

MAIN PICTURE
THE STRICKEN
'COVENTRY'
LISTING, WITH
THE SIGNIFICANT
DAMAGED CAUSED
BY THE BOMBS
VISIBLE HMS
BROADSWORD
ASSOCIATION

On April 5, 1982, three days after Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, British forces were ordered to sail to an overseas territory 8,000 miles away. Days before, with the Argentines en route, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher discussed that eventuality with her defence chiefs, including Sir Henry Leach, the First Sea Lord. She asked bluntly: "If the invasion happens, precisely what can we do?" Leach was calm and considered: "I can put together a task force of destroyers, frigates, landing craft, support vessels. It will be led by the aircraft carriers *Hermes* and *Invincible*. It can be ready to leave in 48 hours."

This force eventually comprised 127 ships: 43 warships, 22 Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships and 62 STUFT merchant vessels (Ships Taken Up From Trade) such as the giant *Canberra* and *Queen Elizabeth 2*, both requisitioned as troopships. Codenamed Operation Corporate, the liberation effort was under way.

When they set sail, there was a chance that war could be avoided. However, it became clear the Royal Navy was sailing toward formidable challenges. With no advantage on land or in the air, the senior service would play a key role and how it fared would decide whether the war was won or lost – the US Navy reportedly assessed the chances of recapturing the islands as 'a military impossibility'.

Highs and lows

Christopher James Pollard would experience the highs and lows of war in just a few hours. Chris, of HMS *Coventry*, underwent "the most exhilarating experience I have had" when shooting down two attacking aircraft, but later that day he suffered "the worst moment of my life" when he watched the *Coventry* sink.

Born in Leeds on June 17, 1955, Chris was the eldest of five children, with four younger sisters. His father, a machinist, had completed his national service on the battleship *Duke of York*. Because his father had served, Pollard wanted to follow in his footsteps. He told me: "As a working class kid from a council

Sailing into Dire Straits

In this exclusive article, *Lord Ashcroft* presents two incredible accounts from sailors at the sharp end of Argentine air attacks off the Falklands nearly 40 years ago

estate, I never expected to go to the Royal Navy College at Dartmouth. But after Cubs and Scouts I went into the Sea Cadets where I had a very good training base, and one thing led to another. I applied for a scholarship to Dartmouth when I was 13, but didn't get it."

He then applied for a short-service commission in 1972, passing the interview board. Pollard entered the Royal Naval College in January 1973 and later served two tours in Northern Ireland on gun-running patrols. On completing the gunnery course at HMS *Excellent*, he was appointed as master gunner in HMS *Eskimo* in 1975, operating out of Belize during a period of turmoil in Guatemala in 1976.

In an echo of events six years later, *Eskimo* was sent south, in Pollard's words to "put the frighteners" on Argentina, because one of its destroyers had fired across the bows of the research ship *Shackleton* in an unprovoked incident. That summer, Pollard served on *Eskimo* as the escort for the Queen's visit to the United States to mark the bicentennial of American Independence. He left the Royal Navy to work as a contract officer in the Sultan of Oman's Navy from 1978 to 1979, during which he spent much time in the Strait of Hormuz chasing smugglers. He re-joined the Royal Navy and by 1982 was a lieutenant and also the master gunner on HMS *Coventry*.

The Type 42 destroyer was ordered to the Falklands on

April 2, 1982 and Pollard revealed to me that, well after passing Ascension Island, *Coventry's* steering motors burnt out, meaning the ship lost use of her rudders. Instead, she had to be steered by her engines and hand pumps: "This was not easy when at 25kts, or when we hit severe gales. We knew that because of the loss of power the ship was in danger of rolling over if she had turned sideways onto the heavy seas – if that had happened, no one would have got out."

Radar blind

On May 1, *Coventry* became the first British ship to enter the British-imposed 200-mile Total Exclusion Zone, and she remained within it – at the front of the fleet – until May 25. She was tasked with bombarding enemy-held Port Stanley with her 4.5in gun and with engaging Argentine resupply aircraft with her Sea Dart missile system. On May 11 she made her first confirmed 'kill', shooting down a Puma helicopter.

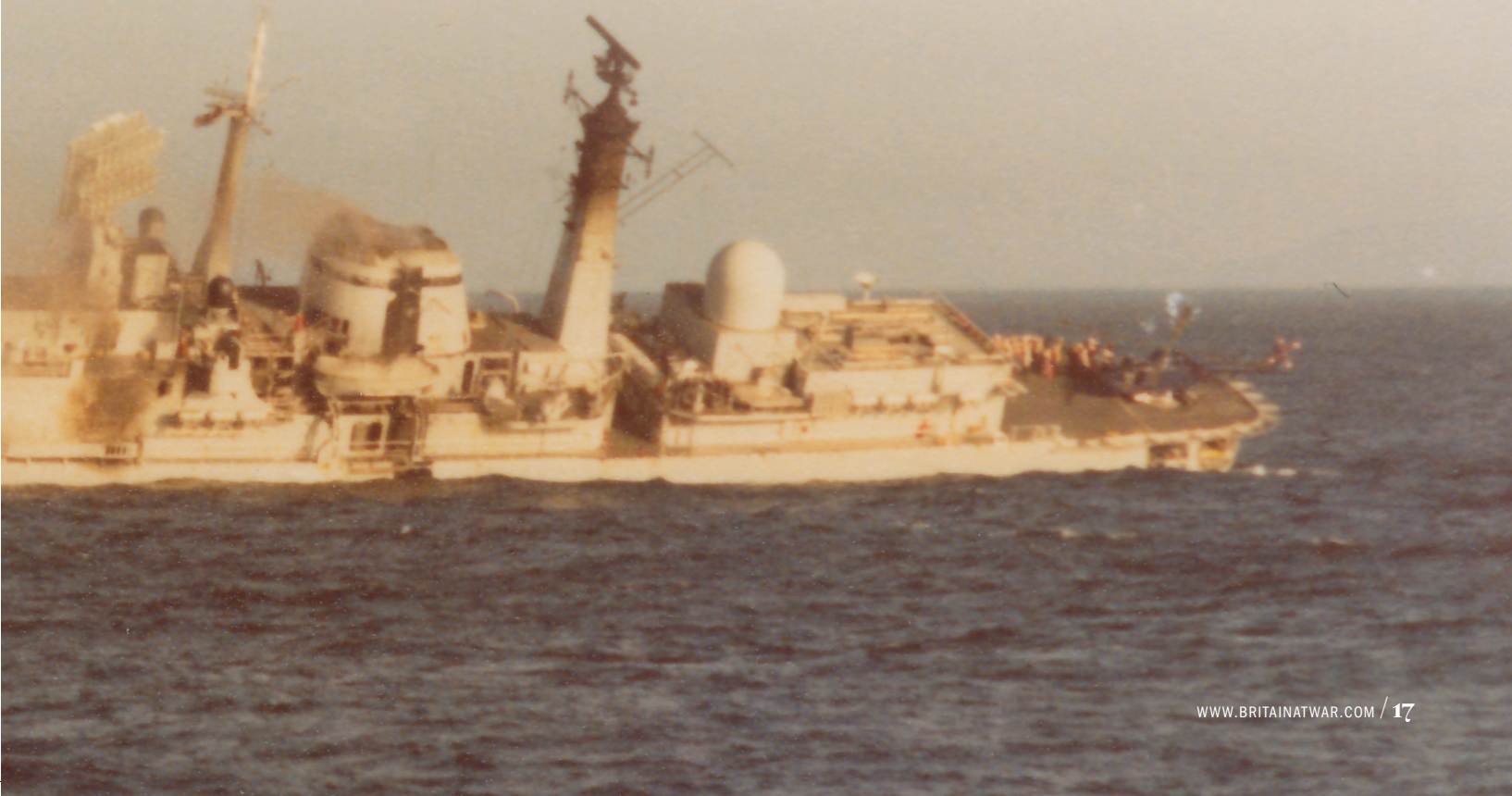
The costly attack on *Sheffield* on May 4 had an effect on the companies of other ships. Writing home on May 7, Pollard began his letter: "Hello! Well, I am still in one piece and intend to remain so. The shock of the *Sheffield* has now worn off and morale is slowly improving, people cheered up when we finally got the final casualty figures and knew who'd copped it – my mate is safe and so I feel much better. We have had an analysis of what happened



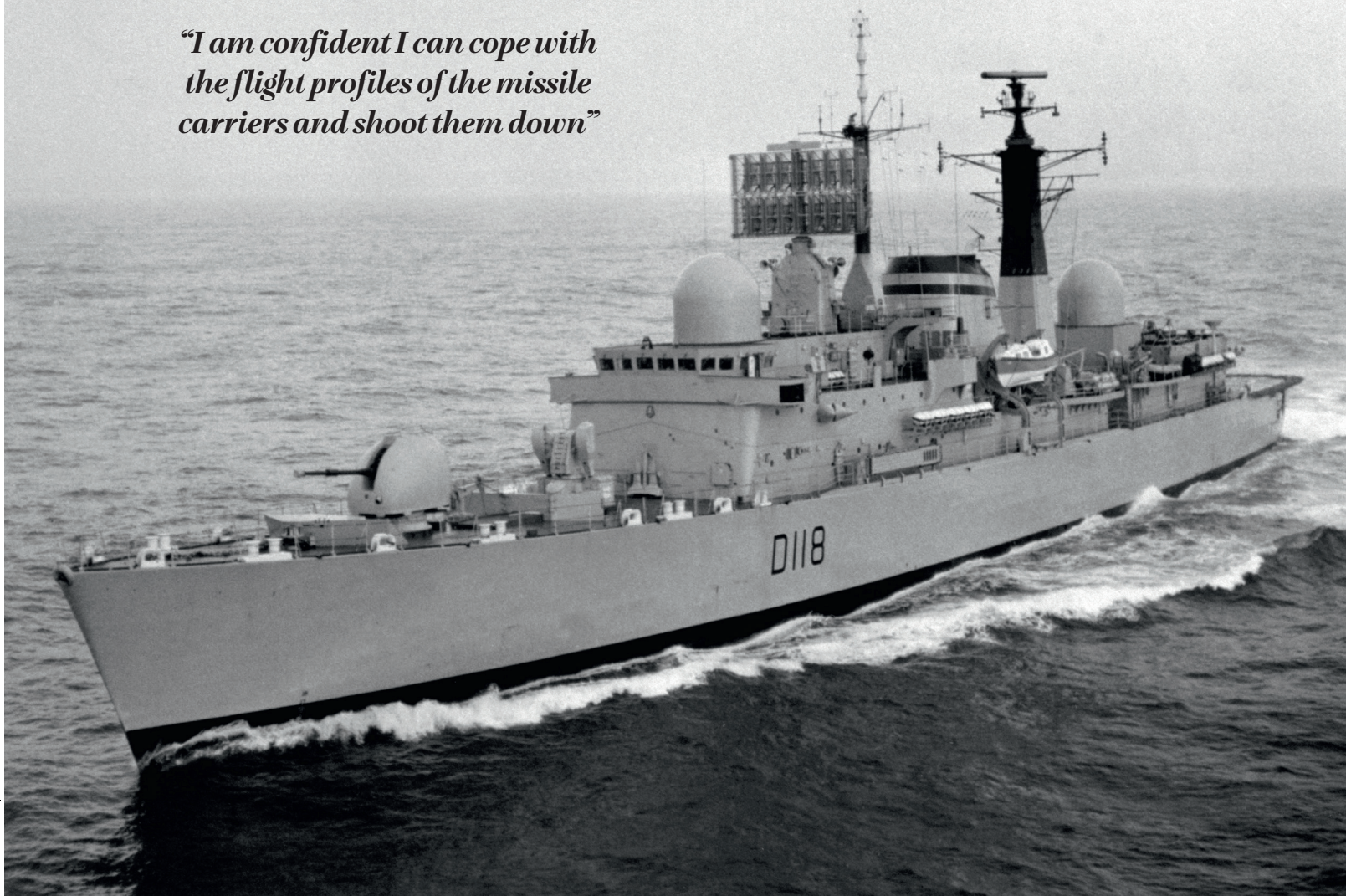
CHRISTOPHER POLLARD WAS THE MASTER GUNNER ON BOARD 'COVENTRY' IN 1982. HE WAS MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES BUT CONSIDERED THE DISTINCTION AWARDED TO ALL THOSE IN THE SHIP'S GUNNERY DIVISION, SAYING: "IT WAS VERY MUCH A TEAM EFFORT" BOTH IMAGES COURTESY OF LORD ASHCROFT



FORMER CHIEF ENGINEERING MECHANIC MICHAEL TOWNSEND WAS AWARDED THE DSM FOR "HELPING TO SAVE THE SHIP" AFTER THE 'ARGONAUT' WAS BOMBED. OF THE FALKLANDS HE SAID: "IT WAS A JUST WAR"



“I am confident I can cope with the flight profiles of the missile carriers and shoot them down”



amid all the confusion, and I am confident I can cope with the flight profiles of the missile carriers and shoot them down. Even so we are very jumpy and receiving alarms on [seeing] patches of cloud, [and] this is not doing a lot for our sleep. I am averaging seven hours a day, but this frequently broken by alarms.”

May 25 is traditionally a national holiday in Argentina, commemorating the 1810 revolution that secured its independence from Spain, and on May 25, 1982, the Argentine Air Force was determined to leave its mark. *Coventry* was deployed, with the frigate *Broadsword*, northwest of Falkland Sound where it was hoped they would pick off aircraft attacking ships in San Carlos Bay. At 12.30pm, the pair were attacked by a wave of Skyhawks.

It later emerged that *Coventry's* radar was ‘blind’ to the low trajectory of the approaching aircraft. Pollard – on watch in the operations room – used a computer link with *Broadsword*, which had a better radar system. He put

this to good use, shooting down two aircraft in the first two waves that day. In an interview with the Coventry-based *Evening Telegraph*, he later said: “It was like looking for a needle in a haystack.” However, he quickly appeared to master the system: “On both occasions, I managed to pick off the lead aircraft, which I realised must have been the attack leaders, and the rest of them cleared off. Looking back, that’s why they came back – this time for us. They had to knock us out.”

Everything went white

Pollard went off duty at 4pm, only for action stations to be sounded two hours later – a third wave was incoming. “We knew we could pick them off, but they also knew what we were capable of. It was a strange sensation. Faintly on the horizon we could see their shimmering exhaust trails fizzing over the wave tops as they came for us. After that everything happened very quickly.”

Pollard and his comrades – on the starboard side – put up a barrage of fire before the attackers diverted

COVENTRY'S CAPTAIN

In *Four Weeks in May* (later turned into a BBC documentary, *Sea of Fire*) Captain Hart Dyke, father of comedy actress Miranda Hart, described the moment the bombs struck: “There was a vicious shockwave, a blinding flash and searing heat... the force and the shock of the impact shook my whole body to the core. All power and communication were lost, the ship was stopped, burning furiously and beginning to roll.”

Having received burns in the attack, he was taken to *Broadsword*, from where he witnessed his ship's death throes. Ahead of the 20th anniversary of the conflict, Hart Dyke gave the *Independent* a fascinating insight: “We were a thorn in the side of the Argentinian Air Force. They ganged up against us to take us out, 19 of my sailors were killed and the rest of us by some miracle swam to life rafts to be picked out of the water by helicopters. At the time you keep going, but it took me about two years to recover.

“It's very sad that we had to go to war. This conflict should have been solved through negotiation... Because they failed to keep the military presence in the Falklands, politicians sent the wrong signal, so we had to do it the hard way.”

“We were preserving freedom for British people. You have to take risks to do this. A British sailor doesn't fight well unless he believes in the cause. We had extremely high morale because we believed – and even though we were 8,000 miles away, we could feel the support from home... I couldn't believe we were asked to do it, but you have to go for it. I wouldn't have missed it.”



towards *Broadsword*. One bomb hit *Broadsword* and the aircraft flew into the distance. "As soon as they'd gone, I told the men to get ammunition and reload. I ran to the port side to find out why the machine gun had jammed. Up on the bridge wing, a young sailor began shouting and I turned to see two more aircraft. It was as if everything was in slow motion. I remember seeing the British insignia on the bombs as they were released, because they were British-made. As the Skyhawks went overhead, I shouted to sailors to get down.

"Through my clenched eyes, everything went white. The deck heaved as the ship lifted out of the water, it felt like my knee sockets were getting ripped out. There was smoke coming from the port side. Then, between the main mast and the funnel, the ship just exploded. One of the bombs must have been delayed, and it blew the guts out of the ship. There was a hole in the deck with flames billowing out. The ship was starting to lean over by about 10° and I could see men everywhere climbing out. We eventually cleared

and test-fired the machine gun, which sent everyone scurrying again."

Pollard, modestly, failed to detail quite how brave he and his crew had been. *Coventry's* captain, David Hart Dyke, wrote in *Four Weeks in May: A Captain's Story of War at Sea*: "Lieutenant Pollard, who was directing the close-range guns from the exposed position of the bridge wings, declined to duck for cover as the enemy aircraft closed

at eye-level and one of them strafed the ship with cannon fire. He then ordered the gun crews to stay at their posts and keep firing, which they did without question."

Within minutes, the order was given to abandon ship, but the crew could not launch the lifeboat because of the list. Amid thick, acrid smoke, some men started slipping down the bridge onto the upper deck.

Pollard recalled how the Chinese men who worked in the ship's laundry were clustered on the upper deck, dazed and disorientated. "God knows how they made it out – we managed to calm some of them down and get them into lifejackets and survival suits."

A lifeboat was launched from *Broadsword*, which had only received minor damage. Pollard described swimming to a raft, dragging who he thought was a wounded shipmate. However, on reaching the life raft he discovered that the man was dead. Hanging on to the side of the crammed craft, he awaited the arrival of a boat. As the two rescue boats collided, he received a blow to the head and was taken into the lifeboat and onto *Broadsword*, where a sailor grabbed Pollard to prevent him falling back into the lifeboat.

I still have nightmares

Pollard reflected: "I didn't feel euphoria at the time when we won the war... I still have nightmares about [Captain Jorge Osvaldo] García, one of the pilots I shot down. I later found out that his body had been washed up on a beach, still in his life raft, nearly two years after the war.

"When I shot those planes down, it was the most exhilarating experience. But only hours later, as I watched *Coventry* go down, that was

FAR LEFT THE TYPE 42 DESTROYER 'COVENTRY' WAS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE AIR DEFENCE TO THE FLEET, AND WAS ON WATCH PROTECTING THE CARRIERS WHEN SHE WAS SUNK PA/ALAMY

LEFT 'COVENTRY' FIRES A SEA DART SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILE AT AN ARGENTINE AIRCRAFT. TAKEN FROM 'BROADSWORD' HMS BROADSWORD ASSOCIATION

LEFT ARGENTINE A-4B SKYHAWK PILOTS CAPITÁN PABLO CARBALLO (LEFT) AND TENIENTE CARLOS RINKE (RIGHT) COME UNDER FIRE AS THEY ATTACK 'BROADSWORD'. BOTH AIRCRAFT CAN JUST BE MADE OUT ON AND BELOW THE HORIZON HMS BROADSWORD ASSOCIATION

BELOW THE A-4B SKYHAWK FLOWN BY PRIMER TENIENTE MARIANO VELASCO, WHO HIT 'COVENTRY' WITH THREE BOMBS SANTIAGO RIVAS





ABOVE AND RIGHT 'COVENTRY' SHROUDED IN SMOKE AFTER BEING HIT BY THREE BOMBS, TWO OF WHICH EXPLODED
HMS BROADSWORD ASSOCIATION

the worst moment of my life.”

The ship was struck by three bombs just above the waterline on her port side. One exploded beneath the computer room, destroying it and the operations room. The second entered the forward engine room, exploding beneath the Junior Ratings’ dining room. The third did not explode. Of *Coventry*’s 280 crew, 19 were killed and 25 were injured. One of the most seriously wounded died less than a year later.

Coventry sank off Pebble Island the next day. An MOD press release dated June 9 said the ship had downed seven fighter-bombers, a helicopter, sunk a patrol craft and controlled numerous Sea Harriers that accounted for several more aircraft, a firm indication the *Coventry* performed magnificently and with great bravery throughout an arduous campaign. After the war, a cross to commemorate those killed on her was erected on Pebble Island. There is also a plaque in the cathedral of its namesake city and another at the nearby Holy Trinity Church.

No crew member from *Coventry* received a medal, but Chief Petty Officer Aircrewman M J Tupper

was awarded the DSM for his part in the helicopter rescue, while Chris was Mentioned in Despatches. He emphasised to me that he considered his MID a distinction awarded not just to him but to the entire gunnery division of *Coventry*. “It was very much a team effort,” he stressed.

Hot welcome

The focus of operations became San Carlos Water, as the British landed men, stores and equipment on East Falkland. Such was the ferocity

manager. Michael left school at 15 to fulfil his ambition to join the Royal Navy, enlisting in February 1959.

Initially, he was a junior marine engineering mechanic – or ‘stoker’, and travelled the world (including visits to the Falklands). By April 2, 1982, Townsend – then 38 and married with two children – had served for 23 years, and was a Chief Petty Officer on HMS *Argonaut*, a refitted Leander-class frigate. On the day of the Argentine invasion, Townsend and his crew were in Portland, Dorset, following



BELOW A SEA KING SEARCHES FOR SURVIVORS NEAR THE CAPSIZED HULL OF HMS 'COVENTRY'
HMS BROADSWORD ASSOCIATION

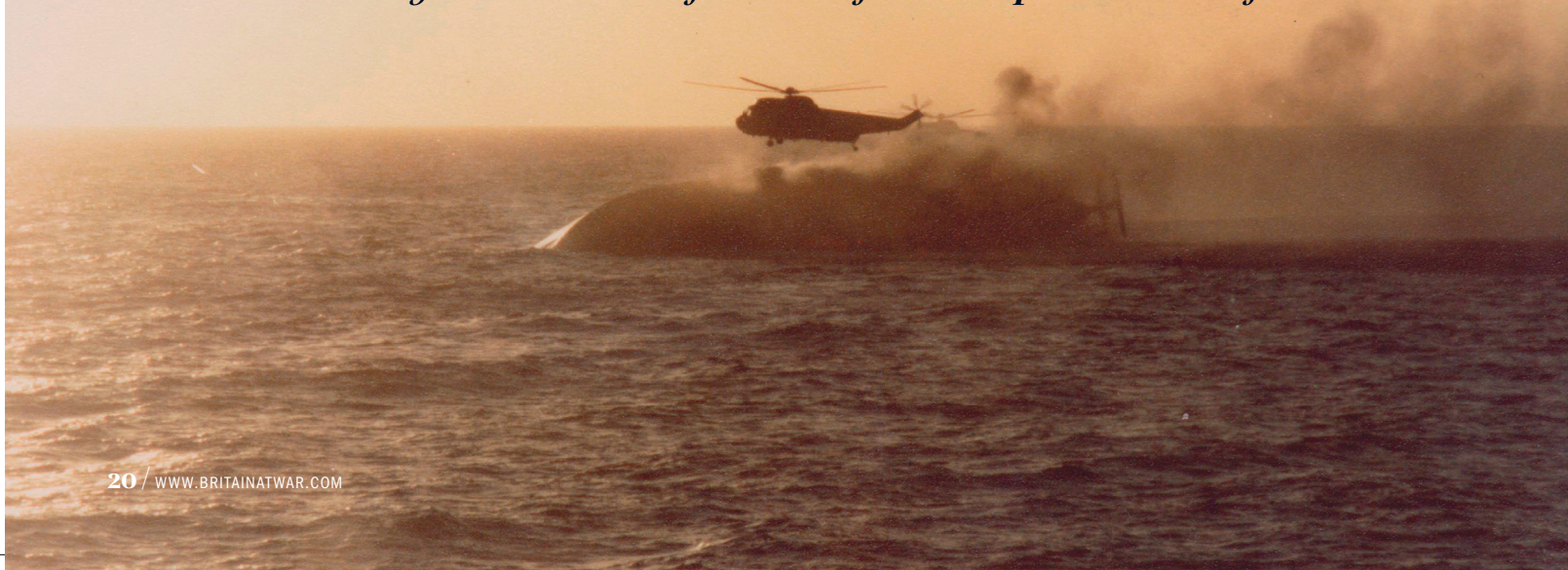
of the action that the location became known as ‘Bomb Alley’ and the phase of the war ‘The Battle of San Carlos’.

Michael David Townsend served during the intense and ferocious fight against the Argentine Air Force. Born in Heathfield, Sussex, on August 13, 1943, he was brought up in Kent. The eldest of three boys, his father had served in the Royal Artillery during World War Two before becoming a driver and site

a six-month tour of the Gulf. In days, they were moving south. As Townsend told me at his home in Yalding, Kent: “We knew we were going to go and kick them [the Argentines] off.”

Argonaut – together with the Type 21 frigate *Ardent* – escorted troop-carrying merchant ships to the Falklands via Ascension Island. By May 21, it had just escorted the amphibious landing ship *Fearless* into Falkland Sound.

“Lieutenant Pollard declined to duck for cover as the enemy aircraft closed at eye-level and one of them strafed the ship with cannon fire”





Admiral Sandy Woodward, sets the scene in his book, *One Hundred Days*: “Then it began. An Argentinian light attack jet [an Italian-built Macchi 339] flying at wave-top height along the north coast, swung suddenly into the entrance to Falkland Sound, going as fast as he could. The first ship he saw was [Captain] Kit Layman’s *Argonaut* and he fired all eight of his 5in rockets at the frigate, coming in low and raking the decks with 30mm cannon fire. One rocket hit the Seacat missile deck area, injuring three men – one of whom lost an eye; another, the Master-at-Arms, took a piece of shrapnel one inch above his heart.

“The attack had been so swift and sudden that the raider was making his escape before any hardware could be aimed at him. They shot at him with a Blowpipe missile from the deck of *Canberra*; *Intrepid* launched a Seacat, and David Pentreath opened up with the 4.5in guns of *Plymouth*. But the Macchi got away doubtless to stagger his

High Command with the tale of what he had just seen spread out below him in Carlos Water...”

Through the narrows

Later, the Argentinians launched their most sustained raid of the day; a 30-minute attack opened by six Skyhawks flying extremely low along the north coast, where radar could not see them. Flying through the narrows at more than 500kts, they picked out *Argonaut* desperately trying to evacuate her wounded by helicopter.

Woodward wrote: “At the last moment [*Argonaut*] saw them and opened fire with everything they had, but they had no hope of stopping all six. Five made it through, dropping ten 1,000lb bombs, eight exploded in the water close to the embattled frigate. Two hit her, but mercifully failed to explode. The first hit forward, going through a diesel tank and coming to rest in the Seacat magazine, starting a fire and causing considerable structural damage.”



ARGONAUT’S CAPTAIN

On October 22, 1982, Christopher ‘Kit’ Layman – in command when *Argonaut* was bombed – penned a hand-written letter of congratulations to Townsend that ended with a joke typical of the black humour enjoyed in the armed forces. Layman, who was decorated with the DSO for his own bravery and leadership in the Falklands, wrote:

“Dear Chief Petty Officer Townsend, very many congratulations on your DSM. I can’t think of anyone who deserved a medal more. The citation only tells half the story: if you had not found and extinguished our fire, we would probably have lost the ship. It is good to see such resolute courage and stamina so well rewarded.

“I am not sure where you are at present, but I hope this reaches you. Poor old *Argonaut* is in a fearful mess; what the Argentine Air Force failed to do the dockyard have done very well! If you come this way before Christmas, or our paths cross in the years ahead, please come and say hello and we’ll share a glass.

“Yours sincerely, Christopher Layman

“PS – Why does Galtieri have glass-bottomed boats? To review the Argentine Air Force!”



The second bomb wrecked boiler room equipment and controls, leaving the frigate perilously close to the rocks around Fanning Head, moving ahead with effectively no brakes or steering: “With remarkable presence of mind, Sub-Lieutenant Peter Morgan [DSC] raced off the bridge, collecting a couple of ratings as he went, and managed to let go the anchor, which dragged the ship to a halt just short of the shoreline. Seconds later they lost all power, there was almost total devastation in certain parts and, with two men killed in the magazine, *Argonaut*’s war was almost over.”

I obtained a copy of the ship’s

TOP LEFT AND RIGHT CHRISTOPHER POLLARD AT HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, COVENTRY, WHERE EACH YEAR HE LAYS A WREATH TO HONOUR THE 19 CREW KILLED DURING THE ATTACK ON HMS ‘COVENTRY’. POLLARD’S SOUTH ATLANTIC (1982) MEDAL WITH MID OAK LEAF, OMAN PEACE MEDAL AND OMANI 25TH ANNIVERSARY MEDAL (OF SULTAN QABOOS’ ACCESSION TO THE OMANI THRONE IN 1970) BOTH COURTESY OF LORD ASHCROFT

LEFT SURVIVORS OF THE ‘COVENTRY’ RETURNING TO SOUTHAMPTON ON BOARD THE ‘QUEEN ELIZABETH 2’ DAVID BAGNALL/ALAMY



ABOVE THE LEANDER-CLASS FRIGATE 'ARGONAUT'. THE FOUR LAUNCHERS ON HER BOW ARE FOR EXOCET ANTI-SHIP MISSILES (WHICH REPLACED HER MAIN GUNS) AND WERE FITTED BETWEEN 1976-80 COURTESY OF LORD ASHCROFT

RIGHT ARGENTINE NAVY PILOT, TEN DE NAV OWEN CRIPPA, THE FIRST TO ATTACK 'ARGONAUT' ON MAY 21, IN FRONT OF HIS MACCHI MB 339A SANTIAGO RIVAS

BELOW 'ARGONAUT' PROVIDED CLOSE PROTECTION TO THE SHIPS OF THE AMPHIBIOUS LANDING GROUP PA/ALAMY

hand-written engine room diary for May 21, which records the events succinctly: "Arrived off Falkland Sound at 0630. 0900 - Action Stations. 1246 - Under attack from aircraft - three casualties. 1312 - Under attack from aircraft. 1432 - Under attack from aircraft. 1540 - Under attack from aircraft. 1726 - Under attack from aircraft - hit by 2x1,000lb bombs, one in the boiler room, port aft corner, the other in forward Seacat magazine. Fortunately, neither exploded. Engine and boiler room evacuated. Command damage control... two dead. Ship stopped in the water. Ship was at full ahead when bombs hit, and machinery spaces evacuated."

Townsend's DSM citation takes up the story: "...Argonaut was struck by two bombs which did not explode, one lodging in the boiler room and the second entering the forward magazine through a fuel tank. Chief Marine Engineering Mechanic Townsend re-entered the boiler room to assess the damage and then organised and carried out the patching of a [4ft] hole in the ship's hull at the waterline. He worked firstly inboard, passing over and working within 5ft of the unexploded bomb, and then hanging over the side of the ship during continuing air attacks..."

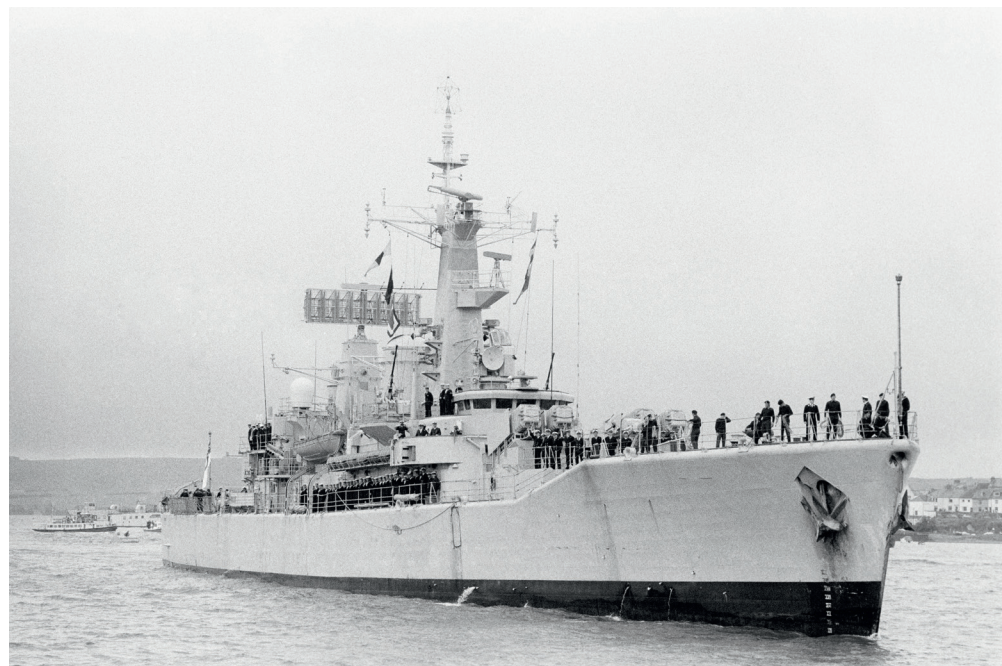
"He then, without a break, attacked the flooding and damage caused by the second bomb. He directed and personally carried out pumping operations above the magazine containing this

unexploded bomb. He continued to search compartments flooded with diesel fuel for almost 48 hours. [He] worked with no regard for his own safety. His fearlessness and resolute stamina in helping to overcome severe damage was a major factor in saving the ship."

Long way to swim home

Townsend told me that when the first bomb struck, he was on the second of three decks in the 'switchboard' area, used for distributing electricity: "When the ship was hit, it jumped up and I was thrown across the switchboard and I smashed my face, breaking my nose and three of my front teeth."

Fire broke out and Townsend was soon organising the firefighting as seawater rose to their necks: "Once the bombs hit us, we lost all power.



They got the emergency diesel running but the young engineers didn't know they were sucking in seawater because one of the bombs had gone through the fuel tank. About 350 tons of diesel was on top of the water on two deck. I had about ten men with hoses to fight the fire for nearly two hours before we put it out."

Only then could Royal Engineers Staff Sergeant Jim Prescott and Warrant Officer 2 John Phillips defuse the first bomb. Townsend said: "There was so much water from the gaping hole in the fuel tank and magazine that we couldn't pump it out with our equipment, the rescue tug sent over some large pumps. We managed to get the water level down and that's when we found the bodies of two sailors.

"At this point I put on a rubber diving suit to hang out on ropes



ABOVE ARGENTINE JETS, SUCH AS A-4 SKYHAWKS AND THIS IAI DAGGER, USED TERRAIN TO MASK THEIR APPROACHES AND OFTEN FLEW BELOW MAST HEIGHT. THEY HAD ONLY SECONDS TO SELECT AND ENGAGE THEIR TARGET
PETE HOLDGATE /IWM VIA GETTY

BELOW BRITISH SHIPS OPERATING IN THE SAN CARLOS WATER AND THE FALKLAND SOUND WERE VULNERABLE TO HIGH-SPEED, EXTREMELY LOW-LEVEL AIR ATTACKS. SHOWN, THE MV 'NORLAND' STRADDLED BY BOMBS AFTER DISEMBARKING MEN OF 2 PARA. LEFT IS RFA 'STROMNESS' AND RIGHT IS HMS 'INTREPID', MAY 21, 1982
PETE HOLDGATE /IWM VIA GETTY

and try to patch up the hole in the boiler room. I told my stokers and the seamen, 'if we come under attack, drop me in the water'. But the sea was so cold that I soon told them, 'Don't drop me in the water again. I would rather get shot than freeze to death!' I spent about four-and-a-half hours in near-freezing conditions, hanging from ropes as I patched up the side."

Townsend and his team then had to address the second bomb and they worked for four days to remove it: "The second bomb, which set off two Seacats when it landed in the magazine, could not be defused. We had to rig ropes and pulleys to get the bomb up to the second deck, and then we cut a hole in the side of the ship and put it overboard. Most of the ship's company were taken off while we were doing that.

It was frightening – we were under constant threat of air attack. I was too busy getting on with the job. I didn't sleep for four days. We were given pills called 'pinkies' and 'blueies', to keep us awake and then, right at the end, to sedate us.

"After getting rid of the bombs, engineers came on board to weld up the hole above the magazine where the forward bomb had been removed. A spark ignited the diesel fumes in the mattresses and clothing in the mess deck and the ship caught fire yet again. We fought this blaze for three hours."

It was decided the ship could be saved, and *Argonaut* limped home to Plymouth, Devon. "We were the first ship to return home. They tried to keep it quiet, but we got in at 9am on a Saturday." He was met on the quayside on June 26 by his wife,

FALKLANDS WAR HEROES

Falklands War Heroes, which is out now, is the new book written by Lord Ashcroft (Michael Ashcroft) ahead of the 40th anniversary of the 1982 conflict. It has two main aims: to champion great acts of valour, and raise money for good causes (all author's royalties are being donated to military charities). The Falklands Conflict may prove to be the last 'colonial' war that Britain ever fights. Fought 8,000 miles from home soil, it cost the lives of 255 British military personnel, with many more wounded, some seriously.



There were many witnessed acts of outstanding courage after a strong task force was sent to regain the islands from the Argentine invaders. Soldiers, sailors and airmen risked, and in some cases gave, their lives for the freedom of the islanders. *Falklands War Heroes* – the seventh book in Lord Ashcroft's 'Heroes' series – tells the stories behind his collection of gallantry and service medals awarded for the war. The collection, almost certainly the largest of its kind in the world, spans all the major events of the ten-week conflict. The book, which contains nearly 40 separate write-ups on war veterans, can be ordered from Biteback, the publishers, or from Amazon. See: falklandswarheroes.com

Mary, and his brother, Barry.

On May 23, Staff Sergeant Jim Prescott of 49 EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) Squadron, Royal Engineers, who had worked on making safe the bomb on *Argonaut*, was killed defusing one of two





ABOVE FORMER CHIEF ENGINEERING MECHANIC MICHAEL TOWNSEND WAS AWARDED THE DSM

ABOVE RIGHT TOWNSEND AND FAMILY AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE IN 1982. HE HAD BEEN DESCRIBED AS "FEARLESS AND RESOLUTE" WHEN HIS SHIP WAS BOMBED BOTH IMAGES COURTESY OF LORD ASHCROFT

BELOW HMS 'ARGONAUT', REPAIRED AND REFITTED, ON THE POTOMAC RIVER IN 1985 NARA



unexploded bombs on HMS *Antelope*. His colleague WO2 Phillips lost an arm.

Townsend later told his local newspaper: "I don't think of myself as a hero. All I wanted was to get on with my job. The ship was my home as well as that of 250 others. I was paid to do it, so I thought I had better get on with it – and 8,000 miles is a long way to swim home."

On November 25, 1982, he attended an investiture at Buckingham Palace, receiving his DSM from the Queen. He was accompanied by his wife and their two children, Simone and David (his son served 34 years in the navy). When I purchased Townsend's medal group in 2011, it came with two pieces of the bomb that landed in the forward magazine and a large aluminium ring that attached the tailfin to the bomb itself. Both bombs that hit

Argonaut were British, sold to the Argentines several years previously. It appears the Argentines failed to adjust the timing mechanisms given the extremely low altitudes at which they were dropping them.

My tribute

Michael Townsend left the navy after being overlooked for a role he wanted. He was discharged in August 1983, age 40, and worked in the pub trade, in agricultural engineering and as a civil servant. He retired as a civilian commanding officer of an army unit aged 65. He has five grandchildren and does voluntary work, including serving on various NHS management boards. He is a keen mountaineer, walker and boating enthusiast. Reflecting on the Falklands, he told me: "It was a just war. We had to go

down there because the islanders were British. I am proud to have played my part."

Chris Pollard was posted as a lieutenant to HMS *Nottingham* before retiring in 1986. He worked for two breweries as an area manager and was a lieutenant-commander in the Royal Naval Reserve until 1998. In 1992, he joined the Sultan of Oman's Royal Yacht Squadron. Semi-retired and living in Hull, he has recently turned his hobby into a job, working part-time as a cook. He is divorced with three children and three grandchildren. Reflecting

40 years on, he told me: "I am very proud of what the navy achieved. It was remarkable to go from a standing start to a full-blown war in just one week and achieve what we did. Very few organisations could have done it. I feel sadness too for the people who didn't come back but, unfortunately, that's war."

The contribution of the navy in recapturing the Falklands is immeasurable. My tribute to these men and those like them, *Falklands War Heroes*, does not seek to provide a definitive account of the war at sea – that has already been fulfilled by many other excellent books. However, I do try to provide insight into the bravery of some of those who served at sea, particularly their gallantry during the losses of some of the Royal Navy's finest ships and most courageous men. ●

***"I told them, 'If we come under attack, drop me in the water.'
But the sea was so cold that I soon told them, 'Don't drop me in the water again.
I would rather get shot than freeze to death!'"***

