



**The Parachute Regimental Association
Aldershot Branch
Newsletter**

02/2007

Charity Number 1125551

Feb 2007

Monthly Meeting

The next monthly meeting will be held on **Friday 2 February at 2000hrs in Malta Barracks.**

Bar Opening Times

The bar is open on Friday evenings **8pm till midnight** and Sunday afternoon from **3pm till 8pm**. Pool table and a good atmosphere await you. Please note that fresh ground coffee is available for those who have to drive or would like an alternative drink.

Burns Supper

Our Burns Supper was held on Friday 19th January at our premises in Malta Barracks. For the second function running we were sold out. Over 100 people attended and enjoyed a fantastic evening. I will provide you with more details and photographs in the next newsletter.

The Falklands

Branch member Bob Darby fought in the Falklands as an officer with the 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment. He has just returned from a visit and has produced a graphic description of his trip around the Island and has given me permission to distribute it to our members. It is a fascinating insight into what has happened since those days. I hope you enjoy the read and many thanks to Bob for spending the time to produce the report.

Spring Function

Barry Longbottom and Len Clark have volunteered to organise a function in the spring. Once details have been finalised they will be published in the newsletter.

Stuart

Walking the Falklands 25 years later

Bob Darby – 3 PARA Op Corporate

3 PARA sailed south on the 8th April 1982. Our ship the Canberra was the second largest liner in the world at the time. After a brief stop at Ascension Island and having listened to all the diplomatic shuffling between London, Washington and Buenos Aires, we knew we would be going to do the job we had been training for. At the time I was the Air Adjutant of 3 PARA.

I returned to the Islands on the 10th June 2006 to a wet cold and grey South Atlantic winter. It was not unlike my first arrival on East Falkland some 24 years hence, on the 21st May 1982. This time however, I went back in the warm cabin of Boeing 747 landing at the RAF airbase at Mount Pleasant. It was very different from the first time across the bow ramp of a naval landing craft.

Since 1982 I have been back twice and in doing so have made many friends on the Islands. The drive from the new airport into Stanley 30 miles away, took about an hour along a graded and partly tarmac road. There was only a muddy track in 1982.

Stanley has changed. There are now many more restaurants than I can remember and another hotel the Malvina, to compete with the Upland Goose, which as I recall was the only hotel in Stanley in 1982. I do remember walking into the Upland Goose just after the surrender and seeing Argentine officers standing at the bar wearing side arms. They had been allowed to keep them for protection against their own soldiers.

Once I got myself organised with a 4 x 4, I set out to have a look at the Islands and visit not just the places 3 PARA had landed and fought for, but also all the other battle sites on East Falkland.

On my first day I stood on the edge of Stanley harbour and looked at the hills surrounding the town. There in the morning sunlight was Longdon, which had cost the Battalion dearly on the night of 11/12 June 1982. Wireless Ridge, which 2 PARA took in a classic all arms battle, was in front of it. Also in my view was Tumbledown, Mount Harriet, Two Sisters, they were all there.

My first stop at the EOD unit in Stanley was to get a map of all the marked minefields. Useful bit of kit if intend walking on the Falklands! There are 58 in and around Stanley alone! It became too risky to clear them after the war, so they were marked and wired off. I noticed there were at least 4 minefields around Longdon, in particular a large field at the Murrell Bridge, which we must have walked through.

It is now almost 25 years since the campaign. Many things have changed. The Islanders have the government they voted for, democratically. They have a good source of income from the sale of fishing rights and oil is believed to be under the seas around their coast. They now have a system of roads linking Stanley to the outlying settlements, something they did not have in 1982.

I have been back to Longdon on a couple of occasions. Most of the debris of battle has now gone and only the memories are left. Those that fell are remembered by their former comrades. Last year 2006, I spent the night 11/12th June on top of Longdon. It was a cold still night and the moon cast its light over the scene of such carnage from a different era. I stayed as a mark of respect for all those who died on that hill. Some I never knew, some I did, but they were all my friends.

My first stop outside Stanley was to Estancia Farm to visit Tony and Ailsa Heathman. In 1982 the Battalion set up a firm base here, from which they patrolled against Longdon. Above the farm are Mount Estancia and Mount Vernet where the Rifle Companies had spent many a cold night before advancing to attack and take Longdon itself.

The Heathmans get a steady stream of visitors each year many of them veterans from 2 and 3 PARA who had passed that way before. They have a unique collection of battlefield artefacts from the conflict. Tony until recently used to find on the surrounding hills bomb carriers complete with bombs which some overburdened, and disgruntled Tom had dropped them into the long grass to avoid carrying them any further.

In 1982 the road to Estancia was a muddy track now it has been surfaced with stone and is easily negotiated by a normal road vehicle although those living out of Stanley still prefer 4 wheel drive vehicles. On the way and just off the road is the wreckage of an Argentine Chinook and Puma both caught by Harriers on the ground and destroyed,

From Estancia it now takes about 2 hours to drive to Port San Carlos (PSC). In 1982 it took about 4 days hard march across the sodden peat, accompanied by driving rain and sleet.

At PSC there is still much evidence of our presence in 1982. Although the hundreds of fire trenches which we dug have now been filled in, the outline of many are still visible, including my own which I shared with the Adjutant, Kevan McGimpsey.

Up on Settlement Rocks above PSC are the remains of the sangars built by B and C Companies, while down by the jetty are a couple of drop tanks from an Argentine Sky Hawk.

Over the next few days I went over to Darwin - Goose Green to look at the area 2 PARA had fought over in probably the most significant battle of the campaign. I stood on the Hill of Gorse where there is a battlefield memorial to their dead and tried to work how they did it. The ground, when compared to the 3 PARA action at Longdon, looked like a snooker table, there being so little cover.

However, the place I really wanted to spend time on was Mount Longdon. I walked up from Stanley with my Bergen and in it, a tent and all the kit I would need to spend a night on the hill. The years have taken their toll and, what would have been a modest load in 82, felt like a ton weight! By the time I got to Longdon I was on my chin strap! It took about 2 hours to get up there from Wireless Ridge, a modest 3kms away.

I walked around the top looking at all the many memorials. The names of many I had known were remembered. The debris of war can still be found all around, particularly the remains of Argentine bunkers destroyed by the assault of A and B Companies up the western slopes. It also seems many serving and ex 3 PARA personnel have been up since the campaign and marked out the spot where a mate had died.

There is still much to see. The rusting barrel of an Argentine 105mm Recoilless Rifle. An occasional boot buried in the ground, a water bottle, a radio battery and a pair of scissors where the RAP had been set up. I also found a plastic cigarette lighter with the name 'Canberra' on the side, dropped by some 'Tom' all those years ago.

From the top of Longdon you can see the minefields laid by the Argentines and not marked at the time. Although the Battalion had two mines casualties, many more of us must have walked through them to get up on to Longdon.

That night I laid a wreath at the 3 PARA memorial with its 23 iron poppies, the number killed up there. The night was the 11/12th June 2006. It was a moonlight night cold but bright, almost as it was 24 years ago.

The other battlefields around Stanley at Tumbledown, Two Sisters and Mount Harriet still have some of the debris of war similar to that, which can be found on Longdon.

I am looking forward to meeting my Island friends again in November 2007. They are the warmest people you can find anywhere. They will always be grateful for what we did for them in 1982. I always tell them, we did our job the best we could!

I would recommend anyone to go and see for themselves what the campaign was all about and what happened. The Islands are a beautiful and desolate wilderness. In 82 we had no opportunity to see some of the amazing wildlife in and around the Islands. In 2006 I managed a trip to Volunteer Point to see the King Penguins and also flew across to West Falkland landing at some of the small settlements. They have de-populated and have much smaller populations than 82. There has been a 'drift' towards living in Stanley. PSC was deserted when I arrived there during my visit.

In 2008 I will be taking walking tours down south so if you fancy a little walk, let me know!

The author now works as a battlefield guide for Remembrance Travel a company of the Royal British Legion. He will be guiding the Royal British Legion's Battlefield Tour to the Falklands in November 2007. Further details can be obtained from Remembrance Travel 01622 716729/716182

It is also proposed to take a number of walking groups to the Falklands in 2008. Feel free to join up!

See page 5 for Photos



**2 PARA MEMORIAL ON DARWIN HILL
GOOSE GREEN IS BEYOND**



**MOUNT LONGDON (HIGH POINT)
WIRELESS RIDGE SEE FROM
ACROSS STANLEY HARBOUR**



**ARGENTINE 105 RECOILLES RIFLE ON
WIRELESS RIDGE, TUMBLEDOWN BEYOND**



**BOB DARBY AT THE 2 PARA MEMORIAL
ON WIRELESS HILL, STANLEY BEYOND**



**3 PARA MEMORIAL ON MOUNT LONGDON
STANLEY IN THE DISTANCE**



**ARGENTINE CHINOOK DESTROYED
BY HARRIERS**