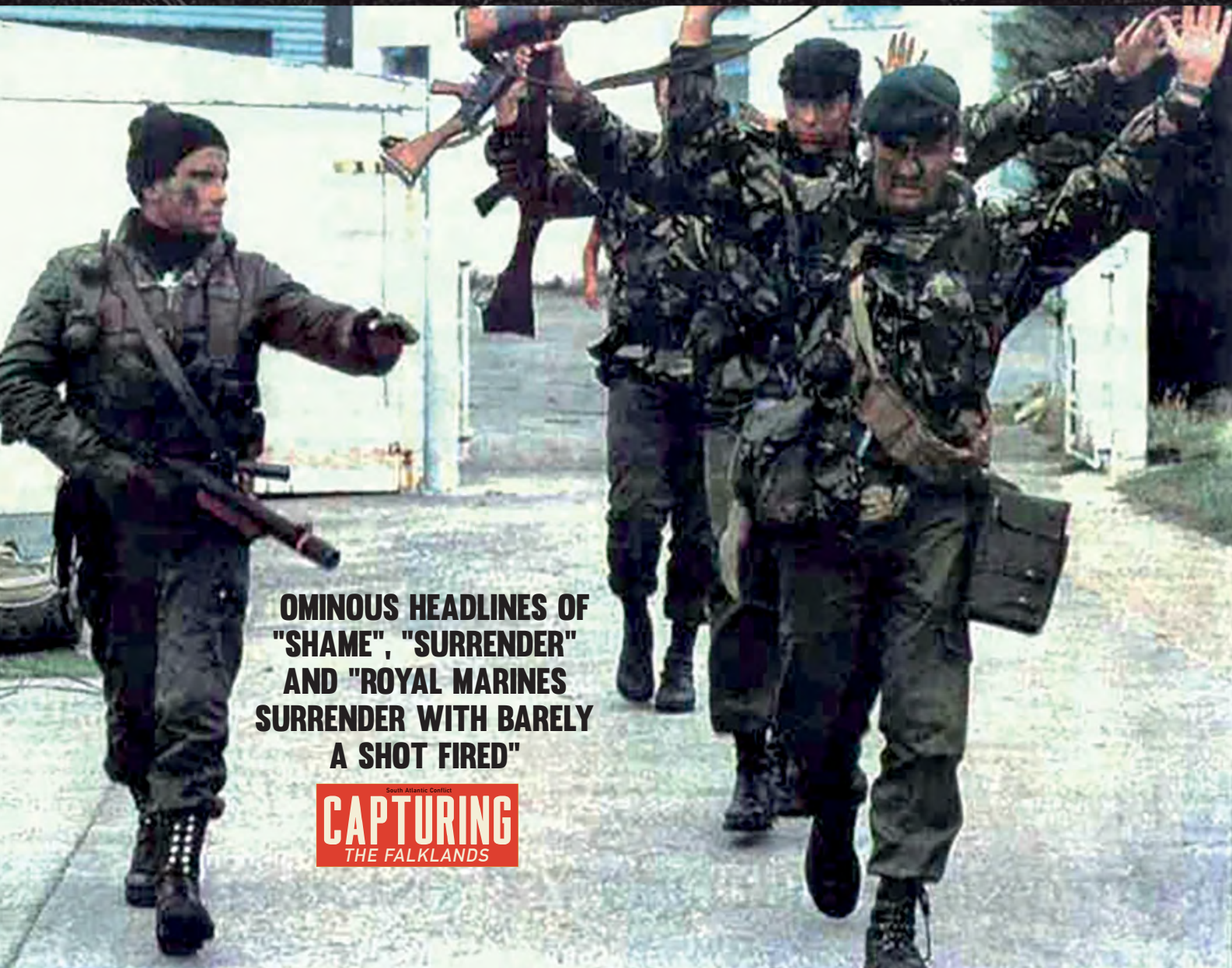


South Atlantic Conflict

# CAPTURING THE FALKLANDS

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# 'FIGHTING I



**OMINOUS HEADLINES OF  
"SHAME", "SURRENDER"  
AND "ROYAL MARINES  
SURRENDER WITH BARELY  
A SHOT FIRED"**

South Atlantic Conflict  
**CAPTURING**  
THE FALKLANDS

THE ROYAL MARINE'S DEFENCE OF STANLEY ON 2 APRIL 1982 IS A RELATIVELY LITTLE KNOWN STORY, BUT BRITAIN AT WAR LIFTS THE LID ON THAT EVENT BY TALKING EXCLUSIVELY TO RICKY D PHILLIPS ABOUT HIS RESEARCH INTO EVENTS THAT NIGHT, RESEARCH WHICH LED TO PUBLICATION OF HIS COMPREHENSIVE BOOK ON THE SUBJECT.

# LIKE LIONS'

It is personally important to me that this story gets told as it happened, since I suspect there are those who would rather it wasn't." With these words, the Falkland Islands' former Governor, Sir Rex Masterman Hunt, opened his memoirs and perhaps tried, considering his political position, to tell the world that something had been afoot in the story of the Falklands invasion. With arguably the most important lines in the whole book, maybe he hoped to tell us to look a little deeper. Sadly, nobody did. Until now.

The story of the Falklands invasion of 2 April 1982 is one which has received scant attention over the last 36 years. Look in any book on the war and you might find a page or two on the invasion before we get onto what might be called 'The real Falklands War', or Operation Corporate as it was known. Of course, a quick look at the available history tells us there is very little to see. Seventy men of the Royal Marines Naval Party 8901 and HMS *Endurance* were attacked by (we are told) 84 Argentine Commandos. The small British force fired off a few shots, killed one attacker, injured three and then promptly threw down their guns and surrendered. People remember that bit - the 'Surrender' - as it was plastered all over the world's press by next morning along with



pictures of the Royal Marines laid out on a road with black-clad Argentines standing menacingly over them.

Ominous headlines of "SHAME", "SURRENDER" and "ROYAL MARINES SURRENDER WITH BARELY A SHOT FIRED" appeared to further the military shaming of Britain. It doesn't exactly appear as the proudest moment in British military history, its media portrayal making it look even less so. Certainly, those pictures and headlines are burned into the minds of the British people. Yet was it true? Was that how it was?

## THE WITNESSES SPEAK

I had always thought that the official story in 1982, and since, just didn't look right. Everyone who looked at this with anything more than a cursory glance would surely think the same. When I looked further, more out of curiosity than anything else, I found fragments of stories and suggestions of a much larger and more desperate action than had ever been reported. Could these all have been rumour?

It was an almost chance conversation with one of the Royal Marines >>

## ABOVE

Argentinian troops enter Stanley after Operation Rosario; the taking of the Falkland Islands.

## OVERLEAF

The famous shot of Marine Lou Armour marching out of Government House after the ceasefire, under Argentine guard.



seemed interested to be heard. The story as we had all been told it, in the UK and Argentina, had largely scrubbed them out of the story as well. As one of them told me: "It was made to look as if we just turned up and didn't do anything. That the Royal Marines just surrendered and there was no fight. That's not how it happened."

Finally, from the people of Stanley, came fresh stories and accounts; private diaries and personal photographs which showed things which simply didn't exist in the

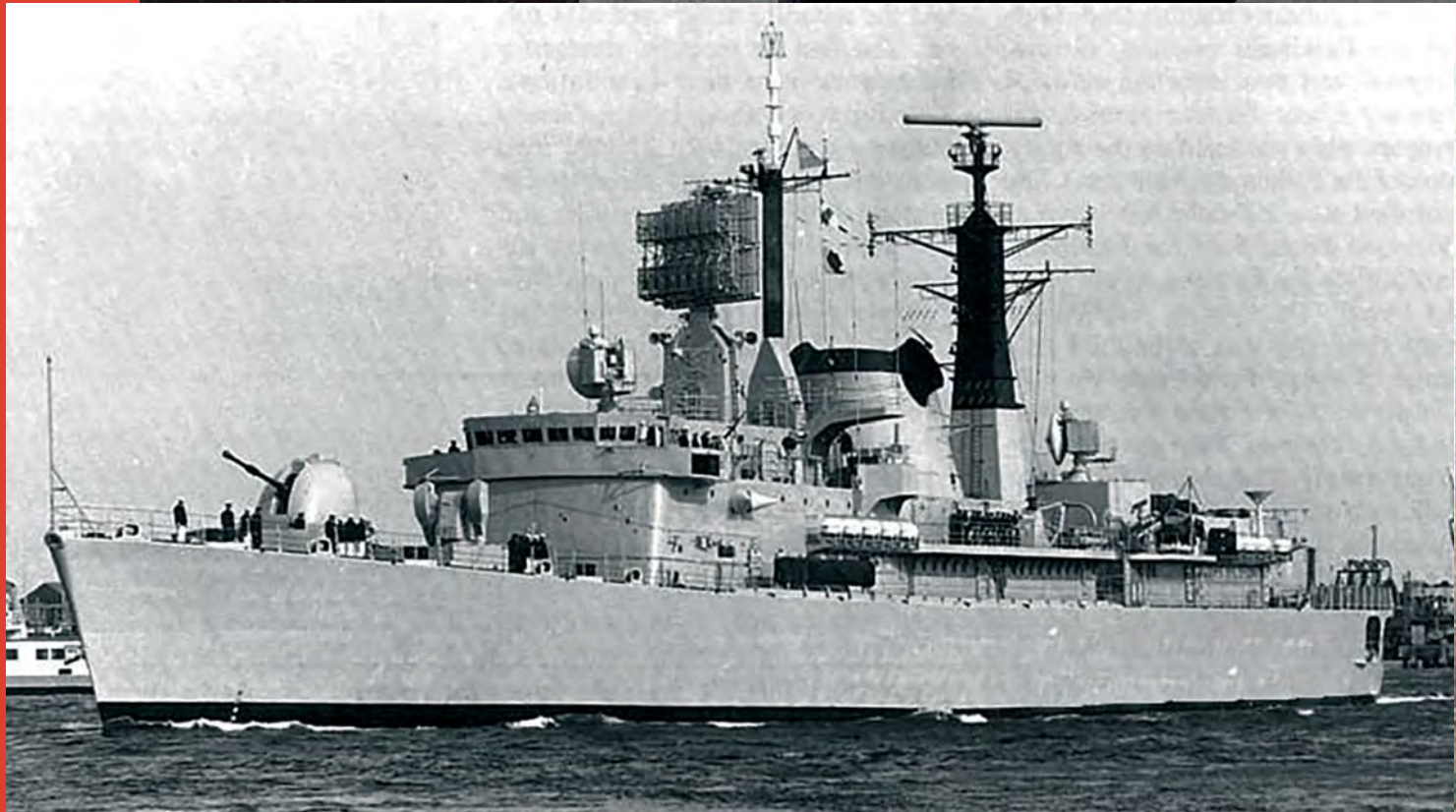
**ABOVE**  
*The ARA Santa Fe played an important role in the invasion before being disabled later in the conflict.*

**RIGHT**  
*Falkland Islands Governor, Sir Rex Hunt.*

**BELOW**  
*The Type 42 destroyer ARA Santísima Trinidad.*

of NP8901 which took this epic story into a new dimension and very soon a great number of the veterans were begging me to write their story. I said 'no', and that someone else might do a better job. Their answer was that everyone else had had 35 years to do something and nobody ever had. It was a convincing argument, but the first thing I noticed about the available history on the subject was that, oddly, nobody had ever asked the men who were there. This is really where the story begins.

The Royal Marines started to send in stories and accounts and I quickly realised the entire story, as we understood it, was wrong. Then came my second shock. Argentine veterans of 2 April 1982 started to appear and



'official' version. I was then joined by Rachel, a Stanley resident, who had seen the invasion first-hand and helped me uncover the truth of a story which had haunted her for three and a half decades. In all, almost 300 people from three different countries joined in and the sheer weight of evidence increased exponentially. Even more so in that their stories all matched up. The official version just died a death when I looked at the weight of evidence before me. So, here is what really happened.

### MURDER IN THE DARK

When the Argentine forces invaded in the early hours of 2 April 1982, they came in rubber boats to the south of the British position and a little behind it. The Royal Marines had deployed to defend the beach, with a plan to fall back by sections, each one hitting the invaders hard, forcing them to stop, deploy, and come on again. Each Marine section would pull back to the support of the next, forcing the process to be repeated over and over. It was not a plan designed to win – they already

knew that was impossible – but to make the Argentines take casualties, to perhaps think again and to buy time for the world to wake up to what was happening. In the darkness, the Marines waited. They stripped the stores bare of every gun, grenade and bullet they could carry and now they waited to do their jobs. Whatever the cost.

The night sky lit up behind the British position as tracer rounds, fragmentation and phosphorous grenades tore into their barracks. For

ten minutes, the place was pounded and each room systematically cleared with rounds put into the bunks. If the Royal Marines had been there, as they should have been on any other night, they would have been exterminated to a man. In the official histories, we can read how Argentine Commandos fired over the roof and only used stun and gas grenades. Yet the Royal Marines saw and described the damage when they went back and rescued what survived of their kit later in the day. And then >>

**"IT WAS MADE TO LOOK AS IF WE JUST TURNED UP AND DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. THAT THE ROYAL MARINES JUST SURRENDERED AND THERE WAS NO FIGHT. THAT'S NOT HOW IT HAPPENED."**



**ABOVE**  
*The upturned hulk of the Argentinian landing craft, sunk in the narrows at the entrance to Stanley Harbour.*



**LEFT**  
*A view of Stanley, with cathedral at centre right, in 1982.*



**ABOVE**  
*Commander Hugo Santillan of 2nd Battalion Marine Infantry (BIM2), who planned and led the amphibious assault up the beach, seen here in the Falklands, 2 April 1982.*

the previously accepted story just falls apart. This was 'a classic house clearing', as Major Norman said of it afterwards.

I made sure to include every account that I could in my book, and even found one Argentine veteran who admitted to me that, yes, it had happened. Meanwhile, in Government House (GH) about a mile from Moody Brook, the Royal Marines watched their barracks being torn to shreds and knew, there and then, that they were not supposed to survive this night: "It was clear our opponents wanted us every bit as dead as we now wanted them", remembered Royal Marine, Jim Fairfield.

## A TURKEY SHOOT

Meanwhile, as the Royal Marine sections realised they had been outflanked and made their way back to defend GH, the Argentine invasion fleet approached, bypassing the defended beaches. From the Tank Landing Ship *Cabo San Antonio* a solitary landing craft, laden with men, sailed through 'the narrows', a slim neck of water which opened into Stanley Harbour. The Royal Marine sections radioed it in, and the Falklands' Governor, Rex Hunt, mentioned it twice, live on air, yet one doesn't find this landing craft in any of the histories barring the broadcast recordings. It vanishes from the story.

Hearing the Governor's words on the radio, local man and keen diarist, Neville Bennett, rushed to his kitchen window overlooking the narrows and peered into the night at the shape which was approaching before it violently exploded: "What the Hell was that!?" He scribbled furiously, recording the scene as the LCVP, which he described as "Like the Higgins boat that they used on Iwo Jima" erupted, rolled over and sank - as the frozen current sucked into the black water heavily-laden and tightly-packed Argentine soldiers.

Now, Argentine 'Amtrack' armoured vehicles hit the beach, each one carrying 28 men and armed with a 50-calibre M2 machine gun, and started making their way towards Stanley as the black-clad Argentine commandos struck at GH. Having seized a rocky ridge to the south of



the house, they poured down fire which tore into the glass and timber residence while a snatch squad, led by the Argentine's own 'Superman', Pedro Giachino, vaulted the back wall and charged towards the kitchen entrance, intending to capture Rex Hunt and drag him to the radio station to force him to broadcast the islands' surrender. Instead, they charged towards four Royal Marines crouched in the darkness who immediately opened fire.

Giachino fell, hit several times, and behind him Lieutenant Diego Quiroga was struck by three bullets. Running to their aid, Ernesto Urbina was also hit and fell wounded as the remaining three Commandos found



**RIGHT**  
*Amtrack '07', peppered with gunfire by the defenders.*



**RIGHT**  
*Major Mike Norman who led detachment Naval Party 8901.*

# OPERATION ROSARIO:

## 1 April

15:30: Officials on the Falkland Islands received a warning of an invasion. The Royal Marines and FIDF mobilised and heavy vehicles parked on the airport runway and disabled. To prevent possible sabotage a small party rounded-up Argentine civilians and workers around Stanley.

21:30: The ARA *Santísima Trinidad* deployed the Amphibious Commandos Group into 21 small boats, they aimed for Mullet Creek but encountered problems and landed at Lake Point.

23:00: The first 84 men landed at Lake Point, the force split, with Lt-Comdr. Giachino heading for Government House, and the larger group, under Lt-Comdr. Sabarots, heading for Moody Brook Barracks.

## 2 April

04:30: Frogmen from the Tactical Divers Group landed by the ARA *Santa Fe* near Yorke Bay.

05:30: Moody Brook Barracks stormed.

06:00: 20 LVTP-7 and additional LARC-V vehicles landed troops from the ARA *Cabo San Antonio* at Yorke Bay. The advanced vanguard was formed of four platoons with four LVTP-7s.

06:30: The vanguard and frogmen secure the airport.

06:30: Officially, 16 Commandos were engaged at Government House by Royal Marines. Lt-Comdr. Giachino was killed with three of his men captured.

08:30: Officially, the main force of 14 LVTP-7s had cleared Stanley, sustaining one injury and one damaged vehicle in an ambush outside the town. The lighthouse was also cleared by frogmen, and work to clear the runway began.

## 3 April

In a separate operation, South Georgia is successfully invaded, but the 22 strong Royal Marine garrison downed one helicopter, damaged one corvette, and inflicted 12 casualties on the Argentine force.

### LEFT

Argentine Marines of the BIM2 deploying at White City to take on Royal Marines Section 2.

### LEFT

Argentinian Amtrack '03' in Stanley town.



than those who feature in the official story. And, there were several more casualties.

## ENGAGEMENT AT 'WHITE CITY'

By this time, the Argentine LVTP-7 Amtracks were making their way towards 'White City', a collection of four prefabricated white houses on the outskirts of Stanley. Here, the anti-tank team of Section 2 were ready for them with an 84mm Carl Gustav recoilless rifle and several 66mm L1A1 LAWs. The first vehicle, curiously, came on alone and into a storm of fire.

Turning to its right, and trying to get off the road, it became stuck on a bank and drainage ditch and the Royal Marines hit it with everything they had. After several misses as it advanced, they now slammed a single 84mm and two 66mm anti-tank projectiles into it. Royal Marine Mark Gibbs recalled: "It rocked on its suspension and then blew a great cloud of black smoke and just died".

By now, the other vehicles were coming down the road firing and swinging to their left, across the front of the Royal Marines' position. They deployed their troops, with the nearest Amtrack, No.07, being peppered with a torrent of fire. Had they had any rockets left, it too would have been destroyed and so they hit it with every bullet they had, smashing the gunner's scope and finally deploying smoke grenades to cover their withdrawal. Strangely, that first vehicle doesn't exist in the official record. >>>

their way upstairs into the house and hid themselves away. Meanwhile, the Argentines surrounding the house were hurling themselves at it using SWAT hostage tactics; running in four-abreast and making easy targets for the Royal Marines who later termed it as 'amateurish' and 'a turkey shoot'. And herein lies another problem.

In the official version, there were only 16 of them, yet with three wounded in the garden, three more hiding upstairs and one by his own account having run for help, this leaves only nine men against 30 Royal Marines. The history, here, is evidently wrong, and yet the Argentines confirm the facts; SWAT tactics, four-abreast, were indeed used in the attack. The numbers alone show there were more men involved

**RIGHT**  
Captured Royal  
Marines are  
forced to lay face  
down on Ross  
Road by their  
captors.

## STREET BATTLE IN STANLEY

As the Marines piled back through the gardens in a mad steeplechase, with Argentine Marines in pursuit, so another battle was raging in the streets of Stanley itself as Sections 1 and 6, having pulled back into town, now faced concealed opponents who popped up from gardens, hedgerows and empty houses as a gun battle raged in the streets. Read any history of the invasion and you won't find a single bullet fired in those streets, or even a single person there. The Royal Marines saw them, and the people of Stanley saw them too. And the damage, in many cases, is still there to see! It's enough to make you wonder where the official story came from.

Trying to break through to GH, which was now surrounded, the Marines gunned down two Argentines near the hospital and, as Section 1 ran for GH, dodging bullets the whole way, so Section 6 made its way back into town to continue the fight: "I never knew our Marines could fight so hard," one Falkland Islander told me, "they were fighting like lions to protect us."

At GH, the Royal Marines' top sniper, Geordie Gill, now decided to hit back and selected an Argentine section commander and rifleman high up on the rocky ridge: "The section commander jerked upright as I shot him, dropped his rifle and slid behind the rock he was using as cover," Gill remembered, "then his mate stuck his head out and I got him too. Then Terry Pares, beside me, said he could see a radio operator and, as he could see him and I couldn't, he asked if he should take him out. I said, "Yeah!" so he fired about ten rounds from



**BELOW**  
Capitan de  
Corbeta Pedro  
Giachino who  
was killed in  
the garden of  
Government  
House.  
(AFTER THE BATTLE  
MAGAZINE)

**BELOW RIGHT**  
Pedro Giachino's  
military funeral  
in Puerto  
Belgrano.  
(AFTER THE BATTLE  
MAGAZINE)

his SLR and shouted, "I think I got him!" He did. I saw the guy roll out of cover on his back and lay there, not moving.'

The Argentines deployed a heavy machine gun and the pair had what Geordie remembers as "...an interesting little time" in which they traded shots until Geordie found his mark. The Argentine gunner jerked, rolled over with his gun spilling sideways as the other Marines watched while his leg thrashed and twitched until he finally fell silent. In this way, Gill and Pares, joined by their comrades who 'took targets of

opportunity', were taking a heavy toll of the Argentines: "At one stage we were in the 11-5 club," remembered Marine Graham Evans: "...eleven killed and five wounded, as we were hitting them hard up on the ridge behind GH."

## CEASEFIRE

By now, with Argentine Marines surrounding GH, their Amtracks coming up to level the place and hostile troops all over town, Governor Rex Hunt decided his men had done all they could. They had caused many casualties and even





## "I NEVER KNEW OUR MARINES COULD FIGHT SO HARD," ONE FALKLAND ISLANDER TOLD ME, "THEY WERE FIGHTING LIKE LIONS TO PROTECT US."

captured the three Commandos who had been found hiding upstairs. But to continue now would be to condemn his men to death. Although there had been no British casualties yet, the near-misses were close and now the town itself was getting hit. On the radio he called to the Argentines and offered a ceasefire. The Royal Marines grudgingly put down their weapons and walked out of GH, counting, as they went, the many Argentine bodies which lay around the house.

Now, it was daylight, and Rex Hunt remembered body-bags being dragged across his wife Mavis' once-neat rockery. As the Royal Marines marched out, they were searched, roughed up and forced to lay down on the road as Argentine cameramen took the 'photos which, ultimately, would lose the war for Argentina. It was the very image of humiliating defeat, the story the junta needed in order to show that these men had been no match for Argentine forces and hadn't believed in their cause, anyway. At the same time, the word 'Ceasefire' was quickly swapped for 'Surrender'.

Meanwhile, the Royal Marines were shipped out under the ceasefire agreement and taken to neutral Montevideo where they were kept

under a press blackout for three days. On the return to London, they first saw the headlines; 'SHAMED' in the Daily Mail and 'SURRENDER' shouted The Sun. The men erupted in fury at stories which claimed they had 'surrendered with barely a shot fired'. Coming home, they were warned not to speak to anybody.

### THE 'ERIC'S'

Nobody has ever gathered so many people together and asked all of their

stories until now, and nobody had ever thought to ask the Islanders for their story, either. Amongst them, I asked the hospital staff who were on duty in Stanley's only hospital that day (Rachel's mother was the matron) and they told of dozens of killed and wounded men, of the types of wounds and the operations performed. The residents tell of bodies in their gardens after the action and I could now mark most of these on a map. The sunken Landing Craft >>



**ABOVE**  
The British Ice Patrol Vessel *Endurance* in 1988. Her Wasp helicopters were involved in the attack on *ARA Sante Fe* on 25 April 1982.

**LEFT**  
The men of NP8901, await their fate at the hands of their captors.





**ABOVE**  
HMS Yarmouth, then Andromeda, astern of HMS Cardiff, as the ships head into the Total Exclusion Zone. To the surprise of the Argentine Junta, the British were able to rapidly assemble and deploy a taskforce to re-take the islands.

**RIGHT**  
Headlines screamed both failure and the humiliation of the Argentinian occupation.



invasion and then on 15 April flown out in 18 helicopter loads to the Tussac Islands just outside Stanley.

**HEROES**

The men of NP8901 and HMS Endurance have endured over three decades of derision, called 'cowards' by some and the word 'Surrender' following them around like a shadow. And yet, they were surely heroes. Major Mike Norman's official report listed 'the most conservative figure possible' of Argentine casualties based only on what they saw and could prove. He stated five killed, 17 wounded, three prisoners and one Amtrack destroyed. His report was ignored, and replaced with the Argentine version; one killed, three

wounded, no prisoners, one Amtrack 'slightly damaged'. That's the story we read today. The truth shows very many more Argentine casualties.

Additionally, even a basic look at the testimony of Sir Rex Hunt shows there was no surrender. The Royal Marines walked out under a ceasefire agreement. Their ammunition expenditure, far from 'barely a shot', was in excess of over 6,500 rounds and 12 anti-tank rockets. Therefore, in my book, I seek to examine the facts and explain why the official story is at odds with those told consistently by those who were there.

Not every one of my witnesses can be wrong, and only the truth remains. But, even after almost 36 years, truth is the first casualty of any war. ☺

was found and hauled up, complete with body parts, and now sits on a beach. The Amtrack, substituted in the official story for the second one, which sustained only mild damage, was found complete with three rocket holes precisely where the Royal Marines and Stanley residents saw it hit. I have held a chunk of it in my own hands, with a 66mm rocket hole straight through it. Rachel's Dad had been a fireman in Stanley and been forced to hose it out after it had been hit. The nearly 30 men inside hadn't stood a chance.

Accounts of dead Argentines after the action were so common that the people of Stanley coined the name 'Eric' for them. They were floating in the harbour for days, and a boat had to pick them up and add them to others who were found in gardens. Not including those spirited away by the Argentines, some 70-odd 'Eric's' were found stacked up just after the



'The First Casualty - The Untold Story of the Falklands War' by Ricky D Phillips is available at [www.beicbooks.com/shop](http://www.beicbooks.com/shop) or via Amazon Kindle.