The Official History of the Falklands Campaign

VOL. II

WAR AND DIPLOMACY

Sir Lawrence Freedman

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THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE FALKLANDS CAMPAIGN

Volume II: War And Diplomacy

In the second volume of *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign,* Sir Lawrence Freedman provides a detailed and authoritative account of one of the most extraordinary periods in recent British political history and a vivid portrayal of a government at war.

After the shock of the Argentine invasion of the Falklands in April 1982, Margaret Thatcher faced the crisis that came to define her premiership as she determined to recover the Islands. The book covers all aspects of the campaign—economic and diplomatic as well as military—and demonstrates the extent of the gamble that the Government took. There are important accounts of the tensions in relations with the United States, concerns among the military commanders about the risks they were expected to take, the problems of dealing with the media and the attempts to reach a negotiated settlement. *War and Diplomacy* describes in dramatic detail events such as the sinking of the *Belgrano,* the battle of Goose Green and the final push to Stanley. Attention is also paid to the aftermath of the war, including the various enquiries, and the eventual restoration of diplomatic relations with Argentina.

Sir Lawrence Freedman is Professor of War Studies at King's College London where he is currently Vice-Principal. He has written extensively on military strategy, cold war history and contemporary conflict and is a regular newspaper columnist.

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THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE FALKLANDS CAMPAIGN

Volume II: War and Diplomacy

Sir Lawrence Freedman

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAA	Air Defence Artillery
AAM	Air-to-Air Missile
AAR	Air-to-Air Refuelling
AAW	Anti-Air Warfare
AAWC	Anti-Air Warfare Control
AD	Air Defence
ADS	Advanced Dressing Station
AEW	Airborne Early Warning
ALADI	Latin American Integration Association
AOA	Amphibious Operations Area
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
APC	Armoured Personnel Carrier
ASW	Anti-Submarine Warfare
ATGW	Anti-tank guided weapons
AVCAT	Aviation Fuel
BAS	British Antarctic Survey
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BFSU	British Forces Support Unit
BMA	Base Maintenance Area
CAP	Combat Air Patrol
CATF	Commander Amphibious Task Force
CBFFI	Commander British Forces Falkland Islands
CBFSU	Commander British Forces Support Unit (Ascension Island)
CDS	Chief of the Defence Staff
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CINCFLEET	Commander-in-Chief, Fleet
CLFFI	Commander Land Forces Falkland Islands
CO	Commanding Officer
COMAW	Commodore, Amphibious Warfare
COREPER	Committee of Permanent Representatives (EC)
COS	Chiefs of Staff
C/S	Call-Sign

CTF	Commander Task Force
CTG	Commander Task Group
CTU	Commander Task Unit
CVA	Aircraft Carrier
CVBG	Carrier Battle Group
CVRT	Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked)
DCDS(I)	Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Intelligence)
DSCS	Defense Satellite Communications System
DIS	Defence Intelligence Staff
DSSS	Defence Secure Speech System
EC	European Community
ECGD	Export Credit Guarantee Department
ECM	Electronic Counter-Measures
EDATS	Extra Deep Armed Team Sweep
ELINT	Electronic Intelligence
ENG	Electronic News Gathering
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Disposal
ESM	Electronic (Warfare) Support Measure
EZ	Exclusion Zone
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation (UN)
FBMA	Forward Base Maintenance Area
FCO	Foreign & Commonwealth Office
FI	Falkland Islands
FICZ	Falkland Islands Conservation and Management Zone
FIDA	Falkland Islands Development Agency
FIGAS	Falkland Islands Government Air Service
FIPZ	Falkland Islands Protection Zone
FOF1	Flag Officer, First Flotilla
FOF3	Flag Officer, Third Flotilla
FOSM	Flag Officer Submarines
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMT	Greenwich Mean Time
GPMG	General Purchase Machine Gun
HE	High Explosive

HF	High Frequency
HFDF	High Frequency Direction Finding
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
HQ	Headquarters
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFF	Identification Friend or Foe
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INMARSAT	International Maritime Satellite Organisation
ITN	Independent Television News
ITV	Independent Television
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JSIW	Joint Services Interrogation Wing
LADE	Líneas Aéreas del Estado
LANDSAT	Environmental resource satellite series
LCU	Landing Craft Utility
LCVP	Landing Craft, Vehicles and Personnel
LFFI	Land Forces Falkland Islands
LPD	Land Platform Dock
LPH	Landing Platform Helicopter
LSL	Landing Ship Logistic
LST	Landing Ship Tank
M&AW	Mountain & Arctic Warfare
MARISAT	Maritime Satellite (commercial satellite company)
MAT	Media Assessment Team
MCM	Mine Counter-Measures
MCMV	Mine Counter-Measure Vessels
MEZ	Maritime Exclusion Zone
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Argentina)
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MP	Member of Parliament
MPA	Maritime Patrol Aircraft
MRR	Maritime Radar Reconnaissance
MSA	Auxiliary Minesweeper
MV	Merchant Vessel

NAAFI	Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes
NASA	National Aeronautical and Space Agency (US)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NGS	Naval Gunfire Support
OAS	Organisation of American States
OD(SA)	Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, SubCommittee on the South Atlantic and Falkland Islands
OD(FAF)	Defence and Oversea Policy Committee, SubCommittee on Future Arrangements for the Falkland Islands
PNG	Passive Night Goggles
POL	Petrol, Oil, Lubricants
POW	Prisoner-of-War
PR	Public Relations
PSA	Property Services Agency
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
QE II	Queen Elizabeth II
R of A	Radius of Action
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAP	Regimental Aid Post
RAS	Replenishment at Sea
RE	Royal Engineers
RFA	Royal Fleet Auxiliary
RHG/D	The Royal Horse Guards/Dragoons (Blues and Royals)
RM	Royal Marines
RMAS	Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service
RN	Royal Navy
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RRS	Royal Research Ship
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SAPU	South Atlantic Presentation Unit
SAR	Search and Rescue
SAS	Special Air Service
SBS	Special Boat Service
SCOT	Satellite Communications Terminal

SCR	Security Council Resolution
SELA	Latin American European System
SF	Sustained Fire
SHAR	Sea Harrier
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence
SPG	Special Projects Group
SSBN	Ballistic Missile Nuclear-powered Submarine
SSK	Submarine-Killer Submarine
SSN	Nuclear-powered Submarine
SST	Surgical Support Team
STUFT	Ships Taken Up From Trade
TEZ	Total Exclusion Zone
TG	Task Group
TML	Twelve Mile Limit [ex-Three Mile Limit]
TQ	Tactical Questioners
UHF	Ultra High Frequency
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USAF	United States Air Force
USN	United States Navy
VCDS (P&L)	Vice Chief of Defence Staff (Personnel and Logistics)
VCNS	Vice Chief of the Naval Staff
VHF	Very High Frequency
VMC	Visual Meteorological Conditions
WMR	War Maintenance Reserve

INTRODUCTION

As the month of March 1982 drew to a close it dawned on the British Government that an incident in the South Atlantic, initially thought to be rather trivial, was turning into a major crisis. The incident had begun with the discovery on 19 March of a number of Argentine scrap metal merchants who had landed without authorisation on the island of South Georgia. South Georgia, significant largely as a base for the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), was then a Dependency of the Falkland Islands. On 31 March information was received confirming not only that Argentina had switched its attention to the Falkland Islands but also that it had put to sea a substantial task force with the intention of occupying the colony. Diplomatic attempts to get the invasion called off using the United States soon failed and on 2 April the invasion took place.

In the first volume of this Official History I described the history of the dispute with Argentina over the ownership of the Falkland Islands, the years of negotiations that had failed to produce a resolution and the dynamics of the South Georgia incident. This second volume picks up the story with the invasion of the Falklands. It then describes the despatch of a Task Force to the South Atlantic capable of repossessing the Falklands and the intense political activity surrounding attempts to get Argentina to withdraw. The failure of these attempts resulted in a British landing and a tough fight for the Islands. This volume therefore covers the two and a half months of intense activity, leading to the recapture of the Falklands, and then considers the aftermath, up to the restoration of diplomatic relations in 1990. I have also looked at some of the post-war investigations into its origins, including the Franks Report and the controversy surrounding the sinking of the *Belgrano*. The benefits of hindsight should never be underestimated, but it can distort historical interpretation. I have therefore tried to avoid the tendency to start with what is known and work backwards. In the process I have sought to open a window on the decision-making process to reveal the expectations and anxieties of the time, the options that were discussed but not pursued, and the pressures weighing down upon those responsible for advising upon and reaching decisions. The focus is on British policy and strategy. I have tried to treat the Argentine position fairly and report what is known about Argentine attitudes and behaviour as is relevant to the main thrust of my narrative. I have been interested to compare what was thought by British policy-makers and commanders at the time with what later appeared to have been the case

I have already written two books on this topic, one with an Argentine academic. I am therefore more than aware that I am passing here over some very familiar ground and telling a story that, in broad terms, is already well known. What then can an Official History add? Most importantly, it provides an account grounded in the documentary record. As official historian I have had privileged access to all archived material, including briefing notes and official submissions, diplomatic telegrams, boxes of military signals and raw intelligence reports. The privilege is a very real one, and this opportunity to explore such a major event in all its dimensions has been quite marvellous.

Although the war in the Falkland Islands lasted only ten weeks, the material available for research in government files is quite staggering. Senior officials at the time, particularly within the Ministry of Defence (MoD), often put in requests for 'Paper Minimise', while on other occasions the amount of signal traffic significantly slowed the transmission of signals. Although Volume One was perhaps dominated by research into Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) files, this is not the case for Volume Two and research is spread far more evenly between military, political, economic and intelligence resources. I was also assisted by the invaluable in-house staff histories of the campaign by the Naval, Air and Army Historical Branches.

This book makes use throughout of papers and signals in the files of the Office of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Secretariat, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence, Chief of the Defence Staff and Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of State for Defence, and Joint Intelligence Committee. I have consulted Cabinet minutes and memoranda, including those of the two key committees of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee (OD)—the War Cabinet (OD(SA)) and that considering the post-war future for the Islands (OD(FAF)). Among the key documents on the campaign are the war diaries of CINCFLEET (Admiral Fieldhouse), FOF1 (Admiral Woodward), Flag Officer Submarines (Admiral Herbert) and Brigadier Thompson, the post-war Reports of Proceedings by the Commodore of Amphibious Warfare (Commodore Clapp), the Commander Land Forces (Major General Moore), and Captain Young (Commander of the PARAQUET Task Force). I have consulted the Boards of Inquiry into those ships lost during the campaign, plus the war diaries and signal logs produced by the various participating units (2 Para, 3 Para, 1 WG, 2 SG, 40 Cdo, 42 Cdo and 45 Cdo), as well as those from the Commanders of 5 Infantry Brigade and 3 Commando Brigade, and Headquarters Land Forces Falkland Islands. I was also able to look at the files connected to the Franks Report, including transcripts of their interviews with participants. I have also spoken with many of those involved in the war. I am also grateful to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and the US National Archives for the provision of documents relevant to the deliberations of the Reagan Administration.

I was fortunate enough to discuss the campaign with Admirals Lewin and Fieldhouse before they died for my earlier books on the subject. For this research I have conducted many other interviews, and these have been helpful to varying degrees. It is unreasonable to expect too much from memories after two decades, and for this reason I have put much more weight on the archive material. It is also the case that many participants wrote up their own accounts, including the Prime Minister of the time, her Secretary of Defence and many of the senior commanders. They and others also gave interviews to those who wrote the earlier histories. In addition individual soldiers, sailors and airmen have told their stories. I have had no hesitation in drawing on these accounts, especially when they could fill in gaps left in the archives.

It has expressly not been my task to highlight the failures of individuals, sensationalise events, or take the opportunity to get as many secrets as possible into the public domain. With regard to intelligence, a variety of sensitive and delicate sources were tapped, providing materials that contributed at all levels. Even if I had wanted to do so it would have been impossible to provide a comprehensive declassified evaluation of the performance of the intelligence community, or even credit many of the contributions. I did, however, believe it to be essential to describe the impact of intelligence reports and

assessments on decision-making, and I am grateful to the mature attitude shown by the relevant agencies in accepting the importance of this task.

This resulting account is official to the extent that it has been built up from primary sources. Official in this context does not mean an officially sanctioned history, so that only safe or agreed opinions are expressed. No attempt has been made to steer my account of events in one direction or another. If I had been inclined to provide an approved governmental interpretation of the conflict, and had been able to identify the form it might take, the existence of so many other independent histories of the campaign would soon test the credibility of any account that diverged markedly from the ample evidence already in the public domain or ducked the obvious areas of controversy.

From almost every comment that has been made to me since I started work on this project I am well aware that this is seen as an opportunity to explore with the best possible information the lingering controversies left over from the Falklands. It might be too optimistic to hope that I can bring some of these controversies to closure, at least in respect of the claims that have been made as to what 'really happened', and in some respects it would be a shame if I did. It will not be long before many, although not all, of the files that I have consulted will be opened up and others will be able to form their own judgements. Undoubtedly they will find materials that I have missed or with meaning and significance that I failed to appreciate. Although this may be considered to be a rather long book with which to cover such a short war, in many areas I have managed only a limited exploration of a wealth of material that has been stored away, and that in other areas the documentary record remains frustratingly sparse. I look forward to the new analyses to come: that is how history stays fresh.

Space imposes its own limitations. I have not begun to do justice to the many acts or bravery, comradeship and sacrifice that marked combat in the Falklands, though I hope that I have been able to give some indication of where the course of the campaign depended on the efforts of individuals. This was a war fought with a small margin of error. More so than was perhaps realised by those not directly involved at the time, final success could by no means be taken for granted. Ministers and commanders-in-chief could only take matters so far before handing over the burden down the chain of command to the point where everything depended on the courage and professionalism of a few individuals. So while from a top down perspective battles can be described with some confidence, because their material consequences can usually be measured and some rough sequence of events identified, this cannot begin to do justice to the dramas of battle. Campaigns such as this, let alone the particular military engagements of which they are composed, can be turned by moments of heroism or losses of nerve or acts of will or tactical errors.

For the historian, official or otherwise, the story of the fighting itself is always problematic. In part this is because so much disparate and often disconnected activity is compressed in time and space that unpacking the story is bound to require more words than can realistically be made available, especially in a history that is bound to look at the 'big picture'. In addition the detail also gets confused and it can be surprising how many differences still persist on questions of timings and casualties. The problem, however, goes deeper. Precisely because of the intensity and confusion of battle there is rarely an agreed account. Some records of some signals are kept. Others are discarded almost immediately. Owing to the lack of secure communication means, most situation reports

(Sitreps) went back and forth along the command structure by word of mouth. Only in exceptional circumstances were messages sent by radio and they were recorded even more rarely due to a lack of administrative back-up. During the Battle of Mount Tumbledown, for example, a long Sitrep was sent by radio but no paper record of it was maintained.

Responsible officers write up accounts, normally in a highly abbreviated form, after the event. Journalists, and then historians, interview participants. Their task is to extract memories from blurred impressions, made up of a succession of images and noises, of shouted commands, incoming fire, desperate runs, anxious waiting, intense violence, the calls of the scared and the dying, of friends and foe. Inevitably some incidents, though not necessarily the most important, will stand out and be readily recalled. Other memories will be less reliable, refashioned through constant retelling, consultation among friends, and even cues from the first circulated chronicles of the events.

With most of the battles I describe there are already many accounts in place. At the very least they normally achieve what I do not attempt, which is to recreate the sounds, sights, smells and pain of battle. That these accounts still often contradict each other may in some instances be the result of poor research, but it is as likely to be the result of attempts to record events which by their nature generate fallible records, suspect memories and partial perceptions, leaving aside any deliberate distortion and myth-making. Many veterans have recounted to me tales of operational confusion, the failings of those above them in the hierarchy and surprising behaviour by colleagues, regularly described as the ‘real story’ of the Falklands. These were often as plausible as they were impossible to corroborate.

It is therefore frustrating, and contrary to what is often claimed to be the arbitrative role of an official historian, to be unable to settle authoritatively many of the disagreements in the accounts of particular battles, particularly those on land. Where possible I have drawn on materials that were unavailable to earlier historians, but as often as not I have had to draw on those who got to the participants while their memories were still fresh and uncluttered. I have done my best to provide the best account I can manage, but it must be recognised that often here I am synthesising and assessing the research of others rather than providing the definitive account.

Pressures of space mean not only that I have had to exclude many anecdotes and vignettes that would have provided a degree of colour to what may be seen at times as a dry account, but also that I have been unable to acknowledge the achievements of many people who played important roles in the campaign. To all those disappointed by their non-inclusion I apologise. Whatever one may think of the wisdom of embarking on Operation CORPORATE or its political and military direction over those ten weeks in 1982 it is hard not to be impressed, and at times moved, by the commitment and fortitude shown by the members of the armed forces as they took on hazardous tasks in less than optimum conditions. In addition, behind those on the front line was an extraordinary effort to keep their equipment serviceable and to provide emergency improvements, to keep them supplied with armaments, fuel and the essentials of survival in inhospitable conditions. At the same time the diplomatic service was stretched to the full, explaining the policies of the United Kingdom to often sceptical interlocutors, working on votes in the United Nations, keeping up the pressure on Argentina. There is not space here to

describe in detail all that was achieved but there is a responsibility to all the men and women involved to acknowledge these efforts and explain their context.

The organisation of this book is not straightforward. The simplest approach would have been strictly chronological. This would have the advantage of conveying, on an almost daily basis, the competing pressures and the variety of issues faced by ministers. It would throw into relief the distinctive mind-sets and time horizons of those planning and conducting military operations and those holding the diplomatic line. By the same token this approach would convey rather than explain the complexity of policymaking, while some of the smaller but still significant issues could get lost altogether. So although the organisation is largely chronological, I have sought to disentangle the strands of policy so that each can be explored in their own terms as well as in the context of the wider conflict. This means at times the narrative may seem to be getting ahead of itself. This is particularly true with the sub-themes of economic pressures and media relations, and at times even with the core themes of diplomatic negotiations and military operations. The strengths and limitations of this approach will become apparent in the earlier sections, where I describe how the Government organised itself during the campaign, the extent of the logistics effort, some legal and economic dimensions, and issues connected with the islanders and British nationals in Argentina. These may lack the drama of the more highly-charged arguments over the possibility of a peaceful settlement or the military engagements, and some readers may even find them tedious, but along with the background discussions of designs for a settlement and alternative military options, they help make sense of these extraordinary months.

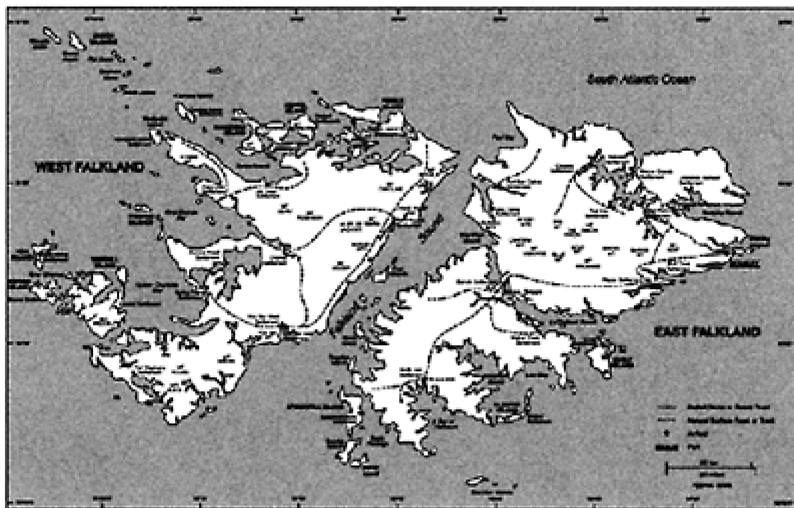
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My research assistant Christopher Baxter has made an immense contribution to this and the previous volume. To say that I could not have managed without him would be a major understatement. He has been assiduous in seeking out files and identifying the critical material for me. I have also been extremely fortunate in being able to work closely with Tessa Stirling of the Cabinet Office's Histories, Openness and Records Unit. She has done everything she can to ensure that relations with the key government departments were smooth and efficient. In this she was ably assisted by first Richard Ponman and then Sally Falk. Members of the steering group from the various departments involved have always been helpful. I was able to visit the Falklands in March 2000 and was very grateful to the warm welcome shown to me by the Governor and his staff, and by the islanders. Many people offered themselves as 'sources'. They are too numerous to mention by name, especially as a number spoke to me in confidence, but they know who they are and I hope that they will recognise where I have been able to make use of the evidence they provided. Special mention is due to Chris Collins who provided me with some material that I would not have been able to get otherwise, Jean Seaton and Simon Wessely for advice on the BBC and psychiatric issues respectively, the Lewin family for permission to see Lord Lewin's papers, and Peter Freeman for his wise suggestions after reading an early draft of the manuscript. My thanks are due to Mark Lacey of Picture This for the artwork.

I have used the local time without elaboration for both precise timings and in such general references as 'later in the morning' or 'that night' when this introduces no uncertainties, as is generally the case when describing geographically limited incidents or diplomatic discussions such as those at the UN. When necessary I have made explicit reference to the time zone in use when describing incidents or actions which crossed time zones, such as longrange telephone calls or other exchanges involving participants in different time zones. For military engagements I have used the GMT time provided by British military records (often with the suffix 'Z' to make that explicit). Where Argentine sources also contribute precise times (as in the case of the sinking of the *Belgrano*) I have quoted them as local, usually accompanied by a GMT translation.

With regard to distances and speeds, I have generally used miles, although I have followed the sources using kilometers in one or two cases, though ships' speeds are in knots. The ratio is about five nautical miles to six statute miles. Thus while the Falklands are normally put at 8,000 statute miles from the United Kingdom, they are 6761 nautical miles.

I have also, after some deliberation, written of Argentina and the Argentines, rather than the Argentinians (although I have kept the original in quotes).



Map 1 The Falklands

SECTION ONE

1
AT WAR

During the late afternoon of 31 March 1982, ministers received an intelligence report indicating that an Argentine Task Force expected to reach Stanley, the capital of the Falkland Islands, in the early hours of Friday 2 April. Admiral Sir Henry Leach, the First Sea Lord, told them that little could be done to prevent the Argentine occupation but that with sufficient effort repossession was possible. This would require as powerful a force as Britain could muster, with both available aircraft carriers, a full complement of escorts, an amphibious capability and a commando brigade. If it could be despatched within a few days, after three weeks it would reach the Falkland Islands. The Government decided to send such a force.

Up to this moment the only available naval unit in a forward position was HMS *Endurance,* the patrol ship that had been supposed to provide the main British presence in the South Atlantic. This had been sent to South Georgia to deal with the scrap metal merchants whose unauthorised arrival had triggered the latest incident. Then it had been held back to avoid escalating this incident; now it was told to disembark its Marines to defend South Georgia and get back to the Falklands to do what it could there, although it was almost bound to arrive after the Argentines. Available to greet the Argentine force on the Falklands were 69 Royal Marines. The only additional moves that had been made thus far were to instruct two nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs) to sail, and consideration was to be given to the possibility that they might be joined by a third. A Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA), *Fort Austin,* had been tasked to replenish *Endurance,* and could stock up with extra personnel and supplies for the new contingency when it reached Ascension, the Atlantic island that served as a valuable mid-way point between the UK and the Falklands. Once it was determined to put together a Task Force, ships that had been exercising off Gibraltar began to move south in order to meet up with a force assembling in British ports. In addition, 3 Commando Brigade was brought to short notice to move to the South Atlantic. The developing military operation was now known as CORPORATE.

The Argentine invasion

It was not until 1 April that Sir Rex Hunt, Governor of the Falkland Islands, received warning of 'apparently reliable evidence that an Argentine Task Force will gather off Cape Pembroke early tomorrow morning 2 April'. He had, however, already decided that something strange was going on, because a Polish supply ship heading for Stanley had been stopped by an Argentine warship some 110 miles north and told not to proceed further. At a meeting in Downing Street the possibilities for more detailed instructions for

TIMINGS

All accounts of the Falklands have difficulty with timing. The campaign headquarters at Northwood insisted that the campaign be fought in 'Zulu' was British Summer Time, which started on 28 March, and so one hour time (suffix 'Z'), that is GMT. This was neither the time in London (which ahead), nor that in the Falklands, which was four hours behind. Taking account of the diplomacy it becomes apparent that many of the principal participants spread across six time zones (France and West Germany, in which some important discussions and meetings were held were, at GMT+2hrs, a further hour ahead of London). To complicate matters further, Argentine time was only three hours behind Zulu, and during the occupation this was imposed on the Falklands, although this was ignored by the residents, and the British troops as they re-captured the Islands. In normal times the Falklands was four hours behind.

By and large I have used Zulu time, because that is how timings appeared in many of those documents I have consulted and cited. It is also important to note that is how the members of the Task Force lived. That is they began their day three hours before their Argentine counterparts. On occasion, however, when attempting to give a sense of how matters appeared to the participants I have used the relevant local time and have tried to make this clear when doing so. It is also relevant that in the South Atlantic dawn was about 1030 Zulu and dusk about 2015. Readers can make the necessary calculations to note that as dawn broke in the Falklands, at 0630 local time, it was already 1130 in London. The following tabulation shows the relationships between the main areas involved:

Table 1 Timings

		Local time at GMT noon
Lima	GMT-5hrs	0700
Santiago, New York, Washington, Falklands	GMT-4hrs	0800
Buenos Aires, S. Georgia, [*]Falklands under occupation	GMT-3hrs	0900
	GMT (Z)	1200
London	GMT+1hr	1300

[*]During the occupation the Argentines introduced Buenos Aires time in the Falklands

Hunt had been considered, but it had proved hard to draft anything sensible. Neither assertions of confidence nor exhortations to glory quite seemed appropriate. The prospect of sending the Governor vague instructions largely composed of platitudes filled Leach with dismay. If he was in Hunt's position, he explained to the Prime Minister, on receipt of such a message, he would 'put it straight in the wastepaper bin and lose my remaining confidence in Whitehall.' His view was that at such a late stage matters should be left to the man on the spot.' [1]

This view prevailed, and it might have spared Hunt some additional aggravation. On the other hand, having been given no advice other than to dispose his meagre forces and do what he could, Hunt might have appreciated a bit more information. No guidance was given on how the Argentine forces might arrive, including their likely use of amphibious personnel carriers, though this might have helped when choosing which beach to defend. The only suggestion received was to crater the runway, but there was no time to do this properly: it would have involved drilling holes in order to insert dynamite. All that was possible was to attempt to block the runway with vehicles. The late warning also meant that there was not time to evacuate out of Stanley old people and children, who were at a boarding school.

Defence was the responsibility of the small Royal Marines detachment, NP 8901. Major Gary R H Noott, the outgoing commanding officer, and his replacement, Major Mike J Norman, were halfway through the administrative handover when the first hints of the impending invasion were received. The handover meant that the defending force was about twice what might otherwise have been expected, but it was still only 69 all ranks, together with 11 Royal Navy personnel from HMS *Endurance's* survey parties and one ex-Royal Marine then living on the Falklands who re-enlisted. Their firepower consisted of a few rocket launchers (Carl Gustav and 66mm). In addition, twenty-three men from the Falkland Islands Defence Force did report for duty and they were sent to observation posts. These were stationed on Sapper Hill and in Cape Pembroke Lighthouse, and a reaction section was held at immediate notice at Moody Brook by day, and deployed to the airport at night. At 0900 local time on 1 April, Norman assumed operational command.

The war role of NP 8901, was laid down as:

1. To enable the seat of government to be maintained in the event of armed incursions.
2. To provide a covert alternative means of communication between the UK and the seat of government.
3. To impede and, if possible, contain any incursion which might affect the maintenance of an effective government or endanger the life of the community.
4. To maintain a cohesive identity in the event that government can no longer continue.

Hunt had recently described this latter role as taking to the hills in the hope that the Marines would be difficult to winkle out. They would then be able to broadcast to the outside world to let them know of the existence of a token resistance.

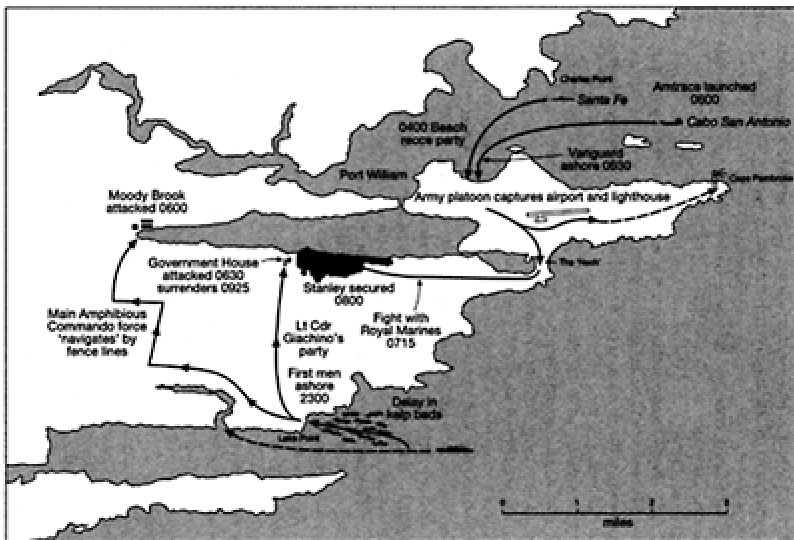
Norman's plan was to hit the invading force as hard as possible at the outset, inflicting maximum casualties and forcing it to deploy, thus delaying its advance and gaining time for possible negotiations. Hunt was keen to avoid house-to-house fighting in Stanley and so sections were in prepared positions on the narrow approach route from the beach/airfield area into Stanley. Norman based one third of his small force in and around

Government House, and the remainder he split into sections to cover the airport peninsula and the approaches to the harbour and the town. He himself set up his Tactical Headquarters (HQ) with the section at Lookout Rocks at the southeast edge of Stanley. The airport runway was blocked with vehicles and oil drums. Over night the Falkland Islands Company coaster, Merchant Vessel (MV) *Forrest,* made two sorties in order to carry out radar sweeps.

Meanwhile the Councillors and senior civil servants were summoned to Government House and told what to expect. At approximately 2015 local time, the Governor went on the local radio and warned the islanders of the situation. [2] Members of the Falkland Islands Defence Force were asked to report to the drill hall, but everyone else was to remain calm, stay at home and avoid the airport roads. At 0400 local time the next morning Hunt was on the radio again explaining that there was little hope of a peaceful solution and declaring a state of emergency. Half an hour later he warned that unless the Argentine Task Force changed course it would be off Cape Pembroke by first light. [3] A few hours later, in case there was a saboteur squad around, he ordered the police chief to round up and intern about 30 Argentine nationals living in Stanley, including a suspicious group of 'oil workers' that had arrived for a holiday at the start of the week. They were to be held in the town hall.

The invading force

While this was going on the Argentine forces were preparing to land. The original Argentine intention had been to land on the night of 31 March/1 April,



Map 2 Battle for Stanley

but bad weather caused a 24-hour delay. In addition, the two senior commanders, General O.Garcia, the Army Commander, embarked in the destroyer *Santisima Trinidad* with the Naval Commander, Rear Admiral G. Allara, were aware that there was a double complement of Royal Marines at Stanley, and also that Hunt had broadcast to the islanders that an invasion was imminent. This intelligence presumably came from the office of the Argentine airline, Líneas Aéreas del Estado (LADE). Its local representative, Vice-Comodoro Hector Gilobert, had left Stanley in February but returned suddenly to Stanley on 31 March. With the element of surprise now lost, a new plan was concocted which saw the main landing beach switched to a more westerly point at Yorke Bay. A direct flight from the mainland to Stanley airport was aborted. The army platoon that was detailed for the capture of Government House was switched to capturing the airport and Government House was now allocated to a small and ill-prepared amphibious commando party. [4]

Early in the morning of 2 April the *Santisima Trinidad* put 90 Marines in inflatables in the water off Seal Point. The Marines split into two groups, the larger making for the Royal Marine barracks at Moody Brook, and the smaller for Government House. The submarine *Santa Fe* launched special force swimmers east of Cape Pembroke, bound for Yorke Bay. The other ships of the amphibious landing force, the Landing Ship Tank (LST) *Cabo San Antonio,* the transports *Almirante Irizar* and *Isla de los Estados,* the destroyer *Hercules,* and the corvettes *Drummond* and *Granville* were to the northeast off Stanley. Warships prepared to protect the *Cabo San Antonio* and provide supporting gunfire for the landing force if required. The aircraft carrier, *25 de Mayo,* escorted by the destroyers *Hipolito Bouchard, Piedra Buena, Segui* and *Comodoro PY* , was well to the north in support. Some 1,000 troops were available—largely Marines but with some Army. Such a large force against such a puny enemy suggested that the main purpose was to make a show of overwhelming strength.

The British were not aware of the Argentine presence until well after the first marines had landed. Stanley received its first report of Argentine activity at 0230 local time from the MV *Forrest* on radar watch in Port William. A large contact had been detected five miles off Mengeary Point. Then, at 0430, as the state of emergency was declared, the observation post on Sapper Hill reported what was thought to be helicopter activity in Port Harriet, followed by more reports of shipping approaching and entering Port William. An attempt was made at this point to get back a message to London that Argentine forces were landing but Cable and Wireless were facing problems with their emergency circuits. At 0600 firing was heard as the Moody Brook barracks, fortunately empty, was attacked in such a way as to contradict the view that the primary objective was to keep casualties down to the minimum. Shortly afterwards movement was reported from behind Government House. As his residence came under fire, Hunt was told of landing craft coming ashore at Yorke Bay. Norman ordered two of his forward sections back to cover Government House, and retired there himself. There was now no way of resisting the landing, and soon the airport buildings were in Argentine hands. A large Argentine force drove across the isthmus down the four and half mile stretch of road to Stanley. After being temporarily held up at the edge of the town, the bulk continued towards Government House. The Marines, who had been trying to delay this advance, now fell back towards the outskirts of Stanley and then to Government House as the final redoubt.

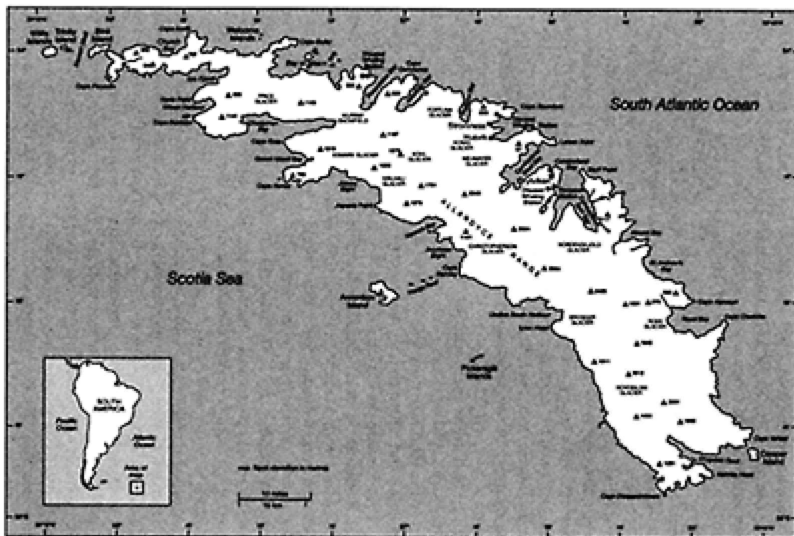
At Government House, the initial assault was repulsed, leaving one Argentine dead and three wounded, although the Marines believed that they had inflicted much greater casualties. Later three commandos who had got into the servants' quarters were disarmed and taken prisoner. As dawn broke, it was relatively quiet, but the local radio transmitter was off the air and some 120 Argentine troops were on the hillside overlooking them. Reports had come in of Armoured Personnel Carriers coming ashore. There was an exchange of fire when a column of these vehicles was challenged with rocket fire from a small Royal Marine party, who then had to fall back in the face of Argentine fire. More troops landed at the cleared airport in C-130 Hercules transports of the Argentine Air Force. Meanwhile a group of Royal Marines, who knew the Islands well and who had been charged with staying behind, were prevented from taking off on motorcycles into the hills. Argentine Special Forces who had landed two miles south of Stanley blocked their way. An attempt was made to send out another section, which did get away, but these men were new to the Falkland Islands and they gave up after 48 hours. Hunt spoke dramatically to Patrick Watts at the local radio station who asked him: 'are you going to hang on and keep them back for as long as possible, or are you going to surrender?' Hunt replied that 'We are not surrendering, we are resisting'. But he added that the group with him 'were pinned down. We can't move'. [5]

Argentine fire was limiting the options for those in Government House. Norman advised the Governor that the options were either for them all to break out and establish a seat of government elsewhere, continue to resist until overrun or else negotiate a truce. The prospect of unnecessary loss of life among local civilians as well as service personnel weighed heavily on Hunt's mind, and he decided to start negotiations, He rang Gilobert, the LADE representative, who professed ignorance of the operation. Hunt encouraged him to leave his house, which he was reluctant to do, and act as intermediary. Gilobert went with Dick Baker, the Chief Secretary to the Falkland Islands Government, to meet Rear Admiral C.Busser, the Commander of the Argentine Marines, at the Town Hall. Busser made it clear that he already had some 800 men ashore with more to come, and that the British position was hopeless. He came to Government House himself at 0920, and at 0925 (or 1225 London time (BST)) the Governor ordered Norman to instruct his men to cease firing and lay down their arms. The attitude of the Marines to this order was later described as generally 'fed up' but they accepted, at least in retrospect, that the Governor's decision was a sound one. The British had suffered no casualties. Many of NP 8901, led by Major Norman, volunteered, after repatriation, to return to the Falkland Islands in Operation CORPORATE, and formed the nucleus of J Company, 42 Commando Royal Marines.

At 1315 General Garcia informed Hunt that he had taken over as Governor of Las Malvinas. Hunt told him that he had landed unlawfully and should leave with his troops forthwith. Garcia said he had no intention of doing so and that now that the Argentines had regained what was rightfully theirs they would stay forever. Hunt was told that he would be flown out of the Falkland Islands that evening. It was agreed that he could broadcast to the islanders so long as he also contacted the Royal Marines at Grytviken in South Georgia to tell them of the position in Stanley. Hunt refused to ask them to surrender without resistance. He drove to the airport in ceremonial uniform in his official taxi flying the Falklands' flag. Through all these events the local radio station had been broadcasting, picking up calls from islanders reporting on what they saw with occasional

comments from the Governor and even, when he was trying to arrange the ceasefire, Gilobert. Patrick Watts, Director of Broadcasting, kept the station going after Argentine officers arrived with tapes to broadcast with instructions for the population and did much to sustain morale.

At 0945 in London on 2 April (0645 in Stanley), the Ministry of Defence (MoD) reported to Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse, CINCFLEET, that all communications with Stanley had been lost: 'Reason not known but not due to evident communication equipment fault'. This was around the time when Hunt had been trying to get back the message that Government House was surrounded. At 1235, with still no radio link, London ordered *Endurance* to remain covert and not to get any closer to the Falkland Islands in the hope that it could discover what was going on. Twenty minutes later, it was told to attempt to make contact with Stanley despite the breaching of High Frequency (HF) silence. This enabled it to confirm the news of the Argentine invasion, which was already being broadcast by the Argentine media. Intelligence from the Master of the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) ship, Royal Research Ship (RRS) *Bransfield,* reported that he had picked up a Falkland Islands radio station broadcast that 200 Argentine Marines with armoured vehicles had landed and were moving towards Stanley. It was also reported that three warships were anchored in the Fort William area and there had been considerable helicopter activity. At 2155 BST on 2 April, *Endurance* reported to London that a local radio operator had reported Stanley quiet with no injuries to British troops. As far as was known there were no civilian casualties either. Captain Nick Barker of the *Endurance* signed off 'This has been a humiliating day'.



Map 3 South Georgia

The humiliation was soon reinforced by images of the Argentine flag being raised and of the Royal Marines as prisoners. The photographs of the surrender of the Royal Marines had been taken by Simon Winchester of the Sunday Times, and were smuggled

out by Rex Hunt's son, Tony. (Winchester went to Argentina where he was later arrested, with two colleagues, for spying). Soon the invading forces had consolidated their hold on the Falklands with units moved to Goose Green and Fox Bay on West Falkland.

The invasion of South Georgia

Some 800 miles away, the defence of South Georgia depended on the 22 Royal Marines landed from *Endurance* on the evening of 31 March, commanded by Lieutenant K Mills. His small force occupied the BAS base at King Edward Point, on the northern side of the entrance to King Edward Cove, at the end of which lies Grytviken Whaling Station. His orders were:

1. To provide a British military presence on South Georgia.
2. To protect the BAS personnel at Grytviken in the event of an emergency.
3. To maintain surveillance over the Argentine scrap metal merchants at Leith Whaling Station.

It was the landing of the scrap metal merchants at Leith in the middle of March in such a way as to defy British sovereignty that had set in motion this chain of events. Mills did receive warning of a likely Argentine assault. He was told to 'open fire without warning on any Argentinian landing in South Georgia, provided you are certain they are armed'. No attempt was to be made to arrest the Argentine party at Leith Harbour, whose arrival had caused all the trouble in the first place. This was just as well as the British still had no idea exactly how many Argentine personnel were at the old whaling station, and would have been surprised at the resulting confrontation.

At first light on 1 April a four-man observation team was sent by boat to Jason Ridge overlooking Leith Harbour to try to see what if anything the Argentine group was up to. The rest of that day passed uneventfully, until about 2000 local time when the Governor's broadcast on Falklands Islands Radio was picked up, warning that the invasion of the Falklands was imminent. The next day Mills heard through the BBC World News what was happening on the Falklands, and he therefore expected some kind of Argentine presence to arrive. He knew of the *Bahia Paraiso* and the Argentine party at Leith and so assessed that he might be attacked by up to 50 Marines, probably in small landing craft or boats, since the *Bahia Paraiso's* helicopter lift was insufficient to land a substantial number of troops at one time. On 2 April therefore the beach and jetty at King Edward Point were obstructed with wire and improvised explosive and incendiary devices, and defensive positions were prepared protecting the BAS Base. Mills's intention was 'to hit the enemy as hard as possible and then to withdraw through Grytviken up into the mountains and mount subsequent attacks from there'.

That morning MoD had signalled *Endurance* warning of 'strong possibility of assault on Grytviken by 40 Argentine Marines from destroyer/*Paraiso*. Possible time 021300 local'. All forces were ordered to concentrate at Grytviken immediately. Previous rules of engagement (ROE) were to be cancelled and 'you are to open fire without warning on any Argentine party landing on South Georgia provided you are certain they are armed'. In difficult communication conditions *Endurance* passed the information to Mills, using

'guarded English and a very cumbersome Slide Code', since there was no cypher facility at the BAS Base.

Barker had proposed that his orders to make for the Falkland Islands should be reconsidered. He wanted to get *Endurance* to South Georgia to support the force ashore: 'If *Bahia Paraiso* is only escorted by one small frigate, then using South Georgia terrain which I know well as cover I could carry out series of AS12 [air-to-surface missile] attacks on both ships'. Fieldhouse, with MoD approval, ordered a return to South Georgia, but not offensive action. *Endurance's* orders were to 'hold in maximum concealment to act as afloat covert intelligence platform'. The ship was to return round the south of the island, and be within helicopter range of Grytviken the following afternoon, 3 April. On the erroneous assumption that there had been no serious resistance in Stanley to avoid loss of life, another change in the rules of engagement (ROE) was passed to Mills: 'Do not (R) not fire without warning'. This was a reversion to the rules issued on 23 March.

The *Bahia Paraiso* had already entered Cumberland Bay East as predicted at approximately 1325 (1625Z) to check on whether *Endurance* was present. The weather over South Georgia was particularly severe which led the *Bahia Paraiso,* after it had contacted the Grytviken Base, to state that contact would be made again the next morning. This information was passed to *Endurance,* who told London that 'it is assumed that this message will ask Grytviken to surrender the Base as 'South Georgia is in Argentine hands". As Hunt could not issue orders, Barker asked London 'what instructions do you wish to be passed to Base Commander?' Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's first view, and that of the FCO, was that the Base Commander should be instructed not to resist. Henry Leach and John Nott, the Defence Secretary, disagreed, taking the view that they should not surrender but should keep to the ROE agreed by the Cabinet (fire in self defence, after warning). The Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, agreed with them and spoke to the Prime Minister early on the morning of 3 April. She accepted that, in light of Nott's views, minimum force should be used. Instructions reached the *Endurance* in time to be passed to Grytviken before the next Argentine move. The text read:

> If statement from *Bahia Paraiso* at 031000Z asks for base to be surrendered, Base Commander should not comply. He should make clear that any attempted landing will be resisted. If Argentines then invade RM detachment is to resist invasion using force in accordance with ROE laid down…but they should not resist beyond point where lives might be lost to no avail.

However, the ROE referred to were those that had been superseded on 31 March, causing some confusion. In the event Mills acted exactly as Whitehall intended.

At dawn on 3 April the weather had improved markedly, and at 1030Z, as expected, the *Bahia Paraiso* came up on Very High Frequency (VHF) and demanded the surrender of the base. 'I have important message for you involving the successful operation by Argentine Forces at Malvinas,' stated Captain C.Trombetta, Commander Antarctic Naval Squadron, 'the exGovernor has surrendered the Islands and the Dependencies unconditionally and I suggest you do the same'.

Apparently under the misapprehension at this point that, in the absence of *Endurance,* he was dealing only with the civilian BAS party, Trombetta ordered the corvette *Guerrico* to close the shore, sent his Alouette helicopter to reconnoitre, and loaded the first group of Marines into his other helicopter, a Puma. Mills read back the surrender demand on HF, much to Argentine irritation, so that this transmission would be heard by *Endurance*. His objective at this time was to get into some sort of negotiation to provide time for *Endurance* to get back. This was not successful, and after five minutes the Argentines demanded that all personnel assemble on the beach in the open. By this time the *Guerrico* was approaching and there was a helicopter overhead. In the words of Mills' report:

> I then tried to stall the Argentines further. I informed the officer on board the *Bahia Paraiso* that there was ambiguity between what he had told us and what our orders were. I suggested that the corvette should hold back until this ambiguity could be cleared up. The Argentines ignored this demand and the corvette continued towards the harbour. As a final attempt to stall the Argentines I told them that there was a British military force on the island whose orders were to prevent them from landing. The Argentines ignored this statement also.

Mills then told the BAS Commander to go to the church for safety, where the rest of his team was sheltering, as there was little else he could do. He then walked down to the jetty, assuming that the corvette would send a boat ashore. He intended to meet any landing party and persuade the officer in charge not to land his troops. However, the *Guerrico* was already turning in King Edward Cove and retiring to seaward, while a small party of troops were landed by helicopter on the point only some 30 yards from the jetty. Mills moved quickly back to rejoin his detachment in their defensive position.

Under fire from the newly landed Argentine group, and threatened by the Puma helicopter about to land more troops on King Edward Point, Mills ordered his men to open fire. The Puma was repeatedly hit by small arms as it flew across the British positions and crash-landed across the cove. The battle then went on for some two hours. The small Argentine group on King Edward Point was pinned down, but the Alouette continued to land troops across the cove. The *Guerrico* again closed and was effectively engaged with anti-tank rockets and small arms, inflicting substantial damage, so she withdrew off-shore to where she could shell the defensive positions without reply. Eventually Mills realised that, outnumbered and outgunned, his position was precarious. His retreat was cut off by enemy troops moving round to Grytviken and darkness was still some hours away. Having achieved his aim of compelling Argentina to use military force and faced with the likelihood of losing lives to no avail, he decided to surrender; even though his men still had the Argentines pinned down on the beaches. One Royal Marine had been wounded while the Argentines had suffered several killed (*Endurance* later reported three) and wounded, lost a helicopter, and had the *Guerrico* extensively damaged. Soon 100 Argentine Marines and 10 Special Forces were gathered on the foreshore where they took the Royal Marines prisoner and searched them.

The Argentines left a garrison of about 55 Marines in South Georgia, based at Grytviken and Leith, and the 39 civilian scrap metal workers also remained at Leith. In

remote locations away from the main base there were still four BAS field parties, who stayed in South Georgia until it was recaptured three weeks later. The questioning of Mills and his group seemed to be largely geared to finding out why the Argentine operation to take South Georgia had been so badly handled. The RM detachment eventually returned to Britain on 20 April.

Endurance rounded Cape Disappointment, the southern tip of South Georgia, about midday on 3 April, and flew off a Wasp reconnaissance sortie at maximum range in the afternoon (approx. 1903Z). The helicopter landed on the ridge to the east of Cumberland East Bay, and shut down. The pilot and observer saw the two Argentine ships in the bay and some boat and helicopter activity, but the battle was over. *Endurance* remained in South Georgia waters for another two days, providing intelligence and giving what comfort was possible to the few BAS people still on the island. On 5 April *Endurance* headed north.

2
RESPONSE

The Cabinet met on the morning of 2 April to hear of the imminent invasion and the preparations that had been set in motion to provide a diplomatic and military response. With little hard information, the Cabinet 'parted in some gloom'. [1] Cecil Parkinson, Conservative Party Chairman and soon member of the War Cabinet recalls his despondency at the timing. The party had survived a deep economic recession and the day before had regained its lead in the opinion polls for the first time in eight months. His reaction to the news of the Argentine invasion was that 'this was really deadly'. [2] Margaret Thatcher was not at this stage the formidable political force she later became (in part because of the Falklands) but presided over a Cabinet which was by no means wholly loyal. By upping the ante and deciding to take on Argentina, rather than accepting the loss of a piece of distant land of limited value, she was taking an enormous gamble. She had no military background herself and could be presented as clutching at straws presented to her by self-serving admirals. If it all went badly and concluded with heavy casualties and the Falklands still in Argentine hands, her premiership would be over.

But it could well be over if nothing was done. Already the Government was on the defensive. Explanations for its surprise at the turn of events were being rehearsed: this invasion might have taken place at any time over the previous fifteen years; the present crisis had begun only twelve days earlier. The quality of the explanations, however, soon seemed to be overshadowed by evidence of the extent of the surprise. When at 1100 a statement was made in the Commons by Sir Humphrey Atkins, the Lord Privy Seal and the second minister in the Foreign Office, the communications problems meant that he was unable to confirm the Argentine landing but, he informed the Commons, it appeared that regrettably the Islands had fallen. He indicated, incorrectly, that the Governor been in touch with the FCO. The lack of information added to the Government's embarrassment. Opposition and Conservative backbenchers alike were outraged.

Around lunchtime the Government heard via the BAS vessel that the Islands had been occupied. By this time the BBC was already reporting the story from Buenos Aires. When the Cabinet met again at 1930 on 2 April there was still no confirmation of the invasion, let alone information on the degree of resistance, or the extent of any damage or casualties, though enough was known about the situation by mid-afternoon to instruct Sir Anthony Parsons to launch the Security Council debate on the British emergency resolution which was to become Resolution 502. The Chiefs of the Air and Naval Staffs gave their appreciation of the military situation and described the Task Force that would set sail in three days. There was nervousness about encouraging any belief that a military solution could be easily accomplished as well as sensitivity to the criticisms already being levelled at the Government for acting too slowly, and looking after nuclear forces at the expense of conventional.

That evening the Cabinet agreed to send the Task Force. This decision was assumed as much as taken, a reflection of genuine indignation at the Argentine act of aggression and

a determination to demonstrate that the Government was not completely helpless. Once it became apparent that a Task Force could be sent there was never any doubt that it would be sent. There may have been much shaking of heads that the decision had been impetuous, taken without due consideration of the consequences, and without really knowing where it might all lead, but if such thoughts were harboured at the senior levels of government they were barely articulated. With only John Biffen (Lord President of The Council) raising any doubts, backing was given to the despatch of the Task Force.

The mood was not helped that evening when the first full report on the Argentine invasion, from Buenos Aires via the U.S. State Department, suggested that the Royal Marines at Stanley had not offered any resistance and had surrendered. It was understood that this was on the orders of Hunt to avoid unnecessary loss of life. This impression was only corrected when Hunt, accompanied by Majors Norman and Noott were released and were able to provide their own accounts. When they met the Prime Minister on their return to the UK on 5 April 1982, she was able to congratulate them on their courage, but was still perplexed by the breakdown in communications.

The morning papers of 3 April were full of this unanticipated humiliation. In order to cope with the anger in Parliament an emergency debate had been promised and it took place that day, though it was Saturday. Members of Parliament met with the country in shock. The debate did not in itself shape policy. The Task Force was already being assembled. But the fact that the Prime Minister could announce this made the occasion more bearable for the Government. The speed of events meant that her speech had been written by her two private secretaries—Clive Whitmore and John Coles—the previous night. The key phrase ‘restore British administration’ came from Whitmore, who felt this sounded less provocative than the restoration of British rule. There was no time to see what other government departments felt. The draft was reviewed by the Prime Minister and then typed out by late Friday and by the time it was sent out around Whitehall the Prime Minister was almost ready to speak in the Commons. Yet the tone was crucial to calming parliamentary nerves. If the speech had appeared equivocal on whether British administration could or should be restored then the Government might have fallen. Even with action in hand, however, the experience was a painful one. MPs from all parties spoke of their anger and disbelief. For a Government that was so avowedly patriotic it was galling to be castigated by an Opposition that was so clearly to its left for losing sovereign British territory to a military dictatorship in such a surprising and convincing manner. The Prime Minister’s personal vulnerability was evident in Enoch Powell’s reference to the ‘Iron Lady’ sobriquet, which though provided by the Soviet Union she rather liked. In the coming weeks, Powell warned, the Prime Minister would ‘learn of what metal she is made’. When she returned to her private office after the debate it was this remark more than any other which had made the greatest impression.

The debate was wound up for the Government by John Nott. His speech was truncated because the Whips wanted more time for backbench speeches. During his remarks, he was caught off balance by former Foreign Secretary David Owen, who remarked on the importance of backing negotiations with force. At this point Nott began to attack the Opposition, at a time when his own Party was not in its most authoritative position, leading, as he later recalled, to ‘uproar and calls for my resignation’. The Conservative MP Alan Clark wrote a vivid account in his diary:

> Poor old Notters on the other hand was a disaster. He stammered and stuttered and garbled. He faltered and fluttered and fumbled. He refused to give way; he gave way; he changed his mind; he stood up again; he sat down again. All this against a constant roaring of disapproval and contempt. [3]

As the debate had ended in a bad way for the Government, the Chief Whip, Michael Jopling, urged that Nott and Carrington attempt to calm back-benchers. [4]

Carrington had not been unduly troubled by the parallel debate to that of the Commons in the Lords, but when he spoke to the Party meeting, with up to 200 Members present, he was 'met by an element of cat-calling, derision and jeers from the assembled members.' Nott was able to sound tougher in the Commons by emphasising the Government's readiness to use the Task Force. Carrington meanwhile was coping not only with the debacle over the Falklands but past resentments, including over the recently negotiated settelement leading to transition to black majority rule in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and a general dislike of the Foreign Office. [5] After this Carrington decided to resign. Nott began the effort immediately to prevent this, but he was not to be dissuaded. The press was also clamouring for ministerial blood. The Defence and Foreign Secretaries were described as 'Thatcher's Guilty Men' by the *Express*. The *Daily Mail* wrote that Carrington should be sacked if he did not 'have the grace to resign'. Particularly influential was a tough leader in the *Times* asserting that he 'should do his duty'. Carrington was convinced not only that a senior resignation was necessary to take the heat off the Government as a whole but also that a Foreign Secretary could not perform effectively in the Lords at a time of such crisis. [6] On 6 April, the other senior members of his team—Atkins and Richard Luce—resigned with him.

When Nott heard of these resignations he was anxious that he would now be depicted as the 'dishonourable' man, who had clung to office while the 'honourable man' resigned. Nott decided that he had no choice but to follow suit and went back to MoD to write his letter of resignation. For the Government, already in dire straits, the simultaneous loss of both the Foreign and Defence Secretaries at the start of a major conflict would have been a devastating blow. Moreover, Nott's own position had recovered from the Saturday debate as a result of an extended interview on Sunday's leading current affairs programme, Weekend World, where he had effectively talked up the Task Force and the Government's readiness to use it. Now the Prime Minister refused to let him go. Eventually the matter was resolved by Nott's letter of resignation and Thatcher's fulsome rejection both being published. [7] Carrington was replaced by Francis Pym, a former Defence Secretary and then Leader of the Commons and with a strong position in the Conservative Party independent of the Prime Minister. All this was symptomatic of a government rocked by crisis. Margaret Thatcher's administration was only just recovering from two years of harsh economic conditions. She was aware that her position—and that of her Government and Party—had suddenly become more fragile and that it was to be severely tested in the coming weeks.

Why resist?

The incident was shocking in part because the Falklands had not loomed large in the national consciousness. The country was suddenly locked in an intense dispute over a distant territory that few could find without consulting a map. Britain had spent the previous decades divesting itself of its imperial responsibilities and many were surprised to find that there were any colonies left, especially one situated so precariously. There were rumours of great oil wealth to be unlocked from the waters around the Falklands, and claims of strategic importance in the light of Soviet encroachments into the South Atlantic, but it was hard to build a case that a great national interest was at stake here. The marginality of the Falklands was underscored by the distinct lack of resources devoted to them by successive British governments, who had only paid attention when trying to find ways out of the sovereignty dispute with Argentina. If the Falklands had mattered so little to Britain in the past, and had been noted in Whitehall largely for their nuisance value, why should they matter now?

In building a case that could settle nerves and point the way forward, the Government pointed to the two principles at stake in the conflict. Scholars of international relations are often sceptical when it is suggested that countries can go to war for the sake of principle—but democracies find it difficult to go to war for anything else, especially when national survival is not directly threatened. The first principle, and one that provided an important continuity with the history of the dispute, was that of self-determination. The small size of the population and the anomaly of their circumstances only made the principle appear more pure, while the evident Britishness of the people and the obnoxious nature of the Argentine regime made its relevance even more evident. To this was added a second principle: aggression must not be rewarded. The Junta may have hoped that a relatively bloodless occupation of what they anyway considered to be their own territory would avoid international condemnation, resulting in little more than a public display of dismay in London, probably combined with private relief. If so, they were mistaken.

The Commons debate of 3 April was therefore of particular importance in putting these two principles to centre stage and forging a bipartisan consensus behind them. They were summed up by the Prime Minister as: ‘We cannot allow the democratic rights of the islanders to be denied by the territorial ambitions of Argentina’. [8] Much credit for the bipartisanship went to the Leader of the Opposition, Michael Foot, who had no problem denouncing the Argentine action as that of a ruthless dictatorship acting against a small democracy. He had made his name in the 1930s as a campaigner against appeasement and more recently as a campaigner for disarmament. He stood for high principle in international affairs. His speech demanded action on this basis:

> The rights and circumstances of the people in the Falkland Islands must be uppermost in our minds. There is no question in the Falkland Islands of any colonial dependence or anything of the sort. It is a question of people who wish to be associated with this country and who have built their whole lives on the basis of association with this country. We have a moral

> duty, a political duty and every other kind of duty to ensure that is sustained. [9]

With the Labour leadership's support, and support from the centre parties as well, there was no serious organised opposition in Parliament to the sending of the Task Force. There was strictly speaking no vote. A motion to continue the debate beyond the planned adjournment time was defeated 204 to 115.

There was, as some commentators observed, a uniquely cultural aspect to the ease with which the British accepted a case for the use of armed force. One less than enchanted commentator, Anthony Barnett, listed the 'essential symbols' that were to be found in the fate of the Falkland islanders:

> an island people, the cruel seas, a British defeat, Anglo-Saxon democracy challenged by a dictator, and finally the quintessentially Churchillian posture—we were down but we were not out. The parliamentarians of right, left and centre looked through the mists of time to the Falklands and imagined themselves to be the Grand Old Man. They were, after all, his political children and they too would put the 'Great' back into Britain. [10]

The positive aura surrounding World War II, combined with the negative connotations of appeasement, the presumed folly of putting a yearning for peace above all other values, allowed the Government to draw deep on national experience and symbols in setting out the case for the Task Force. Yet, at the same time, it had been many years since Britain had mounted a conventional military campaign. The dominant memory remained the Suez fiasco of 1956, when an attempt, in collusion with France and Israel, to topple Nasser's Government in Egypt had been thwarted by a painfully slow military build-up and then economic pressure from the US. In 1967 when Britain decided to abandon its military presence 'East of Suez,' there was a presumption that the time had passed when the country would engage in military operations in areas distant from the European continent, and this judgement had apparently been confirmed in the 1981 Defence Review. Sending a naval Task Force had once been the sort of thing British Governments did regularly: but it was a long time since anything like this had been attempted, and even longer since an attempt had been successful.

The Task Force was sent before the Government had the measure of the risks it was taking. For many sending the fleet made sense as an instrument of crisis diplomacy, but only on the supposition that it would be able to turn back and come home as soon as a political settlement had been agreed. Others, including the Prime Minister, suspected that there would be a fight. 'I knew, as most MPs could not,' she later recalled, 'the full extent of the practical military problems. I foresaw that we could encounter setbacks that would cause even some of the hawkish disposition to question whether the game was worth the candle. And how long could a coalition of opinion survive that was composed of warriors, negotiators and even virtual pacifists?' [11]

Organising Government

As the Task Force prepared and set sail the Government reorganised itself to cope with the rigours of the coming weeks. Initially the Cabinet itself had managed the crisis, meeting twice on 2 April. The immediate economic response was arranged through an ad hoc meeting of economic Ministers, chaired by the Chancellor, meeting the next day, and this led to a special official committee, under the Cabinet Office Secretariat—ODO(SA)—to manage the range of economic measures taken against Argentina. The ad hoc character of the process at this time reflected the lack of any previous formal planning on the organisation of government for crises short of a major confrontation with the Warsaw Pact. The Transition to War Committee was convened, but the sets of issues that such a group might expect to address, relating to national mobilisation and emergency powers, were not for the moment relevant.

Mrs Thatcher was revealed as ‘a punctilious traditionalist in her dealings with both her Cabinet and with Parliament even when her Boadicea qualities were most in demand’. [12] She had spoken with Sir Frank Cooper, Permanent Under Secretary (PUS) at MoD, over lunch on 4 April. Cooper, one of the senior civil servants most admired by Thatcher, emphasised the importance of a small War Cabinet meeting regularly and taking decisions, with a simple chain of command responsible for implementation. Cooper later recalled that Thatcher had already decided that the Chancellor should not be included because finances could not be overriding in such a situation. This view is normally attributed to former Prime Minister Harold Macmillan whom she saw on 6 April, and who certainly confirmed this preference. His advice was similar to Cooper’s, except harking back more to Churchill’s success rather than to Eden’s failure with Suez in 1956, which Cooper (and many others) had in mind. She still consulted the Chancellor, Sir Geoffrey Howe, her neighbour in Downing Street, often after returning from Chequers on Sunday evenings.

When on 6 April the Cabinet met again, the Prime Minister explained that day-to-day political oversight was to be provided by a special Ministerial Sub-Committee of the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee (OD) on the South Atlantic and Falkland Islands (OD(SA)), which came to be known as the War Cabinet. This became the critical instrument of crisis management. Its terms of reference, as set down that day, were ‘to keep under review political and military developments relating to the South Atlantic and the Falkland Islands, and to report as necessary to the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee’. It contained the Prime Minister, Home Secretary (Sir William Whitelaw), Foreign Secretary (Francis Pym), Defence Secretary (John Nott), the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Paymaster General (Cecil Parkinson), with support provided by the Cabinet Office. Parkinson had been brought in as a result of Nott’s concern that he was bound because of his departmental role on occasion to oppose Pym, and that Whitelaw would be inclined to support Pym, leaving a War Cabinet of four divided. Parkinson was seen as a natural loyalist. In the event Whitelaw always supported the Prime Minister, so the combination tended to isolate Pym. The effect was accentuated because Pym disliked rows, especially in the presence of others, and so he would tend to back off. While the Prime Minister may have been unsure when it came to challenging

military judgements, she had no hesitation in challenging diplomatic judgement, and it was Pym's misfortune to be representing a strand in the debate about which she was naturally wary.

Because Parkinson lacked a departmental role he was available to do more media work. He was also the only member of the War Cabinet who had made regular visits to Latin America, including Argentina, although on a variety of trade missions. The Attorney General (Sir Michael Havers) was also a regular as a result of the large number of legal matters that had to be addressed, although his war-time service in the Fleet Air Arm appears to have been a larger influence on his thinking. The exclusion of the Chancellor was understandably against the wishes of the Treasury. Economic issues did not loom large again until the later stages of the campaign, largely in connection with post-war reconstruction of the Falklands. On 22 June, after the fighting, a new Committee—OD(FAF)—was convened.

Over the subsequent weeks the Prime Minister took care to keep the full Cabinet informed, especially when critical decisions, such as the authorisation of the landing on the Islands, were involved, although in this case, and others, questions of timing and secrecy meant that the Cabinet was being associated with decisions already effectively taken. Until the crisis machinery was wound down on 15 July, the Cabinet reviewed the Falklands situation on 20 occasions, sometimes in meetings solely convened for this purpose, and was therefore meeting as a group far more often than in normal times—on average twice a week. In this way the constitutional proprieties could be honoured, but also some real meaning could be given to the concept of collective responsibility. On the other hand, the OD(SA) did not, contrary to its terms of reference, report directly to the Defence and Oversea Policy Committee. OD met only once, the day after the loss of HMS *Sheffield* to an Exocet missile on 4 May. In general its slightly larger membership than OD(SA) offered no advantages. A post-war assessment still described the 'invisibility' of OD as 'remarkable' given that it was supposed to be the senior ministerial sub-committee on defence and foreign affairs and all other committees created were in the OD series.

Until it was dissolved on 12 August, OD(SA) met at least daily. By that time it had held 67 meetings, and considered 70 notes, papers and memoranda on all aspects of the campaign. It was judged to have been a success, to the extent that after the war, on 12 August 1982, a new OD Sub-Committee on the Management of Political and Military Emergencies Overseas (OD(EM)) was created, with precisely the same powers. By starting their meeting between 0900 and 1000, Ministers may not have left quite enough time before they gathered to take stock with their senior officials, but it did allow time for the minutes to be circulated by mid-afternoon. These carried the conclusions of the meetings but, for pressures of time, made no attempt to convey the substance of the discussions. [13] Sufficient officials were also present, including the Chiefs of Staff Secretary, to ensure that decisions were communicated and followed up immediately. There were at times sharp disagreements but the recollection of those involved is that the seriousness of the situation kept the meetings calm and productive. Nott later recalled 'There was none of the hectoring or personal antipathy which had characterised our debates on domestic economic policy.' [14] Initially it had been assumed that the political line-up within the War Cabinet would have Pym and Whitelaw as doves and Nott and Parkinson as hawks. In practice the relationships were much more complex.

Thatcher dominated the War Cabinet. This was not through failing to consult or ignoring opposition. One, who watched her closely during this period, recalls that the Prime Minister would ‘fret away’ while arriving at a decision, ‘discussing the options endlessly with different people’. She liked to canvass a range of views before making up her own mind. Once it was made up and the decision was taken she ‘did not look back’. It was not only force of will that kept the Prime Minister going, but also an extraordinary work rate, that meant that she kept on top of the issues and was often better briefed than her colleagues. Her ability to keep up with other policy issues, was also remarked upon. Requiring only four hours sleep a night, she worked through her ‘red boxes’, on all other Government business, every night. Another official, however, suggested that the boxes were relatively empty. Other departments refrained from loading her with non-Falklands work. Certainly another senior policy-maker recalled days waiting for news from the South Atlantic with little else to do because routine matters were being handled elsewhere.

Macmillan had also told the Prime Minister that she needed a Lord Ismay figure (Military Secretary to the Cabinet) close at hand. Her staff searched, in vain, for a retired officer to provide independent advice on operational issues. None appeared to combine sufficient seniority with probable sympathy with her political objectives and the appropriate personal chemistry. The campaign itself forged close and warm links between the armed forces and the Prime Minister but at the start they were not at all good. Initially Thatcher was seen to have been as culpable as Nott for the 1981 defence review and guilty of not paying attention to what was going on in the forces, evident in her ignorance of the scrapping of *Ark Royal,* the large carrier which would have been very useful in 1982 had it still been in one piece. Her comments on military matters during the first few days of the conflict did not inspire confidence. Yet she was a quick learner. In this she was supported by Clive Whitmore in her private office, who came from the Ministry of Defence, and was able to interpret much of the information she was receiving. She was also fortunate in the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS), Admiral Sir Terence Lewin. His own political and personal skills were considerable and he conveyed a confidence and clarity of purpose to which she warmed. Also fortunate was the fact that his position had been enhanced by a reform instigated by Lewin and instituted as late as February 1982. The essential principle was that the CDS became ‘the principal military adviser to the Secretary of State and to the Government in his own right, and no longer as chairman of a committee with collective responsibility.’ As a result ‘the Chiefs of Staff Committee would become the forum in which the Chief of Defence Staff sought the advice of his colleagues. No longer would it become the fulcrum of collective responsibility.’ [15] In this reinforced position Lewin became in many respects one of the critical members of the War Cabinet.

Lewin had been in New Zealand when the crisis broke. He had been kept in touch with the developing crisis but also discouraged from flying home while there was still hope of peaceful solution, on the grounds that his recall would soon become known. [16] As a result his return had been a rush. To many in Whitehall this was not before time. Relations among the Chiefs of Staff were uneasy, largely as a result of the previous year’s defence review, which had been widely assumed to be anti-Navy. The active role of the First Sea Lord in persuading the Government that there was a serious military option available had inevitably been assessed by the other services in the light of the defence review. Henry

Leach was seen to have seized the opportunity to demonstrate the Royal Navy's continued worth to the United Kingdom, with a degree of confidence that even senior members of his own service did not share. The Chief of Air Staff (Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Beetham) and the Chief of the General Staff (General Sir Edwin Bramall) understood why the Government needed to act, and the diplomatic advantages of an early show of resolve, but they were uneasy about where it might all lead. [17] The fact that the Task Force was, in the first instance, largely configured as a naval operation did not encourage great activism on their part. Later Bramall commented that he was not 'bubbling over with enthusiasm for the operation, because first of all I thought we needn't have got ourselves into this muddle. And I resented the casualties that I knew would be inevitable in order to recover from the mistakes we'd made.' [18]

For all these reasons the initial Chiefs of Staff meetings, in the absence of Lewin, had not gone well. Lewin's return made a substantial difference. His own relations with the other Chiefs had been bruised by the defence review, including with Leach, but as an Admiral he understood the immediate operational issues in a way that a CDS from another service would not. The other Chiefs were brought in to the War Cabinet as and when required, and they met daily to discuss the developing situation, but the views offered by Lewin were his own, and while taking care to consult he did not always attempt to fashion a consensus. He later described the regular Chiefs' meetings as having taken up 'too much time of too many people', with a 'tendency towards post-operational arguments'. His position was strengthened during the course of the campaign as ministerial confidence grew in his ability to deliver the results he promised. One official noted after the conflict that one of the 'political imperatives for the Prime Minister' was that the politicians should support the military, although she sensed at times that she was being provided with a cleared military position without much indication of the alternative views that lay behind it. Only on one occasion was a request for a particular military action turned down. Lewin 'developed an effective technique of obtaining the Prime Minister's approval by making requests orally at OD (SA), often to the extreme annoyance of the FCO'.

Lewin's day would begin at 0600, with the latest signals read through breakfast, and MoD reached by 0715. After an intelligence and operational briefing he would talk to Fieldhouse, and this would take him up to the War Cabinet's 0930 meeting. The Chiefs of Staff would meet later in the morning. [19] Although Nott would attend the Chiefs of Staff meeting for the first few items on the agenda, and in particular the intelligence briefing, he would be briefed later by Lewin on the overall outcome. The relationship between Lewin and Fieldhouse was close. They had been together on *Hermes* and had a close mutual understanding. While Lewin could manage the Government, Fieldhouse could manage the Task Force. Fieldhouse never felt under pressure from politicians on how to run the war.

The military chain of command passed directly from the Prime Minister to the Chief of the Defence Staff and then on to the Task Force Commander. Nott took the view that in 'time of war there is no room for the post of Defence Secretary', except he suspected as scapegoat if things went wrong. This meant that junior MoD ministers had even less of a role and generally felt excluded for much of the crisis. In key respects, the Prime Minister had to be her own Defence Secretary and so Nott confined himself to being a participant in the War Cabinet and, often by playing devil's advocate, 'questioning but

not overly influencing the decisions of the military.' [20] He also took the view that while other government departments needed to be kept informed about military thinking, it was essential that the decision-making process was not hampered by strictly military decisions having to be cleared with the Foreign Office in advance. He judged it important that military requirements be assessed independently of immediate diplomatic exigencies. As a result operational military matters were not divulged to or processed through any formal interdepartmental mechanism. Political control was largely exercised through discussions of rules of engagement (ROE) rather than specific operational plans. John Weston of the FCO developed the proposals on these with Moray Stewart of MoD and the Assistant Chief of Staff (Operations). This made possible a full review of large changes in military practice, but there were still occasions when the Foreign Office had real anxiety that critical decisions had been taken without a full appreciation of their political impact.

Partly for reasons of personality and the sudden elevation of Pym as Secretary of State following Lord Carrington's resignation the diplomatic input was not always forcefully presented. The Foreign Office team always had the handicap of the Prime Minister's instinctive distrust of proposals which were bound to explore possibilities for compromise and conciliation. Moreover, while the Prime Minister tended to display a certain diffidence when dealing with the military, this was not at all case with the diplomats, whose expertise she felt able to challenge. Within the Foreign Office, an Operational Emergency Group was established to handle the day-to-day requirements of the emergency and produce regular Situation Reports (Sitreps). The Information Policy department produced 90 guidance telegrams for missions abroad as well as a number of background papers on controversial topics. After the Falklands a proper situations room would be available for a future emergency. For this crisis the group had to make do with minimal facilities. A Strategy Group was established to consider the military issues and future diplomatic action at the UN and elsewhere, while a Parliamentary and Press Group was responsible for the preparation of future parliamentary and press statements and for the public relations aspect generally. These groups reported to a steering group, which included the Private Secretaries from the appropriate ministerial offices. The appointment of Sir Michael Palliser, who had been until 1 April the Permanent Under Secretary at the FCO, as the Prime Minister's Special Adviser on the Falklands, added an independent viewpoint based on considerable experience, and a specific remit to think about the longer-term. The appointment was something of a surprise because Palliser, as a result of his pro-European views, had never been one of the Prime Minister's favourites.

Unlike Suez, the constant reference point on how not to manage great crises, the senior members of Government were not engaged in a grand act of deception, requiring excessive secrecy. In this case the demands for secrecy reflected the extreme delicacy of the military situation. Moreover, much of the coordination was bilateral—between the FCO and MoD—and the role of other departments was marginal, and in many respects largely over early in the conflict once the Treasury and the Department of Trade had sorted out sanctions, the Home Office the handling of Argentine nationals, and the Law Officers possible emergency legislation.

Real difficulties were experienced in the organisation of interdepartmental coordination at the official level, with the need for the bureaucracy to function being set against a disinclination to allow the wide circulation of sensitive material. The official

group—ODO(SA)—began by ensuring distribution of key papers on the key issues, but had only met three times by 13 April and did not meet again until 2 June when, now renamed ODO(SA)(FE), it began to address the issues of post-war reconstruction. It was later supplanted by MISC 82, a group to consider the future administration of the Islands, which reported to OD(FAF). The organisational problem was that the sensitivity of the issues meant that they had to be handled at a senior level, but the senior figures were extremely busy. By 5 April the Permanent Secretary at MoD was observing that staff in some key divisions had been on a 24 hour basis for several days and it was important that they should not become exhausted. The same day steps were taken to minimise the circulation of paper. All non-Falklands business that would normally go to the Secretary of State was to go to the relevant junior minister.

In the end it was the most senior civil servants who had to prepare the ground for War Cabinet meetings. The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, saw his role as being to ensure that OD(SA) was properly serviced and that decisions were communicated quickly, and that the interests of the wider cabinet were not overlooked. He chaired the ad hoc and informal Mandarins Group, or ‘Armstrong group’, which met to consider the politico-military aspects of the conflict, in order to identify the decisions that would need to be taken and communicate those that had been taken, as well commission any necessary papers. It included the Permanent Secretaries of the FCO and MoD (Sir Anthony Acland and Sir Frank Cooper respectively) as well as Lewin and Palliser and the Deputy Secretary in the OD Secretariat (Robert Wade-Gery) who acted as de facto secretary. Unfortunately it operated wholly by word of mouth, with no notices of meetings issued and no minutes taken so its role is now difficult to assess. Lewin’s biographer suggests that this was the most draining and exhausting of all the CDS’s meetings. The question most frequently asked was ‘where do we go from here?’ The questioning and probing from the substantial figures in this group meant that Lewin felt that if he could win over this group ‘he would most likely be able to carry his proposals in OD(SA) itself.’ [21] An official commenting at the time, however, suggested that Lewin limited this restraint by working on his direct relationship with the Prime Minister.

The informality and inability to draw on staff resources in the normal Whitehall way was later criticised, as the process meant that some problems were missed. Against this had to be put the Government’s anxiety that the constant demands for information from the media, backbench MPs and foreign governments would result in damaging and potentially fateful leaks. It was probably also the case that there simply was not the time for lower level preparation given the intense pressure of events. At times such as these the most senior civil servants have to act as their own desk officers. Some extra support was provided through the direct liaison between MoD and FCO, with a senior FCO representative attending the Chiefs of Staff meeting and the defence desk in the FCO’s own Emergency Unit providing a permanent point of contact with MoD. For many, the crisis conditions were something of a liberation. Nott describes the Whitehall system ‘hit below the solar plexus’:

> A great tangled mass of co-ordinating committees, Cabinet sub-committees, the great panoply of bureaucratic checking and double-checking had been completely flattened. The horrendous way in which Whitehall ensures that it retains control through an excess of co-ordination

> means that nothing happens with any kind of urgency. The whole system had been caught with its trousers down. It was partly due to the fact that Whitehall was virtually in suspense, shell-shocked and useless, that no obstacles arose in getting the Fleet to sea. [22]

Another input that was problematic was intelligence. The key provider to the War Cabinet was the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), based in the Cabinet Office, chaired by a senior FCO figure, and including representatives of all the key ministries as well as the security and intelligence agencies. It could use secret reports as well as publicly available information and diplomatic telegrams. Assessments would come forward from the Current Intelligence Groups (CIG), of which there were eight organised on a regional basis (in this case Latin America). They would be prepared by the Assessment Staff, largely seconded from FCO and MoD. On 4 April the JIC decided that a daily intelligence briefing had to be produced, and that it should contain sections on the Argentine military dispositions and intentions, Latin American and other international reactions, cease-fire negotiations and the reaction and involvement of the Soviet Union. In all 75 daily assessments were issued between 4 April and 18 June, together with 23 more detailed notes. The JIC met twice a week during the crisis, but the main work was done by the CIG. The problem came not with the substance of the assessments but the timing. With Buenos Aires four hours behind, an assessment composed in the early morning in London could seldom take account of events that took place after South Atlantic midnight. At the same time, news of American assessments, which continued to influence the British, would only come in during the afternoon.

Because the preparation of the daily assessment normally took about five hours, if it was to be ready for the normal start of the War Cabinet at 0900, the drafting process would normally have had to begin about 0400. It was decided that this would be impractical. Instead the CIG met at 1100 to consider a draft that was normally issued as early as possible after lunch, between 1430 and 1500. The War Cabinet received some full intelligence assessments, and after 6 May, following the stormy first days of that month, their meetings were opened by Lewin with a briefing on the latest military situation, pulled together from the latest signals. In addition there was a regularly updated basic military intelligence summary (INTSUM), the first of which was available at 0600 each morning. Ministers who had the requisite access undoubtedly looked at any raw intelligence prior to War Cabinet meetings, and would probably have done so even if there was an up to date JIC assessment on their desks.

The Deputy Chair of the JIC was the Director General Intelligence, a retired 3-star officer serving as a civilian, in charge of the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS). While the DIS contibuted to the wider assessments they also produced material directly for their MoD customers. Responsible for this task was General Glover, the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff Intelligence (DCDS(I)), who pursued this task with the support of CDS, while the Chief concentrated on JIC and relations with the US. The DIS had barely a person working on the South Atlantic before April, and a number of the first team set up to deal with the crisis to meet the demands of the campaign had to be replaced. It required a drastic shift in resources to meet the insatiable demand for information and analysis. The FCO also had to reorganise itself. It took until 10 May before it began to produce a daily Sitrep on diplomatic developments.

Command structure

The Commander-in-Chief Fleet (CINCFLEET), Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse, became the overall commander of the Task Force. The Operational Command was vested in Flag Officer First Flotilla, Rear Admiral John 'Sandy' Woodward, who became Combined Commander of Task Force 317 (CTG 317.8) including all surface ships, land and air forces. There were alternative candidates for the role, notably Rear Admiral D Reffell, The Flag Officer, Third Flotilla (FOF3), who had considerable amphibious experience, but he had not been in post long. Although the Prime Minister was anxious that command was being entrusted to a man that neither she nor Nott knew, they accepted Lewin's and Leach's view that it was important to stick in war with those who had been designated for particular roles in peacetime. In addition there were four Commanders Task Units (CTUs). One, the Carrier Battle Group, Woodward also commanded. Commodore Amphibious Warfare (COMAW), Commodore Michael C Clapp, was in charge of the Amphibious Task Force while Brigadier Julian H A Thompson, Brigade Commander No 3 Commando Brigade, was in charge of the landing group. A fourth group, destined for South Georgia, was commanded by Captain Brian Young. Whether these groups were under Woodward or on a level with him was not wholly clear. Initially all four units appeared as separate but equal, but with Woodward doubling as Commander Task Group.

At 1220Z on 9 April, a new task organisation was issued by CINCFLEET giving three distinct groups. The carrier group together with the exSPRINGTRAIN force (less those ships detailed to re-establish a British presence in South Georgia) formed Task Group (TG) 317.8, under the command of Woodward (who had moved to *Glamorgan*). Two key figures in Woodward's team were the Captains of the two carriers—Jeremy Black of *Invincible* and Lin Middleton of *Hermes*. Their individual styles were quite different. Black as a gunnery officer delegated to his aviators; Middleton, an aviator himself, sought tight control. Their Sea Harrier squadrons—*Invincible's* 801 and *Hermes'* 800—also followed distinctive approaches. Woodward does not appear to have full confidence in Middleton, the Captain of his Flagship, and this may have contributed to an occasional sense of isolation.

The amphibious group became TG 317.0 under COMAW. The landing force became TG 317.1 under the command of Brigadier Thompson. The Commanding Officer, *HMS Antrim,* Captain Brian Young, was designated CTG 317.9, in charge of the group for South Georgia comprising the *Antrim, Plymouth, Endurance* and *Tidespring*. On 10 April, CINCFLEET signalled that M Company, 42 Commando and one SNN (with 6 SBS embarked to launch reconnaissance if possible) would join these ships. CINCFLEET, as Commander Task Force (CTF) 317, retained operational control of TG 317.0 and TG 317.9, intending that it should later be delegated to Commodore Clapp for the amphibious group and to Woodward for any other ships operating with or supporting him once they went south from Ascension.

The chart just showed the four units as separate but equal, with Young's eventually reverting back to Woodward's battle group. Woodward was still described as 'Senior Task Group Commander', and was a Two-Star officer while the others were One-Star. The chart created an ambiguity that soon caused difficulties. In practice it would seem that Northwood always assumed that Woodward was senior to Clapp and Thompson, whatever they may have structure, prepared on 2 June. If there was a gap it was the lack

of a Three-Star commander to be in theatre, capable of assessing priorities on the spot and dealing directly with Northwood. Thompson, who felt the absence of such a figure more than most, expressed this view strongly after the war. Woodward might have been able to play this role if he had felt able to leave *Hermes*. Moore was able to support Thompson when he eventually reached the South Atlantic. Either way the seperation of sea and land operations hoped. This is certainly the implication of the most mature chart on command would always have caused problems. [23]

The submarines taking part in CORPORATE formed TG 324.3, under the Flag Officer Submarines (FOSM), Vice Admiral Peter G M Herbert, based at Northwood and reporting directly to Fieldhouse rather than Woodward. Woodward, a submariner himself, knew the boats and their senior officers, and believed he had the wherewithal to exercise effective operational control. If he had been given appropriate communications he would have been able to get orders immediately to submarines, rather than the three cycles of broadcasts it took to be sure they had received messages from Northwood, and they would not have needed to be kept so tightly in separate boxes during operations. There were a number of times during the campaign when he regretted the lack of this direct control. In part Northwood kept control because that is how the headquarters expected to

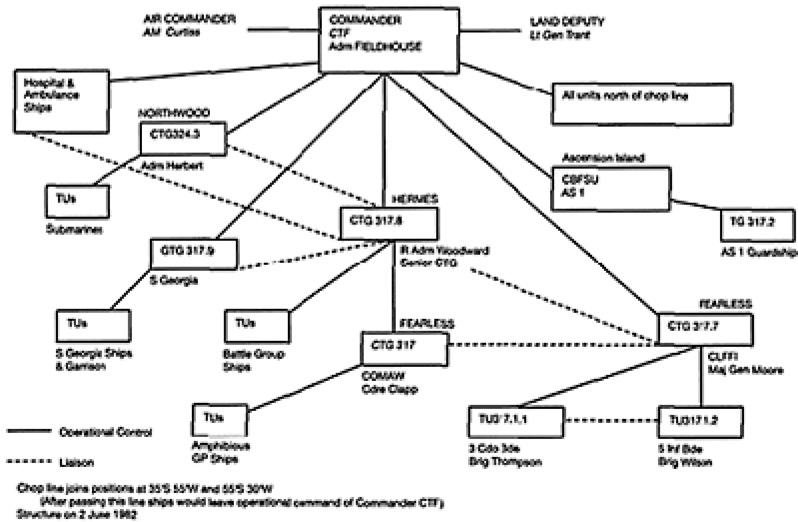


Figure 1 Operation CORPORATE: Command structure

operate in the Cold War. There was the additional thought that any use of a nuclear submarine, Britain's most lethal weapon, was replete with possibilities for political controversy, which is how it turned out. It was therefore deemed essential to keep them under central control.

Once British troops were firmly established ashore operational control of the landed force would be transferred to Brigadier Thompson as Commander Land Forces. When it

was decided to send 5 Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Tony Wilson, a divisional command structure was required, and General Jeremy Moore transferred into this role, with his position at Northwood being taken over by Lieutenant General Richard Trant, General Officer Commanding South East District. Brigadier John Waters accompanied Moore as his Deputy. Moore's appointment was logical, because he had been working closely with Fieldhouse up to this point. There were some later Army complaints, when it was providing five battalions to the three RM Commandos, about a chain of command that went through an Admiral and then a Royal Marine General, but generally the arrangement worked. [24]

The media

As the war progressed, the handling of media relations appeared as the most evident area of weakness in the political and military management of the campaign. It was the first war-related issue to be addressed by the House of Commons Defence Committee. [25] Operational plans lacked a media dimension, and issues concerning the accreditation and handling of correspondents dogged the campaign, aggravated in this case by scarce and limited communications facilities as well as the standard issues of the balance between withholding information to protect operations while releasing it to ensure the most positive public presentation of the military and diplomatic effort.

The novelty, after so many years, of Britain sending a substantial force to a remote part of the world in such strange circumstances naturally encouraged enormous media interest. To be able to satisfy public curiosity the media expected to be able to travel with the Task Force, have their material cleared with the minimum delay, without any interference with style or content unless it compromised security, and opportunities to move between force units as often as the opportunity permitted. The politicians and senior commanders were all well aware of the need to maintain a high level of public support for, and understanding of, the Task Force's role, and so dare not take the media for granted. As Cooper put it, 'keeping the media and public opinion with us here is absolutely crucial'. Yet there was no serious information policy in place that would help them work their way through the unavoidable tensions resulting from the twin policies of keeping the media happy and supportive while at the same time protecting information according to the demands of operational security. The tensions between military and media operations were never resolved and while all agreed the need for an information policy, it was widely confessed after the conflict that nobody with the requisite combination of time and authority worked one out. [26]

There were a number of reasons for this. The factors of distance that made this campaign special in so many respects had a critical influence on information policy. There were severe practical as well as operational reasons why it was difficult to satisfy media demands for material commensurate with the importance of the event. There was not much space for correspondents to travel with the Task Force and those that did were wholly dependent upon Task Force facilities to transmit copy back to Britain. This made censorship possible but it also meant that media copy was competing for time on the ships' military communications system with operational traffic. Another problem was a lack of coordination. There were a number of information policies in circulation at the

same time; Northwood, MoD and the Prime Minister's office all had distinctive interests and approaches. None of these made much impact on senior officers. Nor had the military much experience in dealing with journalists. The Army understood the public relations aspect of contemporary conflict better than the other services because of Northern Ireland but initially this was largely a Naval operation, and many in the RN did not welcome the presence of journalists on the ships. Only the Royal Marines took their own public relations team.

The Navy's view tended towards the more traditional: an active information policy could appear as an imposition on busy people, who had a war to fight. Feeding a media frenzy seemed an absurd distraction when preparaing for battles in which lives were at stake. When helicopters were scarce and communications were overloaded with vital signals, was it not odd to give any sort of priority to ferrying reporters around and dispatching their reports? Yet at the same time they were disappointed when there was criticism or misrepresentation of British strategy. They found it difficult to envisage that this might be a matter of give and take. The country was at war and they expected the media to play their part in the national effort.

As it was assumed that the main flow of information would be emanating from the accredited journalists with the Task Force then that is where any controls would have to be exercised, especially as the media would be relying on military means of communication to get their material back to Britain. The tightness of Britain's military position meant that the controls would have to be severe. Giving intelligence to the enemy seemed foolhardy when the margin of error was so slight, and almost any operational detail could soon be characterised as vital intelligence. To exclude anything containing hard information or speculation on plans and capabilities, the disposition of units and almost anything to do with intelligence necessarily meant only allowing through trivial, colour stories, describing personalities sailing with the Task Force and how they were spending their time. These, however, could hardly appear serious enough for scarce communication facilities. Captain Jeremy Black of *Invincible* later explained the problems this created in terms of priorities, by citing the traffic for 19 April. He needed to exchange data and programming information to update his electronic warfare equipment, yet had to use up 30 per cent of his outgoing traffic on the journalists' copy, including an item about how 'page 3 girls' were going to war, in the form of 'outsize pin-up pictures' that had been airlifted to the Task Force. [27] It was thought that two journalists on *Invincible* were interested in no issue other than what Prince Andrew, a helicopter pilot as well as the Queen's son, was up to. [28]

It was space limitations, as well as an inherent wariness, that encouraged the Navy at first to resist the media clamour to send their correspondents with the Task Force. Though applications from the press to join the ships were pouring in, Northwood initially only allocated six places on ships. There then followed 'violent lobbying of Downing Street.' MoD soon doubled this to twelve, who were to fly to Ascension and join the force there. It was then agreed to increase the number of correspondents to fifteen, embarking them in ships sailing from the UK. Finally, because of the impossibility of rationing such a small number of places sensibly, and the Newspaper Publishers' Association's shrewd exclusion of the *Times, Sun* and *Guardian* from their original list, as well as the need to include the broadcasting media, a total of 29 was settled upon (17 newspapermen, two photographers, two radio reporters and three television reporters

supported by five technicians) and they were divided between the carriers and the amphibious ships. This still left disappointed some 160 organisations. Applications from the foreign press were not accepted. Later complaints were received from the regional press over their poor representation and allocation of facilities they had received.

The speed of departure meant that the journalists sent were often those that happened to be available rather than those with experience of war, while many lacked appropriate kit. Press identification documents dated from the 1956 Suez operation, and therefore contained passages in Arabic. The Deputy Fleet Public Relations Officer, CINCFLEET Staff, was the principal public relations advisor to CTG 317.8. He had overall professional charge and direction of all MoD public relations staff embarked and was the liaison officer for civilian journalists. The six MoD public relations officers (known as 'minders') who were sent to work with the journalists had, like the journalists, been sent without proper preparation or briefings, and also found themselves caught between the need to support the work of the journalists and preventing the wrong sort of disclosure. They reviewed all materials before transmission, although further vetting took place in London. However unpopular overt censorship might be, MoD was confident that so long as the restricted areas were defined and implemented in a reasonable way they would be accepted without too much fuss. The media and the military soon displayed different views about was what reasonable. During the course of the campaign there were numerous complaints about inconsistency and small-mindedness in some of the censorship, and generally that good news came out quicker than bad news. When the assets of the Task Force were so limited, however, news of equipment losses in accidents, even when there had been no casualties, provided Argentina with valuable intelligence, and when there had been casualties then some sensitivity had to be shown to the next of kin.

On 9 April, instructions were sent to the Task Force on the need for tight security when talking with the press, or even where they might be overheard. The press would be looked after by information officers who would remind them of the need for responsible reporting. It was important, Fieldhouse told Woodward, that all correspondents on board should continue to feel free to file their stories and material. 'We rely on public opinion in UK being kept informed but it is also vital that nothing is published which puts at risk lives or success of operation'. In principle there was very little of interest that did not come into that category, and the list of topics to be avoided was long:

> Operational plans, which would enable a potential enemy to deduce details of our intentions; Speculation about possible courses of action; State of readiness and detailed operational capability of individual units or formations; Location, employment and operational movements of individual units; Particulars of current tactics and techniques; Operational capabilities of all types of equipments; Stocks of equipment and other details of logistics; Information about intelligence (especially communications intelligence) on Argentinian dispositions or capabilities; Communications; Equipment or other defects.

Woodward later summarised his instructions as 'Co-operation, yes; information, no.' [29]

A number of ships with the Task Force, although no warships, had terminals for INMARSAT, (a commercial maritime satellite system), and this allowed for voice reports to be transmitted back. There were no good means available for getting pictures of any sort back to London. Still pictures were transmitted using four facsimile transmission machines, initially on *Canberra* but later transferred to other ships, which worked in conjunction with the *Inmarsat* facility. During the conflict 202 pictures taken by Service and press photographers were transmitted from the Task Force, very few by any standards. It took until the middle of May before still photographs could be transmitted from the South Atlantic to the UK. While for a brief time TV pictures could be sent back by direct transmissions from Electronic News Gathering systems while the ships were in the Channel, this rapidly became impossible. As early as 3 April an investigation was initiated by MoD into the possibility of embarking a portable satellite television transmitter on *Hermes* to send pictures from a ship back to Britain using the American Defence Satellite Communications Systems (DSCS) satellite on which the RN had leased channels, but there were two problems with this. The RN channels were standard military audio ones, but TV pictures required a bandwidth 1000 times greater; and no higher-capacity channels could be made available. For pictures to pass through the narrow military channel they would have to be sliced, but this would take 20 minutes to pass a single picture and would require the Americans to tilt their communications DSCS satellite, or a wider channel would need to be provided. At most poor-quality black and white pictures could be transmitted via this route. Informal approaches to the US resulted in a negative response: with their load the satellites could be put at risk by the manoeuvre. The broadcasters suspected that if the military had not been so reluctant to have television pictures of the fighting, on the grounds that images of blood and gore might sap the nation's will and distress the families of those doing the fighting, they might have pushed harder. There is no direct evidence for this but the consequential media frustration is not hard to understand. Video film had to be sent to Ascension Island, from where it could be fed by satellite to BBC or ITN using the specially adapted Cable and Wireless facility, or brought by air to the United Kingdom. This could mean that it could take as much as three weeks from filming to transmission. For all these reasons this was a radio rather than a television war.

The media made proposals for improving the Ascension facility, but the military did not want any correspondents based in a place where so many sensitive activities were underway. Fieldhouse did not want the importance or the vulnerability of the facilities at Ascension to be publicised. The Americans were already embarrassed enough by the British use of their facilities at the airport there and although this was now firmly in the public domain every effort was being made not to draw further attention to it. Nonetheless, two journalists (BBC and Reuters freelance) appeared on Ascension without anyone being aware how they had got there. The bulk of journalists who sailed on *Canberra* were effectively locked up on board for six weeks, with the added frustration of watching troops go ashore at Ascension while being unable to do so themselves, and then later hearing reports on the World Service of action that they themselves were unable (and despite their editors' urgings) to report.

This difficult relationship had to be managed in London as well as on the Task Force. Peace time planning for war had never contemplated the imposition of press censorship but relied on the voluntary co-operation of the press and broadcasting authorities

connected with a system of intensive and continuous guidance operated by both Ministers and the Government's press relations machinery. Imposition of censorship would require Emergency Powers. A draft Defence Regulation did exist but in order for it to be legally enforced, an enabling Bill was required to be passed by Parliament. Short of this the only other method available under current legislation would be to issue D notices and enforce them by prosecution under the Official Secrets Act. There was therefore no formal censorship regime in London. Instead editors were briefed on the principles upon which the Ministry expected the media to operate. There was also some awareness of traditional sources of leakage—letters home from the Task Force and informal conversations between the media and senior officers and officials—but little idea what to do about it other than issue firm guidance. Although the Prime Minister expressed anxiety to the Home Secretary about the problem of armchair strategists, there was little grasp of the unavoidability of informed speculation in an open democracy.

On 6 April a South Atlantic Presentation Unit (SAPU) was set up within the Cabinet Office, consisting of a First Secretary from the FCO and a Principal from MoD, and tasked with providing Ministers and relevant Press Officers material for public use to counter what were believed to be false and potentially damaging media assessments of the military situation or diplomatic developments. It was initially to be responsible to Cecil Parkinson but soon Michael Palliser took it over. All Departments were required to inform the unit immediately of any such assessments, even if they were still no more than subjects of discussion or rumour among opinion formers, journalists, and Members of Parliament. To ensure reliable responses Departments were asked to give a high priority to answering queries from the unit. It produced 32 papers on aspects of policy. This worked well initially in helping establish a consistent line but was less suitable as events began to move faster.

The main channels to backbench Conservative Party opinion were established through the Chief Whip's Office and the Ministers' Parliamentary Private Secretaries (John Wilkinson for Nott, Spencer le Marchant for Pym and Ian Gow for Thatcher) who met daily to coordinate strategy. Gow was particularly active in getting key Conservative MPs in to meet with the Prime Minister. Northwood saw Parliament as one of the main sources of leaks. Nott believed that Northwood had little understanding of the need to maintain parliamentary morale. While the Defence Secretary did not see it as his business to brief the press, in the Commons 'I was very concerned to bring into my confidence the defence buffs, as I called them, the defence specialists who felt that they knew what was going on.' Suspicions of how much backbenchers were being told, and how much they then passed on to journalists, was one reason why Northwood became sparing when it came to passing information to MoD. [30]

Although consideration was given to establishing a formal Press Working Party, in the event daily co-ordination of the press line was handled by a less formal Information Group on the Falklands (IGF), which met 53 times between 8 April and 25 June. It was chaired by the Prime Minister's Press Secretary (Bernard Ingham) and normally met at 1000. The daily round of press briefings, which started with Ingham's meeting with lobby correspondents at 1100, dictated the timing but this meant that he could not attend War Cabinet meetings. For the same reason Parkinson could not attend IGF, and so there was no ministerial input. This underlined the basic problem that those talking to the press were not always au fait with the thinking at the highest level of government, while the

highest level did not always appreciate the presentational issues and possibilities raised by the items they were addressing.

As the fighting began the burden for the presentation of military news, good, bad and often sparse, fell to MoD, although an Emergency Press Centre was not opened in MoD until 2 May. The conflict began with the Ministry's Public Relations Department lacking a permanent professional head and this situation was not remedied until 18 May 1982, when Neville Taylor took over, who had been appointed before the conflict but was serving out his notice at another ministry. Until that time the Deputy Chief of Public Relations, Ian MacDonald acted as Chief even though his civil service background was in policy rather than public relations. This lack of background was apparent in his public performances, although their distinctive style did result in a sort of following for MacDonald. He later recalled how he sat down 'for five minutes' during the first days of the conflict to try to establish some sort of information policy. [31] The quality of his performance became a matter of debate, illustrated by the divergent assessments provided by Leach and Nott. According to Leach:

> Unfortunately he had not the prudent advice proffered in the naval parade training manual for those responsible for conducting a Service funeral: 'assuming an aspect cheerful but subdued…' Weighed down by the solemnity of what he was about to reveal to an expectant public, MacDonald's otherwise handsome face assumed an aspect of stark tragedy bordering on abject horror and his voice was matchingly sepulchral. [32]

Nott acknowledges that the Americans found MacDonald 'strange' and that 'PR smoothies worldwide, including Ingham at No. 10,' wanted a more professional style:

> Frank Cooper, in one of his better moves, said that he thought the way around the problem was to send Ian up to Glasgow for a weekend with his mum. In his place we put on parade a number of polished young officers to do the job. Sure enough, as soon as Ian was gone there was a surge of demand for us to reinstate him. Ian Macdonald was borne back to the world's screens in triumph. There he remained to the end. [33]

In addition to his sense of public tastes, Nott's preference may also reflect his desire to have someone in a key position who understood the policy priorities. He later commented: 'Mr. MacDonald was my man.' [34]

3
RESOLUTION 502

The first task was to establish Britain's case internationally. If any practical support was going to be garnered from allies and partners it was first necessary to confirm that the country was justified in its deep sense of grievance. This provided an opportunity for the FCO to redeem itself at a time when it was in some disarray.

The Argentine invasion had come at the exact moment when the Head of the Diplomatic Service was changing, although the retiring Sir Michael Palliser was soon asked to continue to advise the Government for the duration of the crisis. The two Cabinet Ministers from the FCO, Lord Carrington and Sir Humphrey Atkins, both resigned, as did Richard Luce, the Minister who had been dealing with the Falklands. Senior diplomats who had been handling the issue believed themselves to have been discredited, even though they were not sure what else they might have done, given the approach to the issue taken by the Government as a whole. The new Foreign Secretary, Francis Pym, was a figure respected in the Conservative Party and the Commons, and he made a particular effort to keep Parliament informed about the diplomacy. His instincts were in line with the FCO: 'the fact that people should die for an issue of this kind seemed to me to be wrong, unless absolutely no alternative presented itself.' [1] He was however being thrown in at the deep end and was not notably close to the Prime Minister. In her memoirs she described him as 'a good tactician but no strategist.' She had reason later, she confided, to question the common judgement that this was a man who would be 'just right in a crisis.' [2]

Nor was the Prime Minister enamoured of the Foreign Office as an institution. Its standing had not been helped by a paper prepared as the crisis broke by Defence Department in the FCO, which had been asked about the political costs of military action. These were: a backlash against the 17,000 British subjects in Argentina and possibly formal action, if a state of war was declared; the lack of international support if it appeared that Britain was exacting retribution rather than exercising a legitimate right to self defence; unreliable allies with their own interests to protect with Argentina; an ambivalent US; a Soviet Union fishing in troubled waters; and then, even if action were successful, the problem of 'sustaining a viable British position in the face of much compounded Argentine antagonism and without severe prejudice to our interests in that country.' In addition, the effort to 'many of our friends…will also seem disproportionate to their stake involved.' Thatcher later recalled receiving advice 'which summed up the flexibility of principle characteristic of that department.' [3] Nott added in his own memoir:

> It might have been the duty of the Foreign Office to warn of all these obstacles, which were very clear to all of us, but it is the never-ending feebleness of the institution and its demeaning role as a spokesman for foreign interests that rankles so deeply with Tories like myself. [4]

Yet this was to be an unusually testing time for British diplomacy. Few other governments, even amongst the most friendly, were quite sure why Britain was putting in such an effort and accepting such high risks to retake an asset with so little real value, and less sure why they should put themselves out to help. Whatever Britain wanted—from access to facilities en route to the South Atlantic, to information on arms supplied to Argentina, to adherence to economic sanctions—the case had to be compelling and tenaciously argued. Ambassadors and High Commissioners around the world became overnight experts on the dispute and its ramifications. At the same time as the FCO became bound up with the many practical demands of the crisis, it had to keep a close eye on the political implications of every military move being planned at Northwood. It expected to be to the fore in the search for a negotiated outcome to the crisis, but here the Prime Minister was very much in charge, aware that any apparent concession to Argentina was political dynamite at home.

The critical advice on the diplomatic strategy to be adopted if compromises on the core issues of principle were to be avoided, while entreaties for moderation were respected, was provided largely from the two Ambassadors at the most important posts in Washington and New York. The handling of the American Government was going to be crucial in arranging any political settlement and to gain access to military support. Here the Ambassador was Sir Nicholas Henderson, an unusually experienced and independent-minded diplomat, with a personality admirably suited to making a mark in Washington. The most vital diplomatic battles would be fought in and around the UN, where Britain's Ambassador was Sir Anthony Parsons, a shrewd and popular diplomat, on the rebound from a difficult period as Ambassador to Iran during the time of the Islamic revolution. He understood the culture of the UN and the conflicting pressures that would influence the collective response to the unfolding crisis. [5] Henderson and Parsons together had a clear sense of the amount of flexibility it was appropriate and necessary to show as they faced the unusually demanding audiences of the Security Council and the American media.

Sir Anthony helped redeem the FCO in the Prime Minister's eyes by securing a notable victory in the Security Council, pushing through a resolution, which put the onus on Argentina to withdraw. Institutionally Britain had an advantage as a Permanent Member of the Security Council, working from the commanding heights of the organisation and with the capacity to veto any unfavourable resolution. Yet while it had reason to expect solidarity from fellow members of the western alliance and from Commonwealth countries, the UN had been a difficult arena for some time because of the strength of third world opinion with its strong anticolonial sentiment. The more the Falklands could be presented as a matter of colonialism, which is how it had previously been developed in the General Assembly, the more awkward Britain's position could become. It did not help that it so happened that the two European non-Permanent Members of the Security Council at this time—Spain and Ireland—were the only two with their own territorial disputes with Britain. Moreover, while normally Britain would expect vital support from its closest ally, the US Ambassador to the UN, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, was closely associated with the Reagan Administration's Latin America policy and led the pro-Argentina camp in Washington. Argentina's Ambassador, Eduardo Roca, who had only arrived in late March to take up his position in New York, could take Latin American support for granted, hope for a helpful response from the Soviet bloc by

opposing a leading member of NATO, make the most of the UN's devotion to anticolonialism, while at the same time relying on a sympathetic hearing from Kirkpatrick.

The fact that the new Secretary-General of the UN was from Latin America—the Peruvian Javier Perez de Cuellar—might also have been expected to work against Britain. Perez de Cuellar was fully aware, however, of the need for impartiality and was cautious when it came to launching initiatives that had scant chance of success. As the crisis developed on 31 March he was about to leave for a tour of Europe. He summoned both Roca and Parsons successively to express concern at the rising tension and urge a diplomatic resolution of the dispute, followed by a public appeal for restraint. [6] By this time Roca was already preparing the diplomatic ground for the invasion, circulating a letter to the President of the Security Council, referring to the South Georgia incident and the dispatch of British warships to the area, and complaining about Britain's 'obstinately negative' approach to Argentina's efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the illegal occupation of the Islands:

> It is appropriate for me to emphasise in the clearest possible terms that the means employed by the British Government and their unilateral acts have created a situation of serious tension whose continuation could jeopardise the maintenance of international peace and security.

On the afternoon of 1 April the FCO warned Parsons of the 'mounting evidence' that an invasion was imminent and he was instructed to seek immediately an emergency meeting of the Security Council. A draft statement had already been prepared by the UK Mission, which rehearsed the history of the dispute from a UK perspective, examined the events in South Georgia, and noted the latest exchanges in Buenos Aires between British Ambassador Anthony Williams and the Argentine Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa Mendez. To bring home to the Council the seriousness of the situation reference was made to Argentine naval movements, and Argentine press references to these being 'in readiness for operations in the South Atlantic,' leave being cancelled, and C130 transport aircraft departing from their bases.

Parsons contacted the Security Council President, Ambassador Kamanda of Zaire, to ask that the Council meet in emergency session. Kirkpatrick, the previous month's President, was less than pleased, having told Roca that such a move was unlikely, and warned Parsons that she would 'block' any call for such a session. Parsons warned in return that if she did then he would demand a 'procedural vote on whether we actually discussed the problem. She would have to oppose me on the vote, in public, underneath the television cameras and the rest of it.' Kirkpatrick backed down. [7] Parsons was suspicious of Kirkpatrick's 'close and sympathetic relationship with Roca.' He suspected that she had given the Argentine Ambassador to understand that, if Argentina could support the US over Nicaragua, she would return the compliment over the Falklands.

From Kamanda then came a second appeal to the two parties. He expressed concern and urged the two to 'exercise the utmost restraint at this time and in particular to refrain from the use or threat of force in the region and to continue the search for a diplomatic solution.' Parsons accepted this language in full. By the end of 1 April, Parsons' view was that as much as possible had been extracted from the Council in one day and that 'the

sympathy of the majority of the Council is undoubtedly with us and the Argentines are on the wrong foot.' Assuming that an invasion was imminent Parsons now sought from London not only discretion to make an immediate call to the Council and work for an early resolution, but also to be allowed the 'maximum latitude' in the drafting of this resolution. His problem was to prepare London for language that might not fully reflect the strength of public and parliamentary opinion. Careful drafting would be needed to secure the necessary nine out of fifteen possible votes, which would be required for a positive result or force the Russians to veto. [8] He had in mind a resolution that would call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and immediate withdrawal of all Argentine forces. The 'traffic would bear,' he warned, only so much in terms of 'deploring, condemning and so on.' The standard references to Charter principles and the need to resume peaceful negotiations would have to be included. Carrington gave him the discretion he needed. The next day the invasion took place.

When Resolution 502 was passed on 3 April it took the following form:

> The Security Council, recalling the statement made by the President of the Security Council at the 2345th meeting of the Security Council on the 1 April 1982 calling on the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to refrain from the use or threat of force in the region of the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas),
>
> Deeply disturbed at reports of an invasion on 2 April 1982 by armed forces of Argentina,
>
> Determining that there exists a breach of the peace in the region of the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas),
>
> 1. Demands an immediate cessation of hostilities;
> 2. Demands an immediate withdrawal of all Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas);
> 3. Calls on the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom to seek a diplomatic solution to their differences and to respect fully the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The strategy behind the resolution was straightforward. It put Argentina in the dock by drawing attention to its failure to respond to the appeal by the President of the Security Council for restraint and linked the existence of the breach of the peace with the Argentine invasion. It did not, however, go so far as to denounce Argentina as an aggressor. This would have implied an expectation of a collective response, in the form of economic sanctions if not military action. This could not have been extracted from the Council at that time. The objective was therefore more modest: to put the onus on Argentina to withdraw its forces after the cessation of the current hostilities but then respond to inevitable Security Council concerns by suggesting a peaceful, negotiated route out of the dispute.

The text of the resolution was not very different from Parsons' first draft. As will be discussed below, for tactical reasons, 'Islas Malvinas' was introduced after the Falkland Islands. It was recognised that the first demand could be problematic. The original version, drafted before the actual invasion, referred to 'cessation of operations', which could include the eventual British response to the invasion, and so was replaced by the

more definite ‘cessation of hostilities’ once news came that the invasion was actually underway. A later Argentine attempt to turn this resolution round against Britain depended on separating this first operative paragraph from the second, which called for an Argentine withdrawal.

With a resolution drafted to put the maximum pressure on Argentina consistent with the political realities of the Security Council, Parsons’ tactics depended on quick movement. He persuaded Kamanda to allow him to introduce the resolution at a meeting called for another purpose at 1030 New York time on 2 April. As it began London—where it was now the middle of the afternoon—flashed Parsons, informing him he should ‘go ahead’ in the Security Council on the basis that the Falklands had been invaded. In his speech the Ambassador observed, to dramatic effect, that: ‘As we sit here, a massive Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands is taking place.’ He described this as:

> an attempt to impose by force a foreign and unwanted control over one thousand nine hundred peaceful agricultural people who have chosen in free and fair elections to maintain their links with Britain and the British way of life.

Roca’s reply stressed the British failure to address the issue of sovereignty of the Islands, which had nothing to do with the wishes of the inhabitants. This sovereignty had been taken unjustly from Argentina but had now been recovered. Roca reported that in this recovery there had been no deaths among the civilian population, that an Argentine Governor had been appointed and that Argentine administration had been established throughout the Falkland Islands. The Security Council should be pleased that a dispute, which had been a constant threat to peace and security in the region, had now been resolved. The Argentine delegation, however, had been given no advance warning of the invasion and were slow off the mark in mobilising support, relying largely on Cuba and Panama to appeal on their behalf to the UN’s substantial anti-colonial bloc.

After the initial speeches and the introduction of the draft resolution Parsons found that he was unable to get it carried that day. The Soviet delegation was unhappy that there had been no prior consultations on the issue. A number of delegations were unsure how to vote and needed to get back to their capitals for instructions. There were other pressing issues—on Nicaragua and Israel—that others wanted to discuss. Nicanor Costa Mendez, the Argentine Foreign Minister, was on his way to New York and would not arrive until the next day. For all these reasons Parsons decided to bow to the inevitable and agree on the resumption of the debate that evening. He insisted that there must be a vote the next day.

Parsons argued against a British minister rushing out to New York simply because Costa Mendez was coming. He had thought that there might be a case for a high-profile presentation on the legal and historical aspects of the dispute, but now the situation was becoming more fluid and messy. The Russians, he reported, were suggesting that, as there was a fait accompli, there was no need to hurry. Others saw Britain doing no more than looking for a face-saving resolution. If these sentiments led to delay then pressure would grow for Britain to water down the resolution to meet Argentine concerns. So sympathy was beginning to ebb, and he was by no means sure of getting the necessary

nine votes. It was better, he thought, that a rebuff be inflicted upon an Ambassador than a Minister.

The possible outcomes he considered began with the most positive, at least nine votes in favour and no Soviet veto, and then got steadily worse, taking in a Soviet veto, then less than nine votes and then not even being able to bring the resolution to a vote as the result of the loss of a procedural motion. He saw little to choose between the third and fourth of these outcomes. Given the state of opinion in Britain he judged that it was better to refuse to accept any softening amendments and press for a vote. [9] Failing would still be better than acquiescing in a heavily watered down draft that might not reach a vote for another two to three days. At worst he might have to withdraw if he was not getting any support, even from Britain's friends. At any rate a fall-back position had to be prepared, accepting that there was no useful action to be taken in the UN, and to re-iterate, in the words of Sir Humphrey Atkins' statement on the Friday to the Commons that Britain would take:

> appropriate military and diplomatic measures to sustain our rights under diplomatic law and in accordance with the provisions of the UN Charter.

Even if the current round went well, he was coming to the view that the UN might best be avoided in the future. He feared that 'the Argentines will get us embedded in the substance of sovereignty dispute where they have the votes and we do not'. Carrington agreed that if the effort was to fail, then it was 'better to fail on a good text,' although he was reluctant to rule out future recourse to the UN.

Proceedings on other issues went on until quite late in the evening of 2 April. When debate on the Falklands resumed France, Ireland, Australia, Canada and New Zealand all spoke in favour of the draft resolution. Further discussion was then postponed until the next morning, when Costa Mendez would arrive from Argentina. Now was the time for intense lobbying to secure the votes. Not all those inclined to vote in favour could be taken for granted. France and the US would vote with Britain, as probably would Ireland, Jordan, and Uganda. France was asked to encourage Zaire and Togo to vote the right way, while the US also worked on Zaire as well as Japan. Into the camp of potential opponents or abstainers were put the Soviet Union, Poland, and China because of general opposition to Britain, Spain because of its close connections with Argentina and its own quarrel over Gibraltar, and Panama and Guyana as Latin Americans. The British Embassy in Madrid applied pressure for a positive vote, warning about the implications of Argentina's use of force, while it was soon recognised that Guyana was by no means a lost cause, for its own dispute with Venezuela gave it a stake in the proposition that these matters should never be resolved by force.

At the start of the debate on 3 April, Costa Mendez spoke, in more careful and moderate terms than had Roca the previous day. He described the Falklands as a classic colonial problem, which had now been terminated. The rights and way of life of the islanders would be respected and troops would be used only as strictly necessary. In the ensuing debate, by and large the Latin Americans supported the Argentine case, Jordan (as it later turned out, without instructions) opposed Argentina as did Japan in cautious terms and the United States in a brief statement. Kirkpatrick absented herself from the UN during the course of the debate, while, according to Parsons' sources, her deputy

watered down the text of the statement supporting Britain that the State Department had instructed him to deliver. Britain's most strident opponent on the Security Council was Panama. Foreign Minister Illueca, whose statement was described by Parsons as 'long and vicious,' introduced his own draft resolution which went through all past UN and non-aligned resolutions on the topic and called upon Britain 'to cease its hostile conduct, refrain from any threat or use of force and cooperate…in the decolonization of the…islands.' Illueca proposed suspending the meeting so that a draft could be prepared in all working languages for tabling. He lost the vote with seven against, three for and four abstaining. Later Illueca attempted to deprive Britain of its vote under Article 27 (3). This move had been anticipated, and could be dealt with because, although the resolution was being submitted under Chapter 7 (article 40) no sanctions were being proposed and therefore 27 (3) did not apply. This time even Spain supported Britain.

At this point the British learned that Ambassador Nuseibeh of Jordan had been told by Amman to abstain. Time was needed to reverse this instruction, and to gain it Parsons sought an adjournment that the Latin Americans could not oppose. With a straight face he explained that time was needed to reprint the resolution correctly with the addition of 'Islas Malvinas' after the Falklands. This allowed the Prime Minister to contact King Hussein to get Jordan's vote moved from abstention to support. The conversation was extremely short. The Prime Minister explained the line-up at the Security Council and how Jordan's vote would make a difference. The King said he would be in touch right away, and Mrs Thatcher expressed gratitude to a 'very kind and a wonderful ally.' [10] While this was going on it was learned that, with French help, Zaire and Togo were both now in favour. In the resumed debate, these countries indicated that while they supported Argentina's case they strongly deplored the use of force and the rejection of the President's appeal. This was the basic thrust of the remarks from Ambassador Dorr of Ireland. Then Ambassador Troyanovsky of the Soviet Union made a standard anti-colonialist speech, apparently preparing the ground for a veto.

Then came the vote—without a Soviet veto. The Soviet Ambassador apparently justified his abstention to Costa Mendez by reference to problems in consulting Moscow at that time, [11] but the real reason was probably a sense that third world countries were not overwhelmingly with Argentina. When the vote came he leaned over and congratulated Parsons, suggesting (according to an aide who overheard) that he 'should get the garter'. Only Panama voted against. The three communist states and Spain abstained. Illueca spoke again in heated tones but did not insist on a vote on his resolution. Later he attempted, unsuccessfully, to extract from Parsons a promise that Britain would not use force. Costa Mendez spoke again to maintain Argentina's rights and express disappointment without explicitly rejecting the resolution. Parsons reminded him of Argentina's obligations under Article 25 to carry out the decisions of the Security Council. Given his pessimism of the previous evening Parsons was delighted—he 'could not have got a better result.' He still sounded a clear note of caution back to the FCO:

> It became only too clear that, as I have consistently reported, we have virtually no support on the substance of the problem. We must bear this closely in mind for the future in the UN context.

4
THE TASK FORCE

The successful passage of Resolution 502 was an unexpected diplomatic triumph but there was no optimism that it might lead to an Argentine withdrawal. It was assumed from the start that diplomacy and military pressure were not alternatives but complementary. Until Buenos Aires appreciated that it could not hold onto the Falklands in the face of superior force it was unlikely to contemplate abandoning the long-coveted Malvinas. It was necessary at all times to demonstrate that Britain was offering Argentina a diplomatic way out, largely for international benefit, but without a display of coercive force Argentine would not accept the offer. The second achievement of the first days of the crisis, after 502, was to generate an immediate and conspicuous military response.

Argentina had not been expecting such a response, and was obliged to come to terms with the prospect of a prolonged conflict instead of its intended *coup de main*. Speed was important because of the anticipated deterioration in conditions in the South Atlantic as its winter drew closer. The speed achieved astonished even those who depended upon the First Sea Lord's promises being met. The mobilisation was immediate and ungrudging. Out came the army, including the territorials, to get equipment and stores to the dockyards. Visiting Portsmouth on the Monday, Nott later described as one of his 'most poignant memories' the 'dignity and restraint' with which dockyard workers greeted him despite the fact that under his defence review many would be put out of work. [1] At the same time, assembling a Task Force at speed had its costs. The Task Force sailed without an agreed concept of operations.

On 3 April, the Navy Department at the MoD signalled to Fieldhouse the ships to be nominated for Operation CORPORATE. The ships were to be sailed 'as soon as they are fully prepared for the operation' and Task Force (TF 317) was, as laid out in CINCFLEET's initial directive, 'to proceed for such operations in the South Atlantic as may be ordered'. There was no time to consider, except in the broadest terms, what might be done on arrival in the South Atlantic. There was a widespread hope that there would be no need to complete the journey, as the search for a negotiated settlement was

Map 4 The Logistics effort

launched at the same time. Should this search fail it was presumed that somehow the Argentine garrison on the Falkland Islands would have to be kept isolated and denied effective air and sea support, and that at some point an amphibious landing might have to be mounted. This presumption led to the Task Force being divided into two. First to go would be a carrier battle group led by *Hermes* and *Invincible,* capable of enforcing a blockade and coping with whatever forces the Argentines could muster (the details of which were still unclear). Later an amphibious landing force would follow.

Prior to the Argentine invasion some measures had already been taken with a view to reinforcing the Falklands, notably the despatch of two SSNs, HMS *Spartan* and HMS *Splendid* on 1 April. These were later followed by HMS *Conqueror*. On 31 March it had become apparent that these measures would be pointless unless they were part of a full Task Force. At this stage the force was comprised of two carriers, one Land Platform Dock (LPD), at least four destroyers/frigates and appropriate support. It was to be tasked to transport all three RM commando battalions and the Commando Brigade Headquarters to the South Atlantic. The Army were to provide two Landing Ship Logistics (LSLs). This response to the crisis was ineffectual in deterrent terms, but it ensured that there was now sufficient momentum in the mobilisation process to provide the visible effort that the Government needed. At 0227Z on 2 April, CINCFLEET warned HMS *Hermes, Invincible, Fearless, Alacrity, Antelope* and RFA *Resource* to come to four hours' notice for operations in the South Atlantic. At 0240Z Woodward got his instructions. He had sailed his group of ships on exercise SPRINGTRAIN from Gibraltar on 29 March, having been warned that he may need to go south. Now he was instructed 'to proceed at economical speed' to Ascension Island with HMS *Antrim, Glamorgan, Glasgow, Coventry, Brilliant, Arrow, Plymouth,* and RFA *Appleleaf* and *Tidespring*. HMS *Sheffield* was also detailed for the Falklands operation, provided Woodward was content with her material state. Fieldhouse considered it 'vital that your force has no further contact with Gibraltar since for political reasons impression is to be given that you are already well on your way south'.

The remaining surface ships were either in need of repair or ill-equipped and so, after transferring stores, ammunition and key equipment and personnel to the Task Force ships, they were to complete what they could of the exercises and return to Britain. HMS *Broadsword* and *Yarmouth* who had been about to go to the Gulf followed them from Gibraltar on 8 April. The two carriers, HMS *Hermes* and *Invincible* were at Portsmouth with main leave parties away and their Sea Harriers ashore. *Hermes,* as well as the LPD *Fearless,* had started a maintenance period but this was not too far advanced. Both the LPDs had only recently been reprieved from disposal as proposed under the 1981 Defence Review. The other LPD, HMS *Intrepid* was not quite available. Work had begun to prepare for a refit, and it would be challenging to get it ready to sail before 14 April. In addition to *Fearless,* the amphibious lift was to be provided by five LSLs, including *Sir Galahad, Sir Geraint, Sir Lancelot,* and *Sir Percivale,* plus *Sir Tristram,* then in Belize, which would sail directly for Ascension Island. RFA *Stromness,* at Portsmouth having been stripped of sensitive facilities prior to being laid up and then disposed of in some way, was now given the order to reactivate and be at readiness to deploy by 6 April. It was required to carry 350 Royal Marines and 7,500 man months of provisions.

Not only ships but also personnel had to be assembled in a hurry. In the early hours of 2 April, 3 Commando Brigade RM was brought to 72 hours' notice to move. The Brigade was kept permanently at seven days' notice to move in emergency, but the few days warning were of little help in reducing notice, since no overt action could be taken nor information be passed on. Units were widely spread. 40 Commando was completing personal weapon training near Liverpool; 42 Commando was on leave having just returned from Norway; 45 Commando in Scotland was about to go on leave; with Y Company in Hong Kong en route from Brunei. Many of the key staff officers of the Brigade Headquarters, together with most of the staff of COMAW, were at a NATO

planning meeting in Denmark. The Commando Logistics Regiment was due to go on leave on 3 April. At 0400 on 2 April its Commanding Officer, Colonel I J Hellberg, heard that 3 Commando Brigade was to be sent to the Falklands and within three hours the first trucks were on their way to collect ammunition. Because British Rail was unable to reposition their rolling stock, all the war maintenance reserve (WMR) stocks from the major depots had to be moved by road. By 12 noon on 5 April most stocks had been loaded. The Brigades WMR consisted of 30 days stocks of Combat Supplies at Limited War rates with 60 days' stocks of technical and general stores. A quick decision was taken to supplement the Brigade's inadequate air defence capability with a Royal Artillery Rapier Battery and also to add two troops of armoured reconnaissance vehicles (four each of Scimitar and Scorpion plus a Samson recovery vehicle) from the Blues and Royals. Taken together the enhanced 3 Commando Brigade would total some 3,500 men with large quantities of weapons, stores, equipment and vehicles.

On 3 April, the Third Battalion of the Parachute Regiment (3 Para) was added. This had important consequences. *Hermes* had been initially tasked, with *Invincible,* in an anti-submarine role and ordered to 'embark the maximum number of Sea Harrier and Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Sea King aircraft commensurate with air operations'. Then, during the morning of 2 April, the requirement was changed so that helicopters able to land troops and 800 marines could be accommodated. The decision to take 3 Para confirmed what was already becoming apparent: the RN would not be able to carry the whole amphibious force. Some 2,000 troops and most of the vehicles and equipment would have to be sent in merchant ships. So *Hermes* was confirmed again in the anti-submarine role, with nine Sea Kings Mk 5 (826 Squadron), although some operational flexibility was retained by embarking 120 Marines together with nine troop-carrying Sea King Mk4 (846 Squadron). *Invincible* took eleven Sea Kings Mk5 (820 Squadron). After searching for all available Sea Harriers and pilots, including some involved in training and trials and in the reserve, sufficient were found for twelve aircraft (800 Squadron) to travel with *Hermes* and eight (801 Squadron) with *Invincible*. Meanwhile, the current dispositions of Sidewinder air-to-air missiles read *Hermes* (30), *Invincible* (40) and RFA *Resource* (33). The Navy urgently requested from the US a further 70 for *Hermes* and 30 for *Invincible,* asking that if possible these should be of the improved AIM-9L version (the UK's current equipment was of the older AIM-9G variant). The Captain aboard *Hermes* felt that in assessing the likely air threat: 'urgent procurement of these missiles with their significantly greater capability is highly desirable'.

The lack of clear operational directives aggravated those problems that resulted simply from haste. Commodore Clapp complained on 7 April that he had not had the opportunity to assess a concept of operations in any depth. He explained that: 'Because the speed of mounting, type of STUFT (Ships Taken up from Trade) allocated and lack of a clear amphibious objective has meant we have basically managed to squeeze what we considered essential into the given space'. He worried about the re-loading problem, which could occur 'once we get enough hard intelligence to allow C-in-C and MoD to state clear objective'. On 9 April, he discussed with Fieldhouse the need to carry out military training at Ascension Island. Clapp also reiterated by signal that because of the hurried loading there would be considerable 'shuffling' of personnel/stores during the stay at Ascension. The lack of clarity about what would be the priority items for offloading led to arbitrariness to the initial loading. The next day it was agreed that once

ashore the landing force would best be supported directly from ships using helicopters. At the time it was assumed that it would be safe to do so, on the grounds that without air and sea superiority the landing would not be authorised in the first place. This concept required two LSLs (*Sir Galahad* and *Sir Percivale*) each loaded with the requisite stocks. To get the correct split of stocks, so that the Brigade would not be dependent upon the survival of a particular LSL, as well as ensuring that stocks could be unloaded according to tactical priorities, there had to be a complete ship restow in Ascension Island. So while the political logic for getting the carrier task group on its way was unassailable, whether this need have been carried through to the amphibious force is more debatable. Major General Moore later took the view that the landing force could have sailed 'better briefed and loaded tactically up to two weeks later and still have achieved the landing on 21 May, having avoided the wasted effort entailed in the complete re-stow at Ascension'.

There were no contingency plans in existence for the Falkland Islands or indeed for anywhere else outside the NATO area to support any deployment much larger than a brigade, and there was neither the time nor the hard information to form detailed plans now. The nearest thing to the current activity for which detailed plans existed, a major deployment to north Norway, was the best available guide on what to take and how much, so long as allowances were then made for an extra 7,000 miles. What was clear was that there was no risk of taking excessive supplies—leading to the principle that all available stowage space must be used. The Falklands was known to lack roads so few vehicles were taken. For the most part only tracked or very lightly loaded four-wheel drive vehicles could move across country. Helicopters, by contrast, would be at a premium, both for moving men and equipment from shipping standing offshore and then taking them forward on land.

The process was hectic and often chaotic. There were regular changes of orders, uncertainties over available space, manning arrangements and communications fits. For most of the first week of April supplies were being moved by road, with the Royal Corps of Transport having to bring in Territorial Army vehicles and drivers, and charter about 100 40ft flat-bed trucks. Some 39, 108 tons of freight were moved by road. Rail was also important, but problems were encountered in getting vital equipment and stores to the loading areas, often dependent on the availability of appropriate British Rail rolling stock. By the second week 44 special trains had been hired. Key items had to be found from around the country and so arrived piecemeal.

Of the 4,350 men to be carried, service transport could accommodate all but 1,700 men, 150 tons of stores and some 60 vehicles. By 3 April the P&O cruise liner SS *Canberra* had been identified as a ship that could embark approximately 1400 Royal Marines and 600 Paras while the P&O ferry MV *Norsea* could take the Paras vehicles and equipment. After further investigation the P&O roll on/roll off ferry *Elk* was chosen instead of *Norsea*. It took 100 vehicles, 2,000 tons of ammunition, and hundreds of tons of stores. The Navy Department explained to CINCFLEET that:

> it is not intended that either ship should be placed unnecessarily at risk on entering a hostile environment. The men will it is planned be transferred to RN ships for assault operations on the Falklands and the equipment on *Elk* will not be landed until safe to do so. [2]

Plans were still being laid with the optimum—rather than the most likely—operational environment in mind.

While the merchant tankers could be taken up on charter, for the P&O ships insurance issues arose because of the possible need to carry troops and military equipment right into the combat area. For this reason, and also to avoid claims for breach of existing contracts, P&O and some other companies insisted on requisition. There was some political sensitivity about this, as it required an Order in Council, for the first time since Suez, and could be presented as a conspicuous demonstration of the inability of the RN to carry British troops. On the other hand the blue ensign would be flown under the command of a captain in the RN Reserve and as a consequence of well-established emergency plans. Nott wanted to get the order signed ‘while the nation and Parliament is still in a highly bellicose mood.’ This was done on the evening of 4 April. Discussions with the companies and unions established appropriate bonus rates, conditions of service and disciplinary regimes for the merchant seamen in STUFT. Non-British seamen would not be employed, so the *Canberra* was obliged to land some 400 Asian crew members. While the master retained responsibility for the safety of his ship, a senior naval officer and a naval party were appointed to each, responsible through the naval chain of command for her employment.

As *Canberra* steamed home with cruise passengers on board, she was inspected to see if she would serve as a troopship and then hospital ship, while preparations began to turn her sundeck and swimming pool areas into two helicopter flight decks. Although not requisitioned until 10 April, the P&O ship *Uganda* (which normally took school children on educational cruises) was chosen to serve as a hospital ship. By the time that it sailed on 19 April, it had acquired a helicopter platform, a refuelling point and 83 naval medical staff. Small naval survey vessels, *Hecla, Herald* and *Hydra,* would serve as ambulance ships.

In addition to troop carrying, fuel supplies were the other reason for acquiring STUFT. RFA *Appleleaf* and *Tidespring* were tankers with the SPRINGTRAIN contingent; while RFA *Pearleaf* and *Olmeda* were topped up to accompany the ships leaving Britain. RFA *Blue Rover,* returning from SPRINGTRAIN, was ordered to Portsmouth to load aviation fuel and petrol for vehicles. RFA *Brambleleaf* in the Indian Ocean was released on 3 April from her assignment in the Persian Gulf, and ordered to the South Atlantic via the Cape of Good Hope. Fieldhouse had also been encouraged by the news that the Chileans had offered to make RFA *Tidepool* available for the Task Force. *Tidepool* had been sold to Chile, and on 2 April was off Peru heading south, when the Chileans were asked if she could be promptly returned. CINCFLEET requested that this ‘be pursued with the utmost vigour’. The additional tanker would give the Task Group Commander ‘greater flexibility of operations and endurance’. The next day the Chileans made *Tidepool* available. The ship was turned round and ordered back through the Panama Canal, to load and prepare at Curacao before joining the Task Force at Ascension. Over such long distances, more tankers would inevitably be needed. Two British Petroleum tankers, *British Esk* and *British Tamar* were the first STUFT. They were already fitted with equipment to act as escort oilers so they were ready for their new role in a day. A third, *British Tay,* was soon added.

As the ships were made ready, so they sailed, singly and in groups. The SSNs, having received their orders before the invasion, were the first to go. On 3 April the carrier group

and the amphibious ships were ordered to gather before heading south. On the morning of 5 April HMS *Hermes* and *Invincible* and RFA *Olmeda* sailed from Portsmouth, waved off by vast crowds ashore. Earlier HMS *Alacrity* and *Antelope* had sailed quietly from Devonport to join the carriers. Even as they sailed from Britain, aircraft and stores continued to be embarked.

At 14 knots they would not arrive at Ascension Island until 17 April, especially as *Invincible* soon experienced a mechanical failure. There they would meet up with Woodward's group. He had intended to arrive by 10 April, but as he would have to wait for the carriers his group now proceeded at a more leisurely pace. The Government, however, wanted ships as far south as possible as early as possible, and the carrier group was ordered to make haste, as soon as the *Invincible* defect permitted, to get to Ascension by 15 April.

Although unable to meet the 5 April target, the amphibious group still managed to sail early with *Fearless,* four LSLs, RFA *Pearleaf* and *Stromness* setting off from Portsmouth on the evening of 7 April. *Resource,* which had anchored off Portland to embark a large quantity of last minute stores by helicopter, set out to overhaul the *Fearless* group a days steaming ahead. The *Elk* sailed on 9 April after a hectic two days in Southampton. That evening it was followed by *Canberra,* with much excitement ashore and Vosper Thorneycroft personnel still working on her forward flight deck.

Sustaining the Task Force

Fieldhouse had in mind from the start a 90 days campaign, with the weather, wear and tear and declining public support all likely to be limiting factors. There could be no question of a minimum force. He needed to get out the maximum possible. He told the officer getting ships from trade that 'If you think you need four, order eight'. As soon as the ships set sail consideration was given to what might need to follow. A fourth SSN was soon sent. It was assumed that extra escorts would be needed and early preparations were made to put together the group that was eventually led by the Type 82 Destroyer, HMS *Bristol,* which left Portsmouth on 10 May with the Type 21 frigates, *Active* and *Avenger,* along with the Leander frigates, *Andromeda, Minerva* and *Penelope,* and was soon joined by the Type 42 HMS *Cardiff*. They eventually joined the Task Force on 26 May and were able to provide some relief to what was by then a very battered fleet.

The first tentative consideration of the Argentine mining threat made the case for a Mine Counter-Measures (MCM) force, which would require the MCM support ship HMS *Abdiel,* one RFA, five Hunt or Ton Class Mine Counter-Measure Vessels (MCMVs), and five Extra Deep Armed Team Sweep (EDATS) fitted trawlers as auxiliary minesweepers (MSAs). Argentine mine stocks were known to be well maintained but there was no intelligence to suggest that mines had yet been laid. However, a high-localised threat could exist if the choice of landing beach were correctly anticipated by the Argentines. Other options were examined. Would it be possible to get another carrier to the South Atlantic if needed? HMS *Illustrious* was nearing completion on Tyneside while HMS *Bulwark* was at Portsmouth awaiting disposal. What about the three ships built for the Shah of Iran's Navy but not delivered after he had been overthrown? These had potential value for the amphibious operation but it was diplomatically too complicated to take over

Iranian assets. One of the early departures, in fact the first Task Force ship to leave Britain, was a rescue tug, Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service (RMAS) *Typhoon,* and it was decided that three more were needed, so the *Salvageman, Irishman* and *Yorkshireman* of the United Towing Company were selected and requisitioned.

There was also the issue of casualties, a problem that was logistical as well as being highly political. If losses were sustained, and the Government expected the Task Force to continue with its mission, then not only would casualties have to be evacuated but also replacements would have to be sent. The most hazardous time would be during the initial assault of a landing force and then the establishment of a beachhead. Casualties could be as high as 20 per cent of the landing force over the first seven days of operation, or a total of over 900 men. Of this number about three quarters would need to be evacuated: the others either killed or able to return to their units, giving an evacuation requirement averaging 100 per day, with about 40 of this number put as the more severe, priority one and two cases. After seven days the casualty rates would be expected to reduce. The Royal Marines earmarked 500 men from their training organisation as battle casualty replacements. A provisional plan was agreed to fly 171 Royal Marines to Ascension on 11 May and use a RFA to reach the Falklands about 24 May. Others could be held in Britain until needed. Leach argued that all the services should make similar preparations once the main Task Force had sailed from Ascension Island. The Chiefs agreed this on 18 April.

The surge of activity and the need to prepare for a long haul created pressure on manpower, but no emergency measures, such as recalling reservists, seemed necessary initially. Training was curtailed, leave restricted, and service extended. The initial planning assumptions were that forces would have to be sustained for three months, and that there would be military action, with losses of men and equipment. Later this was raised to six months. Even with local superiority there could be up to 25 per cent attrition of ships and aircraft. This required consideration of replacement ships, the loading of dockyards, the eventual need for extra troops, heavy demands on fuel, rations and ammunition, where it might be necessary to order extra stocks in anticipation or re-open production lines. If necessary, extra helicopters could be found. Extra Sea Harriers would require bringing forward reserve aircraft and re-deploying aircrew, although the Royal Air Force's Harrier GR3 squadrons provided an obvious source of extra aircraft. The container ship *Atlantic Conveyor* after four days work could hold 15 Harriers, with a fly on/fly off capability. Extra effort was put into bringing forward the delivery of weapons already on order, such as Sub Harpoon, Sidewinder AIM9L and Sea Skua.

The sudden emergency in the South Atlantic did not bring to an end all other commitments. The ships participating in operation ARMILLA in the Persian Gulf were told that they would not be relieved and had to accept a further patrol. There was a risk that Guatemala might decide to make an opportunistic move against Belize and so HMS *Exeter* stayed on station in the West Indies and the Chiefs of Staff recommended that the planned withdrawal of British forces from Belize should be postponed for at least three months. A significant reduction in the United Kingdom's maritime and air assets committed to NATO was unavoidable, including almost half of Britain's ship declarations, all Sea Harriers and one third of Britain's maritime helicopters. Naval war reserve fuel stocks would be reduced by one third in the first 20 days and one half of the afloat war reserve back stock of ammunition was going 'out of area.' There could be

permanent shortfalls in ammunition stocks and deficiencies in many specialist areas. It was assumed that British forces would not be considered so critical to the balance of power that the Warsaw Pact would suddenly see an attractive opportunity for aggression.

A further factor to be taken into account was the position of Gibraltar, in dispute with Spain, a country well disposed towards the Argentine case. Because of a possible threat from Argentine sympathisers in Spain against Gibraltar, a frigate was assigned to a guardship role. Certain precautionary and low-key measures were taken in response to a request from the Governor, including additional radar and air defence capability, with a plan for further reinforcement if necessary. By and large intelligence assessments were relaxed about the risk of any Spanish action against Gibraltar, while unauthorised small-scale action by individual elements of the Spanish Armed Forces was not thought to represent a serious military threat. [3] Routine movements of ships and aircraft were used to avoid attracting undue publicity that could inflame Spanish nationalist sentiment and make it harder to make political progress on the wider Gibraltar issue.

The nuclear complication

Brilliant and *Broadsword* joined the Task Force each carrying two MC (600) nuclear depth charges, suitable for delivery by Lynx and Wasp helicopters. The two carriers were already carrying similar weapons. Also at sea were training rounds (which though empty carcasses appeared as accurate replicas of the live rounds, and were intended for training in ground and flight handling and loading), and surveillance rounds, which were also inert and used to monitor the wear and tear on the weapons. These inert rounds were also held on three destroyers and three RFAs.

Even taking nuclear weapons into the South Atlantic could appear as a violation of the Treaty of Tlatelolco (1967), which had established Latin America and surrounding waters (including the Falkland Islands and the Dependencies) as a nuclear weapon free zone. Strictly speaking there could be no violation because not all states had signed and ratified the Treaty, while extra-continental states with responsibilities for territories within the intended zone of application were required to sign and ratify Additional Protocol I, with nuclear weapon states also acceding to an Additional Protocol II. Argentina had signed the Treaty in 1967 and while it had publicly announced its intention to ratify it had not yet done so. The United Kingdom had signed both protocols in 1967 and ratified them in 1969. This meant that had the Treaty been in force, the presence of nuclear weapons or warheads or nuclear materials which were not for peaceful purposes and under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, within the Falklands, their Dependencies, surrounding waters and air space, was prohibited, but the prohibition did not apply to UK nuclear weapons elsewhere in the South Atlantic, including in Argentine territorial waters. The presence of a nuclear-powered warship in Falkland Islands territorial waters would not contravene the Treaty as it was so clearly unrelated to nuclear weapons. [4]

A further factor was that Britain had issued a Negative Security Assurance in June 1978, in connection with the United Nations' Special Session on Disarmament, which applied to non-nuclear weapon states. The assurance involved an undertaking 'not to use nuclear weapons against such states *except* in the case of attack on the UK, its dependent

territories, its armed forces or its allies by such a state in association or alliance with a nuclear weapons state.' But to be considered a non-nuclear weapons state, Argentina would have had to have ratified either the nuclear non-proliferation treaty or the treaty of Tlatelolco and it had done neither, so in principle it was *not* protected by the Negative Security Assurance, and nuclear weapons could be used (subject to provisions of the law of armed conflict regarding proportionality, discrimination etc.) against Argentine vessels or territory *provided* the weapons used were not in the Falklands or territorial waters. [5]

After the conflict there were suggestions that the nuclear option had been seriously considered. It was claimed in one report that it was raised in early internal studies, with one source quoted as saying that: 'Certainly the nuclear option was one of the options studied on 2 April…part of the work done that day involved examining the possibility of retargeting Polaris against Argentina.' [6] When this report was first made public an official investigation could find no trace of such study. It probably was the case that nuclear use appeared in a very early draft of the main options paper, only to be taken out almost immediately. I have found no references to any consideration of nuclear employment. This was never taken seriously as a realistic possibility. [7] Nor is there any archival evidence to support a story that also appeared in the *New Statesman* that an SSBN (Polaris ballistic missilecarrying submarine) went as far south as Ascension Island in order to threaten or have a demonstrative nuclear attack against Cordoba in northern Argentina in the event of the loss of a major capital ship. The source was a senior Conservative backbench MP in conversation with Labour MP, Tam Dalyell, so this may just have been a mischievous test of the latter's gullibility. It was claimed that the details of the deployment 'were given in a series of highly classified telegrams sent to the British Embassy in Washington'. I have found no such telegrams. [8]

While there was never any thought of strategic nuclear use the possibility of tactical nuclear use was less readily dismissed. Lewin had not asked for nuclear depth charges, and had no plans to use them, but he was inclined to take them to the South Atlantic, just in case. The scenario he had in mind involved Russian submarines getting involved on the Argentine side. This scenario did not in itself calm those MoD civilians aware of the issue. As they began to press for urgent action to get the weapons away from the Task Force this began to develop, at least in the minds of some Admirals, as a test case as to whether their operational judgement was to be overruled. Thus while the main influences on decision-making were essentially logistical and political, an admittedly far-fetched operational possibility was also in play.

The politicians were unimpressed by these possibilities and shared their officials' anxiety about the conflict developing any nuclear connections. Indeed they had not appreciated the routine nature of nuclear deployments at sea and as a result of this experience revisited the matter after the war. They did not want to take nuclear weapons to the South Atlantic and how to prevent this was one of the issues to confront the War Cabinet when it met for the first time on 7 April. The immediate reaction was that some way must be found to offload them before they were involved in any combat, but without attracting any publicity. If the issue was raised in Parliament, the whereabouts of the depth charges was to be kept a secret but there would be an unequivocal affirmation that nuclear weapons would not be used in the present context. The MoD would never confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons in any particular location and never had done so.

It might have been possible to remove at least some of the weapons at Portsmouth before the Task Force set sail. This was considered but it could not have been undertaken in even a semi-covert manner, and would have added four to 16 hours to the preparations at the docks, during which time no other major activity would have been permitted in the ships involved or within a 300 yard radius. This would have led to considerable delays at a time when none could be countenanced. On 8 April the War Cabinet backed the Foreign Secretary's proposal that the depth bombs be off-loaded. A range of options was then considered. At a minimum it was possible, using a heavy jackstay, to transfer the weapons from the frigates to the carriers or the RFAs, where they could be more safely stored. Because an RFA could not be spared to get the weapons back to the UK there was no point in them taking on the weapons from the carriers. The alternative was to transfer the weapons to Ascension Island, but there was a lack of suitable storage. Furthermore, any activity at Ascension carried a risk of publicity: reducing this by disembarking by night would increase the more serious risk of accident. Most seriously, taking off the weapons at Ascension Island might have delayed the planned deployment by 36 hours, by taking the helicopters away from the demanding duties to which they had already been assigned in sorting out the stowage on the amphibious force..

In the event and with enormous reluctance Ministers decided that there was little choice but for them to stay with the carriers. They agreed on 11 April that the effort to remove the weapons would introduce an unacceptable delay to the Task Group getting to the Falkland Islands and initiating operations there. The decision was to concentrate the weapons in the carriers, where the safest stowage could be found. Initially the weapons were transferred to RFAs before being taken to the carriers, in order to get them off the frigates as quickly as possible. This meant that *Hermes* was carrying 40 percent and *Invincible* 25 Percent of the total UK stockpile of MC (600)s into the South Atlantic. The surveillance rounds that were carried on *Sheffield* and *Coventry* were also transferred to an RFA. In no circumstances, insisted the Prime Minister, would ships carrying nuclear weapons enter the 3-mile territorial waters zone round the Falkland Islands, which would be a potential breach of the Treaty of Tlatelolco. After the losses of ships to Argentine air attacks in late May, the thought of the consequences if they had been carrying nuclear weapons led to a decision to bring the depth charges back from the South Atlantic. On 28 May it was decided that the depth bombs, plus the training and surveillance rounds, should be removed from ships and brought back to the UK. *Invincible's* load was brought back in *Fort Austin*. In the event, not all could be quickly carried, because this would delay the ships' return. It took until 26 June before *Hermes* could 'disembarrass' itself of the depth charges to *Resource* which returned to Plymouth on 20 July.

While they were still at sea, the weapons were placed where they could be stored with added security. If there was a problem the carriers were more robust than the frigates and had more resources with which to cope with any damage. Analyses were undertaken of the worst case attacks, for example direct Exocet hits, which led to the conclusion that there was no risk of a nuclear explosion, that the weapons were not vulnerable to fire or the detonation of high explosives in the magazines. The Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams with the Task Force had no real experience of nuclear systems—the only expertise was at Aldermaston. On the other hand an incident at sea would not carry the same risk to centres of population as would one in a home port. As a quick response would be impossible the greatest concern was in ensuring an accurate assessment before

any action was taken, initially handled by those on a strictly need to know basis. If the accident came under the most serious 'category three', leading to radioactive contamination, then embarrassing publicity could not be avoided even if the effects were modest.

Another question was how this issue was to be handled should questions be asked. At one level this was straightforward. There was a standard formula to the effect that the presence of nuclear weapons at a particular location would never be confirmed nor denied. The Government would therefore avoid even getting into a discussion on the matter. The only further clarification believed to be required, provided in the form of a parliamentary answer, was that there was no intention to use nuclear weapons in the Falklands context. On 27 April Viscount Trenchard stated in the Lords 'categorically that there is no question at all of our using nuclear weapons in this dispute.' [9] There was occasional speculation—for example the German *Der Spiegel* carried a story that US enquiries had led to a British confirmation that not only were nuclear weapons being carried but that Woodward had permission to defend himself with them in very difficult circumstances. They would be used only if massive air attacks threatened the fleet (an unlikely role for depth charges).

After the sinking of the Type 42 destroyer, *Sheffield* there was some speculation, encouraged by the Soviet Union, that the ship had been carrying nuclear weapons and indeed had been scuttled deliberately to prevent radioactive contamination. Allegations were also made that nuclear depth charges had to be recovered from the sunk *Coventry* as well as *Sheffield*. [10] Officials in the Soviet embassy in Buenos Aires were reported to have spread this canard, with the appearance of a number of dead penguins being cited as evidence of the spread of nuclear contamination. [11] *Sheffield's* surveillance round had in fact been removed in mid-April and *Coventry's* before the San Carlos landing. The diving activity noted around the wreck of the *Coventry,* which encouraged speculation, was the result of its accessibility and the consequent need to remove classified equipment. *Sheffield* sank at a depth well beyond diving range.

Attention was drawn again to the nuclear issue in November 1982 with the publication of a collection of letters from a RN Officer, David Tinker, who was killed during the last days of the war. He referred to what he presumed to be a dummy nuclear depth charge on RFA *Fort Austin* (which was quite possible). This led at least one journalist to obtain confirmation that nuclear depth charges reached the South Atlantic, and that *Fort Austin* had collected them to get them back to Britain. The main effect of this story, however, was to revive the mistaken speculation about *Sheffield*. [12]

When asked about the presence of nuclear weapons, British officials stuck to the standard line of 'neither confirm nor deny'. The *Sheffield* question did lead to a modification of this policy, after the war, to a parliamentary statement, requested by the FCO, to the effect that there had never been any incident involving a British nuclear weapon leading to its loss nor to the dispersal of radio-active contamination. [13] In December 2003, after repeated requests by Rob Evans of the *Guardian* for information about nuclear accidents under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, MoD acknowledged that nuclear depth charges had been taken to the South Atlantic, and returned, and that at some point the door housing to one container had received some damage. [14]

Ascension Island

In planning for Falklands contingencies, the lack of an airhead either on or close to the Falklands had always been seen as a major impediment to appropriate reinforcement but the availability of Ascenscion Island helped considerably. Ascension Island is situated over 3,700 nautical miles from the UK and 3,300 miles from the Falkland Islands. This British Dependency, devoid of native population, was used on leasehold terms by various authorities including Cable and Wireless, the BBC, the United States Air Force (USAF) and the United States National Aeronautical and Space Agency (NASA). Including a local labour force brought in from St Helena, there were some 1,100 inhabitants. Its most vital facility was Wideawake airfield (named after a local species of bird). This had a 10,000 ft runway, built by the Americans during the Second World War and operated by Pan-American Airways, under an agreement with the US Government.

In principle the 1962 agreement allowed British military use at any time required. [15] It did not take much contemplation of a map to realise the potential importance of Ascension Island. It was the only possible option as a forward mounting base. Here the ships of the Task Force could be replenished and provided with the stores, equipment and men that could not be embarked before their hurried departure from Britain. [16] The value of Ascension was enhanced by access to facilities at Dakar in Senegal on the west coast of Africa. By refuelling at Dakar Hercules could carry heavier loads on their way to Ascension.

Ensuring constant and unimpeded access to the facilities at Ascension was one of the first priorities, once it was decided that the Task Force should set sail. One sensitive area was that replenishment of bulk fuel on the Island was an American responsibility. The fuel demands were about to rise steeply and this would require special efforts by the American side that arguably would go well beyond the expectations of impartiality. Fuel storage did not allow for much more than weekly transport to service the US satellite tracking station and further replenishment was not due until 14 April. The US Admiral in charge of logistics at the Pentagon was told that Britain needed an eight million-gallon tanker full of aviation fuel within the next seven days—and would need this regularly. By 13 April the US had agreed that 950,000 US gallons of fuel could be used by British forces out of the 1.2 million gallons that remained in Ascension. There was also the possibility that the British could use the US reserve fuel stockpile in an emergency. At one stage this was permitted because of a problem with a tanker. [17] On 19 April stocks were reported as 700,000 gallons; by 25 April—when a re-supply tanker with 2.4 million gallons began to unload—it was down to 120,000 gallons. At this point the Americans agreed to make available all fuel on Ascension, including their own reserve. Eventually, the British provided their own fuel but its storage required American facilities. There was a shortage of water, which had to be rationed, sewerage, accommodation and other basic facilities.

Wideawake was only accustomed to dealing with three movements each week. Its facilities were limited and its technical and domestic back-up were totally inadequate. Suddenly it became an extraordinarily busy base. The necessary engineering, freight handling, weapon loading and administrative support brought the establishment from nothing to over 800 officers and men of all three services within three weeks. Just before the Argentine invasion, units sent to Ascension included an RM Blowpipe detachment,

airfield enhancement units, Lynx and Wessex helicopters and their flight personnel. Soon men and equipment were arriving at the rate of about five RAF transport flights each day: RN and RAF personnel to manage the logistics, detachments of the Special Air Service (SAS) and Special Boat Service (SBS), a mass of stores, equipment and men for Task Force ships, as well as two Wessex for work on the island. An RAF complement of about 180 dealt with six Hercules and two VC10 transport flights each day as well as operating between two and four Nimrods stationed at Wideawake. The arrival of five Victors would more than double the personnel numbers. The RN party of about 50 had one Sea King and two Wessex. In addition, there were usually men waiting to join ships. Eventually Ascension's role became much more than logistic support, as preparations had to be made to mount RAF operations from the island. It came to support up to 17 Victors, three Vulcans, four Hercules, four Nimrods, two air defence aircraft and two support helicopters.

The management of the limited facilities at Ascension became a challenge. Aircraft not required for the moment often had to be parked back in the UK or Gibraltar. Furthermore, the RAF had to relearn the conduct of long distance operations. The service had increasingly become geared to the demands of the European cold war. Only Victor aircraft were fitted for air-to-air refuelling and long distant flights tended to be no more than crossing the Atlantic to exercises in North America. Within a few weeks aircraft were modified to take extra fuel while Vulcan and Nimrod aircraft were fitted so that they could refuel in air. The Hercules aircraft became adept at dropping critical spares into the water close to the Task Force ships and then fishing them out.

As the various components of the Task Force reached Ascension—the *Antrim* group on 10 April, the SPRINGTRAIN ships on 12 April, the *Hermes* group on 16 April, *Invincible* and *Fearless* on 17 April—stores and personnel transfer flights among the ships grew accordingly, reaching a peak of several hundred each day on 17 and 18 April. It was of particular importance for the Amphibious re-load although this was hampered by the lack of suitable beaches, limited by their steep gradients, soft sand, heavy surf, and their use as a turtle breeding ground!

To start with Fieldhouse was largely concerned about the potential for difficulties with the Americans. Too much was dependent upon the goodwill of the USAF Commander and a handful of Pan Am employees, although so far there had been no complaints about their responsiveness to the tremendous pressure they suddenly faced. When the issue arose over the potential use of the Island as a base for Vulcan raids against Stanley airfield, which the USAF Base Commander believed might fall outside of the Anglo-American agreement, Fieldhouse argued that the time had come to re-examine the lease as a matter of urgency to ensure Britain had full control of the facilities for the duration of the operation. He wanted to make the senior naval officer, who had arrived on 8 April, overall commander of the Island base and the senior RAF officer the airfield commander. The view in MoD was that the rapid build-up on the Island had led to inevitable problems but that the position should stabilise. The preference was to sort out difficulties with the Americans rather than renegotiate the agreement, especially as the arrangements were generally working well.

In the event the main tensions were less between the British and Americans than between the Navy and the RAF. Captain McQueen, Commander British Forces Support Unit (CBFSU), had under his command all British forces stationed on the Island in the

logistic and administrative support of CORPORATE. He was responsible for the effective and efficient operation of all the facilities and also their security. In this role he was answerable to the Vice Chief of Defence Staff (P&L), not CINCFLEET. He also had the delicate job of liasing with the Commander United States Forces Ascension Island. Beneath him there was a rather complex command structure. There were three single-service commanders on Ascension Island, each responsible to McQueen but accountable to their own commanders-in-chief for all had their own views of priorities. From the vantage point of Northwood, the Air Commander, Air Marshal Curtiss, for example, felt that it was incorrect to see Ascension Island purely in terms of naval logistics. In command terms, the focus on logistics, which was organised through MoD, took Ascension Island out of Northwood's direct control. It was true that Northwood could barely cope with existing demands, but real problems were bound to arise under this arrangement, as they did as Ascension became a base for large-scale air operations. In a directive to Group Captain M F J Tinley, the senior RAF officer, Ascension Island, on 14 April, Curtiss stressed that he was to 'ensure that any matters which you are unable to resolve and/or which significantly detract from the efficient and effective employment of RAF resources located at Ascension Island are immediately brought to the attention of the Air Commander'. This officer was not responsible for operations of the Air Transport Force which would continue to be tasked and controlled under normal arrangements.

There could never be a neat division between operations, for which Tinley was responsible to Curtiss, and administration, for which he was responsible to McQueen, and as the operational requirements changed dramatically so did the issues that had to be resolved. It could be hard to extract quick and appropriate decisions from the Central Staff in London, at the same time as having to cope with numerous requests for information and apparently irrelevant communications coming back in the other direction. From the RAF's point of view, all these problems were aggravated by the apparent failure of McQueen to appreciate their tasks and the requirements these generated. The operational issues began to loom large, after CBFSU had been given his own directive. As he was still working through VCDS(P&L), the RAF suspected he was not getting advice from his immediate superiors on the operational demands because they too lacked the full picture. The airmen saw themselves as improvising unusual and demanding operations, as ordered by Northwood, well outside their normal training and experience. To McQueen the purposes of the Vulcan and Nimrod operations, with their heavy use of tankers, seemed disproportionately expensive in terms of Ascension's scarce resources. He would not have been alone in the RN if he felt that the RAF were desperate to get into the Falklands act in some way, and that this had clouded their collective judgement about the real value of the Vulcan operation in particular. Nor was he convinced that the RAF had made much effort to trim where possible, particularly in deploying personnel to the Island, or in sorting out their own command arrangements.

Another indication of anxiety was concern that Argentina might try to disrupt the British operation at Ascension Island. When, on 17 April Northwood asked MoD for an assessment of the threat to Ascension, the reply was 'negligible'. Then on 25 April the Argentine merchant ship *Rio de la Plata* was identified a few miles off shore, and there was a concern that it might have been monitoring communications for a couple of days or even infiltrating saboteurs. There were also indications, probably spurious, of underwater attack. Nothing was found, but the result was a much higher state of alert ashore and in

the anchorage. On 29 April another Argentine merchant ship, the *Glaciar Perito Moreno,* was detected to the north. After being shadowed by *Antelope* it passed clear and continued south. On the same day there was a report that a Soviet intelligence-gathering vessel, *Primorye* was approaching from the north. This vessel remained off Ascension for the duration of the conflict. The Argentine effort, such as it was, was devoted to intelligence gathering rather than any disruptive activity.

The appearance of the *Rio de la Plata* nonetheless led to a reassessment of the threat. On 27 April the Chiefs of Staff had a short discussion of the issue, leading to a request for an assessment from the DIS. In addition to the visit by the *Rio de la Plata* one source had also mentioned a possible covert Argentine attack on Ascension, probably making use of a 707 aircraft. If successful this could be a major propaganda coup as well as potentially causing sufficient physical damage to interfere with British operations. Possible targets included the airfield and the parked British aircraft, water and power supplies, and, if relations between Argentina and the US broke down, the fuel storage sites. More daring still would be an attack from the sea, using Special Forces, or midget submarines deployed from Argentina or neutral merchant ships.

The risk was small. Argentine Special Forces had scant opportunity to deploy covertly into appropriate ships, which would then have to reach Ascension undetected and disembark on a rocky coast. It was highly unlikely that the aircraft carrier would be risked on such a mission, which meant that no Argentine combat aircraft would be within range. Even air-to-air refuelling would not allow for a return journey to Argentina. There were some 14 civil and military aircraft (747 and 707) with sufficient range which could land an attack force, but this would have to be a small force at risk to changes in weather and inaccurate drops. To get surprise an aircraft might be disguised as neutral, simulating an emergency that called for a diversion into Ascension, or operating at night. This risk could not quite be ruled out, especially if the 'Junta wanted a propaganda coup that could also severely damage our lines of communication'. In addition Ascension would be presented as an exclusive military target. Small as it was, when the Chiefs discussed this risk on 29 April, they decided that it had to be addressed, and that this would best be achieved by early warning radar, and some troops for ground defence. A reconnaissance team was sent to Ascension, as were small arms for about 400 of the 600 British servicemen there. For the moment RN ships provided adequate air defence but an early warning radar detachment was placed at 48 hours notice to move. In addition, the Sea Harriers flying out to join the *Atlantic Conveyor* were put at air defence readiness on arrival.

In early May it was agreed that a Wing Headquarters and one Flight of the RAF Regiment and an air defence early warning radar should be sent to Ascension Island as soon as possible. By this time there were sufficient small arms for two thirds of British forces at Ascension, a Guardship had been sent, three GR3 Harriers had been made available and Nimrod flights were providing cover of the area around Ascension. On 10 May, ROE for Harrier GR3 aircraft in the air defence of Ascension Island were signalled. These required that aircraft approaching Ascension by day or night had to be identified by any means available and that any aircraft committing a hostile act or visually identified as Argentine combat aircraft could be destroyed. 'Aircraft Captains' were 'authorised to destroy without warning aircraft operating within 100nm radius of Ascension Island'.

Fieldhouse remained concerned: it was not that he was worried by a Hercules unloading Argentine troops at Ascension, it might drop incendiary devices which could be devastating against Britain's tightly packed aircraft parking facilities at Ascension. He wanted an air defence aircraft such as Lightning, but the Air Commander on Ascension warned that this would cause too many operating difficulties. Instead three Phantoms were to be made available for the air defence of Ascension. They took over from the Harrier GR3s on 24 May. At least one senior naval officer felt that Fieldhouse 'was slightly piling on the threat to Ascension Island but nonetheless supported his general approach'. He was not alone. Nott was also concerned that not enough was being done, to the point that Lewin had to reassure him privately that sufficient protection was now in place.

5
FIRST ASSESSMENTS

On 5 April, Woodward wrote that this had been 'the first day since leaving Gibraltar that there has been sufficient time to look much more than one day ahead! Not short of ideas: very short of answers'. Two days later he was 'particularly keen that everyone should face up to the real possibility of war and the way that most habits will have to change'. He had emphasised that whatever happens, 'we have a very long haul ahead and that our ships are our homes and they need tender loving care if they are ever to get us home'.

Those involved with CORPORATE, military and civilian alike, hoped that the military effort could produce a diplomatic solution before more blood had been shed. At the same time, if in the end it all came down to the quality of the military operation, then diplomatic considerations could come to be seen as the source of unnecessary constraints. From the moment the first ships set sail the requirements of the military tasks ahead had to be met within the terms set by prevailing political circumstances. These were military tasks that had barely been taken at all seriously in earlier analyses. Plans for retaking the Falkland Islands had never progressed beyond sketch form, sufficient to make the point that this would be a deeply unattractive operation to undertake, bordering on the hopeless. Such entirely hypothetical ventures were not deemed worth more than a few paragraphs. Officials who had recently been expressing doubts about the wisdom of expending any resources on the Falklands did not turn into sudden enthusiasts. They remained convinced that even success would mean a bothersome, expensive commitment, lasting as long as the Argentine conviction that the Falklands were theirs, that is indefinitely.

When the question of whether the Falklands could be retaken was posed seriously within MoD on 2 April 1982, the answer therefore was inevitably discouraging. If war began there was no certain conclusion. Much of course would depend on Argentina, and in particular the size of the force it was able to establish on the Islands, its disposition and its ability to resupply and reinforce that force from the mainland. It was also a matter of the reliability of British intelligence on all of this. At the time the data bank of material on Argentine forces was virtually empty, with no information on even the details of Argentina's most recent arms acquisitions. If the Argentine concept of operations to hold on to the Malvinas had been known, it might have been consoling that this was in as sketchy a form as was Britain's to recapture them. Argentine planners had rarely thought much beyond the initial occupation of the Malvinas and had never supposed that they would have to be defended.

The margins were tight. In the first rush a naval force large enough to defend itself and defeat the enemy in air and sea engagements had been sent, backed up by a land force able to mount an amphibious assault. If the naval force had to stay in position for an extended period then elements of it would need at some point to be replaced: if the land force was to do more than establish a presence then it was probably too small: if more troops were to be sent then that would impose extra demands on the already stretched sea