

'It was like watching your house catch fire'

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Soon after, a single aircraft appeared and closed in on the port side of the ship. As the aircraft passed the ship took another 1,000 lb. bomb in the port side just below the bridge, opening up another hole in the hull, again, above the waterline. Unbelievably, that bomb didn't explode either.

The first bomb cost one sailor his life, and another was seriously injured. Other members of the ship's company had minor injuries, like twisted ankles, and cuts, scrapes and bruises. The second bomb had come to rest in the engine room without injuring anyone.

The ship was attacked a few more times during the next two hours as the crew maneuvered up the San Carlos Water to find a place of safety to assess the damage. By 1830 (6:30 p.m.) HMS Antelope anchored in the safety of the protection of the HMS Argonaut, and transferred the seriously injured off the ship.

Most of the ship's company were

moved to emergency stations, away from the areas around the two bombs as crews dealt with them.

"Later in the evening, experts from the British army, a warrant officer and sergeant, came on board to defuse the bombs. They spent their time working on the one in the engine room. Unfortunately, as they worked to defuse it, it exploded. The sergeant was killed outright and the warrant officer lost his arm.

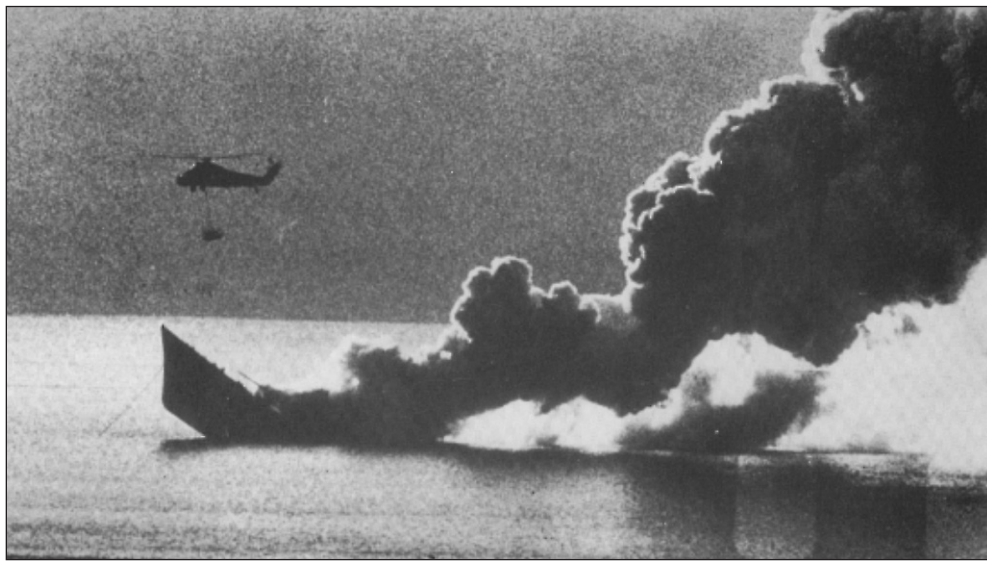
"The shock of the explosion lifted us right off the deck—the whole ship shook, and jumped about a foot or 18 inches in the water," said Marshall, "We spent hours, firefighting to try to save the ship, and we had to rig emergency fire mains, and use flexible hoses, as the rigid ones (on the ship) were ruptured by the explosion."

While that was happening others on the ship were quickly unloading weapons, ammunition and anything that would be volatile, and loaded them onto small craft which took them to other ships nearby.

The fire escalated and the deck became engulfed in heavy black smoke.

At 2210 hours, (10:10 p.m.) the order was given by the commander to abandon ship. Landing craft approached the Antelope and in an orderly style, the ship's company were evacuated onto the landing craft—in minutes.

Shortly after the landing craft moved away from the Antelope, there was a huge explosion—the sky was filled with a fireworks display like no other as the magazine on board exploded. In 10 minutes, another explosion followed, sending missiles searing into the night sky.



A lone helicopter makes a final parting gesture as the HMS Antelope sank in the San Carlos Water, during the early morning hours of May 24, 1982, after a bomb on board exploded during defusing. Photo Courtesy Ship's Company- HMS Antelope

"We were only a half mile away when it blew," said Marshall, "The sky was filled with a pyrotechnics display like we'd never seen before."

The fires continued through the night, with occasional explosions. By early morning (May 24), a final explosion erupted—it's thought to have been the first bomb that entered the ship's hull—and with that explosion, the ship's back was broken. The bow and stern rose up into a V formation, the photo which went around the world, as a sign of the V for victory defiance against Argentina.

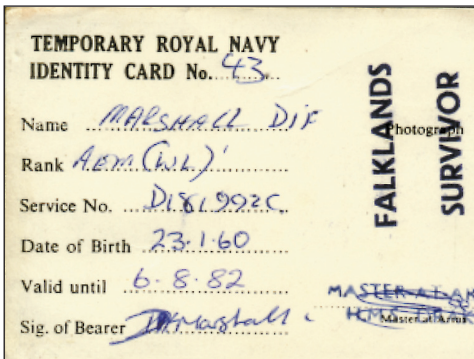
"I felt quite sad, seeing her burn," said Marshall, "It was like watching your house catch fire— your whole world and your whole life is burning in front of you. That was your home— I'd served nine months on that ship— it was my home. I saw grown men crying— part of their love for the navy was right there, in front of them, sinking into the sea."

"The fear factor didn't really sink in during the height of battle," said Marshall. "I think when the raids were happening, we simply fell back on all that exercise and training and react. It was after there was a lull between the air raids, when you actually had time to think about what happened— that was when the fear hit you."

Following abandoning ship, the ship's company were ferried to the shore or other ships on the landing craft, and were eventually billeted on other ships. Marshall was placed on the MV (Merchant Vessel) Norland, a ferry that normally operated the Hull to Belgium ferry run back home—and still does.

Three days later, the ship's company were all transferred to the Queen Elizabeth II in South Georgia, and returned to the UK.

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Don Marshall's navy identification card.

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