

### 30<sup>th</sup> May 1982 – The last air-launched Exocet attack



The 2 Super Etendards (on the right in this photo taken by another Argentinian aircraft as they set off) had unexpectedly come in from the South, following a warning to expect attack from the North. Exeter detected the 'Handbrake' radar and alerted the force. The aircraft fired at least one missile and turned for home. They were accompanied by four A4s (on the left of the photo above), two of which were shot down by Exeter, the others came far too close!



Avenger claimed to have shot down one Exocet at 8nm, with her 4.5 inch gun, though that seems pretty unlikely; perhaps they saw the flames of the crashing A4s. However both Exeter and Andromeda detected the Exocet missile head radar, first sweeping, then locked on.



(Artists Impression!)

We had the 'Eyewater' radar of the missile on UAA1 and were tracking it with the Sea Dart's 909 radar. Some of the crew on Exeter actually saw it crossing our stern and heading towards Andromeda. A Sea King helicopter, that was "up threat", ran and hid behind Andromeda, another was in Exeter's firing line but didn't prevent us firing past them towards the enemy!

Almost everyone had hit the deck and were praying that our Sea Dart would do its job. In the Ops Room, only the Captain, AAWO, EWD and UAA1 operator had not hit the deck and were glued to their screens as the seconds to expected impact ticked down (a running commentary was given by the Captain.....In fact the Seadart Controller fired the last missile from under the desk! It is unclear what happened to the missile, Exeter may have taken it with 'Dart, it may have ran out of fuel and crashed into the sea, it may have been distracted by our Chaff. The most important thing is that it never impacted Exeter and we lived to fight another day!

[The two surviving A4 pilots later claimed to have bombed HMS Invincible. These two A4s would have flown through a barrage of missiles, guns and small arms, Exeter had shot down two of their oppo's within minutes, what chance they would have stood to get anyway near one of the carriers? Then they would have to have turned around and run the gauntlet back out. They were clearly very brave pilots, but no one could have survived a trip into the Task Force for twenty miles and back out again however brave they were.]

The entire engagement took minutes, but seemed to last for hours. After this engagement, Captain Hugh Balfour broadcast a big BZ (well done) to the ships company whilst drinking a large single malt provided to him in the Ops Room by his steward. He suggested we all did something similar and most of us found an illicit bottle of something after that experience! A comment heard on 2 deck was "It's amazing how many chefs you can fit under a Hobart bowl!"