

**1SL'S ADDRESS AT HMS ARK ROYAL'S DECOMMISSIONING CEREMONY****11 MAR 11**

Today, which marks the culmination of a series of farewells, is the moment to reflect on what this HMS ARK ROYAL, the fifth ship to bear the iconic name, has accomplished.

Today, is the moment to pay tribute to each and every one of you. Today, is the moment to honour the Mighty Ark's legacy.

Every one of you should be proud – very proud – of what you stand for. Proud of all that you have achieved.

For the Ship's Company has – together with her embarked Air Squadrons and Royal Marine Commandos – delivered: across the globe, day and night, time and again, over the last quarter of a century.

Your success has been due in part to the remarkable design of this fine Ship. But it owes much more to the people who have both supported her from ashore and served with her at sea.

The Ship's impressive operational record stands testament to your courage, commitment and resourcefulness, both as individuals and collectively and those that came before you. I give my thanks to all of you: those of every Arm, every Branch, and every Trade.

My thanks also go to your families and friends who have supported you throughout your endeavours and to those who have so generously supported this ship throughout its time.

More widely, I am ever grateful for the close links that have developed over the years between the Ship and her extended family, in particular the links with the Cities of Portsmouth and Leeds.

HMS ARK ROYAL has, since her commissioning 25 years ago, loyally served the Crown: deterring conflict, defending the United Kingdom's interests, helping defeat our enemies during conflicts in the Balkans and Iraq, as well as developing diplomatic relations worldwide.

The decision to gap the United Kingdom's Carrier Strike capability was not one taken lightly, or easily. And I know that the impact of that decision, upon those who have demonstrated such outstanding loyalty over so many years, is keenly felt. I recognise that, and I pay tribute to the dignity with which you have greeted this difficult news.

But we have to move on. Despite the gap, the Carrier Strike capability remains pivotal to the nation's future defence posture.

So, just as you have more than lived up to the Mighty Ark's motto – Zeal Does Not Rest – so her legacy will not rest.

The challenge we now face is the recreation of the Carrier Strike capability which has for so long been – and will again be – at the heart of the Future Force which will safeguard our country.

That is not only our future. It is also your legacy.