates are on 2-deck, officers on 1-deck and 01-deck, so 'the lower you are in the rank structure on board, then also the lower you live on board as well.' The camera follows Paul Bailey as he presents his berthing space, and Kelly shows Chris one of the two female messes. Rich Scott describes his 'reasonably large' officer's cabin jokingly as 'caravan living'. The camera's presence appears to be entirely ignored as a minor argument breaks out in Paul's mess over individual untidiness. A contrasting montage of activity (patrolling, boat launches and helicopter patrols) condenses three weeks of fruitless work attempting 'upstream disruption' – intercepting bulk drugs en route before they can be broken down into smaller quantities for easier insertion into the UK. The realistic lack of success is reflected in observed boredom (when Paul uses the ship's remote cameras to find a spot for 'sunbathing and beers' on Anguilla's beaches) and reflexive cynicism, as another sailor remarks that Terrill's recording of their boat trip and barbecue should be used as a recruitment film in place of current films showing 'assault courses and ironing trousers'. However, mundanity rapidly gives way to spontaneous incident. While being interviewed about their views on the anti-drug mission (and being reprimanded for making noise outside the operations room), Kelly and Paul are suddenly called to their posts when suspicious activity is detected on the island of Monserrat. A volcanic eruption in 1999 has left the island's capital 'unpeopled and unpoliced', and the exclusion zone on the island is now a sanctuary for drug runners exploiting the uninhabited coastline. After more disappointment, Terrill's voice-over offers a tantalising hint before the advertisement break: 'further up the coast the helicopter has spotted another vessel, moving at speed'. Finally, by the end of the first episode, HMS *Manchester* is rewarded with the capture of £500,000 of cannabis (Figure 6.12).

In episode two ('Old Lady of the Seas'), the fruitless patrols continue but HMS *Manchester*'s advanced age precipitates mechanical problems. A breakdown of the desalination plant leads to water rationing: 'Everyone now has to shower like they do on submarines.' Loss of refrigeration prompts a different, ironically received emergency: 'Everyone must now consume as much as they can of a three-month meat supply in a matter of hours: cue the mother of all barbecues. England expects every man and woman will do their carnivorous duty.' Despite their efforts, £20,000 worth of food has to be thrown over the side. An engine failure leads to the replacement of the one of the ship's gas turbine engines alongside in Curacao, but this provides Kelly with an opportunity for a run ashore and new 'ink'. Showing her tattoo ('I'd rather be hated for what I am than loved for what I am not') leads to her revealing that she is gay. Coming out at 19 after joining the Navy meant that people on board her ship knew before her family. Although admitting that she has encountered prejudice, the observation of mixed crews in *Caribbean Patrol* (and *Shipmates*) reflects none

Figure 6.12: Commander Rex Cox on the bridge as HMS *Manchester* approaches Havana. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2010. Used with permission.

of the tensions of HMS *Brilliant*. Having partied all night in female company (summarising for Terrill the sailor's creed: 'Matelots will go anywhere where there's food, beer, women and music. End'), Kelly is hung over but still enamoured of the service and its traditions when she must raise the colours at 8am next morning.

While episode three continues to document the routine of the patrol, the closing episodes are, as with *Shipmates*, overtaken by HMS *Manchester*'s sudden involvement in disaster relief following devastation caused by Hurricane Earl. As Lieutenant Penny Armand-Smith, the meteorological officer ('the Weather Witch'), seeks weather information in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Paul and Kelly, who have made a pact to quit smoking, are also observed going ashore. Kelly seeks a nicotine patch from the ship's medical officer, and Paul attempts to telephone the UK. The camera observes Paul from a distance, trying to phone his fiancée, Lauren, from the dockside as there is no mobile reception on board, and catches him reaching for a cigarette. Terrill's voice-over reflects sympathetically: 'the temptation is too much'. Interviewed later, Paul confides that he gave in after 'having a bit of a barney' with the fiancée. He comments on the difficulty of separation, of saying sorry over a distance, and constant awareness of the relationships that have been 'binned in the Navy.'

Manchester leaves port to reposition herself to provide help just as cruise ships come into harbour to take shelter. A cut from images of the ship

refuelling in heavy seas to satellite pictures of the storm from space introduces the danger: 'And this is Earl.' After undertaking a requested helicopter reconnaissance of Anguilla, where no casualties are reported, and providing a marching party for St Vincent's Independence Day celebrations on one of the hottest days of the year, HMS *Manchester* is dispatched to St Lucia in the wake of Hurricane Tomas. Episode five, 'Mission of Mercy', details the response of the ship's sailors: providing first aid, sharing their rations with evacuees and helping in the search for people missing amongst the wreckage and landslides. The ship's Logistics Officer Dickie Underwood remarks: 'we train to deliver maximum violence to the enemy. This is quite the opposite.' Speaking for the whole crew, Bosun's Mate 'Sully' Sullivan articulates the satisfaction of 'self-pride: you feel like you're making a difference', and the voice-over emphasises that 'the arrival of the Royal Navy is a huge relief to a frightened but grateful people – but the place is in chaos.' *Manchester*'s chaplain, Mark Alsop, leads a vain search for survivors, and eventually for bodies, across a massive mudslide, but no one is found. The sailors instead erect a cross and 'the Bish' says a prayer on the site. Sombrely, Terrill's voice-over observes simply that: 'the British destroyer has tried to fulfil its command aim of saving life and lessening suffering'. The episode and series end with *Manchester*'s return after 'nearly 7 months away: 200 days, over 36,000 miles, three hurricanes, [and] two major drugs busts.' HMS *Manchester*'s and RFA *Wave Ruler*'s contribution to rescue and reconstruction in the Caribbean was recorded in *Navy News*, the service's own publication.[251]

Although based in the same methodological approach of embedding and observation, Terrill's series can be seen to straddle categories of docusoap and documentary (though these might be more significant for broadcasters and audiences than the filmmaker himself), which entails nuances of technique and style. While these can be detected in specifically different uses of voice-over, editing, soundtrack or in narrative framing, underlyingly these programmes (taken together with Terrill's subjects in the civilian world) represent a spectrum more than a generically divided catalogue of realist documentation. Rather than introducing a hierarchy of factual programmes and their distinguishable approaches, James Chapman has sought to redeem the denigrated docusoap format due to its relevance as a contemporarily evolving form of observational documentary. For Chapman, these series' concentration upon 'institutions and professional groups rather than individuals' validated and positioned them 'more securely within the historical lineage of British documentary practice'.[252] Terrill's work across this factual spectrum and within this 'lineage' would continue to evolve with a project of even greater duration.

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[251] Anonymous, Ticking all the boxes, *Navy News*, 2010, 677, 20–21. This article features Chris Terrill's photographs.

[252] Chapman, *A New History of British Documentary*, p.199.

Building Britain's Biggest Warship (2019–20)

Unlike other documentary subjects (and unlike other ship construction projects), the conception and completion of HMS *Queen Elizabeth* has provided the prospect of very long-term observation and record. However, this opportunity has not necessarily conformed to the expectations and needs of the broadcast environment. Having observed the ship's 'conception' with the Princess Royal's ceremonial cutting of the first steel at Govan in 2009, Terrill pitched the idea of a series to follow the vessel's development through to her entry into service. Yet it was not until 2016, with the ship nearing completion and sea trials scheduled for the following year, that the project was commissioned by the BBC.[253] The design and construction of the new carriers, the acquisition of the American F-35 aircraft to fly from them, and the eventual entry into service of the 'Carrier Strike' capability represent a vast national commitment and investment that will dominate defence spending for decades.[254]

The decision to build the *Queen Elizabeth*-class carriers essentially constitutes a return to and restoration of a scale of naval aviation deemed unaffordable and thus dispensed with in the 1970s: a policy encapsulated and concluded in the decommissioning of *Sailor*'s HMS *Ark Royal* in 1979. As a subject of other popular documentaries (see Chapter 4), HMS *Queen Elizabeth* (Figure 6.13) has represented a focus for consideration alongside other groundbreaking engineering projects. *Britain's Biggest Warship* necessarily introduces its audience to technical details (with computer graphics to illustrate the ship's '17 decks', 5 kilometres of passageways and 3000 compartments') and significant concepts and challenges (the technologically based 'lean manning', which allows the ship to operate with the fraction of the complement of an American carrier, and the preparatory test flights and landings of the F-35). However, this technical emphasis constitutes a means rather than an end in the case of Terrill's approach: 'I developed a deep fascination with the ship's state-of-the-art engineering – but only as a backdrop to the human stories that unfolded within'[255] (Figure 6.14).

Documenting the ship's completion, the assembly of its crew, its sea trials and flight testing and inaugural voyages allows the series (and its follow-up *Britain's*

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[253] Chris Terrill, Don't ever give up on a good idea – even if it takes a decade, *Broadcast*, 2 May 2018, https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/factual/why-my-series-took-a-decade-to-get-commissioned/5128780.article [accessed 18 May 2022].

[254] House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, Delivering Carrier Strike, HC394, January 2018, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmpubacc/684/684.pdf [accessed 11 June 2019].

[255] Chris Terrill, Britain's Biggest Warship: Goes to Sea, BBC2/Smithsonian Channel, *Broadcast*, 23 October 2019, https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/factual/britains-biggest-warship-goes-to-sea-bbc2/smithsonian-channel/5144060.article [accessed 18 May 2022].

Figure 6.13: HMS *Queen Elizabeth* in 2017. Photo copyright Chris Terrill. Used with permission.

Figure 6.14: Chris Terrill filming on HMS *Queen Elizabeth*'s flight deck. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2018. Used with permission.

Figure 6.15: Captain Jerry Kyd. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2018. Used with permission.

Biggest Warship: Goes to Sea) to follow individual crew members for several years. Aside from the frequent appearances of Captain Jerry Kyd (Figure 6.15), the numerous representatives of the contemporary Navy include Petty Officer Aircraft Handler Emma Ranson, Head Chef Mohamed 'Wes' Khan, Leading Aircraftsman Ricky Gleason and Executive Warrant Officer Dave Garraghty. In the first episode, particular emphasis rests on Commander Air Mark Deller's preparations for handling and launching the ship's future aircraft, and Emma Ranson's role in leading the flight deck crews. As Emma's team practise firefighting, Petty Officer Marine Engineer 'Big' Bruce' Milne leads a squad of *Queen Elizabeth*'s young sailors in training for the field gun competition. The voice-over (provided by actor Caroline Catz) notes the parallels as the two challenges are intercut: 'The fleet's standard time to put out a fire is 75 to 90 seconds; a winning run in the field gun – 75 to 90 seconds.' Emma's group manage to extinguish a simulated aircraft fire in 95 seconds. Bruce's goal of nurturing the spirit of a new crew through a traditional competition is vindicated when *Queen Elizabeth*'s team wins. Punctuating these tests are Jerry Kyd axiomatic comments on the processes and goals of training, in terms that echo Terrill's principal documentary interest:

> You know, the ship is just a metal box, it's a waste of time, it's useless. It's only when you add in the human component of blood and flesh,

> the emotions and the training, does it become a warship. So getting the ship's company to fuse with the ship emotionally, but also in terms of how to operate her and routines, are absolutely fundamental.

Dedication to tradition permeates the preparation of the new ship and crew. At the conclusion of sea trials in 2017, the ship anchors in Scapa Flow. The voice-over details the significance of this site as 'home of the Grand Fleet' in World War I. This visit by Britain's newest aircraft carrier commemorates the first landing of an aircraft at sea aboard a moving ship a century before. A more intimate and poignant memorialisation is led by *Queen Elizabeth*'s oldest crew member (Safety Officer Bob Hawkins), who accompanies two young sailors and descendants of crew members of HMS *Royal Oak* in a wreath-laying at the site of her sinking in 1939. Dave Garraghty seeks to promote the young sailors' sense of naval identity through more popular cultural connections. He brings aboard a toy parrot, with the future objective of acquiring a real talking one to teach proper 'Jackspeak' to the 'Generation Z' sailors. Amidst the memorabilia decorating his quarters is a beer advert featuring an image of the battleship HMS *Queen Elizabeth* from 1915. In a conscious reinvocation of *Sailor*, Dave also adds his own 'Wilf' to the crew for morale purposes.[256]

Awareness of the importance of the ship as a national project and the institutionalisation of the crew to that end always vie for precedence within the series with consciousness of the crew members' importance in themselves, as national and generational representatives. These emphases converge in comments by Emma Ranson (Figure 6.16) elicited by a question from Terrill off camera:

> Emma, you asked to be on *Queen Elizabeth*, didn't you? How come?
>
> Well, we've never had a ship like this and I'm never going to do this again in my career, so it's just to be part of something bigger and better for the Navy. It's the future … so, it's good to be part of it and I can – hopefully, when I have children, then I can talk to them and say, 'Oh Mummy was part of that.'

The transformative potential of life, employment and experience on board the ship is perceptible within the observed subjects. 'Wes' (Figure 6.17) is seen to successfully balance his faith with his work. His imam has permitted him to handle pork in the galley as long as he wears gloves while cooking. When the ship docks in New York he visits the memorial at the site of the World Trade Center. He explains to camera the prejudice he encountered during training

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[256] Dave Garraghty's reinvigoration of Wilf's career had been noted several years before, when Wilf returned to serve aboard HMS *Daring*. Anonymous, Wilf is back – more Daring than ever… *Navy News*, 2013, 703, 16.

Figure 6.16: Petty Officer Emma Ranson. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2018. Used with permission.

in the period after 9/11, which nearly drove him to leave the Navy. On board *Queen Elizabeth* he has been allocated a prayer space that accommodates the practicalities of the ship's movement:

> I do my prayers five times a day, you know. I do have to pray to Mecca but because the ship keeps on turning, I can't know where east is all the time. So, this is my direction, but it's not only for me. It's for anyone who want to come in and pray. Not just Muslims, it's for anyone.

Figure 6.17: Wes Khan in the galley of HMS *Queen Elizabeth*. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2017. Used with permission.

When logistical demands deprive 'Wes' of his prayer room, *Queen Elizabeth*'s 'Bish' helps him set up an alternative multi-faith room. Completing their task, they shake hands and celebrate their 'common ground': a fleeting close-up notes copies of the Holy Koran and Holy Bible shelved next to each other.

This positive image of unity and community is challenged when six of *Queen Elizabeth*'s sailors are arrested in New York (Figure 6.18). Given the visual emphasis frequently placed on sailors' relaxation off duty throughout *Sailor, Warship* and Terrill's other series, this episode is depicted principally through its aftermath, and its coverage in national and international news. While First Lieutenant Trevethan admits that he is 'not surprised but disappointed' and concedes that 'it's not the positive, good news story that the RN is trying to push out', Jerry Kyd evaluates the event as another part of the formation of the ship's and sailors' character:

> Of course, we never excuse bad behaviour ashore. Of course not. You know, we're not automatons, we're not robots. And we want them to have character. We can't have cowering quiet individuals because the nation would expect these people to go to war, put their lives in danger, potentially get wounded or even killed. It's all about relativity.

What the Navy expects and receives from its community and what it endows its community with are revealed by such examples, which depict the most

Figure 6.18: HMS *Queen Elizabeth* arrives in New York. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2018. Used with permission.

everyday, rather than stylistically enhanced and exaggerated events. Repeatedly interviewed on duty dealing with the ship's rubbish, Ricky Gleason is frank in admitting his past and the opportunity that naval service has provided:

> What brought you into the Navy?
>
> I'd exhausted all other opportunities, pretty much. I was a typical naughty kid in school, I was in and out of trouble, I was in and out of care. By the time I was 21 I had 49 convictions for stealing things and fighting all the time. Nothing I'm proud of.

Ricky explains how, following spells in prison and being 'really honest' at the Navy careers office, he was given permission to join once he had stayed out of trouble for 10 years: 'Within two years everything had improved, I'd put on weight, eating properly, bit of self-respect. Decent wage. That was the main thing: money, driving, house.' He also reflects that time in prison meant he was able to adapt quickly to the confinement of life at sea. The diverse examples of 'Wes', Emma and Ricky (and the captain's steward, Glenn Peters, a Rastafarian from St Vincent) represent what Jerry Kyd refers to as 'a little part of Britain … floating around in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean' and the voice-over celebrates as 'a vibrant community of 23 nationalities'. The naval communities committed to record in HMS *Brilliant, Shipmates* and *Building Britain's Biggest Warship*, while similarly embodying the specificities and commonalities of Terrill's other documentary subjects, also reflect the positive and reciprocal evolution of the Navy institutionally and traditionally, in line with the viewing and represented nation. Crew as much or more than ship symbolise a national project:

> The military is drawn from society and so reflects society and its changes in attitude – especially amongst the young people who are perennially sought for recruitment. To some extent the young people have to conform to military tradition and convention but also, to an increasing extent, the military establishment has to bend to the will and expectation of the younger generation.[257]

Appropriately, therefore, while the second series concludes with Jerry Kyd's departure, the voice-over points out that, given the ship's intended 50-year life span, her final crew have yet to be born.

Alongside the sustained observation of and interest in *Queen Elizabeth*'s cohering crew (Figure 6.19), *Britain's Biggest Warship* also inevitably charts the restoration of the Navy's carrier capability and the political climate in which this goal

[257] Interview with the author, November 2019.

Figure 6.19: The ship's company of HMS *Queen Elizabeth*. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2018. Used with permission.

has been achieved. Statements on the Royal Navy's own website champion the new ships as embodiments of an updated military capability (Figure 6.20) and renewed political will epitomising contemporary British status and influence:

> The Carrier Strike Group offers cutting edge air, surface and underwater defence, but it is also a focal point for the worldwide democratic activity that is more powerful than any weaponry … The *Queen Elizabeth*-class carrier is more than just a warship … The two ships are icons, standard bearers and symbols of a nation with a global role and global ambitions.[258]

Comments by Captain Jerry Kyd on camera to Terrill and to his crew continually focus attention on this wider national and international picture defined by the carriers' presence:

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[258] Anonymous, The Carrier Strike Group: Our Nation's Spearhead', *Royal Navy*, https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/features/carrier-strike [accessed 2 August 2022]. Ironically, it seems possible that CVA-01, the new aircraft carrier controversially cancelled in the 1960s, would also have been named HMS *Queen Elizabeth*. Nick Childs, The aircraft carrier that never was, *BBC News*, 3 July 2014, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-28128026 [accessed 2 August 2022].

Figure 6.20: The first landing of an F-35 aboard HMS *Queen Elizabeth*. LPhot Daniel Shepherd. UK MOD © Crown copyright 2020, Open Government Licence.

> Do I think that state-on-state friction is over? No. Do I think the root causes of war are over? No. And therefore we must absolutely remain prepared for it, sadly. The bottom line for any war is it's nasty, really gut-wrenching visceral nastiness. And I think people forget that. And we must prepare people and equip people for that challenge. It's profound.

Figure 6.21: Bob Hawkins. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2017. Used with permission.

In concert with remarks on the resurgence of a Russian presence and threat that punctuate the series, Kyd's comments represent an objective and forthright acknowledgement of the ship's and the Navy's purpose. However, this consciousness of preparation for and deterrence of conflict as the ship's underlying purpose leads to consideration of its implications for several crew members in scenes which encapsulate the series' achievement of individual, cultural and institutional observation.

In the third episode of the first series (suitably titled 'Out With the Old, in With the New'), the young crew of HMS *Queen Elizabeth* are shown watching old navy documentaries (*Sailor* and Terrill's own HMS *Brilliant*) on a dedicated channel of the ship's internal television system. The oldest crew member aboard, Bob Hawkins (Figure 6.21), had appeared in HMS *Brilliant*, and is heard in interview giving his uncompromising personal views on women at sea.

Terrill's camera records the reactions of *Queen Elizabeth*'s present-day male and female crew members to Hawkins's apparently intolerant and unreconstructed views, recorded more than 20 years earlier. Interviewed separately, Hawkins admits that he cannot reconcile his personal and professional views – in welcoming, admiring and celebrating the female sailors that he now serves with, and yet remaining convinced that war is no place for women:

> My view was then, and still is, Chris – this is personally speaking now, Bob Hawkins – that it is a very, very difficult thing to do for a country

> to send anyone in their population into war. It's a vicious, nasty business. To elect to do that with our female population is still a dilemma for me … That doesn't mean that I don't value the contribution that our women make. Indeed, the notion that we do not recruit and train and employ 50% of our population … I think it's unacceptable in 2017 that we wouldn't do that … I would be dishonest with myself if I try to pretend that I don't still think, it is wrong for our women to go to war. But that is juxtaposed with the fact that I really enjoy the courage, and skill and commitment of the women that I serve with now. I would not want to go to war without them. That's the dilemma for me.

Hawkins's comments are interspersed with scenes of the earlier series featuring female officers and sailors framed within the screens aboard HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, instating the inheritance and relevance of the earlier documentary's images to the Navy and its community in the present. The following week, the conclusion of the rerun of HMS *Brilliant* shows that ship's return home, and Hawkins, who is also watching, is suddenly presented with the image of his young sons and his wife, who would die 11 years later, welcoming him home. Off camera, Terrill gently asks Bob if he thinks his views about women at sea, and the awareness of physical risks all sailors must face, are affected by his own bereavement:

> Yes, yes, yes. Indeed, it kind of, er … crystallises who I am as a person. The notion that a mother should be put into a war, and that her children would lose her if she was in … died in combat … I just would not want them … I would not want anyone to lose their dad, but having seen the pain that my sons have suffered … [he shakes his head and looks away from the camera]

His confessions are contrasted immediately with the views of Dani Hobbs, a young female sailor of the warfare branch, who is fully conscious of the risks she faces but 'has only known THIS navy, where females do all jobs'. This conclusion is cemented by parallel comments from Emma Ranson:

> My personal decision is, I chose this career. I've chosen this career path and it's a path that I'm really proud of, and I love it. I absolutely love my job and regardless of whether if we possibly go to war or not, I'll never change it.

Despite the combined technological, national and geopolitical context behind the making of *Britain's Biggest Warship*, the series also produces exceptional moments of poignancy, insight and social commentary. These sequences within the final episode of the first series encompass the span of Renov's recording, revealing, promoting and expressing tendencies and the

merging of Nichols's observational, expository and interactive modes, while also averring that Corner's couplets of 'art/reportage', 'truth/viewpoint' and 'institutions/forms' need not be binary oppositions but rather the inclusive parameters of a compelling authentic record. Terrill's focus clearly remains intimate, personal, anthropological and still 'tribal' in respectfully but revealingly sharing existence with the human crew and imparting his participation in its life with the audience. Terrill's series then serve a Griersonian documentary social goal in connecting the receiving and responsible audience with a pertinent, informative world view instrumental for 'agency of citizenship and reform'.[259] Yet, as much as this series like his others illuminates the differences and similarities of the Navy to any other British community, this sequence also reveals the reciprocal relevance of such documentary records for the culture and community of the Navy itself.

Conclusion

> Public history cannot simply be an aggregate of private histories strung together or nimbly intercut. These oral histories remain valuable for their ability to bring to public notice the submerged accounts of people and social movements. But their favouring of preservation over interrogation detracts from their power as vehicles of understanding. Delegating the enunciative function to a series of interview subjects cannot, in the end, bolster a truth claim for historical discourse; the enunciator, the one who 'voices' the text, is the film or videomaker functioning as historiographer.[260]

Having been nominated in the categories of best documentary film and best documentary series on four occasions, in 2015 Chris Terrill was the recipient of a lifetime achievement award at the Maritime Foundation's Maritime Media Awards in recognition of his contribution to the recording of the nation's life at and relationship with the sea.[261] Uppercut's website champions the company's dedication to 'its own brand of public service broadcasting'. In interview Chris has expanded on his views of the roles and responsibilities implied by that ideal, in selection of as much as approach to documentary subjects:

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[259] Corner, *The art of record*, p.14.

[260] Michael Renov, Towards a Poetics of Documentary, p.27.

[261] The Maritime Foundation, Maritime Media Award Winners, 2015, https://www.maritimefoundation.uk/awards/winners/2015-winners/ [accessed 11 August 2019]. The Maritime Foundation is a British charity organisation devoted to the active promotion of maritime matters and the importance of trade and life at sea for the United Kingdom.

> I worked proudly for the BBC as a staff producer in radio and TV for 21 years and so was imbued with the Reithian values in terms of broadcasting, i.e. that we should educate, inform and entertain. In some areas of modern TV the stress has become too heavily 'entertainment' at the expense of education and information. At Uppercut we try and maintain that magical balance … in the main we make films that celebrate people at their best and who contribute positively and inspiringly to the world we live in. It is no coincidence that many of these determined high achievers are to be found in the military services and, as far as I am concerned, in the Royal Navy in particular.[262]

Seen alongside his other contemporary anthropological and observational documentaries, Terrill's naval series constitute a significant contribution to 'public history', as parts of the public's and populace's history, and assembled from aggregated 'private histories' of which the public needs to be aware to understand them, and indeed itself. As 'enunciator', Terrill's unobtrusive presence 'voices' the texts, in which his own utterances are often infrequent, facilitating rather than focalising, and noticeably discreetly low in the overall sound mix. The conspicuous addition of voice-over to *Britain's Biggest Warship* perhaps reflects the consciousness of an expository requirement to articulate the circumstances of the unprecedented project the *Queen Elizabeth*-class ships represent. However, the atypicality of this feature within Terrill's overall output reflects not so much its possible superfluousness to his focus and emphasis (the crew rather than the ship, rather than the ship as justification for the existence of the crew), as the overriding preference for the crew to communicate, express and 'reveal' for themselves. Nonetheless, and notwithstanding the potential for controversy his programmes have courted in their revelatory access to naval subjects, Terrill's own voice when heard represents that of an informed and sympathetic witness. For example, in introducing his investigation of an alleged war crime in *Marine A: Criminal or Casualty of War?* (BBC/Uppercut Films, 2014), Terrill describes himself unashamedly as a 'passionate' observer, not a 'dispassionate' one. His involvement, not necessarily his impartiality, inspires and requires ours. His description of the embedding approach, which allows him 'to suspend' his 'world view and begin to see things through the eyes of others', is suggestive of its comparable enabling effect upon viewers.[263]

Taken in their totality, Chris Terrill's television series comprise a quantitatively and qualitatively significant contribution to wider documentary culture on British television. Although some of his output can be seen to be contemporary with and comparable to the development of the docusoap, his embedding techniques facilitate a respectful observation of the real, and the elevation of the ordinary in human nature and experience within representative, accessible

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[262] Interview with the author, November 2019.

[263] Terrill, Britain's Biggest Warship: Goes To Sea, BBC2/Smithsonian Channel.

but extraordinary national institutions. Within this body of work, his naval- and service-oriented programmes represent both a sustained and unique relationship and a candid, captivating record of the Royal Navy, as community and family, employment and vocation, organisation and culture.[264] In this cumulative portrayal the Navy emerges as at once distinctive and emblematic within a study of constantly evolving Britishness. Terrill's approach, combining open-minded observation and revelatory recording with the consistent familiarity of modern docusoap reflects both earlier generations of documentary-making and later evolving accessible formats without apparent elitism or compromise. At the same time, the necessarily interactive mode of Terrill's own cohabitation and acclimatisation that facilitates these revelatory historiographic records distinguishes his series as the natural heirs to the public service broadcast and observational documentary ethos of *Sailor*.

[264] Terrill, Shooting Sailors.

Conclusion

(Navy) days of future past

In surveying and suggesting the significance of nearly 50 years of the Royal Navy's televisual representation, this study has sought to address three expansive but inseparable enquiries: how has the Navy changed as a documentary subject over this period? How have the techniques and practices of documentary television changed around that subject? And what does this long relationship between the Navy and British television reveal about the form, function and responsibility of factual television towards a representative national institution and focus of national identity like the Royal Navy? While the relationship has inevitably charted the transformation of both, it has also encompassed their transformation of each other.

While the respective successes and failures of *Warship* and *Making Waves* suggest no imminent return of naval-oriented television drama (leaving aside the BBC thriller series *Vigil* [2021], set aboard a fictional Trident submarine), the trend since 2000 in proliferating documentary treatments of the Royal Navy via frequent BBC and Channel 5 series underlines a perceived and sustained convergence of purpose, programming and popularity in factual television coverage, public service broadcasting and information, and tacit recruitment agenda. That these most recent series have accompanied both a renaissance of the Navy, in foregrounding its activities and the introduction of its new ships, and an assertion of its relevance amid post-Brexit emphases on Britishness and notions of sovereignty and accompany the recognition of a resurgent Russian threat, further suggests the integration of overt political discourses within the evolving fabric of British factual television. If the Navy has grown in frequency and importance as a documentary subject, this is interpretable as much as evidence of changes in its circumstances (and its attitudes and accessibility to media representation) and its political currency as to shifts in the form, address and audience of factual programming.

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Having remarked on the frequency, energy and perceived lack of success with which the Royal Navy has striven to engage with the British public in the period after World War II via film, television, public relations and recruitment campaigns, Duncan Redford connects naval culture and national identity indelibly to the UK's global status. He contends that the country's post-bellum and post-imperial decline precipitated the neglect of the former, alongside and because of the enforced re-negotiation of the latter:

> In the period up to 1919 conceptions of what being an island meant and that of global status were aligned with a need for sea power. After 1919 these conceptions slowly diverged and naval power became less important in imagining what it meant to be British. With the public disengagement from the Navy and naval strategy came increasing vulnerability to budget cuts. At the same time, the lack of any resonant national myths regarding the Navy (unlike that of the 'Few' and the Battle of Britain with regard to the RAF) ensure [sic] that there are no images around which the Navy can be imagined which would allow popular support and new links to aspects of a national identity to develop. The idea that it is the relationship between aspects of national identity and the Royal Navy that is at the heart of the Navy's lack of success in stimulating popular interest and support for a maritime defence posture will be an extremely worrying one. It suggests that public relations efforts are at the limit of what they can achieve as engagement and relevance at the deepest levels are lacking.[265]

Melding the national, naval and imperial aspects of British identity and lamenting the decline of all three from a proclaimed post-Victorian high-water mark constitutes a nostalgic reading of and conservative response to the encroaching economic and political realities that transformed the UK's position during the 20th century. While discounting the unchanged relevance of the Royal Navy to British survival, let alone victory, in World War II, which was sustained in 'resonant myths' found in the contemporary media of the conflict (and perpetuated in post-war feature films as well as recruitment material such as *The King's Navy*), this perspective suggests that the co-dependency of national and naval culture becomes, in times of uncertainty and retrenchment, disadvantageous to both:

> The ideas of both formal and informal empire drew upon the Royal Navy as the cornerstone of their defence and Britain's resulting place in

[265] Duncan Redford, Does the Royal Navy Matter? Aspects of national identity and the Navy's vulnerability to future budget cuts, *RUSI Commentary*, 18 September 2009, https://rusi.org/commentary/does-royal-navy-matter-aspects-national-identity-and-navy%E2%80%99s-vulnerability-future-budget [accessed 11 October 2019].

> the world. With the progressive retreat from formal empire from 1948 onwards, the role of an imperial navy was weakened and the Commonwealth, as an idea to replace a formal maritime empire, did not engage Britain. The result was that this link into an aspect of a national identity was broken. Increasing ties to Europe in the 1960s onwards have only increased this disengagement from the purely naval aspects of British global power and position.[266]

However, apart from risking controversy with its regretful retrospection, such an assertion that an idealistic and unidimensional understanding of 'empire' is essential to conceptions of British status and identity and naval significance overlooks the ironic, problematic but palpable persistence of a British naval global presence from the remainder of the 20th century on into the 21st. Whether this is interpretable as self-interested imperialist intervention or as mature moral obligation, the Royal Navy has remained permanently committed to it. Historical retreats from and returns to 'east of Suez', as much as the Falklands conflict and arguably more than European or North Atlantic commitments, have characterised the activity of the Royal Navy since the 1970s. Similarly, the service's other constants since the end of World War II have been restrictions in defence spending, incessant reductions in the fleet's size, and concomitant difficulties in crewing ships by recruiting and retaining personnel to undertake an undiminished range of international tasks. These are the enduring national, political and institutional contexts that the modern Navy has experienced, and which contemporary factual televisual representations have varyingly eschewed, recorded or actively investigated. However, the national political landscape as well as the international political climate have most recently explicitly reconjoined naval, national and global senses of British identity. Christopher Martin, who, though echoing Redford describes the UK as a 'post-modern maritime and globalised nation', delineates the convergent problems of national identity, internal self-perception and external, international projection confronting the present-day Royal Navy:

> Less than a century ago there was huge public awareness of the importance of the Royal Navy. The navy was the first line of defence from invasion and protected the empire and the trade upon which British wealth and security depended. Children collected cards of naval heroes much like children today collect stickers of football stars. The Royal Navy was, then at least, synonymous in the public mind with defence and prosperity. Today, despite the UK's deep dependency upon the globalised maritime-based trading system, the general public is almost completely

[266] Redford, Does the Royal Navy Matter?

> 'sea-blind'. Few understand what the Royal Navy does. One might also ask if many policy-makers really understand too.[267]

Citing a 2015 Chatham House enquiry into the views of the British public on the nation's image and its right to act as a 'great power' on the global stage, Martin summarises the conflicting factors of history, morality and economics afflicting the funding, construction and deployment of the Royal Navy: 'great wealth brings with it responsibility and self-interest in maintaining the global system; if the UK wants to sit at the top table it has to pay for the privilege, financially and morally'.[268] The enquiry's findings – that 63% of respondents believe Britain should aspire to be a 'great power', 69% that the UK has a responsibility to maintain international security, but that 42% think the country should pursue its own interests, even unethically – highlight contradictions in the perception of national identity, defence capability, political consciousness (and conscience) and self-image affecting 21st-century Britain.[269] That this enquiry preceded by less than a year the referendum on European Union membership, which reflected similar division and ambition in views on Britain's national, regional and global standing, underlines the divergence in public opinion when attempting to process the UK's post-imperial experience and position the country in the 'postmodern' present. Although writing before the Brexit vote became a reality, Martin summarised the Navy's role and nation's image problems of the post-war period, and anticipated the rhetorical redirection of both in the wake of the controversial referendum:

> If there is one aspect that must change, however, it is the persistent conceptualisation of the UK as a post-imperial power as this perpetuates the notion of 'decline'. Many labels are applied to describe the UK today: 'post-imperial', 'great power', 'major power', 'medium power' and 'declining power'. Often, these labels are applied within the context of what the UK *was* 70 years ago … it is important to reconceptualise the UK today, not within the context of what the UK *was* but what the UK *is*, a post-modern power with global interests and with a vital role to play in the international system that will change massively in the next decades, requiring a navy suitable for the twenty-first century, not an imperial or Cold War past.[270]

In an ironic reaffirmation of the vital connections construed by Redford, British identity, a national future and a renewed naval consciousness have characterised

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[267] Christopher Martin, *The UK as a Medium Maritime Power in the 21st Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p.v.
[268] Martin, *The UK as a Medium Maritime Power*, p.3.
[269] Martin, *The UK as a Medium Maritime Power*, p.3.
[270] Martin, *The UK as a Medium Maritime Power*, pp.4–5.

Figure v: F-35 over HMS *Queen Elizabeth*. Credit: Lockheed Martin. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

political rhetoric following the Brexit referendum. Following on from the inauguration of the UK's National Shipbuilding Strategy in 2017, in 2019 Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson restated the government's commitment to the Five Powers Defence Arrangement, confirmed the return to the permanent basing of British ships in the Arabian Gulf, and previewed the deployment of the Navy's restored aircraft carrier capability (Figure v) to the South China Sea as evidence of 'global engagement' and 'permanent presence'.[271] The following year Prime Minister Boris Johnson asserted that the future of Britain's stature and influence was dependent upon a restoration of naval power:

> Referring to his promise to 'restore Britain's position as the foremost naval power in Europe', the Prime Minister added: *'If there was one*

[271] HM Government, Defence in Global Britain: Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson gave a speech at RUSI outlining the future direction of UK Armed Forces, *Ministry of Defence*, 11 February 2019, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/defence-in-global-britain [accessed 5 February 2020].

> *policy which strengthens the UK in every possible sense, it is building more ships for the Royal Navy*'.[272]

The ironies at work in the Prime Minister's statement (in representing a Conservative government ostensibly dedicated to expanding rather than reducing the size of the Navy, in announcing building plans that prevent further shrinkage of the fleet rather than assure its growth, and in aspiring to naval supremacy in a Europe the UK has officially left) extend beyond the re-embracement of an 'East of Suez' policy. This unambiguous revival of a global, high-profile Royal Navy presence, validated on the bases of international order, great power status and the protection of self-interest, stands in particularly stark contrast to the reduction and retreat of the Navy to European and NATO areas under the Conservative government of the 1980s. The unpopular instigator of that policy, Margaret Thatcher's defence minister John Nott, may in retrospect be seen to have been reacting to political and economic circumstances that then (and now) appear to make Britain's ostensible defence decisions untenable, and the moral justification of international intervention no more than 'neo-imperialist do-goodery'.[273]

While an acknowledgement of a renewed emphasis on the significance of the Indo-Pacific region can be backdated to 2013, the unequivocal 'return to East of Suez' as stated in British defence policy of the 2020s reflects post-Brexit economic realities as much as it recalls previous imperial obligations.[274] By 2019, partners in Asia represented seven of Britain's most important export markets and accounted for 20% of British exports and imports, with three – China, Japan and Hong Kong – outstripping Germany (the UK's second largest export market) in value.[275] Within another decade, the region is expected to generate 90% of the world's economic growth, making British commitment to security and trade in the area a necessity, irrespective of no discernible lessening of commitments and connections to Europe, the Gulf and the

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[272] George Allison, UK to become 'foremost naval power in Europe' says PM, *UK Defence Journal*, 19 November 2020, https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/uk-to-become-foremost-naval-power-in-europe-says-pm/ [accessed 14 January 2022].

[273] John Nott, The adventures of a Chelsea pensioner, *The Spectator*, 19 June 2004, https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/diary---19-june-2004 [accessed 11 July 2022].

[274] Alessio Patalano, Days of Future Past? British strategy and the shaping of Indo-Pacific security (London: Policy Exchange 2019), https://www.policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Days-of-Future-Past.pdf [accessed 14 January 2022].

[275] Alessio Patalano, The Indo-Pacific 'tTilt' and the Return of British Maritime Strategy, in *The Integrated Review in Context: A Strategy Fit for the 2020s?* ed. by Joe Devanny and John Gearson (London: Centre for Defence Studies, King's College London, 2021), 50–52, p.51, https://www.kcl.ac.uk/the-integrated-review-in-context [accessed 26 July 2022].

Americas.[276] This period of transformation for Britain's national and naval circumstances has, perhaps unsurprisingly, also been an era of unprecedented coverage of the Royal Navy in factual television, with multiple series of *Warship: Life at Sea, Britain's Biggest Warship* and others appearing over the past five years. The current end point for this study therefore marks a period of more sustained, varied and insistent naval documentary programming than ever before being broadcast on British television, with this emphasis notably shared between channels committed to public service and commercially popular programming, the BBC and Channel 5. However, having reviewed up to this point the different series and programmes that have been produced since the 1970s, this study must also scrutinise and evaluate how the history and examples of naval documentary conform or compare to, or confound and contravene, the documentary precepts advanced by Michael Renov, the frameworks and approaches for representations of the real defined by Bill Nichols and the expectations of factual television set out by John Corner.

A taxonomy of naval documentary

The developmental changes overtaking factual televisual treatment and style that the surveyed examples of naval documentary reflect can be divided between relationships with subject and relationships with style. Corner characterises these insightfully in terms of the text's attention and intensities being turned inward, to privilege and promote authorship of the documentary as 'artefact', or turned 'outward', in reference and responsibility to its subject:

> The more that a piece of documentary work displays such features as, for instance, a strong narrative and diegetic crafting, the placing of its human subjects as 'characters', a self-conscious styling of its images and sounds, a reflexive play across its own project, the easier it is to approach is as an artefact, the outcome of expressive authorship. The more it sticks within the core conventions of exposition and illustration, the more aesthetically modest it is, the more propositionally and descriptively direct, then the more it is necessary to engage it within the terms of *what it is about*, to take the 'outward' route into the world of the referent and the theme.[277]

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[276] René Balletta, Delivering 'Global Britain'—A Naval Perspective, *USNI Proceedings*, 2021, 147(4), https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2021/april/delivering-global-britain-naval-perspective?utm_source=U.S.+Naval+Institute&utm_campaign=832f53df3fProceedings_This_Week__2020_6_5_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adee2c2162-832f53df3f-222721113&mc_cid=832f53df3f&mc_eid=56dca31bd2 [accessed 9 April [accessed 9 April 2021].

[277] Corner, What can we say about documentary? p.683.

Corner's distinction of these predispositions to inward or outward perspectives suggests a similar gravitation of Michael Renov's documentary 'tendencies' towards active, directive and impartial depictive poles of factual representation. Although not definitive or immovable as characterisations of intent or achievement, Renov's isolation of the 'tendencies' to 'record, reveal or preserve' and to 'express' accords with Corner's identification of the 'aesthetically modest' directness of the 'outward route', whereas the 'tendencies' to 'persuade or promote' and to 'analyse or interrogate' are more open to crafting, didacticism and 'authorship' taking precedence over the referent. Similarly, Nichols's documentary 'modes' reflect (though more by way of a spectrum rather than a polarisation) the 'inward' and 'outward' draws of documentary practice, with the 'observational' and 'expository' manifesting more immersion in the 'world of the referent and the theme', and the 'interactive', the 'reflexive' and the 'performative' inclining towards an absorption with 'authorship' and 'diegetic crafting'. Although plainly convergent and complementary in usefully providing terminology and describing technique, these frameworks highlight how individual documentary films and programmes inevitably straddle or combine categorisations. Factual representations exhibit or adopt multiple approaches, methods and perspectives, not only across their entire duration but often within single sequences. Given these fertile, illuminating but overlapping terms and definitions, Corner's thematic identification of documentary intention and interpretation as a series of couplets of 'tension and potential conflict' (art/reportage, truth/viewpoint, and institution/forms) offers a more conclusive framework for evaluating the effects and influence of factual texts. [278]

The chronological and aesthetic precedent of *Sailor* evinces the motivation to 'record' and 'reveal', relying predominantly on the 'observational' mode (albeit with sparing use of 'expository' voice-over) to underpin its reportage and its claim to veracity in impartial scrutiny (and ultimately support and celebration) of the Navy as 'institution'. The key characteristics of this representational benchmark are carried over into *Submarine*. However, this later series exhibits greater dedication to the 'expository' mode, in striving to illuminate and explain the less visible and understood world of the submarine service. In this regard, *Submarine* moves more to 'analyse and interrogate' its subject, most notably in its deliberate foregrounding of debate on conflict (through the 'Ocean Safari' episodes, and particularly in the record of the Polaris submarine's preparation and patrol). In these instances, the interviewer's inquiries – at first implied by interviewee responses and eventually explicitly included off-screen – propel the 'observational' mode into the 'interactive', with the additional awareness of the filmmaker's presence driving at 'truth' and 'viewpoint' (and *through* viewpoint) to a questioning of institution and 'order'. Arguably, at this point *Submarine* (and the later *HMS Splendid*) crosses further thresholds, into the

[278] Corner, *The art of record*, p.11.

'reflexive' by accentuating the process and moment of its production, and also in 'expressing' an opinion on nuclear war and deterrence, if only by foregrounding the recorded views of the Polaris crew members themselves. By contrast, the unique endeavour of *Sea Power* makes no apology or concession for its purpose to 'persuade and promote', to 'express' a rigid subjectivity through reflexive and performative modes. Its didactic exposition advances an institutional viewpoint that it considers and asserts as self-evident truth and seeks to embed its concept of inherited institutional order within a receptive public landscape. Further enhancement or exaggeration of the 'interactive' and the 'reflexive' modes manifests in *Submarine* as the 'performative', which can also be seen to embody the 'tendencies' to 'persuade and promote', and this progression also clearly characterises the evolution of Channel 5's series in subsequent decades.

The naval drama series included in this study because of their contemporaneity with the development of naval documentary can also be evaluated via the same terms and criteria. Despite their categorisation as fictional drama or uniform soap operas, *Warship* and *Making Waves* are interpretable as drama-documentary (i.e. presenting fictional characters in factually based circumstances), with the realism conferred by their collaborative production arrangements with the Navy acting to observe, report, record and reveal. Both these series can be seen to 'persuade and promote' the institutional cause, not least for recruitment purposes, even though the demands of drama frequently (particularly in the case of *Making Waves*) appear to produce less than positive representations of the service. It is remarkable in this regard that, though it featured occasionally exaggerated dramatic incidents alongside its critical, realist and character-based narratives, *Warship* remained consistently more popular through its broadcast history than *Making Waves*, despite the latter's conscious attempts to combine sensational incident and domestic drama. Therefore, despite its status as fictional drama, as factually based television *Warship* (and to an even greater extent *Sea Patrol*) can be seen to unite the otherwise 'generically differentiated delivery of pleasure and knowledge'.[279]

The deliberate combination of entertainment and information in *How to Build… a Nuclear Submarine* reflects the crafting of contemporary factual formats which similarly strive to combine pleasure and knowledge, or perhaps deliver circumscribed knowledge within a packaging of pleasure. The elevation of visual stylisation within this episode from a series (which clearly resembles the pervasive and dominant traits of 'popular documentary' or 'infotainment') therefore distracts from its important social and economic referentiality. The hyperbolical presentation of challenges and crises and rhetorical language of superlatives that characterise such programmes mean that the 'performative' dominates the expository, expression overwhelms record, and 'art' encroaches' conspicuously upon 'reportage'. Nonetheless, *How to Build… a Nuclear*

[279] Corner, What can we say about documentary? p.685.

Submarine remains capable of analysis and some 'interrogation' of its subject, in scrutinising the cultural and political context of shipbuilding and probing the institutions and 'orders' behind its history. By contrast, *Building Britain's Ultimate Warship* attempts to navigate an impartial or perhaps ambivalent course through the controversies of naval shipbuilding. It records but also interrogates a momentous construction programme. It reveals and promotes an institutional perspective and history. It combines the observational, the expository and the interactive to accommodate numerous (and inevitably conflicting) viewpoints on institutional narratives, establishment order and the record of a programme as yet unfinished and untested. While certainly reflecting the transformed style and organisation of contemporary factual representations that merge current affairs, journalistic investigation and public information, these programmes also maintain sufficient referential and analytic validity to be pertinent and specifically naval documentaries.

Channel 5's numerous naval-oriented series since the early 2000s have displayed more self-conscious stylisation, deliberate narrative structuring, and 'expressive authorship' than their predecessors. Narrative editing steers these series from referential records into aesthetic artefacts, and in tandem with insistent and invasive expository voice-over (as in *Submarine School* and *Royal Navy: Submarine Mission*) engenders a dominant performative and persuasive mode. Where voice-over becomes augmented by the presence of a presenter (as in *On Board Britain's Nuclear Submarine: Trident*), the interactive mode descends further into the reflexive as the documentary begins to refer only to the circumstances of its own making and to privilege the responses of the intrusive mediating figure. By contrast, earlier series of *Warship* and *Warship: Life at Sea* retain clearer tendencies to 'record', 'analyse' and 'express' and remain more consistently within 'observational' and 'expository' modes. However, it is in the later series of *Warship: Life at Sea* that the expressive and persuasive overtake the recording tendency, undermining the reliability and veracity of the referential record in the support of an overt institutional order. If the intention is to awaken the British public to immediate danger, to equate truth and viewpoint in a tabloidisation of televisual style and plead the Navy's case for funds and support, then Lord Hill-Norton would probably approve.

Chris Terrill's contribution to factual television in general and to naval representation in particular requires similar conceptual evaluation of its characteristics, relevance and achievement. While perhaps privileging the impartial ideal and tendency to record, reveal and preserve, Terrill's approach and its products mobilise and unite Nichols's modes without contradiction. The filmmaker's presence and shared experience function to connect the extraordinary and the ordinary in his subject reliably and veraciously for the audience, as second order observers to the documentarist. While the consistency of Terrill's presence might indicate expressive authorship or imply interactive or reflexive influences upon the 'world of the referent', the documentary record of the Navy as community and institution he has created suggests that art and reportage,

veracity and subjectivity are not hierarchic or exclusive criteria against which to judge documentary but stand as holistic and harmonising facets to the understanding of the observed subject. At once as 'aesthetically modest' and 'descriptively direct' as *Sailor*, the totality of Terrill's work outdistances this honourable precedent in volume, scope and integrity, and is additionally remarkable in becoming its own institutional reflection, consumed within and influencing the evolving naval culture it has documented.

Beyond its clear evocation in the production and reception of Discovery's HMS *Ark Royal, Sailor*'s influence can be gauged from the strong resemblance to it exhibited by the 10-part PBS series *Carrier* (Icon Productions, 2008), filmed aboard USS *Nimitz* during Operation Iraqi Freedom between May and November 2005. This 12-hour series of a deployment during war moves from illustrating the Navy to the nation to illustrating the nation within the Navy with observational and ultimately preservative veracity. Following a varied selection of individuals from the ship's massive complement, *Carrier* portrays the repetitive, mundane and ordinary aspects of their work alongside the unusual and the extraordinary, disorientating conditions of an unenvisaged war. *Nimitz*'s crew embodies diversity, inclusivity, individuality and tolerance, as well as institutional homogenisation, isolation and palpable tension, aptly representing (in all senses) America after 9/11. *Sailor* is similarly enshrined as an effort to 'preserve', not only in retrospect as a British documentary landmark but by its own rapid concretisation of audience recognition via *Sailor: 8 Years On*. Even more significantly, its relevance to the Navy itself can be gauged from its reappearance in *Britain's Biggest Warship* as a cultural record being imbibed by a new generation of sailors.

Alongside Terrill's *HMS Brilliant, Sailor* is shown to provide the same combination of information and formation for HMS *Queen Elizabeth*'s (Figure vi) crew as participants and viewers of the same evolving community. The sequence detailing the (re)viewing and (re)appraisal of *HMS Brilliant*, on the communal level for *Queen Elizabeth*'s youngest crew members and an intensely personal one for its oldest, crystallises the specificities of purpose and significance for naval documentary for reflection and growth within the Navy community itself, and the universalities of relevance and recognition for the national viewing community as well.

Final words

Christopher Martin contends that the UK is distinguished by indelible 'existential features' that determine its identity as a maritime state, and which therefore necessarily dictate its characterisation as a naval power: being an island with overseas territories, possessing a shipbuilding industry and a domestic merchant marine, and a maritime services sector centred on the world trade hub of London. Under such historical and contemporary impetuses the UK cannot

Figure vi: HMS *Queen Elizabeth*. LPhot Daniel Shepherd. ©UK Ministry of Defence. CROWN COPYRIGHT, 2019: Open Government Licence.

be anything but a 'maritime-dependent state'.[280] In stressing the contemporary geopolitical realities of Britain's trade and security, Martin observes that 'there are no "far off places" in the globalised maritime economy'.[281] Equally, there are no far-off places on television, which renders the geographical, political, cultural and human world visibly and accessibly, but also popularly and partially. Via its pervasiveness and forms of depiction and address, factual television may erode difference or exoticise it (both positively and negatively) in the service of information, influence and entertainment, to foster critical consciousness and active, interrogative viewership (and citizenship) in the recognition of the real. The Navy as both familiar and distant subject, outside of ordinary experience and yet recorded and broadcast as (extra)ordinary British institution, community and constituency, represents an enabling documentary subject for national depiction and engaged audience debate, as Brian Winston suggests:

> Grounding the documentary idea in reception rather than in representation is exactly the way to preserve its validity. It allows the audience to make the truth claim for the documentary rather than the documentary implicitly making the truth claim for itself.[282]

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[280] Martin, *The UK as a Medium Maritime Power*, pp.5–8.
[281] Martin, *The UK as a Medium Maritime Power*, p.8.
[282] Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Documentary Film Revisited* (London: BFI, 1995), p.253.

Figure vii: Under the white ensign. Photo copyright Chris Terrill, 2018. Used with permission.

The varied instances of Royal Navy representation underline the relevance and also the limitations of Nichols's modes, in an environment in which factual television is protean and populist in the ways in which it chooses to fashion and propagate documented reality. The Navy clearly serves television's purposes in a variety of ways, as a documentary subject from commercial as much as public service broadcasting perspectives. Television, as the varying

examples of *Sailor, Sea Power, HMS Brilliant* and *Warship: Life at Sea* suggest, can equally serve the Navy's, the broadcaster's or the establishment's purposes. The important point, to return to John Corner's critical framework for documentary, is to remain conscious of the 'order' behind, and the differences between perceived and depicted reality in the landscapes, or better 'seascapes', of public knowledge.

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In *Screening the Fleet*, Jonathan Rayner explores the representation of the modern Royal Navy on British television over a fifty year period from 1973 to 2023. Contextualising his subject with significant aspects of earlier naval representation, in recruiting, documentary and public information films from the 1940s to the 1960s, Rayner then brings his focus forward to 1973-2023.

The 1970s were a significant decade for naval representation on television, and saw the broadcast of two definitive series: the BBC's drama series *Warship* and the acclaimed documentary series *Sailor*. These landmark series set the benchmark for naval representation in both realist and in fictional portrayals. They also set precedents for audience perceptions, and these have affected the production, and the reception, of the series on the Royal Navy that have followed.

Rayner's work investigates how advances in technology allow programme makers to use new techniques in the spheres of naval drama and documentary. More recent series also need to balance the required conventions for any portrayal of the Navy on television with the revelatory or iconoclastic approaches now expected by modern audiences.

In focussing on the changing portrayal of the Royal Navy on television, however, Rayner also considers how the Navy itself has evolved in the post-World War II world. The series analysed in *Screening the Fleet* also evidence the changing nature and increasing diversity of the naval community as a reflection of changing notions of Britishness.

Offering the first study of its type, this volume highlights evolving and emerging trends in factual and fact-based television programmes through their portrayal of a highly popular, patriotic and persistent subject over a fifty year period. It debates developments in television and documentary approaches using the representation of the Royal Navy, and its changing position in perceptions of British identity.

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