

Falklands 40: How one veteran keeps the story of the conflict alive

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Manny Manfred was 30 years old, married with a young son and living in Warminster when the telephone rang and the codeword for recall came through. At the time he was a Sergeant in 'A' Company of 3rd Battalion of The Parachute Regiment.

Immediately he packed his bags and headed for the barracks in Tidworth, Hampshire, where his unit was based. Within 72 hours the unit had moved to Southampton to board a P&O cruise ship to set sail south to play their part in the Falklands War. Lasting 74 days, the conflict was the first military action since the Second World War that utilised all elements of the Armed Forces, with 255 British personnel losing their lives.

As a Platoon Sergeant with 3 PARA, Manny was at the centre of the conflict and has been drawing on his first-hand experiences to deliver his Falkland's presentation to audiences since 1986. His largest audience to date was 700 schoolchildren in Brecon during Armed Forces Week and his most far-flung was on a cruise ship having just left the Falkland Islands. HM Tower of London before a formal dinner in such splendid surroundings is Manny's most memorable.

Manny, who is a member of RFCA for Wales, estimates that between 12,000 to 15,000 people have heard his presentation, which he delivers around 12 times a year. He regularly presents to regular and reserve personnel at the Infantry Battle School in Brecon.

This year is the 40th anniversary and there are some very poignant lessons that are still valuable for today's generation of soldiers. It's the physical hardship that requires our soldiers to be robust and well trained and the ability to project force some distance away under challenging weather conditions. More importantly, the anniversary brings the chance for veterans to join together and relive shared experiences

said Manny.

One of his first memories was of walking up the gangway on a requisitioned luxury cruiser – while pot plants and deckchairs which had been used by holidaymakers only days earlier were being taken off on another gangway. The military bands were parading up and down the quayside and there was an unreal sense of occasion.

Well, it was a bit Rolls Royce. Some people go in aircraft, some people go in military ships but we had a luxury cruise liner that was requisitioned from trade. Three major units and attached arms

were to travel on the SS Canberra, over 2,000 army, navy and Royal Marine personnel. Ammunition and other supplies were being loaded onto the ship before we sailed

said Manny.

Belonging to a regiment with parachute in the title, it might be assumed that your expected entry to a battlefield would be from the air. But Manny and his companions found themselves on the Canberra near Ascension Island, practicing a new skill – beach landings from landing craft, ahead of their assault onto the Falklands.

It was really strange for the first time in my career to undertake beach landings using assault craft which we'd seen in films for many, many years. Effectively, it felt like it was the battle of Normandy in the Second World War all over again.

I find that the lessons that come from the Falklands are mainly about the men themselves and the need to have well trained, robust individuals.

People often ask me, weren't you frightened? Well ...you undergo comprehensive, rigorous training and the fear is there; it's ever-present. When you are in a situation like that it's how you manage that fear and how you control it and how it's affecting your subordinates – those in your platoon. We move forward and the training kicks in and you just get the job done. It's a common phrase but getting the job done was so important, overcoming the elements, overcoming the enemy and taking our objectives.

As a member of RFCA for Wales, Manny believes it's important that people who have experiences that are of value to today's generation, use them wherever possible. After 20 years of fighting in desert type conditions, the army are still transitioning their training to fight in a more conventional environment. To quote an Instructor from Brecon –

getting the mindset out of the desert and back into the trees. Manny's experiences are valuable in achieving this.

I take every opportunity to deliver my Falkland's presentation and my experiences of the conflict to RFCA for Wales organisations...and I will keep doing them as long as I am able to and while the feedback is still positive. After almost 45 years in uniform, I feel it is time to give something back!