

Between May 9th and the 23rd I was shuttled between different ships of the task force. I finally reached the Atlantic Conveyor on my 26th birthday. I was to help the stores lads already on board as they sorted through dozens of shipping containers, cataloguing their contents so that, as the ground forces demanded certain supplies, tents, field hospital units, field kitchens, fuels, ammo etc. we could get it sorted in quick time.

I was shown to my bunk space where I dropped my bag and then immediately joined the lads down below. The first 24 hours were a blur. Between snatching meals, sorting a lifejacket and 'once only' survival suit, we worked hard. We were due inside the Total Exclusion Zone, an area where any aircraft or vessel not positively identified as friendly would be attacked, that evening. We were relatively unarmed, we had no anti-aircraft guns, just machine guns to defend ourselves. I worked on for another shift and then went to the cabin to get some much needed sleep. It took a while to find the cabin as I hadn't had time to familiarise myself with the ship's layout.

In the early evening of May 25th I was woken by a shout over the tannoy system,

'AIR RAID WARNING RED! TAKE COVER! TAKE COVER!'

I was just about to get out of the sleeping bag when an almighty impact threw me out instead. It threw me across the cabin where I smashed into something unidentifiable in the absolute dark. All electrical supply to that part of ship had been cut. I could not see a thing. I had been knocked unconscious but for how long, I wasn't sure. Another tremendous bang boomed out and the ship shuddered and swayed. We had been hit by two Argentine, Exocet missiles. They had been fired from about 34km away. They weigh 780 kg and skim across the surface at over 700mph. The impact alone would cause incredible damage to a ship, let alone the 165kg explosive warhead!

I was groggy but aware that my shoulder wasn't working, my jaw was shattered and I was utterly, utterly, alone.

It took a moment for me to gather what senses I could. I felt my way around the steel compartment. The melamine lining had been ripped away from the ceiling and walls. Splinters had peppered me from head to toe. I found the door, still closed and sealed against water and gas. Its handles comprised of large 'clips', levers that you pull to open or close. I pulled one to try to get the door open to make my escape. It wouldn't budge an inch. My dislocated shoulder was useless, my head was pounding, like a migraine with a serious attitude. I found it difficult to breathe. The air inside was getting hotter. I couldn't hear properly, my eardrums had been stretched and were distorting sounds. No matter how hard I applied pressure, the clips wouldn't budge. I was aware that my bare feet, (where were my socks? I definitely wore them to bed) were getting hotter by the second. I was scared. I was going to bake, or boil, or roast in this cabin soon. STOP! THINK!

I knew that when I went to bed that there was a fire extinguisher in the cabin. If I could find it among the debris then maybe I could swing it into the clips to get them to budge. What I didn't realise then was that the first missile had impacted immediately below my cabin and the deck, walls and ceiling had all distorted. This was why the clips wouldn't budge.

I stumble around the cabin until my hand found the extinguisher. I moved back to where I thought the door was only to find that it wasn't there. In the pitch black I was disorientated. I had to tell myself to calm down and get a grip. I found the door again and began to swing the tube at the clips. I must have hit the clips and the door a dozen times without success. My feet were beginning to burn. I had to hop about. This was outrageous! The effort was playing havoc with my shoulder and my jaw which was both broken and dislocated. The air was painful to breathe in. I thought about giving up and just sitting down to wait for the end. Then, I thought, you'll just burn your arse!!

I heard a voice from the passage outside. It was muffled. My ears were not working and the steel was a centimetre thick between it and me. I tried to shout but couldn't. I slammed the extinguisher against the door again, hoping someone would hear it and come to help me. From just outside I heard someone say,

'It's Davey Hawkins, wait a mo.' I heard the incredible sound of the first clip screeching across the steel as Davey used a long steel pipe to add to his weight and move it. I grabbed it inside and lifted my feet off the hot deck, adding about eleven stone to the effort. It slowly opened. We managed to open the next one and Davey pushed open the door. Out rushed the heat, to be replaced with more scalding air, this time full of toxins and smoke from the raging inferno around us. The heat was intense and the smoke so thick that I was stumbling blind, following Davy.

Davey guided me along the passageway. I could see a chink of light ahead. I think I started crying. Then, with a groan and a stumble, I was above the heat, out of the choking, black, broiling smoke and into a freezing evening. Someone helped me get into a bright orange survival suit and lifejacket and, unceremoniously, pushed me over the side. I dropped down and into the icy, south Atlantic water. We had been taught to hold our nose and close our mouths when we entered the water. My jaw wouldn't let me do that and the freezing ocean rushed into my already damaged mouth, throat and lungs. It whooshed its way into the survival suit and took me under. My lifejacket deployed and I bobbed back up to the surface. The Atlantic Conveyor loomed above me. I recall thinking, 'Shit, it's going to capsize on top of me.'

Of course, it didn't and I tried to swim as best I could towards the nearest life raft. It wasn't easy and it seemed as though, with every pained and awkward stroke, it drifted farther away. Someone already on board threw a rope and I managed to grab the end. My hands were blue and freezing. I had spent all my energy in the ten or so minutes I struggled in the water. Lads on board were yelling at me to hang on and they would pull me over to them. Eventually they did just that and they grabbed both arms and pulled me in. I didn't even feel the shoulder. I was completely numb.

I have read that the Atlantic Conveyor glowed red and explosions could be heard through that night. She sank the following morning.

I understand that we were taken on board HMS Brilliant soon after. My head was stitched back together by Buck Ryan in the sick bay. At some point I was flown by helo to the 'Red & Green Life Machine' at Ajax Bay. At that remarkable field hospital, set up in a disused tanning factory, next to an ammo dump, I was treated by the most amazing medical team.

My feet had superficial burns, my shoulder was dislocated, and my jaw was broken on the right and dislocated on the left. I couldn't hear anything other than a rumble, everything was blurred, the impact had compressed the air in the compartment, bursting blood vessels all over and causing 80% bruising. Worst of all, I had an eggshell fracture to my skull.

I spent two days in Ajax Bay before being flown out to SS Uganda, our hospital ship, off San Carlos water, known as 'Bomb Alley'. I have zero idea about my actual treatment on board. Somehow the dental team wired my jaw. I know that when the wards became busy some of us were wheeled, on our beds to the upper deck for fresh air. Fresh air! At one point I had about a cm of snow covering the sheet that I was beneath. I couldn't bear blankets, the weight was too painful. I have never been so cold. I hate the cold still.

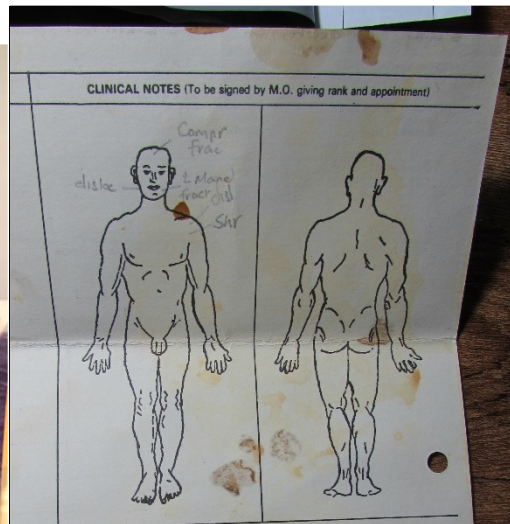
The seriously wounded were transferred to smaller hospital ships to be taken to Montevideo ready to be flown back to the UK. My skull injury was of some concern to the docs. The decision was made to take me back to Ajax Bay instead. Here I was walking wounded and helped out a little while waiting for my turn to go home. I was there when the lads from the Sir Galahad arrived, all terribly burned. To this day, I cannot bear the smell of cooking meat so barbeques are fraught affairs!

I was flown home with these lads and whisked off to the RN Hospital at Stonehouse where I stayed for three months.

I don't know what happened to Davy Hawkins after he saved my life. His body was never recovered. He is one of twelve shipmates of mine, still on patrol in those southern seas. My will stipulates that my ashes will be placed over or as near to the wreck as possible. She is a registered war grave and my final wish is to be back among those heroes who gave their lives.

The past 40 years have been difficult. I spent 35 years punishing myself for surviving. I now spend time helping veterans through organisations such as the Royal British Legion and Help for Heroes. They have been vital in my recovery. The PTSD will ever leave me but I am learning to control it. I can't abide the smell of cooking meats, especially bacon. I don't like it to be too hot or too cold. I have spent 35 years sabotaging anything good that happens, friendships, family, work. The survivors' guilt has meant that I have denied myself pleasurable times, Christmas, social gatherings, parties. My twelve shipmates never had a chance to experience them, why should I?

I am getting better. I am learning to manage a barbeque, I cope with fireworks if I am ready for them, I hate enclosed spaces and the very dark but will go to the cinema at a push. I will overcome.





MEDICAL IN CONFIDENCE

R N / ARMY / R A F
FIELD MEDICAL CARD
FORME MEDICAL DE LAVANT

F/IMD/208
(Revised 2/79)

1. Service No. / Number Matricule: 301000
2. Rank or Grade: MAJ
3. Surname / Nom: MARTIN

4. Other Names / Prénoms: N/A

5. Unit / Unité: AP 1022
6. Regiment or Corps / Régiment: 504
7. Nationality / Nationalité: CAN
8. Date of Casualty or Wound / Date de la Blessure ou Malade: 19-10-82
9. Nature of Casualty (insert X in appropriate box) / Nature de la Blessure ou Malade: Battle Casualty Sick Accidental Chemical

10. Time / Heure: 19:10

11. Diagnosis / Diagnostic: [Blank]

FOLD

12. Treatment Given / Traitement Donné

Treatment / Douleur	Drug	Dose	Time Given	Date
Morphine / Morphine		5mg	19:10	25-10-82
Other Analgesic				
Antibiotic / Antibiotique				
Tetanus / Tétanos				
Atropine, Oxime /				

13. Tourniquet Applied / Garrot Posé: YES/NO OUI/NON

FOLD

Signature of Medical Officer: [Blank] Rank: MAJ Date: 25-10-82

FOLD

BOXES 14-30 TO BE COMPLETED IN THE MEDICAL UNITS IN WHICH TREATED

14. Age last birthday / 15. Year of last service / 16. Married / Single / 17. Type of enlistment / commission

18. Theatre / Fleet or Station / Unit / 19. Length of service in Theatre at date of admission / 20. Name of medical unit in which treated / 21. Final disposal (Duty, Invalidity, death etc.)

Name of medical unit	Date of admission	Date of discharge / transfer / out	No. of days	Serial No.
1st Canadian Airborne Medical Company	10/10/82	12/10/82	12	1311
2nd Canadian Airborne Medical Company	10/10/82	12/10/82	2	
Total			14	

22. Term diagnosis or principal cause of injury leading to admission.

23. Principal complication or sequel of 22.

24. Secondary diagnosis (if injury) etiologically unconnected with 22.

25. Nature of any surgical operations that details will be given in "Clinical Notes" but NOT here.

26. Special information in accordance with current instructions.

INJURY AND WOUNDED CASES ONLY (To be completed by M.D. first seeing patient).

27. Enemy action / Non-enemy action: [Blank]

28. Date of Hurt Certificate (Army) / MCO Form 250 (Army), Form 521 (R.A.F.), (Where relevant)

29. Nature of weapon or cause of injury.

30. Activity at time of injury: N/A

