

## FALKLANDS PART::

Sailed from Rosyth, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1982, to visit the Caribbean and USA, (never got there!!) Falklands invaded by Argentina, April 2nd 1982. "crossed the line" (equator), 8<sup>th</sup> April on route to South Atlantic.

Beer issue is cut to 2 tinnies per day and not usual 3!!!

### **April-June 7<sup>th</sup> 1982,**

This was a time of high adrenalin and constant fighting with limited breaks as HMS Plymouth was at the forefront of most sea fighting activities, including a battle to regain South Georgia, Assisting Troops, SAS, SBS with naval gun support, NGS.

After the retake of South Georgia, which seemed quite comfortable, I was given the task of guarding the surrendered scrap metal merchants, including 7-8 Argentine troops,(POW`s) in the dining room with my SMG!! (disgusting aroma)

Days were pretty similar to typical: Action Stations, Action Stations, Air Raid Warning RED, Hit the Deck, Hit the Deck!!! HMS Plymouths 4.5 turrets firing constantly, GPMG`s firing constantly, Chaff firing, Mortars firing occasionally, Sea-Cat missiles and of course the inevitable being bombed, shot at and just waiting for that Exocet to come through the bulkhead!!!(These times were very scary) Lots happened during these months, as diary shows! (short stories, dits, of everyday life)

June 8<sup>th</sup> 1982 is a day I remember very vividly. This is the day that HMS Plymouth, again, was attacked by several (5-10) aircraft.

While out of "the safety" of San Carlos bay, Falklands Sound, Chief Stoker says fuel needs changing, "I think Jan`s down the boiler room, Jack, change the fuel tanks over from number 4 to number 3", locking the door behind me and on my way to complete this task, little did I know I may not be seeing them again.....

.....Air Raid Warning RED, Hit the Deck!!!..... Whilst lying face down directly outside of aft PO' mess, (having just read my now wife's, maily, and praying "please god, not now", an almighty sound of the ship being hit by a 1000lb bomb. This turns out to be through the funnel, and the ripping/tearing of the sheet steel metal.

Totally panic stricken, "Bob, Bob, we'e been hit, we'e been fuckin hit"!!!

## **My fight.....for life!**

We had been hit alright, one of the 5-10, 1000lb bombs, that were dropped from the attacking aircraft, actually hit our own Depth Charge, on the flight deck, that was awaiting in preparation, to be air lifted by our wasp helicopter, in the event of an enemy submarine being in the vicinity.

At this point I awoke from the blast/explosion with a 3 inch aluminium emergency kick out panel door bracket sticking out of my head and the heavy steel door resting on my back, with a very intense smell of smoke and fire burning.

While guys were fighting the fire, I remember saying, (as my thoughts were, we will not get back to San Carlos bay without changing the fuel, we're too low!) "tell Jan I've not changed over the fuel tanks, someone tell Jan I've not changed over the fuel!!"

At this point I was standing up on my own feet being supported by the Canteen-Manager

The conversation consisted of "can we get to the wardroom", "which ways that", I said, as I could not see anything with all the bandages over my head/eyes.

"We'll have to go over the top and back down the other hatch"

"Just guide me", I says

From managing to get through the smoke and mayhem, I reached the wardroom with Can-Man support, and some true Navy training grit/spirit

Whilst laying on the bed, in the wardroom, bandages removed, metal bracket protruding from my blood weeping skull, the Doc, and a surgeon took a closer look and I heard "There's nothing we can do for him on here"

To this day, I can say "That was the day I thought I had to be dead" ( my own outta body experience )

I crushed the Can-Mans hand in dis-belief.

I am now a totally petrified, scared and very frightened young man with no where to run and hide from this nightmare, ( I'm actually in the nightmare, and it doesn't get any scarier than being in it!! )

I then proceeded to the forward 4.5 turret gun, where a helicopter winched me clear and flew me to a field hospital, as a crew member attempted to keep me awake, which lasted seconds!

I awoke at Ajax Bay field hospital, from life saving/critical surgery to remove the 3 inch metal bracket, smashed bone, severely damaged outer brain tissue (membrane), loose hair, and having a face slightly larger than the elephant man!!

Unfortunately the injured guy next to me, Ajax bay, was sick all over my right side and there was lots of shouting going on in the background, (bit vague that bit)

However, I was then transferred to the hospital ship SS Uganda, intensive care. Tony, broken arm, and Bob, (we've been hit), broken arm, came to my bedside and brought me up to speed with what actually happened, Ouch!!!

At this point I can only thank the surgeon ( who I now know was Rick Jolly ), for saving

my life.

I have been fortunate enough to speak with Rick recently, Dec 06, and I was able to say "Thank You" over the telephone, some 24 years later!!

Transferred to lower decks, once I was out of the serious/critical zone.

I remember speaking to mum and dad on the phone, (first time for a while), and feeling the relief that their son was seriously injured but was OK.

### **The road to recovery.....maybe???**

Being transferred to HMS Herald, as an ambulance ship transporting injured personnel to Montevideo, Uruguay. This was a short journey that seemed to take an eternity, maybe just anxious to get home.

On arrival at Montevideo, together with a few others, I was transported to the A&E, for a scan on my head to ensure it was safe to fly back to the UK. Results concluded for a safe journey home.

On the "converted to an ambulance" plane home, at a meal time, I was on my top bunk style bed, and below was a soldier who had been shot through his head, ( who I now know as Lt Lawrence, of the "Battle at Tumbledown" experience), and he was bleeding from his head wound into his dinner, at which I pointed out to our flight stewards, and they quickly sorted out the problem.

I landed back in the UK, after a long flight, at Brize Norton.

We were ushered to our ward and a few hours later visitors were allowed.

My mum and ex navy (22 yrs) dad came to my bedside and were very relieved to see their son, as normal as possible. A very emotional experience.

After a day at Brize, I was transferred to Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar, Gosport. This was a quiet period of monitoring and being nursed while waiting to see a Neurology Specialist at Southampton General.

On 28<sup>th</sup> June, (3 weeks after being blown up), the RN hospital, had a visit from HRH Prince of Wales. At which we shook hands and I showed him the said metal bracket. From his astonished look on his face, and his remark of "that was actually embedded in your head", I could sense I was very fortunate to even still be here to speak with the Prince.

Days passed and I finally got to Southampton Neurology, General Hospital.

I spent a number of weeks at Southampton, being operated on to remove loose hair, and smashed bone particles. There was also an opportunity to remove some thigh muscle, from my left leg, and use it to repair the shattered membrane surrounding my brain. However, this was done, and a waiting time of up to 18 months was put in place to allow time for the membrane to repair and give it a good chance to heal and gain enough

strength for future ops!!

So I am now walking around with a “hole in my head”, which you can see the brain pulsating!!

A few months pass and I get married, 08/01/83, and still a hole in my head, taking the precautionary anti-epilepsy pills. Although drafted to HMS Nelson, along came married quarters, Portsmouth.

During our stay at married quarters, I received an invite to attend a Garden Party, at Kensington Palace, from HRH Prince and Princess of Wales, in July 83, being held for Falklands injured personnel.

Some 15 months pass, post membrane operation, and I am asked to attend Southampton Neurology to continue with a final operation. This operation consisted of Cranioplasty,(polyfilla), filling the gaping hole in my skull.

I believe a straight forward operation, and a successful one, maybe!!

### **What happens next??**

I return to HMS Nelson to complete my short spell of RN life. (5yrs+)

2 weeks after leaving the RN, along came my eldest daughter.

Having left the Royal Navy, I found it very difficult to settle in work and home life.

Some 4 years later came my youngest daughter and I have been happily married for 24 years

Some of my interests have included playing football, regularly winning trophies, cups and stuff, golfing to a respectable 18 handicap, and cycling has become my main fitness tool, to which I have just completed, (Sept 06) “Cycle around Isle of Wight”, 65 miles, in aid of Alzheimers Society.

I still attend HMS Plymouth reunions, up until Oct 5<sup>th</sup> 06, when I went for a routine hospital check up, and was kept in for 4 nights due to an infection on, yep!! you`ve guessed it, my war wound!! (24 yrs later!!) An X-Ray showed signs of an infection in the area of the cranioplasty. Antibiotics were administered intravenously, as a precaution and a CT scan was taken. However, scaring me again, it has turned out to have been a precautionary measure, due to the abnormal clouding of the Cranioplasty surgery!!

Spookily enough, my wife was having an operation on Oct 6<sup>th</sup> 06, so we did manage to share the same ward for our remaining 3 nights. Things you do to be together!!

Then my follow-up appointment to see a Neuro surgeon, (first time since 1983)

The Surgeon has said he is concerned by the shrinkage of the brain, then he swiftly moved on to the reason why I was visiting him. The CT scan shows actual brain damage, probably caused by the impact of the blast. This has come as a bit of a shock to me as I knew nothing of this. I was only concerned by the possible infection.

However, I am sure everthing is OK, as can be, as all my functions, function!

My main concern, at this moment in time, is Neuro surgeon says:

“ We will have to remove the cranioplasty, that’s been there since 1983 and replace it with a new Titanium Plate, and there is no guarantee that this will not get infected”.

I have always maintained a good spirit about my injuries and will continue to do so, but to get cut up again through no fault of my own, I find difficult to understand.....hence “the road to recovery.....maybe!!!”