



Above: Relaxed and chatting with friends

Above: Hard at work shifting cattle with the *Penelope*

Fin's war: A brave and skilled captain who saved many lives

THE late Finlay Ferguson who sadly passed away in February this year was a hugely patriotic character who attended every Liberation Day in his quiet and respectful manner.

His absence was duly noted and a glass raised in his honour by his friends this year and it seemed appropriate to record some of Fin's less known activities as a seafarer in 1982 and his brave efforts to assist the British Forces.

Fin's war was an eventful one which began soon after the invasion when as captain of the *Penelope* he received an urgent message from the FIC manager Brook Hardcastle to sail to Egg Harbour in Falkland Sound to pick up the children of West Falkland who had been at the school hostel. Consequently they were driven overland from Stanley to Egg Harbour from where Fin transported them across to Port Howard for collection by their parents.

Just a day or so later an Argentine crew took over *Penelope* and the local crew were instructed to remain working on the ship initially, but they were finally allowed to leave the vessel at Egg Harbour from where they walked back to Goose Green only to be locked up together with the other civilians in the Social Club where they stayed until the liberation of the settlement on May 29.

Following the battle for Goose Green and the release of the locals from the hall, Fin took up the role of skipper on the *Monsunen*. Unfortunately for him there was already a Royal Navy officer on the ship, a Lieutenant McLaren, who was there to control their movements and operations. In Lt McLaren's eyes, the *Monsunen* was his ship.

On June 7, Fin and the *Monsunen* moved a full load of about 200 Gurkhas and Paras from Goose Green to Fitzroy, as part of the effort to move the 5th Infantry Brigade forward as quickly as possible. Once unloaded, the *Monsunen* returned to Goose

Green for another load. The safe navigation of the *Monsunen* through the challenging waters of Choiseul Sound in the dark was entirely down to Fin. The trip was about four hours each way.

By first light on June 8 1982 the *Monsunen* was again alongside the jetty at Goose Green. She was joined by the LCU (Landing Craft Utility) *Foxtrot Four* from HMS *Fearless*, with Royal Marine Colour Sergeant Brian Johnston in command. Both vessels were loaded with further elements of 5 Brigade for the big move to Fitzroy. *Foxtrot Four* was loaded with six Land Rovers, signals equipment, and some personnel of 5 Brigade's HQ and Signal Squadron. The *Monsunen*'s derricks were used to load the vehicles on to *Foxtrot Four*. *Monsunen* meanwhile, was to transport another 180 soldiers that were predominantly Gurkhas.

Both vessels were to make a night passage to Fitzroy, but an Officer at Goose Green ordered them to sail in daylight as the rest of 5 Brigade required their loads at Fitzroy urgently. Colour Sergeant Johnston could see how important the signals equipment was and left immediately. Fin, on the other hand, refused

to go, arguing that the fine weather would almost certainly mean that Argentine jets would be out and he didn't want to be caught in broad daylight with a ship full of soldiers. Very few had lifejackets and none had survival suits. Lt McLaren wanted to sail and ordered Fin to do so, but after a "heated exchange" Fin put him in his place and they stayed put until dark.

The soldiers were loaded on to *Monsunen* in the late afternoon. By then the tragic news had been received that Argentine Skyhawks had caught *Foxtrot Four* in Choiseul Sound and attacked her. The bombs and cannon fire destroyed the wheelhouse and badly damaged the stern, killing six personnel including Colour Sergeant Johnston. The survivors shuffled the vehicles forward to raise the stern and keep *Foxtrot Four* afloat. A Sea King helicopter then arrived and lifted the survivors off.

With *Foxtrot Four* abandoned and adrift near the entrance of Choiseul Sound, Fin received instructions via Lt McLaren that they were to locate the LCU, take her in tow and then proceed to Fitzroy. Fin told Lt McLaren – "Thank Christ we didn't go with her!" According

to Fin, he didn't reply. It wasn't explained to Fin why it was necessary to go after the landing craft, but he found out why many years later. Two of the Land Rovers were fitted with cryptographic equipment for secure communications, and if they fell into Argentine hands then 5 Brigades communications could be compromised.

Fin pulled *Monsunen* away from the Goose Green jetty and headed off into the darkness and down Choiseul Sound in search of *Foxtrot Four*. They found her about two miles south-east of Fox Point, in the mouth of Choiseul Sound. Fin had spoken to his boys about how they would get a tow on *Foxtrot Four*, but Lt McLaren had his own ideas and good deal of chaos and confusion followed. Fin's biggest concern then was avoiding heavy contact. With the two vessels in close proximity in a big swell there was a real danger that *Foxtrot Four* could punch a hole in *Monsunen* and send her to the bottom. It called for supreme ship handling on Fin's part. As Fin fought to control *Monsunen* in a big wallowing swell, the line was passed before he was ready and it ended up tangled around *Monsunen*'s propeller. At that point Fin said he was ready to throw Lt McLaren overboard.

Some Gurkhas bravely tried to untangle the rope but failed and the ship was immobilised. Without propulsion *Monsunen* slowly swung side-on to the swell and started to roll heavily. Many of the poor troops in the hold got seasick.

McLaren reported their predicament by radio and HMS *Yarmouth* was ordered to go to their aid. Fin said that the arrival of *Yarmouth* was one of the most breath-taking things he had ever seen. She was in complete black-out and they could hear her long before they could see her. When at last she came in to view, her bow slowly loomed out of the darkness, towering above the

Monsunen's bridge wing. At first Fin thought *Yarmouth* was going to run them down, but she stopped suddenly, very close to *Monsunen*. They lowered a Gemini inflatable and two divers quickly cleared the propeller. Just as quickly as she arrived, HMS *Yarmouth* backed off and disappeared into the night.

By now most of the troops were very seasick and in a bad way in the stuffy hold. Fin got *Monsunen* under way and decided to anchor in the lee of the Sea Lion Islands in Choiseul Sound to give the soldiers a break. This was a familiar anchorage that he was able to find easily in the dark.

Foxtrot Four had drifted off into the darkness and was never seen again. She sank, taking her dead and precious cargo with her. Orders came through for the *Monsunen* to return to Goose Green where a Chinook airlift awaited the troops. Fin had her back alongside the jetty before sunrise.

Fin's refusal to sail in daylight probably averted a major disaster and saved countless lives. Had he sailed in company with *Foxtrot Four* then the Skyhawks would have had a choice of two targets, and with *Monsunen* being the largest it is reasonable to assume that they would have gone for her. His actions were nothing less than heroic and were never fully recognised.

Recalled by Allan White, from a personal account given by Finlay Ferguson.



Above: Former *Penelope* captains Fin and Michael Clarke meet up to bid the trusty vessel farewell as she left the Islands for Germany in 2006

Below: HMS *Fearless* and her LCUs with *Foxtrot Four* centre

MV *Monsunen*