

The beginning

On leave for two weeks before I joined my new Troop, leaving 40 Commando was hard, I had made good mates in B-Coy 4 Troop but decided I needed to get away from Plymouth and broaden my horizons so I volunteered for a year's detachment based on the Falkland Islands. No I didn't know where they were, thought maybe Scotland somewhere.

Anyway I was given two weeks leave before I had to report to the Royal Marine base in Poole Dorset. As a young Marine 19 years old I was indestructible, or thought so until one night in a night club , A fight started , I got caught up in the fray , one bouncer hit me with a water jug of all things and knocked my teeth out. Fine end to the night, I managed to make my way back home, but repairs to my face would take some time.

On our first parade as NP8901 the Sergeant Major looked at my face and made a comment about a bus hitting me, "yes sir". RM Poole was the home of the 148 Commando Forward Observation Battery a specialist Naval Gunfire Support Forward Observation unit within 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery of 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines, based at RM Poole in Dorset, co-located with the Special Boat Service, and R-Coy the Royal Marine display team/Freefall team.

The unit was very relaxed when it came to standards of dress and haircuts because no one knew which little section or department you belonged to. Poole itself was a small seaside town with lots to offer the Marines in the way of pubs and clubs, I was in heaven. The only problem I had with most people was the state of my face and missing teeth, explained away as a car crash, worked every time.

The month beat (No pun intended) up training period involved a variety of courses available to our small detachment, one sort after course was the Dispatch rider course.

The role was to provide a means of transport for liaison, reconnaissance and courier duties.

Can-Am motorcycle a 250cc Single cylinder, 2 stroke Cycle, Air cooled engine was to say the least a tad big to get round the newly introduced part one of the motorcycle test done around a set of road cones set in a circuit to completed without incident before allowed on the main roads surrounding Poole and the surrounding area.

I got one of the two slots allocated along with Danny Betts who would become a good mate over the next few months.

Another course I got myself on was the illustrator's course, I was keen to learn illustrators as a gifted artist I looked forward to learning new methods from the Poole based illustrator's branch. A week spent drawing and learning, I did design the Logo for our detachment deployment that year but we didn't have time to get the Tee-Shirts printed. My only regret is now we cannot say "Been there got the Tee shirt"

We had landed in Montevideo on-board an RAF flight from Lyneham All expecting a 7 day run ashore before starting the tour. I sensed something was not right while sitting inside the airport The Boss rushed off to use the phone, within the next hour they all left the Airport got on a coach down to the Docks, no run ashore no drinking no shopping straight onto the British Antarctic Survey ship (John Biscoe)

23rd of March and we stood on the back deck of the 26-year-old ship looking at the setting sun, somewhere on-board a radio played "Don't let the sun go down on me" by Elton John. No shit .

A C130 passed overhead as the vessel steamed south, One of the Marines shouted "lets Moon" as the plane turned in the sky to make a second pass a row of bare arses pointed towards the sky (What a photo) it made the front page of the papers La Nación

After three days sailing (Chipping and painting) the very small ship they arrived in Port Stanley on the 26th of March.

The atmosphere on the small island could be sensed , we arrived at our new home for the next year. Moody brook was the barracks for the detachment of Marines. Looking at the assortment of wooden building I began to wonder what I had volunteered for.

An old saying "Just like Mushrooms -kept in the dark and fed shit" sprung to mind, as a young Marine I got told nothing of the impending Argentinian invasion on that first day so he went for a run. A fucking run which nearly killed me, a strong wind blows constantly on the islands so a routine 5 mile run took twice the normal time. After spending three days navigating the South Atlantic seas my legs felt like lead, once back in the barracks I began to feel the muscles start to ache, feeling in a lot of pain the next day, the day we started to get snippets of information regarding the whereabouts of half of the old NP8901 detachment we had come to relieve (South Georgia)and the small detachment of sailors left behind by the HMS Endurance to make room for the Marines sent to investigate reports of Argentinian occupation of South Georgia

Moody Brook First of April Orders Group.

Royal Marine's disposition

April 1st

In London, intelligence reports suggest that an invasion force is assembling off Stanley. This information is relayed to Governor Hunt; *“ We have apparently reliable evidence than an Argentine task force will gather off Cape Pembroke early tomorrow morning 2 April. You will wish to make your dispositions accordingly.”*

Governor Hunt warns the population of the Islands before deploying the remaining Royal Marines, together with elements of the local defence force. Governor Rex Hunt reports his dispositions to London; *“(1) Royal marines disposition will be made near expected landing beach and will do what they can to contain landing and to defend airport.”*

Around about 20:00hrs everyone found a place to sit-down in the Bar area of Moodybrook barracks, The place stank of stale ale and cigarette smoke after all this was occupied by the resident Marines 24/7. I sat on a couple of ammo boxes and waited for the Boss to deliver his orders, looking around at the faces I didn't recognize everyone our Troop had been bolted by some sailors from the Endurance and civilian defence force members who volunteered for the up-coming action.

It was all getting a bit serious at this point, Major Norman walked in and stood in front of the Bar, **opening his talk with:**

“You are not fighting for the island, this time you're fighting for yourselves.”

And, ending his talk with:

“Right lads, today you are going to die, so go out there and do your job!”
this is about all I can remember from the orders given that night. When he said that I looked across the room at some pretty shocked looking Sailors.

The faces of people I had never seen before, the smell of fear within that wooden shed they called a Bar, the dark brown colours of the floor stained by copious amounts of spilled beer , the fag burns in the carpet and the manky seat coverings all added to a vivid memory etched into my memory .

The second scene of that night is me once again sitting on top of ammo boxes . I opened a new box containing 200 Rounds of 7.62mm ammunition for my General purpose machine gun. As I pulled the belt of ammo out of the box I heard the Sergeant Major Bill Muir shout “what the fuck are you doing Alden” I looked up to see his red angry face bearing down on me, “Stop fuckin smoking around live ammunition “he said as I realized I had lit up while loading up.

Fucking hell I thought, we have just been told we are going to die and he is giving me a bollocking for smoking. Gaz Clifton sat opposite me with a big grin on his face, Gaz was older and wiser than me. He was the Troop AE.(Assault Engineer) he used to blow thing up, his second job was Number 2 on the Gun, my Gun, so he used to carry most of the ammo while I carried the gun, the weights just about evened out but the joy of rapid fire was all mine.

Gaz and me stuck together where I went he followed, sometimes leading , advising and generally looking after me.

Getting armed up for the night was a free for all, you would normally be issued a certain amount of ammunition and ordinance like grenades , but tonight you take whatever you could carry. I had a Norwegian day sack , a small back pack, and it was packed with belts of 7.62mm totalling 2000 rounds. The one belt which would be loading into the gun initially had been painstakingly put together with Tracer rounds. A normal belt would have a Tracer round every five, one in four, the one I made was all tracer one in one .Tracer Rounds are built with a small pyrotechnic charge in their base. When fired, it burns very bright during night-time firing. This enabled me to make aiming corrections without observing the impact of the rounds.

Gaz carried as many magazines as possible with grenades hanging from his belt, looking like a real cowboy.

It must have been late around 23:00 when we finished sorting out weapons and kit, Lou Armour our section commander told us “No move before Midnight “We moved out into positions at 02:00.

The Plan

Alpha 21, alpha was our section call sign, the section Corporal being Lou Armour a small and compact Marine with his speciality being weapons, he was a PW2 (Platoon Weapons) instructor, well versed in Tactics , map reading and urban warfare tactics.

The Gun team: being Gaz as Number two and myself as the gunner.

Signals I think was Bernie Eccles the other two have been lost in my memory as have a lot of information about that night

Section one was to set up the Machine gun where the road from the airfield to Port Stanley makes a right-angled turn at Hooker's Point.

This to me was just thick tussock grass and Blackness, I could not see a thing and to tell you the truth didn't even know what I was supposed to be looking for . The time would be around 03:00 am as I stared into the pitch blackness out to my front I saw things moving, I saw silhouettes of men .Exhaustion and tiredness will do strange things to the mind. Laying there that night in the deathly silence waiting for a full frontal assault I nodded off woken up by the Clansman 320 radio .a combat net *radio* system used by the Marines at the time. The crackle sounded loud too loud , what I did know was we should have Radio silence, this was now broken .

A whispered message from Gaz into my ear informed me of our impending doom.

A message from London in the UK informing us that no reinforcement on the way, we are all alone and "Good Luck"

Thirty minutes later another order came over the Radio "Get back into Stanley now" so we all got in the Landover and off we went. Of the seven Marines in the section non knew the island or Stanley itself, we had been on the island for 48hours which was no time to acclimatize and get our bearings on streets or locations. We needed to get back to HQ who had based themselves in Government house.

April 2nd – at 3.25 am Falklands' time, Governor Hunt declares a state of emergency.

At 4.30am, Operation Rosario commences with Argentine special forces landing at Mullet Creek for a surprise attack on Moody Brook Barracks. The noise of automatic gunfire alerts the population in Stanley.

Argentine marines come ashore in amphibious vehicles at York Bay while a C-130 transport plane loaded with Argentine troops, lands at Stanley airfield. The Argentine troops move onto the road towards Stanley but are engaged by a section of Royal Marines commanded by Lt. Trollope. Two missiles hit an Argentine Armoured Personnel Carrier before the section retires. After finding Moody Brook empty of British troops, Argentine Special Forces attack Government House. They encounter well placed British defences, and suffer the first casualties of the war. Three Argentine prisoners are taken.

A second group of Argentinean troops led by Captain Pedro Giachino, reached the governor's house. Giaccino and his second in command Quiroga ordered the surrender with no answer from the house. They threw a grenade which was answered with machine gun fire.

Both men decided to approach the house and during the process they were shot. Giaccino bled to death as no medevac was able to reach them on time.

The Fire Fight (Important)

Bumping around in the back of the rover was no fun at all, so when it stopped and Lou shouted for us to dismount it was a relief to be on solid ground , looking up at the night sky I seeing Tracer rounds scaring the black canvas I thought of scene from Apocalypse now, awesome sight until the reality struck home that we had now entered a theatre of urban war.

From the get go it was fire and movement, from gate to gate from building to building from Road side to opposite road side. Never moving until your oppo laid down covering fire. Which in my case was Gas but for the rest it was me Firing the GPMG from the hip as we crossed road intersections .I was loving this, I fired at anything that moved and almost anything that didn't move, just in case.

After what felt like an eternity of this running around a small town lost, and we were lost, no communications with HQ so we didn't have a clue who would greet us if we arrived at Government House. We heard familiar voices close by and shouted for them to close up. Lou and the section commander from six section had a quick conflagration with the Corporal in charge who had only just spent the last twelve months on the island so knew Stanley like the back of his hand. He pointed us in the right direction towards the wood overlooking GH.

Looking down the road leading up towards the small wood we knew we had to cross over and jump a small wooden fence standing about 6 foot high. The rest of the section leapt up and crossed as Gaz and me laid down constant fire into the woods. This constant fire consisted of 3 to five round bursts at a constant rate we fired around 600 rounds into the wood before it was our turn to cross while the rest of the section gave Gaz and me cover.

I ran and hit the fence with a thump then slid down it in a heap, I was knackered, my legs had given in and carrying all that weight, the gun and the belt of ammo attached alone weighed in at over 30lbs(13.85kg) plus the small back pack full of ammo weighing another 30-40lbs I could not make over to the other side under my own steam. We both sat there on the wrong side of the fence in open ground just waiting to be picked off by enemy fire.(Not a metaphor)

Gaz grabbed hold of the Gun with one hand on the stock handle and the other on the barrel. The barrel had just had 600 rounds sent down it travelling at a speed of 835m/s or 1867 Mph, and at that speed the barrel heats up rapidly. Gaz screamed as he threw the gun over the fence which made it clear to the other side but along with the gun went most of the skin from his hand which had fused with the white hot metal.

Still charged with adrenaline he cupped his hands together giving me a foot hole to leap over the fence, a leg up as its known the world over. Only this leg up was timed to perfection, as my legs gained height and broke clear of his hands, the gap in-between was just enough room for a row of holes to appear in the wooden fence. Now that was luck, the enemy rounds had missed my legs, and Gaza's arms completely. As I landed on the other side Gaz joined me within a split second sweating and swearing about the situation we now found ourselves in.

We had no time to think, at times like this your mind and body are running on memory, the memory and training instilled in you during Commando training and unit life. One thing you don't learn is the silence of battle or fire fights. You don't hear the enemy's Muzzle blast (The high temperature, high pressure gases escaping after the bullet leaves the weapon. On the firing ranges you need to wear ear defenders to protect your ears from this and the Sonic boom, sound associated with shock waves created by the bullet exceeding the speed of sound. In a fire fight all you hear

is your own weapon and maybe one or two close to you, it's only the shouting which brakes the silence.

Crack and thump is a common way of describing when a bullet has passed by you, close enough to hear, then the thump is the bullet hitting someone or something behind you. Lucky for you to hear the crack but unlucky for the person to get the thump, on this occasion the bullets hitting the fence made no sound it was a visual realization that it had even happened.

We carried on until we found ourselves staring at an open piece of ground used as a football pitch , we would have to cross the ground with no cover from darkness as it was now getting light, we had pepper pot across the open ground , An old military term, essentially bounding across the pitch, where by one team of 2 men moves forwards covered by an equal number of men behind. All started out good, teams fire and move, towards the cover of a hedgerow I just started firing from the hip again as physically I could not get down on the ground to set up the Gun in its normal prone position to fire.

I could not tell if rounds had been fired at the section during this move, if they did none passed within my hearing range, thankfully.

We had made across intact and our objective lay 200m down a small track lined either side with a small hedgerow which stood waist height. Not really giving any kind of cover from fire or view. Lou Told me to lead from the front with the gun aimed at the building to our front which was Government house and our HQ, so we thought but could not confirm because the comms had not been made between us and them.

So my instructions or orders came in the words "If someone fires at you, fire back" another Marine just behind me, Rich Parker had to shout "Royal Marines "as we got closer. So there you have it, me walking towards the building just waiting for the thump. Or if I was lucky the crack!

This was a long walk and all in what seemed to me in slow motion, like waiting to get shot, I suppose the only people who can describe it are dead hence the term "Walking Dead" It was dreamlike and still is all these years later, I remember the wind, the dark grey colours of the surroundings .A tall hedge faced me with a small gap big enough for a car to drive through to a court yard at the rear of GH., through this gap I could see what looked like dead bodies lying on the floor, either dead or crawling very slowly to avoid detection, like a sniper would move.

Rich shouted "Royal Marines "and got a reply from Corporal Pares who told us where the enemy were located, opening the back door we all sprinted inside to be welcomed by Sergeant Major Bill Muir who gave our section rooms upstairs covering arcs of fire out towards the bay. Now I had watched movies where the shooters smash the pane of glass and poke the barrel through the broken glass. I did exactly that and got an immediate bollocking from down stairs , once again from the

Sergeant Major "Stop smashing windows" Yet another classic, when everything was turning to rat shit he decides to bollock me, I looked at Gaz but he just shrugged his shoulders and raised his normal look of disbelief. We set up the gun, with me taking a line of fire and Gaz lying beside me to feed the belts of ammo while I fired at a constant rate. That was the plan but we could see no enemy movement within our field of view.

Only 6 men from the outlying Sections managed to return to headquarters, the rest were scattered around Stanley taking part in small fire fights with the enemy. The headquarters was under continuous attack from Buzo Tactico, who repeatedly tried to storm the building.

During this attack six Argentinians attempted to enter the rear of Government House. Three of the six were seen, shot and wounded by the Marines

3 of the *Buzo Tactico* had found themselves in the loft of the maids quarters in an outbuilding behind the main house. These three were captured by Major Nott and the help of a couple of Marines.

We had made it back with no casualties which defied odds, nearly two hours in a combat situation can make you physically and mentally exhausted. Once inside the warm building and out of the constant wind I started to feel drowsy. The odd bit of shouting would bring me back on line only to start nodding off again. I knew nothing outside my arc of fire and field of view, I could hear small arms fire and radio noise from down stairs but felt very isolated laying there in my own world of thoughts. It was now light around 09:10 am or 09:30 when we got told to stand down , it was over.

The Surrender

Now most of the opposing forces were well dug-in, and the battle entered its final phase, marked by a great deal of sniping between riflemen. As dawn broke, many of the Marines were of the opinion that they could hold out against the estimated 600 men surrounding the headquarters. The Governor, Rex Hunt, learned by telephone that the armoured force was advancing and would soon be at Government House. Against armour, the Marines would have little chance. Major Norman knew that there was also no longer any chance of a breakout, so he suggested that Hunt negotiate with the Argentines. The Governor agreed reluctantly, but did not intend surrender. The go-between for the talks was Vice-Commodore Hector Gilbert, an Argentine who ran LADE, the civil airline supplying the Falklands.

Governor Hunt met with Admiral Busser at Government House and, remarkably, invited him to leave as an unwelcome visitor. The Admiral declined, politely it must be said, and informed the British he had 2800 men ashore and 2000 more still onboard the ships. There really was no longer any option. At 09:25 Hunt ordered the

Marines to lay down their arms. The Marines had held out for over 3 hours against a force of far superior numbers and equipment with no loss of British life.

10.30am: Governor Rex Hunt formally surrenders the Falklands to General Osvaldo Garcia. Hunt refuses to shake Garcia's hand, telling the General that; *"This is British property and you are not invited"*. Garcia responds; *"It is very ungentlemanly of you to refuse to shake my hand"* to which Hunt replies; *"It is very uncivilised of you to invade my country."* Brigadier General Mario Menendez is appointed governor of the *'Islas Malvinas'*. Rex Hunt, in full regalia, together with his family and the surrendered Marines, are airlifted to Montevideo.

Told to lay down our weapons, I understood and felt a great surge of relief, still covering my field of view I saw a White flag moving along my front held high on a pole, the person or persons carrying the flag could not be seen because a hedgerow kept them out of view. I saw the flag and I heard the shout "I'm not surrendering to no spick bastard" then a couple of shots rang out from the room next to one I occupied. The flag dropped back down behind the hedgerow and everyone started firing again, this went on for a few minutes until orders not to fire got shouted by several people in the building. Mayhem, pandemonium, words like that come to mind, myself I never fired because I had no shot to take, plus it didn't feel right, you get a bollocking for smashing a pane of glass, imagine what you would get for shooting a white flag bearer! Eventually it all calmed down and we had to leave the building with our hands above our heads ready to lay down our arms at the feet of the Special forces from Argentina. It was pretty difficult for me as lifting 30lbs at that stage was not going to happen.

While we filed out in single file towards the front of the building photos were being taken to show the world our humiliation. These photos pasted on the front of the UK newspapers actually had the reverse effect on the general public. It fired up public opinion making it a no brainer for the Government to set in place the operation to take back what is the Island called the Falklands.

Lots happened over the next few hours, lots of emotions and anticipation. Once all our weapons had been laid at our feet and pockets emptied on any relevant paperwork like orders or Radio codes we got led out onto the main road leading into Stanley and told to lay down with our hands behind our heads face down in the dirt.

Yet another photo shoot before the General in charge of the operation. *Major General Osvaldo Jorge Garcia*, Told members of his *Buzo Tactico* Unit to get the Marines to stand not lay down. Once standing up in a line he came across the line shaking hands and telling us we were very brave soldiers and should stand up, that photo never made it onto the front pages. We then got rounded up and told to sit on the front lawn of GH while sitting there The Argentine flag was prepared for hoisting

on top of Stanley House but the rope snapped in the breeze, which was cheered by us all , we sat in our own little groups chatting about what had happened who had done what. One of the sections had not made it back to HQ Section 4 had been told to continue operations alone.

No.4 Section, on the north side of the harbour near the entrance, detected a landing craft trying to pass through the narrows into the harbour, and fired their 84mm Carl Gustav at the ship. The round holed the side of the vessel, which shortly sank. The Section radioed Government House as the fighting was reaching its peak, reporting several targets, including an Aircraft Carrier and Cruiser. As the Section was asking for target priorities from Major Norman, all contact with them was lost. Now acting on their own, No.4 Section escaped in the Gemini inflatable and remained undetected for four days after the surrender.

We had a debrief by one our HQ , cannot remember who, but he asked how many enemy we killed , how many rounds we fired, generally building up a picture of what actually happened that night, I suppose for the records. We call it “Ammo and casualty Report”, this would be how much ammo left and any casualties. This would be for later when we came to collect and Disseminate Information to help in any further operations. For now we only had to live in the moment. Several LVTP-7 'Amtrak' armoured personnel carriers Turned up on the road and we got the order to climb into the back. This to me smacked of the old ploy to split everyone up to put the fear of interrogation and death into separate groups, We did not know what had happened to Section 6 had they been killed, Once in the back with the rear door shut we were blind, no idea where we were headed or the results of the journey. One of the lads started a conversation up in broken English with one of the guards sitting next to him. He asked “If we would come back?” come back where was the answer, here he said come back here to retake the islands. “Yes of course “was the reply from the Marine, the Guard fell silent and looked a little worried.

We stopped and got out to find our Barracks Moodybrook stood in front looking a little worse for wear, Twelve hours ago we had left a building with no holes in it, now it was riddled.

We got told to collect any personal belonging we could carry and take with us to Argentina. I really didn't have any personal stuff so just looked around the room we had spent one night sleeping in, trashed would be the word, kit strewn all over, they had been through all our kit no doubt looking for souvenirs. The smell of cordite and smoke from small explosions filled the room, once again the colour brown and grey come to mind, no bright colours at all. The only bright colours I remember from the last 24 hours are the red tracer round crossing the blackened sky during the fire fight.

Back into Stanley only this time we were taken to the Airfield and around 19:30rs we lined up ready to board an aircraft A C130 waited on the Airstrip to take us all to

Comodoro Rivadavia, in Southern Argentina, getting one last body search before we boarded. One Marine had a large Bowie knife removed from his leg to the dismay of the Argentinian guards looking on. Much of this short flight I spent sleeping so when the plane landed and we disembarked I was still confused and disorientated, I found myself looking down the barrel of several Fabrique National designed (FN) British 7.62mm calibre L1A1 SLR (Self Loading Rifle) pointed in our direction, the half circle made me think , if they fired while we walked in single file through the centre, they would probably start killing each other.

This time on Argentinian soil has once again been erased from my memory from some strange reason, either not important or not interested enough to recollect.

The way back Home

We then got another Civilian flight to Uruguay. Once in Uruguay and the Capital Montevideo we had to suffer being imprisoned in a four-star hotel , It was the middle of the night when we reached the Hotel, we had no chance to wash off the cam cream used to blacken our faces so we sat down in the Restaurant waiting on instructions from the Boss Mick Norman. He read the riot act of how we had to behave and conduct ourselves while under house arrest.

Once again dark colours come flooding back while sitting in what I believe was a Four Star hotel restaurant waiting for our first meal in over 24 hours. Dejected looking battle weary faces receiving a meal of steak if I'm not wrong, then came the drinks trolley, three quarters full with soft drinks the last quarter beer. The beer went on the first two or three tables, much to the chagrin of the rest sat there with tongues hanging out..

Off to out two man rooms after the meal to wash and have a kip, Danny who shared my room saw the arse squirter first "What's that for "he asked. I replied it must be to wash your feet in when coming off the beach!. We had never been in a two star hotel never mind a 4 star.

The next morning I looked out of the window to sea golden beaches and the ocean lapping along the from, looking more closely I could see police cars circling around the Hotel, House arrest.

The breakfast drinks trolley had increased the Beer portion to half, still that went very fast , we asked for more but none came, at lunch the trolley was full of Beer but we had to sign a chit for the Beer, a lot of chits signed M. Thatcher, Duck and so on.

Back to the UK after only 2 weeks Sir Steuart Robert Pringle, as commandant general of the Royal Marines, welcomed us home telling the new Detachment they were going back to retake the Falklands.

Having survived an IRA bomb six months earlier losing a leg, he got out of his wheelchair to shake hands with the Marines.

The trip back to join the Task Force

NP8901 detachment had a week getting issued new equipment and getting used to the idea of joining the Task force which had left on the 5th of April. The plan was to mobilize on and around Ascension Island located in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. This tiny volcanic island was where we flew too staying not on a Ship like everyone else, but in a building on land with its own swimming pool. Like most places the Marines visit, every day usually involves running up or around it several times just to get acclimatized. our section ran up and down this dormant volcano several times a day, not once getting to relax by the inviting swimming pool.

In 1823 the island was taken over by the Royal Marines accommodated in a small stone barracks near the summit of the dormant volcano until 1922. Once again used in 1982 the Island supported operations in the Falkland Islands and a RAF detachment continues to operate on the island in support of the Falklands garrison and the South Atlantic Air bridge operation.

The Marines trained hard zeroing weapons and getting fit, they were reunited with Section 4 who left the Falklands a week after the main body, they spent a week in an Argentinian jail before being released.

SS Canberra acted as the troop carrier accommodating Jim and his troop from Ascension. Nicknamed the Great White Whale, Canberra proved vital in transporting the Parachute Regiment and Royal Marines to the islands more than 9,000 nautical miles (17,000 km) from the United Kingdom. Jim and NP8901 had beds down on E deck situated below the waterline normally used by Crew members like Laundry staff. Once bedded in and into a routine life onboard they now came under the command of 42 Commando forming another Company to replace M Company who had set off for South Georgia, the 40 Marines now formed part of J company.

Proud of being the only people onboard who had seen live action in the conflict, Jim strutted around the vessel hoping other Marines or paras would ask what it was like fighting in Port Stanley. Every day the BBC world service would broadcast updates on political talks between the Americans, UK and Argentina. Secretly Jim hoped they would sort out the problem without going back into war, but on the 2nd of May 1982 it looked like it was all systems go as. Argentina's only cruiser, the General Belgrano, was sunk by a British nuclear submarine in the South Atlantic. The second largest ship in the Argentine navy was struck by two Tigerfish torpedoes from HMS Conqueror. It is thought there were about 1,000 men on board.

During a night of playing cards down in the mess room Jim won a couple of hundred pounds playing 3 card brag, the next day everyone had to write a letter only to be

opened if dead. Jim put the money inside the envelope and wrote a short note: Dad if you get this then you know what's happen, have a drink on me.

The Landings

Canberra anchored in San Carlos Water on 21 May as part of the landings by British forces to retake the islands, Jim and his section still led by Lou, Gaz still number two on the GPMG got down into a Landing Craft The LCU Mk.9 built for use on the LPDs Fearless and Intrepid where they were operated from the dock in the rear of the ships. Once onboard the Marines were told it would be a dry landing, well after smoking a few fags on the approach to the landings Jim jumped off the front into around five feet of freezing cold South Atlantic water. "So much for a dry landing" Jim whispered to Gaz.

The Argentine Army force on site shoot down two Gazelle helicopters with small-arms fire, killing three members of the two aircrews, first task for Jim and the sections. Advance to contact Lou told them the Argies had shot the pilot while in the water. So, wet through and freezing off they yomp up the side of the Bay and set up on the ridge overlooking a small lake with no Sleeping bag or warm dry cloths they spent two days nearly freezing to death with no contact with enemy forces, welcome to the Falklands Jim, he would not be dry for the next 70 odd days till 14th of June 1982.

Coming down from that ridge and having to dig into the side of the hill overlooking San Carlos water nicknames bomb ally, things just went from bad to worse, after digging the hole to stand in it quickly filled with rain water which in turn froze. Jim stood in the freezing water along with the rest of the Troop keeping alert to air raids from the Argentinian air force

I had problems with my feet after three days on that ridge my feet started to swell up . The medical term for this condition is Non Freezing Cold Injury and it is also known as Immersion Foot Trench Foot is caused by prolonged exposure to damp, cold conditions and lack of dry socks carried in my Bergen full of kit . The blood vessels constrict in an attempt to keep warm by reducing blood flow to the extremities. This reduces the amount of oxygen to the feet which can result in tissue and nerve damage.

Unlike frostbite, or frost nip, as the Marines would call it.the condition doesn't require freezing temperatures. It can develop in temperatures up to sixteen degrees Celsius which far exceeded the temperature (-20) during the three days Jim found himself trying to hide from the howling wind.) Any wet environment wearing damp socks and boots can cause Immersion Foot. It can take less than a day of exposure to poor conditions for Trench Foot to develop.

The Move to support the Paras at Goose Green

As part of J Company of 42 Commando under Major Mike Norman we were forwarded by helicopter to Camilla Creek House as were more artillery, support weapons and more ammunition carried by our troop, two rounds each. For the light artillery guns of 29 Battery who had been shelling Goose green before the men of 2 Para had attacked Having dropped off the ammo we then moved into a position overlooking the settlement and as the sun rose the next day 28th of May when the Argentinian forces raised the white flag we could see the type of terrain the Paras had to cover , smoke rose from the small settlement small arms fire continued into the late morning, by the time we found out the surrender had taken place, it was

A victory that defied all Odds; 1,500 prisoners were taken in the battle for Goose Green, and some fifty-five Argentine personnel are recorded as having been killed with under a hundred wounded. Fifteen men from 2 Para, one from the Royal Engineers and a Royal Marine pilot were killed in the fighting, and thirty-seven Paras were wounded. None of the inhabitants of the settlements were hurt.

Gaz decided it was safe to brew up a cup of tea, and as we waited for the water to boil a loud explosion went off sending what I saw as two bodies flying into the sky up around 20 feet high. I turned to Gaz, "did you see that? it was just like the scene from blazing saddles " I could not get that out of my head and I could not explain it to Gaz he had never seen the movie. I must have been the only one to see the funny side of two Argentinian POW's getting killed by an ammunition explosion going off as they tried to get rid of their arms.

We sat on that grassy knoll for a few hours before moving into the settlement walking along the small track leading into the main buildings. On one side lay a row of dead bodies , I counted 11 but could be wrong, what I remember was Gaz stopping next to one of the bodies putting his foot on the dead guys wrist as he stooped down to take a gold ring off the hand, as he put pressure on the wrist it closed the hand sending Gaz off in shock thinking the guy had come back to life and clenched his hand to stop the ring being removed. I started laughing but Gaz didn't see the funny side and carried on walking towards the community hall where over a thousand civilians had been kept prisoners during the attack.

We must have been blessed because the boss told us we would be sleeping tonight, not only sleeping but sleeping inside the community building out of the freezing wind. This sounded like a good idea until we actually started to warm up, my feet swelled to twice there original size once I took off my boots to inspect the trench foot. In the middle of the night I was in that much pain I started actually crying out in pain, Danny woke up thinking I had been shot or something. He calmed me down but we had no pain killers or medics to sort me out. I had to cram my feet back into the boots and tighten then as much as possible.

One night indoors was enough, the next morning we lined up waiting for a chopper to take our company up to the forward operating point of mount Kent. All the helicopters but one Chinook had gone down with the Atlantic conveyor. We waited for the one Chinook, We had never been on a Chinook before and for some reason the Boss thought we could all fit into one, so the whole of "J"Company, all 90 of us stood in single file waiting to jump onboard as it landed. The back ramp dropped and the guy standing there had a look of disbelief on his face as we started to approach, he started waving his arms to stop.

Attack on Mount Harriet

The Chopper would only take They can carry up to 55 troops (more, usually 24 to 40) the guy told us 30 max, so as luck would have our troop got on first. This didn't prove to be so lucky because the weather conditions got worse as we flew towards Mount Kent as the cloud dropped so when he dropped us off we couldn't see a thing. As we left the chopper we got told to take up defensive positions looking outwards, well I could only see around five feet in any direction. After laying there for half an hour or so the buzz got round that we were lost, been dropped on the wrong mountain. Great Gaz said to me, Lou then came back from a chat with the boss and told us the Guns were about to fire and we had to listen out and ascertain from which direction the sound was coming from! This apparently would then give the boss at least a direction to aim for as we left the mountain to try and find the rest of 42 Commando who had occupied Mount Challenger. We stayed on top of Challenger while battle plans got made for our attack on Mount Harriet which lay to the East in between us and Stanley the main objective.

Ten Days we spent on top of that Mountain exposed to all the elements, we had Snow sleet and rain, we had winds gusting 25 to 30 Knots constantly, with little in the way of protection. We connected our poncho's together to make a lean- to in amongst the rocks. Still we had not received our packs with sleeping bags and dry socks so we suffered .

There was extensive patrolling and reconnaissance as other units sought to establish the location and dispositions of the Argentine defenders. Ammunition and guns were brought up but were slow in coming due to the lack of lift ability. The weather was deteriorating as winter began to set in with earnest.

Even though on the 1st of June, with the 5,000 new troops of the 5th Infantry Brigade. Major General Jeremy Moore now had sufficient force to start planning a full-scale assault on Port Stanley.

Advance parties of the 2nd Battalion, Parachute Regiment moved forward and occupied Fitzroy and Bluff Cove, when it was discovered to be clear of Argentine forces. Units of the Welsh Guards and Scots Guards were sent in to support them.

After the sinking of the transport *Atlantic Conveyor* there was only one British troop-carrying helicopter available, the RAF CH-47 Chinook which ferried our company from Goose green to the mysterious mountain, Therefore, supplies and reinforcements would have to be transported by sea. i.e. RFA Sir Galahad and RFA Sir Tristram

Once again the buzz was we had to wait for 5 Brigade to arrive along with logistics needed for the final assaults

.The Two troop transport ships, were loaded up with troops and moved around the south of East Falkland to be landed at Fitzroy. the ships had not been unloaded when A-4 Skyhawk's screamed in and dropped bombs on Sir Tristram and 20 minutes later Mirage planes came in and hit Sir Galahad. The latter was particularly lethal as one of the bombs hit the ship's ammunition hold and caused a massive explosion. There were over 50 deaths and many more injuries with the Welsh Guards taking the brunt of the casualties. It was the worst single incident for the British throughout the war.

We sat there and saw all this unfold from our position, just didn't know who or what was happening outside our little world, Rumours filtered through but you had to take it all with a pinch of salt.

This was a miserable time for me, very dark memories, very painful memories, but what one Marine did to himself on the Mountain begs belief. To get off the that Mountain and out of the war he tried to knock off his own kneecap with a small spade we carried for digging trenches. That must have hurt, but he got a ride out , Medivac to the hospital ship SS Uganda. On 28 May the land battles started and Uganda anchored in Grantham Sound, 11 miles North West of Goose Green, where casualties from both sides arrived by helicopter and were treated. By 31 May she had 132 casualties aboard. By the end of play She conducted 504 surgical operations, treated 730 casualties including 150 Argentinians, one with a sore knee.

I almost got sent back there with my feet, Still in pain the Boss said he was sending me back for treatment to a field hospital way back from the front line. I was to take my kit but leave my Gun with Gaz, I didn't like that at all. A chopper took me back to the Mortar line a couple of miles back from our location where I spent the night in a tent waiting for another chopper in the morning which would take me further back away from the action. That night while lying in the best tent ever, I contemplated my future and decided I was going no further back or I would never return to my Gun. Next morning a Chopper landed and I asked where it was headed next, Mount Challenger was the reply so I asked for a lift, no questions asked I arrived back at

our position to the surprise of Lou and the Lads, but happy to be reunited with the troop and my Gun.

One more incident happened while waiting for the attacks to start, one night what felt like a hurricane was passing through our location, Bivvies' and tent sheets got ripped straight off the securing points and blew off the mountain leaving a couple of lads exposed with no shelter what so ever. Danny was one of the lads and needed to get shelter asked one of the section commanders if he could get in out of the rain and wind, "No, not enough room" was the answer from inside the still intact bivvie. Danny nearly died from exposure that night, we eventually got him inside a make shift lean-to between two boulders, where we got a hot wet brewed and warmed him as much as possible, that night was cold, the actions of that corporal never forgotten came back to haunt him on the journey back to the UK and, I would say still regrets now not showing the spirit of the corps by looking After your own at all costs.

All systems go on the night of the 11th we moved onto Wall mountain directly in front of Mount Harriet, it was our honour to open up on the Argentinians positioned on Harriet, While lying there waiting for the attack to start I saw a faint red dot moving across the black sky, Initially thought it was a small chopper flying with no lights on, then the whole sky lit up with a massive explosion as one of the ships giving navel gunfire got hit with what I now know to have been an Exocet missile fired from the island and from the back of a Truck. Soon after that the whole side of the mountain lit up with 81mm mortars firing, artillery firing, small arms fire coming from the rest of 42 commando, tracer rounds zipping into the darkness to our front, to my left I could see a different firefight happening as simultaneous attacks went in on Two sisters by 45 commando.

We made our way to the base of Harriet through some serious boggy tuft grass, if Lou fell down once he fell down ten times but like a small wind-up toy he kept getting up and carrying on leading the way. At one point he stopped and turned to face me. His face no more than 10 inches away from mine when a rush of hot air filled with molten shrapnel passed between us. An Artillery air burst or proximity shell had just gone off and missed ripping my face off by inches. The advantage of an air burst over a ground burst is that the energy from the explosion (as well as any shell fragments) is distributed more evenly over a wider area, like the side we attacked from. We yomped on regardless but I know how lucky the two of us had been to escape death that night.

We walked straight through a mine field and up the very steep side of the mountain,. Everyone loves firing the GPMG but when it comes to carrying it up the face of a mountain at night you are on your own. Getting onto the summit was very surreal the early morning mist mixed with the smoke from exploding ammunitions gave it an eerie look, Shouting coming from Marines finding small pockets of resistance. Argentinian soldiers hiding in the cracks of the small cliff rock formations on the summit, Hiding in there small two man tents dotted all around the East slope.

People were rounding the enemy up into groups who had laid their arms down to surrender to the Marines, I was too tied to do anything apart from securing a descent firing position looking over towards the ocean. Then the artillery started landing on our position this was called being DFffed, (Defensive fire) meaning once an enemy position has been taken the artillery have exact coordinates to lay down accurate fire and kill everyone on or in that position.

We took cover when we heard the big 155mm start firing from Stanley. Rounds landed in the soft boggy soil causing no damage, we just got covered in bog, when the rounds hit the rocks we got rock and shrapnel bursting everywhere. This went on for a few minutes then stopped, I can only think they had started to run out of ammo the same as our guns.

The best part of that morning was finding a dry two man tent with dry sleeping bags, dry clothing and food. Something we had been short of over the last couple of days. It really was like a camping site on top there, Gaz and I found a tent and made it ours, as the shelling got less and less we got brave or stupid and just climbed into the cover of warmth and nodded off, only to be woken up with Gaz shouting at somebody outside the tent trying to take his boots off. "Fuck off" he said "They are my boots and I'm not fuckin' dead" the bloke outside dropped his leg and ran off, we don't know who he was. Could have been a Welsh guard coming up and through our position, we will never know.

Sometime in the afternoon I really needed to shit, but artillery rounds were still land sporadically on our position. I needed to go and told Gaz, As I climbed out of the tent I felt vulnerable again even though the tent gave no protection from exploding shell I felt somehow protected, once outside with my small shovel I was back in the firing line, when a man needs to shit he has to shit, so I calmly walked towards some rocks pulled my pants down and shit, just then a round landed pretty close covering me in boggy soil. Nice smell Gaz said as I went back to the tent.

On top of Harriet we had warm dry cloths and Argentinian ration packs full of goodies like chocolate and small bottles of spirits, we were happy. The Boss was not, he needed to send one of the troop sections back beyond the no fly line for choppers to collect rations and one section to bury the dead Argentinians littered about the place.

To collect the rations and ammo you had to leave the top and move down the side of the mountain to a point designated as the demarcation line, where the resupply chopper pilots had been told to drop the rations for collection. No way did any one want to volunteer for that detail, it involved a 2 mile yomp out into open ground while being fired at by artillery guns, Lou volunteered to bury the bodies. Jim Mackay's section got the rations. He popped his head into our tent before they set off down the mountain and said: "Tell my Mum I was a good Boy" everyone in the troop knew they had no chance of making it there and back without getting hit by the enemy artillery,

and sure enough around 15 minutes later we heard the big 155mm going off, it fired for about a minute then went silent, we waited.

20 Minutes later one of the Marines from the section came stumbling back onto the position, for the time he would not say a word, someone got him inside one of the argie tents and gave him a Hot sweet wet (Tea) About ten minutes went by before he told how the six Marines had been hit by shells and only Eggman had made back without injury, the rest had called a Medivac chopper in for the casualties. At first Command had refused to send a chopper past the demarcation line but one Marine pilot came and saved the lives of five other Marines, Respect.

We still had to bury bodies, which we did with less reverence that expected, by throwing a few rocks on top of them just to cover them from view. I still think about that and wonder if they got a proper burial , I'm sure they did, I know when the unit Chaplin came and asked where we buried the dead we told him the general area where he went , crossed himself ,said a few words and left.

The night of the 13th we once again got the best seats in the house to watch other battles directly across from our position the Paras once again in action on Tumbledown, a fierce fire fight 5th Brigade launched an assault on Mount Tumbledown, one of the highest points near the town of Port Stanley, the capital, and succeeded in driving Argentinian forces from the mountain. This close-quarters night battle was from my point of view awesome to watch and by early morning they taken up positions along the top and along wireless ridge, getting close enough now to see Stanley.

The Battle of Wireless Ridge which took place on the night from 13 June to 14 June was one of seven strategic hills within five miles of Stanley that had to be taken in order for the Island's capital to be approached. The attack was successful, and the entire Argentine force on the Islands surrendered later that day.

We started to pack our kit and get ready to move off the Mountain, I had managed to dry my feet and get a new pair of boots, the boots were Ski boots used by the Marines in Norway during Mountain and Artic warfare training. They were designed to be worn with cross country skis, and had been taken from Moody Brook after our departure in April along with other bits of kit we found in the position, Butch saw one of the Argies wearing his woolly pulley jumper with the Royal Marine Commando flashes showing as he lined up to leave the mountain under guards.

As we prepared to leave, orders came to collect our fighting order only and form a Fighting patrol, we had an advance to contact.

We formed up in an arrow head formation and moved off down the Stanley facing slope towards a group of Argentinians targeted around about 2 miles away but moving towards our position. When we got to within 500m I dropped down into the prone postion and took aim on the point man of the 20 or so men coming towards us.

Applying the first pressure on the trigger in anticipation of firing on the enemy, seeing arms raised in the surrender position I relaxed my grip but kept alert, these men had come to us to surrender , we took them back to our HQ and then back to Brigade HQ

Things started moving pretty fast now, lots of traffic on the radio, we did hear rumour that Staley had been taken back, but we still had order to move in formation towards the edge of town. We hit the coast road around midday taking up firing positions once again until late afternoon.

The Surrender

SAS Commander Michael Rose, Royal Marines Capt. Rob Bell and a signaller fly to Stanley's sports pitch for a meeting with Governor Menéndez; *"I told Menéndez we did not want a bloodbath in Stanley, fighting building to building, and he would not want to be known as the 'Butcher of Stanley.'"*

Governor Menéndez manages to get a telephone call through to President Galtieri. Galtieri reminds his Governor that the Argentine military code calls for a commander to fight until he had lost 50% of his men, and 75% of his ammunition. Mendez replies, *"I cannot ask more of my troops, after what they have been through ... We have not been able to hold on to the heights ... We have no room, we have no support."*

"I had to repeat to him what our situation was, but he didn't want to understand. Tactically, it was an unsustainable war. I ended the call. I thought, 'This is the end.' I knew my troops couldn't give any more."

9pm: after 6 hours of negotiations, Menéndez agrees to surrender all his forces on both East and West Falkland.

As part of the agreement, the surrender ceremony is held in private; witnessed only by Capt. Hussey, Vice Comodoro Carlos Bloomer-Reeve for Argentina, and Capt. Bell, Lieut. Col. Geoff Field, Col. Brian Pennicott, Major General Jeremy Moore, Col. Reid and Col. Tom Seccombe for the UK.

At the point of signing Menéndez strikes out the word *"unconditionally"* in the first paragraph between *"Islands"* and *"surrender."*

Colonel Rose, Captain Bell and their Signaller boarded a Gazelle and flew to Stanley where they were met by Captain Hussey at 1500 hrs. Captain Hussey took the British to the Secretariat where they met General Menéndez. Colonel Rose saluted him as the senior officer present and then the talks began. Eventually it was time to call General Moore who arrived at 2300 hrs Zulu. The surrender document was signed at 2359 hrs Zulu or 2059 local, and the war was officially over.

Our section, section one had the honour of being inside the secretariat that night, as the protection party for the General, who when he walked into the building saw six

Marines with dirty faces lounging around the bottom of the stairs leading up to the room where everyone waited to sign the surrender. He looked down his nose and told Lou to smarten up, he was clean shaven and smelled good, we had not washed for a few weeks now, we had not been asleep for a few days, what with the warmth of the building it made us sloppy, sorry.

Once all the paperwork had been signed and the big noises had left the building we went to join the rest of NP8901 who had bagged Government house for the night, they all sat around a long wooden dining table drinking Whiskey and shooting the shit.

This night sticks in my memory for several reasons, one we were all there together we had achieved the impossible by taking the island back after only 74 days, with the loss of five injured men. This night being drunk and talking around this grand Table with all its history was momentous, even being there in person when the surrender was signed was historic.

The next day was mentioned that we would have to help moving the prisoners out of Stanley towards the Airport, asked about my feet and whether I would be fit, I said I would prefer to give it a miss. So the next morning when the rest of the troop set off to do escort duties, I stayed behind in the Government house which had been the headquarters for the occupying forces for the last two months. The bedroom where General Mario Menéndez, had been sleeping was where I went first.

First thing I noticed was a new pair of boots under the bed, then on the side of the bed lay a small photo album with photos of himself and President, Leopoldo Galtieri on the island together, which I thought would be a good souvenir and stowed away in my jacket for safe keeping. The next thing I spotted was a polished wooden box which I opened to find a pair of duelling pistols inside, nice as they were it would be of no use to me so I left them there, I took the boots instead.

The next day June 17th 1982 we raised the union Jack back up over the Falklands. This was the sole reason we went back down to the Falklands, this one PR moment when we gathered at the bottom of the flag pole in front of Government house . All the cameras out and smile as the flag was once again flying over the islands. When that was done we had done everyone lost interest in our little group, we got shifted out to the outskirts of Stanley and sheltered in a Corrugated steel dome shaped building with a huge Red Cross painted on the outside. This was meant to stop people firing or bombing the place because it had casualties inside. Well the steel was riddled with holes, I don't know who had fired into it but it made for a good photo as the sun shone through the hundreds of holes. We waited and we waited some more until one day the Boss told us we were going to get lifted back onto the SS Canberra for the trip home to the UK. Happy days.

The trip back Home

On the way down to the Falkland we had rooms down on F or G deck , on the way back we got promoted to C deck where some of the Cabins had a bath. Imagine the joy of lying in a warm bath after not washing for two months, especially with a tin of beer in your hand. That moment had been dreamt of time after time on that cold miserable wet and windy island.

One night while drinking in my room with five other men from our troop, someone bought up the night that Danny got hyperthermia and nearly died because his section commander would not give him shelter. "Lets kill him" Someone said, "Wait I'll get my boots on " Butch said in deadly earnest, from there a plan hatched on a way to kill the guy, he lived in a cabin which backed on to the one we were drinking in so when an explosive noise went off it was clearly heard by everyone left in my room. "fuck they have done it "Danny said, "They have killed him" Things like leaving an oppo to die are not forgotten and never will be.

Many more drunken nights had on the way back home, it got boring, but getting drunk let you unwind , it also made you forget. My memories from this point to when we docked in Southampton are very vague to say the least. I have watched the arrival on TV a few times after the event but personally I didn't see much at all, Danny and me got pissed believing no one was going to meet us off the ship, so when I did stagger down the walkway onto the dock side and saw my Mother and Sister standing there I knew I was in trouble, "Oh look at you, eight thousand miles and you manage to get in this state "Drunk then and still drunk six weeks later.

Combat stress (sometimes called combat and operational stress or combat and operational stress reaction) is a common response to the mental and emotional effort service members exercise when facing tough and dangerous situations.

Some signs and symptoms of combat stress may be harder to detect. Combat stress can cause problems with the way you think and respond to emotions. You may experience changes in your behaviour, and sometimes the symptoms may manifest in physical form. Individuals respond differently to combat stress

Behaviour changes like Withdrawing and avoiding others.. Angry. Crying. Increased smoking, and alcohol use, staring into space (the "thousand-yard stare").

There you have it, increase alcohol use, it worked for me, so now it's a good few years since all this took place and writing this has bought back lots of memories I had drowned out with alcohol.

