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Son páginas de muestra del libro *The Red and Green Life Machine*, escrito por el Doctor Rick Jolly, quien se desempeñó como Jefe Médico (Surgeon Commander) del hospital de Ajax Bay. El sitio tiene un link para la compra del libro.

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The Red and Green Life Machine

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Southampton degenerated into something of a nightmare. Canberra lay alongside a narrow wharf that was opened on to by a series of large baggage sheds. The drizzle fell from a leaden sky as Vosper Thorneycroft's skilled workforce began to cut metal and clear away any upper deck fittings that would obstruct a helicopter's approach to the midships area. Tons of steel girder lengths with mysterious chalk markings appeared in and amongst the quayside jumble of freight and stores. These were lifted carefully up and across into the empty main swimming pool, then bolted together. The weight of water in the pool, when full, had been calculated as about seventeen tons; the new steel forest that would underpin the welded flight deck plates had to be about the same.

The edge for the midships flight deck was the aperture cut in the upper deck for the pool; concept and design soon became reality thanks to some rapid engineering drawings and the diverse skills of the workforce. By dusk, on the day they started, all traces of the swimming pool on the upper deck had disappeared, and a quarter of the old gap had been replaced by a flush-fitting deck surface which was completed the next day.

The next problem concerned how to get casualties (received on the flight deck) down one level to the Stadium night club, which had been selected as the only suitable area for their Triage, Resuscitation and Treatment. The main passenger lifts were smooth and silent, but quite incapable of taking a loaded stretcher. We had to make some different arrangements.

This time, the men from Vospers, plus one of the RN medical officers and a Royal Marine carpenter, combined forces to come up with a fantastic solution. A vertical bulkhead was surveyed and then cut out, to reveal a storage locker behind. Some more sheet steel was acquired and used to extend the length of the original piece. The whole assembly was then angled away through 45 degrees to form a sloping steel ramp which was firmly secured, and sheathed in plywood.

Next, it was fitted with a Southampton dock porter's trolley, which was tilted backwards to rest against the slope. At the bottom end, a buffer stop was fitted and the trolley made to run in the space between two 3" high wooden edges fitted to the ramp, and which extended all the way up to the flight deck above. At the top lip, a wide roller mechanism was installed, around which was fed a long manilla rope, in turn secured to a pulley on the top cross-bar of the trolley. The rope had a decoratively knotted end which, when pulled towards the stern of the Canberra, caused the trolley to move smoothly up the ramp, and had the benefit of some mechanical advantage.

When I showed the transparency of our 'funicular' trolley ramp in the Pentagon a year later, it produced gasps of disbelief. Apparently, what we Brits describe as being created by 'Heath Robinson' they label over there as being derived from the drawing board of a chap called 'Rube Goldberg'! One US Marine Corps voice growled about 'a million dollar problem and the ten-cent solution'. It really didn't matter, because the design worked perfectly, and was absolutely typical of many successful 'lash-ups' and

'bodgits' that were devised at various levels throughout the Force.

Along with ammunition and other bits and pieces, boxes and boxes of medical stores were also delivered to the quayside, then carefully netted and lifted up on to A Deck aft. The wharfies and crane drivers were tireless and cheerful - but almost religious about their tea breaks. Eventually, after moaning about this apparent waste of valuable time, we realised that they were absolutely right. I learned an important lesson from them, which proved vital later on - hot sweet tea, at appropriate and regular intervals, leads on to more productive working hours when coping with a crisis.

A pallet load of Argentine corned beef was then delivered, causing great hilarity amongst the shore parties. In the other direction, piles of furnishings materialised from the bowels of the ship to be piled up on the quayside, all to be replaced later at the Ministry of Defence's expense.

The Royal Marines of 40 and 42 Commando arrived, laden with kit, followed by 3 Para disembarking from their buses, their camouflage smocks contrasting sharply with the blue dress uniforms of their Regimental band. On the medical side, Surgeon Captain (Frank) Roger Wilkes also joined as Medical Officer in Charge, accompanied by the newly-created Surgical Team Three (SST 3) His team looked dejected and tired. I had very little idea of the 'stop-start' routines that they had been subjected to throughout the day; orders and counter-orders had washed over them, combined with rumour and misinterpretation of national and world events. The main news was that all their female members had eventually been removed from potential front line service, and it was a thoroughly hacked-off Roger Wilkes that finally boarded the Canberra.

He was a short, stocky firebrand. As a young medical officer in an aircraft carrier he had been awarded the MBE for his initiative and determination in caring for a Naval Air Mechanic who had suffered a 'flail chest' in a flight deck accident. The man's breastbone had been crushed as a jet fighter's cockpit canopy closed without warning. By inserting six thick catgut sutures around the ribs to each side, Roger Wilkes had managed to stabilise the chest by securing it to a wooden frame hastily constructed by the Chief Shipwright. His actions played a key part in saving the man's life.

I had worked for him previously when doing a recall from the Royal Naval Reserve in the hospital at Stonehouse, and had liked what I saw. He was a rumbustious, no-nonsense sort of consultant who enjoyed teaching, loved his patients and would leave no stone unturned in his efforts on their behalf. I greeted him personally, and told him excitedly about everything that had happened - the way we had advanced our plans for designating the medical areas within the ship, and how well I was getting on with the ship's surgeon, Dr Peter Mayner.

When I had finished, FRW (as we all knew him) eyed me coldly and said that he very much resented being talked down to by a subordinate officer (I think he meant figuratively rather than literally, as I was over a foot and a half taller than him) and that he did not take kindly to either my attitude or approach. I was rather surprised and disappointed - but knew from past experience that FRW could be difficult at times.

That bit of unpleasantness over, I greeted the rest of my colleagues, trying to welcome them on board. Some were old friends from time in the RN hospital at Stonehouse, and the links were quickly re-established. However, one chap, an oral surgeon, looked at me with a rather disdainful expression on his face and refused to shake my extended and welcoming hand.

That surprised and rather hurt me. He obviously blamed Rick Jolly for the lengthy period of being messed about that he and the rest of SST 3 had been subjeced to. Of course, the indecision and vacillation had occurred way above my level, but with this calculated slight coming on top of Roger Wilkes's public dressing-down, my heart was sinking fast. We simply had to get on in a spirit of co-operation and shared effort, but this was not really happening. I went back to my cabin and sat down to think about the problem.

Twenty minutes later, there was a knock on the door. One of the SST 3 ratings stood outside, and his message was blunt. Surgeon Captain Wilkes wanted to see me immediately in his cabin, which was one deck below. I swallowed hard and went down to get another bollocking. When I knocked on FRW's door, a gruff voice shouted from within. As I entered, I noted that the cabin's only occupant had his back to me. His terse order that I should shut the door was obeyed. Roger Wilkes then turned round to face me, with a

sparkling gin and tonic in each hand. In a genuine and contrite way he apologised for being so sharp with me, and said that he very much appreciated the preparatory hard work that I had put in on his behalf, and that I did not deserve any of the bad things that he had said on arrival. He then offered me the gin with a big smile on his face.

The relief that washed over me was so strong that I can still remember the sensation. It may have been a deliberate management ploy, but I was now ready to die for him. I learned so much from that wonderful man. He was a joy to serve, and the whole experience of working for him, from then on until we went ashore in the Islands, proved to be stimulating and happy. He was tough, uncompromising, devoted, thoughtful and utterly loyal to his team. Why the system subsequently missed him out from the South Atlantic Honours List remains another of those strange mysteries that are beyond the understanding of us ordinary mortals.

And the 'gnasher-basher' (dentist)? He did not apologise or explain - but luckily, I never had to speak to him again.

To my surprise I then discovered that although we now had the Plymouth-based Surgical Support Team Two (SST 2) embarked, someone had ordered their colleagues in SST 1 to return to their base at Haslar, in Portsmouth, and then take passage south in HMS Hermes, instead of remaining with us. It was a strange decision, because they were supposedly earmarked and dedicated to the Royal Marines, and had been given both the appropriate equipment and training for this task. I assumed that this unforeseen dilution of our surgical capabilities had been authorised by the Brigade Commander in my absence. After all, he was the ultimate 'owner' of this wartime asset, but it later transpired that Julian Thompson had not been consulted at all. As a result, half of our surgical capability and expertise had been chopped out without his permission...

I tried to console myself with the thought that they would be available to the 'Carrier' part of the Task Force in the event of some disaster before we got to the Falklands, and indeed was delighted later on that they proved useful in the aftermath of the attack on HMS Sheffield, but it was the first inkling of the kind of attitude that Julian and I would encounter later on, when the Brigade's medical organisation was subject to a hijacking attempt by another senior Naval medical officer who suddenly turned up down south.

The medical officers (MOs) of 40 and 42 Commando were Surgeon Lieutenants Mike Hayward and Ross Adley respectively, both green-bereted. 3 Para's MO was Captain John Burgess of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC); as his reinforcement, he had a charming Ulsterman named John Graham, also a RAMC Captain. Worryingly, I noticed that neither JG nor his staff were Airborne trained; they had not completed P Company, or acquired their parachute 'wings'. This would seriously limit my options to deploy them forward as battle casualty replacements in the event of death or injury in the 3 Para medical team. An amusing incident then took place which resulted in disciplinary action having to be taken later on. Five Royal Marines driving heavy lorries in 42 Cdo had brought the embarking unit's baggage up from Plymouth, and also brought their own kit along as well. They parked the vehicles neatly, handed their 'work tickets' in to the military Command Post that had now been established on the dock, and then smuggled themselves on board. They owned up eventually, and were paraded in front of their CO who, while trying to keep a straight face, sentenced them to 'stoppage of shore leave' for a month!

Finally, and almost unbelievably, everyone was over the brow, inboard - and we were ready to go. As the sun dipped below the horizon and daylight slowly faded, we cast off. The Para and Royal Marines bands struck up Sailing and Land of Hope and Glory as the liner edged out into Southampton Water. Cars honked their horns and flashed headlights as Canberra gathered way, her decks lined with thoughtful men, some shedding silent tears as the town of Hamble slipped slowly by along the port side. It was a most emotional moment. Twenty-seven of us would never see England again.

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Loud bangs, in pairs, woke me up. The noises had a brassy, metallic quality and seemed very close. Pulling down the blackout curtain on the cabin scuttle revealed a bright flash occurring just before each sound. Then I remembered that the big guided missile destroyer HMS Antrim was due to provide naval gunfire support for the initial attack on Fanning Head. An Argentine OP (Observation Post) had been spotted in the area, and the boys of the SBS (Special Boat Squadron) were being put in there just as soon

as a preparatory dose of 4.5 inch high explosive warheads had been dispensed.

After putting on more warm clothing, I walked up to the midships flight deck, and stepped out of the red-lit corridor into a chilly darkness. It took a few minutes to gain night vision. The stars of the southern night sky were brilliant and unfamiliar, but all around us was complete blackness. I had brought my binoculars and was feeling my way up to the Officer's sun deck on the port side when HMS Antrim opened up again. From my unprotected vantage point the noise was almost painful. The thunderclap of firing rolled unchecked over the flat calm of Falkland Sound, each shell followed by a long yellow tongue of flame that briefly stabbed out into the darkness. Two, maybe three, seconds later came a distant 'kerr-ump' as the shells impacted on Fanning Head.

We were at anchor while the initial assault waves went in from Norland, Fearless and Intrepid, but the plan was then to move Canberra into San Carlos Water at around first light. Down in the Pacific Restaurant, breakfast tasted good, with anxiety about today's programme of events fuelling my appetite. The stewards were a subdued lot for once, although it was noticeable that Antrim's percussion section was inaudible in the centre of the ship.

The first fingers of light appeared in the east as we then moved silently under Fanning Head to our anchor position. The two picks went down with a tumbling roar of chain paying out from the bows, and I found myself standing next to Lieutenant Colonel Nick Vaux. The CO of 42 Commando RM was obviously fretful at being held in reserve for the initial assault. From the bridge, in the gradually lightening gloom, we could make out the shapes of two LSLs gliding past us, then the familiar outline of RFA Stromness. Over on Fanning Head, a machine gun opened up silently, the red tracer blips streaking in a long curving arc before bouncing and ricocheting at the base of the hill. The SBS were obviously in a fire fight, but this 'Brock's benefit' firework show seemed to be a bit one-sided.

Dawn broke imperceptibly, the violet layers next to the skyline gradually brightening through deep indigo to blue, then changing to orange as the sun's disc rose above the eastern horizon. It was going to be a clear and bright blue sky. Good news for our helicopters certainly, but also wonderful flying weather for any Argentine Air Force planes who might be hunting for us. They must have spotted the landing force fleet by now.

On cue, and on time, the Sea King helicopters of 846 Squadron began to line up in the hover out to Canberra's port side. Their Rolls Royce Gnome engines had a characteristic whistling roar which was blended to the nasal whine of their six-bladed tail rotors. You could shut your eyes but still be sure of correct identification by listening. The netted loads of first and second-line ammunition were lifted from the midships flight deck, then taken ashore, suspended in cargo nets that swung gently beneath their boat-shaped fuselages.

In the clearer light we could also see little groups of landing craft streaming past, taking the men of 3 Para into Port San Carlos. They were about an hour late, but this seemed to be the only hitch in the complex choreography of an amphibious assault that had otherwise gone like clockwork. The Ops Room was busy, but the airwaves were silent because of the embargo on all electronic communication. No one could tell me if the landings were being opposed or not. If there were any casualties sustained, then Stephen Hughes of 2 Para, John Burgess of 3 Para, David Griffiths of 45 Cdo and Mike Hayward of 40 Cdo would simply have to do their best - until I arrived sometime after dawn with the means to get their wounded out vertically.

An hour after sun-up there was still no sign of my Wessex 5, but then suddenly Lt Cdr Mike Crabtree and his crew were out there and closing. They were marshalled onto the forward deck and then allowed to shut down. The crew had already been flying for more than three hours after inserting the SBS and their kit into Fanning Head, so a quick and restorative cup of coffee and a bacon sarnie were in order before we departed.

The run down to San Carlos Settlement was uneventful as Mike Crabtree checked the map, and Lt Hector Heathcote (co-pilot) flew the aircraft. Turning into wind, we landed on Falklands soil for the very first time, and I ran over to the nearest men who were digging slit trenches. Some of the camouflage-creamed faces were recognizable as Marines of 40 Commando. They reassured me that the landing on Blue Beach had been a piece of uneventful routine so far. Two young children then appeared, and ran out to look at the Wessex, this new phenomenon in their lives. I went over to say hello to them too. They were chubby-

cheeked and pink-faced, and one shyly gave me a sweet. I grinned and jerked my thumb at the noisy helicopter, 'burning and turning' on the grass behind me. The elder one smiled, reached into her anorak and gave me another Murraymint - this one for the pilot!

Next, we flew to Red Beach, the Brigade codename for Ajax Bay, and landed on a convenient piece of concrete hardstanding nearby. Our reception here was much less friendly. One of 45 Commando's corporals invited us, in a classic piece of paraphrasing, to investigate 'sex and travel'; he thought that they were being mortared. I persisted, remembering why we had actually come in the first place, but apparently there were no casualties here either. We needed no second bidding though if we really were under Argentine mortar attack. The Wessex rose swiftly into the cold air, and turned back over the deserted refrigeration plant.

Jock Inglis, one of my Medical Squadron marines, had told me that the abandoned freezing compartments were big enough to play football in. Interesting, but it would probably take a lot of time and effort to get ready as a field medical facility or dressing station. Hopefully, and with Northwood's promised 'air superiority', the highly capable action medical organisation in Canberra was going to be all that we needed.

As we climbed away, I had time to lean out of the door and take in a few details. Along the front of the main building, which was shaped like a 'T', there was a narrow concrete track. This road led down to a broken pier, past a huge stack of red and rusting oil drums. The ground looked horrible - wet, muddy and very stony. The whole place reminded me of a long disused municipal rubbish dump.

After refuelling the aircraft on the Fearless flight deck, we distributed the last of the morphine to the various ships. Minutes after returning to Canberra, the first formal casevac request also came in to her Ops Room. The grid reference made very little sense until we asked for it to be repeated, and then found that the figures were in a form of code that we did not possess! Some rummaging in an adjoining stationery store provided a potential correct answer, and away we went. Right at the head of San Carlos Water we then saw a discharging red smoke grenade, and landed on the foreshore nearby. Our customer was a chap from 2 Para who had badly twisted his back after stumbling, in the darkness, into a small creek.

I quickly assessed the patient's condition, agreed with the Para medic's provisional diagnosis, then went back to the helicopter to get a stretcher. Consternation! Unbelievable stupidity! We had actually forgotten to bring one! What the hell were we going to do? Corporal Kevin Gleeson, the Royal Marines aircrewman, was equal to the failures of my planning and common sense. He just disconnected the canvas seating on the starboard side, and ripped the tubular aluminium out of its holding clips to make a crude, lightweight stretcher, onto which we then gently lifted the very uncomfortable paratrooper.

It seemed a slightly crazy thing to do, but in the morning sunlight I then stepped back to take a picture of this historic event. Here was the first casualty of the land phase of the South Atlantic campaign. If you now study the resulting photo carefully, you can clearly see the bewilderment written on the medic's face as he looks up at the camera, with Kev Gleeson crouching beside him. I think that his innermost thoughts at that moment were probably along the lines of 'What the bloody hell is this crazy Naval doctor up to now?'

There was another task waiting when we returned to Canberra, but this turned into a wild goose chase. The saga only ended when we queried the grid reference, only to find that it was the first set of numbers once more, only wrongly decoded this time! While refuelling on Fearless again, I raced up to the Brigade Ops Room to protest. I asked the Duty Officer responsible for these matters to give any casevac tasking positions to us in an uncoded form from now on. There was a slight risk of enemy interception, but we could accept this rather than be sent on fools' errands by human coding mistakes. The anti-flash hooded figure agreed.

My remonstrations then attracted the attention of the Officer Commanding SBS. He was desperate to visit his men up on Fanning Head, but could not find a helicopter to take him up there. Apparently there were some Argentine casualties up on the feature as well, so I offered him a ride, which he gratefully accepted. He grabbed his M-16 rifle and, after strapping in, we lifted off again.

Seconds later we had a new task. There had been some sort of incident involving helicopters up near the

Port San Carlos settlement. We raced up to the scene, but apparently got too close to the forward edge of the battle area. Mike suddenly noticed a line of paratroopers, in attacking formation, advancing beneath him. Some of them were waving him away and back to San Carlos Water. He pulled the Wessex around again in a steep, diving turn that brought us very close to the sea. Having beaten this hasty retreat, we slowed up to collect our senses once more. A closer look at the map, followed by a reduced speed to study the ground more closely, and we were suddenly on top of the reported incident. Mike landed into wind but said nothing. OC SBS and I got out to see what was going on, and were greeted by an awful sight.

With its back broken and the long green tail boom folded back on itself, a Gazelle of 3 Cdo Brigade's Air Squadron lay on the slope before us. I had time to note that the large cockpit transparency must have been destroyed in the air, because there were no Plexiglas fragments on the ground around it, as I had seen in two previous Gazelle training accidents that I had attended. Most of the cockpit contents were strewn over the grass instead, including its two crew members. The pilot and air gunner were intact, but both dead, their flying suits stained with blood. The two paratroopers who had stayed behind had done all they could, but to no avail.

I recognised the pilot as Lt Ken Francis, a bright Royal Marines officer who had flown me down to Culdrose in Cornwall only three or four months before. He had been killed by a bullet that had come up through the cockpit floor and passed on into his flying helmet, nearly severing the chin strap. Death would have been instantaneous, and the aircraft out of control as it plunged to the ground. The crewman also had several bullet wounds to the chest and trunk, and would have also died quickly.

I had some quick decisions to take now. It just seemed morally wrong to leave these bodies out on that beautiful hillside; I was aware of a local predatory rook-sized bird called a striated kara-kara that preyed on sick and injured sheep. The Paras helped me to pick the two bodies up and carry them back to the Wessex. We also removed a machine gun and code books from the wreckage of the Gazelle. Our hearts were heavy as we flew our two dead colleagues back to Canberra, where I passed them down the ramp into the care of my Fleet Chief, the redoubtable Bryn Dobbs.

I still don't see how I could have acted differently, and yet retained a clear conscience, but our actions were later to be a source of great sadness and regret for the

relations of Ken Francis, because his body, and that of Brett Giffen, his air gunner, were later committed to the sea rather than being returned to the UK.

Next, we flew up to Fanning Head. I was greeted by the SBS Sergeant Major with that classic phrase which I had heard so often (and still hear from time to time): "Hello sir, what the hell are you doing here?" Ted E and I roared with laughter, shook hands and clapped each other on the back - we were old chums, meeting up again right in the middle of nowhere.

There were three Argentine wounded to evacuate after Mike had completed a little stores-shifting job for the SBS Troop. We had also brought them some more ammunition to replace what had been used up in the earlier firepower display. This we were entitled to do, as the Wessex was not marked with Red Crosses. The conscript prisoners looked absolutely terrified, and apparently believed the stories they had been told by their superiors that the British were rather fond of eating any prisoners that they captured! Even though they had been expertly treated by the SBS medics with battlefield splints and bandages for their bullet wounds, they were still very wary.

I decided to take the injured Argentines back to Canberra as well because, although there were orders saying prisoners should not be flown in helicopters, there was really nowhere else for them to go on this day. Perhaps, also, if the Junta HQ in Buenos Aires was told that Argentine wounded were being treated in Canberra, it might then leave the liner alone. I took some more photos and we flew back to the Great White Whale in two trips, because cabin floor space for stretchers was very limited. The Argentine lads all had high-velocity gunshot wounds of the legs, so they were definitely going to need surgery.

Somewhere around midday the casevac tasks were temporarily complete, so Mike Crabtree elected to refuel once more, and then return to Canberra's forward deck. With its nylon lashings secured, the Wessex helicopter's four blades slowed to a halt and her engines shut down at last.

Deep in the hull of the ship, life went on normally. The Pacific Restaurant was being cleared after lunch, but the staff arranged a quick resupply of rolls and ham for the four of us. Up in the Stadium, things had been more hectic as the resuscitation tasks and detailed assessment of numerous casualties continued against a background of repeated air raids and Tannoy warnings. As we walked from the Stadium theatre through to what was once the Bonito Night club, the metallic voice boomed out again: "D'ye hear there? This is the bridge. An attack on the anchorage is developing from the North. Two aircraft inbound - TAKE COVER...TAKE COVER!" All around us people dropped, as if pole-axed, to the shiny corridor floors.

Pressing ourselves into an unyielding surface, arms clutched tightly in protection over our heads, we could hear the reverberating echo of the machine guns up on the bridge superstructure as they engaged the attackers. The noise was a bit like a roadmender's pneumatic drill, and seemed to become amplified as it carried through the ship's aluminium superstructure. There was also a sudden 'whoosh' - was that the Argentine jet going past? 'Blowpipe' muttered someone in the dim passageway, the name of a shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missile that I had also seen up on the bridge deck. Shortly afterwards, the 'All clear' was given, and I was munching my ham roll when the next Tannoy order came. "Launch the casevac helicopter..." Captain Chris Burne, Canberra's Senior Naval Officer, then gave a brief situation report, much appreciated by his thousand strong and entirely captive audience. The Leander Class frigate HMS Argonaut had been damaged in an air attack and was asking for help with her injured.

Up on the forward flight deck the lashings were off the Wessex by the time I arrived, and Mike Crabtee had already started one engine. Moments later we were easing up into the air and away again. The helicopter took a direct line to the damaged frigate, easily visible as she curved around Fanning Head towards the north end of Falkland Sound, her funnel smoking more heavily than usual. Mike positioned the Wessex over her boiling wake, with the cabin door looking down to an empty flight deck. Donning the winch strop and sitting on the doorstep, it all seemed clear for my transfer, but the Flight Deck Officer stubbornly refused us. His arms remained crossed - instead of beckoning the Wessex in towards him with his control bats.

The stand-off seemed to continue for ages - probably a minute or more - before the aircrewman tapped me on the shoulder. l unplugged my helmet electrical lead, and he operated the winch motor control lever to swing me up and out of the aircraft to begin the short descent to the flight deck, about twenty feet below. The Wessex now moved sideways and directly over the flight deck, then suddenly dipped its bulbous nose towards the sea and began to accelerate away from the frigate.

I cursed Mike Crabtree's apparent lack of concern for my welfare, and struggled to regain the cabin. By now we were pulling round to the left in a tight turn at low level, really moving fast over the waves. Plugging in again, I had no time to complain. The crewman saw and heard me join the intercom circuit and said briefly: "Air Raid Red, sir, enemy aircraft coming in..." I knelt in the cabin doorway again, my pulse racing, and noticed that we were crossing a small beach under Fanning Head and, as the nose reared up to slow the helicopter down, I looked upwards. Two menacing shapes flashed above us, their stubby delta wings easily recognizable as A4 Skyhawks. We settled in a small gully to take stock of the situation, and as we did so, the air seemed full of snow. It was 'chaff', the metallized nylon fibres thrown up by HMS Argonaut in a last-ditch attempt to deflect her oncoming attackers.

A little later, Mike Crabtree lifted the Wessex off the ground, and moved off along and then up the hillside, following the line of a stream coming down a small re-entrant. At one point the gully widened out, about 600 feet above sea level, and with some careful precision hovering he was able to position the aircraft on the ground with its starboard main wheel on the slightly raised bank of the stream. The cabin machine gun could now be swung in a wide defensive arc of fire that would not intersect with the spinning rotor blades. More attacks were developing on the Naval picket line out in Falkland Sound, so we settled down to watch, as well as wait for the chance to get airborne again.

By now, the tactical radio net was very busy as various ships called the developing air strikes. Every so often our faces split into wide grins as the net controller in HMS Brilliant announced another downed Argentine aircraft. The Sea Harriers, on their CAP (Combat Air Patrol) stations to the north and south were proving lethal to the Daggers and Skyhawks, whether the latter were inbound to their targets or exiting on their way back to the Argentine mainland. The British successes came as a crisp and laconic radio call 'Hello all stations, this is the CAP - Splash one A-4', but to the thin grey Naval picket line in Falkland Sound and the Landing Force ships behind them in San Carlos Water, these words carried huge

encouragement.

It suddenly struck me, with total clarity, that I was watching history in the making, as well as the phenomenon of history repeating itself. Here was a group of Royal Navy warships, spread out in a line below us, taking on a well-handled enemy air force and protecting all the stores and troop ships huddled behind them. It had been much the same in Crete, forty-one years (almost to the month) earlier, when twenty RN ships were lost and over two thousand sailors had been killed or wounded to save the British Army Expeditionary Force as it struggled to get off the island, and escape captivity after a dangerous passage to Alexandria. I felt very calm - and very proud.

In the distance we could see another attack begin on the ships at the southern end of Falkland Sound. A black dot appeared above the horizon, then dipped, swooping in low and fast, then left two towering plumes of water where its bombs straddled the elderly Type 12 frigate, HMS Plymouth. The dot was now recognisable as a Dagger fighter bomber which climbed up and turned away from us, towards the distant Argentine mainland. Its jet engine reheat was lit and clearly visible as it twisted and weaved to make good its escape. Too late. A thin white line joined HMS Broadsword's foredeck to the fleeing Argentine aircraft, which silently exploded, dissolving into metal confetti.

As Corporal Kevin Gleeson and I punched each other on the arm with excitement and laughter, I did not realise that what we had seen would be very important evidence to the Argentine pilot's family some seventeen years later. Our headphones then crackled again: "Four bandits bearing 070 at twenty miles inbound at low level and closing fast..." Kneeling on the cabin floor, I grabbed a handhold and hung out of the doorway for a better look.

Nothing. To the north and east there was nothing but blue sky and puffy white clouds.

It was a very unpleasant feeling to be sitting there, waiting for the air attack to begin, and basically being powerless to do anything about it. I had a very uncomfortable sensation in the pit of my stomach, as if someone had poured iced water into my belly. My mind suddenly switched, quite improbably, to events at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Lord Nelson had arranged the British ships into two columns that bore steadily down on the combined French and Spanish line. Although they would eventually smash through that line in two places and begin its destruction, for about half an hour, the crew of HMS Victory were in range of the French and Spanish broadsides, yet unable to bring their own guns to bear. They simply had to endure the wait, and a great deal of physical punishment, before they could fire back. This was the same sort of scenario, of forced inaction before your own weapons could open up. But what if the attackers saw us first in our little helicopter, sitting on the hillside? Might they go for that easier target rather than engage one of the two Seawolf-equipped frigates at centre stage out there in the Sound? Where were these Argy jets anyway? Was I looking in the right direction?

As I swung back in to the cabin in order to check the bearing, Corporal Gleeson pointed upwards past my shoulder. From the north, accelerating as they dived in line astern, four Argentine Daggers began their attack on HMS Antrim. Like a mother tiger prowling restlessly in the neck of San Carlos Water, protecting her cubs in the den behind her, the big County Class destroyer began to spit back her defiance. The line of splashes caused by the Dagger cannon shells now met her tall grey flanks, and for several seconds she absorbed dozens of direct hits. The fourth aircraft had other ideas. Disturbed by the rising cloud of red tracer coming up to meet him, he suddenly broke off to his left and straightened up, heading directly for us and Fanning Head. Without hesitation, Corporal Gleeson reached for his machine-gun, cocked it, and began to fire defiantly at the lethal outline that we now saw expanding rapidly above and before us. I was completely transfixed. Were those leading edges of the Dagger twinkling with cannon fire directed at us?

My decision was reflex. Jumping down, and taking half a dozen strides away from the Wessex, I dived straight into the ditch beside the stream. Better a clean death here from a 30 mm shell through the head, rather than incineration and fragmentation in a whirling maelstrom of ruptured fuel tanks and broken rotor blades...

But the end did not come in the blinding flash of agony that I was half-expecting. Instead, when I lifted my head again, the Wessex was still sitting noisily behind me, and there was no sign of the Dagger. Once again the skies were clear, and HMS Antrim began another circuit of her endless racetrack pattern. Picking myself out of the ditch I noticed that one trouser leg was wet and muddy, and that my helmet

visor had jammed down after its violent contact with the ground.

I walked around to the front and side of the Wessex, and got a 'thumbs-up' signal from Hector to allow me to approach the aircraft again. Climbing back up into the cabin, I was totally ignored by Kevin Gleeson as he made the machine-gun safe. Mike Crabtree's first words to me as I plugged back in on the intercom had a gently sarcastic ring: "Oh - you back with us then, Doc?" He and his crew had been forced to remain strapped in throughout the incident. Unlike me, they had been given no chance to run away, and I felt very ashamed and humbled at my terror in the face of the enemy. I didn't know it then, but those feelings were to be of great benefit to me a short time afterwards, but just at that moment I was rather miserable about my failures as a warrior.

Down on the beach there was movement near the water's edge, as two heads suddenly popped up above the surface. Frogmen? No, just two seals that played among the kelp beds for a few moments, then dived again to escape the crazy antics of man.

Out in Falkland Sound, the 'Thin Grey Line' of six frigates and the destroyer continued their courageous fight against the Argentine Air Force and Naval Air Arm. We then saw a few more dots above the horizon, then a distant flash and smoke, and we cheered again, thinking that Seawolf might have gobbled up another victim. But then the tactical net repeated the four-letter call sign of the ship that had been hit. It was HMS Ardent that we could just see at the base of that column of black smoke. Mike and I discussed what to do. We both felt that we must go to her assistance, but were unsure whether or not it was safe to get into the air again. There was no-one else to ask. The decision had to be ours.

The inspirational answer came almost immediately as HMS Plymouth's Wasp helicopter rushed past us, nose down for maximum speed, making the transit to Canberra with the casualties from HMS Argonaut that we had originally been tasked to collect. This particular Fleet Air Arm pilot, a chap called John Dransfield, had obviously decided that the requirement for his services exceeded the risk associated with providing them. His unsung but inspired bravery was just what we needed at that critical moment. Mike lifted the collective lever, trimmed the cyclic stick forward to gain speed, and soon we were filling our near empty fuel tanks once more on HMS Fearless. I ran to the main ramp area leading down to the Tank Deck and grabbed two new-looking, winchable stretchers. The Chief Petty Officer of the Flight Deck came over to query my actions, but waved me on as soon as he heard that Ardent had been hit, and that we were on our way to help. A true sailor will give everything he has for a brother seafarer in distress. However, as I discovered later, another individual who thought very little of me had a rather different interpretation for these actions!

We took the direct route to the scene of Ardent's bombing, climbing to cross the Sussex Mountains south of Ajax Bay. It was ground still held by the enemy as far we knew, so Mike, a Commando helicopter instructor, hugged the contours of the ground as we sped along. Over the hump of this ridge and descending, we in the back were denied the sight at which they suddenly fell silent up in the cockpit. Downwind of the burning ship, an acrid smell pervaded the cabin as we flew through a thick pall of black smoke. The Wessex came to a hover again, 30 feet above the swell and just off Ardent's port quarter. Now silenced ourselves, the crewman and I stared out.

What a sight! The Type 21 frigate lay still in the water, listing and drifting. Her lovely, classic lines had been obscenely defaced by some demented giant who had smashed her helicopter hangar in and also opened up the flight deck edge with a huge tin opener. Deep inside this enormous, blackened hole with its ragged edges, the fires of Hell were burning. The flames had a bright orange intensity that was painful to look at directly. Reaching for my camera once again, to photograph this blazing wound, I found to my disgust that there were no exposures left. While I was feeling in all my jacket pockets for another film, Mike and Hector noticed that Ardent's survivors were now mainly grouped on the upper deck, forward of the bridge. Some were already in their Day-Glo emergency survival suits, but almost all of them were pointing at the sea off to the port quarter.

The pilots then spotted two survivors in the water, and Mike immediately moved the Wessex across to get into position above them for a rescue. Corporal Gleeson started the pre-winching safety checks. As a passenger, I had no part to play in this retrieval process, so I continued searching for a fresh roll of film in my various pockets, at the same time watching the seamanship of HMS Yarmouth's captain as he put the elderly Type 12 frigate's stern right next to Ardent's bow. The survivors began to scramble across and down. Then I realised that Kevin Gleeson was having trouble with the first survivor, so I crawled over on

my knees to the cabin door, looked down - and could immediately see why.

The man was drowning.

The downwash from the helicopter's rotor blades was whipping the surface of the sea into a thick spray, through which I could see his agonised expression as he floundered helplessly. The lifting strop that was dangling just in front of his face was also jumping around; he just could not grasp the thing, let alone slip it over his shoulders.

In a flash, I knew that I had to do something, and quickly. I'd had some experience of winching during my time at Culdrose, and this part of the problem was down to me to solve. Replacing the camera in my pocket, and still smarting from the moral disgrace of my behaviour at Fanning Head, I volunteered to go down and get this drowning young man. Corporal Gleeson looked at me strangely, then started talking on the intercom to Mike. I was told later that he was expressing his doubts as to whether I'd be able to do anything useful, but Mike knew my Fleet Air Arm background, and gave his command approval for me to try. The aircrewman shrugged, winched the strop back up, grabbed it and placed it around my shoulders and beneath my arms.

The world suddenly went strangely quiet as I made ready, sensing that I was about to face a serious physical challenge. Seconds later, I was descending towards the surface of the sea. A lot of memories came back at the rush. Winchmen were usually properly dressed in immersion clothing, and were always earthed via a braided copper discharge wire before they made contact with the ground or sea, to disperse the likely build-up of static voltage.

There was no time for this nicety here. The discharging electrostatic shock was most unpleasant, and only just preceded the even worse shock of immersion. They told me later that the water temperature was 3 degrees Centigrade. All I knew was that a sudden and numbing cold had enveloped my whole body as I gasped for breath. I could also feel my heart slowing, and my peripheral vision began to dim as the heart's output dropped and my retinas became less perfused.

All the while Mike, with marvellous precision flying, was towing me across the swell towards the survivor. The desperate look on the man's face, his frantic thrashings and punctured life jacket said it all. A fresh adrenaline surge kicked in, and I forgot my own discomfort. Our outstretched hands touched, grasped - and then I managed to spin him around in the water, and got him gripped in a fierce bear hug. My fingers locked tightly together in front of his chest, and I waited, unable to look up to the helicopter above us. There would be no other way to lift him.

Very gently, Mike lifted the Wessex up about ten feet, and the strain came on my arms as we left the buoyant support of the sea. It hurt, and I felt a something tear suddenly in my left shoulder blade area, but I also realised at the same time that if I could no longer hold on to this survivor, he would drop straight back into the sea, and we would never see him again. I begged my shoulder muscles not to weaken in this moment of crisis. It seemed an agonisingly slow process, but Kevin Gleeson was winching us up very gently. He knew what I was going through.

The aircrewman then displayed genuine skill and real strength in getting us both back into the cabin. He had to raise us almost up into the winch motor housing above the door, making small, precise control movements with his left hand, and then pull hard on my clothing with his right hand as he reversed the winch control and began paying out the wire so he could draw us back in to safety. The blood now flowed back into my arms and shoulders as I collapsed beside the survivor on the cabin floor. We'd done it!

I compressed the casualty's chest hard, looking for some confirmation of life, and was rewarded with a vomited gout of sea water. The young lad then opened his eyes, and was violently sick again. I picked myself up off the floor, sat on the canvas seating, and breathed a huge sigh of pride and relief, realising that I had now done at least one genuinely useful thing in my life. As a team, and against the odds, we had saved another human being from death! I felt really pleased with myself, and especially so that I'd shown my new chum Kevin Gleeson, a Royal Marines Corporal, that although I'd behaved like a tosser up on Fanning Head, I was in reality made of much sterner stuff. Or was I?

I looked across at Kevin and smiled, receiving a warm grin back. He then made a hand signal with his thumb up and a querying expression on his face. I nodded, putting my own thumb up, confirming that I

was OK, whereupon he turned his hand into a fist, with the forefinger pointing downwards. Then I remembered. There was someone else down there. In a cruel mockery of the poet John Masefield's famous line - I had to 'go down to the sea again'...

The aircrewman looked at me anxiously as I donned the winch strop once more, then gave me an encouraging pat on the back as he swung me out of the Wessex for the second time. During this descent, a twist that had developed in the winch wire caused me to spiral slowly as the wire paid out.

A mad Cinerama projection unfolded before my eyes. The burning outline of Ardent, with her crew watching, was followed by the profile of HMS Yarmouth, then HMS Broadsword, now close to us for anti-aircraft protection. After that came Grantham Sound, the Falklands shore, and then Ardent again. I watched, somewhat stunned and rather chilled, until I was just above the surface, when a new sight appeared on the merry-go-round. Lying there quietly in the swell, arms outstretched and blood streaming downsea from amputated fingers and a huge cut on his scalp, the second survivor watched me with uncomprehending eyes. He later told me that because he could not see the winch wire I was suspended from, he thought I was the Archangel Gabriel coming to collect him!

Bang! The horrid static voltage discharged through my body again, and then I was in the water alongside him. I knew that I was now too weak to lift him out manually, and thought instead about slipping the single strop and placing it around his shoulders. I would have to take my chances in the interim, including the possibility that my helicopter might be driven off if another air attack came in. Such a prospect was not an attractive one.

Instinct saved the day. At the top of each swell, the taut winch wire went slack, flexing sufficiently to allow me to reach up and get the winch hook into a small nylon becket on the front of his life jacket. In reality, it shouldn't have worked, but it did, and together we were lifted up to the safety of the helicopter's cabin. My jaw was now rattling with cold, so Mike Crabtree ordered the door closed, and put the cabin heaters on full blast. Agonisingly, slowly, sensation returned. I could now feel things with my fingers again, and they touched the little Olympus camera still in my combat jacket pocket. It was ruined...

We delivered our customers to Canberra, then Mike said: "Well done Doc. Bloody marvellous -" After the events of Fanning Head I felt a lot better, and we were now all square as we flew back to the scene. By this time, Ardent had been abandoned because the fire aft had taken such a hold that her main magazines were about to blow. We were ordered clear, so instead I winched down with the two special stretchers to HMS Yarmouth, which had taken all the survivors aboard. In the emergency sick bay that had been made out of the frigate's wardroom, the young MO was living up to his name. Surgeon Lieutenant Andy Cope was in complete control, pointing out the seriously injured to me for high priority of evacuation, while calmly suturing two lacerated scalps. It was really terrific stuff, and I was very proud of him. That pride was tinged with sadness however, because HMS Ardent's medical officer, Surgeon Lieutenant Simon Ridout, was last seen floating in the sea having been blown over the side. He was missing, presumed dead.

Both stretchers, and some of the men of Ardent with burns or minor injuries were then winched up from Yarmouth's flight deck into one of the stream of helicopters that had arrived to help. We travelled up Falkland Sound, and then round into San Carlos Water, before slowing to come alongside Canberra. The remainder of the subdued, hollow-eyed and tired survivors then transferred onto a moored pontoon, then climbed the gangway up and into the liner's embarkation door. Still damp from my immersion, I joined them.

What happened next will live with me for the rest of my life. The men of 42 Commando RM were waiting patiently in the darkened corridors for their call forward to go ashore. They were all dressed in full battle gear, with camouflage cream on their faces. As the Ardent survivors, for the most part still wearing their anti-flash hoods and gloves, and stinking of firesmoke, stumbled past them in the narrowed passageways, the Marines of 42 Commando quietly applauded, patting some of them on the back with whispered thanks. Ardent's defiant stand against hopeless odds had not gone unappreciated. Royal owed Jack for that, and Royal was now going ashore to sort the Argies out. Many of the Ardents were in tears.

Onboard Canberra, they'd been very busy and, as dusk fell, the Action Medical Organisation swung into top gear. Now, with the risk of air attack gone, the surgeons could work on their patients without interruption, and they started on their long lists. A quick tour of the Bonito Club revealed my two rescued

survivors asleep but comfortable. Both had injuries of sufficient severity to require morphine, and I noted that the first one, an Able Seaman named John Dillon, was lying next to one of the Argentine soldiers that we had lifted earlier in the day from Fanning Head!

As I stared at the second survivor, a bearded Chief Petty Officer, he opened his eyes and looked at me. His parched lips were moving. I bent closer to hear the words, and his whispered thanks meant a lot. I then remembered that someone had given me a paper cup with a tot of rum in it, so with Dr Peter Mayner's approval, I moistened his lips and tongue with a few drops of rum from my finger. Chief Ken Enticknap's face relaxed into a smile, and an instant later he was asleep again. Later, as I changed into dry clothing in my small cabin, another message came through. Simon Ridout had, quite miraculously, survived after all and was now in the Captain's bath in HMS Broadsword. The relief of that news was quickly forgotten with the next Command bombshell. Canberra was being ordered to sail that night, away from San Carlos and any repeat of all the day's danger, away to the safety of South Georgia.

I sought out Roger Wilkes for an urgent discussion. He and his staff had been busy all day, and there was still work to do. We had to get the green-bereted element of the team off quickly, and as there were no cranes or helicopters to unload the freight chacons on the upper deck, it was pointless taking No. 3 Medical Troop ashore, or even the excellent stretcher bearers from our Band. He asked if he could keep them on board in the first instance, which seemed a sensible move, at least until we had found out exactly what facilities were available on land. Also, at the back of my mind was a realistic, but rather cold-blooded awareness that if any of us were killed in the next few days, we would need to be replaced - by those held in reserve on Canberra.

I don't think Erich Bootland was very happy at first with my decision, but it was a case of 'needs must'. The headquarters of Medical Squadron and the Plymouth-based SST 2 were now to get ashore, as soon as possible, and go to Red Beach, the codename for Ajax Bay. There (we thought) we would be meeting up again with Malcolm Hazell and his boys of No. 1 Medical Troop plus their stores from the LSL Sir Lancelot, and also the PCT (Parachute Clearing Troop) off the North Sea ferry Norland.

Hurriedly, we assembled what kit we could man-pack, mainly surgical instruments, blood and medical replenishment stores. My wet clothing was still hanging up to dry in the cabin. I had no proper military boots, only wellies. In the tearing rush to get down to the loading area on time, we all left little but important things behind.

Then, if that wasn't all complication enough, I was then handed a strange signal on my way down to board the landing craft for our journey ashore. It stated, in contradiction to the previous instructions, that the Canberra medical and surgical personnel leaving the ship were not to go to Red Beach at all, but to HMS Fearless instead! This signal did not appear to originate from Brigade HQ, and although the custom of the Royal Navy is normally to 'obey the last pipe', I had sufficient doubts about the message's authenticity to question its content.

We had long ago agreed that although she was a splendid ship, HMS Fearless was nearly useless as a surgical facility, so the rationale underlying this slightly weird instruction did not make any sense. It was difficult to know what to do, but I decided that it would be better to sort the whole problem out come the next morning. The Canberra deck officers were chafing at the bit, anxious to lift the anchor and proceed. We were delaying them.

At 0230, a big LCU (Landing Craft Utility) burbled up to lie alongside the gunport door. In pitch darkness we loaded stores, freight, baggage, weapons and personnel. Everything had happened so quickly that there was no time to make stores lists or to take stock properly. With the last metal bins and gas cylinders loaded, the LCU pulled away from Canberra's tall flanks. The liner got under way almost immediately, gathering speed as her pale and ghostly bulk disappeared in the direction of Fanning Head. Under the sparkling and clear night sky, our landing craft now chugged quietly past several darkened ships towards its destination.

About an hour later, at 0330, the ramp went down, and we struggled over the rocks in the darkness, up towards a trackway laid by the Amphibious Beach Unit. All the surgical stores, blood containers, cardboard fluid replenishment boxes, and our bergans were then carried slowly and carefully up to the main entrance of the building. Complete blackout had been enforced because of the very real risk of counter-attack from West Falkland. The Argentine commander there would have had a grandstand view

of events in Falkland Sound during D-Day, and if he was worth his pay grade, should have been getting his act together for a riposte.

Entering the darkened building, which was lit only by a couple of Tilley lamps, I found that Malcolm Hazell and his boys had got ashore safely together with all their kit. The Parachute Clearance Troop were also in residence, trying to tamp holes through the thick walls of the building for the exhaust pipes of their small electrical generators. I told them to stop. There were too many people wandering about, exploring their new surroundings and chattering.

I then ordered everyone to get their sleeping mats out and their heads down. First light was due in less than five hours, and we would have to 'stand to' then in case of a dawn attack by the enemy. My military talents in organising fire positions and clearing patrols were about what you'd expect from a Naval obstetrician, albeit a Commando-trained one. Luckily, their Lordships had quite understood this point, and we had Lieutenant Fred Cook and WO2 Terry Moran as part of the team in order to look after that side of the shop.

I took a last look around, rubbing the base of my neck and the muscle that had popped while lifting John Dillon out of the sea that afternoon. It hurt, and my whole shoulder girdle was aching from the muscular effort that had been expended. I hoped that Able Seaman Dillon was well, and wondered if I'd ever see the chap again, or if he would ever know who had rescued him. The words of the Neil Diamond song 'He ain't heavy - he's my brother' now had a very real and rather personal meaning for me. Eventually, with my mind still racing, but with a body that was totally exhausted, I fell asleep.

31MAY82

It was the Spring Bank Holiday half a world away, in England. Down here, the war went on.

The Royal Marines Mountain and Arctic Warfare Cadre took out an Argentine Special Forces lying-up position near Top Malo House. There was a brisk and vicious firefight, and three of the marines were injured in achieving total success against their opponents. I recognised two of them immediately, 'Touche' Groves and Taff Doyle, who were both colleagues from ski-ing and rugby days. Touche's 'magic lantern show' was a Sod's Opera highlight whenever he performed it, but now he was fighting for breath with a nasty gunshot wound of the chest. Taff Doyle came round from his anaesthetic wanting to know if he would still be able to 'slip his shoulder' (illegally) as a rugby hooker, as I had seen him do so often from my position just behind him in the second row. Judging by his bullet-smashed upper arm I thought it was unlikely, but could not bring myself to say so.

Our boys were followed into Ajax Bay by their opponents. The three officers and four Senior NCOs represented an unsual rank mix of the kind found in Argentine Special Forces. We prepared them for operations on their gunshot wounds, but remained wary, with their stretcher trestles placed together in one corner of the post-op area. For the first and only time during our tenure of Ajax Bay, we also posted an armed guard close by,

Another unlikely encounter then took place. Two SAS men had been flown in with gunshot wounds that were quite obviously more than 24 hours old. We knew better than to ask them about the circumstances of their injuries, and instead simply operated on them. The anaesthetist, Malcolm Jowitt, used Ketalar, an injectable and steroid-based general anaesthetic that had some occasional and highly interesting side effects. One of the SAS men, a big ex-Sapper, came round from his op and started singing bawdy rugby songs, quite tunefully, at the top of his voice!

The cabaret act was much appreciated, but when I wandered over to check that everything was going well, the other SAS soldier half rose off the stretcher, looked at me strangely - and then reached up and and grabbed my camouflage jacket. With his long hair and scruffy beard it was some seconds before I recognised him. What a strange place for a re-union! As a teenage Royal Marine trainee, Dick P was in No. 14 Recruit Troop when I had joined, over ten years before, to complete the Commando course at Lympstone. He had helped me greatly, especially on the day that I gave up, while trying to complete the Endurance Course pass-out test.

We were running back to camp, against the clock, as a syndicate of three. I'd decided that enough was enough, and that being a doctor in a Polaris submarine had suddenly become much more attractive than

this wet and muddy existence with the Royal Marines. I could (and can) still shut my eyes and recall Dick P's upturned face, pleading with me: "Come on, sir! If you don't get to the line with us, we'll have to do this bastard again tomorrow.." followed by: "Doc! PLEASE don't let us down..."

Those simple words summoned a huge tidal wave of shame that washed over me, dissolved all the fatigue, and enabled me to beat my two companions to the line - in time. From him I had learned a very simple, but life-long lesson. When you think you are beaten, and have nothing more to offer, you've only just scratched the surface of what you are really capable of...

I had heard on the grapevine that he had subsequently left the Corps, possibly to join the French Foreign Legion, or become a mercenary. Now here we were, in the middle of nowhere, clutching each other's hands like long-lost brothers, which in a sense is exactly what we were. I explained this to a group of marines who were watching my strange behaviour; they understood instantly. The sufferings endured on Woodbury Common and on the Tarzan Course were severe enough to bind together forever any men who had shared this experience. What a fantastic privilege I had been granted this day, in that I was able to repay him for his devotion and concern some ten years earlier! Dick made a good recovery, and later on went back to complete his time at Hereford, after a stint as a weapons instructor.

The television and radio crews turned up, and asked if they could film and record us. I agreed, because I knew them. Mike Nicholson and Brian Hanrahan did brief interviews with me, the contents of which I could not even recall a few minutes afterwards. The BBC pool cameraman, a nice chap called Ken Hesketh, lingered for some time on a shot of Charles Batty in theatre, carving dead meat from the large bullet exit wound of an Argentine Special Forces officer's leg. It seemed possible that it might become an image to go around the world. I sincerely hoped so.

Then, before I could do a special piece to camera for Jeremy Hands, who unlike the other two had been with us in the Canberra, one of my senior NCOs suddenly asked to see me, in private. This was a request that I instantly agreed to. Sgt S then told me, in no uncertain terms, that he totally disagreed with my decision to let the media people into Ajax Bay!

This was his privilege of course; I listened to his reasoning, which was full of the usual bias and prejudice, then pointed out two things to him. The interviewers had received nothing but the truth from me, and I also wanted the word to get back to all the wives and mothers in UK that the medical teams at Ajax Bay were doing well. We had become an effective team, and were happy in our work, but just as anxious as anyone else to finish this war and return home. We were also very proud of our track record - everyone who had made it to Ajax Bay alive had also left alive. After 107 major operations, and even in defiance of the awful wounding power of modern munitions, that was no mean achievement.

My subordinate started to bluster again, but I exercised my powers inherent in the Naval Discipline Act, and told him to 'face aft and salute' - and get back to work. Most interestingly, the same NCO asked to see me privately again while we were on the way home. I told him he was already forgiven for what he thought he might have done! He grinned cheerfully, but still apologised for his attitude. His wife had apparently written to say how much my cheerful and optimistic words had meant to everyone back home, and how from her standpoint, if the Boss of Medical Squadron seemed to be on good form, then her husband was undoubtedly OK too!

When I got back to Jeremy Hands, I mentioned to him, almost as an afterthought, the bombs next door. The 37 hours for the time fuzes had been exceeded, and that we regarded them as part of the furniture now. Jeremy was rather nervous at first, but then reassured when I told him that I was happy to stand next to the UXB in the refrigeration machinery. Ken Hesketh was not so keen, and politely declined my invitation to film the beast. That was a pity, because it would have been one of the enduring images of the war to have J. Hands Esq. telling the world that he was standing in front of an unexploded Argentine bomb that had come to rest in the British field hospital!

Sadly, Jeremy Hands died before the new Millennium was in, but I often teased him at our reunions about his missed stellar opportunity. Ken Hesketh also died early, in ill-health - possibly because of an incident in the Iran/Iraq war when he filmed too close to a unexploded chemical warfare munition that was being dealt with. The other Jeremy, Major General Jeremy Moore, had no inhibitions about seeing the UXB. A wiry and tough man who was once my Unit CO, it was all we could do to restrain him from taking a piece of the thing as a souvenir. Some of our other VIP visitors also professed interest in an inspection, but had

usually seen enough from the door of the compartment, fifteen yards away. Perhaps we were all becoming slightly 'bomb-happy'. For our part, we had almost forgotten about the two devices next door.

A remarkable Argentinian casualty arrived, the very last one from the Battle of Goose Green. Private Donato Baez had just been found, barely alive, in a water-logged trench some distance from the airfield. Like the other occupants of the trench, he had been left for dead. He had a penetrating wound of the right eye, and fractures of the right hand and left thigh as well as a rigid belly and a very low body temperature of 32 degrees C. Young Donato should not really have been alive.

Poor, dumb peasant soldier. All my marines and medics, now refreshed by some decent sleep, felt very sorry for him and proceeded to lavish fantastic care on the helpless Argentine conscript. He was surrounded with hot water bottles and foil blankets, given fresh blood, and received a warm Savlon wash for his filthy hands and feet - followed by the best surgeon in this sector of the South Atlantic for his wounds. His low temperature played havoc with the anaesthetic drugs, and Malcolm Jowitt had to ventilate him by hand for two hours after Bill's operations were successfully completed, until Donato's body warmed up and the muscle-relaxing agents could be successfully reversed.

Later on in the evening, during the daily brief to all hands, I mentioned the bombs again, plus the possibility (now passed) of their time-delayed detonation! Everyone looked a bit shocked, then highly relieved. Good fortune still flew in tandem with us. I felt sure that the Fuerza Aerea Argentina planning staff would have put a big red 'destrozado' mark through our map location, and that they would not want to waste further airstrike efforts on us.

But might we run out of ships and missiles before the enemy ran out of planes? It all promised, as the Duke of Wellington once remarked about a completely different battle, to be a rather close-run thing.

08JUN82

30 minutes after first light, the daily Wessex launched from Ajax Bay with a load of post-treatment injured. Our HQ LFFI (Land Forces Falkland Islands), or Divisional HQ as it was sometimes called, had told us, quite categorically, that Uganda would be in close this morning to make up for her absence yesterday. Foolishly, I believed them - without checking first.

With its fuel almost exhausted from inspecting Grantham and Falkland Sounds, our Wessex returned and landed outside the door for the second time. The wounded tried to hide their disappointment and pain from me, but I was really upset. Div HQ replied to my ill-concealed fury with a 'Wait - Out' on the radio.

An hour later, there was still no explanation, but a different voice came on the net as the watch-keeping officers changed over. Perhaps they had been too busy to discuss my 'minor' problem of Uganda's whereabouts? Once again, the word from on high was 'Wait - OUT'. I was feeling very frustrated and irritated by their apparent indifference.

The time had now come to investigate HMS Intrepid's potential as a large-scale forward hospital for the final battles, possibly by using the flight deck, ramp and tank decks for medical purposes, instead of just the wardroom and adjacent compartments up forward as had been previously proposed. This time, the order for a recce and report came down from Brigade, so Bill McGregor, Erich Bootland, Ian Geraghty and I took a ride out to the LPD, where we were met by a very frosty RM Major, the Amphibious Operations Officer. He must have thought this was all a fantastic plot to undermine him, because apparently this was the first time that he had even heard of a 'floating hospital' concept for his ship!

I was very surprised by this news and said so to Captain Peter Dingemans, the model of courtesy and hospitality up in his cabin. Was this another of the wretched NE's intrigues to get himself established on the operational map? I had no real way of finding out. Besides, there were a lot of far more important things to worry about.

After our brief inspection of Intrepid, we returned to report to the Captain, and found that our analysis very much concurred with his. His ship could certainly be made into an emergency medico-surgical facility and parked in Barclay Sound, to the north of Port Stanley, but she would be a very poor choice. No seafarer likes to remain static and anchored while at war. Equally worrying were the large quantities of field engineer stores tucked away down below. These would obviously be needed for the rebuilding of

Stanley. So, why should anyone think of ditching them, in order to make room for emergency hospital facilities that might not be required for anything other than the short term?

After a quick lunch we then went over to the Atlantic Causeway by landing craft. The big container-ship, sister of the ill-fated Atlantic Conveyor, was a far better bet. The vesseel had three large but empty vehicle decks, a lift, and a helicopter platform. There was only one key unknown in the profile of her potential - just how close could she get into Stanley Harbour?

The rest of the party flew back to Ajax Bay, thanks to a friendly passing Wessex crew, while I journeyed to HMS Fearless by dory, in order to find some answers to my questions. The responsible staff officer, one of Gerry Wells-Coles' team there, was most apologetic. Apparently, the new concept of using HMS Intrepid as a 'forward floating hospital' had just gone out of fashion, although it had not been dismissed entirely. He asked me instead to look at Goose Green as a more suitable location for this 'forward' facility, because here we would be just a little closer to the front lines around Stanley. There was no serious objection to this plan, apart from the overcrowding already extant at Goose Green. Bombs, or no bombs, I argued that Ajax Bay still looked like good value, operating as a back-up in support of the Teal Inlet and Fitzroy forward surgical facilities.

Further discussion was interrupted by an 'Air Raid Red' warning. I finished my coffee at carpet level, and was then distressed to hear the bridge's Tannoy information about HMS Plymouth having been hit by enemy aircraft out in Falkland Sound. For the next ten or fifteen minutes the Executive Officer's voice kept his ships' company silent at their duties with a description of the battered Rothesay Class frigate limping into the San Carlos anchorage under a cloud of smoke and steam, listing to starboard but apparently refusing help because they could cope on their own. Then the tone changed. Plymouth had reported that they were short of fire fighters and breathing apparatus, so Captain Larken began to muster his available resources and prepared to get them across.

Back aft in Flyco, I chatted to Lt Cdr Ed Featherstone, Fearless's Aviation Officer. My suggestion that the frigate's request for fire fighters would probably mean they also had casualties, in need of evacuation, was accepted gratefully by the Command team on the bridge. Within minutes I was on my way to the stricken frigate, in a commandeered Wessex that had been passing by.

Shades of Ardent! It was just like May 21st and D-Day all over again, only this time there were no fires apparent, only smoke pouring from the mortar well, flight deck hangar and funnel. Fire-fighting hoses snaked across the flight deck as HMS Avenger pulled up along her starboard side, to play cooling streams of sea water onto the hottest danger areas. Our only access point was up on the foredeck, in front of the gun turret, so I was winched down here.

On the slippery deck surface, the main rotor downwash threatened to push me over the side. I had time, as I struggled to regain balance, to notice a pile of empty shell cases beneath the twin 4.5 inch mountings. HMS Plymouth had been in a stiff fight. The bridge staff looked pale and dazed beneath their anti-flash hoods as they wrestled with their various damage control problems. It took me a minute to manoeuvre the stretcher up through the starboard wing, then down and aft into the main passageway below. There was just time for a cheerful salute, in transit, to Captain David Pentreath, then the acrid smoke engulfed my face. I was soon choking, with fiercely watering eyes, and only managed to continue by tying a towel scarf around my face.

In the main passageway, or 'Burma Road', the fire fighters were briefing carefully in their fire-resistant 'Fearnought' suits, all wearing compressed-air breathing apparatus. There was a clear layer of air next to the actual deck, along which a man could crawl in comfort. The fire fighters were quite cool and collected - the whole thing could almost have been just another Portland damage control exercise generated by Flag Officer Sea Training. That was probably the best way to play it, too.

In the wardroom, the ship's medical staff were very busy. The young MO was Surgeon Lieutenant Alasdair Walker, and he was here as well. They were tending to one man with severe smoke inhalation, another with a fractured arm, and a third with a broken lower leg. Lying against a bulkhead was the most severely injured member of the ship's company, a stoker named Warner, with a depressed fracture to his skull. Sticking out of the top of his head was a piece of metal support bracket, embedded in the bone. This chap needed Bill McGregor, and soon.

Very carefully, I led MEM Warner up on to the main deck level, having passed the empty stretcher up to the deck via another companionway. One of the First Aid Party then helped me to strap our patient in, and we carried him aft to the listing Flight Deck. The tilt to starboard appeared much greater now - perhaps they were having trouble with their counter-flooding. It was no problem for the Sea King which arrived. The big helicopter came and hovered right in over the deck, until we could practically hand the stretcher up to the waiting crewman.

Five minutes later we were round the corner, and once again walking into the 'Red and Green Life Machine'. So concerned was I about HMS Plymouth - and my chance involvement with her problems - that it took me a little while to realise that nobody really wanted to know about what was happening just outside our door in San Carlos Water.

Instead, some terrible event had occurred down on the southern flank, with rumours of fifty or sixty men from 45 Commando killed! I remembered thinking that this made no sense, because 'Four Five' were 'yomping' towards their final objective via a northern route.

Gradually the true picture emerged. It turned out that the LSL Sir Galahad had been bombed by a gaggle of A-4 Skyhawks while anchored near Fitzroy; her sister ship, the LSL Sir Tristram had been attacked too. There were apparently large numbers of casualties, including some from our own sister organisation, 16 Field Ambulance of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

A Gazelle aircrewman then rushed into the Command Post with a scribbled note to me from the CO of 16 Field Ambulance. John Roberts' message was terse and direct: RICK, GALAHAD HIT BEFORE SURGICAL TEAMS UNLOADED. MANY (NOT YET COUNTED) BURNS CASUALTIES. NEED FLUIDS / MORPHIA PLUS PLUS. THANKS JOHN

We responded to this cri-de-coeur as best we could. John Williams grabbed some kit and flew off immediately in the waiting Gazelle. Mike von Bertele followed soon after in a Scout, with a couple of intravenous fluid resupply boxes. Very gradually, the scene around us degenerated into a complete and utter nightmare.

As darkness crept in over the horizon, load after load of helicopter casualties began to arrive at Ajax Bay. Each new patient seemed worse than the last; eventually the Triage and Resuscitation areas were completely choked. Helicopters continued to clatter in, and stretcher-borne casualties kept appearing in the main door. No one knew for certain how many more were coming, only that we had received about a hundred and twenty victims of the bombing, mostly with burns. The phrase 'Mass Casualty Situation' flicked into the forefront of my memory.

By NATO definitions, this was said to have occurred when an overwhelming number of incapacitated or injured people arrived in a limited medical facility which, as a result, could not cope. Hell, we could certainly deal with some of them, but we were duty-bound to try and bring the greatest benefit to the biggest number. After a quick discussion with Erich Bootland, on the ball as ever, I raced down to Log HQ and got on the radio to Division HQ. I asked them, urgently, to prepare a list of ships that could take about a hundred of the lightly burned or injured. The total number we had received (150 and rising) rather staggered the duty officer, but by the time he had recovered enough to query it, I was back up in the hospital. Our ever-reliable Regimental Adjutant, Paddy George, then took over those negotiations.

Mercifully, at around 160, the numbers began to slow. With around ten wounded from HMS Plymouth, that meant we now had around 170 injured, standing or lying around in the building. The medical teams got to work on the more severely afflicted as Paddy's runner came up from the beach with a new message. HMS Fearless, HMS Intrepid and mv Atlantic Causeway were standing by, each ship willing, and getting ready to receive around three dozen injured each when we could get them over.

Down at the Beach Unit, Colour Sergeant McDowell then produced the necessary landing craft from somewhere, and suddenly, we really were coping reasonably well. It was the old human nature bit of helping out your mates. People turned up from the most unexpected quarters and offered their services. The RN Clearance divers came to help, as did some boys from 40 Commando who had come over earlier from Port San Carlos for some rest and relaxation in relative warmth, under a tin roof.

The main question now was how we were going to decide which of our patients would stay, and who

would be passed on. In the demanding circumstances of a Mass Casualty Situation, the normal principles of priority for medical treatment get completely inverted. With normal casualty loadings, you tackle the most severely injured first, while the least injured have to wait. That instinctive reaction had to be suppressed now.

Instead, we had to do the best we could for the largest number, and recognise that some of our potential customers might be too badly injured for us to treat - because they would take up too much in the way of time and resources, and thereby reduce the chances of many others. At the opposite end of this spectrum was another sub-group which might be classified as too lightly injured to deserve any effort from us, and for the very same reason. So, exactly who was going to determine the entrance fee to Ajax Bay? There was only one answer, of course. It had to be me.

The responsibility was huge, and I knew that I had to get it right first time. Luckily, my instincts proved correct. About half of the waiting Welsh Guardsmen had flash burns to face and hands only - about 10% of the total body surface. I decided that these men would constitute the 'too lightly injured' category, but at the same time felt very guilty about the dismissive aspects of this judgement. We also had to tell them, as individuals, why we could not take them in, and where we proposed sending them to.

I expected some ranting and raving, perhaps even accusations of betrayal or flint-heartedness, and prepared myself mentally to apologise for my personal decision which, even as I made it, felt absolutely right.

However, the young Welsh Guardsmen were stoical and cheery as we broke the news of another move to them. Fred Cook and I moved amongst them, each holding a lit cigarette cupped and shielded in one hand so that they could have a smoke without getting a stinging pain in their cheeks from the glowing red tip. Standing near the doorway, blowing on their tattered and painful hands to keep them cool, many of them were totally pathetic sights. Strips of skin hung from their fingers like thin, wet muslin, and their faces were blistered and raw, the hair singed short. But by God, they were brave.

The bad news of another half hour in a landing craft before they could be treated was simply accepted without demur. Each man seemed to know of someone else in the building more seriously injured than himself, and all of them would rather have had him treated first. The sing-song accents of the Welsh valleys repeated the same sentiment to us, again and again: "Don't worry about me, sir. What about Evans 36/ Williams 49/ Jones 27? 'Ave you seen him? He's the one that needs you, not me..."

It was simply heartbreaking to turn nearly ninety young men away from what was the Accident & Emergency Department door that they had paid so much to reach, but there was no other way. I shall never forget the magnificent moral courage of these splendid young men, whose instinctive response did so much to ease my own moral burden in dealing with the collective problem. We only knew how many there were because each man had a field treatment card attached to his clothing, and these had been pre-numbered. There was no time to record any other details, and we never knew or learned their names.

I watched them as they marched away into the night, still blowing on their hands as they went, still maintaining good order and discipline, and with not a single word or gesture of dissent. With the serious overcrowding problem solved now, it was time for an all-out effort directed at the other burned and wounded.

A simple treatment plan was developed for each individual; this was assessed and written down by a medical officer, and then carried out by either a medical assistant, or more frequently, one of the marines. Bernie's divers had turned to as well, to lend their capable and willing hands. For each patient there was one attendant, sometimes two. It was a heartening sight as order was imposed on chaos, and calm returned to a rather frenzied scene.

The fused and charred clothing was cut away, and the total percentage of burned skin area assessed and recorded on the treatment card. When necessary, an intravenous infusion was set up, with the flow rates and volumes calculated individually depending on the burns percentage. Careful titration of intravenous morphine was then embarked on, to control the pain. Then, carefully and lovingly, Flamazine was spread thickly over the affected areas. The cool white cream contained a silver and sulpha drug mixture which was pain-killing, antiseptic and promoted healing. Hands and fingers were enclosed in sterile plastic bags to avoid the risks of bandaging.

If a scar formed under a hand dressing it would probably have remained undetected until too late, and a claw-like contracture might well have been the severe and unwelcome penalty. In the worst cases, Phil Shouler and the other surgeons now performed escharotomies, deliberately slitting the sides of each bloated finger to allow tissue fluid to leak out, and thus prevent strangulation of the digital circulation. He showed me how to do the procedure, as there were dozens to be done. This technique was surprisingly painless, even for the patients! It was a night of 'see one, do one under supervision, plus a few more without a mentor - and then start teaching others to do the same'...

The concrete floor of Ajax Bay was soon ankle deep in rubbish, littered with torn paper dressing packets and cellophane wrappings. We ran out of Flamazine on the last patient, a Guardsman with flash-burned forearms. Bryn Dobbs then remembered that he had a tube of the stuff secreted in his First Aid kit, so he retrieved it. There was now less than an ounce left for any further casualties, so we could only hope that we had finished for the night. Bill McGregor had earlier completed an unpleasant surgical case, revising the traumatic amputation of a lower leg that had been, surprisingly, the most serious item in our workload - that was apart from Guardsman Simon Weston.

This young man had a terrifying appearance, with his face and scalp reddened, blistered and swollen, and some of his hair charred. The whole thing must have been a complete horror show for him. Ironically, some of the least burned areas of his upper body were the most painful, because the flash burning caused by the bomb detonations had lifted the superficial layers of the dermis (skin) and exposed the nerve endings beneath. His pain was severe, and although we did our best with intravenous morphine, the poor chap was still suffering terribly.

It was Malcolm Jowitt who solved the problem for him, using intramuscular Ketamine, a steroid-based anaesthetic that he had particular experience with. Prior to relaxing into a pain-free and trance-like state, Simon had actually been begging me to put an end to his overwhelming pain and misery.

Afterwards, he became a media star thanks to his autobiography and a couple of television films about his recovery, and he put this to good use by creating The Weston Spirit, a benevolent trust that works to help youngsters who have to face the consequences of crippling accidents or deforming injury when they are young. Simon is a shining example of how extraordinary such 'ordinary' people can be.

Within us all there are deep and powerful resources that don't usually get tapped into, because we lead comparatively safe and predictable lives. Hooray for him, but in his Simon's subsequent 'autobiography', the ghost writer did not get the description of his time in Ajax Bay quite right. There was a description of Simon joking and laughing as we looked after him that night, but the reality was in fact very different...

When I reported our situation to Divisional HQ, I found that they were being a bit obtuse again. They were unable to grasp the sheer magnitude of our problem, and even tried to query our need for Uganda to get in close the next morning! A one-syllable word picture to the poor duty officer brought him up to date at the rush, and suddenly all was understood. Someone had told him that Uganda had been just over the hill from us, in Middle Bay, throughout the day, but without any business! An hour later he was back on net with welcome news from London. Uganda would indeed be close in, at first light, although there was an embargo on telling them exactly why.

I thanked him gratefully and told him to forget our differences, although at the back of my mind was an even more important, but unanswered question. Why had neither of the two senior medical officers - either Barrie Blackstone or the chap we had labelled as 'NE' not come ashore to see for themselves what was happening? I never got an answer to that particular query...

One of the RM officers in charge of prisoners of war then started to behave like an idiot, and needed some 'Rembrandting', or 'picturising' in the superb vernacular of the Corps. Apparently ignorant of events on our side of the building, he had demanded to know why our galley was not serving hot meals to his staff at the usual time! He was shown the galley chefs all helping us to spread Flamazine on burned faces rather than margarine on dry biscuits, but continued to grumble. I came very close to losing my temper completely, but one of the HQ team, sensing the impending explosion, whispered a splendid alternative suggestion in my ear. As a result, the selfish idiot was invited as an individual, from now on, to use the main Regimental galley some 200 muddy metres away, rather than our facilities.

John Williams was very worried about a lad from HMS Plymouth with smoke inhalation damage to his lungs. Steroids and bottled oxygen via a mask seemed to be holding the problem at bay, but even in the dim light of our 60 watt light bulbs, it was easy to see the cyanotic, bluish tinge of the young sailor's lips. Captain Terry McCabe and WO2 Brian Apperley led the nursing effort. Once again, there was a constant round of soothing, checking, adjusting, recording and checking again.

The marines had been simply magnificent throughout the night. One little group containing Jan Mills and Jock Inglis were secretly very pleased to have survived the test and done so well. As I poured out another 'Arduous Duty' tot, whisky for the Army, rum for Jack and Royal, their delight was expressed in a slightly oblique fashion, tinged as usual with Corps humour.

One of the boys - it was John Thurlow I think - took a long pull from his somewhat strengthened mug of hot chocolate, and looked at me with an innocent expression on his face: "Cheers, Boss! Bloody good wet that - and now we've done the practical, any chance of getting the theory some time?"

How could we lose, with men like that on our side?

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A terribly cold night made that morning's task of examining the dead much more difficult, because the limbs had been set and frozen into unusual postures that were added to by the process of rigor mortis. This quite natural phenomenon had contributed to the unfortunate rumour that two of the dead Scots Guardsmen from Tumbledown had somehow been captured and executed by a retreating enemy. The bodies had apparently been found with 'hands tied' and 'blindfolded'. Careful examination of their wounds showed this suggestion to be nonsense. One had been killed by a long range sniper shot to the head, the other by a fragmenting mortar round. In other words, my opinion was that they had both died cleanly and quickly, on the field of battle.

The allegation of battlefield misconduct was an important one though, and so I sought advice from another professional colleague, who had also better remain nameless, but found him most unwilling to be of any assistance at all. There weren't many like him, thank goodness, but he was one of those individuals rendered completely useless by the strains of war when the pressure came on. The forensic analysis and reporting was therefore down to me - again - and I was able to describe my findings to Lt Col Mike Scott, the absolutely charming Commanding Officer of 2 Scots Guards, when he came back to Ajax Bay for his mens' funerals. No more was heard of this quite unfounded allegation.

40 Commando crossed to West Falkland, and Lt Col Malcolm Hunt took the Argentine garrison's surrender in Port Howard. They also discovered three dozen or so enemy casualties over there, some with wounds that were a week old and untreated. It was just more work for our surgeons, as we expected, after the war had ended. Some of the young Argentine soldiers' stories were heartbreaking. Most were starving, indeed some had actually injured themselves deliberately in order to gain medical treatment and hospital food. Others had been shot by their officers (so they said), in the feet, to prevent them running away.

Once again our basic surgical policy, based on the time-honoured principles of battle surgery, was shown to be correct. These men had filthy, discharging and smelly wounds a week after their side's therapeutic philosophy of 'early closure'. The wounds of an identical vintage out on Uganda were not only more severe - they were also much cleaner and healthier-looking too.

It was also 'Honours and Awards' time. Ivar Hellberg had asked me to nominate the men of Ajax Bay's medical organisation who were worthy of recognition. The task of picking out those who had risen head and shoulders above the rest of a really outstanding bunch was an appallingly difficult one, and I agonised over it. The choice had then to be re-inforced by a short citation, which was a written justification for the selection. This would then be scrutinised in turn by the CO, then Brigade, HQ LFFI, and then passed up the chain to HQ CINCFLEET in Northwood, and finally, presumably, to the Ministry of Defence.

I put seven names up for various awards and all were accepted, endorsed and passed on by the CO. When I finished the final drafts of the citations, one of the marines who had been watching me beavering away at the typewriter came up and suggested that everyone in Ajax Bay has already got the 'MBE'. My polite agreement that everyone in Ajax Bay certainly deserved Membership of the Order of the British Empire - but there would not be that many awards available for dishing out - was met with the protestation:

"No, Boss - not the medal. I mean the MBE..."
"MBE?" was my baffled reply.
"Yes sir - that stands for Mind Boggling Experience!"

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