

# **Able Seaman Matthew Stuart**

*Born 21 May 1964,  
Killed on Active Service on 21 May 1982*



**A Commemoration of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of his Death on Active Service  
by those who knew and loved him**

This booklet is edited by  
**© John Dixon<sup>1</sup>,**  
**President of Tewkesbury Historical Society**  
and  
**Head of History at Tewkesbury School from 1983-2001**

He is deeply grateful for the help of  
**Mr and Mrs Ray Stuart, Matthew's parents**  
**Michael Peachey**  
**Peter Remmer**  
**David Powell**  
Matthew's teachers at Tewkesbury School  
**The Headmaster, Tewkesbury School**  
who is so conscious of the role of History in the development of the modern School.

Any surplus income from the sale of this booklet  
will be passed to Matthew's parents  
for the donation to a Charity of their choosing.

In memory of  
Not only **Matthew**  
But also

➤ **the other 254<sup>2</sup> British Servicemen killed**  
➤ **the 649 Argentinean war dead**  
➤ **the 1,1845 wounded on both sides,**  
many of whom will have been coping with the effects of their wounds  
during the past 25 years.

All were servicemen who bravely did their Governments' bidding;  
**in the case of Britain, it was our own democratically elected government**

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<sup>1</sup> Any errors of fact or interpretation are the responsibility of the Editor.

<sup>2</sup> **Wikipedia** claims 258 deaths, but Mr. and Mrs. Stuart have pointed out that three died after the conflict ended.

**Able Seaman Matthew Stuart**  
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### **The Tewkesbury School Student**

Over the years, many Tewkesbury School students have dreamed of a career in our armed forces: after all there should be excitement and the opportunity to learn valuable skills which would lead to a good job after leaving the services.

**Matthew Stuart** was one such student: he was very keen on the *Royal Navy*, even from an early age, and it came as no surprise that, on leaving school, he enlisted.

Matthew moved up to Tewkesbury School in 1975. Although not one of the cleverest pupils, **concedes his father**, he was extremely popular, an active member of the drama club: not an actor but a bit of a comedian. Matthew had decided - at the age of 8 - that he wanted to join the Navy, initially as a pilot but, realising academically this was not possible, he had eventually to consider other career choices - but still in the Navy.

Matthew was always busy - he pumped petrol at Ledbury Road Motors most week-ends and, holidays from the age of 13, he delivered the Gloucestershire Echo in Forthampton, the village in which we then lived. He was in the Church choir - because it paid 5p for attendance - and was a very keen member of Forthampton Youth Club; the annual Tewkesbury Carnival saw him on a float dressed up in the theme for the year. His quiet time was spent constructing model aeroplanes; he had a fascination for planes and enjoyed a short trip on the new *Jumbo* when it first came into service. His application to join the Navy was accepted after passing entrance exams and a tough physical: the training was due to start in September 1980. After finishing school in June, he obtained a job on a neighbour's farm to earn some money and keep busy: he hay-baled, straw-baled, drove tractors and a combined harvester from early morning until after dark: it was hard, sweaty, dusty work; he didn't need to do it, he just did it.

He was crazy about motorbikes and, for his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, he became the proud owner of a brand new *Suzuki* that he rode at every opportunity on his home leaves.

**Mike Peachey** taught Matthew when he was a pupil at Tewkesbury School in the 1970s. He remembers him as "*a polite, friendly boy who enjoyed sport, especially football and rugby. He was popular among his peers and tackled all tasks with enthusiasm*".

**Peter Remmer** remembers Matthew as "*a popular young man, always with a ready smile*". He had a '*dramatic*' flair, taking part in productions and entertaining the Year group in the days when end of term concerts took place. It was because of his contribution to enriching the 'life' of the Year Group that when his parents gave the **Matthew Stuart Trophy**, it was decided that it should be given to the Y11 pupil whose contribution had "***added a positive enhancement for the other Year 11 students.***"

## The Falklands War, 2 April to 14 June 1982

September 1980 and his long curly hair was reduced to a short back and sides. Off he went to join training school: gunnery and missiles were the career in which he had chosen to train, though his ambition was to go onto become a ship's diver.

Matthew trained at the Naval training School, *H.M.S. Raleigh*. Whilst there, he suffered a severe ear infection but he persevered. Now at *H.M.S. Raleigh* the *Stuart Cup* is still presented annually for "*Endeavour against all Odds*". On graduating from gunnery school, Matthew was to join the frigate *H.M.S. Penelope* but, "*being a bit of a bloke*", he said he wasn't wearing a hat band with a girl's name, so he was reassigned to the frigate *H.M.S. Argonaut*.

For all of us the outbreak of the *Falklands Conflict*<sup>3</sup> was most unexpected but Mike Peachey recalls that there was a great feeling of pride when the *Task Force* embarked and an ex-pupil was involved.

Few of us really understood at the time why we had to send so many service men so many thousand miles to the other side of the world to defend a group of islands which few knew existed.



These islands lay a few miles off the coast of Argentina so it was no surprise that the Argentineans wish to rule that they called the *Malvinas*, in the same way as we rule the *Channel Islands*. However, Britain had acquired these islands in 1834 as a kind of reward for helping the Argentineans obtain their freedom from Spanish control. In the next 150 years, the islands were populated by Scottish settlers with about 1,800 living there by 1982.<sup>4</sup>

However, by the 1970s Argentina was being ruled by what we regarded as a cruel military dictatorship. When, because of budget cuts, the last British naval ship in that area was withdrawn, the government took it as a signal that Britain was not really interested in these islands and so they invaded.



H.M.S. Argonaut with the Canberra

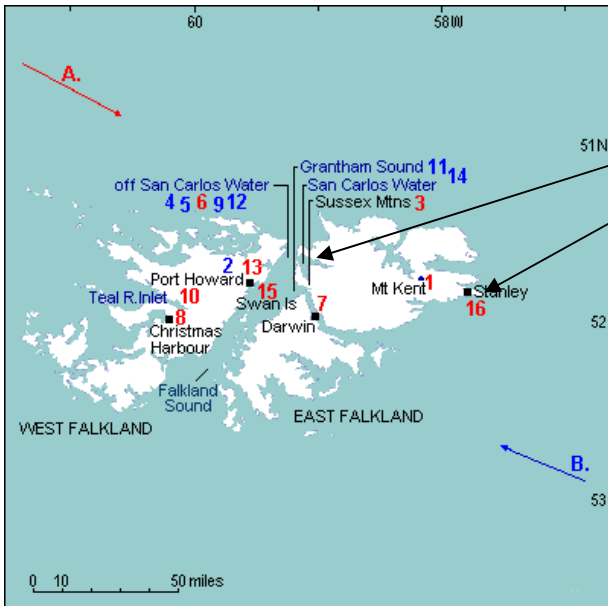
They made the mistake of underestimating the determination of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who, wishing to defend the islands and its 1,800 British people whom we regarded as our "kith and kin", decided to send the *Task Force* on 2 April 1982. I can still remember where I was and what I was doing then I heard that news. I think that most British people were shocked that a naval task force could be quickly assembled and dispatched to the South Atlantic on 5 April 1982 amidst great cheering and trepidation.

Matters turned serious on 2 May when a British submarine sank the battleship, the *General Belgrano* amidst great loss of life (323 sailors) and great controversy which lingers to this day. However on 4 May it was our turn to suffer as modern Argentinean war planes launched French-made *Exocet* missiles to sink *H.M.S. Sheffield* with the loss of 20 sailors. That caused deep shock - and an intake of realism.

<sup>3</sup> It is called a '*Conflict*' because '*War*' was never formally '*declared*'. (Mr. and Mrs. Stuart)

<sup>4</sup> Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2006. © 1993-2005 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

## Matthew's Death: 21 May 1982 - his 18<sup>th</sup> Birthday



However by **21 May**, the *Task Force* was ready to land our soldiers in **San Carlos Bay** with the aim of their "yomping" overland to attack the capital city, **Port Stanley**, from the rear. Had the Argentines been able to attack those landing ships then we would have lost the islands as well as thousands of soldiers. To prevent this, naval ships guarded the bay against air attack.



**H.M.S. Argonaut** was one of them - and it was attacked twice by bombers. Towards dusk, the attacks

became less frequent until one final plane came over; its bomb hit the "*Argonaut*" going straight through the side and into the magazine where the two shipmates **Matthew and Ian Boldy** had been sending up missiles to the deck gunners. The bomb did not explode; divers later removed it through the hole in the side of the ship. The bodies of Matthew and Ian were recovered: we are told they died from the impact.

The bodies were transferred to *H.M.S. Fearless* that had also been damaged and, late on 24 May, the Captain officiated at the burial of both boys from *H.M.S. Plymouth* just to the north of the Falkland Islands.

One of these shipmates posted his memory of Matthew on the internet:

*At the time of the Falklands, Matt was working for me as a 'WE Seaman', and on the fateful day of 21st May, as the Maintainer of the Seacat system.... I was the last person to see him alive - when I closed the hatch to the forward Seacat magazine. What I have found hard to accept over the years, is that it was his 18th birthday, and he never got to enjoy it. That apart, he was a helpful and considerate young man - with a strong sense of humour.*

Mike recalls hearing the terrible news: *the school, along with the local community, was devastated.. And our thoughts turned immediately to his parents and family as such a difficult time. A service conducted by the late Reverend Corless was held in school for all who knew Matthew and a tree was planted in his memory.*<sup>5</sup>



2006 Award Holder,  
**Ed Burrows** beside the  
commemorative tree

The final irony: *H.M.S. Penelope* did not go to the *Falkland Islands* in 1982.

<sup>5</sup> The tree was moved when the Science B Block was built and is now by the main school entrance along with the plaque.

### Another Tewkesbury School Student

The conflict carried on with losses on both sides but the "yomp" to the capital was successful. Indeed, I have only just learned from Mike Peachey that another Tewkesbury pupil took part: **Phil Williams** was a member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Parachute Regiment whose landing was protected by Matthew's ship. Phil was wounded during the campaign but was fortunate to survive the experience and led a successful 22 year career in the army, retiring only recently.

### The Aftermath

The Argentineans surrendered on 14 June 1982 after a two month war. The military government fell, but Mrs Thatcher went on to win a General Election - and in 2007 the *Falklands Islands Dependency* is still defended by Britain.

### Remembering Stuart



In 1983 Matthew's family were amongst those who travelled 8,137 miles by air and aboard the "*Cunard Countess*" on the Falklands Pilgrimage to the Islands and visit the co-ordinates "*for those you have no grave but the sea*". The soldiers families who chose to have their loved ones buried at the cemetery in San Carlos Bay were able to visit the graves.

After 25 years, the tree has grown significantly whilst most teachers, who remember Matthew, have retired. However, each year the **Matthew Stuart Trophy** is presented to a Y11 who has made an outstanding contribution to the life of the school. The current recipient is Ed Burrows whose plans are to join an expedition to Greenland.

As I looked at other names on the trophy, I encountered some fine pupils but maybe we should focus upon one, **Catrin Jones**. She graduated from Sandhurst alongside Prince Harry but with much less publicity - and there was no hesitation to send her to Afghanistan where she is a signals officer.

We should be praying for her safe return whilst recalling another pupil in **Matthew Stuart** who sacrificed his life whilst doing his duty.



Matthew's sister, **Alison**<sup>6</sup>, wrote two poems inspired by the loss of her brother.

### MATTHEW'S SONG

I waved from the deck of the Argonaut  
As she carried us off to the war  
And my friends and I cried, full of fear and  
pride  
For what we were fighting for?  
Oh, what were we fighting for?

The Navy life for me I'd said  
When the fire of youth was ablaze  
And the first few months were hard but good  
And friends made short the long days  
I felt so high, so warm and proud  
In my badge and my uniform.  
But fear and the uncertainty  
Were strong in the Falkland's dawn.  
My friends helped disperse the anxiety  
And they had my support in return  
But when the news of the *Sheffield* and its  
dead men came,  
The tears in our hearts just burned  
And floating in the death cold sea  
I thought of these things once again  
Of Ginge and Mac and good old Tim  
As the bullets fell like rain.  
I thought of my parents, of Doug and Al  
And the life I'd left behind  
As I drifted away to a peaceful sleep  
The memories calmed my mind

I waved from the deck of the Argonaut  
As she carried us off to the war  
And my friends and I cried, full of fear and  
pride  
For what we were fighting for?  
Oh, what were we fighting for?  
But I wanted Peace and I've found that peace  
And so I will fight no more.

Alison Stuart - his sister, 23rd May 1982

He is the fighter  
A father, a son  
He is the Youngman  
Who picked up a gun  
He is the bullet  
That pierced the soul.  
He is the Victory  
He is the goal  
He is the widow who sits down to weep  
He is the family  
With just memories to keep  
He is the thought  
Of a sad goodbye  
He is the tear  
That falls from the eye  
He is the grief  
For a young life lost  
He is the hero  
He is the cost;  
He is the bloodstain  
On the green land  
He is the wreckage  
Washed up on the sand  
He is the dead man  
Who lay on the shore  
He is the silence  
After the War.

Alison Stuart - January 1983

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<sup>6</sup> Alison was, in 1982, a pupil at Tewkesbury School. She subsequently followed a career in the R.A.F., rising from the ranks to become an officer.

## Matthew's Formal Memorials


**Twynning**



**Forthampton**



*From, The Revd. J. P. Hudson, A.R.C. Royal Navy.*



HMS FEARLESS  
BFPO Ships

26 May 1982.

Dear Mr. Stuart,

During the night of Monday 24 May, it was my sad duty to officiate at the burial service of your son Matthew, North of the Falkland Islands, at position 51° 23' S: 59° 07'8" W.

Matthew and Jan Bolby, a colleague killed with him, were taken from HMS ARGONAUT by boat with proper ceremony to HMS PLYMOUTH, and thence to sea, where at 2130 the Service took place.

Over the years I have officiated at a number of burials at sea, but none so poignant and moving as this one. In a short simple ceremony attended by shipmates from HMS ARGONAUT and HMS PLYMOUTH, Matthew and Jan were committed to the sea, in the tradition of the Service they loved and served so well.

The Naval action in San Carlos Water has demanded the very highest courage and fighting skill of everyone involved in it, and nowhere have these qualities been displayed more than in the lives of these two young men. Their untimely death has been keenly felt in their own ship, and throughout the whole of the task group.

May I express my own personal sympathy to you and your family in your loss, and assure you of our thoughts and prayers at this tragic time

pfo

Letter written by the Chaplain to Mr. and Mrs. Stuart