



3 Days in June

James O'Connell

This edition: Monoray, 2022 (Octopus Publishing Group, London); ISBN 978 1 91318 361 5, Privately published edition: 2013



'Serving your country can take quite a toll on your mind and body, but we will always be there for one another' (James O'Connell, closing words)

This year is the 40th anniversary of the Falklands War, precipitated by Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands on 2 April 1982, and ending with the surrender of the invading forces on 14 June. This short war has nonetheless had lasting effects on the lives, minds or bodies of all those involved on both sides of the conflict, and on many families of those who fought. Several commemorations and books are marking this anniversary, not least among them James O'Connell's 3 Days in June.

I have chosen to recommend 3 Days in June to you as our Book of the Month for three main reasons.

Firstly, from an overall military and historical perspective, this is an outstandingly well-researched and well-written oral history record of the definitive battle of the Falklands campaign – and a fitting tribute to those who gave their all on Mount Longdon. The author – who fought at Mount Longdon (as Private Jimmy [Scouse] O'Connell of the Third Battalion, The Parachute Regiment) and was seriously wounded himself – was determined to portray the battle as it actually was, and not as one man's or historian's account.



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He has spent years and travelled thousands of miles to record, transcribe and collate personal accounts from over 148 veterans, including Argentinians involved in the defence. He has done a sterling job interpreting and juxtaposing all their individual snapshots of a modern infantry battle, depicting the chaos, confusion, mayhem, terror, tears and drama involved in a night attack through minefields and against prepared defences, much of the time under artillery and mortar fire. The result is a superbly coherent and vivid portrayal of the whole. Above all else, it demonstrates courage, compassion and self-sacrifice, the readiness of soldiers to sacrifice their lives for their mates. Very few modern battles if any can have been examined so painstakingly and comprehensively at platoon and company level, from the perspective of so many individual soldiers on both sides. One fascinating snippet is by Argentinian veteran, Cpl Gustavo Pedemonte, 7th Infantry Regiment, who was eyewitness to the clash between Sgt Ian McKay and Argentine forces that resulted in McKay being awarded the Victoria Cross – an extremely rare account by an enemy soldier of a Victoria Cross action.

All soldiers in today's Armed Forces would be well advised to read this book in training in case they are called upon to face the real thing in the near future – a distinct possibility as I write.

Secondly, from a military medical perspective, the book's final chapter 'Medical and Evacuation 3 PARA and Attachments' uniquely records many personal accounts by casualties and connects them with the accounts of the medics and junior doctors, and padre, at the regimental aid post, together with accounts by helicopter crewmen evacuating these same casualties from the battlefield. Thus, we have a vivid and true-to-life portrayal of what is now described as the 'operational patient care pathway'. Casualties (often critically wounded at the time and sometimes not expected to survive) describe what happened to them from point of wounding, through reception and life-saving treatment by RAMC medics (not least, Pte John Kennedy, who received a Certificate of Commendation) and doctors (Captain John Burgess and Captain Mike von Berteles) at the regimental aid post, and onwards to safety. The RAP often came under artillery or mortar fire and everyone there was continually at risk of injury or death. Very useful lessons can be gleaned by reading these accounts.

My final reason for recommending 3 Days in June to you, specifically the chapter 'Medical and Evacuation 3 PARA and Attachments', is to set the scene and invite you to our commemorative talks 'The Falklands War, 40th anniversary - Personal Reflections from Role 1 and Role 2', by John Burgess (Regimental Medical Officer 3 PARA, as above) and David Jackson (OC No.1 Field Surgical Team) on Friday 1 July at Millbank (and on Zoom). The registration link is on www.friendsofmillbank.org. Please do come to Millbank to meet and listen to each speaker, if possible, otherwise do attend on Zoom. Should you read this after 1 July, recordings of the talks will be on our Members Area.

Personal accounts by John Burgess and David Jackson, and by Jim Ryan, are also being published in a new book 'Glimpses of the Falklands War', by the British Modern Military History Society (14 June), and on our 'Glimpses of War' webpage: <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/gow/>.

The book 3 Days in June is dedicated to the memory of those who gave their all on Mount Longdon.

Peace is not bestowed, it is achieved through sacrifice.

David Vassallo
Chairman, Friends of Millbank
16 May 2022



info@friendsofmillbank.org



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