

COMBAT STRESS 100

LEARNING RESOURCE 1a PTSD & MENTAL HEALTH

Combat Stories

re-voiced by students from

St Thomas More Language College

DANIEL / JULIAN (Falklands War 1982)

We had prepared well, we'd had all of our orders. We had about a 10 mile advance to contact through the night. We formed up at the bottom of Mount Longdon. B company was my company. We were the lead company to take the ridge of Mount Longdon. We had a lot youngsters in our company. I remember distinctly our company Sergeant Major, Johnny Weeks, at the bottom of the mountain, got us almost all in single file and asked us to fix bayonets, which was very bizarre, almost going back to your childhood... looking at those war films from the 1960s you'd seen. Did he just say, "Fix bayonets?" Then he said, "And I suggest you have a little prayer as well boys" And that was really when it hit home. We were going up there, we were going into battle.

So from beginning to end of the actual hand-to-hand fighting, it was probably about a good 12, 14 hours before the fallback position was actually taken. Of which in the meantime, we'd lost 23 fellas dead and over 50 wounded. I was hit, I got fired at from an angle coming across from my back left out from my right, from a position that we'd overlooked. I got shot through right by the base of my spine ...and it come out of me through my hip. What it did unfortunately, it missed all me bones, but it had hit my sciatic nerve on the way through and that's what had caused this ruction and I couldn't, for the life of me, get back on my feet to do anything.

Some mates of mine who cursed and lambasted me for being a lazy oik laying around and hogging all the limelight... they lobbed me some blankets from cover and lobbed me them to keep me warm and I lay under there for all these hours. They got me singing because they said to me, "Don't go to sleep. Whatever you do don't go to sleep because you'll get hypothermic. Don't pee yourself." And I was gagging for a pee. They said, "Don't do that. It will bring on hypothermia quicker." They got me to sing songs to stay conscious. One of the most poignant things for me was really weirdly, the choice of song. I was into The Stranglers big time as well as me Ska and stuff like that and so I was singing a lot of Stranglers songs and everything. There's a battle going on overhead... this is absolutely true. Golden Brown had just come out. I'd already been to see them down the Rainbow Theatre. Massive fan of them, so I was singing Stranglers songs. Then moved on to, weirdly enough, change of tempo and as I got more and more hacked-off, Simon and Garfunkel. I knew they was really taking the mick when they started shouting out requests from cover, you know what I mean? I thought, "Bloody hell". It was like pre-karaoke days so at the time it was, "You hum it, I'll strum it!" But they were very true memories. And joking aside, that's what gets you through it. Just little things like that, you know?

At each point I kept thinking, "I ain't going to get out of this. I ain't going to get out of this." In that period where we were lying out front...it was Kev Eaton, Simon Clark, Mushrooms Bateman, they'd all been shot, incapacitated, couldn't move and they were in the same position as myself. I was lying slightly to their left.

SEBASTIANO / BRIAN (Falklands War 1982)

The Falklands was just a strange place because it looked very much like my homeland on the west coast of Scotland. Very few trees. Shitty peat smell in the air. You get all four seasons in one day. I didn't really know where it was, if I was honest. They said you're on Sir Lancelot and you'll be transferred to Galahad and Tristram and every ship I went on got blown up so it wasn't a good day out. On the 21st of May, we landed in San Carlos Water. It was all quite exciting. We engaged our weapons and found out there was a load of cows on the top of the hill that were running away because the night sights weren't that good, so poor cows but we'd won the war already.

We landed and there was one error after the other. We were six hours too early. So we knew things go wrong in war.

Unfortunately, within about two hours of daylight, we had our first of very many air attacks. That was exciting. People call it fear. The adrenaline, the buzz is phenomenal when someone (enemy aircraft) are doing 600 knots by your left or right ear, chucking thousand pounders at you, there's no other word for it. It's absolutely buzzing. You're in survival mode, fight, flight, freeze or fold. My impressions were, is this really what war was like? But we hadn't seen any bad stuff till then. But within that first day, we had seen some Navy ships sunk and my impression as a young man was, these planes can go fast and awful fast so we need to change our tactics. We put armour piercing and tracer in so we could see roughly and we'd fire in front of them.

The biggest impact was probably on the 8th of June. My ship got bombed, Sir Lancelot, so even though we abandoned ship, we went back on and stayed on it because it was dry and it was warm. There was only three UXBs on board so unexploded bombs...if they're going to go off, they'll go off. If they don't, they don't. You become quite blasé and then we got cross-decked to Sir Tristram, and then we went round on Sir Tristram with our raft through a minefield and we started unloading and the locals, they brought all the tractors down because the landing sites were pretty poor. We had to get artillery ammunition ashore quickly.

Unfortunately, the cloud cover cleared and Sir Galahad run in and the Argentinians from the mountains went, "Ah! There's two big grey ships there, and they're not protected." That was the most significant point and probably the start of my post-traumatic stress. Within four minutes, we had 55 killed and 138 injured, and it's the burning. We had waterproofs then that would melt into you. We didn't have good kit. That was the most significant time. And as a young Lance Corporal, I had to go out and rescue some of these guys. We rescued over 100 people.

SONNY / COLIN (Northern Ireland Conflict/ The Troubles late 1960's-1998)

There was an eerie feeling, it really was and there was like, no kids, there was no people, there were no cars, not even a dog on the streets because the dogs, when they saw you they just went for your ankles anyway. And to me then... Yeah, this is strange, it's a combat indicator that something could be up here. The way they ended up, they were in front of me and they were probably from no more than like 20 metres away, 20 yards away from me and Dougie started coming, pulling across.

As soon as they hit the junction of the two sorts of alleys, just the whole place just lit up and boom. At the time, there was the bang. The flash and the bang to be honest, you do see the flash first and the boss was lying on the ground. I remember Dougie coming in, I grabbed the radio and we grabbed a piece each of his chest rig and we dragged him out of the way and just the trail of blood.

Your training has kicked in, your medical skills have kicked in and they say after three, what do you call them? First three dressings, straight to the tourniquet. So it was 1 and it was soaked... 2, 3, within a matter... and it wasn't even a minute and the three dressings were soaked through with blood and it was just rifle sling off, bang, tourniquet and get him patched up. It severed his femoral artery and at the time we weren't aware of the full damage.

So at the time there was just that buzz feeling, a massive adrenaline rush. We got to the hospital. He went into the emergency ward to get treated right away and they just brought us... we'd no physical injuries but the nurse said, "Go in there and get yourselves cleaned up." I wasn't aware of what state I was in. My hands had blood on them. I hadn't looked in the mirror at this stage, I was just starting to wipe clean my hands and then I looked into the mirror and just my face was plastered fully in blood. Next thing, I was woken up on a bed. I just boom. I just cowped it. And that was the end of the adrenaline rush probably at the same time... A big massive down. I just...flaked it. I was out cold.

VENT / DEAN (War in Afghanistan 2001-present)

My mate got hit with an IED right in front of me in February 2010. He stood on a wooden IED and lost both of his legs. I was a Cat C casualty. And I got hit in the face with shrapnel.

We'd seen a lot of action, we'd seen a lot of contacts and we'd seen a lot of IEDs. I dug one up in fact with my tractor. It just didn't go off because it was wet. I seen it hanging off and just reversed off. Then it just got to February and my mate...he just stood on one... a wooden IED. Can't even find it with the metal detector. So that was quite hard. At the end of that tour we went back to Germany, and it was just like decompression and quite chilled out for the first couple of months. I can't really remember what we trained for or if anything else came off to be honest. Decompression from Afghanistan. It's like winding down from it. It takes months to wind down, to be honest. I can't remember the in-between stuff. I've got all sorts of blanks, to be honest.

VENT / SHAWN (War in Afghanistan 2001-present)

When I went to Afghanistan... I've always had an interest in history and places and things so I was blown away by how nice it was actually as a country. There's some beautiful places out there. I remember when we landed, it was coming to the end of winter. There was sand storms that would come rolling in. There was thunderstorms and you could see them form a trail across the sky. I just remember how beautiful it was and I was quite saddened that there was actually a war going on there, you know. But I'd say, we were there to do a job and that was what I was trying to focus on.