

Fighting for the Falklands

Capt. Piers R. J. Page

"They landed approx 0930 GMT this morning in landing craft and stormed the capital Port Stanley and have taken over the government office - they landed with heavy armoured vehicles. We're now under their control. They are broadcasting that all local people will be treated as normal. Fairly peaceful in Stanley at present time."

With these words, transmitted by Bob McLeod broadcasting as VP8LP from Goose Green, the UK discovered at 1600 hrs London time on 2nd April 1982 that the Falkland Islands had been invaded by Argentine forces.

Background

The roots of the conflict (war never officially being declared by either side) lay several hundred years previously, in the rapid expansion of the empires of several European nations. In the 1690s the body of water between the islands was named after 5th Viscount Falkland, a future First Lord of the Admiralty, by John Strong as he sailed between them. In 1765, the western region was claimed for Britain by John Byron, on the grounds of their prior discovery. Unfortunately, the eastern reaches had been settled the year before by the French, who took exception to the British claim before selling the settlement to Spain a year later. Spain promptly took the British settlement in 1771, returning it shortly after.

In 1774, the British left, assuring continued possession by means of a brass plaque asserting the fact. Spanish government continued from Buenos Aires until 1816, when Argentina became independent and claimed inherited rights from Spain.

A brief but catastrophic period of Argentine rule, which included a spat with the USA culminating in an armed visit from the USS Lexington and a failed penal colony whose soldiers mutinied and killed its governor prompted a British return in 1833.

Over the following years, a British colony was established, which thrived throughout the colonial era. Much later, at the time of independence for many colonies, Lord Shackleton (grandson of explorer Ernest) was commissioned to explore the potential for viability and economic growth in the Falklands (during which his ship was fired upon by the Argentine navy). This inquiry found the islands to be net producers of wealth in British public purse terms, and to be stable, settled and self-managing. This was not the answer the Argentine government wanted to hear; when HMS Endurance, the naval exploration vessel was listed for withdrawal by May 1982 and the "Kelpers" of the Falklands were denied full British citizenship in 1981, the junta saw its opportunity.

South Georgia

First landed on by Captain James Cook, the barren island of South Georgia experienced an intense half century as an

industrial base for the South Atlantic whaling industry. By the mid 1960s, however, maritime engineering had produced the factory ship and there was no use for the giant factories on the shores of the island.



HMS Chatham off South Georgia

On 19th March 1982 an Argentine flag was seen flying at Leith, the centre of the old whaling station. It had been run up by Constantino Davidoff, a scrap merchant who had decided to dismantle the station.

The flag was run down after immediate British diplomatic action, but a further 7 days yielded no further co-operation; Davidoff had been ordered to present himself and his permit for the expedition to the British Antarctic Survey delegation on the island. He continued to resist this and by the 27th this Steptoe situation had escalated to the dispatch of a troop of British marines aboard Endurance, countered by the Argentine removal of nearly all the scrap men and replacement with their own marines. On the 27th, the writing was on the wall when two further missile boats arrived to support the Argentine marines and aircraft from the mainland remained almost constantly in the sky over Port Stanley.

What has never been clarified is the degree of orchestration of this event by Buenos Aires. It seems quite possible that the initial action was in fact spontaneous, but offered an ideal opportunity for the junta to escalate its provocation of Britain.

Britain awakes

On Wednesday 31st March John Nott, Margaret Thatcher's defence minister, visited her to tell her that signals intelligence confirmed preparations by the Argentine fleet for invasion of the Falklands. This would be news to very few, as the entire fleet were at sea and had deviated from the course of their normal spring exercise.

By Thursday evening, the Navy had committed a task force based around *Hermes* and *Invincible*, which it had vowed to put to sea by the Monday morning. Land forces were put on standby for immediate deployment and further ships set sail from Gibraltar to meet the force on its way south.

Contact! – 2 April

At 0230 contact was called amongst the waiting marines; a fleet could be seen assembling off Cape Pembroke, as intelligence

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had predicted. What was not predicted, however, was the arrival at 0430 of Argentine special forces by Puma helicopter at Mullet Creek, south-west of their expected approach on Port Stanley. They landed here unopposed and began their infiltration. Within two hours their fierce assault on the thankfully empty British marines' accommodation at Moody Brook demonstrated their will to win and destroyed any credibility the argument that they had aimed to take the islands without unnecessary losses might have had.

Simultaneously, a large force of Amtrack LVTP-7 armoured personnel carriers was reported to be coming ashore by the OP above Yorke Bay – already, 18 were rolling across the island.

Shortly after, assaults began on Government House, defended by the marines who had not formed the initial OP parties. Rex Hunt, Governor of the islands, called a meeting with Admiral Busser (leader of the invasion) and requested immediate Argentine withdrawal of forces. Busser replied that he felt with nearly 3000 men on the island and 2000 more in reserve at sea, he was unlikely to be made to leave.

At 0925, the minuscule force of marines surrendered to the 600 Argentine special forces who they had held at bay through the early morning. Argentina had the Falklands.

Within a day, South Georgia fell after a similarly heroic defence. Lt Mills of the Naval Party garrisoned at Stanley previously and due for replacement had taken 12 marines to the island after the escalation of the scrap metal affair. On 3rd April, an Argentine icebreaker ship hove into view, accompanied by one of the missile corvettes sent to reinforce the landed marines. As he watched the jetty he had booby-trapped awaiting further incursions, a Puma brought Argentine special forces to the island and discharged them in front of his face, whilst the missile boat brought fire down on the position. Mills immediately opened fire on the helicopter and one of his marines scored a waterline hit on the missile corvette with a Carl Gustav launcher. After ninety minutes of spirited defence, the inevitable was accepted and surrender agreed.

As Operation Corporate began, careers were ending. Lord Carrington had grossly underestimated Argentine will for the invasion and as such his diplomatic efforts as Foreign Secretary were far too little too late. He resigned, describing the invasion as “a humiliating affront to this country.” John Nott also tendered his resignation as Defence Secretary but Mrs. Thatcher, concerned that the outbreak of war was no time to be losing a cabinet, did not accept it.

Due South

The assembly of the task force saw the initiation of a measure last implemented in the second world war – “take up from trade” of merchant ships. It was on this basis that that P&O's flagship cruise vessel the SS Canberra sailed its final leg from Naples to Southampton for conversion to a giant troop ship.

As Canberra sailed home to its renaissance as the floating home of the land force, the rest of the task force set sail on the morning of Monday 5th April. *Hermes* and *Invincible* left Portsmouth with *Fearless*, an amphibious assault vessel with 8 landing craft in its wake. *Sir Galahad* and *Sir Geraint*, both logistics craft escorted by *Antelope*, steamed to join from Plymouth sound and await the arrival of their partner ship *Sir Tristan* from Canada. *Arrow* and *Plymouth* joined the carrier group in the channel as their escorts. Another key vessel was *Glamorgan*, a missile-destroyer carrying Admiral Woodward, commanding the task force.

While the impressively rapidly assembled task force sailed on towards the Falklands, *Canberra* metamorphosed from luxury liner to high-capacity troop ship. Its living quarters were chopped into tiny cabins and the swimming pool was drained to be fitted with a helicopter deck. This helipad would in time

become the less favoured of the two (the other being a sundeck), due to its alarming tendency to move with a helicopter in the hover above it.

Total recall

Having found the floating contingent, land forces were now needed. Brig Julian Thompson, commanding 3 Commando Brigade had been warned off 5 hours before the invasion; his brigade was now feverishly reassembling itself for war, just days after many units had returned from NATO exercises. 42 Cdo was based locally but on leave, so recall notices were issued and policemen sent to relatives' houses all over Britain to deliver the news to relaxing marines. 40 Cdo in the North-West and 45 Cdo in Arbroath began their preparations as 42 personnel streamed from all over Britain back to the South-West.

Further strength was needed, preferably at high readiness. 2nd and 3rd battalions of the Parachute Regiment fitted the bill, but were also dispersed on leave (the later famous CO 2 PARA, Lt Col H Jones was skiing in the French Alps when he heard of his unit's deployment). 2 and 3 PARA were recalled in a similar fashion – at one point, tannoy announcements could even be heard on London stations informing all Parachute Regiment personnel that they were to return to Aldershot immediately.



“H” Jones VC, Commanding Officer 2 Para

Background noise

As April wore on and the task force elements steamed south, other elements of the plan continued. Ascension “Wideawake” Island, over 1000 miles west of Africa, was to be used as a staging post and therefore had to be reinforced. An RAF deployable Marconi radar was quickly installed, giving a tactical perimeter to the island, and a fuel farm established. Wideawake had a vast runway for the American satellite station there, and with extra logistic support was the ideal outpost to support the operation.

Despite its excellent facilities, the British force still put great pressure on the infrastructure and visits were strictly limited, with several ships receiving their resupply by helicopter rather than putting ashore.

The assembled land forces on their respective ships put the cruising time to good use. Weapons were inspected, fired and stripped daily, the decks of Canberra reverberated to the sound of regimental PT and ceremonial bandsmen refreshed their skills as combat medics. Despite wearing conditions and frayed tempers, the British land forces were going to arrive ready to fight.

Back in the UK, a diplomatic effort slowly gathered momentum. Al Haig, the US ambassador to Britain, spotted

the diplomatic difficulties in the USA's twin interests of Britain against the Eastern Bloc and hard-right South American states (amongst whom Argentina was one of the foremost) against the central American Marxists. He volunteered himself to conduct negotiations personally, and consequently spent much of April in the air. Unfortunately, his fellow ambassador to the UN was not of a similar inclination and set a frosty backdrop to negotiation by attending an Argentine banquet on the night of the invasion and declaring that she could see no problem in Argentina repossessing its own islands. To Galtieri and his colleagues in power, a scantily opposed invasion of the islands followed by a senior US diplomat apparently showing support for their actions, suggested things were going very well indeed.

Over the first few days, though, some progress was made. The EEC nations showed surprising solidarity; several put in place immediate import sanctions (symbolically if not economically significant), with an EEC-wide order being put in place on 9th April. On 3rd April, the UN had passed resolution 502, permitting use of force to regain the sovereignty of the islands. The USSR had made objections but stopped short of using its veto, sensing an ultimate battle it did not wish to be on the losing side of.

Black Buck – 1 May

This was the name given to the nothing short of spectacular feat of delivering bombs onto (around, in the event) Port Stanley airfield by RAF Vulcan bomber. These behemoths of Cold War airpower were due retirement within weeks; this, their swansong, was a feat of logistics sadly unmatched by its tactical impact.



A Vulcan bomber

Staging out of Wideawake, the formation of 2 bombers and supporting Victor air-air refuellers set out on 1st May. The first Vulcan was obliged to turn back rapidly due to a technical fault, leaving Flt Lt Martin Withers to make the lonely journey in XM607 to the airfield. A complex system of sequential refuelling by the Victors ensured viability of the mission – at each stage, one tanker would give all its fuel back return and reserve quantities before turning for home. The final tankers gave more, in fact, than was safe, relying on calling a Victor back out from

Wideawake before reaching home.

When the bombs finally hit the airfield, some fell to the side causing minimal damage to the dispersal and parked aircraft, while some only cratered the runway. Just seconds after appearing, XM607 was on its way home, payload delivered. Although the tactical impact was short-lived with most damage repaired within the day, the impact on morale of Britain's capability to strike the heart of the invasion force from such a distance must have been significant. Withers won the DFC for flying this mission, and Sqd Ldr Bob Tuxford, pilot of the underfuelled Victor who had risked his life for the mission the AFC.

Follow-up sorties were made by the Sea Harriers of the task force, punching further holes in Argentine air capability and morale.

The Belgrano goes down – 2 May

For more than a week, the crew of *HMS Conqueror* had been tracking the movements of the *General Belgrano* after a warning from Chilean intelligence that she had put to sea in the direction of the task force. *Conqueror's* initial task was to watch and wait; as time wore on, however, it became obvious that the vessel was likely to be forming part of a pincer attack on the force. By the beginning of May, she was about to reach the shallower waters of the Total Exclusion Zone, into which *Conqueror* would not be able to follow her undetected.

It was unthinkable that the group should come under direct threat, even with the inevitability of the global condemnation that would follow an act of aggression such as this. *Conqueror* was, therefore, ordered to engage *Belgrano*. Several Mk 8 torpedoes struck her as she turned, exposing a massive target. The damage was catastrophic, and within the hour she was sunk. Predictably, this caused outrage in many quarters – even the British press quickly quelled their riotous headlines such as “*Gotcha!*” as the extent of the disapproval became clear. One more step had been taken down the path to war, with consequences to be seen very quickly.

On the same day, the Sea Harriers took their first loss when Flt Lt Paul Barton (on exchange to 801 NAS) engaged a Mirage at close quarters whilst on Combat Air Patrol around the group.

Belgrano is avenged – 4 May

At 1400 hours 2 days later, a plume of white smoke snaked towards *HMS Sheffield* as it protected *Hermes* and *Invincible*, the only sign of the Exocet missile about to bury itself deep in the ship. It had been fired by a low-flying Super Etendard, a class of aircraft flown by the most able of Argentine pilots. Although its warhead did not detonate, the ship was ablaze within a minute and direct hits had been taken to both the main engine and main generator. An unserviceable backup generator curtailed all smoke extraction facilities and the survivors struggled through acrid black smoke to reach safety. 20 were lost, as was the ship when it finally sank on tow 6 days later.

A sombre mood prevailed back home when news of the loss broke, and delight at early successes forgotten. Loved ones would not be returning, and the fight had barely begun.

5 Brigade put to sea – 12 May

The Cunard liner QE2 left Southampton on 12th May, carrying 5 Inf Bde, commanded by Brig Tony Wilson in chipboard-lined splendour. The 3000 strong brigade consisted chiefly of the Welsh and Scots Guards, in addition to a Ghurkha battalion. Their routine was much the same as those who had sailed before them – weapons handling, PT and boredom.

Pebble Island – 14 May

Boat troop, D Sqn 22 SAS recreated the regiment's North African successes in this raid on the main Argentine air asset. It had been adopted due to its proximity to the mainland and distance from the hazards of constant bombardment which its sister airfield at Stanley was suffering. The invaders had thus far used this strip unopposed – resupplying at leisure and flying frequent harassment sorties at the task force. A previously placed OP instructed that numerous aircraft were seen at the location, which they advised should be attacked overnight. After the patrols were reinforced by Sea King, the attached Naval Gunfire Officer called in support from *Glamorgan* which enabled attachment of plastic explosive to equipment whilst the garrison was pinned down.

The total Argentine losses numbered 11 aircraft, the fuel dump and radar facilities. The cost of this was 2 minor injuries to SAS raiders, all of whom were successfully exfiltrated by helicopter. Events continued apace.

San Carlos – 21 May

The time at sea had been productive for the command element of 3 Commando Brigade. The key question was where to come ashore; Julian Thompson favoured a direct attack into Stanley, various SF elements proposed disparate “softening” raids, but one voice, and a relatively junior one at that, was heard above all others. Major Ewen Southby-Tailyour had previously commanded the marine party in the Falklands, and as a keen sailor had spent a great deal of spare time exploring the coastline. He had kept a sketch-book; this added a great deal of weight to his opinion that San Carlos offered a sheltered, navigable approach. The only problem was that it was on the wrong side of the island.

There was no better fighting composition in the world for long-distance terrain coverage, however, than the combination of the Parachute Regiment and Commando Brigade. It was decided at a meeting on 10th May that the landings would be at San Carlos, with a 3 pronged move east to Port Stanley supported by helicopter for troop movement where possible.

At around 0400, 2 PARA and 40 Cdo scrambled ashore at San Carlos unopposed, with 45 Cdo reaching Ajax Bay at first light. For several hours before the landings, there had been diversionary raids at several other possible landing points; the only possible resistance to the San Carlos landings had been at Fanning Head. This had been signalled in by a special forces OP just the day before, so the prelude to the landings had been a helicopter-borne assault to neutralize the threat.

40 Cdo immediately secured the area to the east, into the Verde mountains – in combination with 45 Cdo's position at Ajax Bay, the harbour was now well defended. 3 PARA cleared



HMS Ardent on fire

Fanning Head definitively whilst 2 PARA dug in, having scaled the ridge of the Sussex Mountains. Now, 42 Cdo could be brought ashore from reserve.

As the light gathered, the inevitable attention from the air began. Sorties of Argentine jets maintained constant pressure on the group – *Argonaut*, *Antrim*, *Broadsword* and *Ardent* all took repeated hits. Eventually Ardent, forming the southern screen as well as keeping the pressure on Goose Green, took its 17th and final hit. As its civilian NAAFI manager (a retired SASC instructor) brought its machine guns to bear on the raiders, *Yarmouth* took survivors on from alongside. *Argonaut* was luckier – although hit repeatedly, it was crippled but not sunk.

By the end of the day, a huge defect had emerged in Argentine tactics. Their zeal to destroy the defensive capability of the group had blinded them to the fact that they had clear shots on *Canberra* throughout. By the time *Ardent* was being abandoned, *Canberra* had disgorged not only the fighting troops, but their logistic support as well. The brigade was ashore and ready to fight.

The Conveyor stops – 25 May

By 25th May *Antelope* was lost in a very similar fashion, forming a perimeter well out into the Sound with no screening mountains. The aerial assault was relentless and eventually delivered a WWII design bomb which punched its way into the ship, but like the Exocet which finished *Sheffield*, did not detonate. Sgt Jim Prescott was tragically killed whilst trying to defuse the rapidly overheating bomb – he managed, however, to talk through the process to his team, ensuring that handling knowledge was passed on in case of further incidents.



Atlantic Conveyor being refuelled by RFA Tidepool

A loss more pivotal to the assault was that of the *Atlantic Conveyor*. She had been taken up from trade due to her massive carriage capacity, and was bringing the Chinooks so critical to the brigade's overland assault in addition to tents, munitions and Harrier mats. Ironically the Exocet that sank her may well have been destined for *Hermes*; when the radar signature was detected, chaff rockets successfully diverted the missile. When it sought a second target, the giant, defenceless *Conveyor* was in the frame.

As its oil-soaked plywood decking roared with flames, the task force's air assets went up in smoke as well. The only way to Stanley was now by foot.

East to Stanley – 26 May

Julian Thompson's original plan had been a direct advance on Stanley when the balance of the troops arrived. On 26 May news arrived from London – an immediate advance should be made, with a simultaneous attack on Goose Green. This dilution of an already understrength force pleased nobody but,

orders being orders, 2 PARA dutifully turned south and set out from the Sussex Mountains. Airlift was available for heavy weapons, but boot leather would have to suffice for everyone else.

Meanwhile, 45 Cdo and 3 PARA set off on the long tab North and East, destination Stanley.

Sunray is down – 27 May

Goose Green was to result in one of the conflict's highest profile casualties – Lt Col Herbert "H" Jones VC. Naval gunfire began to soften the target in the early hours of the morning, with infantry fighting beginning at around 0600. The early phases of the attack involved repeated contacts with entrenched machine gun positions; well-dispersed, they bogged down the attack at several points. It was to break such a bottleneck that H Jones led his tactical HQ into the gully to the right of Darwin Hill, which A Coy had so far failed to overpower. He was cut down by an emplacement eventually neutralized by 66mm LAWs, and with the words "Sunray is down" command of 2 PARA was devolved to Maj Chris Keeble. It was time to test the alternate command structure set out for just such an eventuality – Jones had designated an entire alternate tactical HQ.

Thankfully, the strategy held good and the battle continued apace. 3 were lost in one of the most distasteful episodes of the war, when Lt Jim Barry sighted a white flag flying in the trenches by the schoolhouse. He took 2 NCOs with him to take the surrender of the position; once in plain ground, all were cut down in a hail of machine gun fire.

That night, Darwin was taken and with it came the information that the community hall at Goose Green held civilians in large numbers. Keeble's plan of softening the settlement with an overnight bombardment was clearly now unworkable; permission was sought from Brigade HQ to negotiate. After a night of hasty field diplomacy Keeble went forward to the Argentine position with 2 reporters to witness talks, offering the options of surrender or release of hostages followed by continued military action.

Air Vice Commodore Wilson Pedroza offered the surrender of the garrison and shortly afterwards the men of 2 PARA watched agape as the parade of 250 men were joined by another three times as many. The British battalion had defeated a defending force 3 times its size; the excrement smeared on walls and destroyed furniture was testament to the brave new Argentine world the islanders had been liberated from.

3 PARA now turned east to take Teal Inlet, a waypoint to Stanley, while 45 Cdo had drawn the short straw (but long walk) and were to head north to Douglas before following the paras' trail through Teal Inlet.

Stanley in sight – 31 May

42 Cdo's move was less footsore but potentially far more lethal. Key high ground to be secured in the battle for Stanley was Mount Kent and the ground around it, which overlooked the town. The only way to move the marines this far forward within the required timeframe was helicopter – an unarmoured flight in appalling weather, necessitating several hops for the required numbers.

After being forced back by a whiteout on 30 May, 2 Sea Kings deposited K Coy of 42 Cdo and Lt Col Mike Rose of 22 SAS on Mount Kent, a Chinook following shortly behind with a 105mm gun and 300 rounds. After a day of isolation, the Sea King force brought the rest of the battalion in a series of daring low-level flights.

Once established the unit quickly secured Mount Challenger, Estancia House and Bluff Cove Peak, tightening the grip on Stanley and providing an LUP for 3 PARA and 45 Cdo. With these units in place, a pincer was forming ready to close on the

increasingly beleaguered Argentine garrison.

Closing in – June

After cross-decking from *QE2* to *Canberra* and *Norland*, 5 Bde were put ashore on 1 June. Their immediate task on 2 June was to head east and form the southern prong of the attack, potentially entailing a long, cold walk. A local civilian suggested that telephone communications might still be working at Fitzroy, so a heliborne party deployed to the nearest working line at Swan Inlet. They managed to raise a farmer at Fitzroy who confirmed that Argentine forces had been and gone, leaving a golden opportunity. This was later confirmed by Patrols Coy 2 PARA, now under brigade command.

Tony Wilson was keen to exploit this at the earliest opportunity, and so commandeered the sole Chinook to move the brigade to Fitzroy. A near blue-on-blue due to the unannounced nature of the flight brought criticism from San Carlos, but the brigade had, nonetheless leapt ahead.

By 3 June 3 PARA under Hew Pike were established at Mount Estancia, staring up at Mount Longdon which stood between them and the final objective of Stanley. As the days passed, recce parties went forward to assess the strength and disposition of Argentine defence and artillery was brought forward to the battalion.

Farewell *Sir Galahad* – 8 June

Another blow was struck from the air with the bombing of *Sir Galahad* as it lay in Port Pleasant near Fitzroy, with the Welsh Guards aboard. After the Scots Guards were deposited by *Intrepid* 3 days previously, it was decided that logistics ships should be used to land the Welsh. In Fitzroy, 16 Field Ambulance were due to disembark with a Rapier air defence unit, but the Welsh were supposed to be at Bluff Cove, not navigable by the ship. As the debate over safety at sea or a long walk to Bluff Cove continued, 4 jets screamed over and dropped a stick of bombs squarely on target.

As petrol, ammunition and equipment blazed, the embarked troops triaged, treated and evacuated as best they could, many working with horrific injuries themselves.



RFA *Sir Galahad*

The final days – 10-14 Jun

The formation took shape, Stanley was encircled by commandos, guardsmen and ships and the task force steeled itself for the advance into Stanley. The plan was divided into 3 stages. Firstly, Mounts Longdon, Two Sisters and Harriet were to be secured by 3 PARA, 45 Cdo and 42 Cdo (aided by the Welsh Guards) respectively. This first phase was to take place in the early hours of 12 Jun.

Phase two involved the capture of Wireless Ridge by 2 PARA, who would be held in reserve during the first phase before

moving through and beyond 3 PARA. The Scots Guards were to take Mount Tumbledown, the Gurkha rifle battalion Mount William and the Welsh Guards Sapper Hill. This was scheduled for the night of the 12th. The third and final phase would be a move through 5 Brigade's consolidated positions and into Stanley, to defeat the occupiers in the street.

Longdon

Longdon proved a fearsome environment for the Paras; the two months of occupation had allowed the Argentine forces to develop two well defended positions with numerous bunkers and machine gun emplacements. A combination of armament and topography made Longdon a challenge for the toughest of soldiers resulting in a hard fought engagement. The western position, "Fly half" was taken rapidly, although the platoon advancing from the west bypassed a position in the dark and subsequently took rounds to their rear.

"Full back" lay to the east and was ferociously defended. The advancing Paras began taking rounds from at least 2 GPMG emplacements, joined by a .50 calibre heavy machine gun.

At the start of the attack on the position, the detonation of an antipersonnel mine had triggered the beginning of a bombardment, the grids having already been set. As the shells rained in, the Paras tried sending a flank attack to the north of the position. They sustained withering fire, and the flank was recalled. The advance was finally made in true infantry style, on their bellies from the west along the ridgeline, expending virtually all grenades and finally resorting on 66mm weapons to clear positions. The summit was finally taken at the closest of quarters, with bayonet fighting in the trenches. The cost to the battalion was 23 dead and 47 injured, but a decisive victory was had.

Harriet

In contrast to the heavy fighting from the outset on Longdon, surprise minimized losses on Mount Harriet. After a delayed start, the Welsh Guards and 42 Cdo got to the foot of the slope undetected, and called in the spectacular firepower of the assembled batteries of 29 Cdo Regt RA, a firm deterrent to even the most committed occupier. As the rounds fell, the assault continued forwards and cleared to the summit using small arms, anti-tank weapons and grenades.

Milan, the latest hi-tech anti-tank weapon was used in anger against the well established bunkers on the summit. When these were overrun, a treasure trove of rations, ammunition, maps and even a battlefield radar were taken.

Two Sisters

45 Cdo's assault on Two Sisters was another triumph of committed, brutally tough soldiering. The men had to fight up the rocky outcrops under perpetual bombardment, eventually ransacking the captured positions for shelters, warm kit and food as they lay exhausted on the peaks of the mountain. Phase one was complete, with all objectives taken.



Two Sisters

Wireless Ridge

The already battle hardened soldiers of 2 PARA readied themselves once more for battle, their objective to take Wireless Ridge in readiness to move into Stanley. In contrast to the austere logistics supporting Goose Green, they had armour, artillery and air support. At first light, the winning partnership of the 30mm cannon of the Blues and Royals and GPMGs of the battalion had cleared the bunkers and the assault on Tumbledown (in conjunction with Scout-borne SS12 missiles) had neutralized the Argentine guns which had hampered the final phase of the assault from across Moody Brook. A and B companies, with the Blues and Royals, finally got to look down to Stanley.

Tumbledown

The original plans for the Scots to assault Tumbledown directly from the south up a fearsome slope were soon abandoned as a result of the ferocity of resistance met by an initial recon party. Given that 3 Cdo Bde were already dug in to the west, a flanking attack from there seemed to offer (relative) safety.

The three companies assaulted from the west, moving through each other in the line of march. With each wave, more men were occupied by clearing and holding sangars as they went, leaving a dangerously understrength force holding the front line of attack.

The series of dogged and relentless attacks eventually took the summit from, as it transpired, a very professional Argentine marine company. The fighting had been every bit as bloody as that on Tumbledown.



Mount Tumbledown

Two more hills to go...

As the light gathered and battle raged on adjacent Tumbledown, the Gurkha rifle battalion waited to start their assault on Mount Williams. When Tony Wilson deemed the Scots close enough to the finish line, the Gurkhas were waved off, again with all the support that could be mustered. Artillery, Milan and .50 cal once again entered the fray but equally potent was the dedication of the Nepalese unit, which moved round Tumbledown under its Scottish stewardship to assault Williams from the north. The aggression worked up for the final attack proved unnecessary as the Argentines fled in the face of the Gurkhas, who they had been reliably informed were cannibals.

The composite of the hugely depleted Welsh Guards and 40 Cdo waited impatiently to take the final ground before Stanley, Sapper Hill. White flags were already flying in the town, and nobody wanted to miss the action.

For expediency, a company sized assault was launched by helicopter and followed up by the rest of the composite on foot. This made quick work of the few brave stay-behinds and by late afternoon the Welsh and commandos watched the Paras move into Stanley.

Going to town

The move down from Wireless Ridge began at 1300, after Julian Thompson surveyed the situation from the air. The armour of the Blues and Royals, one vehicle proudly displaying

their regimental colour, ferried the Paras in as they swarmed towards Stanley. The order was received to halt at the racecourse – the occupiers wished to discuss terms.

Surrender – 14 Jun

For several days before the encirclement of Stanley, Col Reid (listed as being 22 SAS) and Capt Rod Bell RM (who had been raised in Latin America) had been transmitting on the medical advice frequency of the King Edward Memorial Hospital, known to be occupied. Although no reply was received, it became clear early in negotiation that Gen Menendez's staff had been listening. They now wanted to talk.

In the afternoon of 14 Jun, Reid and Bell were carried forwards by Gazelle to a bizarrely formal meeting with Menendez. After quibbling over whether he could surrender the geographically but not geopolitically separate islands in the group, Menendez acquiesced to all terms except the use of "unconditional" in describing the surrender.

After bad weather grounded him, Maj Gen Moore, task force commander, eventually arrived for a final round of talks at 2300. At 2359 on 14 Jun 1982, Britain took the surrender of

the Argentine occupiers of Stanley – the Falklands were retaken.

As Britain celebrated its reassertion as a world power, the units of both the task force and the occupation buried their dead. To come was a massive effort in repatriating prisoners of war and a long journey home. For now, though, it was enough that the fighting was over.



Falkland Islands Memorial Chapel, Pangbourne, Berkshire