



## The Falklands

We have been fortunate in persuading Lord Ashcroft to give us an overview of his perception of the spirit of the Falklanders in the 1982 conflict. To find out more on this fascinating subject we would refer you to his book, mentioned at the end of this piece.

### The brave resistance of the islanders during the Falklands War

While researching my latest bravery book, *Falklands War Heroes*, I naturally came across numerous stories of bravery enacted by British soldiers, sailors, airmen and support staff. However, I also heard some accounts of a less well-known valour – that displayed by islanders whose remote British Overseas Territory had been invaded by a huge Argentine force on April 2, 1982.

My book, published in November, concentrated solely on gallantry medal groups from my own collection awarded to servicemen – and one woman – during the



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war. However, more recently I researched the defiance and bravery of the islanders, speaking to several who experienced the events of 40 years ago. At times, the courage of many of the 1,820 islanders brought back memories of *La Résistance*, the famous organisations who fought the Nazi occupation of France during the Second World War. Like the brave French men and women eight decades ago, some Falkland islanders risked, at best, their freedom and, at worst, their lives by secretly plotting against the Argentine aggressors. This article provides an insight into their courage from four decades ago. When a large Argentine force descended on the Falkland Islands in the early hours of April 2 1982, the

main island, with just a small presence of Royal Marines, put up a short but spirited defence until everyone was ordered to surrender by their Governor Rex Hunt. The islanders then debated in private what they should do: most opted, in the face of overwhelming odds, to build a working relationship with the invaders but to fall short of total cooperation. Some bided their time waiting for the best moment to take up arms.

However, throughout the occupation many took significant risks by forming a loose resistance group that sabotaged the communications and other operations of the Argentine invaders, whilst also passing on vital information, including the locations of enemy troops, to the British. The men of the Public Works Department, who ran the electricity and water supplies under armed guard, considered trying to sabotage both services, but they realised that the islanders would suffer as much as the invaders if this was done.

One man whom the Argentines disregarded as a threat was Steve Whitley, the island vet, who was allowed to tour the islands tending to farm stock and pets. Phil Middleton, a teacher, helped Whitley secure the homes of Government officials who had left the Falklands after April 2. Middleton later recalled, “Steve



had his 'magic scissors', a gelding tool that he used to cut the army telephone wires." Whitley had managed to hold on to camera equipment too which he used to good effect during so-called house clearing missions, photographing various enemy positions and the like for the UK Task Force to use at some point. Speaking from his home on the Falklands, Middleton told me: "At the time, we [Steve Whitley and himself] were fundamentally angry that someone had come to take over our island, our homes and were telling us what to do."

Soon some of the braver amateur ham operators were also seeking to pass on intelligence, including Reg Silvey, who at the time had lived on the Falklands for 13 years. After the invasion, he handed in his "rig" at the Town Hall, making sure it was signed for, but he then managed to get hold of a radio and transmitter that had been secretly hidden by another islander. He then managed to pass on key information to the British with this equipment.

Perhaps the bravest islander of all was Terry Peck, the former police chief turned councillor, who wandered around with a camera and telephoto lens concealed in a drainpipe. His images of anti-aircraft missiles and other weapons were smuggled to the British forces. Fearing arrest, Peck, who was in his early 40s in 1982, fled Port Stanley, the capital, on a motorbike, armed with a semi-automatic pistol and ammunition hidden earlier in his spare tyre. For the next few weeks, Peck, who had good waterproof clothing, hid out, sometimes sleeping rough and at other times seeking help from islanders who fed him and allowed him to sleep in their outbuildings and use their bathrooms. Peck, who had the codename of "Rubber Duck", was determined to meet up with members of the British Armed Forces once they arrived on East Falkland from the UK 8,000 miles away – and he did just that. After the men of 3 PARA and Royal Marines landed at Port San Carlos on East Falkland, Peck got a radio message to them that he was riding to meet them on his motorbike and they should not fire on him.

Peck later described to local journalist Graham Bound riding through the men, sporting their red and green berets. "I was frantically waving to everybody and they were waving at me." Over the next few days, he was debriefed by intelligence officers. Over a two-way civilian radio, he made contact with Trudi Morrison (now Trudi McPhee) urging her to get "as many drivers and vehicles together as you can" and meet them as soon as possible.

Morrison, then aged 29, was farming the land where she still lives with her then partner. During the occupation, she had shielded up to 16 people, including women and children, in her two-bedroom farmhouse and neighbouring caravan. Once she had her request for help from Peck, Morrison wasted no time in getting several volunteers with Land Rovers, tractors and other supplies to join her cross-country convoy. "I am a pretty strong-willed character. There was no way I was going to miss out. I wanted to get rid of those bloody Argies," she told me. At 4am on May 31, much to her parents' concern, Morrison and her group of some 22 islanders drove through the Para lines and on to nearby Estancia with enemy soldiers all around the mountains. Soon the volunteers were taking 300 Paras and their kit up Estancia Mountain. As the battle loomed, both Peck and Morrison stayed with the British forces. At one point, Morrison led a military convoy sporting a pair of white gloves so they could be seen easily as she pointed out the best directions in the gloom. Morrison said she was not really scared, even when she came under enemy fire. "I just felt so damn cross that these people [the enemy] had done this to us and I wanted to do all I could to help," she said.

The Battle for Mount Longdon was won on June 11/12. On June 14, Port Stanley

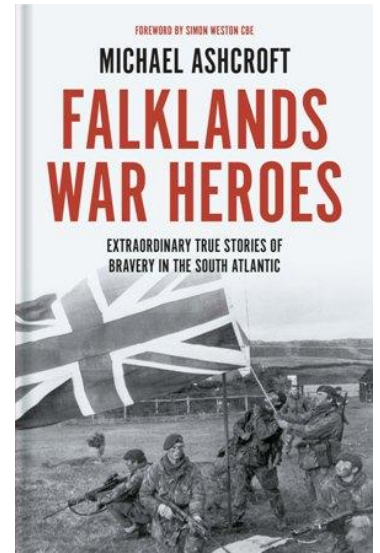


was captured and the enemy surrendered. Sadly, during the fighting on June 11, three civilians, all women and including Sue Whitley, 30, the vet's wife, were killed - but their fight to help regain their homes and their freedoms had been won. Terry Peck, who actually fought with the Paras, was awarded the MBE for his bravery and other islanders were recognised for their courage too. Today, at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, England, there is a memorial tribute to the bravery of the islanders who resisted their invaders and oppressors. However, the willow upland goose, designed to represent the islanders' freedom and erected in 2010, is falling into disrepair.

I have made a contribution to the £50,000 appeal to construct a more permanent memorial made from metal for I believe the courage of these islanders 40 years ago must never be forgotten.

Lord Ashcroft

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## Old Bill

This 1934 cover of the "British Legion Journal" shows "Old Bill", a fictional character created in 1914–15 by cartoonist [Bruce Bairnsfather](#). Old Bill was depicted as an elderly, pipe-smoking British "tommy" - or here an ex-tommy - with a walrus moustache.

His classic cartoon "Well if you knows of a better 'ole... go to it!" is the frontispiece of his book "Fragments from France" which is available - free - on Gutenberg.org (I would recommend the Gutenberg project to any of you who read on e-readers. Thousands of free books which are out of copyright are available) [Click here to see "Fragments"](#) and more pictures.