

A Warriors Report:

A whole lifetime in just 50 pages, highlighting:

A Falkland Islands War Medic

- 2 Para -

One of Maggie's Para's



Pictures courtesy of Paradata

Many have written about the events of those long past months of struggle back in 1982. A good number have made reference to me, though few have troubled themselves to verify with me the details of what they wrote. So, before I no longer can, here is my own version of events during the Falkland Islands War of 1982, as seen through the eyes of someone just doing their job as a Para-Medic in combat.

L/Cpl MWL Bentley MM

Inside of cover

Space left for personal dedications:

The citation for my Military Medal was announced in the London Gazette on the 8th of October 1982, it read:

Lance Corporal Bentley was a member of the Regimental Aid Post of the Second Battalion The Parachute Regiment throughout the Falkland Islands Campaign. During the battle for Port Darwin and Goose Green on the 28th/29th of May it was of tremendous credit to the Regimental Aid Post that none of the Battalions thirty-four wounded died. This credit belongs to none more than Lance Corporal Bentley. From the first moment that the Regimental Aid Post came under mortar and artillery fire Lance Corporal Bentley's qualities manifested themselves. His courage and presence of mind in carrying out his job acted as an inspiration, not only to the other medical orderlies, but to all those who came in contact with him. With an immense pack of medical kit on his back Lance Corporal Bentley was to be found wherever the casualties were thickest. Regardless of enemy shell and mortar fire he not only dealt with his casualties in a calm reassuring manner, but boosted their morale with a continuous light hearted banter.

Typical of his sustained performance during the course of the battle was when a soldier had his lower leg blown off by a mortar bomb. Lance Corporal Bentley, still with heavy pack, ran forward onto a forward slope position and, although under persistent enemy fire, calmly and efficiently carried out the emergency medical treatment that undoubtedly saved the soldiers life.

This incident is just one of many that epitomises the qualities of this brave, resourceful and exceptional man. He acted in and beyond the finest traditions of The Parachute Regiment.

I was awarded my Military Medal by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second during an investiture in Buckingham Palace, London, England.

Chapter One: Before the Falklands War.

Before we get down to the blood and guts, of which there was more than enough, I want to make clear the situation before we set off. Many of our soldiers were fresh out of depot or had been called back from postings or joined us for the first time from other units. Each person had their own past before we joined together to do the business. Some did not return, those of us that did were different people from those that had set out just a few months earlier.

My own background:

There are those that say to me: ,you are not normal' this is often NOT intended as a compliment. In my opinion ,who wants to be NORMAL' ?

In what way am I ,NOT NORMAL' ?

I have come to the conclusion that it is because I always do my personal best at whatever I do. Most people that I have ever met do not, they cruise along looking for the easy way through whatever they are doing. This does not make me a popular person, because I often appear to excel, achieving more than most. Many of whom had more knowledge or skill than I, but never exercised their ability. I am well aware that I am NOT ,the best' at anything, but I am usually ,up there with them'.

I was born in the early days of 1955, in Gorton, Manchester, Lancashire as it then was. In 1960 we moved to Chorlton-cum-Hardy. I attended Chorlton Park Primary and then Wilbraham Technical High School. I was not a good scholar and often in trouble. Cross Country Running was the only sporting activity that I made an effort in while at school. I finally stopped attending school, with no qualifications whatsoever, at the age of 14, when I could still barely read or write, though I was very good at Arithmetic and had enjoyed Trade Training, particularly Metalwork.

The only club outside of school that I joined as a youth was was a judo club held in the Macfadyen Church, on Barlow Moor Road. Denis Goggins was my Sensei. Denis's son Tony and I would not only assist in coaching other kids, but we would stay on with the adult classes and train with people way above our own weight class.

In 1969 we attended the Amateur Judo Association's National Championships, at Crystal Palace, in London, I came 4th in my own weight class.

I have never enjoyed team sports like football, rugby or cricket, but I always did well at individual sports. Over the years I excelled in Langlauf Skiing and Shooting and so was selected for the National Biathlon Squad. I fought several times at National Judo Championships and competed in various Open International Mountain Marathons. I was also a competent climber/ mountaineer, canoeist, horseman, driver and motorcyclist.

My childhood friend's father was a Police Sergeant in charge of the Dog Section and he taught us boys to hunt and shoot. John F. Leigh and I are friends to this day.

From the age of eight years old I have always had a job, often more than one job at the same time. Since then I have always had 'my own money in my pocket'. Work often caused me to be late for school and so was the root cause of many of my problems, but not all of my problems, I was 'a troublesome kid' for sure. Police Sergeant Fred Leigh stood up more than once on my behalf, when I had been wrongly accused, he knew what I might do and what I definitely would not do, because he trusted me in spite of my robust manner! It was obvious from early on that I was different from my many siblings. Mother was pregnant 14 times, bore 10 children, 7 of us are alive as I write this. We were poor for sure, but never received any form of social security, because father had inherited the house in which we lived, so he did not pay rent, and so we did not qualify as being 'needy'.

In early 1970, at the age of 15, I joined the Junior Leaders Regiment of the Royal Armoured Corps, located in Bovington, Dorset and became a skilled crewman on Chieftain Heavy Tanks. That is in all three trades: Gunner, Signaller and Driver-Mechanic. I attended a Winter Warfare course in Germany, learned to ski and later represented the Regiment at the National Skiing Championships, earning my Regimental Colours for Langlauf skiing. I also passed my road vehicle driving licence for cars and motorcycles, attended a Helicopter Pilots Aptitude Course and completed the 'All Arms P Company' qualifying as a Paratrooper. I had also completed the 'Army Education Promotion Certificate Advanced'. Because 3 Junior Sergeants were squabbling about who would become the next Squadron Sergeant Major, our Squadron Leader surprised them all and promoted me, from Corporal, to become 'his Sergeant Major'.

So, in my final term I was the Junior Squadron Sergeant Major of A Squadron and received an award as the Best Soldier Passing out to a Cavalry Regiment.

In 1972 I joined the 14/20th Kings Hussars in Tidworth. Still being under 18 years old, I was not allowed to serve overseas. We had squadrons in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Northern Ireland. It was embarrassing for me, not being allowed to do my duty 'on the front line'. Ironically I was a member of the first Regular Army Unit to be attacked by IRA supporters on English soil. From Tidworth, I was again in Germany, at the National Skiing Championships and for my effort I was then also awarded my 14/20th Regimental Colours. The regiment was due to convert to the reconnaissance role with the latest 'S Range' of light armour. Having nothing else to do I attended all of the conversion and upgrading courses and so when the regiment reformed, in Germany - Herford, I was one of the most qualified soldiers on the new vehicles, especially on the Scorpion, the fastest tracked vehicle in the world sporting a 76mm cannon/ gun.

When I had joined the Royal Armoured Corps it had 20 regiments, each of about a thousand men and an elite Parachute Squadron of about just 100 men. I had seen these mystical soldiers who were based just down the road from us in Tidworth and I had approached their OC Major David Malam about my joining them. He suggested that I come back in a few years. However the Parachute Squadron was at this time also about to convert onto the new 'S Range', because these 'light tanks' could be parachuted into action. Somebody put one and one together and I was posted to the Para Sqn RAC, by then based at Old Sarum, near Salisbury and with a new OC Major Peter D. Bentley (no relation). My being accepted amongst these fabled warriors was unusual, as normally Para Sqn soldiers had at least 5 years previous military experience. It follows that I was nicknamed 'Young 'un'. During my time with the Para Sqn I served in Malaya, Sharjah, Cyprus (throughout the 1974 war), Germany, Norway and Northern Ireland (also in civilian clothes, in the intelligence section), as well as throughout the UK. I was repeatedly at the National Skiing Championships and was selected for the National Biathlon Squad in 1975. Unfortunately 16 Airborne Brigade was restructured and renamed. The Para Sqn, along with several other very fine units, was disbanded. My boss, Lt. Rod Hine, insisted that I should join the SAS, who I had, until then, never heard of.

To bridge the time until the next SAS selection course, I was posted back to my Mother Regiment: the 14/20th Kings Hussars, now in Warminster. The regiment gave me every support in my new objective and my already being an excellent shot I was nominally attached to the Bisley Team.

In due course I attended the SAS selection course 2/76. Due to the break up of 16 Para Brigade this course was very much larger than any previous course and many experienced soldiers passed the initial physical selection without problem.

I went on and completed all aspects of the course including Combat Survival, Escape and Evasion and eventually Jungle training. Jungle Training had to be delayed for some months due to the extra administration required for the considerable number of successful candidates. During this time I worked with the CRW (Counter Revolutionary Warfare) Team and on the Sharpshooters and Snipers courses. After the jungle training, at my final interview, I requested to be returned to my Mother Regiment. This request was met with astonishment by the interviewing officer, 'nobody turns down the SAS'! But soldiering there is very different and it simply did not suit me, I had worked in better environments.

I rejoined the 14/20th at Lulworth Cove, Dorset, the home of Tank Gunnery and a delightful part of our beautiful countryside. There I was with Range Troop, swanning around on an army BSA motorcycle, opening and closing a public road which crossed the firing ranges. I was also able to use my newly learned skills with explosives, assisting in destroying unexploded and dangerous ammunition found down range after firing. There was also some great rabbit shooting down range where nobody else was allowed to go. To crown it all, the cliff face, 'free climbing' on the Dancing Ledge, near Swanage was awesome.

Shortly thereafter we were posted back to Germany - Hühne, again on heavy tanks.

Most Regiments regularly spent time in Northern Ireland and so we again took our turn.

Since I had been with the 14/20th we had lost far too many comrades, not just in N.I., but also in the UK and Germany: often through RTA's (road traffic accidents), more often than not, through the excessive consumption of alcohol. RIP lads.

I was in line for promotion to sergeant and worked in the stores to learn more about administration. During the pre N.I. training I mostly worked as an unarmed-combat instructor, first aid instructor or search techniques instructor.

When we arrived in N.I. I took over a section on the streets. I had been tasked to look after an officer who was a complete idiot, he repeatedly proved that his reputation was well deserved. Eventually, following an incident, I spent a while in various hospitals and from there I refused to again serve under his command.

Directly from hospital I was allowed to purchase my discharge and left the army. Later there was an enquiry into the conduct of the 'idiot officer' and I understand that he was discharged from service. In any event I received a very nice letter from the Brigade Commander and my discharge purchase costs were refunded.

As a civilian, living near Warrington, I had several jobs, organised for me by a former paratrooper called Whalley Barnes, who worked in the Job Center. I had picked up my Heavy Goods Vehicle drivers licence whilst still in the army and so started driving trucks. This was not going to last long, racing to and from quarries to build motorways etc., racing at full speed, in vehicles mostly unfit for use on public roads was fun, but very dangerous, for all. I choose not to put myself or others deliberately in harms way.

Whalley, who I had become friends with, got me a residential course as a Professional Salesman and although I was soon earning very nearly a thousand pounds per week (in 1979) I was not satisfied with my life.

On the 27 August the IRA murdered Lord Mountbatten and in an other incident killed 18 soldiers in a double bombing at Warren Point. 16 of the soldiers killed were from 2 Para and there were a great many more severely injured. I used this opportunity to re-enlist.

Whalley had himself served with 2 Para during WWII. Having broken his leg parachuting he was unable to be with the battalion when it went to Arnhem ! Because of this he devoted his entire life to supporting military charities, donating tens of thousands of pounds to good causes. Whalley and I remained friends until he died. RiP Whalley old mate !

I eventually joined 2 Para in N.I. on the 16th of December, on the same day as Peter Grundy was killed. Some moron had determined that I would only hold the rank of Lance Corporal, but at least I would be in 'C Patrols Company' - Nelson Troop, where I led a section on and around the border for the next year. Nelson & Rodney Troops were tasked with 'attacking the IRA'. We laid many an ambush and crewed many a 'chariot of fire' - intended to annihilate 'Illegal Vehicle Check Points'.

I don't think that we had much success, but the training was dangerously realistic and great fun. We were in and out of helicopters, day and night, often overloaded, abseiling into areas where road vehicles could not reach, or where it was too dangerous to land or get there by road. This was as good as it gets, we thought at the time. Most of our missions were based on 'intelligence', but Paddy was good at spreading false rumours, so we were often just chasing shadows.

A young lad that I had got to know well seemed 'willing to go further'. Actually his nickname was Paddy O' and we two would sometimes go out on my motorcycle, cross the border and have a drink in known IRA pubs.

An old friend from the Para Sqn, Nobby C. was by then in the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Paddy O' and I would ride into Belfast and blast away on their firing ranges, with their guns. Then ride home, more than a bit drunk, sometimes in snowy conditions.

Another friend, from the 14/20th, Ray Mc., was also in the RUC, he was married, had a house, and would occasionally put us up for the night... to prevent a potential RTA!

On leave (holidays) I would rather stay in N.I. and go running in the Mourne Mountains, often with a former Junior Leader friend: Andy Baxter, then with the SAS, and his mate Ginge R., bless them all!

Sometimes I would pretend to be an 'Outward Bound Warden' looking for 'new adventure Training locations'. With Geordie E. we did a delightful tour of the North Antrim Coast, crossing over to Rathlin Island on a lobster trawler. N.I. was not always as bad as its reputation and tis a beautiful land steep in legends: like the Giants Causeway.

I sometimes went away alone, one time to Marokko, where I did a solo ascent of the Djebel Toubkal. An SAS friend, Titch Mc, laughed saying „that's not a hard climb“, he himself being a very good climber and having been there with an SAS team. Plan it, pay for it and do it entirely on your own, in winter conditions, with no support whatsoever, was my reply. For only then do you know what you can do entirely on your own, or you die trying.

Three more 2 Para soldiers would be killed before that tour ended. Towards the end of that tour I chose to become a full-time medic. My father had been a medic in the RAF and one of my brothers in the Lancers was also a medic.

I had been a Troop Medic in the Para Sqn and in the jungle with the SAS and I fancied that I would prefer medical work as opposed to ,normal infantry soldiering'. There were a number of rather bloody incidents in N.I. before we were posted to Aldershot. The Medical Centre Staff, under Doctor Stan Brooks, were very capable and I eagerly learned all that I could from them.

In Aldershot I did a number of medical courses to improve my skills. We also had a new Doctor: Rory Wagon and he led us through a major NATO Exercise in Denmark where the principals of a conventional RAP (Regimental Aid Post) in battle were drilled into us.

We also did a fabulous tour of Kenya. Whilst there, under the leadership of Major Phil Neame, I was a member of a team who climbed Mount Kenya's five highest peaks and circumnavigated the entire Massif. Phil is not only an excellent climber, but also a great bloke and he later proved to be a fearless and very capable leader in battle. It's odd, but 40 years on I have still never heard a single bad comment about this very fine fellow.

Whilst in Kenya I had a run in with our new Commanding Officer: Lt. Colonel: H.Jones, because I had pinched two wheels off a parked Land Rover, so that I could drive our ambulance to the site of an accident where a soldier had been badly injured.

How was I to know that the only other Land Rover there was supposed to pick up the Colonel ? H.Jones had to march miles back to our base and he was livid, ready to ,eat the cretin that had pinched his wheels'. Doc Wagon kept me away from base until H.Jones had cooled down. This meant that I was with the Helicopter Detachment, attending all medical emergencies of which there were many. What a joy it was to be swanning around the skies admiring all of Africa's wildlife for free ! At a local Bush Surgery, Doc Wagon and I did a great field surgery job on one of the lads who had been returned from hospital after an operation, but still had festering splinters deep inside his injured leg. You just can't get that sort of experience back in the UK !

Doc Wagon moved on and we were appointed a new Doctor: Steven Hughes. Under Colonel H.Jones our role was not exactly ,conventional warfare' it was more of ,hit and run' or rescuing hostages from terrorists or even from unfriendly foreign nations.

It was very exciting and realistic stuff. We would parachute in, in any weather, sometimes having dozens of casualties just on the landings. We certainly knew where the limits of the peace-time possibilities were. On such exercises Doc Hughes appointed me to be H.Jone's personal medic, so I got to know him rather well and often experienced his explosive temperament. After Kenya I had learned when not to be around, 'out of sight but always in earshot' and so I got on rather well with him. He preferred to have a 'personal medic' who would 'do anything to rescue a casualty (him)', rather than a guy who perhaps had more medical experience, but might not be there when needed.

Lt Colonel H.Jones always PROMISED us: „If one man is left behind a Section will remain. If a Section is lost a Platoon will recover it. Should a Platoon be stuck their Company will stay and pull them out, if a Company can't get out, the Battalion will stand and fight to the last man“. I was with him when he prevented our Hercules, the last evacuation Hercules, from taking off at the end of a spectacular rescue exercise, because one man was still on the ground. H.Jones personally jumped back off the ramp of the accelerating aircraft, which he and I had just raced to catch up with whilst the aircraft was taxiing to take off. Not one man, not one fucking man will be left behind he swore ! This certainly made you feel wanted... But the guy on the ground didn't feel very wanted when H.Jones ripped into him.

Our next posting was to be Belize. The climbing team: Major Phil Neame, Rick Tewson, Nick Higgins and myself were again planning new adventures in South America.

All of our equipment, both military and private was boxed up and shipped out. 95% of the lads had gone on leave. Some of us, having no climbing/ camping equipment and so nowhere to go, remained in barracks. The Quartermasters people were putting pressure on us to 'bugger off - go home', but this was 'home' for some of us !

I had long since considered myself to be a warrior. There are not many warriors left in this world, not even in the armed forces, most of the lads are 'normal', just wanting food to eat, a warm bed, a wife and kids, a TV and these days facebook & co. They never consider where their food comes from, what a home or wife and kids cost the environment in which we live, or the dangers of social media. Since my first trip to the jungle, with the Para Sqn. RAC, in 1973, I have been an 'active environmentalist', but NOT an environmental activist !

Chapter Two: Heading South.

Suddenly lads started returning to camp, somebody, terrorists (?) had invaded Scotland, some islands, beyond the Orkney's: the Falkland Islands... (??).

It might seem absurd in this day and age of high-tech communication, satellite navigation etc., but we barrack rats (single soldiers) hardly ever saw a newspaper and some of us just didn't watch TV. Our life was outside doing sport, chasing women or in a bar.

Nobody, not anybody was prepared for a return to this barracks or what happened next. There were a lot of irritations and there was a lot of drinking. It was by now clear that the war was to be with Argentina, where many old Nazis had found sanctuary after WWII. Friends made pacts with one another. About 20 of us all had the same tattoo, a Caveman with CREW 82 written below him. We swore that should we ever see a lamp-shade with this tattoo on it, we would kill the owner. There was much bravado.

What I found brilliant was that, because we had no equipment, we had a free ticket to access all of the National War Reserves. We could order anything and it arrived very quickly, sometimes with a police escort, before you had even cleared a space to place it. The RAP had to be completely replaced: a Land Rover with a trailer and all of the tentage: shelter for a field surgery and all of the medical equipment down to the last bandage! Also a fully equipped Land Rover Ambulance to evacuate casualties, 'the full monty'.

I was happy when Doc Hughes told me to go with the advance party and prepare the medical facilities on board the ship that would take us to war. Our ship was the MV (Merchant Vessel) - Norland, a Roll-on-Roll-off North Sea Ferry. I spent about a week on board, hardly coming up for air. I was scrubbing up an old canteen which would become our on board surgery. After a couple of days I was, one night, very surprised to find a helicopter landing pad was being welded onto the back of the ship. Sparks from arc-welders and angle grinders were flying everywhere, it was like Bonfire Night. Directly under the Helipad were containers which, before we set sail, would be full of ammunition! Those engineers worked day and night to enable us to go and do the business. War is very much a national effort.

Even the crew of the ship stayed on board, including the entertainment people, quite amazing, our respect and thanks to every one of you !

Eventually we sailed around to Portsmouth to pick up the rest of the battalion who were then packed on board like sardines. It was quite emotional watching families waving goodbye to their loved ones. Nobody came to see me off, I would not have wanted them to. In fact, like several others, I had been due to leave the army, my three year term of engagement was running out and I had chosen not to extend it. But nobody was going to be allowed to miss this exercise and our terms of engagement were simply extended ! I managed to post some letters and received some mail. In one letter there was a crayon picture of us soldiers on a ship, it was from one of my many God Children, Steven. His father, Vic, a former Para Sqn guy who, unlike me, had stayed in the SAS and had later been a key player in freeing the Iranian Embassy from fanatics, wished us all well. Vic had arranged a diplomatic security job for me in the USA, but that would now have to wait.

I did not know many people in the Battalion, the COP (Close Observation Patrol) guys that I had worked with in N.I. had always kept ourselves to ourselves, a little elite group within an elite unit. Then I became a medic. Medics, like cooks, bottle-washers, store-men and bandsmen were not at all respected within the Airborne Infantry, we were all classed as REMF's (Rear Echelon Mother Fuckers). There is/ was a sad arrogance within the Airborne Infantry, whereby the fighting soldiers believed that they alone were 'chosen men'. Their open hatred of non airborne soldiers 'Crap-Hats' was fearsome. They could not even accept airborne soldiers from other Corps as their equal. This is/ was perhaps the worst side of The Parachute Regiment. None of this troubled me, I had broad shoulders and was easily recognisable as a seasoned soldier and so I was left in peace.

One of the medics, Irvine Gibson (Gibo), was a seasoned marathon runner and I often did some training with him, Jimmy Laker and Chris Byrne. We became good friends and Jimmy asked me to be the God Father to his son. I was not surprised, for whatever reason, I have been asked 14 times to be Godfather for friends children. Once on board ship, I don't think that I ever saw Jimmy or Chris again, at least I can't remember it. I guess one of the other medics was training their sections.

Personally I was never in any doubt that we would have to fight, I wanted the fight ! I had already been in service for 12 years and this was going to be my personal ,Ultimate Test', not the SAS selection. I gave 100% all the way through.

Many people thought at first that I was overdoing the medical training, telling soldiers „if a finger, your hand, or even your arm gets blown off, bandage it up yourself before you become unconscious, or you will bleed to death. Do NOT expect a medic to be with you any time soon, this is NOT going to be like Northern Ireland !“

After the General Belgrano had been sunk, killing more than 300 enemy sailors, they all wanted to listen to me/ us. I had in any event already ,infected' the other medics with my own enthusiasm. This had not gone unnoticed up-stairs either. It was electrifying, suddenly having people trusting, believing your every word.

Personally, I was so involved in my own learning and teaching that I did not even find time to do the ,cross loading training' - onto the BLC (Beach Landing Craft) at Ascension Island. I did very little physical training and almost no firearms training. I was very fit and an expert with all available weaponry anyway. What I needed even more was medical understanding and Doc Hughes was the perfect teacher. He was advancing the medical training of us medics, negotiating with his superiors, especially the Adjutant: Captain David Wood and the 2ic: Major Chris Keeble and of course Col. H.Jones, who never allowed anything to happen that he had not personally sanctioned. Then he (Doc Hughes) had to get the Company Commanders to agree to adopt his medical training plans. They were not all happy as so many of their soldiers were hardly 18 and had no active military experience. New senior soldiers had been posted in and platoons restructured, there was a lot of training for them to do. We medics were largely left alone, no watch or kitchen duties, no distractions. I am certain this was also at Doc Hughe's insistence.

Paratroopers are not the brightest of people (which bright people jump out of perfectly serviceable aeroplanes ?) and Doc Hughe's wanted to keep things as simple as possible, so he created ABE, the ,Airborne First Aider'. ABE, three letters, two of them starting as the alphabet does, A then B, was basic enough for the simplest soldier to understand, a name they could easily remember: ABE. This is vital, because if somebody does not understand what you are teaching them they lose interest very quickly and you are wasting your time.

ABE stood for:

A = Airway, if a casualties airway is blocked, nothing else you do will save them.

B = Breathing, bleeding, breaks and burns, treat in that order, or as required.

E = Evacuate = get the casualty to a Combat Medic, then to the RAP a.s.a.p..

Of course this was still based on the assumption that we RAP medics would have our tented field surgery from which to function, a mile or so behind the advancing troops, and an ambulance to ferry ,professionally stabilised casualties' back to a field hospital. In the event none of our ,physical RAP equipment' arrived and so it was a rather brilliant foresight of Doc Hughes, because every single soldier was himself ABE: The Airborne First Aider ! Doc Hughes also introduced the ,Rectal Infusion', a very delicate subject for ,hairy arsed paratroopers'. Hereby the plastic tube of an infusion was inserted into the rectum of a casualty by his buddy, the electrolyte solution then being absorbed by the bowel... so the theory. The second aim of this was in fact to convince every officer and soldier to carry half a litre of ,Blood Volume Booster Fluids', so that specially trained Combat Medics would be able to place a ,main line infusion' on the spot. It was utterly unrealistic that the RAP should carry the entire stock of BVBF's, hundreds of litres ! What if our transport broke down or a single stray projectile punctured our container; exploding the entire supply ? All would be lost ! This was a brilliant manoeuvre by Doc Hughes. In the event every soldier gladly carried ,his personal 500ml BVBF, morphine and several shell dressings'. Some soldiers later reported having drunk their BVBF to stave off thirst.

We medics and of course Doc Hughes worked day and night, training as many soldiers as possible to look after each other. With just one doctor and six professional medics for up to 600 fighting men, we RAP medics were under no illusion about what lay ahead and of how impossible our task would become.

Initially we professional medics were Dr. Steven Hughes, Cpl Nigel Jones, L/Cpl Bill Bentley, Privates: Phil Clegg, Ian Davis, Irvine Gibson and Mark Polkey. Doc Hughes had his own Signaller, Peter Hall. There was also a Sgt Bradshaw, his role was resupply, which was sadly desperately inadequate and we never saw him until the fighting was over. Then there was our Padre: the Reverend David Cooper and his bodyguard Tam Thornborrow who would, for obvious reasons, always be close by us.

Some of the soldiers who were chosen for advanced training as 'Combat Medics' became very close to us. We would talk and practice our procedures late into the night with them and we became 'a band of brothers'. It is safe to say that I loved some of those guys more than my own siblings. No, not any homo crap, brotherly love of the purest form !

When a helicopter crashed into the sea killing 20 of its occupants, mostly SAS soldiers, even we Paras became intensely aware of our own mortality. When we later went to 'Action Stations' because an enemy submarine had been detected in our area, I saw brave men silently crying. Paratroopers are of the Air and Land, not of Water and we were very, very conscious of our vulnerability and helplessness a thousand of miles from land. It takes an incredible amount of self control to be silent and just hope that it is your lucky day !

Not much factual news was reaching us junior-rank soldiers and rumours were going around like wildfires. Some older senior-soldiers, even some senior-ranks, were acting as if they ruled the roost. It is at moments like this that our Padre, David Cooper, came up trumps. He always had a story, a tale with a moral. I don't exactly recall when he told this one, but it has always stayed with me:

One freezing cold morning three sparrows were perched on a beam in a barn, they were all at death's door. With the first ray of the morning's sunlight a cow awoke and had its morning crap. One of the sparrows flew down and ate the lot. Now energised it flew out onto the roof and sang with joy.

The other two sparrows looked at each other in despair. Then a second cow awoke and had a crap and a second sparrow flew down and ate the lot. Then it joined the first sparrow out on the roof and they sang with great delight.

The last sparrow was desperate, alone and failing fast, when a third cow had its morning crap. Sweeping down he also ate his fill and joined the other two sparrows outside in the sun. What happy chappies they were chirping loudly and dancing around on the roof. A thousand feet above, a sparrow hawk was looking for breakfast and could hardly overlook the noisy trio. Seconds later the sparrow hawk was enjoying a fresh warm breakfast.

The moral to this tale is: **If you are full of shit, don't sing about it !**

Everybody knew exactly what was being said and many, realising how they had been acting, thought twice before again riding rough-shod over those with less experience, knowing that they themselves were being watched and that they, all too soon, would also have to prove themselves in battle.

Another spectacular soldier deserves a mention here: the RSM (Regimental Sergeant Major) Mal Simpson. He was very conspicuous by his invisibility. I mean this in the most respectful possible terms. All soldiers know their RSM and he is usually ,the loudest, meanest son-of-a-bitch in the valley'. I can honestly say that I never noticed him shouting. He somehow carried out the many orders of Colonel H.Jones without making a fuss about it. The RSM is arguably the third most important person in a regiment (Battalion). Firstly the Colonel, secondly the Adjutant and thirdly the RSM. It is the RSM that controls the soldiers and to do this, so well, and hardly be noticed is quite remarkable.

As we got ever nearer to the Falkland Islands the weather conditions were certain, it would be bitterly cold. Colonel H.Jones ordered that ,every single soldier MUST wear or at least carry his army issue long underwear'. This underwear was utterly unfit for purpose, being of shapes and sizes that fitted no human being. This niggled me as some friends and I had, before embarkation, quickly bought much better alternatives. Cpl Nigel Jones and I decided to protest about this ,order'. It's not a clever idea, provoking a man with Colonel H.Jone's temperament, a man who could literally have us thrown overboard for mutiny !

The two of us climbed into a single pair of long-johns, Nigel with both of his legs in one leg of the long-johns, me in the other. Then we pulled a single top over both of our bodies, both heads poking out through the enormous neck hole. Each of us holding the other with our inner arm, our outer arms through the sleeves of the top. We then hopped to Colonel H.Jone's bunk and knocked on his door.

When he saw us he knew instantly exactly what we were telling him. A second later he said: „My order stands, every soldier must wear or carry his army issue underwear ... except you two“, he then shut the door. We scarpered rather quickly.

It had become clear that Irvine Gibson and I would team up as buddies. We both had our Ron Hill's running trousers which we would use as an alternative to the army issue long-johns. We also had our own running shoes instead of the army issue road-slappers and we made a pact: Should the battalion be over-run we would do our best to escape and attempt to make contact with the islanders. If caught we would pretend to be holiday makers who had been caught up in the war. I know that Jimmy Laker and Chris Byrne made the same pact and we hoped, in such an event, to meet up. I feel certain that others also had their own private ,plan B', but such plans of ,desertion' were sworn secrets !



Our convoy of ships sailed on and on, training continued as long as possible, then everyone prepared their equipment time and time again, just like before a parachute jump. The 24 hour warning order was given, I doubt that many could sleep. Then we were all stood one behind the other, moving down the long dark corridors. It's just like a night jump from an aeroplane I thought, then I was at the door, the ice cold air, a dispatcher said ,go' and I stepped out into the darkness, into the unknown.

Chapter Three: The Bridge Head

Logically the BLC (Beach Landing Craft) was bobbing up and down on the waves alongside of the ship, so timing was critical so that the drop was not too far. The landing craft was also moving towards or away from the ship. At times you just have to have faith in others: the dispatchers. For me all went well, two sturdy fellows caught me by the arms as I blindly landed and they pushed me forwards, the next guy was already landing behind me. One of our men was not so lucky, he fell between the ship and the landing craft and was 'nipped' between the two. I suppose that buoys cushioned the two iron giants from one another and the equipment that he was wearing would have given some padding. Nevertheless his hips were crushed and he was out of the game. He was hauled back on board, not our responsibility.

We were packed onto the landing craft very closely, eventually she cast off from the ship and moved into a formation, waiting while other landing craft were loaded. Presumably the Royal Navy were creating a distraction because shells could be seen arcing through the night sky and enormous explosions could be heard in the distance. The assembled landing craft then headed for the beach, this was 'our D Day'.

As the ramp went down there was a surge amongst the men, a shot was fired, just one, were we under sniper fire? Somebody screamed 'GO, GO'. I had expected to be knee deep in water. Many soldiers were in 'battle order' with just their weapons and webbing. We medics had large heavy rucksacks full of medical equipment. The water was in fact hip deep, then a wave hit me from behind lifting my rucksack and so pushing me forwards, I lost my footing and my head was forced under the ice cold sea water. My rucksack by now floating on my back prevented me from getting my feet back on the ground, then the wave ebbed, I found my feet in the sodden ground and waded as fast as I could towards the shore as another BLC raced onto the beach a few yards to my left. Ahead there was a dimmed torch-light and I headed for it and was directed towards the other medics.

We were all wet through, in a single line, expecting to move forwards any second, a minute passed, then another. I decided to take off a boot and let the water out of my trouser leg, wrang out my sock and replaced the boot as quickly as I could. We moved forwards, then stopped again. I quickly drained the other leg, wrang out my sock and replaced my boot.

Lady luck was smiling upon us, it was thankfully not an opposed landing. During the repeated stops I also drained my rucksack and webbing equipment. We were carrying over a hundred pounds (50 kg's) without sea water, thank you very much.

At one stop a medic was called forwards, not me. I have it on first hand authority that a young soldier had had a nervous break down and the lad simply refused to move any further. Colonel H.Jones was there and pulled out his pistol, pointed it at the young lad and said „march or die“. Other senior soldiers in the vicinity protested, giving the lad the chance to recover his nerve and get back in line. We were the first major unit to land and if this Bridge Head failed the entire war could be lost before it started. Colonel H.Jones was not going to let anything or anyone stop his battalion from securing this Bridge Head.

By dawn we had dispersed into the surrounding mountains. It was a long hard slog up to our designated position. We medics were located with HQ Company. On the first day two soldiers turned up at our location with ‚slight gunshot wounds‘. They had both been grazed by the bullet ‚negligently fired‘ on the beach landing craft. Both soldiers refused to be evacuated !

From first light the enemy's aircraft were continuously attacking our ships down in the bay, which became known as ‚Bomb Alley‘. At first our soldiers were trying to shoot them down with small-arms-fire, which had inevitable consequences. What was fired from one mountain came back down on the next mountain. We were in danger of shooting each other ! Everyone was digging in as best we could, two men to a shell scrape, with as much overhead cover as possible. Now there was a feeling of helplessness, not firing at the aircraft for fear of shooting a comrade. It did however not take long for the air defence lads to get set up and make life hard for the enemy pilots.

They must have been very dedicated pilots, because they came in wave after wave, successfully bombing several of our ships causing havoc for those on board. Fortunately for us our landing site had been well chosen, the so called mountains around San Carlos Water were not very high. Bombs dropped from aircraft have to be above a certain height to avoid the blast of the bomb from overtaking the aircraft and so destroying it !

For this safety reason, bombs dropped at too low an altitude would not ,arm themselves'. This meant that the enemy pilots flew in hugging the (low) mountain tops to avoid being targeted by our ground to air defence rockets. Some soldiers simply could not resist blasting away at these ,oh so close targets' with their small arms weaponry, in spite of the obvious danger to their own comrades.

The enemy pilots then had to climb steeply to avoid this small arms fire and to achieve their required bomb-release-height. The higher that they climbed the easier a target they were for our cannons, guns and rockets. Several jets were shot out of the sky, exploding in great balls of fire. Many other aircraft were hit and damaged and so presumably never made it back to their own bases. Some did not climb high enough and so, although their bombs hit their target, the bombs were ,not armed', landing as a very dangerous piece of scrap metal but not exploding. So several of our ships had ,unexploded and unstable bombs' on them, nevertheless essential work continued as normal, in spite of the imminent danger.

One night HMS Antelop exploded, she was torn apart, the deafening noise vibrating throughout the mountains, more self detonating explosions followed, hours later She sank before our eyes. Can there be a more disturbing sight, knowing with certainty that comrades had just been evaporated. No bomb that we had ever seen in Northern Ireland had anything like this magnitude !

Out at sea our ships were also regularly under attack. Several ships, including the Atlantic Conveyor, were sunk and so our entire ,physical RAP', as such, was lost along with most of our helicopters etc.. This was a severe blow.

Our own jets were also doing all they could to ward off the attackers, but we were all a very long way from home !

Now all that we medics had was that medical equipment that we had carried in on the beach landing. The cold weather and the fact that many soldiers had not, as I had, risked draining their boots just after the beach landing, were now suffering from trench foot, foot rot and or frost bite. Just being there, doing nothing, was wearing many of the lads down.

Word came through that we would soon be advancing to confront the enemy at Port Darwin & Goose Green, what a relief !

As the next day darkened we set off almost reaching our forming up point when, for whatever reason, we had to return back to our previous positions at the Bridge Head. The very next evening we set off again. It was easier this time as we had a much better understanding of the lay of the land. For us medics it was just a case of following those in front of us, treating the odd injured person, then catching up again. The only reasonable way to move in this terrain was one behind the other, for sure there was a spear-head at the front covering the flanks. This formation became known as 'The Airborne Snake'. Silently 'Tabbing' (Tactical Advance to Battle) at high speed.

By now we medics had become used to working well together in pairs, myself & Irvine Gibson, Phill Clegg & Mark Polkey, Ian Davis & Nigel Jones. But because we now had no 'physical RAP', Doc Hughes had worked out a new strategy. Somehow he had convinced Colonel H.Jones & Brigade HQ that to give reasonable medical support for the attack on Port Darwin & Goose Green we needed a second doctor and two more men. It could not have worked out better our former boss: Doctor Rory Wagon was with the Task Force and so he was posted to us. Each doctor would now lead a medical team, making us more flexible. However it was only possible for Doc Wagon to reach us as the attack on Port Darwin & Goose Green was already underway.

The A team: Doc Hughes, Signaller Hall, Myself, Irvine Gibson, Phill Clegg & Mark Polkey.
The B team: Doc Wagon, Signaller Hamer, Nigel Jones, Ian Davis & Hank Hood.
Hank, although not a professional medic and with no previous medical experience, had been trained as a Combat Medic during our journey south. He was attached to us to make up numbers. In fact, Hank had a hearing problem and was technically not allowed to serve on the front line. In theory, with a conventional RAP, he would have been nowhere near the 'big bangs'.

Now on our second night out from our bridge-head positions, again very close to our forming up point, we were informed that the BBC had already broadcast on the World News that "2 Para are already in action at Goose Green". Colonel H.Jones was furious, what treachery!

We were now forced to lay up all day while our commanders worked out what to do. We medics were working hard all day, out doing 'house calls', ensuring that every man was battle fit. In doing this we missed our resupply of rations. Oh well, our load now lighter than we had wanted.

A Land Rover with enemy soldiers in it was ambushed by one of our patrols. Two of the enemy were wounded, additional prisoners were taken and the vehicle captured.

As darkness fell we moved up into our forming up positions, rested as best we could, obviously no fires and no warm brews, waiting for the order to advance to contact. This was already our third night on 'tactical hard routine' and the fighting had not even started.

Chapter Four: The battle for Port Darwin & Goose Green

The order came through and we tactically advanced to contact.

We were moving along the track which the Land Rover had used, indicating that it had not been mined. Our Artillery and Royal Navy ships were suddenly firing, their shells passing low over our heads. The rush of air was like a train racing past, trying to suck us from the ground, then the awesome explosions as the shells landed just a couple of hundred meters ahead of us.

Moving on we heard what turned out to be horses galloping. Perhaps it was this that had also alerted the enemy to our presence, whatever, within seconds we came under heavy and accurate enemy artillery and sniper fire. The shoe was now on the other foot, we were now also being bombed and shot at.

Doc Hughes was convinced that a sniper had targeted him personally, but more likely he was just shooting at anything that he could see, „keep your head down“ was my tip.

Clearly our approach along the track had been anticipated and a 'defensive fire plan' had obviously, previously, been measured up awaiting our arrival. We were now 'in their killing zone' and someone had to give the order to spread out. Not an easy decision as one could just as well assume that the sides of the track had been mined. After a short wait, I am sometimes an impatient beggar, I, a Lance Corporal, took the initiative over my many superiors and gave the order to spread out.

Which was just as well as the track became a death trap just a few seconds later. Whether the sides of the track were mined, we will never know, perhaps the frozen ground had prevented a complete disaster. Soon Doc Hughes took control and we moved forward into some dead ground on the right of the track. Here we found ourselves directly behind 'D Company'. Ahead of us on the upward slope the battle was raging and casualties were soon being brought down the hill to us, a group of medics and still only one doctor, with what little equipment we had been able to carry in our rucksacks.

One young soldier had been dragged down to our location, Baz Grayling had been shot in his water bottle which had exploded, probably breaking his hip. There were no obvious bleeding wounds, so he was sedated and placed to one side for a cas-e-vac (casualty evacuation), whenever that might be possible. We did not have suitable splinting equipment for such injuries, that had all been lost at sea inside the Atlantic Conveyor.

It would in any event not have been reasonable to do such a procedure under those conditions. It was soon obvious that under these circumstances we medics moving up to the casualties would be less traumatic for the casualties than them coming to down us. Their comrades still being in the thick of the fighting could not really help them. It was the stretcher bearers (the cooks, bottle washers, bandsmen, store-men etc.) who were going forward and dragging the wounded from where they had fallen ! Irvine Gibson (Gibo) and I heard the call for a medic and so we found a young soldier writhing in pain. The PT Sgt, acting as a stretcher bearer, had somehow dragged him thus far down the hill. In the dark we could not identify the soldier's injury and so I persuaded the PT Sgt to shine his torch onto the casualty. The PT Sgt was horrified at the thought of lighting up the darkness while the battle raged just ahead of and above us. Nevertheless, using his own body to screen the light from the direction of the battle, he did as I had requested. We were then able to identify that this young lad had also been shot in his webbing, the bullet had ripped through his equipment, travelled along the inside of his belt and had come to rest exactly in his umbilicus. Clearly the lad was shocked and bruised and he had a half decent burn from the heat of the bullet, but as I could find no bleeding injury and there were obviously no broken bones, I wanted to send him back to his platoon. After all they were still in the heat of the battle ! Doc Hughes was more sympathetic and had the lad made ready for cas-e-vac., for a proper check-up at Ajax Bay.

(This young soldier rejoined us before the battle for Wireless Ridge where he was then killed).

The fighting moved forward ahead of us, but we remained on the reverse slope where it was much more realistic to treat the casualties than on the battlefield itself.

'During quiet moments we tried to take a nap but the bitter cold made this almost impossible. We had no more than a poncho to keep the frost at bay and nothing to protect us from the ground cold. We had carried insulation mats and sleeping bags, but these had been given to the early casualties.

As dawn broke, leaving our rucksacks to identify 'Our Lines and The RAP' we went forward in light order to search for our missing comrades.

The Padre asked me to go with him, he had found Gaz Bingley. The Padre and I carried in our first dead body. Gaz had been a friend of mine back in Northern Ireland. He and Baz Grayling had attacked a machine-gun position eliminating it, at a price.

Gaz had been shot through the head, the bullets had ripped the back of his head off and literally blown his brain out. While carrying his body back into our lines, in a poncho, with every step his head kept banging against my knee giving off a 'hollow echo like a dry coconut', a sensation that is not easy to forget.

Somebody told me that Tony Cork, another friend of mine from the N.I. tour, was wounded and over there, waving with his hand to indicate the direction. I went out, this time with Mark Polkey. Mark and I decided to split up, the area to cover was considerable and time was critical to the survival of our friends and comrades. I soon became aware of someone sitting or crouching, about a hundred metres ahead of me. Looking for cover I saw a trench and ran to it and jumped in. In the bottom of the trench there was obviously someone hiding under a poncho. Instinctively I fired a long burst of SMG (Sub Machine Gun), luckily past my own feet, into who or whatever was under the poncho. It was then as if I was treading on a water-bed with lumps in it. I guess I was shocked, springing back out I again moved towards the crouching figure. Then I saw another trench and moved into cover there. Here there was a severely wounded Argentinian soldier who was unconscious and dying. Just 50 meters ahead of me was the still unidentified crouching figure.

Was it my friend Tony or perhaps another missing comrade, maybe it was another enemy soldier ?! Should I help this unconscious enemy soldier and perhaps risk being shot by the unidentified crouching figure ? If that figure was Tony, would he die while I was treating this stranger ? The seconds were ticking away, the enemy soldier spluttered, coughed up fresh arterial blood and died.

Again moving forward towards the crouching figure, I realised that he was in fact also an enemy soldier. I moved quickly and cautiously towards him and as he made no aggressive gestures I was also not aggressive towards him. In front of me was a young Argentinian soldier, he had been shot through the lower leg and was in deep shock. The youngster had no weapon at hand and so, without treating him, I hoisted him up over my shoulder, a classical fireman's lift, and carried him into our own lines. Looking back this was quite a risk as he would have been looking down onto my bayonet, in its belt holster, and it would have been fairly easy for him to have drawn it and stabbed me in the back. Again Lady Luck was with me.

Somebody else indicated to me that my missing friend Tony was ,over there'.

(Looking back: how could so many comrades have known where Tony was, when nobody had brought him in ?)

This time I found Tony's dead body alongside the body of another of our young soldiers lying directly next to him. It was obvious that Tony had been injured first and that the youngster had gone to his aid. The shell dressing and the position of the bodies was unmistakable.

They had then both obviously taken a prolonged burst of machine-gun fire that had made a real mess. Out of respect for the youngster I chose to carry him in first, for his having tried to help my friend Tony. Laying down next to the youngster, I took both of his arms up over my shoulders and staggered to my feet, as I did this the youngster just rolled to the side and back to the ground. I was still holding his right arm over my own shoulder. Spreading my own poncho out on the ground, I rolled his body onto it and dragged him back towards the makeshift RAP. Somebody came out to meet me and helped me to drag his body the rest of the way. One comrade then tried to tell me that Tony had tried to rescue the ,new lad' and that he was a hero. I had been there and seen the evidence and squashed that rumour instantly. It was the ,new lad' that had tried to save Tony, no question !

I desperately needed a break, we had now been moving in extreme conditions for three and a half days. I had to ask two other soldiers to go out and bring Tony's dead body back, while I had a brew and tried to take a nap.

I awoke to obvious confusion. Doc Hughes was getting ready to go forward and attend to Colonel H. Jones who had been shot. The RSM (Regimental Sergeant Major) would brief us and I should bring up the rest of the A Team Medics at the double. The B Team Medics, now with doctor Rory Wagon had received other orders and had already departed whilst I was asleep.

The RSM told me to take forward as much ammunition and weaponry as possible, so I stashed my SMG in my rucksack and grabbed a GPMG (General Purpose Machine Gun) and as much ammunition for it as I could carry. My own load was well in excess of 120 lbs (60 kg's) my buddy Gibo was similarly loaded and he was wrapped with more belted ammunition for my GPMG. We two went on ahead of Phil & Mark. 'Just follow the track' was our only instruction.

The noise of battle just ahead of us was so loud that we didn't hear the Pucara, a ground-attack/ fighter-aircraft approaching, firing directly at us, until we saw the ground around us being ripped up. I immediately returned fire from the hip with the GPMG but the gun soon jammed because I was by then firing almost directly overhead. Gibo raced to help me, to feed the gun, but he fell to the ground like a stone. The Pucara flew past us and I moved to help Gibo. Luckily, he had not been wounded by the Pucara's cannons, but had tripped and was winded by the weight of his load landing on top of him.

We looked for the Pucara which was, by then, shooting down one of our helicopters about half a mile away. (I later learned that the helicopter pilot, Lt Richard Nunn, was killed and his Crewman Sergeant Bill Belcher was severely injured).

I saw Tam Thornborrow, who had also engaged the Pucara and I got a glimpse of the captured Land Rover ferrying ammunition to the fighting troops, now just ahead of us.

Immediately upon our arrival at A Company's position we were relieved of our GPMG and its ammunition and so I now felt quite naked with just my SMG. At the very next opportunity I took an SLR (Self-Loading Rifle). It was from the hands of a dead Marine Corporal and I wondered what he was doing here, wearing a Green Beret.

(It later transpired that ,Airborne-Marine-Engineer, Cpl Mike Melia‘ had been tasked to check that the bridges which we had to cross were not mined and to deal with other explosive dangers. He had then advanced with A Company, Rip Mike).

All medics of the A Team followed suit, picking up SLR’s from our fallen comrades and ditching their SMG’s. At the first opportunity we checked that our new weapons were hitting what we aimed at. Mine was spot on and would serve me well.

We found Doc Hughes and Peter Hall who had gone forwards with him, Colonel H.Jones was already dead. Others desperately needed our attention and, having assisted a couple of casualties, I became aware that one of the young platoon Combat Medics, Paul Shorrocks, with whom I had become very close during the training on our long journey south, needed urgent help. Paul had been shot some hours earlier and he had lost a lot of blood and, although he had been patched up by others, he was also in danger of freezing to death when we found him. Our dilemma was: was it more important to replace his loss of blood with cold BVBF’s and hope that it would not kill him, or just hold his hand ? There was no way to warm him up, his pulse was very weak - we decided to give him a main line infusion. We medics each always carried one bag of BVBF under our smock to prevent it from freezing. Gibo ripped open his own shirt and placed an infusion bag against his naked body to try to take off the chill, while I placed the infusion needle into Paul’s arm. It was a moment so desperately full of emotion that I can only compare it with the delivery of my own two daughters into this world. We evacuated Paul on the next available helicopter, regardless of medical priorities ! Paul survived as did, luckily, all other casualties who were alive when we reached them.

Another young platoon Combat Medic, Steven Tuffen, had been shot through the head. A squirt of his brain was visible on the back of his head, like toothpaste that had been squeezed out of a tube. I did not consider that he could possibly survive and told Phil Clegg & Mark Polkey to ,give him a lot of morphine‘ (which was intended to allow him to slip away without undue suffering). Doc Hughes thought however that he could have a chance. Steve Tuffen had been also shot some hours earlier, Doc said: „If the damage to his brain had affected those parts of the brain responsible for survival, he would already be dead ! That he is still alive indicates that he can be saved and so with help from our Doc, Phil and Mark, Steve Tuffen also survived.

The day passed with moments of intense action and quiet moments. During a heavy barrage, I found myself sharing a shell crater with our padre, what a guy!

If anything put me off him it was the extra long spade that he carried, just in case he had to 'dig a quick grave'. He always had a story or a quick joke like 'not being fussy about who I have to bury' and „I would be proud to do you the favour“. Well thanks, Padre!

Steadily the row of our own dead bodies grew and at some point my good friend Chuck Hardman's body was brought in. Chuck was a typical loud mouthed sawn-off-Jock. But he was, in my eyes, a brilliant soldier, a warrior of the first grade. I searched his dead body expecting to find terrible wounds, wounds worthy of killing a warrior of his calibre, but there was just a tiny spot of blood behind his left ear where a projectile had entered his head and turned his lights out. I dressed him as smartly as I could and wrapped him in his poncho. Rigor Mortice had set in and his arms were simply not willing to be wrapped alongside his body. I became upset that somebody would have to break his arms to put him in a body bag to evacuate him. I lovingly wrapped him up as best I could and paused in thought. We were not getting any useful medical re-supplies, boxes arrived but they were full of items needed in a static surgical RAP, totally unsuitable for front line use! We were all dead tired, hungry, even eating biscuits etc. from the pockets of the dead, friend and foe alike, and the ammunition was running out. The colonel was dead along with a growing row of officers and men, the enemy's artillery had us pinpointed, things were looking pretty desperate! This was all just too much, I confess that I broke down and cried.

Bob Cole, an experienced and trusted soldier, a Corporal from Rodney Troop, back in N.I., came staggering down from the crest of the hill towards us, his bayonet fixed from some previous engagement, he told Doc Hughes that yet another platoon Combat Medic, Chopsy Gray and another friend of mine, again from Rodney Troop: Tony Teigh, were both severely wounded on the other side of the hill. Doc Hughes looked at me, he was very conscious of what I had already done and I know that he would have chosen to take on this mission himself, if only he could; I heard myself volunteering.

Bob led me up the hill, through our own front line, then over the hill. He passed through a gap in a stone wall.

There he instantly opened fire on two enemy soldiers about 15 meters away. I also breeched the gap and opened fire. By the time I came up level with Bob, he was thrusting his bayonet into the second soldier, the first was already most definitely dead.

We then cautiously moved on to the forward slope, creeping down a small depression, to a point where Bob could point out the casualties to me. They were about 25 meters away, fully exposed to the enemy down in Goose Green. I told Bob to await the rescue party and then to creep over to us on my signal. I crept over to Tony and Chopsy. Tony told me to „look after Chopsy first, he is in a bad way“ ! Chopsy had gone back to rescue Tony who had been shot through the arm and, in so doing, had himself been hit ‘full on’ by a mortar bomb. This had utterly shattered one leg, the Tibia was gone ! The other leg was obviously broken and he was full of fragmentation. I quickly decided that it would not be possible to deal with all of this on the spot and so I opted to amputate the remains of the shattered lower leg. By now somebody had become aware of my presence and bullets were “pfloping” into the soft ground around us. I placed a tourniquet on Chopsy’s thigh and severed the remains of his lower leg with my Swiss Army knife, so that I could place a stump bandage. Chopsy just cringed into the ground, into the crater caused by the explosion, which was already drenched with his own blood. That sweet sickly smell of blood blended with the cordite burnt flesh and fresh earth is unforgettable !

The incoming fire was by now increasing and so, turning to help Tony. I gave the signal to Bob to come and get Chopsy. I was expecting perhaps four stretcher bearers to creep over to us. However, a young captain had taken command of the rescue party and he had decided to rush in, grab both of the wounded and bolt for cover, which is exactly what happened.

When the enemy saw a group of men rushing from cover, all hell broke loose. The ground all around us was being peppered with bullets. I remember placing Chopsy’s severed leg on the stretcher then suddenly they were all ten metres ahead of me. The ground between us then erupted, it was alive ! I have often seen the so called ‘beaten zone’ of machine-gun-fire out on the firing ranges, especially out in the desert and on open water. Now we were at the receiving end and I watched it, at very close quarters, chase the rescue party up the hill. I decided to play dead where I was. To have followed the others would have been suicide. After what seemed to be an eternity the rescue party reached the crest of the hill and safety, then the incoming fire faded away. If a plan works, it was the right plan on the day !

As dusk came in I slowly gathered my medical equipment together and as many of the left behind weapons and ammunition, dropped by the rescue party, as I could carry and, in the now almost darkness, made my way back up the hill.

I became concerned that I did not know the password to re-enter our lines. This however was not a problem, the lads had seen everything that had happened and welcomed me with open arms. When I asked: what is the password? Somebody said: „who cares, when we challenge: who goes there? If the answer is Que? We shoot the bastard“. I arrived back over the hill just in time to see Chopsy and Tony still waiting for a helicopter evacuation. When the helicopter landed, we placed Chopsy's stretcher in the pod on the outside of the helicopter, but we could not get the pods lid to close. I then realised that Chopsy still had his webbing on and that the spade that he carried was preventing the pod lid from closing. I sat Chopsy up to remove his shoulder harness and so his webbing equipment and the spade, that's when he saw the remains of his own leg lying across the end of the stretcher. He stared at me, or rather straight through me. I gave him a hug, assured him he'd be ok, pressed him back down, closed the pod and waved to the pilot to take off. Enemy artillery had seen the helicopter landing and were again making things most uncomfortable.

The other medics were all still very busy, Doc Hughes was up at HQ. I made a brew and wanted to take a nap when Doc Hughes came down from HQ, Basha! (my nickname) he said, (we were by now on first name terms), I have a job for you. Shortly a helicopter will arrive and I want you to go and collect some wounded. He gave me a slip of paper with a grid reference on it. The helicopter arrived, I jumped in and gave the pilot the piece of paper. He plotted it and said this is wrong, it can't be right! Check with HQ I replied. A few seconds later he said fasten your seat belt. We took off in total darkness, without any flight safety lights on, and flew up and over the hill, along the crest of which our troops had gone to ground. We were now flying in full sight of Goose Green, shielded only by the darkness. It did not take long before we came under enemy fire, but neither the pilot nor the co-pilot seemed to notice it. The helicopter was taking some direct hits and I was feeling pretty uncomfortable, so I undid my seat belt and slapped the pilot on the shoulder, pointing out the gun flashes. The helicopter immediately lurched to the left, climbing in a hard turn away from the gunfire.

Then suddenly it was chaotic wrenching in all directions, I was being thrown around like a stone in a tin can, uncertain if we had crash landed, but this seemed to go on for ages, then just as suddenly we were flying calmly again and I quickly put my seat belt back on. We were now back on our side of the hill, but our mission was to collect casualties still on the other ,unfriendly side of the hill'.

(I learned many years later that the pilot had effectively done a ,U turn' to escape the enemy gun fire. Then he had somehow seen a second helicopter racing head on towards us and both pilots had to take instant evasive action to avoid a mid air collision. This second wrenching manoeuvre had destabilised our helicopter and he had to struggle with the controls to prevent it from crashing into the hillside.

The second helicopter had been sent to assist the first in picking up the casualties, as was our mission. After this near disaster he flew back to base. I guess that's just one of the dangers of flying without safety lights.)

My pilot however flew once more over the hill. The lads on the ground, who needed the cas-e-vac, were doing all they could to very discretely identify themselves with a dimmed torch light and, as luck would have it, we spotted them. Cautiously landing amongst a group of soldiers I jumped out. The lads on the ground immediately piled their wounded mates into the back of the tiny helicopter. Three casualties were squeezed into the two back seats, another one from each side sat on their feet. One in each pod on the outside, but there was still one lad in a wheelbarrow screaming, he had been gut shot. The co-pilot, by now straddling the casualty pod on his side of the helicopter, like me, trying to coordinate the loading of the casualties, indicated to put the gut shot soldier in his own seat ! He remained outside, straddling the pod, and then the helicopter tried to take off, but it was clearly massively overloaded. A couple of us rushed to the pods and tried to lift the helicopter into the air, more of our lads came to help, as many as would fit and could find a grip, we heaved and heaved, trying to lift the overloaded helicopter from the ground. Somebody coordinated the action, one-two heave, he screamed, one-two heave. The propeller was whizzing away at full revs just above our heads. One-two heave, one-two heave. The helicopter was vibrating violently, the engine revving like crazy, burning fuel. One-two heave, one-two heave, suddenly she started to climb and with a last push upwards she took off vanishing into the night sky.

I was still on the ground and now had to make my escape with the fighting soldiers. They had taken any number of prisoners and we still had some walking wounded, though one big welshman had to be carried on a stretcher.

The prisoners were ordered to carry Taffy at the shoulder and we set off up the hill towards our own lines. There were fires all over the place. The enemy had dropped Napalm earlier in the day, our soldiers had annihilated the School House and it was still burning. Aircraft had been shot down causing fires, not to mention the artillery from both sides, flares, grenades etc. etc.. As I caught glimpses of the procession silhouetted against the various fires it seemed like I was a part of some sort of medieval funeral ceremony, very spooky ! I was unbelievably tired, exhausted, hungry, I just followed the man in front as best I could. That I was also supposed to have been guarding the prisoners was wishful thinking. Eventually we were back on the 'safe side of the hill'. The Padre gave me a cup of tea and I fell asleep.

All too soon I was woken up, it was my stag, this was to be my only real guard duty of the war. We were guarding the prisoners down by the burning gorse. The prisoners had huddled as near to the fires as possible to try and stave off the bitter cold. I noticed that one group had moved away and left one of their comrades very close to the fire. I went over to see if he was ok, but he was dead. I called to one of the guards to help me and as we lifted the body away from the fire his arms just came off, he was cooked through ! We placed his body in a trench and cast some earth on him. We also hugged very close to the fires, scalding on the one side, freezing on the other. Watching the prisoners with one eye, sleeping with the other.

My stag was eventually over and I went up the hill to speak to Doc Hughes and asked him if the overloaded helicopter had made it back to Ajax Bay, he reported that all was well. Then I told him about the crazy flight that we had had. He was very impressed and reported this to Major Keeble, who was now our Acting Commanding Officer. The pilot: Captain John Greenhalgh was later decorated with the Distinguished Flying Cross for this and other daring rescue missions.

The Padre was there again with a mug of tea which he gladly shared with me. He briefed me on what the morrow would bring. Major Keeble had sent a couple of captured Argentinian Soldiers back to their position with an ultimatum: they should surrender !

To help them make up their mind, we were to use up much of our remaining ammunition doing a fire power demonstration, we were to get our first Harrier support and considerably more Navy Guns and Artillery support than had to date been available. Frankly I thought that Keeble was nuts, as mad as H.Jones had been and I went off to try and sleep, to forget the madness.

I was woken up by the incredible noise of the fire power demonstration and made my way up to the ridge to watch, man oh man was it impressive !

Everything that the combined services could muster was thrown into a small area just outside of Goose Green. It did not take the enemy long to decide to surrender. Major Keeble had gambled all on one card and won !! I seriously doubt that we could have continued to fight and win, his was the only way to victory. His plan saved a great many lives on both sides, he is the man that deserved the credit for winning the battles of Port Darwin and Goose Green !! God bless you Chris.

At around this time I again saw Bob Cole, his bayonet still fixed and ready. A Warrant Officer who I did not recognise was also there and he said „Corporal Cole, that bayonet looks rather dangerous“ Bob said „you’re fucking right it is“, the Warrant Officer went his way without further comment.

Helicopters were by now landing, bringing in ever more ‚back seat heroes‘ and the Press and they were congratulating everyone who’s path they crossed. The OC A Company suddenly appeared and ordered me and my fellow medics to „immediately clean up the area, you have left all of those bloody bandages and junk laying around, it’s a disgrace“ he said. I am of the opinion that he had completely lost the plot and ignored his stupid order !

I rushed back down the hill to grab my by now depleted rucksack. Doc Hughes was trying to dissuade some reporters from photographing our dead. These bastard vultures had been unwrapping the bodies of our dead. My friend Chuck Hardman, our dead former Commanding Officer: Lt. Colonel H.Jones (who was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross), Captains Wood and Dent and our other fallen comrades, just to get some sensational photographs. Doc Hughes shouted to me stop them Basha !, stop them !

I understood this to be a direct order and instantly presented myself right in front of them and, in my best Junior Squadron Sergeant Major’s parade square voice, screamed EH !

I had their attention and so I then said, clearly and loudly and as an order with pauses: „if you touch one more body, one more time, you will be laying there ‚dead‘ next to them in one second“. I must have looked very convincing because they scurried away like fleeing rats, apparently finding something else more interesting. Because of my personal intervention there were no Press Photographs in the newspapers or on television, from the battlefields of Port Darwin and Goose Green, to torture the families of our heroic fallen brothers.

Of this I am very proud !

We again wrapped our dead in their groundsheets. I gathered the lads together, Doc Hughes had a photograph of the ‚A Team‘ taken:

A picture says a thousand words:

Do note that all four medics from the A Team were sporting SLR's, having ditched our SMG's. My SLR was in green camouflage, taken from Cpl Mike Melia - Royal Marines I was also the only person who wore a ‚red cross armband‘ throughout.

From left to right:

Peter Hall, Tam Thornborrow, Myself, Doc Hughes, Mark Polkey, Phil Clegg, Irvin Gibson.



Picture courtesy of Paradata

Together we then crossed the ridge, proudly wearing our red berets, and we moved quickly down towards Goose Green. Just before passing what was left of the school house we passed three more of our own dead: Lt Jim Barry, Cpl Paul Sullivan and L/Cpl Nigel Smith, who had been killed in the infamous ‚White Flag incident‘. RiP lads.

The Argentinians were by now pouring out of a large hanger and lining up, the count on the day was around 1200 prisoners of war. They then laid down their weapons and surrendered. This was a sight to be seen and a great relief !

The enemy were truly surprised to see so few of us taking their surrender, during the day helicopters brought in a few fresh troops to help guard the prisoners. Our own fighting men were still out in the mud playing soldiers.

We had attacked with about 450 front line fighting men (Mortar-men, Medics, & Stretcher-bearers included). We had defeated an enemy of almost three times our number. 18 of our brothers were Killed In Action, 64 more were wounded/ injured.

Numbers vary somewhat from the other side, but about 50 of their soldiers were KIA and about 130 more were wounded. More than a thousand were taken Prisoner of War.

I especially want to praise our own Mortar Platoon who throughout the battle did a truly super human job. Although under regular enemy counter bombardments, they were able to move a couple of their mortar tubes forward, to better support our advance. This meant that they had to man-haul tons of bombs as fast as humanly possible to their own advanced location. Also the REMF's, the stretcher bearers, who were made up of anybody who was not dedicated to fighting on the front, it was these men who so often enabled us medics to save lives. It went on the record that „**not a single casualty who reached a professional medic alive then died of his wounds**“. The title Medic was now an expression of gratitude and honour and very highly respected !

This is what P Company instills in our soldiers, such hard and merciless training is essential if civilians want their army to win wars on their behalf.

The alternative is to surrender every time somebody wants to bully us or take away that what is ours !!!

One might assume that now that the fighting was over we could all take a well deserved break, but nothing could be further from reality. Enemy Special Forces had been landed by helicopter during the night and a counterattack seemed very realistic. So our fighting troops had to take up defensive positions all around the village, as opposed to just placing sentries. Some of the lads had freed the civilians who had been held captive in one of the buildings.

We set up a medical center and immediately soldiers were queuing up with injuries and ailments, as opposed to wounds, needing treatment. That said one Sergeant had been scratched by shrapnel during an early encounter and his wound was now festering, but he refused to be evacuated.

By the time I came out into the fresh air again it was already dusk. The names of our 'missing presumed dead' were being banded about, yet another one was a good friend of mine and I so wanted to see him one last time.

Tam Mechan and I had both been in Nelson Troop in N.I.. Tam was another sawn-off-Jock with a big mouth, he was not a great soldier, but he was very funny.

No matter how difficult a situation was he could make us laugh and laughing is a powerful medicine against stress, the soldiers constant companion. I think everyone liked Tam ! While I was asking around if anybody knew where Tam was, it was snowing heavily again. Over there, over there, over there was the only answer that ever I got. The snow was by now thick on the ground and I was straying ever further away from the village. I realised that this was crazy, I could bump into hostile forces, there could be mines or unexploded ammunitions laying around, hidden under the snow, and I was dead beat, not thinking clearly. Very downhearted I went back to the village. There I saw our Padre and he told me that Tam was 'with others' in a small enclosure. I quickly found the enclosure where a row of bodies, perhaps six, were wrapped in ponchos, covered by thick snow. One by one I carefully unwrapped each of the bodies, but I was unable to recognise my little friend in these conditions and with their terrible wounds, so I hugged each of them, gave each of them a kiss, then wrapped them up again and headed back to the medical center. I felt better now, I'm sure I had found him and said goodbye.

Inside the medical center there was some warm food and a hot brew, what luxury. Then I went to sleep, I have no idea where, just a space on the floor, more luxury - no wind, I don't recall being cold that night, not like when sleeping during the past few days. I suppose it was the next day when Doc Hughes told me to go to Port Darwin, another small community nearby. There I was to look after A Company. To be perfectly honest I have no recollection of my time with them, there in Port Darwin. However, we had obviously had considerable resupplies of medical equipment because my rucksack was again bulging at the seams.

Chapter Five: In between the battles, Sir Tristram & Sir Galahad

My next clear recollection was that I was told to go with Major John Crossland, the OC of B Company, with an assault force to take the settlement of Bluff Cove. Major John Crossland was a former SAS soldier and he was a legend even before we went down to the Falklands. In battle he had proved to be the perfect leader, his men loved and admired him and I was honoured to be joining 'his team' and his 'chosen men' on this operation.

I took a photograph of the mighty Chinook Helicopter as she came in to land on the crest of the hill just above us.



Somebody came around with mortar bombs, everybody must take two bombs, we all knew that we would be out on a limb on this job and we all well knew the value of our mortars. Even so, it simply was not possible to don my rucksack without the help of two mates, such was the weight, we all helped each other. Then we streamed up the ramp into the Chinook, her engines running. It was dark outside, but it was even darker inside and we squeezed ever tighter together. I suspect it was this tightness that stopped many a lad from falling over under the weight of our loads.

The flight was not long, and it was a great relief to get back out into the fresh air. I stayed on the mortar base line while the fighting troops entered the settlement. Fortunately there were no enemy present, so we secured the village until reinforcements arrived the next day.

The precise order of things over the next couple of days is very vague. At one point I was in the sheepheads at Fitzroy. I was on a BLC (Beach Landing Craft) with our CO Major Keeble. Then I was again at Bluff Cove. At some point family Killmartin very generously invited us medics to ,tea' Diann had herself been a nurse and was very sympathetic to our cause and needs. Then, we medics had just set up a medical center in a building near the Cove when another medical team turned up and demanded that we leave, they wanted our room ! Doc Hughes was arguing with their boss who was a far senior rank.

We had just repacked our rucksacks and were waiting outside. I didn't even have my boots on, just my training shoes which I slept in or wore whilst drying my boots.

The familiar sound of jets racing past followed instantly by several enormous explosions shattered the peace. I had not even been aware that we had ships in the harbour and they were now ablaze, instantly repeatedly self-exploding. It seemed that everybody was rushing down to the Cove to help and I could see that it would soon be very crowded down there. Helicopters soon arrived and began fishing the survivors out of the burning water, but it was almost impossible for them to off load their precious cargo amongst the crowd. Where then to take the casualties, where were the medics ?

I realised that from the cliff top we would be much closer to the ships, so I led whoever was still around me along the coast line, along the cliff top, to the point nearest to the ships. We held up stretchers and were soon spotted by the pilots who were obviously keen to have a shorter distance to fly and more room to offload their precious cargo and so get back to the remaining survivors more quickly and fish them out of the acrid burning water. Time and time again the pilots flew into the thick fog of smoke and flames, ignoring the continued explosions on the ships, using their down wind to clear a patch of water searching for those still alive, then fishing them out, some still on fire.

Perhaps a dozen casualties or more were dropped off at our location during the next hour or so, nobody was counting.

One young lad had had his lower leg blown completely off, I was asked to look at him because he also had deep gashes in his throat. It was strange, not typical, so I asked him what had happened: He was remarkably clear: he had lost his leg being blown through the wall of the ship he said. Then he was floating in burning water which was covered with spilt oil and fuel. Several times he had tried to dive and come up somewhere else but he was in Hell ! He could not breathe, his face and hair were on fire. So, he took out his clasp knife, opened the blade and tried to cut his own throat, he said ! He had however opened the wrong blade, the tin opener and he had repeatedly gashed his own throat with this, trying to end his agony. I could now decide that there were not more serious shrapnel wounds deeper in his neck and began to treat his obviously more serious injury, the remains of his leg. I then became aware of somebody leaning on my shoulder, preventing me from moving freely while I was trying to give life saving treatment. It was a fucking camera-man getting close up pictures, so I pushed him away.

He stood up again and continued to film us, still getting in the way. So I told one of the lads to 'get rid of him'. Clearly the cameraman had been upsetting all who were trying so desperately hard to save the lives of our critically injured comrades. Paratroopers do not play slap, he went down like a stone. I think he was still there when we moved back into the settlement, nobody was going to help that twat. His interference was tantamount to attempted murder !

Down by our former medical center there were still lines of men propped up against walls, against anything that would support them. Their faces charred to black soot and white ash patches, with folds of skin and huge blisters hanging off and open wounds not bleeding having been cauterised by the intense heat. Their hair burned away frizzled up on the remains of their scalps. Many had their eyes open, their eyelids like shrivelled scabs in the corners. Their hands in plastic bags to try and prevent later infection. By now the helicopters had stopped fishing and were ferrying the casualties back to Ajax Bay. That was a very long day, I have no idea when or where or even if we slept that night.

It was the 8th of June 1982, a day best forgotten !

The Sir Galahad and the Sir Tristram were successfully attacked by the enemy jets and later that day another smaller landing craft.

In the first attack 48 comrades were killed, the other attack later on the same day killed a further 9 comrades. Hundreds were injured, nobody who was there was not mentally scarred.

The next day it became clear, we had lost our medical center to the more senior officers. We moved out into the cold again. Apparently Paras don't suffer under the elements as other soldiers do. No matter that we were again utterly exhausted, short on medical equipment and all other creature comforts. This was the real thing! We then had to resupply our rucksacks and make ready for the advance on Port Stanley.

Chapter Six: The battle for Wireless Ridge and Port Stanley

A week or so earlier Doc Hughes had injured his ankle on the way towards Goose Green and it was not healing. So he was simply not fit to complete the gruelling march towards Port Stanley. He would be brought forward by a helicopter taxi and rejoin us before we attacked our objective. For the rest of us it was a really hard slog over unforgiving ground in appalling weather conditions. Our next objective was Wireless Ridge, way over to the left, overlooking the ultimate objective: Port Stanley.

As we crossed behind Mount Longdon, where 3 Para were already in contact, we could see that the enemy had no intention of giving up. It was obvious that their artillery was mercilessly blasting our airborne brothers, memories of our battle at Goose Green and real concern for their lives. (23 Comrades were killed on Mount Longden and almost 60 wounded. RIP You Brothers in Arms!).

As we continued to arc to the left, around behind 3 Para, we too came under artillery fire. Huge chunks of peat and stone making eerie noises were screaming past us and splattering into the soft ground, far too near for comfort. Initially we took cover, but not for long, we were out in open country and if we sat still for long enough they could hone in on us. So we got up and pressed on. Clearly the enemy had spotters up in the hills behind us and our only cover would be the oncoming dusk, if we kept moving we would be harder to hit.

The only consolation was, that by firing at us they had less guns available to target 3 Para and our other brothers in arms.

Years earlier, while on SAS Selection, I had started to have back problems, sciatica, lightening bolts of disabling pain and now this agony had come back to haunt me. We were yet again carrying around 100lbs. (50kg's) of equipment, far too much for comfort or good measure in this terrain. If I ever experienced fear, it was: 'the fear of falling out because of this bloody disabling pain that I could not control or ignore'. It's a bit like when parachuting, many lads jump because the embarrassment (fear) of refusing was greater than the concerns of actually jumping out of a perfectly serviceable aeroplane. I repeatedly filled my face with a handful of pain killers. We slogged on, finally resting up after dark, this is where Doc Hughes was waiting for us, just before moving up to our final assault positions. It was Doc's 25th birthday and we medics had arranged a surprise for him. His torch had been playing up and we had found one with red and green lenses, a few days earlier I had also made a blind lens with a pinpoint hole for tactical white light use. We proudly presented him this torch whispering 'Happy Birthday Doc', he was very moved.

Actually he was utterly convinced that he would be killed in the ensuing battle and he demonstrated great personal courage in leading us once more into the Hell of Battle.

Doc gave us our instructions and we did as was bid without question. We were now again functioning as a simple RAP group, though Ian Davis had been attached to one of the companies. Later, during the battle, an artillery shell landed directly in Ian's location, killing another soldier and so injuring Ian that he would never again be able to use one of his arms. The rest of us established our RAP in the dead ground on the reverse slope of the hill, near to the mortar base line. Stretcher bearers, made up of cooks, bottle washers, store-men, bandsmen and the like, would bring any casualties down to us for further treatment. We came under regular counter bombardment as enemy artillery were trying to knock out our Mortars. I suppose the heavy snow was preventing their artillery spotters from giving good information as to our location.

One young lad was brought down with a shell dressing on his neck. I felt that I needed to see the wound to better decide his Triage Status. Removing the dressing I found no wound, just lots of blood. Cutting away his clothing I located his wound at his shoulder.

The lad was asking: how bad is it ? I could see the remains of a tattoo ,wings' and so told him „your para wings tattoo is ok“. But I don't have a para wings tattoo he said. I looked again before bandaging his wound which was quite serious: Priority 2 for evacuation, and told him there are the remains of a ,wings tattoo'. He started to cry uncontrollably. That was an ,angel' a tattoo in memory of my auntie he said. Damn ! How many Paratroopers have tattoos of angels I thought, continuing to search for other injuries, fortunately I found nothing else requiring my attention. He was by now on a stretcher and so I covered him with a poncho, just then we came under another heavy artillery barrage. The snow was falling so thickly that I couldn't see more than a few yards, so I just cuddled up with the lad to stave off the cold, for both of us ! As the snow fell and their artillery shells rained in he wanted to talk about his aunty ,the angel' and I was happy enough to listen. She had been killed in a car crash. But, before that, when he was ,very young' she had taught him all there was to know about sex. Well, I don't remember feeling quite so cold during his telling of his youthful experiences. I'm certain that the lad thought he would not survive and was ,kind of confessing to me'. Me not being a vicar I can tell this tale whenever it suits me, but I have never told his name !

Eventually he was made ready to be evacuated and I was on my next job.

Another story that reached my ears was:

Down on the Mortar Line they were again having problems firing accurately, because the base plates were sinking into the soft ground. In an attempt to stabilise the base plate one lad braced it with his foot, perhaps a foolish thing to do. The shock wave broke his ankle, but the mortar bomb had landed accurately. A stray mortar bomb can be very dangerous to our own men and so the alternative was too ,stop firing' or try to again brace the base plate. Another lad braced a base plate with his foot, another mortar bomb landed on target and so they continued to fire until his ankle was also broken. Two more Mortar Men risked breaking their ankles to get off a few more bombs, until they also had their ankles broken. Finally they had to give up firing, but those last few bombs had helped to swing the advance in our favour.

Shortly after there was a familiar roar as a magnificent Scorpion of the Blues & Royals passed through our position. For an instant I thought that I must move forwards with them. Five years earlier I had been one of the most qualified and experienced Crewman on this incredible ,small tank' and well knew what it could do in my hands...

But I was already totally committed as a Para-Medic, here on Wireless Ridge. Though just seeing that beautiful Scorpion reassured me that nothing could now prevent our victory.

Doc Hughes called us together, we then followed the advance up towards the crest of Wireless Ridge. As daylight broke we saw a wrecked wire fence, one of the medics saw a sign ,Mine Field', but had we already crossed it or would we be moving into it ? Doc Hughes led us onwards, other footprints in the snow indicated that we were not the first to go this way ,keep moving'. He was himself struggling with his ankle. Ahead of us down the hill we could see our own lads driving the enemy before them. He suggested that I go on ahead and give medical support if needed. And so it was that I raced ahead, catching up with with our leading troops. In fact they had moved forwards far more quickly than anybody had expected, especially our Commando comrades who had so wanted to have been the first into Port Stanley. We were overtaking groups of enemy soldiers who had clearly ,given up' and were retreating back into Port Stanley. I entered the Governor's House and one of the lads told me that they had been ordered not to advance any further. Indeed hundreds of enemy soldiers still carrying their weapons were now pouring down the main road from behind us and on into the town center. We were ,way out on a limb' and so secured our position to await reinforcements.

On the 14th of June the enemy officially surrendered, the war was over !

Eventually I moved back along the road to link up with the RAP who had by then taken possession of a building to use as a medical center. Here I located some white robes and commandeered the local ambulance and a 9mm Browning Pistol. So equipped I spent the next few days driving backwards and forwards to the airfield ,finding' anything that might be of use to us. Still sporting my Red Cross Armband and having my Red Cross Identity Card, which had been issued to all medics, I would tell the Military Police, who had blocked all unauthorised traffic, that I was from the ,Red Cross' and that they had no authority over me, thus we had many creature comforts so sought after by the fighting soldiers. At last we were able to shower and wash our blood caked clothes for the first time since leaving the MV Norland almost a month earlier.

All's well that ends well you might think. I was watching a large helicopter, probably a Wessex, taking off when its down draft lifted a large nylon bag from the ground.

It then got sucked into the rotor blades breaking one of them whilst still climbing. This then became a club smashing into the body of the helicopter. The engine was protesting and the whole corpus was vibrating violently, then the whole thing plummeted out of the sky from about 40 or 50 feet high, smashing its undercarriage as it crashed back into the ground. All sorts of scrap iron came bouncing off in every direction. We were all very lucky that nobody, not even the crew were injured, though they were shaken up for sure.

2 Para had been the last fighting unit of the 'Assault Force' to leave the UK. We were however the first major unit to beach at San Carlos, the first unit to engage in a major battle, amongst the saviours of the Galahad & Tristram disaster, the only unit to fight two major battles, the first unit into Port Stanley and now we would be the first unit to return to the UK.

After some leave we reformed at our barracks in Aldershot. I was given assurances that I would receive accelerated promotion and further exciting qualification courses, but I had been there before. Shortly after the Para Sqn. RAC had returned from a very successful tour, throughout the 1974 war in Cyprus, we were disbanded.

I actively supported the efforts to have our dead returned home and was very honoured to attend the funerals of David 'Chuck' Hardmann and Thomas 'Tam' Mehan and others.

I was confused about the decision not to repatriate the body of Lt Colonel Herbert Jones who was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross, that is NOT what he himself had wanted !

I had also been gutted about the replacing, rather than 'promoting in the field to Lt. Colonel' of Major Chris Keeble, to become the official Commanding Officer of 2 Para. Although he had performed so brilliantly and snatched victory from a far stronger enemy at Goose Green, an alternative Commanding Officer was flown out from the UK.
(Nothing against David Chandler who was a fine CO).

In my opinion 2 Para were/are the best infantry unit in the world !
(2 Para's efforts at Kabul Airport in 2021 prove that the spirit lives on).

So, I once again chose to leave the army.

I have mentioned many people thus far, but perhaps the most important person in any conflict is The Big Boss. Most politicians waver like pansy's in the wind, not so Margaret Thatcher. She really was ,the Iron Lady', supporting those troops that she had sent so far from home to recover a distant British Territory from those who would take it from us. She never for one second wavered, against all odds at home and abroad, she was loyal to her soldiers, sailors and airmen and women and I for one was proud and honoured to have served as: one of

,Maggie's Para's'.

Chapter 7: After the war:

Of the 2 Para Medical Team and attachments after the war:

Captain Doctor Steve Hughes and I remained close friends, he even asked me to be the Godfather to all three of his children. Steve became a consultant surgeon, continuing to help to rebuild other peoples lives. All the time himself suffering from PTSD, this mental illness eating him away from inside. Steve died far too young, at least partly due to his experiences Down South. Our Padre, David Cooper presided at Steve's funeral, Steven's two sons, Colonel Chris Keeble DSO, myself and two stalwart former Paratroopers Wang and Johnno carried Steve's coffin.

RiP my boss, my mentor, my friend, we shall meet again !

Captain Doctor Rory Wagon eventually moved to Australia where he became a key player in their Special Forces Medicine. He retired from their Armed Forces and continued running a surgery until retirement. We are still in contact.

Mark Polkey has disappeared, some say that he killed himself, but I have had no evidence of this act and so refuse to believe it until that day comes.

Hank Hood did kill himself, of that there is no doubt.

Ian Davis was permanently disabled and retired to Europe, Poland I believe.

Nigel Jones I never saw or heard from again, I did hear that he became a Civilian-Paramedic, a very good one I do not doubt.

Irvine Gibson went on to become a brilliant Paramedic, devoting his life to the rescue and care of others, the last I heard, before Corona, he was living in Thailand.

Phil Clegg stayed in the army and served on to become a WO1. At Steve's funeral he told me that he wanted to retire and live in France. During the Corona panic we have lost contact, I can only hope that he is safe and well.

Tam Thornborrow went on to become a Professor and also lives in Thailand.

David Cooper, our beloved and highly respected Padre, continues to preside over the funerals of his comrades. A rock of a man if ever there was one !

Of the spectacularly wounded survivors:

David ,Chopsy' Gray died at the age of 40 (ish). His mother found a Swiss Army Knife, with my dog tag on it in his belongings and she returned it to me. I had presented it to David after the war and he had obviously kept it safely for 20 odd years. RiP Buddy.

Steven Tuffen married a beautiful lady and they had two wonderful children. Although almost blind Steven has worked for much of his life. I have often visited them and been their guest, though I don't think that I deserve their kind generosity and warm friendship.

Paul Shorrocks I have most sadly never seen again.

Here I want to mention one of the most tragic events surrounding war. Whilst I was swanning around over in the USA, my good friend Jimmy Laker, for whatever reason, murdered his wife and children then committed suicide. I still can not understand what so haunted such a nice guy to make him do this. RiP dear friends.

On a more cheerful note: In 2021 I had the distinct pleasure of meeting Simon Weston, Simon survived horrific burns during the Sir Galahad and Sir Tristram bombings and he has had to have countless operations over the years. His suffering has been unimaginable ! Nevertheless he is an incredibly optimistic person who unquestionably stands tall amongst the bravest of the brave.

Whilst on about bravery, people say that I was brave, but that's not how I see it. I never did anything that was deliberately reckless. For sure some situations escalated, then you just do what you can. I was never ,afraid' and so by definition I can not have been ,brave'.

It would be more appropriate to say that I am ,fearless... and very, very lucky'. There were others who were afraid and overcame their fear, that is bravery !

My own story continues:

Having left the army I took up the still open job offer in the USA. There I joined a team of bodyguards protecting Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz who, during my time there, was appointed as the Saudi Arabian Ambassador to the USA. Without my personal initiative his inauguration ceremony could not have gone ahead, but that's another story. Also during my time there I was able to establish perhaps the best medical rescue system of its day. We worked hand in hand with the Secret Service and some of us were invited to visit the FBI Academy at Quantico. I was moving in higher circles.

Following my work in the USA, I returned to the UK where I bought a small modest house in Rawtenstall, Lancashire, for cash ! I was always busy renovating this old house. To provide a cash flow I drove a taxi whenever I had time, thus I was able to set up first one, then several businesses. Parallel thereto I joined the Territorial Army's Home Service Force. There I worked my way up to become a Staff Sergeant with the appointment of Troop Leader. My application for an officers commission was thwarted because the Commanding Officer of our administering unit was an old friend of the ,idiot officer' that I had caused to be discharged so many years earlier.

The Brigade Commander offered me a commission in any other unit in his brigade, but I rather respectfully resigned, because clearly ,the writing was on the wall'. I sold my house for nearly four times its buying price and put a manager in charge of my business interests.

I then moved to Germany where after working in a security job I trained to become a Gas- und Wasser Installateur. I passed with the second highest marks in the county. The first place would have allowed me to move directly on to my Master Craftsman's course. Locally people talked about ,the Englishman who can fix anything'. So I acquired quite a name for myself and was ,head hunted' by a millionaire investor to oversee the building of a multi million DM complex in Berlin, which I later became the manager of.

During all of this I had to close down my own businesses in the UK: ‚Outdoor and Leisure Camping and Sports Equipment‘ also ‚Basha ! Enterprises‘ and the ‚National Register of Specialist Operatives‘, all based in Haslingden, Rossendale, Lancashire.

Unfortunately, without my own direct input, the manager that I had trusted to run the businesses was unfortunately not up to the job.

In due course I bought an old ruined farm outside of Berlin, in the former East, and started breeding horses as a hobby. My first wife had left me years earlier. Through this hobby I met my second wife Rahi, shortly thereafter, following an operation on my spine I had repeated infections of my body and nervous system. I was pushed from one specialist to the next with little or no improvement. In truth, more than once the treatment of the specialists actually caused my conditions to worsen. I was by then also coughing up blood, unable to even stand up or use my hands or arms. With our savings eaten away and my being unable to work, we really struggled for several years !

I was also the Chairman of the Berlin Branch of The Royal British Legion. When I asked London for their advice about help, most surprisingly they were about as much use as an ashtray on a motorbike. So I resigned.

My successor, Ray Gullan, did help me by buying some coal for me, because when he had visited me I had no heating material for my fire. Dear Ray actually got into trouble for doing this ! Ray most unfortunately died very young. RiP you good man, you good friend !

I then tried to claim compensation from the army for ‚injuries sustained during my service‘. For several years they refused to acknowledge that I had ‚been so injured during my service‘ „They had no record of any such injury“ they wrote. I became very disillusioned !

One time, in hospital, coming out of the narcoses, I dreamt that I was ‚a prisoner of war‘, but the dream did not end when I woke up. I found myself stealing a knife from the dinner table and found myself planning to kill the nurse who was treating me, so that I could escape. This really worried me, so I contacted Combat Stress. They said that they could only help me if I were in the UK.

During all of this the bastard bank had tried to foreclose my mortgage, even though I had never missed a single punctual payment. I had even stopped paying my pension contributions to be able to continue paying my mortgage.

Now I was really fighting for survival !

I started to day-dream about walking along the 4 meter high beams in my barn, testing which one would be best to hang myself from. It was very close !

The outcome of all of this crap was that my wife and I got into herbal medicine and bee-keeping, because conventional medicine had completely failed me.

Amazingly I rapidly started to recover and overcame the worst afflictions enough to again walk and perhaps most importantly think clearly !

A former Para Sqn friend: Chris Gryzelka had been through a similar odyssey and advised me to demand a copy of my 'service medical file'. Only then did they tell me that my file had been 'lost' and that they were working from a 'dummy - empty file' ! No wonder that they had no record of any such injuries, those evil pen pushing assholes !

Thereafter my claim was at least partly accepted and processed.

It is said „if you do good it will come back to you“. Several friends, hearing of my dilemma, chipped in and paid off my mortgage for me, buying me time.

I used the opportunity of the 25th anniversary of the Falklands War to sell my medals at auction. Lord Ashcroft paid a princely sum for them and I am most grateful to him. He has also mentioned me in his books 'Special Ops Heroes' and 'Falklands War Heroes'.

With his money I was able to repay some of my debt to my friends.

One of those friends that had helped me, a German friend who was an Estate Agent for the Deutsche Bank, asked me to survey - do the Technical due Diligence on a property for a Danish investor who 'didn't trust any German to tell the truth'. The Dane was very pleased with my report. Soon I was surveying for half a dozen Danish Investors and again earning good money and so able to clear all of my debts. Thank you Henni & Sophie & the M's !

Another good friend who had once been a 17/21st Lancer, Kevin Shannon, and later served with me in the HSF. Kevin was an excellent and champion pistol shooter. After training with him I myself became the North West TA Pistol Champion. Kevin himself is a military book writer and has helped me in many ways over the years also encouraging me to put this together. Thanks Kevin & Glynis !

Paddy O', from my 2 Para N.I. days, has since then been my most loyal friend. We have climbed a live volcano and been stuck on a glacier in Patagonia, wrangled with baboons, crocodiles and elephants in Zimbabwe, been in prison in Jericho, though we did nothing wrong ! We have spent Christmas in Bethlehem, and enjoyed the delights of Asia together. Not to even mention Europe. Thank you both Paddy & Shu-Ning. Ah the good old days !

Finally, my dear wife Rahi, who sold her beloved car and emptied her bank account for me and has suffered my disabilities and bad moods and gives as good as she gets, she is a true equal partner ! Thank you my love !

In later years, I was still surveying part-time and Rahi was working part time as a nurse as well as us jointly running our self-sufficiency farm. We were also devoted bee-keepers and well versed in the use of edible and medicinal herbs., we produced about 95% of all of our food needs including meats, which we bred, slaughtered and conserved ourselves.

Now again in control of our own destiny and always with the support of my wife Rahi, we divided and sold parts of our land, using the money to design and build a fantastic environmentally friendly house. The only heating was solar heated water and a log fire with a back-boiler for winter. We had our own deep water well and a diesel generator for power cuts etc.. Our grounds were protected like a fortress, using mostly natural barriers like Blackthorn, Whitethorn, Firethorn, Sourthorn and Brambles, but also electric-fencing, physical fencing and ditches.

When we had garden parties we provided grills and a fire place, everyone had to prepare their own food, we also supplied the drinks. Singing and jumping over the campfire always excited the women. Life was good again !

Eventually however the cold started to get to me, old injuries started to play up again. I had to give up ,responsible work' and took up ,bit jobs', blending tea, delivering newspapers, cleaning for older people or gardening for them. My own clock was ticking fast.

Just ten years after building this optimal environmentally friendly house, to everyones absolute surprise, we sold this perfect small-holding and headed for Portugal towing our caravan. Eventually we stopped in Spain, where the climate better suits knackered old codgers. There we bought a Mobile-Home. More recently we want to buy a private plot of land.

There we can site our caravan and again keep bees.

Warriors also have to be able to live well when not fighting. Warriors tend to avoid fights because they understand that somebody **MUST** loose. Warriors are very aware of their environment, because clean air, clean water and shelter are essential to life, all life !

It has taken me forty years to put this together from notes made at the time or shortly thereafter. Of course the quality of my expressing myself has improved over the years and so the text has changed slightly, but not the facts. So this report is as accurate as possible, not a distant memory and with no elaboration. I have taken every care only to refer to things of which I had personal experience or first hand knowledge.

If I have made any mistakes it is entirely my fault !

Neither BREXIT nor the whole Corona fiasco has concerned us directly. We are more concerned about Earthquakes, which are not infrequent, Volcano's who's ash in the atmosphere has halved our photovoltaic solar harvest this year and water which either comes in great torrents or not at all ! The plot of land that we almost have is a lost valley in the foothills overlooking the Mediterranean, this poem reflects my most recent dreams:

In our lost valley, where artificial light has no place, I see the moon and stars and wonder about their space.

Where the sound of traffic can not reach, we look between the mountains down to the beach.

A bee fly's by landing on a flower, she makes us honey which gives us power.

You can keep your towns and skyscraper towers after the storm they will again all be flowers.

Nurture nature for we are the same, not something special that thought's insane.

Play by the rules or you shall all perish, dear Mother Nature you **MUST** cherish.

Or she will come with might unknown and destroy your towns and your homes !

Following the example of 'Abbe Emile Warre', a bee-keeper who's first priority was the health and well being of his bees, I have decide to give away my story: this report.

This PDF is entirely free, if you think fit, send a copy to a friend or two !

In memory of all those, on both sides, who lost their lives during or because of the Falkland Islands War of 1982 and those who suffered on, and those who still do !

My best regards to anyone who read all the way down to this last line Bill Bentley MM

Back cover:

PS:

This story is a warning to all about the insanity of war, there must be a cleverer way !

That does not exclude the simple reality that we, every individual, every family and collectively every nation, must always be ready to **„defend that what is ours“**.

I thoroughly enjoyed most of my time and experiences in the army, including, perhaps especially, the Falkland Islands War. It was an absolute high, the ultimate test for me as a person, as a medic, as a soldier and as a warrior !

Environmental awareness is the reason that this story is being distributed privately via the internet, to make the best possible use of the planets resources, not to just consume and produce waste. Because what you throw away today will not be there for your children or your grandchildren in the future !

This story is entirely free of any charge in its PDF format. If you enjoyed it, please feel free to pass it on to a friend. Should any former comrade wish to contact me or anybody wishes to pass comment, I can be contacted at: **billbentley4900@gmail.com**

NB. I only open mail that is identifiable as ‚a person with a name‘ before it is opened.

Yours, Basha !

My thanks to Paradata for their support.

Join Paradata to experience more about our Airborne Forces.