

“Air raid warning Red” - by Jim Rose

Joining HMS FEARLESS 4th Assault Squadron was an exciting prospect as a 19 year old Royal Marine. As the Dartmouth training ship, flying the flag and training Midshipmen (Naval officers in training), life was good. Indeed, our first 3-month deployment to the Caribbean was great, despite sailing through the centre of a hurricane force 14 in a flat bottomed assault ship (therein lies another story).



During that deployment however, news was beginning to break about an Argentinian scrap metal dealer and a team of 40 (including Argentine Marines) who raised their countries blue and white flag on South Georgia, staking a claim to the Falkland Islands. Little did they know that the pile of scrap worth circa £7.5 Million, would turn into a full-scale war.

Easter leave was cancelled for those still waiting to take it. Service personnel were recalled to duty, the ship was prepped and readied for sea, and off we sailed to the South Atlantic. We stopped at Ascension Islands and filled hundreds of sandbags. From the top of the Islands' volcano the sight of the assembled fleet was truly something to behold, an image that has stayed with me for a lifetime.

The night of the incursion of the Royal Navy to Falkland Sound and subsequently San Carlos (Bomb Alley) water, was done under redlight conditions, and on the end of a duty free King Edward cigar. Celebrating victory, such was the confidence (or was it teenage arrogance?), before the conflict had begun.



As a Signaller, I had two responsibilities on board. To act as dock control, with Captain “Popeye” Edwards RM, bringing the landing craft in a coordinated fashion in/out the back of Fearless, and battery storeman, ensuring all the vehicles and comms kit had the power they needed. My weapon of choice, the Clansman 351 VHF radio. The night of the assault was conducted under radio silence, my usually busy headset was quiet for a change, but the pressure and tension were high, senses tuned. It was as if I was attempting telepathy, as the landing craft came back and forth landing troops and supplies on the Island.

Being off watch was probably worse than being on. Once the gloves were off and Bomb Alley began to live up to its name, my weapon of choice became my trusty SLR, to provide small arms fire in response to Argentine air raids. Being off watch, “Air Raid Warning Red” is the call you didn’t really want, because all you could do is sit in your mess deck in anti-flash gear, listening to the 500lb bombs, gunfire and the woosh of a SEACAT on the chase of a Mirage or A4 bomber. So, to combat this we resorted to the only sensible thing we could do, load up a Queen Live video and play Bohemian Rhapsody, playing air guitar and headbanging in anti-flash. Not the best look but we figured it was better than just sitting there. The loudest explosion of all was the 500 pounder that exploded a few metres away from our mess deck. I honestly thought we’d been hit that day. Off to the muster point faster than a greased weasel, probably the only time I never banged my head or shin on a hatch way, straight through.



Back to my primary role of Dock Controller, never did it seem a more important role when things were not going so well, and the landing craft (LCMs) were being used to evacuate our own servicemen from Sir Gallahad/Tristram and HMS Antelope. Bringing the wounded back to Fearless for medical triage. Losing one of our own LCMs to an air raid was also telling, empty bunks on your mess deck drove home the realities of war. Watching HMS Antelope as she drifted past in flames off to her final resting place is another vivid image that has remained with me.



And so it went on to the end of conflict, a quick trip around to Port Stanley, then 8000 miles home. One of the other duties we conducted was that of "lifebuoy ghost". This meant we stood on the back of the ship, looking out for anyone potentially falling overboard. The position on watch overlooked the landing dock, it seemed strange looking at 3 landing craft rather than four. A constant reminder of the loss of colleagues and friends. A quick stop off in France then back to the Portsmouth welcome committee.

It would be another 9 years before I finally trained as a Radio Officer and qualified to work at CSOS Culmhead then later several posts at HQ retiring some 25ish years later. I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to serve in the military and the Civil Service. I have worked with some truly remarkable people, and they will be forever in my thoughts.

Jim