

Nick Last - Lynx De-commissioning

Thank you Phil for inviting me today and allowing me to give you a short recollection of my time in the Falklands and Gulf.

LUCKY

I was extremely lucky to be in exactly the right place at the right time from being selected to train on the Lynx to the ships I served in and operational tours I took part in and the people I served with.

ATTITUDES

I first went front line 36 years ago, less than 36 years after the 2nd world war finished and attitudes were different then. There were still some people serving in the Navy who had been in the 2nd world war and some who had never seen the inside of a helicopter. A year later was the Falklands war. The Lynx was still regarded by some senior officers as a glorified Wasp and the majority of FOST training was CASEXs and HDSs with the occasional surface search during the Thursday war. The Royal Navy was an anti-submarine force. The Falklands changed that. The Lynx came of age and showed just how versatile it was. New equipment was fitted and new procedures such as night load lifting were devised in theatre. The first operational Sea Skua firings took place with success. I've been asked if war is scary. When you're flying around and being shot at you don't have time to be scared, you do what have to and think about it afterwards. It's far worse waiting for the forthcoming air raid and whether your ship will be targeted. That's where I was lucky. Serving on a ship without a gun we only went into bomb alley quite late on and Argentine Air Force changed their tactics the first day we were there and stopped attacking the ships and concentrated on Army positions so our ship was never targeted.

THE GULF

The 1st Gulf War was totally different. Our ships were fairly safe, even in the Northern Gulf with the main threat being a floating mine. The Lynx was proven versatile helicopter. Commanders knew how to use the Lynx and the weather was better than the South Atlantic. I was lucky to be a Flt Commander on my last operational tour at sea in war zone doing the job I had ultimately been trained for. To successfully deliver a missile and sink a ship more than 150 miles away from your own ship is something a helicopter had never done before and is unlikely to do again. Locking onto a target and pressing the firing button is exhilarating. Waiting two seconds for the missile to fire up seem like a lifetime. Watching the missile go down to its intermediate skim height and go in the right direction is a relief. Waiting for the missile to complete its 1 minute flight to the target is nervous and then you see the explosion and have to remember to complete all the records. The glass of Champagne the Captain gave us on the flight deck on our return was nice. When I returned from the Gulf one of nieces asked if I had killed anyone. I don't know but I probably did. You don't take any satisfaction in killing anyone, only pride in doing the job you had trained for. I will miss seeing and hearing the Lynx over Dorset, particularly as you don't seem to see so many Wildcats. It looks an impressive helicopter and I'm sure it will do an excellent job at sea but it's a shame it doesn't have a missile yet. **Thank you.**