

Also on 29 March the submarine H.M.S. SPARTAN was detached from Exercise SPRINGTRAIN and ordered to embark stores and weapons at Gibraltar for deployment to the South Atlantic. Subsequently, on 30 March H.M.S. SPLENDID was ordered to deploy from Faslane. A third nuclear powered submarine, H.M.S. CONQUEROR was subsequently sailed a few days later. All were stored for war within 48 hours of order.

On 31 March I was instructed to make covert preparations for a Task Force for operations in the South Atlantic. On 2 April, after the Argentinian invasion, the preparations were allowed to be conducted openly.

Argentinian forces landed in strength on 2 April at Port Stanley and the very heavily outnumbered Royal Marines of the Garrison resisted, sustaining no casualties but inflicting an unknown number on the invaders. After some four hours fighting His Excellency the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Falkland Islands and the Dependencies, Sir Rex HUNT, C.M.G., ordered the Marines and the survey party from H.M.S. ENDURANCE, who had been working on the Islands and who assisted with the defence, to surrender.

The following day Argentinian forces landed at Grytviken in South Georgia. The small Royal Marines detachment on the Island put up a stout resistance in the face of a considerably stronger invading force, damaging the corvette GUERRICO and shooting down a Puma helicopter, before they too surrendered.

Meanwhile, on 2 April the aircraft carriers H.M.S. HERMES, H.M.S. INVINCIBLE with the assault ship H.M.S. FEARLESS, two frigates, two Logistic Landing Ships, 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines and the necessary logistic support were ordered to be brought to immediate readiness in United Kingdom ports. H.M.S. HERMES with 826, part of 846 and 800 Naval Air Squadrons and H.M.S. INVINCIBLE with 820 and 801 Naval Air Squadrons sailed from Portsmouth on Monday 5 April. Admiral WOODWARD, flying his flag in H.M.S. ANTRIM, was ordered to sail from the Gibraltar area for Ascension Island with six other destroyers and frigates, and with R.F.A. support. The flag was transferred to H.M.S. GLAMORGAN on 4 April.

The Aim

I was informed that in the current situation the overall aim of Her Majesty's Government was to bring about the withdrawal of Argentinian forces from the Falkland Islands and the Dependencies and to re-establish the British Administration there as quickly as possible. My mission was to conduct military deployments and order operations in support of this aim.

Command and Control

In my capacity as Commander-in-Chief Fleet I assumed overall command of the operation as Commander Task Force 317 (all surface ships, land and air forces) and Task Force 324 (submarine forces). This tri-service command was exercised from my Headquarters at Northwood and I was responsible direct to the Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Terence LEWIN, G.C.B., M.V.O., D.S.C. The Air Officer Commanding 18 Group RAF, Air Marshal Sir John CURTISS, K.C.B., K.B.E., C.B.I.M., R.A.F. was appointed as my Air Commander, and the Major General Royal Marines Commando Forces, Major General Sir Jeremy MOORE, K.C.B., O.B.E., M.C. and Bar, was initially my Land Forces Deputy. When later General MOORE flew south to become the Commander Land Forces, Falkland Islands, he was replaced by the Commander South East District, Lieutenant General Sir Richard TRANT, K.C.B. Submarines were operated under the control of Flag Officer Submarines, Vice Admiral P. G. M. HERBERT, O.B.E. The command team at Northwood was completed by my Chief of Staff, Vice Admiral Sir David HALLIFAX, K.B.E., who was responsible for the detailed naval planning and the co-ordination of all staff work. Admiral WOODWARD was appointed Commander of the Task Groups in the South Atlantic and he transferred his flag to H.M.S. HERMES on 15 April.

Military and Logistic Considerations

My foremost considerations when planning this operation, were the Argentinian military capabilities and the proximity of their bases and the comparison with our own situation : especially, the difficulties of transporting troops, aircraft and equipment some 8,000 miles from the United Kingdom to a theatre of operations within range of aircraft based in mainland Argentina and more than 3,000 miles from my nearest forward mounting base.

It is always difficult to quantify enemy capabilities. Intelligence and other sources gave the total number of warships at Argentina's disposal as 73. These included one aircraft carrier, one cruiser, 4 submarines, 2 modern "Type 42" destroyers, and other older but well equipped frigates and destroyers. Its aircraft included 65 A-4 Variants, 39 Mirage III/V, 5 Canberra, 60 Pucara, 8 Puma and 2 Lynx helicopters, and 5 Super Etendard equipped with Exocet sea skimming missiles, together with a small but significant air transport force which included 2 C130s (Hercules) with air to air refuelling tanker capability. The number of troops on the Islands was more problematic. Estimates varied from 7,000 to 10,000 well equipped troops. These were supported by more than 30 light attack aircraft (mainly Pucarás) and about 20 helicopters. It was difficult to assess the intended role of Argentina's military and civilian manpower reserve, its Merchant Marine and its civilian air transport. A further factor was the possibility of materiel assistance from other countries.

I did not have within my normal resources the ships necessary for the 7,000 mile transit of the troops, equipment and logistic support for the size of forces which I considered were required to counter the threat and