

Some personal recollections of the Falklands campaign

By Geoff Mills G3EDM

Way back before the Argentine military forces invaded the Falkland Islands, in the Southern Atlantic Ocean, I used to speak on ssb (single sideband) to a number of Falkland hams on a regular basis. At that time there was a weekly, if not a daily, net on the lower end of the 20m ssb section of that band. A number of the members of that net were Scottish hams as the Islands were jokingly referred to as being offshore from Scotland. In reality, thousands of miles south from the Scottish mainland.

I was speaking to a ham in Goose Green at the time the first wave of Argentinean planes attacked the Islands. This ham passed the comment that he thought they were on their way to Port Stanley, the capital of the main island. During the war my nephew, Lt. Keith Mills DSC, and twenty-two marines were put ashore in South Georgia at Grytviken to make contact with Cindy Buxton and her companion, Annie Price, who were exploring and photographing wildlife in the mountains there. Cindy, I believe was a relative of Scott the Antarctic explorer. Also the marines were there to protect the unused whaling station at Leith near Grytviken.

At Grytviken the marines fought a losing battle with personnel disembarking from an Argentinean frigate. Outnumbered, and after exchanging small arms fire, they eventually surrendered, without loss of any marines, but not before rendering the helicopter brought with the frigate useless with their anti-tank gun. For the three weeks afterwards my late brother Alan, G3NNF, and myself kept daily contact with a ham, CX1DDI, in Montevideo to find out where the captured marines were being held. Also I was being rung by landline from a newspaper reporter in Newcastle, UK for a daily update. At the end of these three weeks my brother and I received a message from the Uruguayan ham that Keith and his marines had been released. A half an hour later the Foreign Office rang my brother to tell him that Keith had been released. So ham radio triumphed over the bureaucrats!

After the Falklands war my nephew, Keith, was best man at the wedding of the Governor's daughter in Port Stanley. Prior to that we had a sked with Keith because we were expecting him to visit a ham in Port Stanley from the marine's ship called Endurance. After having been in contact with the ham for several hours David eventually turned up at his shack. He had not come ashore earlier because the radio operator on board had told David that there was no propagation to the UK. The ship's operator had learned from the government radio station in Port Stanley that they were unable to contact the UK although they were running a few kilowatts. Just shows that ham aerials can outperform high power commercial stations when transmitting low relative power. At the time I was running a homebrew transceiver, the HW100, and an h/b linear amplifier, the SB200 from Heathkit on 21 MHz. All thermionic valve rigs, in those days, that kept the shack nicely warm!

After the Falklands war my Nephew received his commendation for his exploits during the campaign from Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, at Buckingham palace.

Further details of the South Georgia operation and the reason for the marines being there is described at www.britains-smallwars.com/Falklands/South-Georgia.html

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