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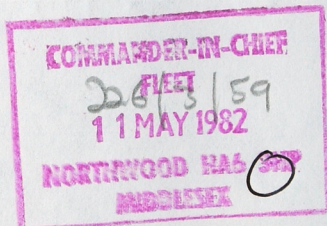
The Commanding Officer  
HMS ENDURANCE

7 May 1982

Sir

I have the honour to submit my Record of Proceedings concerning your Royal Marines at Gryptviken, South Georgia from 31 Mar 82 to 21 Apr 82.

I have the honour to be  
Sir,  
Your obedient Servant



Keith Mills

K P MILLS  
Lieutenant Royal Marines

Copy to:

The Commander-in-Chief Fleet  
The Commandant General Royal Marines  
Flag Officer Third Flotilla  
The Major General Royal Marines Training & Reserve Forces

CINC  
COS  
MAG  
A/cos(o/p)  
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Soco

HMS ENDURANCE ROYAL MARINE DETACHMENT  
REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS 31 MARCH - 21 APRIL 82

1. On the 31 March 1982 at about 2100 hours the Captain of HMS ENDURANCE, Captain N J BARKER summoned myself to his cabin. He then informed me that he had orders to sail to the Falkland Isles and that myself and the detachment were to disembark at South Georgia. The detachment at the time consisted of myself, 1 SNCO, 2 NCOs and nine marines from the original HMS ENDURANCE detachment plus 1 NCO and eight further marines detached from NP8901 to reinforce the detachment. My orders were threefold and were as follows:

- a. To be a British Military presence on the island of South Georgia.
- b. To protect the British Antarctic Survey personnel at Grytviken in the event of an emergency.
- c. To maintain surveillance over the Argentine scrap metal merchants at Leith Whaling Station.

My rules of engagement were as the Northern Ireland Yellow Card.

2. The detachment had disembarked by 2200 to the British Antarctic Survey Base at Grytviken, and HMS ENDURANCE immediately set sail for the Falkland Isles.

3. The night passed by uneventfully, and at first light on the morning of the 1st April 1982 I sent a four man observation team to Jason Ridge by boat to commence the surveillance over Leith harbour. This four man team had enough rations to last for four days.

4. No preparation of a defensive nature could be prepared at the British Antarctic Survey base due to the fact that the British Antarctic Survey commander had not informed his men of a possible invasion of the Falklands by Argentina. He did not therefore want the detachment to do anything that might alarm his men.

5. The rest of the day passed by uneventfully up until 2000 hours that evening. It was about this time that somebody tuned the radio on to Falkland Isles Radio frequency. It was then that we heard the Governor talking to the people of the Falklands warning them of an imminent Argentine invasion. The Governor made a series of transmissions throughout the night, his final one being at about 0600 on the 2nd April which said that the Argentines had landed and that he could hear shooting.

6. The detachment immediately began to prepare its defensive position in the area of the British Antarctic Survey base as this would be the obvious place for the Argentines to land. I believed the Argentine forces in the area of South Georgia at the time to consist of one ice patrol vessel called the BAHIA PARAISO, carrying a detachment of marines of about twenty, but possibly as many as fifty in number. The ship also carried one possibly two helicopters of about WASP size, and four landing craft of about LCVP size. I therefore assumed that the Argentinians would attempt to land by boat and landing craft, as they could not possibly put enough men on the ground at any one time by using their helicopters. We therefore prepared our defence against such an attack, which included wiring the entire length of the beach to our front and the jetty with home made NAPALM charges. This was done by using 45 gallon petrol drums, tins of paint and plastic explosive. My intention was to hit the enemy as hard as possible and then to withdraw through GRYTVIKEN up into the mountains and mount subsequent attacks from there. We placed our bergens loaded up with stores and ammunition along our withdrawal route to the rear of GRYTVIKEN so that our initial withdrawal could be done quickly.

I evacuated the British Antarctic Survey personnel to the church in GRYTVIKEN whaling station for their own safety. Only the base commander, STEVE MARTIN, remained to assist me in the running of the communication network in the base's radio shack.

7. At about 1000 that morning on the 2nd April a signal came through from HMS ENDURANCE informing us to expect an Argentine invasion by 40 military personnel at 1300 that day.

8. At about 1230 the BAHIA PARAISO appeared in the bay in front of Grytviken. The detachment was stood to in their incomplete defensive position. The BAHIA PARAISO entered the bay, looked around, and I can only assume that it was because of the weather that she left and went out to sea again. The weather on this day was about force 10 or 11, and it would have been impossible to either launch a boat or an aircraft. The detachment was then stood down.

9. The rest of the day passed by uneventfully, and an early warning sentry was placed out to the flank of our position. The remainder of the detachment continued to prepare their positions. The four men surveillance team could not be withdrawn to reinforce our main position due to the inclement weather.

10. At about 2000 hours that evening, 2 April 1982 the BAHIA PARAISO made its first radio contact with the base on VHF channel 16. Both myself and the civilian base commander STEVE MARTIN were present in the radio shed at the time. Due to the low power output on the base's VHF transmitter we were unable to communicate with the BAHIA PARAISO on channel 16. We then informed the BP of this fact using the HF transmitter on a frequency of 11255 KHz. The BP received our message, but refused to pass their message for us on HF, and informed us that it would contact us again the following morning on VHF and pass their message then. She then broke contact.

11. We then informed HMS ENDURANCE of the latest development using HF communication. ENDURANCE then passed us a message in code informing us that she would be returning to GRYTVIKEN PM 3 April 82, which was to be the following day.

12. The night passed by uneventfully, and when dawn broke the weather had improved considerably. I then decided to send Sgt LEACH and one other marine by boat to pick up the surveillance team from JASON RIDGE. Just before the team was withdrawn they informed us by radio that the BP was anchored in Leith harbour, and that an Argentine corvette had just appeared and was heading into STROMNESS BAY.

13. Sgt LEACH and the surveillance team returned to the British Antarctic Survey base by about 0900, 3rd April. Meanwhile the detachment continued to improve their defensive position.

14. That morning three messages were received in the base sent to us via HMS ENDURANCE. The text of the first was approximately as follows: when the BAHIA PARAISO makes contact with you, you are not to co-operate. The OCRM is to continue with the orders with which he went ashore.

15. As the message was ambiguous in the fact that I wasn't sure whether the ENDURANCE did not want us to co-operate with the text of the message, or whether they did not want us to establish communication with the BAHIA PARAISO, I sent a reply asking ENDURANCE to clarify their last message as there was ambiguity to its interpretation. ENDURANCE's reply was "when the base commander is asked to surrender he is not to do so". Five minutes later a further message came in, "The OCRM is not to take action which may endanger life."

17. At approximately 1030 3 April, the BAHIA PARAISO came up on the radio again on channel 16 informing us that she had a very important message for us. Again, due to our low power output we could not in turn reply on VHF. We then informed the BAHIA PARAISO on HF of our difficulties and she told us that she would send her message on VHF, but we should send our reply by HF means. The message from the BAHIA PARAISO was as follows, "following our successful operation in the Malvinas Islands the ex Governor has surrendered the islands and their dependencies to Argentina. We suggest you adopt a similar course of action to prevent any further loss of life." I then asked the BAHIA PARAISO to repeat the message several times, and then when I was absolutely clear what the message was, I read it back to them using HF means to enable the other Antarctic bases, HMS ENDURANCE, and the RRS BRANSFIELD to hear what the message was. The Argentines were clearly annoyed by this action and told us not to read back any further messages. I then asked for time to consider their demands before giving an answer. It was my hope that if I could stall them long enough ENDURANCE may return to the area, although I had realized that the presence of an Argentine corvette in the area would be likely to deter her from returning. Five minutes later the Argentinians came up on the air again informing us that we had had enough time to decide, and that we should now assemble all personnel in a group on the beach in front of the base to enable the Argentines to be able to count us. It was about at this time that the corvette appeared and started heading into the bay, whilst at the same time a helicopter flew overhead, presumably carrying out a reconnaissance.

18. I then tried to stall the Argentines further. I informed the officer on board the BAHIA PARAISO that there was ambiguity between what he had told us and what our orders were. I suggested that the corvette should hold back until this ambiguity could be cleared up. The Argentines ignored this demand and the corvette continued towards the harbour. As a final attempt to stall the Argentines I told them that there was a British military force on the island whose orders it was to prevent them from landing. The Argentines ignored this statement also.

19. By this time there were at least two helicopters flying around the base and the corvette had come within 300 metres of the base. I then told the base commander STEVE MARTIN that there was nothing more that he could do. I then sent him across to the church to join the remainder of his party. I myself, moved down to the jetty as I assumed that the corvette was about to send a boat ashore. It was my intention to meet the officer who was to be in charge of the landing party in an attempt to persuade him not to land his troops.

20. On arriving at the jetty I saw that the corvette had turned about and was heading back out to sea. What I did not see, until the last moment, was that a helicopter had come in very low and was landing approximately 30 metres away from me. I then moved out from my position of cover to witness 6 - 8 Argentine marines disembarking from the helicopter. I raised my hand in an attempt to draw their attention. The first three marines to disembark did not notice me. The fourth marine on seeing me, looked at me and then pointed me out to the marine in front of him. This marine turned towards me and raised his rifle. I then took cover, and realised that it would be impossible to negotiate with the landing forces. I then made my way back to our defence position.

21. As I arrived back at the position I noticed I Puma helicopter heading directly towards our position. At about this time we came under fire from the marines who had landed from the initial helicopter. A further helicopter was dropping off troops on the far side of the bay who also engaged us with machine gun fire. I then gave the order to engage the Puma helicopter. Approximately 500 rounds were fired at the helicopter. Somehow the helicopter managed to make it to the far side of the bay leaving a trail of black smoke behind it before landing heavily on the far side. No personnel were seen to disembark from the helicopter.

We then engaged the Argentine position within the British Antarctic Survey Base as well as the positions on the far side of the bay. Two Alouettes were in the process of dropping off more troops on the far side. We engaged these helicopters also. One was seen to drop out of the sky and on landing its rotors stopped turning. This helicopter did not take off again.

22. The corvette, which was now about 2000 metres away about turned, and started heading back into the bay for a second time. It engaged our position with heavy and accurate fire from its 40mm rear gun. I realised that if we opened fire immediately then the corvette would move further out to sea and engage us at long range. I therefore allowed the corvette to come right into the bay and as it drew opposite our position I ordered my men to open fire. The corvette was committed to entering the bay and could not turn round. The first 84mm round fired at the ship landed approximately 10 metres short of its target. The round did not 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. The ship was also engaged by heavy machine gun and rifle fire.

23. The ship then moved right into the bay, about turned, and headed out to sea again at full speed. We engaged the corvette for a second time scoring anti-tank rocket hits on the Exocet and to the main upper deck superstructure. Again she was engaged by heavy machine gun and rifle fire. I was later informed by an Argentine marine officer that we had scored a total of 1275 hits on the corvette, and had we hit her again below the water line she would surely have sunk.

24. The corvette then made its way to a position about 3000 metres away and started to shell our position with her 100mm main armament. What I did not know at the time was that the elevation control on the gun had been destroyed and the ship had to manoeuvre its own position to enable the shells to land accurately on our position. This shelling continued for a period of about twenty minutes. During this time we were continually engaged by heavy and accurate fire from the other Argentine positions.

25. When the shelling stopped there seemed to be a temporary ceasefire. It was then I realised that a withdrawal for us would be almost impossible as the Argentine troops that had landed earlier on the far side of the bay had moved round to cut off our withdrawal. We had by this stage already sustained one casualty, and I realised that we would sustain many more had we waited until the hours of darkness before attempting a withdrawal. A withdrawal in daylight conditions would have been impossible. Having already achieved our aim of forcing the Argentines to use military force I realised that we could achieve no more, and it was at this stage I decided to surrender to the Argentine forces. We were also in the fortunate position at this stage of having pinned a group of Argentine marines down close to our position.

26. As we had not planned to surrender we had no white flag, and therefore had to improvise using a green anorak with white lining. On initially waving this article of clothing the Argentines engaged it with heavy fire. I then waved it again and this time it was not engaged. I realised that I would have to move forward from my position to negotiate with the Argentines as it was unlikely that they were going to come to me. I slowly stood up, and remarkably I was not shot. I then moved forward to the Argentine position in the base and was met by an Argentine marine officer. I informed him that his position was desperate as was ours, and unless we ceased firing then he and his men in the position in the base would surely die. We had achieved our aim and if we were to be guaranteed good treatment we would lay down our arms sparing the lives of many of his men who would surely have died had he taken our position by force. The Argentine officer agreed saying that it was a very sensible decision and that he would guarantee good treatment for my men.

27. I then called my men forward and we assembled on the beach. We were then searched and my men were taken aboard the BAHIA PARAISO. I ordered Marine DANIELS to defuse all the explosive devices that he had assembled as I decided that we would not be treated under favourable terms had the Argentines subsequently blown themselves up. The British Antarctic Survey scientists were rounded up from the Church, and they too were taken on board the BAHIA PARAISO.

28. We were then kept at sea for a further eleven days. During this time we did not know where we were being taken. We were allowed to do physical training every third day in the ship's hangar. It was during one of these PT sessions that I counted twenty bullet holes in the one remaining Alouette on board the ship.

29. On the 13th April the BAHIA PARAISO docked at Porto Belgrano and we were disembarked in the early hours of the 14th. We were taken to an Argentine Marine Base where we were held for a further four days. During this time I was asked to assist with an enquiry into the conduct of the Argentine forces in South Georgia.

30. On the evening of the 17th, we were flown to Montevideo where we were looked after by the British Consulate. On the morning of the 19th we were flown back to England by RAF VC10 and we landed in Brize Norton on the morning of the 20th.

31. The Argentine marines who were responsible for our well being showed great fear towards us; they were however well disciplined and we were looked after extremely well throughout our internment.