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# **TOMORROW MAY BE TOO LATE**

## **A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF NAVAL ENGINEER OFFICER**

Not for the first time in its long history the Royal Navy is going through a period of great change. Manpower is being pruned drastically in both the uniformed and the civilian arms, long-established organizations are being swept aside under a new wave of commercial radicalism, traditional and cherished practices are being sacrificed on the altar of improved efficiency, and new technology, especially the ubiquitous micro-chip, is beginning to make a real impact on all fields of naval engineering.

My very great pleasure and pride in becoming CNEO is thus tempered with the concern that many young engineer officers must be regarding the future with a feeling of uncertainty, if not foreboding. It is one thing to accept a challenge when the way ahead is clear however hard the going may be: it is another matter when you know the path is there, but you cannot see it because of the fog.

Our purpose as naval engineers is to ensure to the best of our professional ability, that the Fleet is ready to fight when it is needed. The best weapon system in the world will be of little value tomorrow if you need it today; the finest aircraft will accomplish nothing if they are not ready to carry out a full operational mission; the most modern machinery is of no avail if you cannot maintain the speed of the Fleet when called upon to do so. No new message, and you have all heard it before. In today's turbulent world however it does provide us with an unchanging purpose against which we can measure our actions.

You may feel that the Royal Navy is in decline or you may be as excited as I am by the prospect that a new Navy, the Navy of the 1990s, is beginning to emerge as new designs of highly capable ships, submarines, and aircraft begin to leave the drawing board. Indeed, 1985 is a remarkable change-over point in the naval programme. The last CVS and Type 42 will be delivered; the last pre-Trident SSN, the last two Type 22 frigates, and the last two MCMVs will have been ordered. Five first-of-class will be under construction or will have been ordered or will be in prospect: the first new SSKs since the OBERONS, the first Type 23 frigate, the first Trident submarine, and the first SRMH, with the first AOR due to be ordered in March 1986.

You may feel that these good things are still some way away, but that you have to contend with the problems of the present. To the pessimistic among you I would say that it is far better to be struggling to cope with the capabilities we have rather than ruing the loss of those we have not: to the optimistic I would say keep your feet firmly on the ground. One thing is certain, the new Navy will be just as demanding, if not more so, on our engineering professionalism and judgement, and it is both our challenge and our opportunity to improve both our readiness for war and our fighting effectiveness.

Above all make sure that it works today: tomorrow may be too late.