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Es el diario escrito por Tony Groom, un buzo del equipo de desactivadores de bombas y minas de la Royal Navy durante el conflicto de Malvinas.

A efectos de preservarlo como documento histórico para el caso en que el archivo original o el sitio que lo contiene no figurasen más en internet, a continuación se ha realizado una copia.

## Diary from the Falklands Conflict



Tony Groom, a diver in the Royal Navy's bomb and mine disposal team, had just turned 23 when he was sent to the Falklands in April 1982.

He kept a diary of his experiences and contacted the BBC News website to tell us about it. Tony re-read these diaries for the first time this year and is now planning to write a book.

### FRIDAY 21 MAY 1982

We entered Port San Carlos at 0415 on Sir Tristram.

As we came into port, the ship was in darkness. Shooting could be seen but not heard, up in the hills around us. Our hearts were racing.

We came in very quietly and unopposed. All through the early hours of the morning, troops, tanks and jeeps were pouring off the ships.

I was given a job as gun's crew; it was a job I had done before.

Around 2200, we heard "Hands to action stations, gun crews close up, air raid warning red imminent". This time was for real.

A photograph of a handwritten diary entry on a piece of paper. The text is written in blue ink and reads: "SUNDAY 20<sup>th</sup> MAY. 1982", "RFA SIR TRISTRAM.", "Steaming around", "inside the 200 mi".

First page of Tony Groom's diary

Five Skyhawks and three Mirage fighter jets attacked the fleet. A large mortar bomb landed between us and the Elk - it was meant for the Elk.

It was terrifying, but fantastic.

The noise was incredible: 4.5 inch guns were going off from the warships. Bofors, Seacat missiles, Blowpipes etc were coming off of us.

Our missiles could be seen going up but we saw no planes coming down. They were so fast.

They attacked three more times, in waves of four. The gun I was on got four rounds away at a Pucara jet but missed.



Tony Groom, in the middle, defusing a bomb on the Argonaut

At the end of the day, 14 of their planes were shot down.

I had to go to the Antrim to deal with a 1000lb UXB [unexploded bomb]. It hit the deck-head, which was the helipad, and dropped down to the floor below. It took all night to lift and get over the side.

During this, the Ardent could be seen exploding about two miles away. It sunk around 0700 - 20 died.

The survivors came on board us (Antrim) and other ships. Got no sleep.

The chopper on the flight deck was riddled with holes and a sergeant who was manning the machine gun was killed. The flight deck was covered in blood and holes from shrapnel and rockets.

The injured were in the wardroom; crying could be heard.

## SATURDAY 22 MAY 1982

Just about daylight, still on Antrim.

From the bridge came "air-raid warning red imminent". We all got deep into the ship for cover.

Five minutes later, we were lying in the main passageway, anti-flash and lifejackets on. We could hear the two-inch rockets hitting the ship's superstructure.

It's bloody frightening: there were about 200 of us lying, face-down, hands over our heads, in the main passageway - praying.

Two Army helos [helicopters] were shot down today, both crews killed.

Got back to Tristram and were sent away again to HMS Argonaut. She has two UXBs, both 1000lbs. One had gone through the port side, a foot above the water line.

It did a full circuit of the boiler room and came to rest under the ladder of the engine room.

The second bomb went in the forward magazine five foot below the water line, ripped right through the ship, hit the hull off the starboard side - there is a four foot long rip in that side. It then went up, hit the roof and landed back down on top of two Seacat anti-aircraft rockets.



Tony Groom, at work in the boiler room

One of the rockets partially ignited and welded itself to the bomb. There is broken ammo all over the magazine.

The magazine flooded when the bomb went in and killed two young sailors, drowned.

The RE [Royal Engineer] did the one in the boiler room - defused.

## SUNDAY 23 MAY 1982

Another clear day.

Some of the lads went over to Argonaut to measure up the holes to make patches.

They have to do the job at night due to constant action stations during the day.

Panic.

We have half an hour to get all our gear off the Tristram as she is going to sea. Loading gear onto small landing craft to go to the Intrepid. Air-raid during the loading.

Got a letter from Marie - it took half an hour to read because I was under a table in the dining room sheltering from the raid.

A very bad one.

Antelope, Fearless and Yarmouth hit. Antelope got two UXBs, both above the water line. All we could see were two holes like that on Argonaut. REs left us to defuse them.

Left Tristram, stopped at Argonaut to drop off a water pump.

Approx 1900, while alongside the Argonaut, a huge explosion took place. Everyone hit the floor because it was very close.

The UXB on the Antelope had blown up while the REs were defusing it.



Tony Groom and colleague lifting bomb through hole cut in ship

There was a hole in the ship's side about 30 foot wide and four decks high. The fire took over immediately.

All landing craft and choppers went to assist. We and others got hoses into the hole but it did no good.

The ship's company were taken off after about 10 minutes, all boats told to get clear as it was very close to the Seacat and torpedo magazines.

We waited and watched for about three hours totally helpless and almost silent. Returned to the Intrepid 0400, unloaded our gear and slept on the floor - although exhausted, not much sleep was got by any.

I felt sick because of what we'd seen. I think that's when it really sank in.

## MONDAY 24 MAY 1982

0800: Antelope still burning about one mile away.

The fire helped by the wind had gone from the bridge to the stern, gutting it. We were amazed it was still afloat.

Dave, Boss and Stan went to look at the bomb on Argonaut, not a popular job after last night's viewing.

Ben, myself and others went to patch a hole on the Argonaut, also not a popular job. There's not many popular jobs about anymore.

While working (diving to patch up) on Argonaut, an air-raid was said to be imminent. We left the ship in the landing craft to head for the nearest beach.

Before getting there, four Mirage fighters came over the southern mountain, sheltering one Canberra bomber.

One bomb hit the Sir Geraint and one hit Sir Percival. The one we were on the previous day (Sir Tristram) was in between these two before going to sea.



HMS Antelope on fire, after being hit the night before

Again, neither bomb exploded, both 1000lbs.

The Canberra came over our head with one Mirage. Both were hit. Rapiers, Sea Cats and all sorts of missiles were chasing the jets. It was like Star Wars, but real.

We saw the smoke appear from two fighters and the Canberra hit a hillside rather quicker than he ought.

We had just left the St Geraint 10 minutes ago.

Bullets were coming across the water from all directions. Another air-raid followed five minutes later. We had gone aground by then but we weren't too bothered about that.

The next wave came from completely the opposite direction. Five Mirages. Two didn't get even halfway across the valley; one was got by Sea Cat [missile] and one by 40/60 [anti-aircraft gun] then hundreds of marines with machine guns.

The other three came over us and the rest of the ships. We could see a rapier missile chasing a Mirage.

We were jumping up and down and screaming at this missile to go faster, and it did.

The Mirage let out black smoke and visibly slowed down. Not one of the five left the valley.

The shouting and cheering could be heard for miles as one by one they hit the water and the hills around us.

All this took no more than a minute, as the jets are going so fast. Thirteen aircraft were shot down by the fleet and the Harriers.

One was killed on the Sir Percy, three on the Sir Geraint. If the bombs had gone off? Hundreds maybe?

Boss, Dave and Stan spent the night working on the Argonaut. The plan is that it will take four days to get it out again.



A Harrier which just made it back to deck before running out of fuel

## TUESDAY 25 MAY 1982

Fine again.

Up at 0500, Some ships thought they had heard something on the ships' bottoms (limpets?)

We split the team into three. Divers searched all but nothing was found. For the rest of the day, the raids were said to have been beaten off by Harriers.

The first happy day we'd had for a while. Reports came in every time the Coventry shot down a plane.

Cheers went up accordingly.

Five planes she'd got. That's why we'd not seen any today. They'd all been attacking her about 10 miles away.

1805: Gloom and despondency set in again as we were told the Coventry was being abandoned. Twenty-two died, 20 casualties.

An hour later, the Atlantic Conveyor was hit by two Exocet. She was carrying RAF Harriers and choppers.

Broadsword was also hit by one of those non exploding bombs. It hit the flight deck at an angle and went out of the side.

Morbid and high tempers set in again.

Not had a wash for three days now. What's new?



A chopper and a Harrier preparing for take-off

(Some of this is written a day or more late.)

### WEDNESDAY 26 MAY 1982

The 1600 raid came at half five today.

Three waves of four. The first two waves were said to have been chased off by the Harriers.

We were lying down under cover on Intrepid waiting for news on the third raid. We couldn't see what was going on as we were three decks down.

The frigates opened up on the other side of the valley. Thirty seconds later we were told [an Argentine plane] had just crashed in the water about a mile and a half up the sound.

The pilot had ejected. He was the only one of three.

We thought maybe they'd been attacking one of the ships further out again, but luckily nothing was heard.

As it got dark, six of the lads went over again to shift the ammo etc from around the bomb on HMS Argonaut.

It took all night.

The patches we put on are holding well. Not much water at all is getting into magazine.

Found one of the lads' wallets who was killed.

SAS went ashore at midnight to cause havoc around Port Stanley (about 60 SAS and 30 SBS) - should pick them up in a few days. They're not trying to take Stanley, just frighten them a little.

Good boys.

Something really tragic happened today, we ran out of beer.

I couldn't for the life of me figure out what day it was today, or the date, nor did anybody around me know. It makes no difference what day it is or what time it is, it all just rolls on into each other.

### THURSDAY 27 MAY 1982

Got to bed early last night, half 12.

Got next to no sleep.

My long-awaited wisdom tooth has started poking its head out and I have an ulcer to go with it.

Dave, Stan and Boss went over to Argonaut this morning.

Ship's company have started cutting holes in roofs and ship's side to lift the bomb up and out the side. During the cutting, sparks caught fire to something and the forward part of the ship caught fire.

The compartment with the bomb was flooded immediately (by ship's damage control party). We stood on the upper deck of Intrepid and watched the smoke billowing out of her.

Eventually the fire was brought under control.

Thank God. Dave was somewhat worried.

Lots of the ships have gone now. Canberra to South Georgia with Elk to pick up QE2's troops so it leaves us a better chance of being hit.

Intrepid was missed narrowly two days ago, I'm told.



Rocket damage to HMS Antrim

It was while I was on the beach on the landing craft.

At 1300, went over to look at the bomb on Sir Geraint. It was in a fairly easy place to get out.

The fuse from the front had disappeared and the one in the back was smashed with all wires hanging out.

It had metal wrapped around it where it was spinning as it came through the three metal walls.

Made a sling and lifted it out into a Gemini (rubber boat) by crane.

We had sent the ship's company to HMS Intrepid during this.

They didn't need much pushing. We took it away to deep water to sink it.

We sunk the Gemini as well. All that could be seen was thousands of flashes on the surface.

All day went by with no attacks.

I was on the flight deck with George and Wilky waiting to go to Argonaut. Two Pucararas came over the nearest shore to us, dropping 1000lb bombs.

We saw it as clear as daylight - only one went off, the one that hit the ammo dump.

We learned later that three had gone into the field hospital and not gone off.

Their intelligence must be good for them to know there was an ammo dump there. [Or] who in their right minds would bomb a hospital?

The casualties came on board the Intrepid most of the night. Four dead (very lucky), 40 injured (some from the hospital).

The day before it was argued whether us or the other diving team should be ashore. They went ashore, which was considered to be the safest place!

They were in that camp. It seems nowhere is safe now.

Some of the team left under the cover of darkness to do - yes, you've guessed it - Argonaut.

Tonight, it comes out and over the side.

My bloody tooth!

## FRIDAY 28 MAY 1982

Bomb out by about 0500.

You have never seen a more relieved ship's company.

We'd never been so popular, drinks all round etc, hand shakes from skipper, jimmy [first lieutenant], commanders, signal from C-in-C [Commander in Chief] etc.

0800: started to lift the smashed up Sea Cats [surface to air missile] and 40/60 [anti-aircraft guns].

Three of the Sea Cat's warheads had gone off when hit by the bomb; some of the shells were reduced to 3/4 and 1/2 inches thick.

All was smothered in diesel and oil, bits of war head and high explosives were everywhere. I don't think the two guys had a hope.

More drinkies from wardroom, first touch of gin for six weeks. Nice stuff.

Got told the Paras have taken Goose Green.

The Pucaros had been bombing troops but they were their own troops!

They shot down one and left the other two because they were doing a good job.

Bed about 0100.

Mouth and neck swollen because of this stupid tooth.



Intelligence about Argentinian meeting led to this attack

I don't think diesel helps.

## SATURDAY 29 MAY 1982

It seems a lot longer than nine days.

0515, hands to action stations. Two jets dropped some bombs.

We don't think they knew where they went (the bombs).



It is the first time they've struck at night. Hope they don't make a habit of it.

Back to bed at 0600.

My tooth!

Action stations a few times but planes believed to be attacking troops.

Dinner, or action snacks as they call them, has gone from roll and tomato and a piece of corned beef to just a roll.

Sometimes if we're good we can have butter with our roll.

Tooth man, tooth!

## SUNDAY 30 MAY 1982

Went to sea in the middle of the night, woke up expecting to be in Bomb Alley.

Gone to do an RAS (replenishment at sea) with RFAs [Royal Fleet Auxiliaries] and join up with the Invincible and Exeter.

Nice to be away from Bomb Alley, we thought, we'll get a restful night's sleep. Well, that's what we thought anyway.

About 0100, I was half way up the vehicle ramp, on my way to the helo pad. Three rockets flew overhead.

They make a deafening noise. I and everyone else hit the deck, waiting for the bang, it didn't come. Over the tannoy came "we have just picked up a single sweep from a super standards radar, they are they horrors that carry Exocet.

The rockets were ours fired from the bridge; they exploded in a pattern around us and dropped millions of pieces of silver paper.

The Exocet is meant to go for them instead of us.

I have my doubts about this theory. It was a false alarm.

But managed to get us and everyone else worrying about the Exocet.

About 2145, some of the ship's company was watching Dirty Harry Crazy Larry on film.

Those bloody rockets went off again.

It worked again, everyone dived under the tables.

This time Exocet had been fired toward the three ships, when two miles away, this thing picks out its own targets.

Action stations, anti-flash, close all red openings etc.

One of us was to be hit.

After the Standard had fired its Exocet, the Exeter shot her down with sea dart.

Then the arrow opened up with her four to five guns on the missile and two or more sea darts were fired from Exeter. One of them hit the Exocet, both claim it of course.

All this was done by Radar of course. Of course, of course!

The two Skyhawks that exoceted the Standard were chased off by Harriers.

It's weird, sat waiting to hear either a bang or something over the tannoy.

You can see fright in people.

We've decided we prefer Bomb Alley.

At least we know what to expect and you can swim to the shore if need be.

Exocet frightens me more, I think.

Out here, we have sweep stakes on, that it'll be Exocet or torpedo tonight.

Bomb Alley in the morning.

What a thing to look forward to.

On a big downer all day, tooth has stopped me from talking, to everyone else's delight, I'm sure

Hacked off with it all and can see no quick end.

Home please!



A diver departing for Wireless Ridge

## MONDAY 31 MAY 1982

Bank holiday, so what!

Wish I was in a traffic jam.

Wake up in Bomb Alley.

It doesn't get light until about 1200, then gets dark around 1900.

The Argies, this morning claimed the Invincible was hit and ablaze because of an attack last night.

They couldn't have known the missile was shot down until we said it on the news today.

The quietest day yet. A couple of the old "air raid warning reds" but saw nothing.

Heard on the news they're rolling bombs out of the back of Hercules. They've been using Hercs to refuel their planes in the air, we think.

Never take my clothes off when going to bed now, even sleep with my boots on.

Can hear my feet humming at night.

## TUESDAY 1 JUNE 1982

A couple of air-raid warnings during the day. One was a Hercules. Two Harriers attacked it.

It was hit by a Sidewinder missile and also cannon-fire. Bet it went with a bang.

We're hoping it was the tanker that was refuelling their jets.

I mentioned previously that the other diving team had gone ashore. Some of them came on board today to bring more bomb disposal gear to us. They are having a rough time ashore. They are living in Red Beach, the field hospital I said was bombed.

The team said some are very young and skinny, some were only fourteen years old. They apparently are no trouble at all, just glad to be alive and want to go home.

They were told: "The British will shoot you if they catch you."

Team dived on the Fearless today to blank a hole.

Going into Teal Inlet to pick up a small mine-sweeping team that we took there last night. Forgot to mention it.

So it's back into Exocet country for a while. Hope they found no mines. Another job for us if they have.



British soldiers crowd on deck

Teal Inlet is where the main attack is going to go on, I believe.

## WEDNESDAY 2 JUNE 1982

Going to sea for two days, to the maintenance place for a rest period.

All the sailors on here are keeping what's called "defence watch". It is six hours on, six hours off, constantly.

They've been at it since we got in the danger area now. During the six off, of course, there are meals to be had and washing etc.

We're told we're out of standard range now. One was shot down today by a Harrier.

Two thousand more troops went ashore today. We could take Stanley, any time now.

Been busy, and lost track of the days. I'll start again on the 5th.



A rare moment of down-time for British troops

## SATURDAY 5 JUNE 1982

I got picked for a good job. Four lads, Mick and Ben and I left the Intrepid just as it was getting dark in a Sea King [helicopter], the pilot was the special ops pilot (SAS).

Six of us (divers) went off, there were also lots of Paras to protect us. We were complete with rucksacks, ration packs; "you-can't-see-me gear".

The pilot never went above 50 feet and did 110 knots all the way. About 10 minutes to cover 30-odd miles, through valleys, over and round mountains etc.

We landed at a place called Bluff Cove just as it was getting dark.

It is a small settlement of only two families, they were English and would do anything to help us get the Argies out.

The old man from the settlement gave us a lift to the small estuary we were to swim in, in search of mines.

It was about midnight when we got there. Myself and Billy dived, searching for the mines. It was a spectacular ride.

We cleared the estuary and the REs [Royal Engineers] cleared the shore. We finished diving around 0400 and slept the night in a pig pen or sheep pen, both smell the same.

In the morning, the families topped us up with tea and steak sarnies. They flew a Union Jack that day for the first time since the invasion.



A dive team heads to Bluff Cove to search for mines

Our tanks and Paras appeared from all over the place that morning. The Argies have killed over 150 of their sheep and torn down over four miles of fences to burn.

The following day, nearly 1,000 Royal Scots Guards will come in to Bluff Cove estuary and land at the site we dived. The families don't know that yet, for security reasons.

She'll have some tea to make then!

Caught another chopper back about six the following day.

It was 6 June 1944 that D-Day really happened. I don't know what happened to 7 June. I don't think there was one.

## TUESDAY 8 JUNE 1982

Bomb Alley.

It had only been light about half an hour - it was about midday. Air-raid warning, red, imminent.

I was stood on the flight deck, camera in hand - getting brave these days!

The Exeter fired her sea dart. She was about a mile behind us in San Carlos Bay (all ships at anchor). It was a very clear morning. The missile could be seen going up.

It does twice the speed of sound, this thing. We all watched where it had gone, but could see no planes as they were at 30,000 feet.

A small puff of smoke was seen after a few seconds, thousands of feet up. It was confirmed a hit over the tannoy. Cheers accordingly.

We could see it spinning and glinting in the light as it came down. The smoke train following it. It's the first time they've tried it at such long ranges.

No doubt it's not the last.

The high level bombing was a new theory of theirs - not getting hit because we're too high.

At sea tonight to pick up the landing craft that dropped the Scots Guards off. Oh no! Tooth ok now.

Think I'll wash my socks just for a laugh. They'll fall to pieces, it's the dirt that's holding them together. Wrong!



British soldiers crowding on deck

## WEDNESDAY 9 JUNE 1982

Attacked about 1730. Waves and waves of Mirages and Sky Hawks.

After the attacks, the Plymouth came in just ahead of us. She was ablaze and listing badly. She asked for bomb disposal assistance.

We all looked at each other - it's a sick feeling deep in your stomach. Mick (Fleet Chief), myself and Billy E went over to her.

She had been hit by two 1000lb bombs, plus cannon and rocket line. The two bombs had gone in the port side and amazingly turned upwards and flew out of the dock about midship. The funnel was ripped apart.

One of the cannon fire shots had hit a depth charge on the flight deck. It went off a full order, nearly. There was a hole ripped in the deck about 15 foot in area.

The other end caught fire and swept forward. Again brilliant naval fire-fighting saved the ship.

When the bombs came in, they smashed two mortar bombs in half, in the mortar magazine. That's what we had to render safe. We lowered them over the side in about an hour.



Tony and his colleagues were sent to HMS Plymouth to assist

Another air raid took place during our job. It was not at us but at the Teal Inlet, I mentioned it earlier, I believe.

Tristram and Galahad were at Bluff Cove. On arrival back to Intrepid we were hit with the news, Sir Tristram and Sir Galahad were ablaze and abandoned.

Tristram took two 1000lbs and Galahad three or four at Bluff Cove. The casualties were ferried to the Intrepid where a hospital was again set up in the dining room.

Crew and embarked forces were ferried to us from Tristram and Galahad. Some were burned beyond recognition.

Many we knew well from our four or five weeks on the Tristram. It was clear lots had not been wearing anti-flash.

The blast or flash had caused most of the burns. Many had no skin on the exposed areas. Their flesh was black and swollen, most had no hair.

It was sick, disheartening and demoralising, the guys we knew from Tristram told us about it all. They said she was exploding like mad as they left.

They don't know if she sunk. I hope not, to put it mildly.

#### THURSDAY 10 JUNE 1982

Attacked but were all beaten off by Harriers. Nice day.

#### FRIDAY 11 JUNE

Today was the day for the big attack on Stanley. Naval gun fire, Harriers etc. For some reason it was put off 24 hours.

I can't stop thinking about home. I mean, they're going to think we were on the Tristram. They won't give any casualty numbers to us for some reason. They were much more than expected.

#### SUNDAY 13 JUNE 1982

Big push forward ashore today.

2 Para have taken the Two Sisters and 45 Commando have taken Mount Longdon. In fact, all objectives have been taken.

We went to sea to Berkeley at nightfall. It was to drop off one of the landing craft the Intrepid carries and pick up four others.

At about 0200, there was an air raid warning. Three waves of four.

They were going overhead to attack the troops ashore. They passed directly overhead very low without seeing us. Or not bothered about us?

We were 43 miles from Port Stanley. We could see the flashes from the bomb lighting up the sky.

One flash was in the sky and shortly after we could see a ball of flames come all the way down until it went out in the sea.

Four ships behind us were giving naval gun fire support around Stanley when the attack came and the Cardiff got the one we saw with Sea Dart.

We thought they were going to attack us on the way back as they had to go over us anyway. We heard the countdown - 10 miles, five miles to only one mile.

Again they went over the top - we stayed in a snow cloud so they obviously didn't see us.

Got to bed around 0400. About 0430 there was an Exocet warning so we were up again for a while. Sleep? Ha.

## MONDAY 14 JUNE 1982

The push forward by troops went on all night with some resistance.

This morning, the Argies had retreated again, further back.

At 1605, a pipe came over that they had virtually surrendered. 1615: a white flag was seen flying in Stanley. At bloody last!

Tonight the peace treaty should be signed, this is only for the land forces, not the sea or air force. At 1130 a pipe from the Commander said that we, the Intrepid, will go to West Falklands to secure that agreement and rescue the civvies.

West Falklands is still in Argentine hands so it might be fun sailing into Port Howard, they might not wish or might not know they are supposed to surrender.

It snowed heavily today. It's cold enough diving but at least we can get into the warm afterwards. Not at sea tonight. In Bomb Alley.



The High Street in Port Stanley

The lads on the hills and mountains mustn't half be cold at night. Picked up hundreds of prisoners.

Been to Stanley, seen the damage. Seen it, done it, read the book, seen the film, blah-blah.

**WEDNESDAY 23 JUNE 1982**

Just been told we are going home on the Fearless on Friday next. Don't know if it's possible but have to get mail away today. It may all fall over, usually does. Must go or I'll miss the helo.



Tony Groom surrounded by hundreds of Argentine prisoners

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