

Falklands 40

Lord Ashcroft is a champion of the bravery of Britain's Armed Forces and author of the newly published 'Falklands War Heroes', which highlights the courage of the soldiers, sailors, airmen and support staff sent to the conflict. Here he recalls stories of two veterans from the South West...

THEIR wartime roles could hardly have been more different. Yet the remarkable stories of two Devon veterans of the Falklands War epitomise the courage of the UK task force in retaking the remote South Atlantic archipelago 40 years ago.

Keith Mills was a 22-year-old lieutenant in the Royal Marines who had to take life-or-death decisions on the front line that were both above his 'pay grade' and his experience. Naval nurse Jeune Hendy was 26 and had never been to sea before when she was tasked with treating scores of seriously injured servicemen from both sides of the conflict while aboard the hospital ship, HMHS *Uganda*.

Both were called to serve Queen and country after Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands on April 2, 1982. The prime minister of the day, Margaret Thatcher, acted decisively and amassed a task force of more than 100 ships and some 20,000 men to protect the freedoms of 1,820 islanders living 8,000 miles away.

As a champion of bravery, I wrote *Falklands War Heroes*, published in November last year, highlighting the courage of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and support staff in a brutal war that cost the lives of 255 British military personnel and left hundreds of others wounded, many seriously.

Rather than simply retelling the story of the war in general, I decided to recount nearly 40 individual stories based on the collection of gallantry and service medals that I have amassed, as a collector, over the past four decades.

Partly by good fortune and partly by design, my medal collection spans the full length of the war and all the major battles that were fought. The common thread that runs through my book is my admiration for the valour of servicemen and women waging a difficult war so far from their homeland.

Two of those stories related to Keith Mills, from east Devon, and Jeune Hall (née Hendy), from Exmouth, both of whom provided exclusive interviews of their wartime experiences for my book.

Bravest of the brave served Queen and country with honour



The aftermath of the Battle of Grytviken

Cometh the hour, cometh the man. Mills and his men had been dispatched to South Georgia on the patrol ship HMS *Endurance* from the Falkland Islands to eject the scrap metal dealers who had illegally arrived and put up the Argentinian flag on March 19. Twenty-two men had been landed on South Georgia from *Endurance* on March 31 and regained control of the island peacefully.

At 10.30am on April 3, Captain Cesar Trombetta, on board the *Bahía Paraiso* and leading the Argentinian force in the area, radioed, over the Channel 16 international frequency, to the South Georgia garrison, saying: "Following our successful operation in the Malvinas Islands, the ex-governor has surrendered the islands and dependencies to Argentina. We suggest you adopt a similar course

of action to prevent any loss of life. If so, all British troops and Government personnel will be repatriated to the UK unharmed."

Eventually, Mills and his men decided to put up a fight. The Marines were 'dug in' at a position about 100 metres from the shore in a sheltered bay, with a Union flag fluttering nearby. The first the Marines saw of the invading force was the corvette *Guerrico* rounding

a point and coming into a cove close to the BAS base. She was supported by an Alouette helicopter, hovering above.

After assessing the situation, Mills ordered his men to open fire and more than 500 rounds of small-arms fire hit the helicopter from a range of under 100 metres. Trailing smoke, the aircraft pulled away and limped some 1,200 metres to the other side of the bay, where it crash-

Falklands 40



Above: Lt Keith Mills (standing, second left) and his small detachment of Marines shortly before the Battle of Grytviken on South Georgia. Right: Jeune Hendy serving on the hospital ship HMMS Uganda during the Falklands War



landed. Next on the scene was another helicopter, again an Alouette, but this aircraft was hit, too, and crashed.

Next, *Guerrico* began blasting away with her 40mm guns from her stern and with a 100mm gun from her bow.

Mills and his men expected her to remain out of their range, firing from a safe distance. Instead, *Guerrico* carried on until she was only

500 metres from the British force.

In his official report of the incident, of which I have obtained a copy, Mills later wrote: "I ordered my men to open fire. The corvette was committed to entering the bay and could not turn around. The first 84mm round fired at the ship landed approximately 10 metres short of its target. The round did not

Falklands 40

'The bravery of men and women like these must never be forgotten'



» FROM PAGE 21

detonate on impact with the water, but did detonate on impact with the ship below the water line. The ship was also hit by a 66mm round behind the front 100mm turret, and was engaged by heavy machine gun and rifle fire."

It is believed that for two hours the 22 Royal Marines faced an overall invasion force of some 300 enemy servicemen. The sole British casualty was a corporal shot twice in one arm. The number of enemy casualties is not known - but it is likely there was a total of around 20 casualties (dead and wounded).

Eventually, Mills was forced to surrender against overwhelming odds. He and his men were taken as prisoners of war and, after some time, allowed to return to Britain unharmed.

Mills was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) on June 4, 1982, when his citation ended: "Lieutenant Mills' resolute leadership during this action reflected the finest traditions of the Corps." Mills left the Marines in the rank of captain on July 4, 1996. By that point, he and his wife, who were married in 1986, had two children.

After leaving the Armed Forces, Mills started a business developing and running care homes for the elderly in east Devon, where he continues to live. Now aged 62, he remains as managing director of Doveleigh Care Ltd, which has three award-winning care homes.

Jeune Hendy (her maiden name) was selfless and dedicated to her job when she became one of some



Jeune Hendy, top, and with her colleagues onboard HMHS Uganda on its return to the UK after the Falklands War

40 female nursing staff who courageously served in the HMHS *Uganda*, a floating hospital that was anchored in and around the Falkland Islands during the height of the war.

After some of the fiercest battles, up to 160 casualties a day - from both sides - were treated on the hospital ship, some suffering from horrendous injuries.

Hendy was a member of the Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service (QARNNS). After arriving in the 200-mile total exclu-

sion zone, the *Uganda* received her first casualties on May 12.

By May 31, she had 132 casualties on board. Hendy said: "The first day was orderly chaos as we were all finding our feet. For example, an oxygen cylinder fell over because it hadn't been secured properly. We had a sterilising unit that was quickly nicknamed 'Vesuvius' because the damn thing was always blowing and not doing what it was supposed to do. One of the early casualties told me that, when they saw our ship arrive with its Red

Cross flag, the wounded were lifted psychologically. The men thought: 'If we can get on to that ship, we will be safe.'

"We saw so many men in terrible pain and in shock who arrived looking war-torn and not in good condition. The hardest thing for me was seeing so many young, fit men with missing limbs or limbs that were so badly injured they had to be removed [amputated]. In some cases, we had to take their boot off, still with their foot in it, and throw it over the side because there was

nowhere to store body parts. It was very distressing: you knew life for them would never be the same and that their careers in the military were over.

"Some of the burns were terrible, too. One man with terrible facial burns was crying and grabbed my arm and said: 'I used to be handsome but now I'm never going to look normal again.'

"The work was relentless. We worked every day, four hours on, four hours off, day and night."

As stated, on their busiest day,

Falklands 40



After the surrender was announced, Hendy became the first naval nurse to set foot on the Falklands when she jumped on board a landing craft that was taking supplies to a beach from *Uganda*. She did so because she did not want to go home having not stepped on one of the islands. "I thought: 'I've not come all this way not to set foot on the Falkland Islands.'"

Hendy did a further 12 years with the QARNNS after arriving back from the Falklands, bringing her total service to 18 years in all. For her work, she was awarded a long-service medal.

Today, Jeune Hall (her married name) lives in Exmouth with her grown-up daughter, Amy. She works as a steward at the Royal Marines base at Lympstone, Devon.

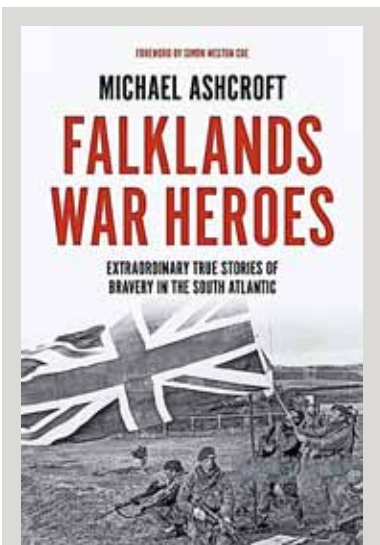
Reflecting on her war service nearly 40 years on, she told me: "If someone said, 'would you do it all again?', my answer would be, 100 per cent, 'yes, without question.'"

In simple terms, the Falklands War was a ten-week undeclared conflict that Britain fought and won but, as with all wars, it came at a price. Apart from the deaths and physical injuries, many servicemen and even the islanders themselves still suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Falklands conflict may well be the last 'colonial war' that Britain ever fights but one thing is certain: the bravery 40 years ago of men and women like Keith Mills and Jeune Hall must never be forgotten.



Above: former Royal Marine Keith Mills pictured at his home in Devon. Right: Keith (second right) with former governor of the Falkland Islands, Sir Rex Hunt, (second left). Left: Jeune Hendy on the deck of *HMHS Uganda* wearing an immersion suit



Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His latest bravery book, *Falklands War Heroes*, was published in November last year. It tells the stories of nearly 40 servicemen and women who displayed outstanding gallantry during the 1982 conflict. For details on the book and how to order it, visit www.falklandswarheroes.com. For information on Lord Ashcroft's work on bravery, visit www.lordashcroftonbravery.com. For details on his general work, visit www.lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter and/or Facebook @LordAshcroft

staff on the hospital ship had treated 160 casualties but more typically, when the fighting was at its height, they would welcome between 40 and 70 wounded men.

In total, during the war, doctors, nurses and medical assistants in the ship treated 730 casualties, including 150 wounded Argentinian servicemen. In total, *Uganda's* staff conducted 504 surgical operations on board.

Hendy told me: "It was mentally and physically exhausting – the hardest nursing any of us had ever

done. I remember one day when I was on what was called 'red watch'. I had just done my four hours on and I had got into bed and over the tannoy it announced: 'Red watch, at the rush go to the operating theatre'. The operating theatre had flooded in bad weather conditions and it took us forever to sort it all out. Then afterwards we were back on duty and everyone was so, so tired."

Typically, an operating team consisted of a surgeon, an anaesthetist, a nursing sister and junior nurses. Hendy said that equipment short-

ages meant that lots of things had to be used over and over again after being sterilised. "Sometimes the surgeons put their rubber gloves on and they would disintegrate because they had been recycled so many times," Hendy recalled.

She said there were a few times when she broke down in floods of tears. "One chappie, who was Special Forces, had to have his leg amputated. But because of his medical history he couldn't have a general anaesthetic; he had to have a local, spinal anaesthetic. While the sur-

geons were removing his leg, he was still conscious but there was a screen in place so he couldn't see exactly what was happening to his leg.

"My job was to sit and hold his hand and this brave man said to me: 'You poor nurses. I bet you don't know what to talk to us about while men like me are having their legs chopped off'. His bravery got to me and made me tearful and he said: 'Oh, don't be upset'. And I thought: 'This is the wrong way around. Why are you reassuring me?' He was such a wonderful man."