

How sappers in the South Atlantic earned themselves a free beer . . .

**FALKLANDS
FILE**

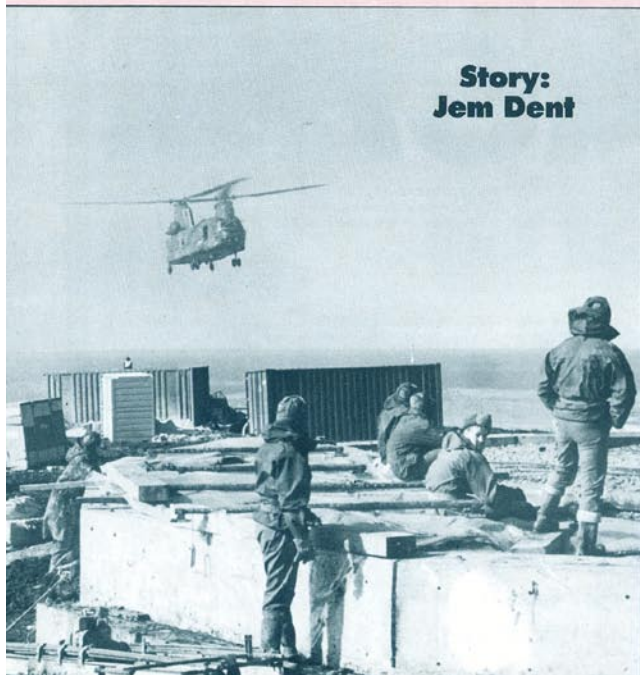


PROJECT ZEUS -



SUMMIT OF SUCCESS

**Story:
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PROJECT ZEUS, a classified radar construction project and one of the most spectacular that the Royal Engineers have taken on in recent years, is drawing to a successful close before the Falklands winter. And to celebrate the progress that had been made against all odds, Major General David Thorne, until recently Commander British Forces Falkland Islands, visited the mountaintop radar station to present each of the jubilant sappers with a beer.

The general was honouring a promise he made on New Year's Day 1983 that he would reward the 34 Field Squadron Sappers who work on the site if they could achieve the progress he demanded. The men on Project Zeus have conquered numerous setbacks, a shortage of stores and the fickle nature of helicopter operations in the variable weather to create a liveable, workable site in a hostile environment.

In conjunction with the ceremonial issue of beer, the Officer Commanding, 34 Field Squadron, Major Ian Plant, invited the General to unveil a plinth. The bronze plaque mounted in the top reads: 'ZEUS — A ROUTINE TASK FOR 34 FIELD SQUADRON'. But, as Major General Thorne was quick to emphasise, "It was anything but a routine task, carried out by exceptional soldiers. I have nothing but admiration for the way in which each soldier buckled down to this task and carried it through".

Personnel of the RAF's Radar Erection

◀ Work stops as a Chinook responds to a hooker's directions.

◀ **A Chinook delivers two skips of aggregate to the Project Zeus site.**

Team, a group of the recently arrived Royal Irish Rangers and men from 30 Air Defence Battery have all now joined 34 Field Squadron on the remote summit of Project Zeus.

Construction started in December 1982 after a planning report was pushed through in a tight schedule. The Royal Engineers have built the bases for the RAF's technical equipment and a domestic complex to allow men to live on Zeus and operate the radar station. Now only some minor electrical and water supply work remains before they finish the job.

Major Ian Plant believes the success of Zeus hinged on two factors: "The stamina of the workforce was incredible. The ninety sappers, REME, ACC and RAMC medics never lost a single day's work during the four months of living with their heads in the clouds! And they could not have done without the back-up in stores and administration. The men of HQ, Support and 1 Troops, working on sites near Stanley, have also done Zeus proud".

It is something of a miracle that the project got off the ground at all. The relatively short planning and execution time, the need to order specialist stores and equipment from manufacturers 8000 miles away and the total reliance on Chinook airlift for all technical materials, equipment and day-to-day supplies set problems which many, from outside and inside the Services, doubted would ever be solved.

Here Major Plant pays tribute to the RAF: "The achievement of Zeus is a great credit to the Chinook detachment. Unfailing support in terms of hundreds of sorties to bring men and material to the mountaintop has allowed us to get Zeus finished. The Chinook helicopters have given us what we wanted despite being fully committed to other sites and units."

The Chinook detachment commander, Squadron Leader Gordon Woolley called it: "One hell of a task. I was pleased, though, with the teamwork which developed between our aircrew and the sappers' hookers. 34 Field Squadron have developed the most professional helicopter handling team we have met."

It was this slick work at the airhead just outside Stanley which enabled the Project Officer on Zeus, Captain Chris Moulder, to vary his priorities according to the task's progression. "We had a good service from the bottom," he said. "Of course, there were misunderstandings, but they came up with the goods when they were needed."

Despite the high work rate required to finish the project on time, soldiers were allowed to take helicopter lifts to Squadron HQ on the outskirts of Port Stanley. The men labelled it 'Raz', taken from the Navy's acronym for Replenishment at Sea.

The two days doing laundry, relaxing and sightseeing regenerated the sappers' batteries before returning to Zeus as Major Plant explained. "When you live and work in such conditions for protracted periods, amenities such as the sauna, the cinema and the pub are not luxuries — they are essential priorities."

The determination of Squadron HQ to give the site the same facilities as the rest of the Falklands Garrison even led to the 'high-jacking' of a Combined Services Entertainment



ments (CSE) Show. With the Squadron's first class ground/air radio communications, sometimes better even than the helicopters' controllers, the CSE Show's aircraft was guided into the Zeus helipad.

Despite the limited facilities, the artistes gave a rousing performance and singer Kerry Washington confirmed afterwards: "It was the best show of the tour. The lads entertained us, as well, in the pub. They were real gentlemen!" Zeus has now become a permanent fixture in the CSE itinerary.

Early work on shuttering for random walls.

Major Ian Plant summed up the feelings of many sappers in the Falklands: "The magnitude of engineer tasks here is both essential and exciting. The diversity of skills practised by men and all Royal Engineers throughout the Islands is a tribute to the Royal School of Military Engineering, Chatham. Project Zeus and other engineer tasks in these Islands will long remain a monument to the Corps." ■

Erecting the generator site screen. Inset shows Officer Commanding, Major Ian Plant.

