

## Explosions and Breakthroughs

*Por George Russell, Time Magazine, Lunes 7 de Junio de 1982, Nueva York, Estados Unidos*

The British lose ships—and gain ground

Suddenly, a bridgehead became a blitzkrieg last week in the embattled Falkland Islands. Members of Britain's Parachute Regiment moved rapidly out of their hard-won corner of East Falkland near the settlement of Port San Carlos, taken by invasion only a week earlier, and descended 20 miles south near the settlement of Darwin.

Using helicopters to hop across the boggy ground, the crack British troops confronted an Argentine garrison once estimated at about 600. There were reports of sharp fighting, and then the British Defense Ministry tersely announced that Her Majesty's troops had captured both Darwin and the neighboring settlement of Goose Green, site of an important airfield. Said Defense Ministry Spokesman Ian McDonald: "The Argentines suffered casualties, and some prisoners were taken." British casualties, said McDonald, were light.

Meanwhile, British Royal Marine commandos, backed by 7.8-ton Scorpion tanks, which move with relative ease through swampy areas, had begun their own breakout from the beachhead. Traveling eastward from Port San Carlos, they were moving along roads that were no more than rutted tracks toward the Falklands capital of Port Stanley, 50 miles away. Their aim: to launch an attack on some 7,500 troops dug in around the settlement, the bulk of the force that precipitated the South Atlantic crisis with their own invasion of the bleak islands on April 2.

The British troops were maintaining radio silence, and the Defense Ministry was keeping a tight control on what it blandly called "offensive land operations." Nonetheless, the dual attack showed signs of being a classic pincer movement. The outnumbered 5,000-man British force was relying on surprise and mobility to take the battle to the enemy. Only a day after British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher told the House of Commons that "our troops are moving forward," the British had taken a long stride toward the goal of winning the fierce, stubborn and frustrating war for possession of the Falklands.

In Buenos Aires, the government of Argentine President Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri was slow to admit the recapture of Darwin or the general thrust of the British advance. Instead, the junta announced that a raid by British troops in helicopters had been repelled at Darwin, near Goose Green, the second largest settlement in the sparsely populated Falklands, and that a Harrier had been shot down at Port Stanley. Insisted Brigadier General Basilic Lami Dozo, commander of the Argentine air force: "The battle is going well for us. We have our capacity intact."

But the battle did not seem to be going well for Argentina, and at the very least a ferocious war had entered yet another stage—the British were poised for a major assault, and perhaps a bloody one, on Port Stanley.

In the days before the offensive began, the Argentine air force had done its determined best to keep the British penned up in their expanding bridgehead. As the Port San Carlos landing area grew from a toehold on a rocky shore into a substantial area, Argentine pilots flew sortie after sortie against the warships and supply vessels that moved through narrow Falkland Sound, and the results at times were devastating

for Britain's warships. As they have all along, the claims from London and Buenos Aires varied greatly about the course of the spectacular war of attrition offshore. Britain reported the loss of a missile-bearing frigate, H.M.S. Antelope, destroyed when a bomb in its midsection exploded as efforts were being made to defuse it (see photograph at right); a destroyer, H.M.S. Coventry, sunk by bombing; and a supply vessel, the Atlantic Conveyor, disabled and abandoned. The Conveyor was hit by the same type of Exocet missile that sank the British destroyer H.M.S. Sheffield four weeks ago. Including another frigate, H.M.S. Ardent, sunk on May 22, Britain said it had lost five ships in the struggle to regain the islands, but Argentina claimed Royal Navy losses were higher than that.

Reports of general losses were even more conflicting. The British claimed to have shot down a total of 69 Argentine aircraft, about one-third of Argentina's air force, since the Falklands fighting began. The Argentine government said those figures were much too high, and the truth was probably somewhere in between.

As the bitter war seemed to be nearing its climax, both sides had gained grudging respect for their adversary's fighting powers. Said British Defense Secretary John Nott: "I think the Argentine pilots have shown great bravery." Still, Prime Minister Thatcher declared: "We in Britain know the reality of war. We know its hazards and its dangers. Despite these grievous losses, neither our resolve nor our confidence is weakened."

The military government of President Galtieri, 55, showed no more signs of bending than the British. On May 25, Galtieri and his fellow junta members, Admiral Jorge Isaac Anaya, 55, and Brigadier General Lami Dozo, 53, took part in a Mass and Te Deum in Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Cathedral that celebrated the 172nd anniversary of Argentina's equivalent of the Declaration of Independence. Said Galtieri afterward: "At this time of patriotism, the sons of our land from the army, navy and air force will be singing the national anthem, even in their trenches." Galtieri publicly rebuffed a conciliatory letter from President Ronald Reagan marking the anniversary. In a return letter, Galtieri declared that Argentina was "surprised" at the support that the U.S. was giving Britain in the Falklands conflict and declared Reagan's affirmation of common interests and values uniting Argentina and the U.S. to be "incomprehensible under the present circumstances."

Those circumstances included growing U.S. matériel support for Britain. Alexander Haig had promised that support when the U.S. abandoned a month-long mediating effort and swung behind Britain, on the principle that unprovoked Argentine aggression could not be condoned. In the early 3 stages of the Falklands crisis, Washington's support for London consisted largely of providing some intelligence information and fuel supplies for the British armada at Ascension Island, the closest British staging area to the Falklands. That help has now been extended to cover a broad range of war goods, such as Sidewinder missiles, which the British could use to replace those fired by the task force Harrier jump jets, and Stinger portable anti-aircraft missiles in U.S. Army supply depots in West Germany.

Even as Britain and Argentina stiffened their resolve, efforts continued to find a diplomatic solution. At the U.N., the Security Council voted after lengthy debate to instruct Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuellar to "negotiate mutually acceptable terms for a ceasefire" between London and Buenos Aires. He was given a week to try to achieve this impossible task before reporting back to the council.

Yet another attempt to provide a moderating influence was made by Pope John Paul II. On the eve of a long-scheduled six-day visit to Britain, the Pontiff announced that he would also visit staunchly Roman Catholic Argentina. In a letter to President Galtieri, John Paul promised that his British visit would be "an incessant prayer in favor of peace."

As the fighting went on, the international implications of the crisis continued to grow. In Brussels, Britain received a strong boost from its European allies. Eight of ten members of the European Community, including France and West Germany, voted to extend indefinitely economic sanctions that the Community had leveled against Argentina following its April 2 invasion of the islands. British Foreign Minister Francis Pym declared himself "grateful" at the decision, even though Ireland and Italy refused to join in the measure.

In Washington, at an emergency meeting of the 31-member Organization of American States called to discuss Britain's Falklands landing, Argentina made a strong bid to rally Latin American nations to its side (see following story). The Reagan Administration was also concerned about a vague threat by Argentine officials that if the Falklands conflict proved lengthy, Buenos Aires might turn for help to Moscow, its largest trading partner. The Soviets are already believed to be providing Argentina with intelligence information via two spy satellites now orbiting over the South Atlantic.

But all last week's diplomatic maneuvering was no more than a side issue compared to the vicious immediacy of the fighting. By choosing to invade Port San Carlos on the narrow Falkland Sound, the British had taken a considerable risk. Only 15 miles wide near Port San Carlos, the waterway gave the British fleet little maneuvering room against air attack. That problem was compounded by the fundamental weakness of the task force: its lack of adequate air cover and of an early-warning system like the U.S. AWACS aircraft. With only 36 Harrier jets aboard the armada's aircraft carriers, *Hermes* and *Invincible*, Task Force Commander John "Sandy" Woodward had to take the chance of using missile-bearing warships as part of his frontline anti-aircraft defense. His tactic: to establish a British naval "gun line" around the vulnerable assault ships, supply vessels and troopships that actually carried out the landing.

Argentina reacted to the challenge with skill and daring. Brigadier General Lami Dozo ordered as many as 72 warplanes at a time into the air, everything from Pucará attack planes to Mirage III and Dagger fighter-bombers and A-4 Skyhawk bombers. The aircraft swooped down on the San Carlos inlet from the west and from the south, their pilots showing little regard for safety as they tried to get at the fleet. In groups of up to three at a time, they raced the full length of the San Carlos anchorage on their low-level attacks. At times they flew so low that spray flecked their canopies.

On the sea below, there was disciplined pandemonium. Klaxons howled as British seamen rushed to red alert stations. Machine guns hammered a deafening staccato and Sea Dart and Seawolf missiles aboard British destroyers and frigates locked on to targets and then whooshed away in clouds of smoke and flame. Land-based Rapier anti-aircraft missiles joined the fray, as did the nimble Harriers with their Sidewinder missiles (see box). The attacking Argentine pilots could see the missiles zooming toward them and hear the gunfire, but they continued to press their attacks. Said one military attache: "They are bloody good flyers with plenty of courage." After a bombing run, one Argentine pilot said: "The adrenaline races through you. Instinct takes over. You do everything you have learned and practiced over and over again until you had

nightmares about it. There is no time to think, no time for anything. A split second freezes until you pull out and up into the high blue. When you land you are drenched with sweat like you've been in a shower. Your legs won't stop shaking."

One pilot flew so low over the frigate Antelope that his aircraft scraped against the ship's mast. A 500-lb. bomb penetrated the frigate's midsection, where it failed to detonate. The ship limped slowly up the Bay of San Carlos, giving off smoke, and British bomb-disposal experts were sent aboard to see if they could defuse the bomb. The main assignment fell to Staff Sergeant James Prescott, 37, of the Royal Engineers. "One twitch, Dad, and you're dead," he had once told his father about his work. The bomb exploded and he died instantly.

Fire spread swiftly from the water line to the deck. Landing craft hurried to the Antelope to lift off the crew and transfer them to other ships. More explosions sent sparks and debris high into the air as the frigate burned through the night. At dawn, the hulk was still glowing red, one side ripped open. Finally, hours later, the Antelope sank.

The British were braced for particularly heavy attacks against the fleet on May 25, to coincide with Argentina's National Day celebrations. Waves of Skyhawk bombers soon began screaming over Falkland Sound. The Coventry, helped by other vessels, shot down four of the attackers but was hit and sunk by later sorties. Then the 14,946-ton Atlantic Conveyor, a merchant ship hired for the task force, was attacked by two of Argentina's deadliest type of warplane: the French-built Super-Etendard fighters that carry the sea-skimming Exocet missile. The aircraft fired their weapons from a distance of about 28 miles. One missed the Conveyor; the other struck home. Though the vessel stayed afloat, the crew abandoned ship. Loss of the Conveyor was particularly painful for the British: the ship was carrying a large load of invasion equipment, possibly including heavy troop-carrying Chinook helicopters and spare parts for the Harriers. What made the attack on the freighter especially disturbing for the British was that the Conveyor reportedly was within sight of the carrier Hermes when struck. Presumably, the Hermes was the real target; the Argentines had taken aim at the wrong blip on their radar screens.

The loss of the two ships marked Britain's bleakest day in the war. In the House of Commons, Defense Secretary Nott announced that recent additions to the British task force (an additional three destroyers, four frigates, two submarines and a large minesweeper joined the fleet last week) more than balanced its losses in the past few weeks. Said Nott: "The task force has more escort vessels today than a week ago."

But to bolster its forces in the South Atlantic, Britain had to slash its commitment to NATO. Between one-half and two-thirds of the Royal Navy's operational warships are now in the task force, leaving a large gap in North Atlantic defenses. Normally, the British are responsible for 70% of NATO'S antisubmarine defenses in the eastern Atlantic zone, particularly between Iceland, Greenland and the Danish Faeroe Islands. The U.S. Navy has now taken over those responsibilities, leading U.S. Chief of Naval Operations Thomas Hayward to worry: "We are pushing the Navy as hard as you can push it in peacetime." Argentina was also being increasingly hard-pressed by the war and was searching world markets for spare parts and weapons. In particular, the Argentines were seeking Exocet missiles. Originally, there were believed to be only six in the country's arsenal, and four have already been fired. Only a few other countries in the world might have Exocets to sell. Among them: Iraq, Pakistan, South Africa and

Peru. The latter has already offered Argentina military support. A Peruvian navy vessel, attempting to take delivery of eight Exocets in France two weeks ago, was informed by French officials that the missiles were unavailable for "technical reasons." France has embargoed sales of the missile to Argentina.

The harsh news of British losses at sea only seemed further to stiffen the resolve of Prime Minister Thatcher. Aides described her as being completely confident of her position, completely in command of herself. The personal traits that have made her so many political enemies—her combative nature, her refusal to bend to indecision or doubt—had singularly suited her to fulfilling the role of a wartime Prime Minister. General Galtieri may look haggard and Foreign Secretary Pym troubled, but Thatcher, close up, showed not a bit of strain. Her firm, clear voice ringing through the House of Commons, she defended her position while the rows of Tories behind her rumbled their approval.

Addressing a Tory women's conference last week, the Prime Minister, a deadly serious figure dressed all in black, said, "To those—not many—who speak lightly of a few islanders beyond the seas and who ask the question 'Are they worth fighting for?' let me say this: right and wrong are not measured by a head count. That would not be principle but expediency." The Conservative women gave her a standing ovation.

Confident of victory, Thatcher and her top advisers have already mapped out a tough course of action to determine the future of the Falkland Islands. The plan, says a top British official, is predicated "on total surrender of the Argentine forces on the Falklands." After a British triumph, reports TIME Correspondent Frank Melville, the captured Argentine troops would not immediately be repatriated to their homeland. They would be held as prisoners of war until the junta agreed in writing to a formal ceasefire, one that included air and naval units as well as ground forces. If necessary, Britain would move the Argentine prisoners to the United Kingdom until its demands were met. If the junta launched another invasion of the islands, or even continued air strikes, the Thatcher government would attack Argentine airbases on the mainland with long-range Vulcan bombers and commando raids.

Once the British had repossessed the Falklands, they would not feel bound by any understandings reached with the Argentines before the talks broke down. The affairs of the islands would be run not by any international body but by Rex Hunt, who would be returned to his post as governor. The British also intend to keep a garrison, initially of about 3,000 troops, on the Falklands indefinitely and to lengthen the runway at Port Stanley so that it could handle high-speed, longer-range jets such as Phantom multirole fighters and Buccaneer strike aircraft. If the need ever arose, these planes could carry out attacks on the Argentine mainland.

So adamant is Thatcher toward the junta that she would not agree to any face-to-face talks, private or public, by any British official with the Argentine government. Britain would hope to use as intermediaries either Secretary of State Haig or U.N. Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar. Their first job would be to convince the Argentines that they are in a no-win position with a Britain, says a top government official, that has both the "resources and will power to stick it out indefinitely in the Falklands." In the negotiations, the British would brush aside the Argentine insistence that talks lead to eventual Argentine sovereignty, although Thatcher's government does not rule out the prospect that the islands some day may indeed become Argentine. But that is a process that would take years, not months, in the British view. For one thing, the

islanders, whose wishes Thatcher insists on taking strictly into account, would clearly not vote in favor of joining the country that had just invaded them. Thatcher would also face a rebellion of Conservative backbenchers if she were to concede prejudgment of Argentine sovereignty after the loss of British lives in regaining control of the islands.

Leaving aside the question of the ultimate status of the islands, the British feel there must initially be a search for some kind of halfway solution. One possibility: a U.N. trusteeship for the Falklands. Another: an independent Falklands "nation." A third: a new Antarctic trusteeship that would include the Falklands.

Whatever is decided, Britain would want the security of the Falklands to be guaranteed by a number of countries in the Southern Hemisphere plus the U.S. Britain would also be faced with the cost of repairing the war damages, but would want to attract as many nations as possible to invest in developing the islands. Says Foreign Secretary Pym: "The best future for the islanders will be in rebuilding. If there is peace, stability and friendship in the whole region, people are more prosperous and their economic future is brighter." Pym also feels that the Falklands and Argentina must work out good relations if the islands are to prosper.

As the Thatcher government increased the pressure in the Falklands, it clearly had the support of the British people. Polls indicated that public approval of the Tories had actually risen after the invasion began and the casualties started to increase. One poll showed that 84% of those questioned backed Thatcher's handling of the challenge, in contrast to 60% when the task force was first dispatched to the South Atlantic.

Until the Falklands crisis, the Tory Party was registering a razor-thin lead, if any, over Labor and the newly formed alliance of Social Democrats and Liberals.

In the latest poll, 51% endorsed the Tories, 25% Labor, and 22% the Social Democrat-Liberal alliance. Said a senior Thatcher aide of the British spirit: "We do take a long time to rouse. We avoid it. But when we are roused, there's no stopping us. The ordinary working man in this country is a much tougher bastard than he is given credit for."

But the losses in the Falkland Islands sobered the British public about the war. The excitement, tinged with jingoism, of the early days of the conflict was gone; the destruction of four warships of the Royal Navy was a jolt. Telegrams of sympathy from across Britain, and from Canada, Australia and the U.S., poured into Plymouth, home port of the Ardent and the Antelope. Lord Mayor Reg Scott said his city's mood was one of "grief tempered with determination."

For the first time, Queen Elizabeth referred in public to the Falklands fighting as she opened the Kielder Dam in Northumberland. Her voice filled with emotion as she said, "Our thoughts today are with those who are in the South Atlantic and our prayers are for their success and a safe return to their homes and loved ones. But ordinary life must go on." In Gloucestershire, Prince Charles was asked about Prince Andrew, second in line to the throne and a Sea King pilot aboard the Invincible. Prince Charles replied: "He's all right—just flying very busily. I don't think he's ever done so much flying in his life."

In Buenos Aires, the public mood throughout the invasion week was restrained and somber. On National Day, the ruling junta decreed that an atmosphere of "austerity and solemnity" should honor the occasion. Argentines were buoyed but not ecstatic at the news that John Paul II would visit the country, something that Argentina has greatly desired for years. Headlines in the local press claimed extravagant victories (THE ENGLISH HAVE SUFFERED 200 DEAD AND 800 WOUNDED), but few citizens could ignore their government's reluctant admission that 1) the British had established a beachhead on the Falklands and 2) the foothold was rapidly growing. More and more, Argentines were expressing a longing for peace. Said Produce Vendor Jose Oscar Moryda, as he tidied up his display of fruits and vegetables in the El Retiro market in central Buenos Aires: "If I knew the Pope was coming here specially to bring a solution to the war, it would be great. I suppose he might try, but events have gone so far I just don't know if even he can do anything."

On the flat, humid pampa, as the vast Argentine grasslands around the capital are known, there was still plenty of fierce gaucho pride and patriotism. Those sentiments ran deep in the town of Ranchos (pop. 2,500), a tidy cluster of one-story colonial Spanish houses around a square lined with whitewashed plátano trees, located about 120 miles southeast of Buenos Aires. The sons of two local families were on garrison duty in the Falklands. Renato E. Riva, editor of the town weekly *Here Is Ranchos*, said that "everyone knows when the families receive letters or a postcard." Fund raising for the war effort in Ranchos was proceeding well. The local rural agricultural society had collected more than \$200,000; a local radio station held a 48-hour telethon two weeks ago and raised \$36,000. According to Riva, the town's patriotism "has never been higher, but there is increasing anxiety that war may affect this haven of peace in ways none dare predict." Father Fidencio Gago, the parish priest, was holding a special Mass every evening, leading the community in a simple prayer: "We beseech you, Mary, Holy Mother of Christ, that peace will come soon."

In Liniers, a working-class dormitory suburb on the outskirts of the capital, one resident explained: "There may have been enthusiasm in the first days after Argentina regained the Malvinas [Falk lands], but no more. We are thinking of all the dead boys. The women want the war stopped at any cost. The men also want an end to the shooting, but we must have a solution with dignity." Said a housewife as she trailed her small daughter by the hand through the local supermarket: "The whole thing is out of control. It's like determined children stamping their feet. Surely there are some grownups around on both sides who can talk in serious fashion, without guns."

But as the fighting increased on the ground last week and the British marched toward Port Stanley, the guns were doing all the talking.