

Welsh hero Simon Weston



This famous hero was born in 1961 and is best known for his experiences as a soldier in the Falklands War. This war was a brief conflict between Britain and Argentina over ownership of the Falkland Islands, which are known in Spanish as the 'Islas Malvinas'. There had been disputes about who owned the islands since 1826. This last battle began in April 1982 and within 74 days Britain had recaptured the islands.

Simon Weston, the British soldier who suffered burns over 46 per cent of his body as the result of a bomb in the Falklands/Malvinas war, underwent 70 operations and will have to have more. He is badly disfigured, and can yet say, "It might sound crass but I feel that being burnt and injured has been positive for me. I've been allowed to do so much. I've achieved a level of contentment that I might not have achieved otherwise."

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Originally from Nelson in the South Wales Valleys, Simon Weston joined the Welsh Guards in 1978 and experienced the typical round of British army postings – Northern Ireland, Germany and a spell in East Africa.

When Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands in 1982, Simon Weston sailed for the South Atlantic with the task force hurriedly assembled to recover the former British possessions.

He was with 3 Company of the Welsh Guards on the afternoon their virtually undefended troopship Sir Galahad was bombed at low level by four Argentine jets. Stocks of petrol stowed on board magnified the fireball that engulfed the ship.

For the British, it was the most disastrous episode of the war. Thirty-three Welsh guardsmen were among the fifty-one soldiers and sailors who lost their lives. Simon Weston suffered terrible burns to half his body.

The circumstances surrounding the attack on the Sir Galahad that day at Fitzroy have been the subject of much controversy, but Simon Weston has never been unduly interested in the apportioning of blame.

Instead he began the long and painful journey back to normality, movingly chronicled in the television documentary series *Simon's War*. It was a stark lesson in the human cost of conflict as he endured operation after operation to repair the physical damage.

The programmes won him countless admirers, fame that he has used to the advantage of others. Founded in 1988, his charity The Weston Spirit helped nearly fifty thousand underprivileged youngsters.

He is the author of two autobiographical volumes and a thriller – *Cause of Death* – and is much in demand as a broadcaster and motivational speaker. With his downbeat modesty and good humour, he sets a supreme example of how to take whatever setbacks life has in store for you. Unlike most brave soldiers, Simon Weston's heroism did not begin until his army days were done.

Abridged from *Forgiveness: Breaking the Chain of Hate*, by Michael Henderson (first paragraph above) and *100 Welsh Heroes*, by Allison Coleman, Ian Courtney, John Davies, Iestyn George and Miles Fletcher (remainder of text)

1 How much of Simon Weston's body was covered by burns? (ring one):
almost a quarter almost a third almost half almost three-quarters

2 In which regiment did Simon Weston serve?

3 How long had he been in this army company at the time of the Falkland Islands' invasion?

4 Why does he accept that 'it might sound crass' for him to see his injuries in a positive light?

5 From your knowledge of Simon Weston's character and his life since he left the army, why do you think he is uninterested in discussing who is to blame for his injuries?

6 Simon Weston gained a great deal from his horrific experiences. At the time when this piece was written, who was benefiting particularly from all that he had learned?

7 In your own words, explain the meaning of the word 'motivational'.

8 Explain how and why 'Simon Weston's heroism did not begin until his army days were done'.

9 Simon Weston's 'journey back to normality' was 'chronicled' in a television documentary.

a) What is a chronicle?

b) Why is the word 'journey' used to describe Simon Weston's recovery?