

**Sandy Woodward,
naval hero of
the Falklands, tells
CAROLINE PHILLIPS
why he deserted his
wife after 32 years**

How to win a war and lose a marriage



WHILE we talk he doodles, drawing a battleship. He speaks in a crusty voice, peppering his conversation with pukka expressions such as "chaps" and "oh, good Lord".

Admiral Sir John "Sandy" Woodward, Britain's greatest living naval hero and the man who led the task force to victory in the Falklands, is speaking publicly for the first time about his adulterous affair with a family friend, the breakdown of his marriage after 32 years and his ongoing friendship with the man whose wife he stole.

We meet in a cosy cottage in Twickenham, South West London, that he acquired after leaving the marital home. A grandfather clock ticks in the corner and his own sketches and watercolour seascapes cover the walls. Woodward, 6ft tall, wears a stripy shirt and striped Royal College of Defence Studies tie. He has a weather-beaten face, grey hair and eyebrows that rise expressively.

How does he wish to be addressed? "You can call me Sandy," he replies, "or Admiral, Admiral Sandy or Admiral Sir John." He was nicknamed Sandy, aged one, despite his dark hair.

He had a job that was formidable, isolated and daunting but it earned him the respect of a nation. Acquaintances have sometimes dubbed him private, paranoid, a cold fish and arrogant. In truth, he is sensitive, humorous, clever and self-critical.

HE MET Charlotte, his wife, in London in 1958. A doctor's daughter, she was then a radiographer. They wed in 1960. "It was a pretty ordinary marriage," Woodward says, now.

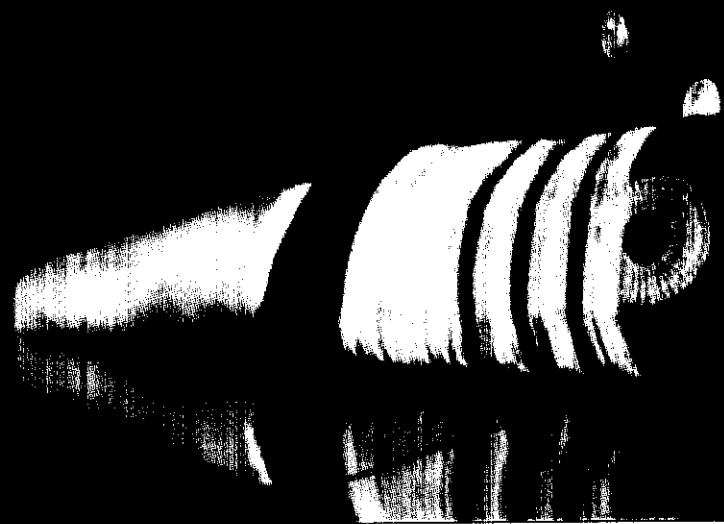
"We rubbed along. Sometimes I was prickly to her, beastly, tetchy, not tender enough. I'm sure I was quite difficult. If you're going to rise to the top of the military, there has to be a little iron in your soul.

"People think I got into a terrible mess because of the war. They try to attribute the break-up of my marriage to the effects downstream from 1982. It may have been a contributory factor but it wasn't the pivotal thing. We wound each other up much too often. We rowed too often. No, I didn't hit her and I wasn't verbally abusive. I was just acid.

"Sometimes I'd be at home only 64 days a year," he continues. "As the years go by, the separations make it harder to get back into the domestic scene. Instead of worrying about how you're going to pay the gas bill, you're sitting with Mrs T at No 10, thinking about national defence.

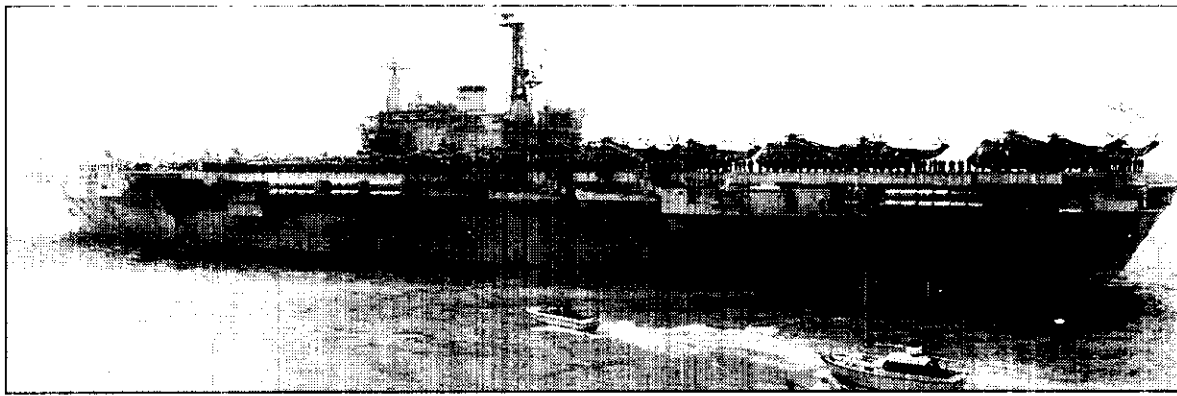
"The estrangement is progressive unless you make positive and continuous efforts to keep your connections. I

Turn to Next Page



SHIP SHAPE:

Sandy Woodward was senior task group commander in the Falklands campaign from April to July 1982, when HMS *Hermes* saw action

**From Previous Page**

didn't, out of sheer carelessness, which I regret."

When his service career came to an end in 1989, after 43 years in the Navy, it was a time of crisis. "I was disturbed. I was 57 years old and thought, 'Crikey, now that's all behind me, what am I here for?'"

"I lost the organisation and structure of my life and the small army of people who did things for me. Suddenly I had to fix all my own things."

"Occasionally I still feel as if the whole future is about to descend on me in a massive wave. Instead of knowing precisely what I'd be doing for the next three months, I didn't even know what was happening from day to day."

Woodward left his wife and home in 1992. Two years before, he and Winifred Hoult, a family friend of 25 years' standing, had become lovers.

Winifred, known as Prim, was living with her husband Tim, a senior partner at accountancy firm Price Waterhouse. Woodward explains the attraction: "I fancied her, didn't I?" He laughs. "One thing led to another while we were both married. I liked her character and sense of humour."

He's tickled when I ask whether sex after 60 is a big motivation. "Obviously the physical side is important in any marriage."

How did he handle not getting his oats for such long periods at sea? "Fortunately we didn't have women at sea at the time. But you cope. You don't have to be thundering up and down the whole time."

It is said that powerful

men have strong libidos. Does he regard himself as highly sexed? "No, I don't. I'm normal. But if you see yourself as paranoid, you're most unusual for a paranoid."

Tim was gentlemanly about the new marital arrangements. "I can't remember how he responded initially, which suggests it wasn't violently or strongly," explains Woodward.

"He is highly intelligent, good-humoured and sensible, and didn't get over-excited about the whole business. Charlotte is no longer good friends with Prim. She finds what has happened hard to live with."

AMAZINGLY, the other three remain close. "I don't know how. You'll have to ask Tim. We meet up sometimes with the family or sailing in Chichester Harbour. Occasionally Tim comes to stay the night."

Woodward was born in Cornwall, the son of Tom, a modest and unambitious Barclays Bank cashier. He was the baby of the family — with an "independent" brother Jim and an "equally tough" sister Liz — and went to boarding school at eight.

He was bullied, felt isolated and learned to cope. He finished there as head boy, "albeit a very moderate one".

At 13 he began to prepare for a vocation in the Navy, having won a scholarship to the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth. "The services are really like an extension of school life."

Today Woodward spends his time sailing, writing "blood and thunder fiction" (airport novels), playing bridge and lecturing. "I'm not rich."



NEW LIFE: Woodward with lover Winifred Hoult



FATHER FIGURE: But Woodward wishes his family could have been closer

BEFORE THE SPLIT: Woodward says he regrets his "sheer carelessness" towards his wife Charlotte

he says "I'm not particularly interested in making money. But I don't need much money. I'm mean, basically."

In a sense, his Falklands War has continued. Even now he has on his computer a brilliant simulation of the military defence of the Falklands. "We're fine at the moment in the extremely unlikely event that the Argentines come again."

HE IS also spearheading the scheme to create Britain's first national memorial to the Falklands war dead at the nautical college in Pangbourne, Berkshire.

"At social occasions, people would come up to me and say, 'You killed my son'. That's difficult to deal with unless you're prepared for it and I wasn't. It happened more than once.

"I can't remember what I said. I didn't feel personally responsible. The son was killed in the service of his country but no mother is going to be comforted by that. For some, the price is too high.

"Equally, though, other people would ask, 'Can I touch you for luck?'"

Woodward also explains how, 14 years after the war ended, a fight is still being waged.

Battle has broken out between himself and the other hero of the Falklands campaign, Commodore Michael Clapp, his friend of 40 years who has just co-written *Amphibious Assault Falklands*, a book purporting to tell the true story behind the military operation.

Clapp reveals a deep division between the two

senior officers from different branches of the Royal Navy and disputes the accuracy of *One Hundred Days*, Woodward's best-selling account of the Falklands, which was published in 1992.

Clapp challenges Woodward's claim that it was he who took one of the most important decisions of the war in choosing the shelter of San Carlos Water for the critical amphibious landings.

Clapp claims the decision was made jointly by himself and another officer who then informed Woodward.

It has been reported that Woodward says Clapp's book makes him "look a fool". "Who fed you this junk?" he asks in an angry 10-page letter to Clapp. "What I write to people is private between them and me," says Woodward, now.

Clapp also accuses him of insensitivity and intransigence. Is his fellow officer trying to steal Woodward's thunder, rather belatedly?

Woodward is keen to play down the problem. "Mike is an old and valued friend and has written a graphic, interesting book. I really don't want to get into this. This is personal between me and Mike."

He refuses to be drawn into the fray. The commander-in-chief, Admiral

Sir John Fieldhouse, is dead and so cannot verify either claim.

Before the interview, Woodward sent me his copy of *One Hundred Days*, with chunks about the BBC highlighted.

"We're making major corrections for a forthcoming US imprint, because the BBC say I accused them wrongfully of giving information to the enemy when they were given it by the Ministry of Defence in the first place. Quite reasonable of them, really," he says, ironically. The Government leaking critical information to the media could have endangered lives.

WE RETURN to the subject of his marital break-up. These days Woodward lives with Prim. "I couldn't ask for more. I'm very lucky."

But he has not divorced Charlotte. "We haven't got round to it, partly for financial reasons — while we're still married she gets half my state pension if I'm run over." He sees Charlotte fortnightly "to try to mend fences, literally and figuratively".

Their children, Tessa, 23, who works in equities, and Andy, a 35-year-old computer systems designer in California, were upset.

"Initially there was shock and horror. My

daughter took it less well than my son. Now my relationship with my children is as close as ever it was, but of course it was never very close.

"The sad thing is that, from the day my son was born until he was 10 years old, I was hardly ever at home.

"I very nearly failed to make any connection with my children because I was away so much."

He mulls over whether the separation was the result of a mid-life crisis. During Suez, aged 24, he says he had his first mid-life crisis. "I was facing the distinct risk of getting rubbed out."

He laughs at his definition of what constitutes mid-life. "I had another when I went to the Falklands. When you come back from a clear focus of threat to your personal existence, you see your marriage from a different perspective."

He nurses his cup of coffee and confronts his mortality. "I'm not frightened of dying. I'm an atheist. But I don't think it very likely that I'd be popping up in Heaven in view of the things I've done.

"A girl at Bryanston School said I was a murderer. That would be enough to send me to Hell if it were true."

He finishes the last line of his doodle. "For me, Hell would be to be interviewed permanently by the media."

Too late he recalls that his service training taught him to divulge no more than name, rank and number if interrogated.

Cover picture, by Joe Partridge, is reproduced from Sandy Woodward's book *One Hundred Days*, published by HarperCollins.

'When you come back from a clear focus of threat, you see your marriage from a different perspective'