

Argentine invaders claim the Falklands have surrendered

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Argentine troops landed on the Falkland Islands during the early hours of yesterday morning in an invasion involving all three of the country's powerful armed forces.

An Argentine navy spokesman claimed that within 12 hours of the initial landing the British Governor, Mr Rex Hunt, had surrendered.

The Argentinians reported that one of their naval officers - apparently a frogman - had been killed and two soldiers injured during the early stages of the takeover.

The Argentine Navy said in a communiqué that its casualties occurred when British Marines resisted an initial landing. It added that in a tough clash a captain was killed and a lieutenant and a corporal was wounded when the first wave of Argentine troops disembarked. The communiqué said that there were no civilian or military casualties among the British subjects.

Argentina also announced that the South Georgias, a further 950 miles to the east of had also been occupied. This is where a group of Argentine citizens landed illegally two weeks ago yesterday, sparking the dispute between Argentina and Britain.

The first reports of the invasion were made in the Buenos Aires press, although rumours that an invasion was imminent had persisted for much of the preceding day.

By the middle of the week Argentine officials were privately giving warning that the 149-year-old dispute between the two countries over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands and dependencies would be resolved "one way or another".

The first landing is said to have been made by Marines at Cape Pembroke, three miles from the Falkland Islands capital of Port Stanley.

However, reports differed over the timing of this first landing. The leading Buenos Aires daily, La Nacion - which is generally recognised as expressing the views of the armed forces - reported that a commando-style raid had been launched at about midnight.

But unconfirmed reports quoted navy sources as suggesting that the troops may have landed as early as 10pm on Thursday - about the time that when the Argentine Foreign Minister, Mr Nicanor Costa Mendez, was saying that the rapidly worsening quarrel with Britain was in the hands of the United Nations.

The Marines were said to have seized the airport near Port Stanley within the first two hours and planeloads of other soldiers were reportedly flown in.

The Argentines blacked out communications and the position of a group of British marines stationed on the main island was not clear.

The first indication that a serious invasion attempt was under way came with reports suggesting that the Argentines had dispatched almost all their fleet to the South Atlantic. "Everything that can float is out there," said one defence source.

Heavy military activity was also reported on shore during Thursday, particularly at the air force's main transport group base at El Palomar, near the north-western industrial city of Cordoba.

From there, it was suggested, crack troops had been moved to Atlantic coast ports and air bases near Rio Gallegos and Comodoro Rivadavia, well in the south of the federal capital and roughly in line with the Falklands.

Military sources also said that the Argentines had at least six ships in the region of the South Georgias including the former British aircraft carrier, The 25th of May. The fleet sailing to the trouble zone was said to be under the command of Rear Admiral Wallara.

The flotilla near the South Georgias - the centre of increasing tension as the dispute worsened through the course of this week - included two French-built missile corvettes, Drummond and Granville, perhaps three destroyers, a submarine and Argentina's only large tanker supply ship.

Diplomatic sources here suggest that the British decision to send the nuclear-powered submarine, Superb, and other warships to the area may have persuaded the Argentine military of the need to go for a pre-emptive strike before reinforcements reached the zone.

The immediate indications were that the Argentine Government intends the takeover to be permanent and not just a demonstration of power or a brusque negotiating tactic designed to push London into making concessions during future negotiations over the sovereignty of the islands.

They have been under British rule since they were occupied by British troops in 1833.

Diplomatic sources think that Buenos Aires's attitude in future talks with the British will be that the discussions should primarily be about the orderly transfer of power.

President Galtieri, in a celebratory speech, said that the decision to seize the islands had arisen from "the necessity to put an end to the evasions of Great Britain in order to perpetuate its dominion over the islands and the zone of influence".

Argentina would not go back on its occupation of the islands because of threats from Britain.

The Government's first statement - in which it claimed already to have returned the Falklands to Argentine rule - spoke of Argentine citizens having to make an "extreme sacrifice in carrying out the objectives we have imposed upon ourselves".

This statement also alluded to Argentine troops "in combat" to recover the islands.

In Buenos Aires, where curiously, two popular weekly magazines had published long "hypothetical" reports of how an Argentine occupation of the Falkland Islands might have been achieved this week, the initial reaction to the news was generally subdued.

However, this rapidly gave way to patriotic fervour - there was a demonstration in the city's central square, the Poazode Mayo, and calls for president Leopoldo Galtieri to appear. Taxis bearing the national flag moved in columns around the streets of the city, with their drivers tooting their horns with joy.
