

The Argentine Air Force during the Malvinas War

Comisión Batalla Aérea por Nuestras Islas Malvinas - BANIM
(Air Warfare Commission for Our Malvinas Islands)



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BANIM**

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The Argentine Air Force during the Malvinas War



«For those who came back, it is our moral and inescapable obligation to give an account of this feat, it is to dig deep into the fertile soil of our nationality. In the words of our Commander, nothing shall be forgotten, nothing shall be underestimated. We do not count on comparative examples with which to explain what happened in 1982. We only have—and their value is incalculable— memories and a verdict; an answer to hope, and a firm and severe warning to the usurper. A promise and an attitude: *“Tras su manto de neblina, no las hemos de olvidar”* (Behind their misty veil, they shall not be forgotten)¹ is a motto by which we uphold the validity of this cause, which enters into the spirit of the National Glories.»



Brigadier VGM Luis Guillermo Castellano (†)
Comandante del Componente Aéreo Malvinas
(Malvinas Air Component Commander)

¹ Translation into English of a fragment of the Malvinas March, Official Song of Provincia de Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur.

In memory of *Comodoro* VGM (R) Oscar Luis Aranda Durañona,
Secretary of the BANIM Commission and driving force behind
this book.



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We would also like to thank the FAA Language Institute (Centro de Instrucción de Idiomas) Director, *Brigadier* (R) Alberto Raúl Gadea, and the translators Lorena Alejandra Iglesias, María Florencia Alesandrini, Paola Andrea Sosa, Guadalupe Quiroga and Ana Laura Pagliaro who were in charge of translating into English the original Spanish text.

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Foreword by the Air Force Chief of the General Staff, *Brigadier General Xavier Julián Isaac*



In my capacity as Chief of the Argentine Air Force General Staff, I am honored to present the latest work of the BANIM Commission, *La Fuerza Aérea en Malvinas (The Argentine Air Force during the Malvinas War)*, after almost five years of hard work.

Even though the secrecy on the British side bestows a sense of incompleteness upon some data, it will be only a matter of time until the truth of what is expressed here comes out.

Nevertheless, we still count today on the lively and beating presence of many of the participants in the South Atlantic warfighting actions who have managed to recount their experiences in this book.

Although this work is not aimed at a specific audience, there is no doubt that the Argentine Air Force personnel shall find a considerable number of role models that will leave an indelible mark —on present and future generations— of day-to-day business common experiences. Said experiences, performed during the din of the conflict, enabled this Institution to reach its operational maturity, imprinting an exclusive and specific organizational culture, widely respected all over the world.

The young military may observe that those engaged in combat were their peers, who shared their dreams and hopes, but were driven by such powerful emotions that enabled them to perform exploits that have gone down in the annals of military aviation.

Despite the geopolitical result of the conflict, the Air Force thus tries to hand down to current and future members the spirit of those heroes who gave everything without expecting anything in return, in a chivalric and epic exploit.

Finally, I hope these pages help to make a more generous society in their commitment to the common good; it is my desire that this work encourages Air Force members to give their best in serving the country and, in short, that it inspires our fellow countrymen and women in their honorable task of being Argentinian.

Prologue

The sixth Air Warfare Commission for Our Malvinas Islands (BANIM) Drafting Commission started working in 2017, as per resolution of the Argentine Air Force Chief of the General Staff. It was made up of thirty four members, mainly Malvinas War Veterans, and some others who despite not having participated in the conflict, were committed to this piece of history and contributed their thoughts and knowledge.

Our task was to give a thorough account, as complete as possible, of the Argentine Air Force involvement in the South Atlantic conflict. It involved updating the previous edition with countless research and data contributions that have come out over these years, in order to disclose some facts and mysteries that had remained unknown for more than three decades.

Although we are aware that there is still a lot to be written — not only due to the inevitable selection of statements, but also because of the difficulties posed by finding data 40 years later and the veil of secrecy the opponents have drawn over certain events— we have tried to describe the most important actions performed by the Argentine Air Force, with all the players and specialties involved, adding new perspectives.

In early April 1982, when there was a lot of uncertainty as regards the conflict evolution, the National Strategy assumed that the crisis would be solved through diplomatic channels. Nevertheless, the Operational Strategic Commands, together with the Subordinate Commands reporting to them, were appointed for each theater of operations.

Brigadier Ernesto Horacio Crespo was appointed as Commander of the Argentine Air Force Southern Command, with the mission of supporting the ground forces, which were prepared for possible warfighting from Chile. Likewise, *Brigadier* Roberto Fernando Cambor was appointed as Southern Air Defense Commander. Both understood very early that, while the Argentine Republic was trying to solve the dispute following the crisis management rules, the United Kingdom considered it a *casus belli* from which it was almost impossible to turn back.

Thus, they jointly suggested to their superior level the creation of an independent Air Force at the Southern Theatre of Operations, with the assets allocated to both Commands, but depending on the Strategic Air Commander. Once the strategic situation had been defined, *Brigadier* Crespo was in charge of the Argentine Air Force Southern Command, being the ultimate responsible for commanding the assets during the war, supported by *Brigadier* Cambor, both convinced of fully using the means of warfare in the conflict.

At a General Staff meeting, Crespo clearly and firmly explained the role that our Institution would play in the conflict: «The Argentine Air Force will fight!» From that moment onwards, he became a figure whose undoubted leadership was present in the will to fight of all those who fought at the South Atlantic Conflict, myself included. His astuteness as regards the conflict evolution enabled the Argentine Air Force to prepare and get ready to fight a powerful enemy as the United Kingdom.

The pages of this book seek to clarify the spirit and commitment of the Argentine Air Force members who, despite the fact of being on terribly unequal conditions facing the opponent, managed to find the way to affect and damage it using unprecedented tactics, which gave rise to heroic actions and remarkable sacrifices. They defied fear and technological disadvantage professionally and were convinced of the just cause.

Ironically, the best testimonies about these actions were given by the British themselves, through countless publications and declarations in which they agree that, despite the fact that they counted on the most sophisticated weaponry known so far, they felt vulnerable to the Argentine aviation attacks, because the pilots had shown great determination from the onset of the conflict.

I would like to warmly thank all BANIM Commission members for their dedication and commitment. Throughout these years, they have worked in pursuit of the goal of leaving the testimony of those involved in the conflict for future generations. I also thank the War Veterans who have contributed with testimonies, photographs, and experiences, which have undoubtedly enriched the pages of this book.

I would like to remember the BANIM Commission members that passed away before our work was over: *Brigadier* VGM Manuel Augusto Mariel, *Comodoro* VGM Héctor Manuel Rusticcini, *Comodoro* VGM Rodolfo Emilio Drigatti and, especially, *Comodoro* VGM Oscar Luis Aranda Durañona, the driving force behind this book, and who, undoubtedly, set an example of commitment for the whole Commission.

After *Comodoro* Aranda Durañona left the Historical Studies Directorate, both his successor to that Directorate, *Comodoro* Rubén Lunaklick, and the current Director, *Comodoro* Ricardo Ylla, continued supporting unconditionally this book writing project contributing with documents from the Archivo Histórico (Historical Archives) and the Archivo General de la FAA (Argentine Air Force General Archives). I am grateful to all their staff who have closely collaborated in searching for documents, data and bibliography which have been included in these pages, and I am especially grateful to Mr. Horacio Rodríguez, who was responsible for correcting the content, and who has accompanied me during all these years so that this work came to fruition. I also want to thank the Revista Aeroespacio (Aeroespacio Magazine) staff who have worked with the layout and the image files, as well as the staff of the Secretaría General (General Department) of the Argentine Air Force who promoted this publication at our Baptism of Fire forty-year commemorations.

These pages depict the forty five days of combat as a sort of war diary, where not only the fragmentary orders of every flight made by the different airplanes involved in the conflict were included in detail, but also the different tasks that our men carried out and which affected the Argentine Air Force's war effort. Pursuing that comprehensive goal, some inadvertent errors have been probably made, a missing name, some detail, or a relevant action which has been overlooked. Shall this be the case, we trust it can be rectified in the future.

The Malvinas Conflict marked a turning point in the war veterans' lives. All of us have left something there. Those who were involved in combat, saw ourselves fighting a war which legitimacy is deeply moving. The claimed islands have always been on the Argentinians' minds, in the bosom of every family, at school, in the verses that read «*tras un manto de neblina, no la hemos de olvidar*» (behind their misty veil, they shall not be forgotten). The ones responsible for the war shall be judged by God and History. But once the conflict had started, the Argentine Air Force men did not get out of their commitment to their country and their community. Fifty five heroes remain there.

Brigadier General VGM (R) Mario Miguel Callejo
Chair of the BANIM Commission

Introduction

Four decades have gone by since that historical 1 May 1982, when the Argentine Air Force men received their «baptism of fire» defending their country. Throughout these years, many authors have tried to explain the confrontation between the Argentine Republic and the United Kingdom. These two western nations, sharing more reasons to approach than to confront each other, separated 12,000 kilometers by an ocean, started an all-out war.

For 150 years, the dispute between both countries had been resolved using historical and legal arguments through diplomatic channels, while their governments and peoples kept a profitable commercial, social and cultural exchange. Moreover, for ten years before the war, both parties had shown, through specific acts and initiatives, a strong will towards finding a pacific solution to the dispute.

Nevertheless, despite logic predictions, in 1982, the South Atlantic waters and the Malvinas peatlands were stained with young Argentine and British men's blood. The brevity and violence of combats, as well as the courage shown and the way they rigorously adhered to the laws of war, called the attention of strategists and researchers all over the world. Some called it an «unprecedented war», while others considered it «the last fair war in history». The epithets and names used show that most authors have written driven more by emotion than by carefully assessing events. The papers written by vernacular scholars (civilian and military) were also influenced by the institutional and political situation the Argentine Armed Forces were going through at that particular moment in history. Various interests of an ideological, political or sectorial nature, even the interests of the combatants themselves, led to losing objectivity, overestimating rights, hiding wrongs and thus, claiming achievements and holding others responsible for failures.

On the other hand, some anti-military authors emphasized the negative factors of the conflict —such as the hardship endured by the conscripts— while they hid the positive actions carried out by the Security and Armed Forces during the major 20th Century commitment honored to defend National sovereignty.

The Argentine Air Force, the youngest of the three Armed Forces, exercised responsible leadership from the beginning of the actions and showed clear signs of a fighting spirit even in the poorest of conditions, concentrating on a war they had not planned.

Once the war was over, and moved by the determination with which its men had fought, the Argentine Air Force started writing the history in order to exhume the difficult circumstances they had lived, to draw on the experience and pay proper homage to combatants.

Thus, the Drafting Commission for Our Malvinas Islands Air Warfare History¹ was created. In order to depict the official history, plans, orders and reports written during and after the war were gathered. The Commission was renewed as time went by. The undertaking proved not to be simple—the task faced complications due to the natural reluctance of some of the actors to recount their experiences or to hand over documents or testimonies they had kept as real trophies at their homes. It was because of those obstacles that, not until 1999, the Historical Studies Directorate, after having received the files from the commission known as BANIM (*Batalla Aérea por Nuestras Islas Malvinas*, Air Warfare Commission for Our Malvinas Islands), managed to publish the two volumes that make up Book 6 of the «History of the Argentine Air Force», *The Argentine Air Force during the Malvinas War* collection.

¹ «Directiva del Estado Mayor General 308/83» dated September 23rd, 1983, *Boletín Aeronáutico Reservado*, N°. 2102.

After said publication and before the present one, numerous testimonies and books of national and foreign origin have been received, which information sheds more light on the facts. Therefore, the Argentine Air Force high-ranking officers deemed the search for the truth as regards the 1982 events to be a moral obligation to the Institution history and to the ones killed in action. And thus, the Argentine Air Force Chief of the General Staff ordered the publication of a new version.

Besides enlarging the information on the actions, it was established that the new texts present significant differences as regards the reports provided by the United Kingdom concerning material and personnel actual losses, always minimized compared to the numbers shown in the Argentine records. This ambiguity may probably be resolved once the British Government declassifies their documentation and grants access to said information.

Thus, when preparing this new edition of *The Argentine Air Force during the Malvinas War* drafted by the BANIM Commission, special care was taken to include as many research papers as possible, both by national and foreign authors, which could provide solid evidence as regards questioned facts.

Based on the original documents handed down by the previous administration, the following modifications have been introduced:

- Elimination of historical references to the British usurpation and of the subsequent Argentinian claims.
- Summary of events in which the Argentine Air Force and other government agencies had taken part, trying to settle the diplomatic dispute through pacific actions, right before the conflict (1971-1981).
- Correction of names, dates and times.
- Day-by-day arrangement and naming of the air tasks according to the classification included in the Argentine Air Force regulations.
- Only those British actions that help understand Argentine air operations are described.
- Organization and summary of contents according to the Institution's primary responsibility: to exercise the power of weapons through aerospace. Thus, the actions are grouped together according to the command in charge of their planning and control.
- Mention of British declared casualties, extracted from official data and records, closing the daily description of the conflict. Nevertheless, in case of differences between said records and our own, literature or primary sources consulted in order to clarify facts are quoted.
- Most significant events summarized at the end of each chapter.

It is also worth mentioning that the compilation of the Argentine Air Force operations was obtained from the documents kept at the Argentine Air Force General Archives and at the Historical Studies Directorate, corroborated, in turn, by the veterans involved in every weapons system and specialty.

On the other hand, since it is not possible to count on the documentation from the units deployed on the islands, most of the events that took place there were reconstructed using the partial information and direct testimonies provided by the participants.

The only cases in which complete documentation was received from the islands were the VyCA (Spanish acronym for *Vigilancia y Control Aéreo*: Air Control and Surveillance) and Pucará Squadrons War Diaries. The Malvinas radar detailed activity — compiled in the diary that made it out of the islands to the mainland the day before the capitulation — turned out to be of utmost significance for cross-checking information.

The BANIM Commission has gathered an important number of testimonies, mostly written, provided by the actors themselves, which have been guarded by the Archivo Histórico de la Fuerza Aérea (Argentine Air Force Historical Archives). Moreover, reference has been made in these pages to oral testimonies which have come up during the monthly presentations and meetings carried out for writing this book. The BANIM Commission authorities endorse the authenticity of said testimonies.

Flight missions based on Fragmentary Orders (Frag-Os) are written according to the following format: command, aircraft/s, registration mark, call sign, weapons or cargo, mission, crew, time off ground and time of arrival. In certain cases, information is complemented by more data; in some others, it is complemented by available testimonies or references. If no more information is available, «nda» (no data available) is added.

As far as squadrons or combat aviation sections are concerned, crews are referred to by their specific role; in the case of four aircrafts, the order set forth is: flight leader, wingman number 2, section leader, wingman number 4.

Similarly, as regards helicopters and transport aircraft, the crew members list is led by the aircraft commander and then the rest of the members are ordered according to their duties on board, although only the special combat roles are specified.

The transportation flights performed on the mainland throughout the conflict are not recorded in detail; only the total effort expressed in flying hours and the amount of cargo transported are included. The personnel and Escuadrón Fénix material transportation flights performed on the mainland are not included either due to the lack of supporting documents.

Finally, for the ease of reading, throughout this translated work, Argentine and British military ranks are capitalized and written in upright style, as agreed upon by the author, editor, and translators. For ranks equivalence, please check the “Glossary, Comparison of Military Ranks and Geographic Terms” section.

* * *

In short, this is an institutional book written by the successive Drafting Commissions organized since 1983. Each Commission was validated by a resolution signed by the then Argentine Air Force Chief of the General Staff. This new edition is the result of all the previous studies and was prepared to be published in 2022, forty years after the conflict.

Considering the time elapsed, this will probably be the last official text to be written and revised by the Malvinas war veterans, who directly witnessed and lived the events recounted. The final conclusions convey the experience gathered by the authors hoping that, as a bottle thrown to the sea of times, the message expressing the satisfaction of having fulfilled their duties will reach the Argentine Air Force younger generations.

Setting up of the successive drafting teams

The information gathered and corrected by the successive commissions that started to work one year after the conflict was used to write this book. The officers' ranks are the ones they had when they were members of the commission. As from 2013, complying with an Argentine Air Force Chief of the General Staff directive, "VGM" was used for addressing Argentine Air Force Malvinas War veterans. Moreover, those contributors who have passed away are followed by (†).

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Comodoro VGM (R) Roberto M. Cerruti
Comodoro VGM (R) Narciso Juri
Comodoro VGM (R) Eduardo O. García Puebla
Comodoro VGM (R) Roberto E. Rivollier
Comodoro VGM (R) Juan L. Micheloud
Comodoro VGM (R) Oscar R. Spath
Comodoro VGM (R) Tulio C. Felici
Comodoro VGM (R) Héctor H. Sánchez
Comodoro VGM (R) Gustavo Aguirre Faget
Comodoro VGM (R) Fernando Robledo
Comodoro VGM (R) Luis A. Longar
Comodoro VGM (R) Gerardo G. Isaac
Comodoro VGM (R) Rubén Sassone
Comodoro VGM (R) Arnaldo H. Favre
Comodoro VGM (R) Fernando Espiniella
Capitán de Navío VGM (R) Washington Bárcena
Vicecomodoro VGM (R) Ricardo A. Sifón
Vicecomodoro VGM (R) Rodolfo Yuse
Mayor VGM (R) Jorge A. Benítez
Teniente de Navío VGM (R) Oscar G. Vázquez
Capitán VGM (R) Guillermo A. Ballesteros
Capitán VGM (R) Carlos E. Cachón
Capitán (EA) VGM (R) Héctor D. Tessey
Capitán VGM (Rva.) Emil Williams
Primer Teniente VGM (R) Enrique G. Felice
Suboficial Mayor VGM (R) Nicolás C. Dómina
Suboficial Mayor VGM (R) Víctor Martínón
Suboficial Mayor VGM (R) José A. Álvarez
Suboficial Auxiliar VGM (R) Alfredo R. Clariá
VGM Alejandro Lombardi
VGM Gerardo Mancisidor
Dr. Mariano Sciaroni

Mrs. Haydee Gamen, Vcom. VGM (R) Roberto M. Gamen's widow

Part 1

The Road to War



Chapter 1

Support and Cooperation in Malvinas, 1971-1982



Albatross – the starting point

Since 1945, the Argentine Air Force (Fuerza Aérea Argentina, FAA) had exercised the responsibility of administering and conducting civil and military aviation adhering to the Integral Air Power concept which stated that, in peacetime, Aeronautics as a whole contributed to achieving political objectives more efficiently than the most destructive bombing. That was the reason why, from 1949, after Air Force specialists were made responsible for the Orcadas Islands Meteorological Observatory² and then, after the establishment in 1952 of Río Gallegos Military Air Detachment (Destacamento Aéreo Militar Río Gallegos) to support Antarctic air exploration³, the Institution became familiar with flights over the South Atlantic.

On 16 December 1965, the United Nations General Assembly approved Resolution 2065, by which the governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland were invited to reach an agreement on the Malvinas islands sovereignty dispute. However, the following year, during Teniente General Juan Carlos Onganía's administration, the Argentine Navy studied the military occupation of the archipelago⁴, and on 2 October 1966, ARA *Santiago del Estero* submarine secretly disembarked an amphibious command task group on a deserted beach of Soledad Island, 40 km from Puerto Argentino⁵. Likewise, in 1977, Almirante Emilio Eduardo Massera, Argentine Navy Commander in Chief, submitted a new project to the Military Committee, which was not approved by President Jorge Rafael Videla⁶.

In the meanwhile, encouraged by the UN resolution, the Argentine State Department celebrated a Memorandum of Understanding with its British peer on 14 August 1968 with the purpose of «definitely and amicably settling the dispute [...] duly considering the population's interests.» Said agreement was drafted by the then Argentine Republic ambassador to the United Kingdom, Brigadier (R) Eduardo Francisco Mc Loughlin, who held office between 1966 and 1970. Notwithstanding its «secret» classification, the document was leaked to the press. Diplomacy ran into the resistance of British financial groups investing in the islands which had always denied sovereignty transfer, usurped from 1833.

For that reason, the Memorandum remained at a standstill and the country was forced to postpone the claims and devote herself to win the goodwill of islanders or kelpers. An attempt was made to solve the islands' communications problems and comply with other settlers' needs. The establishment of regular air and maritime transportation lines was offered, as well as the provision of essential life services. Up to that moment, the only connection available was the ship RMS *Darwin* which communicated Stanley with Montevideo every month. Each journey took twenty days of navigation, round trip, plus ten days at the port. Any simple item that was to be acquired by the islanders took, at least, thirty days to arrive.

In 1970, the Conservative Party dislodged the Labor Party in the United Kingdom, and the Argentine offer was seen in a different light. By the end of that year, with the purpose of verifying the air service feasibility and with the determined participation of the Argentine

² "Nueva Comisión para Orcadas", Revista Nacional de Aeronáutica, No. 2, Buenos Aires, Círculo de Aeronáutica, February 1949, page 4.

³ "Creación del Destacamento Aeronáutico Militar Río Gallegos", Decree 1010/52, Boletín Aeronáutico Confidencial, No. 66, 25th of June, 1952, Buenos Aires, Ministerio de Aeronáutica, page 201.

⁴ Comisión de Análisis y Evaluación de las Responsabilidades del Conflicto del Atlántico Sur. *Final Report* (known as *Rattenbach report*), Volume 4, Buenos Aires, Military Junta, 1982, page 636.

⁵ "El desembarco secreto del 66", Clarín, March, 31st, 1996.

⁶ Comisión de Análisis, *Rattenbach Report*, op. cit., Volume 1, page 168; Volume 4, page 636.

Air Force, members of the British Embassy in Buenos Aires and Malvinas islands leaders went around the Patagonia in order to assess port and airport facilities in Puerto Madryn, Comodoro Rivadavia, Puerto Deseado, San Julián, Santa Cruz and Río Gallegos.

Capitanes Oscar A. Vijande and Rubén O. Moro manned aircraft G-II of the I Brigada Aérea (1st Air Brigade) which transported the entourage. The Embassy Secretary Argerich and Subprefecto Adrián Lasalvia (Argentine Coast Guard port specialist) constituted the Argentine delegation. The British representatives who traveled were the Embassy Secretary, Ray Withney; the Falkland Islands Company (FIC) Manager, Alistair Sloggie; the islands Attorney General for the Treasury, Leslie Gleadell; and *Darwin's* Captain, Warren White, native with more than twenty years of navigation experience among different points of the archipelago.

First air transportation

In that spirit of goodwill, on 11 February 1971, the I Escuadrón de Tareas Especiales de la Base Aérea Militar Tandil⁷ (Tandil Military Air Base 1st Special Tasks Squadron) received an order from the Comando de Operaciones Aéreas (COA, Air Operations Command) to perform the urgent aeromedical evacuation of a severely ill individual from Malvinas Islands to Buenos Aires. Landing on the islands would only be possible by water landing.

The only Grumman HU-16B Albatross available, the BS-03, experienced engine failures. The Air Base summoned the retired mechanics through LU-22 Radio Tandil. Thanks to their favorable response, the following day at 2100 the aircraft was already repaired. The test flight was performed that same night. The aircraft crewmembers were: Mayor Carlos A. Quaglino, Commander; Capitán Alfredo A. Cano, first pilot; Primer Teniente Raúl A. Tamagnone, navigator; Suboficiales Mayores Roberto Thomas and Fidel Contin, mechanics; Cabo Principal Héctor O. Rodríguez, radio operator; and, Suboficial Principal Ernesto Llanos, paramedic. At 2000, the Air Operations Command reported the island radio beacon and radio station frequencies. It did not state the water landing site, the air controller language, how to reach the coast or the mooring area.

On 14 February, the BS-03 took off from Tandil and, after 5 hours and 30 minutes, it landed at Comodoro Rivadavia. Dr César de la Vega, Chief of the Gastroenterology Department at Buenos Aires Hospital Rivadavia, and Air Force Doctor, Capitán Eduardo Escribano were waiting for it. The doctors inquired whether the aircraft was equipped with a stretcher, an oxygen system and other items.

Crewmembers were concerned about the aircraft weight. The Albatross maximum weight to water land in protected waters was 13,400 kg. This flight, considering cargo and fuel, would weigh 14,300 kg, i.e. 900 in excess of the authorized weight. Circumstances were worsened since the procedure –to be performed in open seas and with heavy waves due to wind– would be an emergency in itself.

On 15 February 1971, the BS-03 took off at 0600 heading for Malvinas. When flying abeam Puerto Deseado, the sun was rising. The sky was clear and there was unlimited visibility. Fortunately, Stanley radio beacon signal was received. The radio compass provided a constant bearing well in advance since, by Cape Leal at the northern end of Soledad Island, a dense layer of clouds prevented them from seeing the ground. When the crew made contact in English, Stanley's operator answered in perfect Spanish and informed them of the weather conditions. Said conditions forced them to improvise an instrument approach that, curiously, would be used by Albatross in subsequent flights.

⁷ The I Escuadrón de Fuerzas Especiales had been assigned the following aircraft: three Grumman HU-16B Albatross (registration marks BS-01 and BS-03 –both amphibian– and the BS-02, amphibian); one Douglas C-47 modified (TA-05); and two Douglas HC-47 (TA-06 and TA-07); plus one Otter, one DH 104 Dove and one Cessna C-182.



Grumman HU-16B Albatross moored to Port Stanley

Photo courtesy of Brig. VGM (R) Bloomer Reeve

During the operation, the amphibious aircraft exited the clouds 50 meters above sea level. Although visibility was reduced by rain, they caught sight of a red Beaver hydroplane flying 600 meters forward. From that aircraft, they were told in Spanish that the water landing site would be indicated.

The BS-03 was coming closer in zigzags, without passing it, and followed it that way up to Stanley bay (east to west oriented). While the Beaver was water landing, the Albatross made a 360° wide turn and, after overflying the town, entered final.

At 0931, an Argentine Air Force aircraft was water landing at Malvinas islands for the first time. The operator guided them to a mooring buoy anchored near the ramp-equipped hangar, 1500 meters away from the city. An inflatable boat, with two frogmen on board, reached them to carry the personnel to the ground. As the mooring maneuver was delayed, only the two doctors were taken on the first trip, while the commander and navigator followed them on the second trip. Capitán Cano and the two mechanics decided to stay to add two take-off auxiliary rockets (JATO⁸) and test the firing electrical circuits.

At the port office, the BS-03 crewmembers met Miriam Booth and her father. She was the operator and he was the Chief Electrician at Falkland Islands Company (FIC), and the pilot flying the Beaver which had guided the water landing. Then, the ambulance carrying the sick man arrived. He was Mathew Mc Connan, a Scottish descendant who was born in Santa Cruz (Argentina), who had lived and worked at the lighthouse situated at the Bay of Stanley port entrance. A raging alcoholic, he suffered from chronic cirrhosis, stomach bleeding ulcer and nephritis. He received eight transfusions before being taken from hospital.

With the assistance of four city policemen and the harbor master, the crew and doctors put the stretcher on an old lighter and sailed to the BS-03. Once the aircraft ties were loose, two vessels supported the maneuver by sailing around. Capitán Cano, now acting as a pilot, sailed to the take-off point. The 900-meter-wide by 7000-meter-long bay had to be flown across to face the wind blowing from 320° at 65 km/h. With full throttle, the aircraft did not rise within the expected distance due to excess weight (14,300 kg). At mid-length, mounted on the hull *redan*⁹ and with leveled wings, it reached the 150 km/h required to ignite the

⁸ JATO: Jet Assisted Take Off.

⁹ *Redan*: step amphibious aircraft have below the hull.

JATO¹⁰. When they were fired, the aircraft detached from water and started to climb. It was 1230.

Since the man was acutely ill, in the middle of the crossing, the Commander required the Command a faster machine. That was the reason why Mayor Martín Álvarez, who was performing a Líneas Aéreas del Estado (LADE) flight on board the F-27 registration mark TC-46, headed to Comodoro Rivadavia so as to transport him to Argentina's capital city (Capital Federal). An ambulance, a bilingual nurse, journalists and photographers were waiting for the BS-03. The TC-46 landed at Comodoro at 17:30, it took off at 1810 and arrived at Jorge Newbery Airport at 2150. Mc Connan was admitted to Hospital Rivadavia. It was a vain effort since he died the following Sunday. The family had him buried at La Tablada cemetery.

Joint Statement of Buenos Aires, 1 July 1971

After the aeromedical evacuation experience and within the general framework of the negotiations recommended by Resolution No. 2065 of the General Assembly of the United Nations, on 1 July 1971 the Representatives of both countries signed the Joint Statement of Buenos Aires¹¹. It can be summarized as an agreement of communication and cooperation between the governments of the Malvinas Islands and Argentina. Subject to the approval of the respective authorities, the new measures would contribute to the process of finding a definitive solution to the dispute over the islands, as had been advised by the UN.

Second flight – first one with passengers on board

Given the signed agreement, the BS-02 departed to Malvinas carrying the Embassy Secretary Carlos Louge, from the Dirección General de Antártida e islas Malvinas; Comodoro Ernesto J. Arillo, from the Argentine Air Force Command; the British John Ashey Jones, Richard V. Goss and Richard Hills. On 3 July, 1971 at 0815, the Albatross took off from Río Gallegos flown by Mayor Carlos A. Quaglino and Primer Teniente Antonio A. Bruno. Also, Primer Teniente Raúl A. Tamagnone, the mechanic, Suboficial Mayor Abel Poletto and the radio operator Suboficial Mayor Julio Martín completed the aircrew.

After 3 hours and 15 minutes, on a shiny day, the amphibian water landed in Malvinas. The same as in the first flight, residents received it in joy. At 1440 the return journey started. Due to headwind, the flight to Comodoro Rivadavia lasted 5 hours 11 minutes.

Third flight

On 11 August 1971, a group of civilian and military engineers from both the United Kingdom and Argentina headed to the islands in order to study the ground on which an airstrip would be built. They took off from Comodoro Rivadavia on the Albatross registration mark BS-02, commanded by Capitanes Alfredo A. Cano and Ángel G. Toribio. On their way back, they evacuated a port worker who had suffered an accident and required specialized surgical treatment. Stanley Hospital Director accompanied him to Hospital Británico in Buenos Aires.

Fourth flight – first one carrying mail

It used to take up to seven months for letters sent from the United Kingdom (via Montevideo) to arrive in Malvinas. The *Darwin* ship, which used to sail Malvinas-Uruguay, showed irremediable failures. That was the reason why the Argentine Foreign Affairs

¹⁰ Each JATO provides a 1000 pounds (455 kg) additional thrust during fifteen seconds. Albatross used two for take-off and it could use up to four.

¹¹ Refer to "Annex 1", at the end of this chapter.

Department, the Argentine Air Force, Aerolíneas Argentinas, and the Secretaría de Correos y Telecomunicaciones (Mail and Telecommunications Office) agreed to organize a mail service to the islands. With that purpose, an Albatross was ready in Comodoro Rivadavia to transport the bags that would arrive on an Aerolíneas flight. Aircraft commanders, with the participation of the Post Office, would exchange the bags.

On 20 August 1971, at 0600 in the morning, the BS-02 took off heading towards the islands flown by Mayor Carlos A. Quaglini and Primer Teniente Antonio A. Bruno as co-pilot. The aircraft carried Stanley Hospital Director, who was returning. After 3 hours 50 minutes, it water landed on the rough surface waters of the bay, caused by a strong wind. The islanders, who were keen sailors, had learnt from their previous experience. They arrived on a lighter and placed an inflated rubber tube on the left side of the fuselage to prevent hitting the aircraft. In the middle of the roadstead, they had placed a big dimension buoy which, by means of a rope, they used as a tie-down point for the Albatross.

In spite of the steersman's efforts, waves hindered the mooring maneuver. In a matter of seconds, the lighter deck was 1.5 meters below the BS-02 door and, immediately after, it was 30 centimeters above the flap, which is usually 2.5 meters from the surface in the water. Despite that, crewmembers started jumping to the deck one by one, while the mechanic stayed on the aircraft. During the short trip to the coast, the lighter submerged its bow in the water from time to time. Upon disembarking, they carried the two mailbags to the local office on a Land Rover. A few minutes later, mail distribution had started. To their surprise, settlers confirmed that only seventy-two hours had passed from the postmark date.

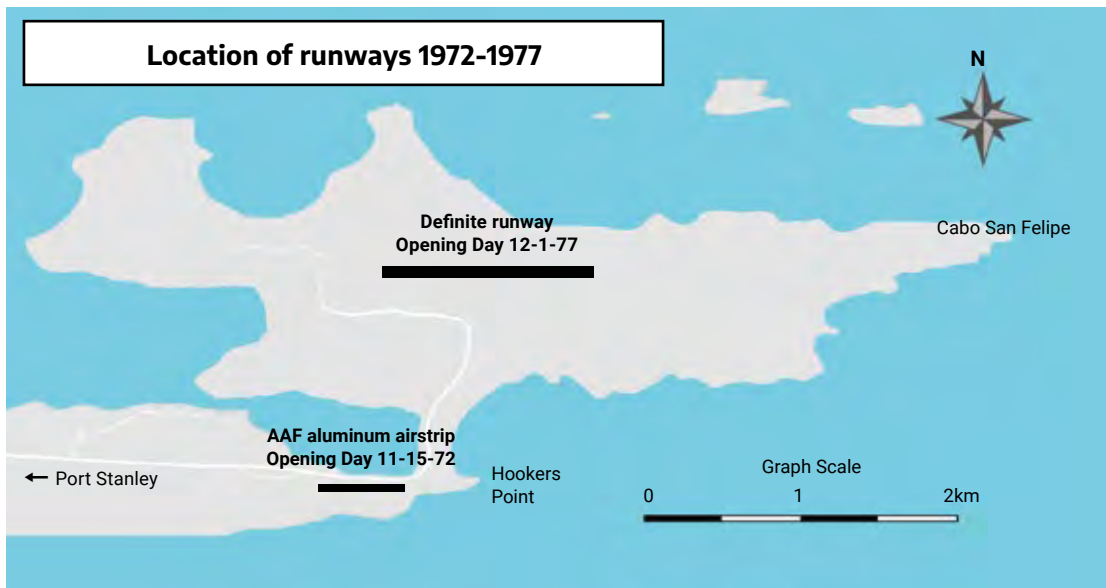
Inside the airplane, Suboficial Mayor Fidel Contino felt the violence of the heavy swell which covered him completely from time to time. At noon, Mayor Quaglini started to feel uneasy because neither could he see movements, nor the mechanic answered the VHF; therefore, he asked to be taken to the lighter. However, getting near the BS-02 without running the risk of hitting it was impossible. At 1600, a new attempt was made; a row boat was towed with two men on board. With great effort, they tied two ropes to the Albatross wings and rescued the mechanic. Since the waves exceeded the maximum height allowed for take-off –one meter and a half– they stayed in Stanley overnight.

The following day, although weather conditions were better, aircraft conditions were not. About two hundred liters of water flooded the forward bilge area and the bilge pump was not working. In spite of that, they untied the moorings and tried to start engines. It took Engine No. 1 almost ten minutes to start, and it was during that time that the wind pushed the aircraft too near the coast. Finally, with both engines on, they moved towards the bay eastern end. The wind was blowing from 340° at 75 km/h. The pilot applied full throttle while struggling to keep the wings leveled. Speed increased slowly. The commander ordered to activate JATO before advisable conditions had been reached. The airplane rose, but fifteen seconds later, once rockets had extinguished, it returned to the sea and continued the run. Near the end of the bay, it finally took off and flew at a very low height above the Royal Marines headquarters.

After flying for 6 hours and 45 minutes, the aircraft landed on the airstrip. Then, it continued heading towards Tandil. The commander went to the city post office in a vehicle, where he delivered the bags taken from Malvinas. The chief of the station and the present personnel were deeply taken aback by that attitude.

First airstrip

Sea transportation with the *Darwin* between the islands and Montevideo suffered significant losses. After its decommission, it was sold by the FIC. Without other means of communication, flights with Albatross became a matter of routine. Therefore, Argentine and British authorities decided to move one more step forward towards the integration contemplated in the Joint Statement of 1971.



It was decided that a provisional airstrip for wheel landings would be built, airdrome services to support aircraft operations would be installed, together with an agency to commercialize tickets. The assignment would not be easy –land characteristics presented a challenge by themselves. Surface was uneven and, besides, its geomorphological conditions (humidity logged peat) were the least appropriate for laying any foundations.

In September 1971, a flight departed carrying representatives from both the Argentine Air Force and the Argentine Foreign Affairs Department. The commission should select an airdrome site suitable for Fokker F-27 aircraft. Headed by the Secretary Carlos Rouge, the entourage was made up of Coronel (R) Luis González Balcarce; Vicecomodoro Alcides A. Degand Löb; Mayor Carlos F. Bloomer Reeve, former Business Manager at Líneas Aéreas del Estado (LADE) headquarters; Mayor Luis A. Remorino, an engineer from the Dirección de Infraestructura (Infrastructure Management) that would carry out the job; and the Royal Air Force (RAF) attaché in Buenos Aires.

The airdrome would operate for two years, until the United Kingdom built another one with a paved runway. The project entailed reaching agreements so that the Argentine ships from Transportes Navales could transport machines, aluminum plates —similar to the ones used in Vietnam— and personnel from the then Argentine Air Force Grupo I de Mantenimiento (Group I Maintenance). Likewise, it would be necessary to get authorization to:

- Purchase at least three houses (one of them for the technical personnel of Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales) and some premises to establish Líneas Aéreas del Estado office;
- Install two SSB (single side band) communication stations;
- Take two or more vehicles from the continent, including a fuel truck;
- Prepare access to the runway;
- Temporarily house thirty workers;
- Reconcile accounting mechanisms for funds transfer;
- Authorize the Argentine Air Force officer to issue the White Card that allowed round-trip journeys for the kelpers between the islands and the Argentine continental territory. Issued in Buenos Aires by the *Cancillería* (Argentine Foreign Office) or in Stanley by its representative, it would be a document for native islanders. In the case of citizens with other nationalities, even British, the corresponding passport would be accepted.

From all the inspected areas, the commission chose one near a cape protrusion called Hookers Point, 2 km from Stanley. With a great technical effort, a 720-meter long and

30-meter wide airstrip, without a braking area, could be built on that surface. Dimensions and orientation would condition the F-27s operation. Also, it would be necessary to build a road to connect the airport and the city.

Permanent Argentine representatives in Stanley

The Joint Statement from 1 July 1971 established that both the Argentine and British Special Advisory Commission representatives would live in Stanley. According to that decision, a Vicecomodoro would be designated in December to fill the position for a two-year period.

The Chief Officer would depend on the Director General de Antártida y Malvinas (Antarctica and Malvinas General Director) at the Argentine Foreign Affairs Department.

The public official was assigned different areas of national Government responsibilities involved in Argentine foreign affairs actions intended to win the islanders' goodwill. In the first place, he would be in charge of LADE Directorate; secondly, mainland Argentina government agencies and companies would answer to him, under different levels of dependence, i.e. private and tourism commissions, and work teams from government agencies and companies rendering services to islanders: Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales, Gas del Estado, Transportes Navales, the Argentine Air Force, Secretaría de Correos y Telecomunicaciones, among others. In fact, he would facilitate and coordinate field research from the Sociedad Científica Argentina (Argentine Scientific Association).

A LADE supervisor would assist him as Base Commander and in promoting sales of tickets from Stanley to any place in the world through connections with other airlines; specifically, with Aerolíneas Argentinas. Furthermore, the positions of Argentine aircraft control tower operators, and of the communications service to maintain SSB linkage and teletype communications with mainland LADE agencies would be filled.

The island government assigned one house for the Vicecomodoro, with the symbolic payment of one copper coin, and transferred some premises to LADE, where the radio station was placed. Likewise, houses were rented for Argentine employees.

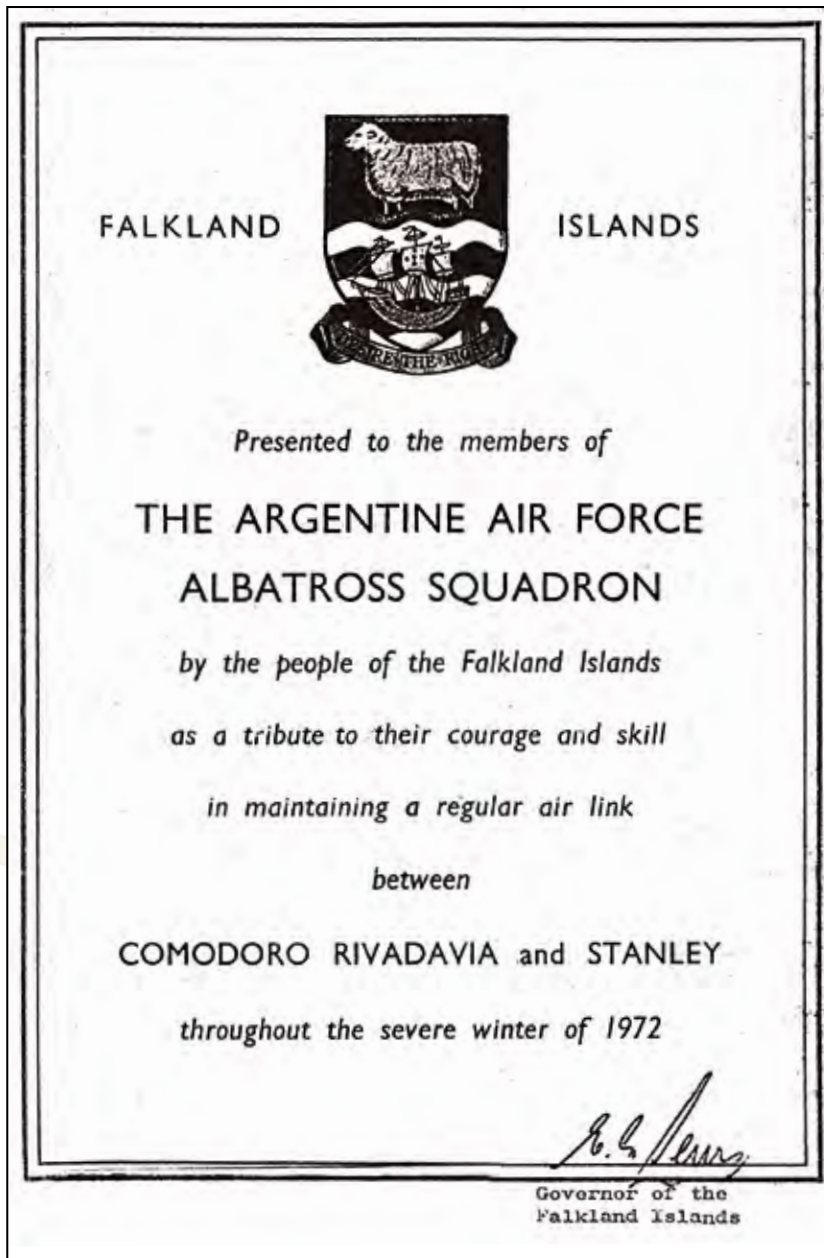
1972. Vicecomodoro César Alberto de la Colina

He held office between 1972 and 1974, assisted by Supervisor Mario Sassi as Base Commander. During his tenure, forty people under the command of the Capitán Raúl O. Maiorano —from Grupo 1 de Construcciones (1st Constructions Group)— leveled the ground and built the temporary airstrip. Furthermore, workers were always willing to collaborate with islanders. Once, they rescued a Land Rover which had entered the sea as a consequence of its driver's negligence.

LADE first scheduled service

On 12 January 1972, while the future airstrip was being built, LADE started to operate with an Albatross configured for six and eight passengers. In all, thirty 22 crossings with 203 flight hours were performed. The vicissitudes of each water landing with those slow search and rescue airplanes demonstrated the pioneering actions of crewmembers.

The personnel who performed as pilots were Mayor Alberto S. Álvarez, Capitanes Ángel G. Toribio and José A. Demarco, Primeros Tenientes Juan M. Maclay and Antonio A. Bruno; as navigators: Primeros Tenientes Héctor González, Francisco F. Mensi and Raúl A. Tamagnone; as mechanics: Suboficiales Mayores Fidel Contino and Rubén C. Bidegain, and Suboficial Auxiliar Néstor Fernández; and as radio operators Suboficial Mayor Julio Martín, Cabos Principales Juan C. Scianca and Eduardo Castilla, Cabo Primero Jorge Morales and Cabo Ricardo del Río.



Diploma granted by
Governor Gordon Lewis to
the Albatross Squadron for
the services rendered

Photo courtesy of:
Brig. VGM (R) Bloomer Reeve

F-27 aircraft inaugurate the aluminum airstrip

On 15 November 1972, when the airstrip was authorized, LADE started to operate with Fokker F-27. One day before the inauguration event, the I Brigada Aérea (1st Air Brigade) sent six pilots to familiarize them with the airdrome: Vicecomodoros Raúl A. Barcala (Brigade Operations Commander) and Roberto H. López (F-27 Squadron Commander); Mayor Jorge R. Ruiz (LADE Operations Commander); and Capitanes Rubén O. Moro, Carlos G. Novillo and Abel A. Síntora.

Pilots had never landed on aluminum plates before. That was why they observed the arrival from the cockpit. The airstrip did not look as short as its 720 meters long indicated because, in perspective, the few 30 meters wide gave the illusion it had a regular size. Landing short, performing a long landing or exceeding the plates would break the landing gear since there were no shoulders or braking areas. Beyond the aluminum plates, everything was spongy humid peat with no consistency to bear a person's weight. That day a crosswind was blowing, at 90° from the airstrip. Anyway, the Vicecomodoro Barcala, the



The aluminium airstrip, build by Grupo 1 de Construcciones at Hookers Point, 2 km Stanley Port

Photo courtesy of: Brig. VGM (R) Bloomer Reeve

F-27 Commander, landed without inconvenience and he could stop it right before the final with the brakes applied.

On the next day, the inauguration ceremony started at 1100, when the T-43 arrived in Malvinas. Said airplane transported the Air Regions Commander, Brigadier Mayor Higinio González; Líneas Aéreas del Estado Director, Brigadier Eliseo S. Ruiz; General Staff Jefe I Intereses Aeronáuticos (Aeronautical Interests Chief I), Comodoro Roberto J. Rodríguez; the Infrastructure Director, Comodoro Alfredo R. Cabeza; Southern Air Region Commander, Comodoro Ángel M. Zamboni; Jefe del Grupo I de Mantenimiento de Infraestructura (Chief of Group 1 Infrastructure Maintenance), Comodoro Oscar A. Stagnaro; the Chief of the Argentine Air Force Public Relations Department, Comodoro Evergisto Gómez; Chief of the Departamento de Asuntos Civiles del Estado Mayor General (General Staff Civil Affairs Department), Comodoro Alcides A. Degand Löb; Chief of Transportes Navales, Capitán de Navío Guillermo H. Tello; Antarctica and Malvinas Islands Director General, Minister Mario Izaguirre; and the Latin America Department Director, Minister Enrique Ros; among others.

The delegation was welcomed by the British Governor Ernest Gordon Lewis who, on behalf of the Crown, was thankful for the efforts taken to build the airstrip and praised the work done with the amphibious airplanes. Then, Brigadier Mayor Higinio González delivered a speech representing the Nation's authorities. The Catholic bishop and the Anglican reverend blessed the airdrome together and a commemorative plaque was unveiled. Next, Líneas Aéreas del Estado agency was opened, and the ceremony was certified by means of a protocol —the first one signed on the islands since 1833.

From that moment on, the F-27 scheduled flight would be performed on Mondays. It departed from Comodoro Rivadavia at 1000, arrived at Stanley at 1230 and returned one hour later. Each crossing cost £ 9.80 or ARS \$ 230 from Buenos Aires to Comodoro Rivadavia. Commercial airlines charged ARS \$ 295 per ticket. In order to travel to Stanley, it was necessary to have an international vaccination certificate and the authori-



View from the cockpit of an F-27 about to land at Hookers Point - Photo courtesy of: Brig. VGM (R) Bloomer Reeve



Arrival of the F-27 registration mark-44; Vicecomodoro César A. De la Colina accompanied by Governor Gordon Lewis, the aid de camp Richard Goss and the Police Chief Terence Peck - BANIM DEH-FAA

zation from the Argentine Foreign Affairs Department. These requirements were only for Argentine citizens and resident foreigners. Foreigners were required to have a passport. Travelers had to carry, at least, five pounds per day of stay.

At both Comodoro Rivadavia and Stanley, the Customs service fulfilled its functions without further requirements. There, boarding/landing cards were filled out both in Spanish and English, stating nationality, address and identity card number. When traveling to the Argentine mainland, Malvinas settlers had to meet the requirements and get the White Card at the British representative's office.

1974. Vicecomodoro Carlos Felipe Bloomer Reeve

He arrived at Stanley with his family on 26 February 1974. After sharing office with Vicecomodoro De la Colina for a week, he assumed his diplomatic functions and those corresponding to the management of the LADE branch, where Supervisor Sassi continued to be in charge.

Bloomer Reeve had experience on issues related to Malvinas islands. In 1969, while he was working as LADE Business Manager, and the only Argentine newspaper reaching Stanley was the *Buenos Aires Herald*, he recommended the morning newspaper Director to publish an article about the development line. The journalist Bonnie Tucker interviewed LADE Directors, who declared their conviction that the Argentine Air Force operated company was the most suitable instrument to establish a regular connection between Malvinas Islands and Comodoro Rivadavia. For the same reason, he had been designated by the Air Force to be a member of the joint commission with the Argentine Foreign Affairs Department.

During his stay, Foreign Affairs introduced new approach measures. To start with, two Spanish bilingual teachers were commissioned to live in Stanley. In March, the ARA *Bahía Buen Suceso* transported three grumete sailboats for the islands youth group, a donation from San Isidro and Ushuaia yacht clubs. Some months later, they were returned for repair purposes.

Furthermore, the construction of Antares II plant —with seventeen fuel, jet fuel, kerosene and gas oil tanks— a laboratory, and a gas station started. Construction works, under YPF direction, involved the participation of sixty four workers during six months. The vessel ARA *Cabo San Gonzalo* performed two crossings transporting materials. At the facilities, a pipeline supply system was established from the Falkland Islands Company dock. Once it was set up, the British company did not authorize its operation alleging safety reasons, breaching the initial agreement.

Likewise, Gas del Estado rendered a gas tube service, and, also, authorized the use of thirty heaters and stoves. It built some distribution premises and two islanders received installation training on the mainland. LADE was in charge of the management and, by May, it reinforced the personnel with Suboficial Principal Jorge Sossa, who was responsible for communications and operation assistant tasks.

In 1974, the Sociedad Científica Argentina made another contribution to the Malvinas settlers by means of an archipelago agricultural and cattle research and its corresponding report. In 1975, it sent containers with items for sheep artificial insemination, which had been required by the veterinarian Ronald Crosby. Later on, the Dirección de Remonta y Veterinaria del Ejército (Army Remount and Veterinary Directorate) would send purebred horses for breeding purposes. The animals were left under the Turner family's care.

Also, cultural activities were fostered. In May of that year, a group of actors —under the direction of Iris Marga— traveled to the islands. They staged theatrical and musical performances organized by LADE in the Town Hall. It was the first time islanders lived that kind of experience. Most of them attended two performances.



LADE office at Port Stanley

Photo courtesy of:

Vcom. VGM (R) Agnoletti



Fokker F-27 after landing on the aluminum airstrip at Hookers Point - Photo courtesy of: Brig. VGM (R) Bloomer Reeve

On another occasion, through the mediation of Buenos Aires Instituto Salesiano de Artes Gráficas, a special flight transported paintings and sculptures collections which reminded of *Martín Fierro* poem first publishing. The works of art belonged to Castagnino, Pettoruti, Quinquela Martín, López Anaya and De la Vega. On LADE's building top floor, a Spanish language library was established with the collaboration of Argentine publishing houses¹².

In 1975, LADE bestowed awards on those supporting the aeronautical activity: Daniel Borland, Forecaster; Ashmoore, Chief Physician; Cox, Second Physician; Kern, Chief of Local Air Services; Halliday, Customs Chief and Port Captain; and Monsignor Spraggon, Catholic Bishop. During this period, LADE donated spare parts for the Beaver airplanes performing the islands' air service through FIGAS (Falkland Islands Government Air Services).

On 14 October 1976, one of the Beavers, which was equipped with pontoons, declared an emergency over the sea. The pilot, Ian Campbell, died and Bernard Lee, his companion, saved his life. Vicecomodoro Bloomer Reeve requested the search and rescue from the Air Force, which assigned the mission to an F-27 equipped with external auxiliary tanks.

¹² In 1974, a group of islanders visited the Biblioteca Nacional de Aeronáutica, accompanied by Vicecomodoro César A. de la Colina. The islanders left their signatures on an infographic that, at present, is framed on a wall next to the entrance to *Héroes de Malvinas* room.



Fuel plant established by YPF Antares - Photo courtesy of: Brig. VGM (R) Bloomer Reeve

Commanded by Mayor Alfredo Cano, the plane took off at 0625 on 15 October from the I Brigada Aérea, carrying doctors, survival specialists, and photographers.

Through radio communication, the search area was coordinated with Vicecomodoro Bloomer Reeve. They initiated a parallel exploration pattern in a north-south direction. At around 1600, they spotted a strong reflection on the surface of the sea at Punta Aguda, Bougainville Island. The sun glinted on the polished pontoons of the airplane, which remained afloat, inverted and half sunken. Just a few meters away, the sole survivor was waving for help. The discovery was immediately reported to Comodoro Rivadavia, from where the rescue was coordinated with Malvinas Islands. The F-27 remained flying, orbiting until a speedboat arrived.

The Beaver had experienced an in-flight engine flameout. In the emergency, the pilot headed towards the only protruding rock nearby, and attempted ditching. Unfortunately, the plane landed on an algae carpet, the pontoons got entangled, and the aircraft flipped over. The pilot drowned while trying to escape, while his companion survived and reached the rocky outcrop.

The F-27 landed in Malvinas Islands, where Vicecomodoro Bloomer Reeve awaited them and extended the crew an invitation from the governor to visit his house. Once the overnight stay had been authorized, they were accommodated at the Upland Goose hotel. At dusk, as they walked towards the governor's residence, they received unusual displays of affection from the settlers. The following day, the F-27 flew non-stop for the first time from Malvinas Islands to the I Brigada Aérea, El Palomar.

The Argentine Air Force installed a Very High Frequency Omni Range (VOR) to assist aircraft radio navigation. At the same time, they carried out medical evacuation flights and coordinated the crossings of scholarship holders to the mainland. The 1st Constructions Group deployed twenty-five men to maintain the temporary airstrip; the task demanded twenty-one days.

Not all interactions with the islanders were driven by affection. In the summer of 1974-1975, the Argentine Social Welfare Department chartered the Greek ship *Regina Prima* to perform cruises to Malvinas Islands and Antarctica. The contract stated that the vessel would not raise any courtesy flag as it was usually done when arriving at a foreign country. On the first trip, during the ship's stay at the port and while music bands were performing a concert in the Town Hall, local students visited the ship.



Amphibian airplane Beaver, owned by Falkland Islands Government Air Services (FIGAS) - Photo courtesy of: Com. (R) Canosa

On the fourth trip, the Falkland Islands Company committee exerted pressure so that the British courtesy flag be hoisted. Upon consultation, Argentine Foreign Affairs rejected the demand because acceptance would imply a modification of what had been agreed on. As a consequence, the island authorities did not authorize the passengers' disembarking.

In 1975, the United Kingdom awarded the construction of the paved airstrip to Johnston Construction Co. The beginning of works provoked adverse reactions. Argentine ophthalmologists and pediatricians traveled to address preventive medicine issues. As they did not count on the local physician's approval, the meeting was held at Cecilia Gooch's home, a retired nurse married to a resident naval engineer. When necessary, the patients were evacuated to the Alvear Hospital at Comodoro Rivadavia, and the Canadian community religious sisters acted as interpreters. In addition, eminent scientists such as Dr René Favalaro and Dr Amílcar Argüelles visited the archipelago. The latter conducted research on local patients in the endocrinology field.

On 4 February 1976, the oceanographic vessel RRS *Shackleton* was intercepted on the high seas by the Argentine Navy destroyer *Almirante Storni*. This unjustifiable action by the Argentine warship was a serious obstacle for the rapprochement policy. The British vessel just refused to stop and continued sailing and the Argentine ship did not take any punitive actions. When they arrived at Stanley and the news was disseminated, Argentina's opponents found the argument they needed to express themselves against said country. Bloomer Reeve's family returned, stating that living conditions were uncomfortable. The governor made every effort to reverse the situation and indicated that dissatisfaction stemmed from the British company, the airstrip constructor, since only 25% of workers were residents.

In the same year, Lord Edward Shackleton, nephew of the Antarctic explorer and responsible for the South Atlantic island issues, arrived on a LADE (Argentine Air Force) service. He engaged in lengthy conversations with the Vicecomodoro and appreciated in detail the tasks carried out by the airline company.

1976. Vicecomodoro Rodolfo Abel Carnelli

He stayed in Stanley from February 1976 to February 1978. During his office, he preserved a positive image of both the country and the Air Force, and managed to gain trust in his statements and commitments. Along with his family, he maintained friendly and cordial relations with the inhabitants. Like his predecessors, his goal was to win the islanders' goodwill.



VOR established by the Argentine Air Force in the vicinity of Port Stanley airport - Photo courtesy of: Vcom. VGM (R) Agnoletti

There were also unpleasant incidents. On one occasion, after the visit by a group of Argentine tourists had finished, the local authorities turned to the Vicecomodoro to claim an antique plate that had disappeared from the Anglican church. On another occasion, a camera was missing. Although these are defects travelers from any part of the world may have, and the items were returned, it negatively affected the perception of Argentina in the eyes of the islanders.

The senior officers who served as delegates were convinced that time was working in favor of integration. However, they acknowledged that this approach went against the goals of the Falkland Islands Company (FIC) and the United Kingdom Falkland Islands Committee (UKFIC)¹³. These associations' members hindered efforts and influenced the islanders by accusing those who accepted to work for the *argies*¹⁴ of being collaborators.

At the beginning, thirty young people made use of the study scholarships. In the end, the FIC's speeches convinced them that accepting said scholarships amounted to treason. As a result, only a few students received education in Argentina. Another sign of dislike was observed when they left a considerable amount of empty beer cans at Carnelli's doorstep or when the Vicecomodoro noticed that if he ran into a neighbor, he would greet him politely, but if said neighbor was accompanied by someone from the FIC, he would ignore him and even deny him a greeting.

The Falkland Islands Company, which exercised a strong oligopoly over the islands economic activity, received a British government's subsidy to stay in business. In view of that weakness, in 1977, the then President of the Board of Banco Tornquist, Héctor F. D. Capozzolo, conceived an oblique approach to recover Malvinas islands.

The banker estimated that shareholders, who were receiving meager dividends from their investment, could very well be tempted to sell their shares. He presented the plan to Minister Martínez de Hoz, who agreed on it and committed to financing the operation through the Argentine National Treasury.

To conceal Argentina's intention, the negotiation was entrusted in the greatest secrecy to Mrs. Beau, president of France's Banque Occidentale. The transactions were well underway, even an approving nod from the British government had been received, until the local newspaper *La Opinión* disseminated the project and caused an immediate reaction in the House of Commons¹⁵.

¹³ UKFIC: non-governmental organization established in London to defend the interests of the FIC.

¹⁴ Argie: pejorative term used to designate Argentine people.

¹⁵ LOWELL S. GUSTAFSON, *The Sovereignty Dispute over the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands*, Oxford University Press, 1988, page 101.

In addition to that setback, in 1977, Governor Neville A. French was replaced by James R. Parker, who arrived with instructions to harden relations. Among other measures, he created the Deputy Governor position, thus breaking off direct contact with the Vicecomodoro. Conditions became stricter: only Transportes Navales' vessels that had requested permission in advance were authorized to dock at the pier.

In Comodoro Rivadavia, Gas del Estado trained a Malvinas islander to install natural gas in a hundred houses. When the time came to enable the connections, senior staff members traveled to the islands. Since an inspector found faults in one of the houses, the local radio broadcast the disagreement between the worker and the Argentine company as if it were a



Bienvenido a Las Malvinas.

El Comando en Jefe de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina estableció una agencia de Líneas Aéreas del Estado en Puerto Stanley.

Una pista de aterrizaje será construida por el Grupo 1 de Mantenimiento con materiales y técnicas de avanzada.

Así se establecerá el primer servicio de comunicación aérea entre Las Malvinas y Comodoro Rivadavia. Aviones G-II —de fabricación nacional— operados por LADE, realizarán el transporte de pasajeros y carga.

Como vehículo exclusivo para la base y apoyo en tierra para el servicio, la Fuerza Aérea Argentina seleccionó un Pick-Up Dodge D-200 V8 de 202 HP.

Algo que enorgullece a Chrysler Fevre Argentina

e Igarreta su concesionario oficial para ventas al gobierno por cuyo intermedio se entregó el Pick-Up Dodge .

Este vehículo resulta especialmente apto para misiones en la zona, por su tracción en todas las ruedas, su potencia, su capacidad para 6 pasajeros y equipajes, caja de 6 velocidades de avance y dos de retroceso.

Todo esto demuestra lo que es anticipación automotriz en la Argentina.

Las Malvinas nos dieron la bienvenida por primera vez.

No será la última.



CHRYSLER
FEVRE ARGENTINA



FUERZA AEREA ARGENTINA.
LINEAS AEREAS DEL ESTADO.

Ad showing the delivery of a utility vehicle by Chrysler Fevre Argentina to LADE for its use at Stanley Port

Photo courtesy of: Brigadier VGM (R) Bloomer Reeve



G-II VR-16 radio aid verification aircraft at Stanley Port airdrome - Photo courtesy of: Vcom. VGM (R) Agnoletti

matter of state. In response to the installer's resignation, the Vicecomodoro asked him to reconsider his behavior for the community's sake. When it seemed that there were no more obstacles because the technician had accepted the apologies, required that the bills be paid in Argentine pesos instead of Malvinas island pounds. Eventually, thanks to the governor's mediation, residents had natural gas at home.

On 1 December 1977, in compliance with the 1971 agreements, the company hired by the United Kingdom finished building the airport and the 1,250-meter long asphalt runway on the Freycinet Peninsula, near Cape San Felipe. The first Argentine aircraft to land was the twin-turboprop IA-50 G-II radio aid verification aircraft, registration mark VR-16, flown by Mayor Juan C. Agnoletti¹⁶.

1978. Vicecomodoro Eduardo Julián Canosa

He held the position from February 1978 to 1980. During the Advisory Commission's first official meeting, he expressed the need for finding some land, within the airport area, to build an aviation fuel plant. Furthermore, he required that radio frequencies of Comodoro Rivadavia Flight Information Region (FIR) and of the Search and Rescue¹⁷ service should be answered in both English and Spanish to ensure scheduled flight operation; that the Transportes Navales vessel be granted greater accessibility at the FIC dock; and that a new house or a building site for constructing one—intended for the Argentine representative—was purchased.

On 17 May 1978, the Argentine Air Force's twin-engine jet aircraft Fokker F-28, registration mark TC-52, landed at the newly authorized airdrome, thus inaugurating the new LADE service. The crew consisted of aircraft commander, Mayor Armando E. Buira; co-pilot, Capitán Luis C. Sabolo; aircraft mechanic, Suboficial Auxiliar González; and the cargo handling assistant, Suboficial Mayor Antonio Pereyra. A new period to integrate islanders to the mainland was beginning.

Thanks to the airstrip and the radio navigation (VOR) established by the Argentine Air Force, the advanced Fokker F-28 left islanders just one hour and twenty minutes away from

¹⁶ JUAN CARLOS AGNOLETTI, *Crónicas malvinenses*, Volume 1, Buenos Aires, Cadan Publishing House, 2010, page 43.

¹⁷ FIR: Flight Information Region. SAR: Search and Rescue.



Fokker F-28 at Stanley airport performing a LADE scheduled flight - Photo courtesy of: Brig. VGM (R) Bloomer Reeve

Comodoro Rivadavia healthcare services, the thriving oil capital of southern Argentina. Until 1982, the twin-engine aircraft had flown 639 hours.

The F-28 service made a most auspicious start. In spite of that, Canosa was concerned about the islanders' attitude who were displeased with the negotiations progress. The British part of the Advisory Commission expressed dissatisfaction with aircraft lack of punctuality, and, furthermore, with the pollution caused by Transportes Navales. Some people thought that if in the end sovereignty were transferred, Malvinas Islands would sink into oblivion, the same as had occurred with Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia. According to them, it would become another Isla de los Estados (Staten Island) in a short time. They also stressed the anxiety they suffered every time they traveled to the mainland and the return flight was delayed. Furthermore, difficulties related to vessel-transported cargo arose. Food products were rejected for being unsuitable; for example, there were cereals with weevils and unsealed oils. When winter came, a problem emerged once it was confirmed that the VOR equipment was operating with some deficiencies. The Advisory Commission required a new power line. A month later, the equipment operation was stabilized by technicians from Comodoro Rivadavia.

During the summer, there was a ceaseless influx of tourists and official visitors, mostly British. In meetings, a recurring topic was communications progress, which had changed life on the islands. Another one was the growing political activity of a group of islanders who advocated for maintaining autonomy should the United Kingdom stand apart.

The British Prime Minister's arrival heightened comments and discussions about sovereignty. During the official reception, the official informed Vicecomodoro Canosa that the land requested for the house had been granted.

By the end of the winter, as erosion had undermined the aluminum airstrip base, a storm of wind and rain blew some plates over the route to the airport. Islanders cleared the road and asked the Argentine Air Force to transport them back to the mainland. With the help of local government's machines and other machines hired from the Falkland Islands Company, a group of Argentinian people arranged the freight for sea transportation. They worked for two months and, to the delight of both Catholics and the community, they painted Santa María church.

After a visit from Remonta y Veterinaria del Ejército, a trip was planned with about fifty islanders to visit Argentine cities and the Rural Exhibition. The organization was flawless and, for most of them, it was their first trip to the mainland. Upon returning, the pro-British



Stanley airport runway finished - Photo courtesy of: Com. (R) Canosa

group received them with signs accusing them of traitors. Travelers answered by laughing and clapping.

1980. Vicecomodoro Héctor Ricardo Gilbert

In the early eighties, the United Kingdom started to seek a solution to the sovereignty dispute by means of a lease back, i.e. renting the islands for a long period. Although the proposal did not fully satisfy aspirations, it represented a step forward and a radical change in the British attitude, since it deviated from previous delaying tactics. Furthermore, thanks to the services established under the 1971 agreements, life conditions improved in Stanley. A decade after LADE flights had started operating, Malvinas settlers openly enjoyed the goods they received from Argentina.

That was the situation when Vicecomodoro Héctor R. Gilbert, the fifth Argentine representative on the Special Advisory Commission, arrived. Concurrently with the arrival, the Governor, the Government Secretary and the Anglican Cathedral Reverend were replaced. In other words, except for the FIC's manager, the most influential British authorities were renewed.

Gilbert held office from February 1980 to the beginning of February 1982. Under his command, the following personnel served in Malvinas: Miguel Olaechea, as LADE agency Chief; Richard Anderson and Alexander Betts (Malvinas settlers), assistants; Suboficiales Principales Héctor Blanco and L. Peralta, radio operators and tower controllers; Mauricio Matthews and Alicia Zapata Matthews, Spanish teachers; Luis Boursenard and José L. Boscardín, YPF plant Directors; and Carlos Degesse, assistant; Capitán de Fragata Rodolfo Gafoglio (nonresident), Transportes Navales; Richard Anderson (Malvinas settler), Gas del Estado Plant and Marketing Manager.

At first, the new authorities treated Vicecomodoro Gilbert in a smooth and preferential manner which was evident in social or working meetings. The 1971 Agreement implementation or interpretation problems were analyzed without speculations and with an open-minded approach, thus allowing for quick solutions. Also, ideas emerged to increase and deepen cooperation. Both Governor Rex Hunt and Secretary Dick Baker's stance on this improved relationships.

The most significant sign of that policy possibly was approving the construction of the Argentine representative's residence, which was only later surpassed in size and hierarchy by the Governor's residence. The permission had been postponed due to the fierce opposition from contending groups to grant the Vicecomodoro a status equal to that of the British authorities.

British disposition remained unchanged on the personal level, even in the most tense moments. In spite of local inconveniences, problems between the nations were cordially addressed. They always used to reach acceptable agreements without the need of appealing to the Argentine Foreign Office. They clearly knew that the sovereignty conflict resolution depended exclusively on their central governments and not on the position adopted in Stanley. It was clear that the better they understood each other, better conclusions would be reached. In this way, service quality was enhanced, and little by little, the inhabitants' goodwill was being gained.

Nevertheless, contact with the local community was hard. Their cautious attitude and the language barrier posed a problem. Mastering English was decisive to participate in social life and avoid loneliness, as it happened to civilian employees. Natives distrusted both the Argentinians and the British. With the typical islander or farmer's idiosyncrasy, they were elusive and reserved. They preferred to continue isolated. In spite of that, once those barriers were overcome, they were kind and simple. Argentine children used to learn English fast at school and made friends with Malvinas Islands' children who —unaware of the territorial dispute— fraternized with them without prejudice.

Gilbert's wife was three months pregnant when she arrived. As medical care on the island was good, she decided to give birth in Malvinas. By mid-July 1980, Mariana was born in the King Edward Memorial Hospital. The birth accelerated the family's integration into the community, although at first Gilbert family's decision had caused resentment since it was feared that a propaganda maneuver with the baby's Argentine citizenship would be used. Once they were convinced that would not occur, they showed friendliness towards the family.

Unsuspected communication channels opened up, facilitating the family's relationship with even the Resistance's hardest members. Friendship allowed them to be informed about the opinions and true feelings as regards the conflict. Gilbert understood that it would be hard for Argentine claims to be accepted, at least, by that generation.

Out of the people accompanying him during his office, the best known was the YPF assistant. A young and single man who suffered living alone until he started frequenting bars. On Fridays, he participated in the traditional celebration of the weekend's arrival and the habitual fights which were the crowning point of those peculiar meetings, according to British deep-rooted customs. At first, the Vicecomodoro was worried about that behavior. Later, he noticed that those episodes belonged to folklore and tempered friendship, since on the next day they would play rugby as if nothing had occurred. Carlos Degesse seemed to be a native, he felt integrated and respected. During the war, he stayed in Stanley; he acted bravely refueling aircraft, even under fire, and that was why he was given an award by the Argentine Air Force.

Beyond their pleasant attitude, Malvinas settlers traditionally rejected the sovereignty change. They resisted any actions that would represent an advance in negotiations. The opposition expressed itself in different ways, according to how interests, traditions and the way of life were affected.

Senior officials, most of them from the United Kingdom, accepted their central government political decisions without hesitation; though they avoided taking sides or showing sympathy for one side or the other since they were not at all concerned about the island's fate. Another group made up of citizens from the British Commonwealth (New Zealanders, Australians, Canadians) and a few Chileans and Uruguayans showed consi-

derable opposition. They thought they would be adversely affected since, as they were neither British citizens nor Malvinas settlers, they had no rights to claim for benefits.

The third group was made up of the natives, most of them Scottish or Welsh descendants with several generations on the islands. They did not understand or justify the Argentine claims based on history or on titles inherited from Spain. Furthermore, being receptive to propaganda, they considered Argentina a strange country, with a different language, religion, different costumes and habits. The few pieces of news they heard referred to the military government, inflation, strikes and other problems they did not experience because they lived on those far away islands. They suspected the British would abandon them and feared an Argentine invasion.

In short, the population did not want relations to progress; they only accepted business relations since they could be controlled without compromising lifestyle. The greatest resistance was mounted by those who considered their interests were being put at risk and they opposed by taking direct action measures. The Falkland Islands Company (FIC) held the lead.

As it had controlled the economic activity for decades, the FIC feared facing competition and did not foresee good prospects in case sovereignty status changed. On the contrary, they knew they would lose privileges; therefore, they mounted and backed smear actions, supported by the difficult circumstances the country was going through.

The UKFIC delegation, that defended the FIC's interests in London, was made up of natives and British from different social levels. While their actions benefited the company's objectives, their motivations were not the same. They expressed, perhaps too vehemently, the feelings of both the population and other institutions such as the Royal Navy. They were simple people, with deep-rooted nationalist feelings and attachment to the United Kingdom's traditions.

Those groups neutralized the Argentine psychological actions by disseminating information that damaged the Argentine image. Also, by means of cunning tricks, they sought to distort the benefits that the population was effectively receiving from the services they were provided with. Perhaps as a consequence of some form of extortion, the students who were attending British schools both at Buenos Aires and La Cumbre in Córdoba, expressed themselves as if they had been instilled great love for the United Kingdom and some scorn for Argentina. This means that, after years of effort had gone by, instead of supporters, they gained tens of opponents.

Then, it was concluded that the best countermeasure to reduce those effects would be to grant scholarships to attend the Liceo Aeronáutico Militar in Rosario. Later, vacancies for the Liceo Naval Femenino would be negotiated; that idea was not materialized due to the course of events. The young man Paul Betts, who belonged to a family with five generations on the islands, attended the Liceo Aeronáutico.

At first, he had difficulties to adapt himself, particularly due to the language. Later, he managed to find his way thanks to the institute directors' resolution and willingness. Paul was attending the second year when hostilities began. He decided to continue and graduated from high school in 1985, as an Argentine Reserve Alférez. He never returned to Malvinas, he got married and lives with his family in Rosario at present. That isolated case alarmed opponents due to the enthusiasm it generated among other young people who were not stopped by political speculations and kept alive hopes to also wear the *Liceo* uniform.

Líneas Aéreas del Estado was the best instrument found to gain trust. Aware of that, the "anti-Argentinian" acted shrewdly and established a travel agency at the FIC's offices. For some time, they managed to keep settlers away from Argentina since they offered better economic benefits. They even sold LADE and Aerolíneas Argentinas tickets, as well as international tickets in their capacity of British Airways representatives.

With this new modality, Malvinas Islands travelers —most of them FIC's or government's employees— stopped attending the Argentine office. Reservations and payments were made at the company. Moreover, they tried to obtain the totality of seats from LADE so that they could monopolize the sales and control who and when traveled. Also, they prepared travel packages including a LADE flight to Comodoro Rivadavia, a connection flight by Aerolíneas Argentinas or Austral to Aeroparque, and British Airways personnel's coordination, who waited for passengers, guided them to a hotel and, on the next day took them from Ezeiza airport to London. It was an ideal offer for islanders, who felt assisted and protected while traveling through a country “with such a poor reputation.”

FIC's campaign was not easy to neutralize since its procedures were legal and complied with the rules of the International Air Transport Association (IATA)¹⁸. Only a better proposal could help to regain passengers. With that purpose, LADE's Director, Comodoro Hugo J. Liernur, changed the F-28 weekly flight route and schedule. It would stay overnight in Stanley and early depart back to Aeroparque, with stopovers in Comodoro Rivadavia, Bahía Blanca and Ezeiza. Thus, the international airport would be reached in good time to get onboard Aerolíneas Argentinas flight to London, which had the advantage of being a direct flight. In contrast, the British Airways flight had stopovers. The innovation halved traveling time and saved the expenses of transportation and overnight stays.

In order to improve assistance at Stanley agency, a trustworthy islander was employed: Alexander Betts, cadet Paul's father. His presence proved to be very useful due to his familiar relationship with the residents. In this way, the FIC's special advantage was equalized: «office run by its own people.»

From the beginning of LADE operation in Malvinas, at the local government's request, Richard Anderson was hired as Base Commander assistant, who barely spoke Spanish. Over time, it was discovered that he was actually an official spy. He kept the government, the FIC and the UKFIC well informed about what happened at the offices and, specifically, at the Vicecomodoro's office. As uncomfortable as the situation was, it had to be accepted and discreetly dealt with. It even allowed for taking counterintelligence measures by spreading news that would misinform the opponent.

Also, the incorporation of two Malvinas island young girls as flight attendants (stewardesses) to assist LADE flights to Stanley was contemplated. The initiative aroused great expectations, but potential candidates were still underage, and those over eighteen were already married and had children. Finally, war thwarted the idea.

As an additional service, LADE used to coordinate exchange orders. Each aircraft used to arrive with fresh food supplies, fruits and vegetables, free of charge, as well as household items and appliances which had been repaired in the mainland. Comodoro Rivadavia personnel prepared the orders and favored the performance of the Argentine representatives in Malvinas.

Neither the FIC, nor the UKFIC tried to impose restraints on that matter; maybe because their members made frequent use of that good will service. They only raised their complaints to the government when orders included potatoes claiming phytosanitary reasons. Though, their real purpose was to prevent Malvinas settlers from abandoning the tradition of growing their own vegetable garden, a stronghold of self-supply.

During Vicecomodoro Gilobert's office, extension works at the liquid gas cylinders and bottles storage facilities were carried out with the purpose of satisfying the daily growing demand. Indeed, consumption had spread among the population due to the intrinsic advantages of fuel and its low sale price in Stanley. Residents seemed to be determined to abandon the time-honored and hard practice of extracting and using peat.

¹⁸ IATA (International Air Transport Association): encourages the safety, reliability, trust and economy in the air transport field for the benefit of airline companies.

Gas del Estado engineers, by means of presentations and demonstrations, revealed the advantages of the fluid usage and the company's efficiency to develop trust about continuity and due supply. Once the armed conflict was over and the Argentine depot was out of stock, Malvinas settlers returned to peat for a long time since the supply from the United Kingdom rendered the price unaffordable. Nowadays, they are supplied from Chile.

The FIC allowed the entry of goods only if they obtained good profits. In their capacity of dock owner, they charged a high price for loading, unloading, transportation, and handling. In the end, due to docking fees, the national company ended up paying more than what it collected from sales. As a countermeasure, it was proposed to adjust the price by adding the costs imposed by the FIC. The 45 kg-cylinder price rose from 7 to 14 pounds. On a percentage basis, that accounted for a 100% increase.

Gas del Estado did not have its own personnel in Malvinas. Container sales and distribution were entrusted to Richard Anderson. However, the company's engineers traveled frequently to Stanley. 2 April 1982 surprised them on the islands and that night, while they were under arrest with other Argentine citizens, they lived recapture alternatives under the armed surveillance of the British strength.

YPF's investment in Malvinas was huge. Some years before, they had built a large-sized plant in the adjacent bay to perform fuel supply with tankers. The depot was not opened because the British authorities required a special dock to unload in the safest way possible therefore preventing water contamination.

That way, YPF efforts failed while the FIC took advantage since, as fuel could not be unloaded in bulk, it was transported in drums to their dock. Gas del Estado was in the same situation. The impossibility to use the plant and the high transportation costs led YPF to limit the supply of jet fuel for LADE aircraft, of gasoline for vehicles and of kerosene. The FIC maintained the sale of gas oil for the Land Rover vehicles and fuel oil for the power plant.

Teachers' activities did not face any problems. The task was performed by a young Scottish married couple, which facilitated contact with the local educational community. Moreover, children's level of prejudice was lower. The rest of the colleagues did not get interested or involved in the territorial dispute. Different was the case of the relationship established between the Argentine representative and the British authorities, which had started to show thorny problems.

While crises started to occur on a daily basis, solutions were harder to be reached. The need to state they were the government and would impose their decisions based on their interests was always present. In turn, Gilobert had to reject the measures that evaded agreements or hindered national agencies' action in Malvinas. Both the Government Secretary and the Governor reserved themselves the referee role.

In that context, significant public conflicts arose and their development was closely monitored by the Argentine Foreign Office. The FIC invalidated the criteria established for Transportes Navales ships' arrivals, from docking time to unloading time. Agreements were reached through the Advisory Commission intervention. Certainly, the FIC always won since they charged the time spent at the dock.

After the visit of the Foreign Office¹⁹ Secretary, Nicholas Ridley, tensions rose. UKFIC's members painted inscriptions on YPF facilities repudiating both the negotiations and the Argentina. When the claim was made, the authorities made light of it and, implying that they did not consider it important to identify those responsible, they left things as they were. In order to force a reaction, the Vicecomodoro Gilobert told the Government Secretary he suspected that the fuel could have been adulterated and, in consequence, he would suspend LADE flights until doubts were resolved.

¹⁹ Foreign Office: British Foreign Office.

The good quality verification required sending samples to YPF laboratories on an aircraft whose endurance would allow it to perform a round trip without refueling in Stanley.

In other words, the solution would be delayed and, in the meantime, the services would remain suspended unless the responsible parties declared that there had been no adulteration. Upon being warned about the damages, the residents reacted. The affected parties would be passengers with scheduled vacations and local stores due to the absence of tourists. The government changed its attitude. That same afternoon, the perpetrators were located and assured that the fuel was in good condition. The authorities ensured the assertion veracity and took over responsibility for cleaning up the plant. Terry Peck was the head of the young people who painted inscriptions. The residents became aware of the inconveniences and unanimously condemned the group. They turned from heroes to villains. That made them calm down and they did not cause any trouble for some time.

On another occasion, some moments before the F-28 weekly flight arrival, Fitzgerald Cheek, the airport manager told LADE manager that, from that moment on, that company's signalman would not enter the platform to perform his duties since aircraft would be guided by an airdrome's employee. Although the measure —which seemed unimportant— could have been considered an attempt to relieve the burden of tasks, the UKFIC's policy was intended to gradually dislodge the Argentineans until their presence in Malvinas became unnecessary.

As the airport manager was an active member of that committee, his decision did not draw anybody's attention. Upon knowing about that pretension, the Vicecomodoro Gilbert ordered Suboficial Principal Peralta —Spanish tower operator for LADE aircraft— that the F-28 returned to the runway threshold and held position there until the restriction was modified. The delay created a climate of tension among the passengers and those who were waiting for them at the station.

Without delay, Gilbert met the governor who was in the airport waiting for his son who was arriving from London. This circumstance gave the situation a certain seriousness. Hunt listened to the Vicecomodoro and deemed his arguments reasonable: no airline would trust non-certified personnel to guide taxiing to the hydrant and, least of all without certification. Nobody tried to implement that arbitrary measure ever again.

The massive presence of visitors from the mainland and their eagerness to buy every single cheap trinket offered in Stanley did the Argentine image no good. Representatives were always worried about moderating that behavior by means of pre-arrival recommendations. Every effort was useless. Although they were eager listeners, they could not help being noisy when the time came.

Many fellow countrymen who visited the islands contributed to show positive aspects of the Argentine society. Aircraft crews had great prestige and appreciation. Also, they were admired for their operational professionalism. No LADE flight underwent an emergency. The same occurred with teachers and YPF and Gas del Estado's personnel. Residents fondly remembered Vicecomodoros De la Colina, Bloomer Reeve, Carnelli and Canosa, and their families.

The opening of LADE House residence coincided with the tenth anniversary of air services to Malvinas and generated another disagreement. A social meeting that would be attended by authorities of the Argentine Air Force, the Argentine Foreign Office and the islands was organized. Upon learning about it, UKFIC's members showed their opposition and threatened to manifest repudiating Argentina's representatives. The reaction was so hard and determined that the local government and the Vicecomodoro were concerned about it: the celebration could turn into an embarrassing episode and complicate relations.

The previous week to the scheduled date, tension had risen so much that the British proposed to cancel the ceremony and, in replacement, hold a modest open house without the presence of Argentines. Gilbert, who was about to accept that condition, visited the UKFIC's most

influential members to especially invite them; he nicely appealed to the proverbial British chivalry. The celebration was a success. Most people attended and fraternized with the authorities. At present, LADE House is a war museum and it is called Britannia House.

By mid-August 1981, the local dairy farm owner visited the Vicecomodoro's house. He expressed his distress because, due to an unexpected delay in the ship's arrival, many farms had run out of animal feed and they feared they would die in a few days. In response to the emergency, Gilobert informed the residents he would arrange a flight to address emergencies. Under the approval of the Argentine Foreign Office, the Argentine Air Force sent an Hercules C-130H. Three days later, despite the British displeasure, the shortage was solved. It was the first time Malvinas settlers had by-passed rulers and fulfilled their needs at LADE's office.

In retaliation, the authorities showed obstructive behaviors. The most evident was the customs officer's intransigence when denying permission to unload from the C-130H three sacks of potatoes which were coming from Comodoro Rivadavia and intended for the Argentines. He sheltered behind phytosanitary regulations: the sacks could not touch the ground. The real reason was they wanted to reaffirm the British authority. Fortunately, the goods had been placed behind the access door blocking the rest of the load. The Vicecomodoro decided that if the potatoes were not unloaded, the bags with livestock feed would not be unloaded either. As it was a Saturday afternoon, most residents were at the airport. Some of them eagerly awaited the goods; others only wanted to see the C-130H operation. Everyone witnessed the situation.

Gilobert went to the Government Secretary's house and, to his surprise, he was told the Secretary had left and his return date was unknown. He went to the Governor's residence, whose presence was also denied under the pretext of walking in the fields. A couple of hours later, the order had not been revoked yet because the authorities did not appear. Meanwhile, the people present watched in distress how the food intended to save their animals' lives were kept inside the plane, with the possibility of returning to its place of origin.

The Vicecomodoro resorted to the neighbors and told them that only Secretary Baker or Governor Hunt could reverse the situation. They immediately went to trace them. Half an hour later, the order was countermanded, after receiving a severe reprimand for having addressed LADE's Manager without previous notice to the government.

The fact that White Cards were issued by Argentine authorities hurt the British pride, especially that of the UKFIC's members, who resisted going to LADE to obtain it. Avoiding that provision, which subjected them to the *argies'* control, represented a challenge for some islanders. On one occasion, Desmond Peck, a native and UKFIC's member, decided to travel to the United Kingdom thanks to the prosperity achieved selling trinkets to tourists. While processing the ticket, he stated that he held the White Card from the times of Vicecomodoro Carnelli and that he would show it before boarding the plane.

On the departure day, Peck arrived just in time and passengers were already on board. When LADE's Chief asked him for the White Card, he said it was in the suitcase he had sent to the cargo hold—he had speculated that, in the rush of departure, he would not be asked for it—and he hurriedly got onto the plane. Once the Vicecomodoro was informed of that, he got on board the plane and, adopting a friendly attitude, he reminded him that he would be able to fly only if he showed that document. He was forced to postpone the trip until he met the requirement. Both Peck and the population reacted with a sense of humor to the episode. Furthermore, it was made clear that it was hard to evade said control and the White Card requirement had to be seriously taken.



Provisional certificate known as "White Card"

1982. Vicecomodoro Roberto Manuel Gamen

Gamen was the last commanding officer appointed to live in Stanley and hold the position of Argentine representative on the Special Advisory Commission and LADE agency's Director. He arrived in Malvinas on January 27th 1982 with his family. His term overlapped with that of Gilbert's until February 3rd, when he moved into the brand new LADE House.

In welcome gatherings and during the early days, a friendly and optimistic atmosphere as regards the islands sovereignty future was sensed. That situation began to change from the early days of March and reached a crisis point on the 19th, when Davidoff's team disembarked on Georgia Islands. He was an Argentine businessman who had been hired by a British company to scrap three obsolete whaling factories²⁰.

Before moving to Malvinas, Vicecomodoro Gamen was aware of the secret plan to recover sovereignty by employing the Armed Forces, though he did not know the exact execution date.

By the end of February, he participated in the coordination of a secret mission devised by the Argentine Air Force *Jefatura III*: a Malvinas VOR verification task would be simulated but, instead of being executed by the INAC²¹ radio aid verification Learjet 35 A, the flight would be performed by a photo reconnaissance Learjet 35 A of the II Brigada Aérea (2nd Air Brigade), with the purpose of carrying out a photographic survey of Puerto Stanley and its adjacent areas. The material would be used to plan the islands' recapture operation.

Gamen coordinated that an INAC's NCO would do the reception on the island for that operation ground support so that the British would not be suspicious of the aircraft change. Due to unfavorable weather conditions and because the verification process could not last more than three days, the Learjet returned to Paraná without having completed the required survey.

²⁰ Haydée Gamen's testimony, widow of Vicecomodoro Roberto Manuel Gamen.

²¹ Instituto Nacional de Aviación Civil (Argentine Civil Aviation National Institute).

On a second secret mission with the purpose of completing the previous one, Gamen participated directly. On 12 March, he adduced his wife was sick and, with the excuse of treating her, he traveled to Buenos Aires on a LADE scheduled flight. The mission consisted in returning him to Malvinas.

On 19 March, Vicecomodoro Gamen went aboard a photo reconnaissance Learjet 35 A. It took off from Río Gallegos and, when overflying Malvinas, the aircraft commander pretended he had a landing gear failure; he performed several verification passages over the airport control tower and, therefore, completed the photographic task they had started in February. The photographers and the material used were left back in Río Gallegos. Then, it departed again towards Malvinas carrying Vicecomodoro Gamen, who got off on Stanley Port platform with the engines on. The Learjet returned to Río Gallegos immediately.

On 22 March, because of the protests sparked off by Davidoff's disembarkation on Georgia Islands, LADE offices were attacked. The life of the Gamen family, as well as that of the Argentine residents, got complicated. From that moment on, they would be watched. Some days later, when it was known Task Force 40 had departed from the mainland towards the islands, they were confined to their houses, under the custody of armed islanders, members of Civil Defense.

From 2 April to 1 May, Vicecomodoro Gamen gave advice and fulfilled reconnaissance tasks on probable British task forces landing sites, by flying the plane Britten Islander²².

Situation by 31 March 1982

Argentine actions seeking Malvinas settlers' welfare were at their height. Islanders enjoyed, without reservations, the services they received thanks to 1971 agreements.

It is worth mentioning the most important ones:

- Two weekly LADE F-27 and F-28 flights, which permitted tourists' visit and stay, with the subsequent profits for the trade and hotel industries.
- Postal and cargo services in all flights enabling the regular arrival of mail, newspapers, magazines, videos, films to be projected at the local cinema, supply of vegetables, fruits and medicine.
- Through YPF, regular provision of fuel and kerosene. Gas oil, fuel oil and lubricants were traded by the Falkland Islands Company.
- Liquid gas in bottles and cylinders provided by Gas del Estado, which had to enlarge its storage plant to fulfill demand.
- Transportes Navales, under the Argentine Navy, offered sea transportation with a four-month frequency that ensured the supply of gas, fuel and other products such as flour, corn, balanced food and groceries.
- Spanish lessons at Stanley's schools, taught by Argentine bilingual teachers.
- Scholarships for attending High School at British schools in Argentina.
- Increase of both Argentine and international tourism, and of the related trade industry.

For ten years, the Argentine Air Force carried out 1515 sorties adding up to 3553 flight hours, during which 21597 passengers and 465763 kgs of cargo were transported. After considerable efforts, and working jointly with other Argentine State agencies, in spite of Falkland Islands Company and UKFIC committee's interferences, the islanders' life quality

²² British Government's official aircraft intended for local flights which, occasionally, distributed correspondence among settlers from the islands interior.

was improved. The already popular islanders, who lived in a group of islands, did not have citizenship and constituted a colony unknown to the British. In fact, they knew about its location on the map on 2 April 1982.

Unfortunately, the peaceful actions seriously and positively carried out for both nations, with the purpose of negotiating sovereignty within a reasonable time frame, were not properly understood by the beneficiaries.



Annex 1

Joint Statement of Buenos Aires of 1st July 1971

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship

Special conversations were continued in Buenos Aires from the 21st until the 30th of June 1971 about communications and movement between delegations of the Government of the Argentine Republic and of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the latter including participants from the Islands. The conversations were held within the general framework of the negotiations recommended by resolution 2065 (xx) of the General Assembly of the United Nations and in accordance with letters addressed to the Secretary-General of the Organization by the Permanent Representatives of both countries on the 21st of November 1969 and the 11th of December 1970.

The delegates concluded that, subject to the approval of their Governments, the following measures should be adopted on the understanding that they may contribute to the process of a definitive solution to the dispute between the two Governments over the Islands which is referred to in resolution 2065 (xx) mentioned above.

1. *In order to deal with questions which might arise over the setting up and promotion of communications between the Argentine mainland and the Malvinas Islands in both directions, including questions relating to the movement of persons, those which might arise for residents of the Islands while on the mainland and those concerning residents of the mainland while on the Islands, a special consultative committee should be set up, consisting of representatives of the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the British Embassy, with its headquarters in Buenos Aires. The committee should have its representatives in Port Stanley who would keep it informed.*
2. *The Argentine Government shall issue a document, according to the annexed model, to residents of the Malvinas Islands irrespective of their nationality who wished to travel to the Argentine mainland, which would allow them free movement within it.*

A document in the same form issued by the Argentine Government shall be the only document needed by residents of the Argentine mainland for journeys to the Malvinas Islands.

3. *Residents in the Malvinas Islands shall be exempted by the Argentine Government from all duties, taxes, and any other obligations arising from activities in the Malvinas Islands. In addition, residents of the Malvinas Islands who go to the Argentine mainland in order to provide services connected with communications shall be exempted from taxes on their salaries and other emoluments which they receive from their British employers.*

The British Government shall not demand tax payment to residents of the Argentine mainland providing services in the Malvinas Islands for activities related to communications on their salaries and other emoluments they receive from their Argentine employers.

4. *The Argentine Government shall take the necessary practical measures so that the normal luggage of residents of the Malvinas Islands who travel between the Malvinas Islands and the Argentine mainland in either direction be free from the payment of all duties and taxes.*

Residents of the Malvinas Islands shall be exempted from the payment of all Argentine duties and taxes in respect of their luggage, household effects and motor cars passing directly through the Argentine mainland towards the Malvinas Islands or going abroad through the Argentine mainland.

The British Government shall take the necessary measures so that the normal luggage of residents of the Argentine mainland who travel between the Argentine mainland and the Malvinas Islands in either direction will be exempted from the payment of all duties and taxes.

- 5. The Argentine Government shall take the necessary measures so that each resident of the Islands who establishes a permanent residence on the Argentine mainland may bring in once only free of all duties and taxes all personal effects, household effects and a motor car.*

Equally, the British Government shall take the necessary measures so that each resident on the Argentine mainland who establishes a permanent residence in the Malvinas Islands, may bring in once only free of all duties and taxes all personal effects, household effects and a motor car.

- 6. The Argentine and British Governments shall facilitate on the Argentine mainland and in the Malvinas Islands respectively, the transit, residence and work of persons directly concerned with practical measures adopted in order to implement and promote communications and movement.*
- 7. The British Government shall take the necessary measures to arrange for a regular shipping service for passengers, cargo and mail between the Malvinas Islands and the Argentine mainland.*
- 8. The Argentine Government shall take the necessary measures to arrange for a regular service of weekly frequency by air for passengers, cargo and mail between the Argentine mainland and the Malvinas Islands.*
- 9. Pending the completion of the airfield at Port Stanley, the Argentine Government shall provide a temporary service by amphibian aircraft between the Argentine mainland and the Malvinas Islands for passengers, cargo and mail. This service shall be reviewed from time to time in the light of progress in the construction of the airfield mentioned above.*
- 10. Both Governments shall cooperate over the simplifications of administrative practices, regulations and documentation for sea and air transport bearing in mind the need to promote and speed up communications.*
- 11. In order to facilitate the movement of persons born in the Malvinas Islands, the Argentine Government shall take the necessary measures to exempt them from all obligations related to enlistment and military service.*

The British Government shall declare that in the Malvinas Islands non-obligations for military service enlistment exist.

- 12. Both Governments shall study and exchange views on measures to facilitate trade and to permit a greater ease of commercial transactions.*
- 13. The Argentine and British Governments shall take the necessary measures so that postal, telegraphic and telephone communications in both directions between the Argentine mainland and the Malvinas Islands are as effective and expeditious as possible.*
- 14. The tariffs for postal, telegraphic and telephone communications in both directions between the Argentine mainland and the Malvinas Islands shall be at a rate equivalent to the internal rate at the place of origin of the communications.*
- 15. Postage stamps on mail travelling between the Argentine mainland and the Malvinas Islands in either direction shall be cancelled with a mark referring to this Joint Statement. Mail bags shall be similarly marked.*

16. *The Argentine Government shall be prepared to cooperate in the health, educational, agricultural and technical fields if so requested.*

The Argentine Government shall arrange for places to be available in schools on the Argentine mainland for the children of residents of the Malvinas Islands and should offer scholarships which should be published from time to time, the number of which shall be decided upon in the light of local requirements.

Both Governments shall continue to exchange views on the matters referred to in this paragraph.

17. *Conversations shall be continued through the customary diplomatic channels and the next meeting should be held in Port Stanley in 1972.*
18. *If either Government shall decide to terminate the measures referred to above, it shall give six months' notice of its decision to the other Government.*

*Minister Juan Carlos Beltramino
Head of the Argentine Delegation*

*Minister David Aubrey Scott
Head of the British Delegation*



Chapter 2

On the way to April 2nd



International political context

First of all, it is necessary to remember that British claims over the Malvinas Islands are based on the use of force principle instead of on the right granted by discovery or first occupation. The causes forcing the natives of the Río de la Plata Argentine Confederation in 1833 out of the Islands and the taking back of the archipelago in 1982 were only concordant with the United Kingdom's strategic need to defend its interests as a naval sea power and to keep the dominance of the sea.

At a glance, it is easily understood that the Malvinas archipelago is a key to controlling naval and vessel traffic on the South Atlantic, thus, controlling the islands was a long-standing objective which did not depend on the government in office, but on the British imperial concept still valid in the 21st Century.

In 1824, Bernardino Rivadavia, in his capacity of Minister of the Argentine Government, obtained a one-million-pound-loan from the British company Baring Brothers for investing in harbor and sanitary infrastructure works in Buenos Aires. These works were never undertaken and the loan set limits on the strategic situation, to such extent that, in 1828 due to non-payment, the naval squadron was worked off, and two frigates under construction in the United Kingdom were part-exchanged. Thus, there was no naval force to counteract the Malvinas Islands usurpation in 1833.

Only three years after the Malvinas Islands were taken by force, Mariscal Santa Cruz, President of the Peru-Bolivian Confederation, started a war against Argentina and Chile (1836-1839), influenced by France, who supplied weapons, and counted on the diplomatic support of the UK. This opened up a second front for the national government which would make it even more difficult to pay the loan.

While this was going on, the Argentine Confederation waged an 11-year-war (between 1838 and 1849) against France and the UK, caused by the French naval blockade against Buenos Aires, who wanted free navigation for European commercial and naval fleets on the Paraná River.

The war fought between the Argentine Confederation and the alliance consisting of the Empire of Brazil, Uruguay, and the Argentine provinces of Entre Ríos and Corrientes (1851-1852), was part of a long-standing dispute between Argentina and Brazil for influence over Uruguay and Paraguay, which was supported by the United Kingdom in order to reduce Argentine dominance and open up the De la Plata and Paraná Rivers for international navigation.

During the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870), the United Kingdom covertly incited Brazil and Argentina to act against Solano López, President of Paraguay. The conflict would historically destroy the latter.

In short, ever since our independence, the UK has been a main protagonist in the history of our country, sometimes in an underhand manner and sometimes resorting to force, with a non-declared but otherwise existing intent, which would be reinforced when the Shackleton Report was known — a British research, carried out in 1976, on the potential of energy resources around the Malvinas Islands.

Argentina's process of diplomatic claims for the Malvinas archipelago started twelve days after the British usurpation of 1833, i.e. as soon as news about the violation reached Buenos Aires. Argentina, as a Confederation at first and as a Republic since 1860, for generations, would start on a long path of firmly-based claims, constantly and periodically repeated, with no possibility of their legitimate rights being granted.

When the United Nations was created in 1945, another option opened up for Argentina in terms of the new rules of the public international law; mainly, after the adoption of Resolution 1514, which states the need to decolonize the world, thus improving relationships among men and peoples.

In 1965, diplomatic negotiations over the Malvinas dispute, took a favorable turn for Argentina as from the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2065 (XX). It recognized the existence of a sovereignty dispute between the United Kingdom and Argentina over the Malvinas archipelago, requesting the former to immediately end the colonial situation²³. Resolution 2065 was the starting point for bilateral conversations, with highs and lows as regards possible agreements. Only occasionally did the United Kingdom agree to negotiate on the sovereignty issue.

Meanwhile, the first sign that an attempt to fight for possession and sovereignty recapture of the South Atlantic islands could be made, appeared in 1966 with the Malvinas military occupation secret plan²⁴ considered by the Navy and the clandestine landing on the islands from the ARA *Santiago del Estero*²⁵ submarine, which objective was to identify suitable beaches for an amphibian assault.

On 14 August 1968, through a Memorandum of Understanding, the British government expressed it would agree to a sovereignty transfer on the essential condition that the islanders' interests be respected. The Memorandum was rejected by the islanders and strongly criticized by the British press and Parliament.

Under those circumstances, the United Kingdom deviated from this line of thinking and, from then on, would emphasize agreements on the economic exploitation of the sea, particularly after the Shackleton Report. Every time an attempt was made to move forward on the subject of sovereignty, they stopped Argentine efforts using the islanders' principle of self-determination as an excuse, a concept which they used with different viewpoints, depending on the circumstances.

As from the 1973 oil crisis, the British reluctance to negotiate on sovereignty was supported by the proliferation of supertankers crossing from one ocean to the other across the Drake Passage, in search of new hydrocarbon sources. The Malvinas Islands recovered their relevance as key to the South Atlantic naval traffic. Moreover, there was the growing need to count on food and fresh water, e.g., the fishing resources of the Argentine continental shelf and the increase in value of Antarctica as the world fresh water reserve.

Some years later, in 1977, the Argentine Navy Chief of the General Staff, Almirante Emilio Massera, submitted to the Military Junta of Commanders in Chief a project to recapture the islands, similar to the one of 1966, which was rejected²⁶ by the Comité Militar (Military Committee, COMIL, its acronym in Spanish, high-ranking leading authority of the Armed Forces). That same year, the Navy deployed a scientific station on islas Thule (Thule Islands, archipelago of the Sandwich del Sur islands) named *Corbeta Uruguay*. This action triggered the planning of the Journeyman operation in London, which consisted in the deployment of a flotilla made up of a nuclear submarine, two frigates and tenders, with the aim of removing the Argentine garrison. In the end, the British decided not to resort to force and the station remained active until they were expelled five years later, during the armed conflict.

²³ PABLO OTERO, "Malvinas: el célebre alegato de José M. Ruda" (*Malvinas – José M. Ruda's famous statement*), *La Prensa* newspaper, Buenos Aires, April 4th, 2017. In 1964, under Arturo Illia's administration, José M. Ruda was sent to the UN as representative to defend Argentine sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands. His statement was unanimously approved and it laid the foundation for the historic Resolution 2065.

²⁴ JUAN JOSÉ LOMBARDO, *Malvinas: errores, anécdotas y reflexiones (Malvinas – mistakes, anecdotes and thoughts)*, internal publication by Naval War College Library, Argentine Navy, Buenos Aires, 2001, pages 27 through 29.

²⁵ *Clarín* newspaper, Buenos Aires, March 31st, 1996.

²⁶ COMISIÓN DE ANÁLISIS..., (Rattenbach report), Final report..., op. cit.

During the second fortnight of February 1982, President Galtieri informed the Minister of Foreign Affairs Costa Méndez that the possibility of carrying out a military occupation of the Malvinas Islands was under analysis. According to his own declarations, the Foreign Minister believed that it involved conducting studies, that no decision had been taken to occupy the islands, let alone a specific date. Moreover, he was not entrusted, in his capacity of Minister of Foreign Affairs, with preparing diplomatic support for that request, he just had to take it into consideration.

On February 26 and 27, the round of negotiations took place in New York, in which Ambassador Carlos Ortiz de Rozas and Foreign Undersecretary Enrique Ros were members of the Argentine delegation. The representatives of the United Kingdom were Ministers Richard Luce and Robert Fearn, and Ambassador Anthony Williams, together with two councilors from the islands. This delegation was to insist on prioritizing the islanders' wishes.

The round ended with the British delegation apparently intent upon recommending the Argentine proposal to the London government. This submission, known as Reactivation Proposal, favored the establishment of a permanent negotiating Commission which was to meet the first week of each month, alternating between the two capital cities, in order to keep the negotiation force going. Argentina looked for an agreed conversation period to be established through said Commission, as well as a date for the handing over of the islands. The British party tried to indefinitely delay the subject, as they had historically done.

On March 1, a communiqué was issued, which main content was as follows:

The meeting was carried out in a positive and congenial atmosphere. Both parties reaffirmed their decision to find a solution to the sovereignty dispute and thoroughly considered an Argentine proposal on procedures to make more progress in this regard. They agreed to inform their respective governments about it.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Costa Méndez considered it necessary to publish on the next day, i.e. March 2nd, in Buenos Aires, the following text approved by the National Executive (Poder Ejecutivo Nacional, PEN):

For more than fifteen years, Argentina has negotiated with Great Britain on the resolution of the dispute about the islands sovereignty, patiently, loyally and in good faith, within the framework established by the UN relevant resolutions. The new system is a forward step towards the rapid solution of this dispute. Furthermore, should that fail, Argentina maintains the right to put an end to this arrangement and to freely choose the procedure best suited for their interests.

This communiqué, affecting the foreign affairs of the country, was issued without prior discussion with the Argentine Air Force and Navy Commanders in Chief. Later, it was used by the United Kingdom as a sign of the Argentine intention.

After the failure of the ninth meeting for the negotiations suggested by the United Nations at New York on March 1st, 1982, the positions defended by both governments hindered any negotiated solution of what was already seen as a conflict escalation.

What Argentina did not have to do was to remove the sovereignty issue from the United Nations framework, even if the English obstructed and set limits on the negotiations. In case this was done by force, Argentina would be involved in a bilateral aggression problem, outside the UN negotiations, which had been so hard to achieve²⁷.

As regards the political situation prior to the conflict during Margaret Thatcher's government, Clive Ponting, a senior official from the then British Ministry of Defense, pointed

²⁷ MARCELO NOEL URIONA, Thesis: "*Los Principios de la Guerra aplicables a las Fuerzas Aeroespaciales*" ("The principles of war applicable to aerospace forces"), Buenos Aires, Air Command and Staff College, 2017.

out: Anyone trying to understand the background of the Malvinas War campaign, should consider two important factors:

First, the position of the Royal Navy. The year before the Falklands conflict John Nott had carried out a major review of Defence spending in which I had been heavily involved. The bulk of the reductions had fallen on the Navy and in particular on the surface fleet. The pride of the Navy, the new aircraft carrier HMS *Invincible*, was to be sold to the Australians; the assault landing ships *Fearless* and *Intrepid* were for disposal and the number of destroyers and frigates was to be cut from sixty to at best fifty and of these about fifteen per cent were to be non-operational in the stand-by Squadron. The Royal Navy had never accepted these cuts and fought hard to try and get them reversed. By the end of March 1982 the point of no-return was rapidly approaching when some ships would be sold and others sent for scrap. The Argentinian invasion [sic] of the Falkland Islands on 2 April suddenly provided an unrivalled and unexpected opportunity for the Royal Navy to show that it could help the politicians who were in difficulties and thereby save itself. The Royal Navy had one fear: that the Task Force would sail all the way to the South Atlantic and back again without a fight. There had to be a conflict if the Royal Navy was to prove its effectiveness and indispensability²⁸. This feeling was allied to the normal military tendency to see any problems in terms of a solution by force of arms. They left it to others to find a peaceful solution if they could.

The second factor was the political position of the Government and in particular the Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher. In March 1982 public opinion polls were showing that the Government was spectacularly unpopular; the Social Democratic Party in alliance with the Liberals seemed to be the new political force. Then despite clear indications stretching over many months and subsequently chronicled by the Franks Report the Government lost British territory to a foreign invader [sic] — something that had not happened since the Second World War.

The Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, and his junior Ministers resigned. The Government was in disarray. The immediate response was the despatch of the Task Force, announced by Mrs Thatcher in the historic Saturday debate in the Commons on 3 April. Would it be used or could a diplomatic solution be found? What would such a solution entail? Could the Government survive a diplomatic solution that eventually transferred power to Argentina? Could the Argentinian Government accept anything less?

Almost imperceptibly an alliance emerged between the politicians and the Royal Navy. They needed each other. The Royal Navy wanted to convince the politicians that they could do what was wanted. The politicians wanted them to do it to save the Government²⁹.

While the Royal Navy needed to justify its surface fleet, the British government was undergoing an unpopularity period. For these reasons, the United Kingdom decided to escalate the conflict. On more than one occasion, London had implicitly suggested — having a global vision of the kingdom's problems — the possibility of dissociating the Malvinas Islands from their territory, a position that confronted the strong opposition of local-interest groups, the Falkland Islands Company (FIC) and Governor Rex Hunt in the first place. These groups actively opposed any project involving a transfer of sovereignty and, at the same time, they disapproved the inactivation of the surface fleet, the reduction of Antarctic activity and the British prestige overseas.

²⁸ Editor's note: The NATO would have a new mission: the control of the Soviet Navy mainly by way of the underwater weapon, which would reduce the number of surface units.

²⁹ CLIVE PONTING, *The Right to Know - The Inside Story of the Belgrano Affair*, Londres, Sphere Books, 1985, pages 71 and 72. In July 1984, Clive Ponting sent two documents, nicknamed «the crown jewels», to Labor MP Tam Dalyell concerning the sinking of the Argentine navy warship ARA *General Belgrano*. He faced a trial for revealing classified information.

They just had to wait for an event to trigger the conflict, and it finally happened: the crisis over the South Georgia Island.

National political context

As from 24th March 1976, the Argentine Republic was governed by the Armed Forces. In December 1981, Teniente General Roberto Viola was the President of the Nation, whereas the second Military Junta, the State Higher Authority was made up by Almirante Jorge Isaac Anaya, Brigadier General Arturo Basilio Lami Dozo and Teniente General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri. The need to reinstate political power and revitalize the military government, which was showing clear signs of exhaustion, created a favorable atmosphere for the understanding between Anaya and Galtieri to replace president Viola and to plan for the Malvinas Islands recapture by force, as an alternative to the diplomatic negotiations³⁰.

On 15 December 1981, Anaya ordered the Naval Operations Commander, Vicealmirante Juan José Lombardo, to elaborate a Plan to recapture the Malvinas Islands. Since the 1960s, the Navy had considered the islands a probable source of conflict which could demand, in time, the action of said Force. This possibility was not envisaged within the conflict hypothesis and, accordingly, neither within the military joint planning; therefore, it had never been taken into account in the short, medium and long-term equipping and development programs³¹.

Nevertheless, there was a document at the Argentine Department of Planning called National Strategic Intelligence Plan (Foreign Sector) which envisaged a conflict hypothesis with the United Kingdom, and which principal points were drawn up at said Department during 1981. In said document, this conflict was assigned priority 2 (below the Southern Conflict) and was described as «Serious Conflict» and «War Hypothesis in the short-term» (pages 2, 3 and 4 of the previously mentioned document at the Central Nacional de Inteligencia, National Intelligence Central Agency)³².

Under Anaya's orders, Vicealmirante Lombardo devised a plan to recapture the islands which, in short, did not entail major difficulties since it would only face opposition at Port Stanley Seat of Government, where they relied on a force of forty Argentine Navy Marines, unlike the rest of the territory. A joint operation could be carried out using the available assets, without extra personnel, weapons or special budget items requirements. No tentative date was specified. It was just necessary to count on the surprise factor but, then what?³³

On December 29th 1981, Malvinas Islands' British Governor, Rex Hunt, organized a social gathering for the end of the year. Standing apart from other guests, he spoke freely to Vicecomodoro Héctor R. Gilobert — Argentine representative before the Special Advisory Commission — about his distrust of the new President³⁴. He was worried about the presence of a General with a reputation for being hard. Hunt thought relations could turn difficult. Personally, he had a downbeat attitude and could not see a pacific way out of the sovereignty dispute.

At the same time, on that same day, once the brigadier promotion ceremony at the Condor Building was over, Galtieri informed Lami Dozo about the possible South Atlantic campaign. By the end of the year, the Malvinas issue was on the National Government agenda and, under Galtieri's orders, a joint Working Commission made up by General de

³⁰ OSCAR CARDOSO, RICARDO KIRSCHBAUM Y EDUARDO VAN DER KOOY, *Malvinas, la trama secreta*, Buenos Aires, Arte Gráfico Editorial Argentino, 2007, page 21.

³¹ COMISIÓN DE ANÁLISIS... (*Rattenbach report*), op. cit., fl. 27.

³² COMISIÓN DE ANÁLISIS... (*Rattenbach report*), op. cit., paragraph 116.

³³ JUAN JOSÉ LOMBARDO, op. cit., page. 31.

³⁴ "El General Galtieri inicia en Argentina un gobierno firme y riguroso" ("General Galtieri introduces a firm and severe government in Argentina"), *El País* newspaper, Madrid, Spain, December 22nd, 1981 edition.

División Osvaldo García, Commander of the 5th Corps of the Army, Vicealmirante Juan José Lombardo, Brigadier Mayor Sigfrido Plessl, and General de Brigada Julio Ruiz, Second Commander depending on García.

The commission prepared a 14-page handwritten document called Outline Plan for Recapturing the Malvinas Islands. It envisaged a joint operation which consisted in landing after being transported by helicopter and taking the airport so as to enable the landing of transport aircraft. This document also specified a minimum 15-day notice for the execution. No part of the plan envisaged any subsequent defense in case of a British military reaction.

At the Military Junta meeting on January 5th 1982, the operation turned into a State issue which was decided to be carried out should the round of negotiations, within the United Nations framework, to be celebrated at New York on February 26 through 28 fail. Around mid-January, when bidding Vicecomodoro Gilobert farewell, Governor Hunt once again expressed his concern about the activities performed at the time by the Argentine businessman, Constantino Davidoff, and the working team at the Georgias Islands. He added that he was afraid Galtieri might be tempted to use the force and highlighted that Argentinians were wrong if they supposed the United Kingdom would not fight back.

Georgias Islands crisis

The Argentinian businessman, Constantino Davidoff, used to buy and sell industrial equipment and, in 1979, he had signed a contract to purchase the material that could be recovered from the inactive factories on the South Georgia Islands. The contract was entered into in Scotland and he paid three hundred thousand American dollars for all he could obtain at the Puerto Leith facilities.

Besides the dismantling, the main problem lay in the transportation of the material from that faraway region. He was involved in discussions with the British to charter the HMS *Endurance*, but without success. By mid-1981, after consulting with the Argentine Foreign Office, he chartered the vessel ARA *Bahía Buen Suceso* from the Navy for transporting the workers.

He traveled a couple of times by his own means to Puerto Leith in order to assess the scale of the works and, finally, once the team was organized, he went to the British Embassy at Buenos Aires in order to inform them about his movements and the immediate beginning of the task. He requested White Cards for his forty one workers, and the Embassy set no objections at all. It was the beginning of March 1982.

All the arrangements made by Davidoff were public and verified actions; there was nothing in the formalities that the British authorities did not know about, neither in the workers' transportation nor in the vessel chartering. It was just a commercial operation.

On March 19, the *Bahía Buen Suceso* chartered by Davidoff arrived at Puerto Leith. The workers disembarked. It was an abandoned place, nobody lived there. Shortly after that, a group of British people appeared to demand the lowering of the Argentine flag raised on a metal tower as well as the workers getting back on board. Moreover, they filed a complaint stating that the men had been hunting, an activity they had been trying to prohibit.

The British had arrived from Grytviken, the most important settlement on the island, a few kilometers away, but from which it was necessary to make a detour circumventing considerable heights to arrive at Puerto Leith. The British presence was not a matter of chance, they had been previously informed and it had been explicitly done to oppose the Argentinians' disembarkation.

Several publications have stated that, on March 19, Mr. Davidoff's workers were infiltrated by Argentine military men. That was not the case. It was only some days later and after the excessive British reaction led by the Malvinas Governor, Rex Hunt, who sent the icebreaker HMS *Endurance* with a group of Marines on board, that the Navy General



Workers arriving at Puerto Leith - Photo taken from the ARA *Bahía Buen Suceso* by Captain Héctor O. Caimé, maritime pilot at the Río de la Plata

Staff ordered the icebreaker *Bahía Paraíso* to go to Puerto Leith carrying the then Teniente Astiz³⁵ and his group of ten men³⁶.

On the same day of the Georgias incident, Port Stanley LADE's premises were attacked at night. This incident, insignificant in itself, shows that the British on Malvinas carefully followed Davidoff's movements 1480 kilometers away. That trading operation in a remote archipelago could mean that London was giving up power and that the Argentine Government was strengthening its rights in the area.

Neither the British in London nor the Argentine Government were capable of controlling these reactions and easing the impending crisis. In order to face the Georgias problem, the decision to occupy the Malvinas Islands was taken. A minor incident turned to a war started which catalyst had been the Falklands Government.

Towards April 2nd

Military and strategic context

The geographical features of the theater, the weather conditions and the personality of the leaders are the factors to be considered in order to understand the operational environment in which an armed conflict air operations shall take place. The South Atlantic confrontation in 1982 took place in the Malvinas archipelago, which is made up of two main islands, the Gran Malvina (western) island with a surface of 4532 km², and the Soledad (eastern) island with a surface of 6308 km². About a hundred of small islands complete the group totaling a surface of 11,718 km².

The climate on the Malvinas islands, 720 km away from Argentina and 7200 km from Ascension Island, is harsh maritime weather, characterized by cold, strong and persistent winds; hail, clou-

³⁵ The Grupo Alfa (Alpha Group) commanded by Teniente Astiz had the mission to establish –by mutual agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs– a scientific station on South Georgia Islands, which was occupied by the British Antarctic Survey, a British government scientific organization.

³⁶ JUAN JOSÉ LOMBARDO, op. cit., page 56.

diness, night frost and frequent fog. During May and June, the average minimum temperature is 6 °C while the maximum one is 8 °C. South, southwest and west winds cause wind-chill factors below -10 °C.

The South Atlantic Conflict was an unexpected confrontation for both countries. It was unexpected both for the British forces — measured and trained to be part of the NATO and fight against the Warsaw Pact troops — and for the Argentine Armed Forces which, save for the Navy, had never considered this hypothesis, regardless of the fact that the preliminary planning was secretly done and, thus, they lacked minimum state of readiness.

Despite the fact that the Rosario Operation³⁷ initiative to recapture the islands was led by Argentina, the United Kingdom counted on more time to prepare for an armed conflict, since the islands recapture was already planned as from April 2, before the Military Committee (COMIL) had even planned how to defend them.

Most of the members of the Argentine Armed Forces did not find out about the upcoming conflict until April 2. And since the high-ranking leaders had ruled out an armed response, it was not until April 4, after having confirmation that the British task Force was getting ready to sail south, that they started to put the material into commission, to obtain equipment suitable for flying over water and to train in order to fight naval targets.

As far as intelligence is concerned, it was not until March 9, when the Argentine Armed Forces Joint Staff was alerted to the operation, that the necessary process of information about the enemy capabilities started. When the Secretaría de Inteligencia del Estado (SIDE, Secretariat of State Intelligence) received the order to address the Malvinas issue, they placed on record that the Essential Elements of Information (EEI) would not be ready until June.

As regards the use of air assets, it is worth mentioning the difficulty caused by the doctrinal differences that emerged among the Military Power components equipped with fighter aircraft, from the very moment in which the operational commands were set up. They were deep-rooted disagreements, casting suspicion among sister forces which just had to cooperate with each other, and that would be the main obstacle for using the Air Power of the Nation in a comprehensive manner.

Poles apart from local institutional contrasts was the vast experience the British Forces counted on. The Command was the exclusive responsibility of the Admiral of the Fleet John Fieldhouse, who was then the Royal Navy Commander-in-Chief. The leadership stood out due to the fact that it was a joint one, and because of the command relationships in effect, which were pre-established and accepted by all ground, naval and air forces.

As far as combat experience is concerned, the Argentine Armed Forces only counted on the relative lessons learned in domestic confrontations. On the other hand, the United Kingdom rested on a long-established warfighting tradition, with the younger generations enriched by participating in realistic air operations exercises, such as Exercise Red Flag or similar ones. If we add to this training their permanent willingness to operate in the North Atlantic harsh weather conditions, similar to the ones on the Malvinas Islands, their clear advantage can be deduced.

Another factor that influenced the operational environment configuration of the confronting forces was the presence of a non-neutral third party. The conflict hypothesis that Argentina considered was the recent confrontation with Chile over the marking out of the far south they shared which almost led them to war in 1978 and 1979. Given the traditional friendship between the United Kingdom and Chile, the possibility of our neighbo-

³⁷ The operation lacked a final name and "Rosario" was suggested to Contraalmirante Carlos Büsser by Teniente Coronel Mohamed Seinedín aboard the troop carrier ARA *San Antonio*, some hours before disembarkation, in honor of Liniers before the final assault to recover Buenos Aires in August 1806. See CARLOS BÜSSER, *Operación Rosario*, Buenos Aires, Atlántida Publishing Company, 1983, page 64.

ring country helping the former was not ruled out, and this in fact was the case, although covertly. This assessment, well-founded according to the recent statements made by the then Chilean commanders, prevented the Argentinian effort from focusing on maintaining operations on Malvinas for fear of weakening the defensive attitude towards the Trans-Andean country.

Moreover, although this was known thirty years later, Chile's collaboration enabled the Task Force to be informed, almost in real time, of any air movements at some Argentine airports detected by the surveillance radar at Punta Arenas. Moreover, the Chilean government made available the operation from San Félix Island, on the Pacific Ocean, of British electronic intelligence aircraft Nimrod that flew over the South Atlantic Ocean. Due to the limited operation on the island runway, these aircraft had to take off with minimum fuel; then they landed and refueled at Concepción (*Carriel Sur*) Airport during the night-time, when *Carabineros* closed and protected the airport for the mission to remain veiled. Support to San Félix Island came from Easter Island and the continent, with British C-130 aircraft bearing the Chilean Air Force insignia painted on them —although they were clearly distinguished by their forward air refueling probe— which transported 50-gallon fuel tanks for the Nimrod operation³⁸. Thanks to this resource, the British forces knew about Argentina's deployment of communications and radar information at the Patagonia and Malvinas Islands.

Events leading to the conflict

Between 1971 and 1981, in line with the foreign policy of gaining the kelpers' goodwill, the Argentine Air Force had used men and resources. Meanwhile, in the diplomatic arena, other initiatives were put forward in order to solve the dispute. In December 1973, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) once again expressed their concern over the scarce progress achieved in negotiations. In 1974, the Inter-American Juridical Committee of the Organization of American States (OAS) made a statement along these same lines in 1974 and emphasized the feeling of unease the persistence of foreign-power occupied territories caused in the American continent.

In March 1975, the Department of Geology Sciences of the University of Birmingham submitted a report called "Geology of the Region around the Falkland Islands" according to which there were real chances of finding oil on the islands and adjacent seas. As a result of this report, a survey mission to the Malvinas area was organized in October and led by lord Shackleton, on board of the icebreaker HMS *Endurance*. Faced with this situation, Argentina filed a protest. Diplomatic relationships were strained up to a breaking point.

On 16 January 1976, the OAS Inter-American Juridical Committee stated that exploring the potential of energy resources on the Malvinas islands was a threat to hemispheric security and, at Rio de Janeiro, it declared that Argentina had unobjectionable sovereignty rights over the Malvinas archipelago.

The tension breaking point was reached on 4 February that same year, when the destroyer ARA *Almirante Storni* tried to stop the oceanographic research ship RRS *Shackleton* by force, 78 miles (145 km) south of Port Stanley, claiming it was sailing on Argentine territorial waters. The British captain, under orders radiated by the Malvinas governor, Neville French, given on the radio, did not come to a halt and refused to receive a group of inspectors on board, or to continue sailing up to Ushuaia guided by the *Storni*. In order to pressure further, the Argentine destroyer actions were supported by an SP-2H Neptune aircraft, while the *Storni* was firing at the *Shackleton* bow, which continued towards Port Stanley.

The incident caused the ambassadors to be withdrawn and the interruption of negotiations. The «positive» side to the Shackleton Report was the assertion that exploiting resources in the area would not be rational or profitable without the Argentine govern-

³⁸ SIDNEY EDWARDS, *My Secret Falklands War*, London, The Book Guild, 2014, page 53.



HMS Endurance anchored in Port Stanley roadstead - Photo courtesy of: Brig. VGM (R) Bloomer Reeve

ment's cooperation and approval. When it was clear that the Foreign Office tried to reach an understanding with Argentina, the UKFIC managed to increase the number of Island representatives at the Legislative Council at Stanley.

Thus, the prevailing principle was that, when discussing sovereignty, the settlers' wishes should be considered before their interests, as our country maintained. Despite the fact that Argentina operated an airline for them, and provided assistance and services that increased their well-being, the beneficiaries blocked government initiatives that might help to solve the dispute.

If the Shackleton Report is understood to be one of the reasons that triggered the conflict, it is worth considering its content.

The main motivation of the Shackleton mission was to study the possibilities to develop the islands' traditional economy based on wool (a declining world market), and on the hunting and exploitation of seals and whales. These activities had been monopolized by the Falkland Islands Company since 1851, cornering more than half of the economically exploitable lands, almost all domestic trade and the complete control of foreign trade. Public finances had been negative since 1968 and depended on the contributions from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund.

In general terms, the Shackleton Report estimated that the Malvinas Islands were surrounded by a sea which was probably home to the largest resources of protein in the world.

The document was published in July 1976 and sold at Port Stanley for eight pounds. It was 450 pages long and divided into two volumes, and elaborated by a group of experts from the finance, wool, fishing and oil industries. It aimed at assessing the potentials to be exploited in the colony, which could be summarized as follows:

- Fishing: the waters surrounding the islands, in a 200 mile-radio, were home to a great population of fish; bluefish alone could account for the same volume of British har-



Oceanographic research ship RRS *Shackleton* - BANIM DEH-FAA

vesting at the time. In the vicinity of the South Georgias Islands, there were large amounts of krill (the Federal Republic of Germany, Japan and the Soviet Union were greatly interested in the extraction of 75-million tons a year of this protein-rich small crustacean, whose potential return exceeded the total of world fishing). Fishing: the waters surrounding the islands, in a 200 mile-radio, were home to a great population of fish; bluefish alone could account for the same volume of British harvesting at the time. In the vicinity of the South Georgias Islands, there were large amounts of krill (the Federal Republic of Germany, Japan and the Soviet Union were greatly interested in the extraction of 75-million tons a year of this protein-rich small crustacean, whose potential return exceeded the total of world fishing).

- Seaweed: for producing alginates, which have great economic return.
- Skins: due to the growing population of seals and walruses in the South Georgia Island waters.
- Oil: the surveys indicated the existence of hydrocarbon in the Southern Argentine Sea, which confirmed previous presumptions and reports.

Although it was indicated that oil exploitation would not be profitable without the Argentine Government cooperation, this statement reflects the British intention of conjointly exploiting Argentine resources in the area, which enabled the sustainability of the islands during the long term that would entail reaching a solution similar to Hong Kong. The difficulty in this line of business was its commercial development. Besides the high costs, there was the political need to coordinate a status with Argentina for seeking and prospecting oil in an area claimed as her own and, thus deemed as part of the Argentine natural resources.

Moreover, the research addressed problems such as transportation, the development of dairying and horticultural production, redistribution of lands, and the like. Despite its eminently technical nature, the Shackleton Report did not escape the political field. It concluded, although not explicitly, that the islands should not be handed over to Argentina.

In 1977, the Labor Party Foreign Minister, David Owen, informed the House of Commons that both countries' governments had agreed to negotiate the political future of the Malvinas,

South Georgias and South Sandwich Islands, including its sovereignty, as well as to economically cooperate in said territories and in the South West Atlantic.

The rapprochement took place when Héctor Francisco Domingo Capozzolo, Argentine, made an offer to buy the Falkland Islands Company, with the Government's support which, through Martínez de Hoz, had agreed to pay on a non-reimbursable basis.

The operation was prepared in the greatest secrecy and it was advanced until Jacobo Timerman, for the *La Opinión* newspaper, leaked the news to the press, which resulted in a big scandal in the House of Commons³⁹. This delay of 1977 coincided with the new project to recapture the islands by force submitted by the Almirante Emilio Massera to the Commanders-in-Chief Committee, which was not approved by President Videla.

In 1979, on the initiative undertaken by the Argentine Foreign Affairs Department, it was agreed that ambassadors would be reinstated in 1980. In May of that same year, the Labor Party handed over the Government to the Conservative Party, led by Margaret Thatcher. In June, the new Foreign Office Undersecretary, Nicholas Ridley, visited Stanley. Temporarily in Buenos Aires, he met with the Foreign Undersecretary, Comodoro Carlos R. Cavandoli, with whom he agreed to improve bilateral relationships and to give negotiations a new boost. Ridley and Cavandoli analyzed different alternatives to solve the dispute. The most interesting one was to carry out a Hong King-like lease back, i.e., to share the administration of the islands for ninety nine years before handing over the sovereignty. The Argentine Government would guarantee the Islanders' possessions and way of life and they would maintain their British citizenship. Their children would have dual citizenship and their grandchildren would be Argentinian.

In September 1980, during the United Nations General Assembly, at New York, the Argentine Minister of Foreign Affairs, Brigadier Carlos W. Pastor, met with his British counterpart, lord Peter A. Carrington and expressed that the Malvinas issue was vital for Buenos Aires. On the contrary, Carrington replied that the South Atlantic issue was almost at the end of the Foreign Office list. In November, before his second trip to the islands, Ridley mentioned to Cavandoli that he favored the leasing alternative and that, although the Prime Minister, Ms. Thatcher, did not support those negotiations, he had managed to get the Cabinet's approval to ask for the opinion of the Islanders on a basic plan towards that solution. According to the British historian, Peter Beck⁴⁰, Ridley's negotiations and proposals transformed the dispute since the Government of the United Kingdom publicly stated its disposition to consider handing over the sovereignty to the Argentine Republic.

Ridley went to Malvinas convinced his proposal would be accepted since it looked logical and suitable for both parties, from a neutral standpoint. Nevertheless, when he arrived at the airport, a loud demonstration took him by surprise. The activists, carrying placards and singing, rejected the presence of the diplomat. On the way to Stanley, painted messages could be read demanding that he should take his proposal elsewhere.

Then, in at a public hearing at the Town Hall, the objections of the groups spokespersons opposing the option were made public and broadcast by the radio for the inhabitants living in the country. Through the analysis of the recording, the Dirección General de Antártida y Malvinas de la Cancillería (Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malvinas and Antarctica General Directorate) was able to know the opinion of the population. The Malvinas settlers did not spare their condemnation at Nicholas Ridley's farewell either. In short, the islanders only accepted having commercial relationships with Argentina.

In February 1981, a new round of negotiations took place in New York. On this occasion, the Falklanders were members of the British delegation, as *de facto* negotiators. In September, Nicholas Ridley left the Foreign Office.

³⁹ LOWELL S. GUSTAFSON, *op. cit.*, page 101.

⁴⁰ PETER J. BECK, *The Falkland Islands as an International Problem*, New York, Routledge Revivals, 1988.

During Vicedomodoro Gilbert's administration (1980-1981), his relationship with Malvinas and Antarctica General Directorate had been smooth and productive. The Foreign Minister Carlos Blanco and his advisor, Coronel Luis González Balcarce, followed closely the requirements they received. The developments of the ever more difficult situation were sent to the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Argentine Air Force, once a week and through diplomatic channels. A file summarized the approach actions as compared to the profits. Results were poor due to the fact that the beneficiaries themselves blocked the actions and no support could be expected from them unless they were offered some advantage. Given the state of things, from the Malvinas settlers' point of view, they had everything to lose.

The conclusion awoke Foreign Minister Oscar Camilión's interest so much that he met with Gilbert and listened to his reasons. For the first time after Capozzolo's initiative, the idea of offering financial compensation as an incentive for the islanders to reconsider their rejection was entertained. Camilión was not excited about it but he had no objections. Later on, General Leopoldo Galtieri took office and Nicanor Costa Méndez was in charge of Argentine foreign affairs and the turn of events already described took place.

Meanwhile, the program to reduce the number of Royal Navy surface ships involved removing from service the icebreaker *Endurance*, belonging to the British Antarctic Survey⁴¹ (BAS), assigned to the Malvinas Islands. Notwithstanding, around mid-December 1981, at the request of the Legislative Council at Stanley, the Parliament called for an increased naval presence in the area, aiming at the Antarctic projection.

The authors of this initiative, who were deeply reluctant to negotiate sovereignty, were part of the most recalcitrant group of islanders. They, together with the British corporations having economic interests in the islands, who were afraid of losing their privileges, prevented Argentina from consolidating her bonds with the islanders and demanded military protection from the United Kingdom, that would dissuade any armed actions.

The members of the UKFIC saw in this demand the best excuse to create lobby groups in the British Parliament. The Houses, made up of Members of Parliament with radicalized ideas, the far-right press and the admiralty itself joint forces to ensure sovereignty was not handed over to Argentina. On the pretext that they aimed at protecting the natives' wishes, they coerced both the UK Government and public opinion. Moreover, they counted on Governor Rex Hunt's collaboration.

Chronology of the crisis

1979-1981. Businessman Constantino Davidoff, through his representative Collin Shap, an Argentine-naturalized British citizen, contacted the company Christian Salvesen Limited at Edinburgh, a UK Crown contractor, in order to scrap three abandoned whaling factories at Stromness, Husvik and Leith, at Stromness Bay, on South Georgia Island.

The contract approval process began in September 1979. It was not executed until December 1981, after several discussions and studies. It included the option to purchase equipment and ships. The contract price was 27 million US dollars. Before signing the agreement in London, Davidoff went to Malvinas and met with Governor James Roland Walter Parker. On the other hand, the Scottish firm Salvesen also informed the Governor about the operation.

Moreover, in 1976, the Argentine Navy (ARA) had established a scientific base on the South Sandwich Islands. This action only triggered a tepid reaction from Britain. In August 1981, in view of this alleged lack of interest, the Navy, in mutual agreement with the Argentine Foreign Affairs Department, planned a similar operation on the South Georgias, occupied by the British Antarctic Survey. In order to carry it out, a Task Group made up of ten scientists and military personnel was drafted, known as Grupo Alfa (Alpha Group).

⁴¹ British Antarctic Survey, United Kingdom's national polar research institute.



Naval transport ARA *Bahía Buen Suceso* - BANIM DEH-FAA

20 December 1981. On board the icebreaker *Almirante Irizar*, the Grupo Alfa sailed to Tierra del Fuego in order to train in cold weather areas. Having nothing to do with them, Davidoff and six other people were also on board the *Irizar* heading for South Georgia Island in order to survey the terrain for scrapping. The businessman returned to Ushuaia, from where he flew to Buenos Aires in order to procure authorization at the British Embassy. He chartered the ship ARA *Bahía Buen Suceso* from Transportes Navales to carry personnel and the salvaged ferrous material.

In the meantime, the Military Committee had set up a joint Working Commission that planned to recapture the Malvinas Islands by force. Its members did not know about Davidoff's workers' trip and assumed that any actions hindering the execution of plans would be avoided.

2 February 1982. The military government ordered to postpone both departures (Grupo Alfa towards the Georgias Islands and Davidoff to South Georgia) until the round of negotiations was over, which took place in New York on February 27 and 28 with no positive result for Argentina. Foreign Minister Costa Méndez published a statement according to which the country reserved the right to «freely choose the most convenient procedure according to her interests»⁴².

9 March 1982. The Grupo Alfa boarded the vessel ARA *Bahía Paraíso*, assigned to the Antarctic Campaign, which departed towards the Orcadas Islands.

11 March 1982. Counting on no formal permit issued by the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Commanders-in-Chief Committee, but in the exercise of its power since it involved a private commercial transaction, Transportes Navales authorized the *Bahía Buen Suceso* to carry Davidoff's forty one workers to the Georgias Islands, holding their corresponding White Cards⁴³.

⁴² RUBÉN OSCAR MORO, *La trampa de Malvinas - Historia del conflicto del Atlántico Sur (Parte 1)*, Buenos Aires, Edivern, 2005, page 93.

⁴³ Ibidem, page 94.

19 March 1982. The UK Ambassador at Buenos Aires, Anthony Williams, had advised Davidoff that the ship should first arrive at Grytviken, an entrance and control port designated by the British Government. Nevertheless, following the order of the Chief of Transportes Navales, the Captain of the *Bahía Buen Suceso* went directly to Puerto Leith where technicians and workers disembarked to dismantle one of the whaling stations. It was not a capricious decision. Should British supervision be accepted, sovereignty would be implicitly acknowledged.

After the arrival, members of the British Antarctic Survey, reporting to the Malvinas' governor, claimed that the expedition had used Navy ships, that military were part of the contingent, that firearms were fired and that they raised the Argentine flag; actions that showed an assertion of Argentine rights on the islands. This information, handled by the UK Parliament and the press, worsened the situation and helped to disseminate propaganda causing the British people's dissatisfaction.

Immediately, the Argentine government was accused of ordering an action that was a real threat to the Malvinas inhabitants some 800 miles (1480 kilometers) away from the Georgias. On March 20th, 1982, ambassador Anthony Williams formally filed the claim before the Argentine authorities. He stated that his government had taken the incidents seriously and, as an ultimatum, he threatened to take measures if the crew members did not abandon Puerto Leith immediately.

On that same day, National authorities denied having any links with Davidoff and his people, as well as the presence of military personnel among the workers. The Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintained that although the *Bahía Buen Suceso* belonged to the Navy, it was a ship which operation was chartered by a commercial firm, through Transportes Navales, in order to carry out a task approved by the UK and that the events lacked importance.

Later on, it was established that the accusation that had allegedly triggered the conflict was unsubstantiated. To begin with, the shots had been supposedly fired by the French crew members of the French-flagged *Isatis* yacht. Hoisting the flag was an insignificant action carried out by civil workers, who refused to abide by the formalities because they were following orders.

The British government stuck to its position even though the nature of their claim it made was not in keeping with the 1971 Communications Agreement. Article 2 specified that unilateral events, by either party, did not bring any advantages as regards sovereignty claims.

21 March 1982. The Military Committee ordered the Outline Plan for Recapturing the Malvinas Islands to be reactivated, which had been carried out by the Working Commission and presented a few days before. None of the scheduled ships (*ARA Bahía Paraíso*, *Bahía Buen Suceso* and *Almirante Irizar*) were available, they were assigned to Antarctic tasks. An alternative plan had to be developed.

The icebreaker *Endurance* sailed from Stanley towards Leith with Marines on board, in order to remove the workers and to enforce the Malvinas' governor demand to leave within twenty-four hours. 22 de marzo de 1982.

22 March 1982. The British Antarctic Survey claim was submitted to the captain of the *Bahía Buen Suceso* vessel, assuming the workers depended on him. The latter answered his vessel was only complying with a charter agreement and, without further procedures, he set sail from Leith. The workers remained on the island. Meanwhile, at Stanley, activists broke into LADE's offices and damaged the premises. Answering Governor Hunt's call, foreign reporters arrived to cover the events.

23 March 1982. The British government notified that it would expel the workers and again stated that their presence posed a threat to the Malvinas inhabitants. According to the UK,

the Argentine attitude was an act of aggression, without considering the fact that Davidoff had visited the embassy several times and consulted about requirements to carry out his project.

In turn, the National government considered the use of British Marines as a clear provocation and that the United Kingdom would probably send naval units to dissuade a military escalation. The transport ARA *Bahía Paraíso*, which was at the Orcadas Islands, was released from the Antarctic Campaign and sent to protect Davidoff's workers, together with the Grupo Alfa, before the *Endurance* arrived.

Argentina found herself at a crossroads. On the one hand, if Argentina let the workers be removed by force without opposition, she would be accepting British sovereignty over the islands, according to the doctrine of Estoppel⁴⁴. On the other hand, if she accepted Governor Rex Hunt's proposal arbitrarily requiring that passports be stamped at Grytviken, it implied waiving the rights *ipso iure*.

24 March 1982. In view of the development, the Argentine government decided to speed up the studies to recover the islands sovereignty through the use of military force. On that same day, the English supply vessel *John Biscoe* set sail from Montevideo carrying on board the relief crew of Marines for the British garrison at Malvinas, which would double the strength⁴⁵.

25 March 1982. The ARA *Bahía Paraíso* left Grupo Alfa at Leith, a crew of ten Marine officers⁴⁶, in order to protect the workers, together with enough elements and supplies for a long stay. The Naval Operations Commander sent two corvettes (ARA *Drummond* and *Granville*) to intercept the HMS *Endurance* in case civilians had been captured. Once its implementation was arranged, the order became ineffective due to the Navy's intervention before the COMIL to prevent Argentina from being portrayed as an aggressor.

In turn, the joint Working Commission reported that the military operation to recapture the islands could be conducted starting from April 1, thanks to the advanced readiness of the task force intended to carry out the assault⁴⁷.

26 March 1982. The logistical transport RFA *Fort Austin* at Gibraltar was the first ship to depart southwards to resupply the *Endurance* at Malvinas. A day later, the fleet auxiliary tanker RFA *Appleleaf*, which was passing through Curacao, in the Netherlands Antilles in the Caribbean, was diverted to Gibraltar to load general cargo and also head to the South Atlantic to support the two ships.

29 March 1982. In secret, a nuclear submarine departed from the United Kingdom. Another submarine preparations began, and the destroyer flotilla in Gibraltar was put on alert. Admiral John Woodward was appointed to organize the task force⁴⁸.

30 March 1982. A severe storm delayed the maritime progress of the Argentine task force and postponed disembarkation one day. British intelligence detected the naval movement, while the Argentine Air Force deployment went unnoticed⁴⁹. That day, by order of the

⁴⁴ Doctrine of Estoppel (Anglo-American law) or Doctrine of own actions in Argentine Law: it is a legal principle that prevents someone from asserting or denying certain rights that contradict what they previously said or agreed to by law, contrary to their statements or acts regarding such facts or rights. By way of an irrebuttable presumption, a person is prevented from refuting, within the legal process, those facts that are immediate consequences of their statements or actions (as they may also be bound by facts that they have implicitly established, not only through their words but also through their own behavior).

⁴⁵ CARLOS ALBERTO BÜSSER, "La Recuperación de Malvinas" ("The Recapture of the Malvinas Islands"), Boletín del Centro Naval (Naval Institute News Bulletin), No. 748, January-March 1987.

⁴⁶ JUAN JOSÉ LOMBARDO, op. cit., page 56.

⁴⁷ CARLOS ALBERTO BÜSSER, "La Recuperación...", op. cit.

⁴⁸ Idem.

⁴⁹ Idem.

Argentine Air Defense Command, a squadron of four M-III/EA interceptor-fighter aircraft with five pilots and technical personnel on board was deployed to the Río Gallegos Military Air Base (BAM).

Planning prior to the conflict

Background

The territorial organization, both prior to and after the conflict with Chile, established theaters of operations under the responsibility of a senior Armed Forces officer. The planning of the Southern Theater of Operations had three components led by senior officers from the three Forces, in which the appointment of the Commander of the Componente Aéreo del Teatro de Operaciones Sur (Air Component of the Southern Theater of Operations (CATOS) traditionally fell on the Chief of the 4th Air Brigade.

In 1981, at the Department of Planning, the National Strategic Intelligence Plan already considered the hypothesis of an armed conflict with the United Kingdom, although it was not yet included in the joint military planning. However, up to that year, the Argentine Armed Forces had not jointly planned an armed action to recapture the Malvinas Islands⁵⁰.

In mid-1981, the Military Committee ordered the newly created operational strategic commands to update their respective campaign plans in case the ongoing mediation to resolve the border dispute with Chile failed.

In general terms, Military Strategic Directive (DEMIL) 1/81 envisioned the organization of:

- Two joint commands for which the Army was primarily responsible:
 - Western Theater of Operations Joint Command
 - Southern Theater of Operations Joint Command
- A Northeast Strategic Security Area for which the Army was primarily responsible
- A Southern Strategic Security Area for which the Navy was primarily responsible
- Two specific commands:
 - Strategic Naval Command with Navy assets
 - Strategic Air Command with Air Force assets
- Two joint commands led by the Air Force:
 - Air Transport Command
 - Air Defense Command subdivided into four Air Defense Zones:
 - Central Air Defense Zone
 - Southern Air Defense Zone
 - Northwest Air Defense Zone
 - Northeast Air Defense Zone

Each theater was assigned an air component by the Air Force Command in the form of tactical air forces, known as the Fuerza Aérea Oeste (Argentine Air Force Western Command, FAO) and the Fuerza Aérea Sur (Argentine Air Force Southern Command, FAS). It was also clarified that until achieving adequate air superiority, these organizations would receive orders from the Strategic Air Command, and as the offensive against enemy aviation succeeded, the assets would be made available to the Theaters of Operations Commands to provide air support for ground maneuvers.

The given briefing did not even remotely contemplate the possibility of engaging in an armed conflict with the United Kingdom as regards the Malvinas Islands sovereignty.

⁵⁰ COMISIÓN DE ANÁLISIS..., (*Rattenbach Report*), op. cit., *Final Report*, pages 25 and 26.

Working Commission and Joint Staff

On January 5th, 1982, after a meeting to designate governors, the Military Junta decided, by mutual agreement, to initiate planning for the recapture of the Malvinas Islands in utmost secrecy, since it was based on the scenario that the operation would only be feasible if the United Kingdom did not increase its military strength. The involvement of the Joint Staff and the Armed Forces Staffs was primarily ruled out. Instead, a Working Commission was set up with deeply trusted personnel: Vicealmirante Juan J. Lombardo, General de División Osvaldo J. García and Brigadier Mayor Sigfrido M. Plessl⁵¹.

When the joint Working Commission met on January 15th to plan the Malvinas recapture, planning only existed for the Chilean scenario. Each Force appointed their respective Commission assistants: the operation Commanders representing the Navy — Contraalmirante Walter Allara, Commander of the Naval Fleet; Contraalmirante Carlos García Boll, Commander of the Naval Aviation; and, Contraalmirante Carlos Büsser, Commander of the Marine Infantry—, General de Brigada Julio Ruiz, representing the Army; and Comodoro Knud Erik Andreasen, representing the Air Force.

In the notes sent to the commanders drafting the Outline Plan called «for Recapturing the Malvinas Islands,» Brigadier Lami Dozo requested the preparation of a National Strategic Directive (DENAC 1/82), a document that must be drawn up for each conflict hypothesis. A Military Strategic Directive (DEMIL) is then developed based on the DENAC, and it is completed with the necessary military plans.

The COMIL briefing indicated that the operation should be unexpected and bloodless, since the sole purpose was to negotiate sovereignty from a more favorable position. The Working Commission met at Puerto Belgrano and would complete the Campaign Outline Plan, using the one already prepared by the Navy as a reference and adding the actions to be executed by the Army and the Air Force.

The plan considered the only opposing forces would be the ones existing in the Malvinas, and anticipated the temporary creation of a theater of operations that would encompass the Malvinas archipelago and the South Georgia Islands. Secondly, it called for the establishment of a joint command that would exercise operational leadership, as well as a joint task force (Task Force 40, TF-40) as the higher tactical element that would simultaneously conquer the insular objectives. In practice, this implied a coordinated landing of a helicopter assault force combined with an air assault⁵²; the participating ships would be the ARA *Almirante Irizar*, ARA *Bahía Paraíso*, and ARA *Bahía Buen Suceso*. Finally, it expressly specified that the operation would not be executed before May 15, 1982, as long as the element of surprise remained. The plan did not include any military response from the United Kingdom, nor did it consider a possible subsequent defense of the islands. It is important to highlight that at no time did the COMIL impose a probable execution date for the Plan on the members of the Working Commission.

The latter discussed the readiness of assets and personnel training, which was particularly critical for the Army, as it was in the process of incorporating the 1963-Class conscripts. An initial deadline of July 9 was set, but it was objected by the Argentine Air Force, which advised a date later than September, given that most combat aircraft lacked night offensive capabilities.

After recapturing the islands, an Argentine Army garrison of around 500 men would remain on the Malvinas. Their aim was not to provide defense against any reconquest attempt, but rather to maintain local control and collaborate with the government. The Navy and the Air Force would leave a minimum number of personnel for specific tasks.

⁵¹ HERNÁN DOBRY, "Entrevista al brigadier Lami Dozo", *Revista Perfil*, April 3rd, 2010.

⁵² "DEMIL 1/82", Annex 5, Strategic Concept, paragraph 4, 1), pages 1 through 4. DEH-FAA Archives.

By the end of February, the DENAC 1/82 and a handwritten fourteen-page document called “Outline Plan for Recapturing the Malvinas Islands” were ready.

On March 9th, the COMIL gave intervention to the Joint Staff and ordered them to prepare the DENAC 2/82, extending the previous one without considering any UK military reaction, except for the local one. Additionally, they were tasked with preparing the corresponding documents: the Military Strategic Directive (DEMIL) and the Campaign Outline Plan.

The preparation of a new Campaign Outline Plan started on the basis of the previous one, creating the Malvinas Theater of Operations (TOM, for its acronym in Spanish) under the command of General de División Osvaldo García. General de Brigada Américo Daher was appointed as Chief of the Ground Forces, Brigadier Luis Castellano as Chief of the Air Component, Contraalmirante Walter Allara as Chief of the Amphibious Force, Contraalmirante Carlos Büsser as Chief of the Landing Force, and General de Brigada Mario B. Menéndez as the military governor. In short, this would be the leadership for Operation Rosario.

On March 20, after Davidoff-related events at the Georgia Islands, the Military Committee ordered the reconvening of the Working Commission to outline an alternative plan since the Navy ships initially planned were assigned to Antarctic tasks.

On March 23, General García, in charge of the Working Commission, submitted the rough draft of the alternative plan to the Military Committee, which was immediately approved. It would be a joint operation consisting of an amphibious landing launched from a single transportation vessel, the ARA *Cabo San Antonio*.

The closest date set for the landing force departure was 28 March. In just five days, the alternative plan was completed, maintaining the high-ranking leaders from the Joint Staff plan. The ground, naval, and air forces were assembled, and the necessary coordinations were carried out. The operation was initially called *Azul* and later designated Operation *Rosario*. There were no plans for or precautions against any enemy reaction other than a local one.

On 26 March, the Military Committee decided to take the Malvinas Islands, which took the Joint Staff by surprise, who had not yet finished the DEMIL or the Campaign Plan. Therefore, the islands recapture would be carried out using the alternative plan proposed by the Working Commission.

Finally, on 30 March 1982, the Military Committee approved the DEMIL 1/82 drafted by the Joint Staff to plan the use of the force and urge the United Kingdom to negotiate the Malvinas Islands sovereignty. The Directive maintained the Chilean case precautions and established that, in the event of an armed reaction after recapturing the islands, a defensive strategic military stance should be adopted, and that, depending on the circumstances, British maritime traffic should be interdicted to deter the dispatch of troops and/or the theater of operations established on the Malvinas Islands should be supported.

The estimation that the United Kingdom would not respond with a military operation was of particular influence on the development of the conflict. Appendix 1) through “Annex 6” of the DEMIL 1/82 specified the enemy’s capabilities and subsequently determined the following adoption probabilities:

1. Capability No. 2: «Not responding with a military operation, but attempting to recapture the islands submitting claims before international organizations, the Vatican, and various forms of pressure.»
2. Capability No. 4: «Wearing down our own forces through the actions of 1 or 2 nuclear submarines and command operations on installations and personnel.»
3. Capability No. 1: «Deploying an Infantry Brigade (+) with the ability to subsequently provide logistical support, antiaircraft, anti-surface, and anti-submarine warfare detection and interception capabilities. Arrival as from D plus 30.»

4. Capability No. 5: «Engaging in general harassment actions throughout the island and the mainland territories by disrupting maritime traffic, blockades, etc., with or without a declaration of war.»
5. Capability No. 3: «Attempting the recapture of the islands through the use of a coordinated Task Force and the simultaneous attack by Chile in the Southern Theater of Operations (TOS) and the Área Naval Estratégica Austral (Southern Strategic Naval Area, ANEA)⁵³.»

The assessment carried out by the Joint Staff, and approved by the Military Committee, indicates that Britain was not expected to commit to a significant military effort, estimating that the British would deem it a minor and distant conflict.

Later on, this critically important document for the preparation of the islands defense campaign plan would no longer be valid as the conflict developed.

Since the geographical scope of operations was the South Atlantic, their leadership fell under the specific responsibility of the Strategic Naval Command, and in accordance with the dictates of the Military Committee Resolution 1/69, the air interdiction actions against ships and submarines were the primary responsibility of the naval aviation assets. This was the organizational and doctrinal framework that served as a reference for issuing the National Strategic Directive (DENAC 2/82) to regain sovereignty over the islands.

Tasks assigned to the Air Force

Before “D-Day”

- Conducting photographic reconnaissance of the target area
- Infiltrating personnel so as to gather information for the Joint Command and operate the Elemento de Control de Transporte Aéreo (Air Transport Control Element, ECTA, in Spanish). For this purpose, Vicecomodoro Gilbert was supposed to travel to the Malvinas Islands, monitor the movements of British troops, and organize the LADE Command Group to facilitate the air assault.

During “D-Day”

- At “H-hour,” seizing control of the Stanley airport (Operation *Alfil*) through coordinated actions with the amphibious and air assaults.
- Carrying out an air transport operation with landing deliveries and establishing an airlift between Soledad Island and the mainland.
- Exercising airspace control upon the deployment of the air assets.

After “D-Day”

- Establishing and organizing flight support services at the Stanley airport and ensuring the continuity of air operations.
- Fulfilling the Joint Command air transport requirements.
- Exercising control of the airspace within its jurisdiction.
- Deactivating the assets assigned to the Joint Command as from “D plus 5.”

The planning was carried out by the Air Operations Command. The execution was ordered in absolute secrecy and personally communicated to the unit commanders and the personnel involved in the recapture and the establishment of the Malvinas Military Air Base (Malvinas BAM). Plan No. 1/82 *Azul y Blanco* (Blue and White) was handwritten, and the 1st Air Brigade was tasked with developing a complementing plan. With this plan,

⁵³ “DEMIL 1/82”, Annex 6. DEH-FAA Archives.

named “Aries 82,” this unit scheduled the airlift tasks to transport personnel, as well as the Army’s and their own equipment.

After “D plus 5,” the planning included the following: keeping a contingent of 120 to 130 men and operating the airport services; maintaining surveillance and exercising air control; ensuring the operation of a Pucará squadron and a helicopter squadron; and providing security with the Grupo de Operaciones Especiales (Special Operations Group, GOE, in Spanish).

Formally, Plan *Azul y Blanco*⁵⁴ was not signed, but its execution was moved forward to April 1 (with alternative dates of April 2 or 3) to defend Davidoff’s group of workers on the Georgias Islands. According to Brigadier General Lami Dozo, the date was also advanced due to political and strategic circumstances⁵⁵.

By advancing the execution to April 1, and despite the fact it bore no signature, Plan *Azul y Blanco* was the basis of the oral briefing to carry out the Islands recapture tasks unaffected by the change of date⁵⁶.

Air Operations Command internal considerations

As the possibility that negotiations to solve a conflict may end up in warfighting operations should never be ruled out, it was essential in 1982 to deem correct the supposition that the United Kingdom would seek to recapture the islands by force after they had been recovered by Argentina. Consequently, it was necessary to plan for a minimum level of Armed Forces readiness to oppose the most dangerous enemy capability with some possibility of success.

The representative of the Comando de Operaciones Aéreas (COA, Air Operations Command), during the presentation at Puerto Belgrano, upon learning that the Military Junta was considering the hypothesis of recovering the Malvinas Islands, did not hesitate to consider the United Kingdom a belligerent country. However, he received the directive not to prepare more air units than those involved in the recapture. Furthermore, the Contraalmirante in charge of the briefing emphasized the need for the Commission to limit itself to planning actions just to install a provisional Argentine government on the islands.

The speaker emphatically refused the idea of developing alternative plans as there was reliable evidence indicating that there would be no violent reaction from the United Kingdom and that the United States would remain neutral.

Based on that briefing, the analysis carried out at the Air Operations Command stood by the “Responsibilities and Competencies of the Argentine Armed Forces in War Operations” established by the Joint Staff Resolution 1/69, signed on January 1, 1969⁵⁷. Regarding the Argentine Air Force, point 2.2.1.1 states that:

«Direct air support to surface, submarine, and amphibious naval operations, including: exploration, reconnaissance, anti-submarine warfare, mining, and anti-mining, attack, air defense, and auxiliary operations for such purposes, is a primary responsibility of the Navy and a collateral responsibility of the Air Force when involved in such types of operations.»

Based on the knowledge of the available assets in Argentina, the Air Operations Command assumed that, although it was a collateral responsibility for which it could not incorporate specific elements, it could be requested to conduct distant and close air-maritime exploration using Argentine Air Force aircraft that were somewhat suitable for such responsibility.

⁵⁴ Plan de Operaciones Azul y Blanco, pages 2 through 13, DEH-FAA Archives.

⁵⁵ COMISIÓN DE ANÁLISIS..., (*Rattenbach report*), *Final report...*, op. cit.

⁵⁶ Plan de Operaciones Azul y Blanco, last page 1-1, copy 01 typewritten in September 1982, DEH-FAA Archives.

⁵⁷ “Responsibilidades y Competencias de las Fuerzas Armadas Argentinas en Operaciones de Guerra” established by Resolution 1/69, 31 January, 1969, DEH-FAA - C10/3B Archives.

On the contrary, the Argentine Air Defense Command never interpreted that the “control of airspace” that it was required to exercise using the air control and surveillance systems designed to detect and identify airborne targets could be used to control maritime spaces and detect naval targets.

Air Force Planning

In early January 1982, as was done once a year, the Commander of Air Operations (COA), Brigadier Mayor Hellmuth C. Weber sent a directive, to his dependent units, stipulating the setting up of and list of personnel for the Strategic Air Command (CAE), Argentine Air Force Southern Command (FAS), Argentine Air Force Western Command (FAO), and the corresponding Military Operational Deployment Air Bases. As far as the FAS is concerned, Brigadier Ernesto Horacio Crespo was appointed Commander, Brigadier Luis Guillermo Castellano was appointed Chief of Staff of the FAS, and Comodoro José Antonio Juliá was appointed Chief of the Operations Department (A-3).

On 25 January 1982, the Commander of Air Operations, upon learning of the planning imposed on the Working Commission, ordered his Planning Department to present the initial assessment on 2 February. After hearing it, the Commander concluded that none of the assumptions made by the Military Junta were right. Under his responsibility, he gave the order to accept as fact that the United Kingdom would launch a military response and anticipated it as an alternative for the occupation phase of the Plan *Azul y Blanco*. Furthermore, he ordered the planning of the necessary tasks to be executed afterwards.

When assessing this new plan, assumptions were made not only concerning the British reaction but also the procedures that the Military Junta of Commanders in Chief, the Army, and the Navy would choose when the enemy fleet attacked the troops on the Malvinas Islands, and what would be the best response by the Argentine Air Force to face an air-maritime offensive.

The Operations Plan 2/82 *Mantenimiento de la Soberanía* (Sovereignty Maintenance) — which would be completed in early April — assigned: tasks of exploration and reconnaissance in coordination with the commander of the South Atlantic Theater of Operations in the areas adjacent to the Malvinas Islands (500 nautical miles, or 925 km); strategic interdiction tasks against the United Kingdom fleet and tactical air operations on the islands through exploration and reconnaissance, close fire support, offensive reconnaissance, and direct air defense. It also established coordination measures with the Theater of Operations (TOM and subsequent TOAS⁵⁸) and with the command that would exercise the leadership of the Air Force assets (FAS), specifying that the initial attack order would be given by the Theater Commander and confirmed by the Strategic Air Command. It further stated that the latter should assist the requests made by its subordinate command — the FAS — during the operations without interfering in their action.

The plan was drafted with the level of detail necessary for the FAS to carry out its complementing planning with appropriate freedom of action, establishing the priority target to be attacked and the coordination measures.

As the planning progressed, orders were given to obtain detailed images of the Malvinas area. Two secret missions were carried out. The first one, in February, simulated that one of the *Comando de Regiones Aéreas* (Air Regions Command) verification aircraft was inspecting the radio aids at the Malvinas airport; in this way, the true aerial photographic activity was concealed. The second mission, in March, during a transportation flight of Vicecomodoro Roberto Gamen, an emergency landing gear situation was simulated in order to complete the aerial photographic task. The crews of the Aerial Photography Squadron of the 2nd Air

⁵⁸ TOM: Malvinas Theater of Operations [TOM, its acronym in Spanish]. South Atlantic Theater of Operations [TOAS, its acronym in Spanish].

Brigade, flying Learjet 35 A aircraft, conducted surveys of Port Stanley and surrounding areas without knowing the real purpose.

As the studies continued, the planners at the Air Operations Command concluded that they should set up a cargo terminal at Stanley airport and deploy an air control and surveillance squadron, an antiaircraft artillery squadron, and an air attack unit on the Malvinas Islands to carry out offensive actions to support ground forces. This action required a prior deployment to the Patagonian coast and the preparation of military air bases in favorable relative positions. The tasks of the existing capabilities plan, developed on the basis of the Chilean conflict hypothesis, were reviewed. The planned device for organizing that order of battle could be easily adjusted to the operation in the Malvinas.

Combat aircraft would reach the Malvinas at their operating range limit, taking off from the Patagonian airfields. Confidence was placed on the pilots' skills and attitude, but the lack of preparation and appropriate weapons to face a capable air-naval adversary equipped with advanced technology was a concern.

Significant deficiencies were recognized:

- Limited endurance of the Argentine Air Force aircraft.
- Lack of on board radars for air-maritime exploration.
- Lack of in-flight refueling systems for the Mirage III/EA and M-5 Dagger.
- Poor number of jettisonable fuel tanks.
- Only two KC-130 Hercules tankers.
- Lack of air-to-air self-defense equipment for the IA-58 Pucará.
- Scant helicopter weapons.
- Complete lack of a radar warning system (RWS⁵⁹) and countermeasures to neutralize the approach of anti-aircraft missiles.
- Insufficient length of the Stanley runway and small unloading platform.
- Lack of anti-exposure suits for the crews.
- Lack of night vision devices.
- Lack of fire-and-forget weapons.

Lives could be saved by addressing some of these problems. This understanding led the Air Operations Commander, Brigadier Mayor Hellmuth Weber, and the Defense Commander, Brigadier Mayor Jorge A. Hughes, to pursue the acquisition of these items in a race against time. Although the chances of success were slim, the most critical instructions were given. In the moment of truth, aware of the risks and limitations, the Argentine Air Force accepted the challenge imposed by destiny, but on one condition: they assumed that the «occupy to negotiate» criterion, repeatedly expressed by the Military Junta, would be strictly observed.

For this reason, it was taken for granted that in the face of a UK armed response threat, Argentina would do everything possible to prevent confrontation. And if it was inevitable, the government would agree to a ceasefire without surrendering. The Argentine Air Force, with all available assets, set the objective to contribute to deterrence and, if necessary, to wear down the enemy's air-naval power in order to provide time and arguments for the ones in charge of the country's foreign negotiations.

As a first step, the Air Operations Command authorities decided to expedite readiness. Only the runways in Comodoro Rivadavia and Río Gallegos were considered usable from the air squadron peace-time bases. For this reason, it was necessary to deploy most of the units to the Patagonian coast as soon as possible. To maintain secrecy, the deployment should not take place before recapturing the islands. Additionally, since it had not been anticipated in the Working Commission, authorization from the Military Committee was needed.

⁵⁹ RWS: Radar Warning System.

For the previous fifteen years, the Argentine Air Force had been preparing airfields to operate with mobile air squadrons based on regional conflict hypotheses. After some exercises, the facilities had been examined, and the main deficiencies had been addressed. The capacity for accommodation, rationing, health care, supply, fuel depots, communication facilities, transportation infrastructure, headquarters, and security at each potential deployment airfield had been assessed. The analysis also took into account the deployed personnel's demands and the needs of the local population to ensure they would not suffer supply shortage faced with a sudden increase in consumption.

Each air squadron had repeatedly been relocated to the Patagonian airfields and had operated with the appropriate personnel for that area, including training, rationing, and accommodation. Some sites were suitable to serve as support bases for South Atlantic operations. The only thing missing was the Military Junta's authorization and moving the Air Force to the south of the country. Galtieri did not justify the deployment, despite acknowledging its potential deterrent effect. He firmly believed that there would be no war. However, the Air Operations Command insisted and used arguments related to the regional framework and the responsibility to take preventive measures in order to avoid surprises. It added that if they were caught at the peace-time bases, their response would be slow, difficult, and ineffective.

Furthermore, the planning included the totality of the Argentine Air Force assets and a portion of State and private aircraft with the necessary crews to be mobilized. The initial effort would fall on the Air Transport Command, made up of elements from the 1st Air Brigade at El Palomar and reinforced with civil aircraft. The Argentine Air Force Southern Command, which was traditionally organized according to the Regional Framework planning, would bear the greatest burden of operations. This higher tactical command was assigned most of the combat units (aircraft and anti-aircraft artillery) and operational support (communications, photography, surveillance, and air control).

The Materiel, Air Regions, and Training Commands would form the Air Force Logistics Command, which would provide support with elements both available and to be acquired, for the future Air Defense Command (CAD), Strategic Air Command (CAE), Air Transport Command (CAT), and the Air Force Southern Command (FAS) and would lead the deployed air assets. Additionally, if the hypothesis of war due to Chile's intervention was broadened, it would support the elements of the Air Force Western Command (FAO). This course of action aimed at keeping the Institutional doctrine unmodified and avoiding the introduction of new procedures beyond those practiced in operational exercises, whether in simulators or on the field.

1st Air Photographic Group Secret Missions

In the months leading up to the recapture of the islands, and in order to conduct photographic surveys at Port Stanley and the airport surrounding areas, the Air Operations Command, in coordination with Jefatura III Planificación (III Planning Division), ordered the 1st Air Photographic Group and the Learjet Squadron, both from the Paraná 2nd Air Brigade, to deploy to Río Gallegos Military Air Base.

The first mission took place between February 23 and 26. The overflight zone specified for the aerial photographic operation was Port Stanley, the airport, and its surroundings. The crew consisted of Primer Teniente Eduardo Bianco, Capitanes Carlos Ronconi and Marcelo Lotufo, Suboficial Auxiliar Víctor Martínón, Suboficial Ayudante José Antonio Gordiola, and Cabo Primero Juan Mothe.

The T-22 aircraft flew to Río Gallegos, where it was prepared for the photographic survey. During the approach to the Malvinas Islands, the crew had to pretend to verify the VOR⁶⁰ equipment markings at the Port Stanley airport and photograph the runway

⁶⁰ VOR: Very High Frequency Omnidirectional Range. Radionavigation aid system used by aircraft in order to fly following a pre-defined route.

and the nearby areas, especially the coastlines, while maintaining the circulation required for the alleged study.

The operation was coordinated with the Air Survey Squadron personnel, which was already deployed on the island. The pretended mission was effectively concealed since the new VR-17 Learjet 35 aircraft, equipped for the task, had previously conducted other verifications at Port Stanley.

The mission was partially accomplished due to weather conditions, as some of the requested areas were covered by clouds that prevented the photographic survey.

The flights in February were as follows:

- February 23: Paraná-Rosario-Aeroparque-Comodoro Rivadavia-Río Gallegos, navigation and transportation flights..
- February 24: Río Gallegos-Malvinas-Río Gallegos, operational flight.
- February 25: Río Gallegos-Malvinas-Río Gallegos, operational flight.
- February 26: Río Gallegos-Malvinas-Río Gallegos, operational flight.

After completing the mission, they returned to *Aeroparque* on the same day. Total flying hours for aerial photography: 10 hours 30 minutes.

The second mission was executed between March 16 and March 19 with the Learjet 35 A registration mark T-23. The overflight zone selected for the aerial photographic operation was Port Stanley, the airport, and its surroundings. The crew consisted of: Capitán Narciso Juri, Teniente Enrique Felice, Suboficial Auxiliar Víctor Martínón, Cabo Principal Ernesto Guevara, and Cabo Alejandro López.

On the 19th, a flight to the islands was coordinated under the pretext of transporting Vicecomodoro Roberto Gamen, the Argentine representative and Malvinas LADE Chief. The sky condition that day appeared to be broken; if they flew through the gaps among the clouds, they could take high-quality photographs⁶¹. It was the second attempt they made to reach Malvinas, as the previous day, on the 18th, they were not able to make it due to bad weather conditions. As soon as they took off, they opened the ventral door of the photography compartment on the Learjet 35 A floor so that the pressurized glass could quickly come into contact with the outside temperature. Thus, flying relatively low, they approached Malvinas.

During the flight, they were detected by the HMS *Endurance* radar, sailing towards the Georgias Islands. The ship's operator requested them in English to identify themselves, but the pilots did not respond. They only made radio contact with the control tower at Port Stanley. They approached the city after entering into the inertial navigation system the coordinates for the points they would vertically overfly.

During the first aerial photography passage, they took advantage of the sunlight on the beach. The system automation allowed them to take some oblique photos with a 35mm camera. The Port Stanley TWR continuously made calls, sometimes in English and sometimes in Spanish, requesting the reason for their passage over the city. The pilots replied that they were trying to solve a landing gear problem, that they had an instrument indication it was not down and locked but remained unlocked and in motion.

During the third approach turn of the aerial photography passage, the questions became more incisive, and they were ordered to descend. Ignoring all indications, they completed two more passes; they already had five perfect passages taped and stored. However, weather conditions quickly turned unfavorable, with increasing cloud cover between the airplane, the city, and the beaches which, as the crew later learned, would be the landing points.

⁶¹ Written statement given by Suboficial Mayor VGM (R) Víctor Martínón before the BANIM Commission.



Air Photographic Group T-23 Learjet - Photo courtesy of: My. VGM (R) Caballero

Considering the time and after about 40 minutes in the area, they understood they had no more excuses to continue and that weather conditions were not suitable to carry on. They decided to abort the mission and informed the control tower that, since they were unable to fix the landing gear failure, they chose to return to Río Gallegos, where they would have better safety conditions in case of an emergency landing.

Upon their return to Río Gallegos, they also simulated the same situation, anticipating possible Chilean espionage scenarios. They declared an emergency to the control tower, and the latter instructed the departing aircraft to take off and the landing aircraft to land immediately. The Learjet, with the landing gear extended, performed a low-altitude fly-by parallel to the runway and over the aircraft platform, while the TWR radioed that they could observe the landing gear seemed locked.

They prepared to land with emergency services, an ambulance, and fire trucks positioned by the runway threshold, ready to act. When the Learjet landed, it was followed until the plane came to a stop on the apron. There, the maintenance personnel pretended to repair the landing gear. Later, inside a hangar, the photography staff got off with the films. The crew went for lunch, and after a reasonable length of time, the pilots ordered refueling and presented a new flight plan with Port Stanley as its destination in order to fulfill the declared mission: transporting Vicecomodoro Roberto Gamen to the islands.

The Learjet took off again towards Port Stanley. Once landed, Vicecomodoro Gamen got off while the plane engines were still running. The aircraft immediately returned to the runway threshold and took off, avoiding being inspected by the British military.

At the 2nd Air Brigade in Paraná, the photographic material taped during both flights was processed, and the mosaic that would be used in the planning of the April 2 landing was prepared. The work and effort of the 2nd Air Brigade (Paraná) Photographic Squadron would prove invaluable for planning Operation Rosario

The flights in March were as follows:

- March 16: Paraná-Aeroparque-Río Gallegos, navigation and transportation flights.
- March 18: local flight in Río Gallegos, the operational flight could not be carried out due to poor weather conditions.
- March 19: Río Gallegos-Malvinas-Río Gallegos, operational flight.
- March 19: Río Gallegos-Malvinas-Río Gallegos, second operational flight

On that same day, March 19th, the T-23 aircraft returned on a navigation and transfer flight from Río Gallegos to Paraná with a stopover at Bahía Blanca. Total flying hours for aerial photography: 6 hours 10 minutes.

Preparations to recapture the Malvinas Islands

On March 26th, when the recapture operation was advanced, Brigadier Mayor Weber, Air Operations Commander and also Chief of the Strategic Air Command, called the commanders of the units involved. He verbally ordered them the tasks they were to fulfill in order to execute the complementing Plan *Azul y Blanco*.

Among those present were Brigadier Luis G. Castellano, who would serve as the Air Component Commander in Malvinas, and Brigadier Enrique R. Valenzuela, the Air Transport Commander. Weber pointed out that the Military Committee estimated that the troops presence on the islands would be limited to a maximum of five days. Afterwards, a small joint force would remain to support the islands' military government.

After the presentation, Brigadier Castellano requested that the personnel appointed to his Staff should turn up at Comodoro Rivadavia no later than Sunday, March 28th. Orders to act were also given to the Chiefs of the Special Operations Group, the Air Transport Control Element (ECTA), and the so-called LADE Command Group, led by Vicecomodoro Roberto Gamen, which was to facilitate the airborne assault on Stanley Airport. Subsequently, these groups would be responsible for temporarily setting up the air base at the airport, while the VyCA Squadron would set up the TPS-43 radar for airspace surveillance and control.

On March 27th, on board an IA-50 G-II aircraft, the first members of the Malvinas Air Component Staff traveled to the 9th Air Brigade, including Mayor Antonio F. González Iturbe. Upon arrival, he appeared before Brigadier Castellano, who at that time was holding a meeting with Comodoro Guillermo Mendiberri, appointed Chief of the A-2 Intelligence Department. Both officers were the first to learn about the purpose of their presence in Comodoro Rivadavia.

On Sunday, March 28, at 0900, under the covert pretext of participating in an operation related to the Chilean conflict hypothesis, a B-707 aircraft transported most of the personnel who would work in the Malvinas and the Argentine Air Force Southern Commands, along with members of the Special Operations Group (GOE) and the Air Surveillance and Control Group (VyCA). The following day, these men learned the true purpose of the deployment. From that moment on, they remained quartered at the 9th Air Brigade, attentive to the developments in the South Atlantic.

Tasks of the Grupo 1 de Transporte Aéreo (1st Air Transport Group)

On March 28, at 0230, the Air Transport Command Chief of Operations and Transport Group Commander, Comodoro Jorge F. Martínez, was summoned to Brigadier Weber's office at 0900. He was informed of the situation and ordered to plan «an airborne assault operation in the Malvinas Islands.» Before leaving, Comodoro Martínez asked for the reason behind the operation, and he was told it was a «political diversionary measure.»

Immediately, the Operations Department Chief of the 1st Air Brigade and Squadron Commanders were called in. They were required to turn up at the Unit with overnight gear by 1100. The meeting took place at 1400, and in view of the task and in complete secrecy, planning for Operation *Aries* 82 began, with a strict prohibition imposed on external communications. The plan was presented and approved by the Air Operations Command on March 30, setting April 1 as the start date, although due to weather conditions, the execution would be postponed for 24 hours.

On April 1 at 1700, the crews, who were unaware of the purpose of the meeting, were summoned with overnight gear to the Officers' Mess Assembly Hall. Comodoro Martínez

began by saying: «Gentlemen, you will have the opportunity to achieve what you have dreamed of your entire lives –to recapture the beloved Malvinas Islands.» The audience was deeply surprised, and then an intense and overwhelming joy followed. He then explained the reason for the meeting, the *Aries* 82 operation order, the airborne assault, and the details of the task to be carried out by the military air transport. Squadron commanders provided specific aspects, and the meeting concluded with a review and update of sea survival techniques.

The task of the 1st Air Brigade was to organize a *Puesto de Operaciones de Transporte Aéreo* (POTA, Air Transport Operations Post) at the 9th Air Brigade in Comodoro Rivadavia, carry out an airborne assault landing at Stanley Airport, and transport the personnel and equipment urgently needed on the islands, so as to establish a military consolidation of the recapture and to begin managing civilian institutions on the Malvinas as soon as possible. According to the Plan *Aries* 82 flight schedule, the first departure of a C-130H aircraft was set for 2000 on that April 1.

The 1st Air Transport Group would participate with four Hercules C-130H aircraft for transporting special forces, troops, and equipment; five Fokker F-28 aircraft for transporting personnel; one IA-50 G-II aircraft for liaison tasks; and one Fokker F-27 aircraft for search and rescue.

According to the priorities set by the Strategic Air Command, the following boarding priority was established:

- Special Operations Group (GOE)
- Staff of the Malvinas Theatre of Operations Air Component (EMCA- TOM)
- 25th Infantry Regiment (RI 25)
- 9th Combat Engineers Company
- Staff of the 9th Infantry Brigade Command
- Air Surveillance and Control Squadron (VyCA) with a mobile radar
- Air Transport Control Element (ECTA)
- Air Cargo Terminal
- Transfer of a Bell 212 helicopter
- Crates with aluminum plates to widen the parking apron at the Malvinas airport
- Assets for organizing the military airport services in Stanley

The cargo to be transported included supplies and support equipment for the units involved (weapons, ammunition, vehicles, power generators, antennas, radio equipment, firefighting equipment, cargo handling equipment, field accommodation and rations, portable fuel and water tanks, fuels, and lubricants).

No major issues regarding flight procedures were foreseen. The 1st Air Brigade crews had been visiting the Malvinas airport for years. The members of the F-27 and F-28 squadrons, which operated the LADE weekly services, performed frequent flights to the islands. The last scheduled flight to the islands had taken place on March 30⁶².

However, the situation was different for the *Escuadrón I Hercules* (1st Hercules Squadron). Only a few crews had operated on the islands. Among them were the crew that had transported items in February 1981 for the residence of the Special Advisory Commission Argentine Representative in Stanley⁶³; the crew that had delivered supplies to the settlers in September of that same year; and the KC-130 TC-70 crew that, on March 7 1982, carried out a distant exploration task over the Georgias Islands area, as requested by the Argentine Foreign Office and directly ordered by Brigadier Mayor Weber, Chief of the Air Operations Command. The planned route was El Palomar-Río Gallegos-Georgias Islands-Río Gallegos-El Palomar. While flying over the South Atlantic, an emergency occurred due to fuel loss caused by a malfunctioning transfer valve. The aircraft could not reach Río

⁶² RUBÉN OSCAR PALAZZI, *Puente aéreo a Malvinas*, Buenos Aires, Aeroespacio Publishing, 1997, page 17.

⁶³ RUBÉN HORACIO CABANILLAS, *No apagues la luz cuando te vayas*, Buenos Aires, BM Press, 2004, page 82.

Gallegos using the remaining fuel. The only possible alternative was the Malvinas Islands. The aircraft commander, Comodoro José María Pérez, was forced to request assistance through the Red Nacional de Emergencia (National Emergency Network), asking a radio amateur to establish contact with another person in the Malvinas to request the unblocking of the deliberately obstructed runway, as there were concerns about a possible assault operation. Thanks to this communication, permission to land was granted after flying for 11 hours, 40 minutes. After resolving the technical failure, the TC-70 refueled and completed the planned route. The navigation officer was Comodoro Roberto Mela, who was performing his last flight before retiring⁶⁴.

The air transport operations would be carried out in close coordination with the other branches' assets. The Navy group, Task Force 40 (FT-40), which had set sail on Sunday March 28, was made up of a landing unit, a transport group, an escort group, and a special tasks group (tactical divers). On board the flagship, the destroyer ARA *Santísima Trinidad*, were Contraalmirante Walter Allara, Landing Force Commander; General Osvaldo García, Malvinas Theater of Operations Commander; and Vicecomodoro Alberto Alegría, Air Force Liaison Officer.

Tasks of the Special Operations Group (GOE)

By the end of March, the Chief of the Planning Department summoned Vicecomodoro Esteban L. Correa, Chief of the GOE, and described the task to be carried out by his unit: to occupy and secure the Stanley airport in close coordination with the amphibious assault of the 2nd Marine Battalion (BIM 2) and Company C of the 25th Infantry Regiment of the Army. The GOE's landing final details were conditional upon the situation development and the intelligence reports to be sent from Stanley by Vicecomodoro Roberto Gamen, Chief of the LADE Command Group.

Islands' government team foresight

The leaders appointed to take up the Malvinas Islands government were getting organized and analyzing the measures they would apply to win the islanders' goodwill. The Military Junta had appointed General de Brigada Mario B. Menéndez, Chief of the 3rd Operations of the Army General Staff, to be in charge as Military Governor.

General Galtieri assured him that his commission would not extend beyond November or December as they did not expect any complications. Menéndez quickly requested to be assigned assistants, as there were around 1,900 people living in the archipelago: 1,420 natives, 450 British citizens, and approximately 30 foreigners (including Argentinians, Canadians, Uruguayans, Israelis, and Americans).

In response to General Menéndez's requirements, as from April 5, the Cabinet would be set up with the following authorities:

- Government Secretary-General, Comodoro Carlos F. Bloomer Reevee
- Secretary of Education and Public Health, Capitán de Navío Barry M. Hussey
- Secretary of Public Works, Coronel Manuel R. Dorrego
- Secretary of Economy and Finance, Coronel Oscar R. Chinni; assistants, Mayor de Intendencia del Ejército Juan C. Hidalgo and Capitán de Corbeta Rodolfo V. Angelo
- Secretary of Communications, Coronel Francisco E. Machinandiaarena
- Secretary of Justice, Vicecomodoro Eugenio Miari; assistant, Capitán de Corbeta Leopoldo Vinelli

The Argentine Air Force participation in the government would entail a special responsibility. Of the three services, it was the only one whose personnel had lived among the

⁶⁴ Written statement given by Brigadier VGM (R) Jorge Martínez to the BANIM Commission.

islanders, collaborating in the development of the Malvinas Islands' infrastructure or in matters regarding the well-being of the community (supplies, health care, and education). The effort of the previous ten years of service had allowed them to become familiar with and understand the complex relationship among the islanders, the British Administration, and the Argentine Government. The countless support tasks performed by the Air Force personnel, including humanitarian requests, were professionally carried out with a high spirit of service, improving the islanders' quality of life, putting an end to isolation, and enabling direct communication with Argentina. This closeness, combined with their involvement in most of the projects for the Malvinas Islands, committed the Argentine Air Force to ensure that the administration was as efficient as possible.

Argentine Air Force Representative

Comodoro Carlos F. Bloomer Reeve had been the Argentine representative before the Special Advisory Commission and head of LADE on the Malvinas Islands between 1974 and 1976. Additionally, in his capacity of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Chief of Staff, he had participated in formal and informal rounds of talks between 1979 and March 1981. In 1982, he was performing functions as Air Attaché to the Argentine Embassy in the Federal Republic of Germany. He was possibly the cabinet member who best understood the Malvinas Islands' reality.

In the morning of 27 March, in Bonn, Bloomer Reeve received the order to immediately travel to Buenos Aires so as to witness the execution of the contract with Dornier Company for the design of the IA-63 Pampa aircraft. At 0900 in the morning of the 28th, he arrived at Ezeiza Airport, where the Airport Chief was waiting for him to tell him to contact Brigadier General Basilio Lami Dozo. The latter then referred him to Brigadier Mayor Sigfrido M. Plessl. They met the following morning, and Plessl explained the plans for the recapture of the islands and the Junta's planning. He then expressed the Air Force confidence in him due to his experience in the Malvinas Islands and in the Argentine Foreign Office. He ordered him to report to General Menéndez at 1100 at the Army General Staff. He advised him to maintain absolute secrecy, warning him that no other commanders were aware of the plans.

Both officers agreed on the inconsistency of the assessment regarding the British government attitude and their military response capability. However, they expressed hope for an intelligent and mature diplomatic action to prevent an armed confrontation, which outcome was deemed unfavorable. Assigned to the task, Bloomer attended the briefing called by Menéndez. The General explained to the appointees that the islands would be considered a province, that he would be assuming the position of governor, and they would form the cabinet with direct responsibility over the civilian population. They were all surprised when they were informed that the recapture was planned for 1 or 2 April. Only Capitán de Navío Hussey had noticed some unusual movement of ships.

Once the islands had been recaptured and the secrecy lifted, and despite being familiar with the island environment, Bloomer requested the latest updates at the Argentine Foreign Affairs Department. Coronel (R) Luis González Balcarce, advisor to the Malvinas and Antarctica General Directorate since 1970, recognized Bloomer and understood the reason for his consultation. He provided the available documents and the information sent by Gilbert, which warned about the unrest in Stanley.

In subsequent meetings and on the basis of these data, it was decided to organize the government on the existing structure, which the islanders were familiar with. The existing communication networks could be used, and public officials, without many alternatives for employment, would appreciate the opportunity to keep their jobs. Patriotism and the fear of being labeled as collaborators could be overcome with the excuse that they were serving their fellow citizens. Some governance effectiveness was expected.

The cabinet still needed to be completed with officers specialized in justice, accounting, and finance. Law and order would initially be maintained by military police personnel. The governor would lead the administration, assisted by a chief secretary who would oversee the superintendencies of the basic government agencies. The treasury would report directly to the governor, except for certain duties of the chief secretary. In addition, there would be two elective councils: one with legislative functions and the other with executive functions. Both would be chaired by the governor and assisted by the chief secretary and the treasurer.



Part 2

April 1982



Chapter 3

Recapture of the Islands



The previous days

On Thursday, 30 March 1982, Vicecomodoro Héctor Gilbert arrived in Stanley aboard a Fokker F-28, in what would be the last scheduled service of Líneas Aéreas del Estado (LADE) to the Islands. The aircraft was guarded by armed Marines under the pretext of preventing hostile attitudes. However, it was clear that they wanted to prevent the possible descent of Argentine commandos hidden inside. The F-28's arrival, after the riots at the airline commercial offices following Davidoff's incident in South Georgia, immediately aroused the authorities' suspicions as they already knew that a Task Force had set sail for the South Atlantic.⁶⁵

Gilbert explained he had come to assess the situation after the attack against LADE's premises and wished to clear the air. As he entered the town, everything looked as usual. Local residents did not seem to suspect the reasons for his visit and exchanged polite greetings. However, a very different situation was heard on the local radio broadcast. Gilbert requested a meeting with the authorities, which was scheduled for the following day.

A sophisticated communications equipment, which had been transported on that same flight, was installed at Vicecomodoro Gamen's house (LADE House) to send coded messages. The installation was done in front of local residents, as it had been impossible to conceal the bulky packages being transported and the technicians working with the antennas, although some of the work was carried out overnight.

On Wednesday, March 31st, Gilbert went to the Government House accompanied by Gamen, who was completely unaware of the imminent operation. When they entered the governor's office, a cabinet meeting was taking place with the presence of the Government Chief Secretary, Dick Baker, the new commander of the Royal Marines' Naval Party 8901, Major Mike Norman, and other government officials. A map of the peninsula was unfolded on the table.

After the formal greetings, the British listened to Gilbert as he tried to justify his visit. Governor Hunt expressed their deep concern about the escalating conflict and reminded him of the conversation they had had at Gilbert's farewell party, clearly referring to his pessimism about the outcome of the conflict.

As he left, Gamen was surprised by the tone of the conversation, the underlying meaning of which he could not quite understand. According to the information he had received in Buenos Aires at the beginning of March, everything indicated that there were preparations for facing a probable crisis, but not an imminent one. Hence his concern when Gilbert confirmed that the plans were indeed to be executed and Argentine troops were to land soon.

After such a revelation, time seemed to go by as usual. Local residents tried to hide their nerves. The rest of the Argentine population, unaware of the state of affairs, continued with their daily activities while the FIDF⁶⁶ kept them under a discreet surveillance.

Around 1900, on March 31st, Stanley's radio broadcast spread the news on the Islands that the Argentine fleet had been set back twenty-four hours due to a sea storm. This cleared things up. Not only were the British aware of the ongoing situation, but they could also accurately locate naval surface units. Meanwhile, such news and the events in Stanley were coded and rebroadcast to the landing forces command via LADE's stations in Buenos Aires and Comodoro Rivadavia.

⁶⁵ RUBÉN OSCAR MORO, *Historia del Conflicto del Atlántico Sur (La guerra inaudita)*, Buenos Aires: Escuela de Guerra Aérea de la Fuerza Aérea Argentina, Nos. 135/136, 1985), page 59.

⁶⁶ The acronym "FIDF" stands for "Falkland Islands Defence Force."

On the morning of April 1st, Gilbert and Gamen discussed ways to support the air assault to the airport without involving LADE's employees. The less number of personnel involved the more chances of achieving the goal. At the right time, they would approach the runway, each of them separately, on foot, and across the field so as not to be seen.

Although everything continued as usual at Stanley, where stores and public offices were open, the atmosphere was rather tense. At noon, Danny Borland, the airport's meteorologist, invited Gilbert and Gamen to dine at his house. This meant an impossible obstacle for them to overcome: covering the 10 kilometer distance to the runway and arriving with enough time for the air assault. With that trick, the British would retain both men without capturing them. A similar situation would lie ahead for the rest of the Argentine leaders.

Around 1400, on April 1st, Reinaldo Reid, an Anglo-Argentine man who had been living for a long time in Malvinas' capital, informed Gamen that the runway was blocked with vehicles to prevent landings. Only a small portion was available for the Britten Norman Islander, the aircraft owned by Governor Hunt, which was patrolling the area around the adjacent sea. At 1700, the radio announced that the aircraft had confirmed the proximity of the Argentine fleet, and summoned FIDF's volunteers to take up their posts. Based on the ships' distance and speed, the radio broadcaster announced that the invasion would start at 2200.

Meanwhile, at 1810, Vicecomodoro Gilbert informed the command of the runway status, using code words such as "obstacles" and "comfortably accommodated".⁶⁷ Under such circumstances, besides the aftermath of the previous day's storm —the swell had made the helicopter break loose from its moorings rendering it inoperable—, the Argentine Task Force 40 commander was forced to redistribute tasks and to change the sequence of the execution plan.

Before 1900, following British tradition, Gilbert and Gamen were having dinner at Borland's house. The atmosphere was rather tense, with an air of strange courtesy. From the next room, as though coming from far away, orders and information being broadcast on the radio could be heard. Both Argentine men tried to understand the messages spoken in distorted English, maybe a mixture of cockney accent or London slang and Gaelic.

Dinner finished at 2100, and the Argentines left for Gamen's residence. Once there, they found the house guarded by four armed FIDF militiamen. Both men assessed the situation: the guards prevented them from moving, the runway was blocked, and troops were deployed and ready. Since they were convinced that the air assault would not be executed, they did not go to the airport. Meanwhile, policemen and defense forces searched the houses of Argentine residents. All adult men were sent to the Town Hall under armed guards.

On the other hand, a group of foreign journalists and an Argentine graphic reporter had been staying in town for several days to cover the news of Davidoff's trip and the naval efforts to remove the scrap metal workers. That night, the British sent them to different rooms of the Government House.

On April 1 at 2200, Gilbert and Gamen began their radio communications attempts with the Task Force 40, at the scheduled times. They repeated the procedure every two hours, until the early morning of April 2, when they heard gun firing had started.

The air assault begins

At the 9th Air Brigade located in Comodoro Rivadavia, the early hours of 2 April started with some unusual activity. The F-28, registration mark TC-51, landed at 0015 carrying the Comando Aéreo de Transporte (CAT, Argentine Air Transport Command) commander Brigadier Enrique R. Valenzuela. Immediately afterwards, three C-130Hs and two F-28s more arrived. After 0100, a C-130 and a KC-130 landed, as well as the vehicles carrying the Regimiento de Infantería 25 (25th Infantry Regiment) troops which had not traveled

⁶⁷ "Diario de Guerra del Comando Aéreo Estratégico", DEH-FAA Archives, 1 April 1982.



Obstacles scattered across the runway in Malvinas on 2 April- Photo courtesy of: Archivo G1 Comunicaciones Escuela

with the Task Force 40, the Compañía de Ingenieros de Combate 9 (9th Combat Engineers Company), and elements of the Command of the IX Brigada de Infantería (9th Infantry Brigade). Personnel and materiel boarding began at 0400. The Assault phase of the Operations Plan Aries 82 had started.

At 0515, aircraft call sign LITRO 1 (C-130H, registration mark TC-68) took off from Comodoro Rivadavia heading to Malvinas. The men who would consolidate the Islands occupation traveled in the aircraft cargo hold: a total of 108 passengers who would make up the Staff of the Air Component of Teatro de Operaciones Malvinas (TOM, Malvinas Theater of Operations), commandos of the Grupo de Operaciones Especiales (GOE, Special Operations Group), the Elemento Control de Transporte Aéreo (ECTA, Air Transport Control Element), materiel for the Terminal Aérea de Carga (TAC, Air Cargo Terminal), personnel and materiel of the Grupo 1 de Comunicaciones Escuela (G1CE, 1st Communications Group Institute), and Army troops with two Jeeps. Argentine Air Force personnel were responsible for the airport control and the organization of assets to support air transport operations.

At dawn, close to the Islands, the TC-68 made radio contact with the fleet vessels and was ordered not to land. The situation was yet to be defined while the battle continued in the vicinity of the airport, so the aircraft flew a holding pattern for two hours.

At 0700, the airport was finally recaptured. As they found no opposition, a Company C section of the 25th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Teniente Coronel Mohamed Alí Seineldín, and supported by a company of the Batallón de Infantería de Marina 2 (2nd Marine Battalion), removed the obstacles, road machines and the vehicles scattered around preventing air operations. At 0730, the runway was clear.

Landing clearance was issued at 0830, and, as a precaution, aircraft doors were opened during the flight so that GOE commandos could take up their positions with their weapons since they would fly over a thousand meter open field before reaching the airport. The LITRO 1 touched down in Malvinas at 0845. Though there was no armed resistance, according to Argentine Air Force doctrine, that air assault task with landing delivery was the first combat air operation of the Malvinas conflict.

As soon as the aircraft stopped, the 29 GOE commandos, under the orders of Vicecomodoro Esteban Luis Correa, descended forming two rows in a combat crouch position. They

surrounded the aircraft to protect it in case of a possible attack, since it was uncertain whether the airport was indeed clear. After confirming that there was no enemy resistance, GOE's leader authorized the rest of the passengers' descent.

While machine gun fire was heard in the city, commandos thoroughly searched the premises looking for booby traps, weapons and other elements that could entail a risk. As they secured the different areas (TWR, hangars, communications facilities, fuel station, etc.), they handed them over to those in charge of setting up general and special services for airport operation and air traffic control.

GOE troops, divided into patrols, spread throughout the airport raking through the surroundings, and found abandoned ammunition and materiel. When the task was completed, they occupied a hangar and unloaded equipment and provisions, while sentry posts were getting ready to guard the airport.

The GOE would provide the target security and defense until 3 April. Afterwards, it would be relieved by a company of the 9th Air Brigade that would continue with the assigned tasks.

According to Plan Aries 82, after the arrival of the TC-68, three C-130s and four Fokker F-28s (call signs LITRO 2 to LITRO 8) would follow, concluding the Air Assault phase.

Events in the city

The night of 1 April, Vicecomodoros Gamen and Gilbert, confined to the Argentine residence, learned about the course of action over Stanley's radio broadcast. Around 0900, when firefights concentrated on the Government House, Hunt telephoned Gilbert and sharply demanded his intervention to stop the assault. As he was unable to contact Argentine troops, both men decided they would meet at Hunt's office to work on a solution.

Gilbert walked the 300 meters between his residence and the Government House waving a white flag, while Argentine Navy Marines continued the firefight, unaware of the ongoing negotiations. The Islands' defenders seemed relieved as they watched him from their positions, and encouraged him to keep going. When he arrived, the leader of the Marines received him and led him to Hunt and Baker. On his way, he noticed that some documents had been burned and several cryptographers lay destroyed on the ground. Without saying a word, the Governor asked him to contact the Task Force commander and to demand, on behalf of the Crown, the immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of troops. Though Gilbert knew it was just an expression, he could not believe what he had just heard, and reminded him that the disproportion between the forces could make the position untenable for the British. He also informed him of the decision to prevent casualties and the commitment to respect the Islands' military and civilian personnel.

Gilbert's arguments did not convince Hunt. Only the weight of reality persuaded him to accept the capitulation. As the siege of the Government House continued, they decided to meet with the landing forces commander.

Gilbert and Baker went to the radio station to send a message for the Argentine commander, certain that he would have it tuned in just as the Islanders. First of all, Gilbert informed the Argentine authorities' measures to be implemented, and assured Islanders their interests would not be affected. Then he addressed Contraalmirante Carlos A. Büsser, and explained the Governor's decision to make the surrender official. Since his presence was necessary, he invited Büsser to meet at Santa María catholic church to go together to the meeting with Hunt.

Nobody knew for sure if Büsser had received the message. While they waited, news was received that the cargo ships were near Stanley and that another C-130H was landing on the runway. Minutes later, Büsser arrived at the church, unarmed and accompanied by his assistants. On their way to the Government House, Gilbert gave him details of his conversation with Hunt.

Argentine troops kept firing until Contraalmirante Büsser ordered the ceasefire. Once again, the Governor demanded the withdrawal of troops. The Argentine commander advised him to lay down their arms. Hunt did so, and ordered the leader of the Marines to organize the surrender. At that moment, Büsser asked him if he could have the honor of shaking his hand in recognition of the extraordinary courage demonstrated by his men. Hunt, surprised at such a request, agreed and asked Gilobert to aid the wounded. They went to the back of the house, where several Argentine soldiers were lying on the floor. Immediately, Capitán de Corbeta Pedro E. Giachino, the most seriously wounded man, was taken to the hospital, but died soon afterwards, and was the only fatal casualty.

Utter confusion followed the ceasefire. Coming from the four cardinal points, Argentine and British troops converged towards the Government House without a clear understanding of the situation. Exhausted, nervous, they went past one another carrying their loaded weapons. At mid-morning, the helicopter –coming from the destroyer *Santísima Trinidad*– arrived bringing General de División Osvaldo García, Contraalmirante Walter Allara and members of the Argentine Staff.

The air assault continues

The remaining aircraft followed the arrival of the TC-68. The LITRO 2 (C-130H, registration mark TC-63) landed at 0920 carrying twenty-five men from the Army and a similar number from the Company of Soldiers of the 9th Air Brigade Battalion, who were to support the GOE in Security and Cargo Terminal functions. The LITRO 3 (C-130H, registration mark TC-64) landed at 0945 carrying Army men, a jeep, and the rest of the soldiers from the 9th Air Brigade Company, transporting a total of one hundred passengers. The LITRO 4 could not depart from Comodoro Rivadavia at the scheduled time due to technical problems; thus, it would depart in the afternoon. The LITRO 5, LITRO 6, LITRO 7 and LITRO 8 (all F-28s, registration marks TC-51, TC-54, TC-52 and TC-55 respectively) landed in Malvinas at 0955, 1050, 1105 and 1110, respectively, carrying fifty-four passengers each. The LITRO 4 (C-130H, registration mark TC-65) arrived at 2005 transporting the AN/TPS-43 radar of the 2nd VyCA Group, and a vehicle.

Flights conducted during the Air Assault phase:

LITRO 1. Type: C-130H. Registration mark: TC-68. Crew: Comodoro Carlos J. Beltramone, Vicecomodoro Alfredo A. Cano, Comodoro Roberto F. Mela, Suboficial Ayudante Juan Rydzik, Cabo Principal Mario E. Cemino, Suboficial Ayudante Manuel R. Carabajal, Suboficial Ayudante Ramón A. Pajón, and Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos A. Salzano. The aircraft took off from Comodoro Rivadavia at 0515 and arrived in Malvinas at 0845. It took off again at 0920 and landed in Comodoro Rivadavia at 1130.

LITRO 2. Type: C-130H. Registration mark: TC-63. Crew: Vicecomodoro Alberto Vianna, Capitán Andrés F. Valle, Capitán Roberto M. Cerruti, Suboficial Principal Pedro E. Razzini, Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar A. Ardizzoni, Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos D. Nazzari, Suboficial Ayudante Juan E. Marnoni, and Cabo Principal Ricardo O. Figueroa. The aircraft took off from Comodoro Rivadavia at 0620 and arrived in Malvinas at 0920. It took off again at 0950 and landed in Comodoro Rivadavia at 1150.

LITRO 3. Type: C-130H. Registration mark: TC-64. Crew: Mayor Rubén O. Palazzi, Vicecomodoro Julio C. Sanchotena, Vicecomodoro Adrián J. Speranza, Suboficial Auxiliar Juan C. Romero, Cabo Principal José L. Torres, Suboficial Principal Américo A. Arévalo, Suboficial Principal Carlos A. Sánchez, and Cabo Principal Juan B. Reynoso. The aircraft took off from Comodoro Rivadavia at 0655 and landed in Malvinas at 0945. It took off again at 1000 and landed in Comodoro Rivadavia at 1200.

LITRO 5. Type: F-28. Registration mark: TC-51. Crew: Brigadier Enrique R. Valenzuela, Capitán Agustín A. Míguez, Capitán Antonio F. Fazio Carreras, Suboficial Principal Julián Rodríguez, Cabo Primero Gerardo F. Roldán, and Suboficial Ayudante

Carlos A. Martínez. The aircraft took off from Comodoro Rivadavia at 0815 and landed in Malvinas at 0955. It took off again at 1045 and landed in Comodoro Rivadavia at 1215.

LITRO 6. Type: F-28. Registration mark: TC-53. Crew: Vicecomodoro Oscar J. Bahamondes, Mayor Carlos H. González, Suboficial Ayudante Héctor A. García, Cabo Primero Osvaldo Puñet, and Suboficial Ayudante Enrique R. Prince. The aircraft took off from Comodoro Rivadavia at 0915 and landed in Malvinas at 1050. It took off again at 1110 and landed in Comodoro Rivadavia at 1240.

LITRO 7. Type: F-28. Registration mark: TC-52. Crew: Mayor Raúl E. Echenique, Mayor Héctor M. Pupek, Cabo Principal Juan R. Medina, Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos N. Verasay, and Cabo Primero Ramón O. Avendaño. The aircraft took off from Comodoro Rivadavia at 0930 and landed in Malvinas at 1105. It took off again at 1130 and landed in Comodoro Rivadavia at 1250.

LITRO 8. Type: F-28. Registration mark: TC-55. Crew: Vicecomodoro Eduardo J. Amores, Capitán Ricardo L. Altamirano, Suboficial Principal Roberto Verdú, Cabo Principal Jorge L. Gamba, and Suboficial Auxiliar Hugo J. Ochoa. The aircraft took off from Comodoro Rivadavia at 0945 and landed in Malvinas at 1110. It took off again at 1945 and landed in Comodoro Rivadavia at 2115.

LITRO 4. Type: C-130H. Registration mark: TC-65. Crew: Mayor Julio A. Domínguez, Vicecomodoro Rubén O. Moro, Mayor Jorge A. Valdecantos, Suboficial Auxiliar Ranulfo M. Lozano, Suboficial Auxiliar Juan C. Hümöller, Suboficial Auxiliar Roberto M. Ovejero, Suboficial Principal Domingo G. Farías, and Cabo Principal Horacio R. González. The aircraft took off from Comodoro Rivadavia at 1755 and landed in Malvinas at 2005. It took off again at 2050 and landed in Comodoro Rivadavia at 2245.

This last flight completed the Air Assault phase of the Plan Aries 82 conducted by the CAT. Before noon, most of the flights' crew (except for the LITRO 4 crew) had crossed to the Islands: the Staff of the 9th Infantry Brigade, members of the 25th Infantry Regiment, and the 9th Combat Engineers Company. The fifty soldiers of the 9th Air Brigade were the first contingent of Air Force troops to set foot on Malvinas.

During the first hours of the air assault, a serious disagreement came up between the Navy leaders, who were already in Malvinas, and the Air Force leaders who had just arrived to be responsible for the airport operation and control. The misunderstanding arose because each armed force had received different instructions on how to manage the airport, runway and facilities.

The COA planning had not included the involvement of the Navy transport aircraft. Hence, the Air Force took part accordingly. When nobody expected it, however, the Navy F-28, registration mark 5-T-20, carrying Naval Aviation commander Contraalmirante Carlos García Boll, requested landing clearance, to take control of the airfield and set up a naval air base. It was not authorized until an hour later, after the intervention of Contraalmirante Carlos Büsser and Contraalmirante Walter Allara. They both came to an agreement with Brigadier Luis Castellano, the Air Component commander, and the decision was reconsidered.⁶⁸

Furthermore, the hasty planning before the occupation posed other problems which failed to be solved by verbal agreements as the above mentioned, and which would affect the operations development. Initially, Air Force and Navy landings and take-offs were not

⁶⁸ Account given by Brigadier Luis Guillermo Castellano, DEH-FAA Archives. On its return flight, this aircraft carried the remains of Capitán de Corbeta Pedro E. Giachino.



British Royal Marines boarding a C-130 bound for the mainland - Photo courtesy of: BANIM DEH-FAA

coordinated, thus it was impossible to organize efficiently the reduced parking area available at the Malvinas Airport.⁶⁹

The surrender of Port Stanley

Brigadier Castellano left the airport at 1045 and went to town to appear before the Argentine authorities. In such circumstances, he learned that an official ceremony was being prepared to hoist the flag in front of the Government House. As there was no time to gather a more formal audience, he ordered the personnel available to go to the flagpole area.⁷⁰

A few minutes later, Vicecomodoro Gilibert accompanied Hunt and Baker up to the Town Hall. There, they made the surrender official before General García, with the presence of the commanders of the Armed Forces involved and journalists. When he found out he would be evacuated that afternoon, Hunt expressed his wish to leave the Islands with dignity, wearing his governor's uniform, and driving his official car, the classic Austin.

When they arrived, General García greeted him, extending his hand cordially. Hunt, with his hands clasped behind his back, refused to return his greeting. He said he was sorry but he could not do so under the circumstances. He was informed he would be deported to Montevideo, together with the troops, and that his request was accepted. Baker would stay temporarily in Stanley to facilitate the transfer of power to the incoming administration.

Gilibert was appointed to escort Hunt and his family until their departure. The former Governor asked him to explain to General García –who had felt snubbed– that, under those circumstances, it was not appropriate to show fraternity publicly. And, though he had refused to greet him back, it had not been for personal reasons. Moreover, he earnestly requested Gilibert to keep an eye on his private aircraft, the Islander. He had just bought it and kept it inside a hangar at the airport, waiting for the regular supply ship to take it to the UK. The commitment was diligently fulfilled in collaboration with the Air Force personnel.⁷¹

⁶⁹ On 3 April at noon, two Navy S2E Tracker aircraft landed at the BAM Malvinas. The aircraft occupied a portion of the airport apron making it difficult to unload the successive C-130s and F-28s flights coming from the mainland without interruption. Consequently, part of the assets had to be unloaded on the taxiway and on the runway thresholds. That event resulted in a direct request from Brigadier Castellano to the FAS commander. On 11 April, both aircraft returned to Espora without having performed a single exploration flight that would justify their deployment to Malvinas.

⁷⁰ Account given by Brigadier Luis Guillermo Castellano, DEH-FAA Archives.

⁷¹ The aircraft was kept in perfect condition until the early morning of 1 May, when a British bomb damaged it beyond repair.

Around 1600, wearing his flamboyant uniform, Hunt got into the old car together with his wife and son. Gilbert observed that intimate moment and bid them farewell before the vehicle started. Hunt thanked Gilbert deeply touched, while his wife comforted him saying: “Don’t worry, Héctor. This is the third time we are dismissed from an assignment.” Along their way to the airport, the Islanders waved them goodbye.

British troops, taken prisoners during the recapture of the Islands, arrived at the airport together with the former Governor and his family. Unnoticed by the Argentine authorities, Tony Hunt —Rex Hunt’s son— was hiding inside his shoe a news dispatch by Simon Winchester, the Sunday Times’ journalist who was in Malvinas to cover the news on Davidoff’s incident.

Their custody during the flight to the mainland and then to Carrasco airport (Uruguay) was exclusively assigned to the GOE.

At the airport, the Navy Intelligence personnel searched through the Hunts’ personal belongings, looking for the Royal Navy cryptographic codes. The former Governor never forgot the humiliation. From that moment on, he became a bitter enemy of Argentina, and started leading the most radical groups. Hunt, who had always been impartial, would twist facts so as to diminish our country’s image. Hunt and his family were transported to Comodoro Rivadavia aboard an F-28 escorted by a guard led by Alférez Guillermo Sorensen.

British troops boarded the C-130 Hercules, registration mark TC-68. In this case, security was in charge of Teniente Hugo Dante Amaya, Cabo Primero Roberto Agüero and Cabo Manuel Darío Córdoba. It was an uneventful flight.

The aircraft took off about 2030 from Puerto Argentino heading to Comodoro Rivadavia. Once all prisoners arrived, they were taken on two buses up to the runway threshold, where they boarded an Argentine Air Force Boeing 707. The aircraft commander, Vicecomodoro Horacio Genolet, welcomed them aboard in perfect English and informed them they would be taken to Uruguay.

They were under GOE’s custody at all times. About 0300 in the morning, they arrived at Carrasco airport, where prisoners were handed over to the British ambassador in the neighboring country, Patricia Hutchinson. Neither the crew nor the custody members got off the aircraft.

Once the mission was accomplished, the aircraft returned uneventfully to the 1st Air Brigade in El Palomar, and the four GOE members were taken to their home base, the 7th Air Brigade in Morón. The rest of the GOE members stayed in Malvinas.

Escuadrón Pucará deployment

On that 2 April at 0430, a flight of four IA-58 Pucarás landed at the BAM Río Gallegos coming from the 3rd Air Brigade in Reconquista, Santa Fe province.⁷² Crew members included Capitán Roberto Vila (A-556), Teniente Héctor Furios (A-529), Teniente Miguel Giménez (A-552), and Teniente Roberto Címbaro (A-523). Each of them was accompanied by the following mechanics Cabo Principal Jorge Piaggi, Cabo Primero Luis Toloza, Cabo Antonio Ramos, and Cabo Primero Rubén Carreras, respectively.

At 0730, four additional Pucará pilots arrived at the same BAM aboard a Boeing 707: Capitán Jorge Benítez, Primer Teniente Francisco Navarro, Teniente Daniel Jukic and Teniente Hernán Calderón.

Fragmentary Orders (Frag-Os) were issued immediately for deployment to Malvinas:

Frag-O w/o no. Aircraft: four IA-58 Pucará. Call sign: TIGRE. Weapons: 20 mm cannons and 7.62 machine guns. Mission: deployment to Malvinas. Crew: Capitán Jorge Benítez

⁷² They had taken off from their home base the day before at 1230, and had a stopover in Tandil at 1535. From there, they took off again at 2300 headed for the BAM Río Gallegos



The Pucará Flight in formation with the supporting TC-70 arriving in Malvinas on 2 April

Photo courtesy of: Comodoro VGM (R) Aranda Durañona

and Cabo Principal Jorge Piaggi (A-529); Capitán Roberto Vila and Teniente Miguel Giménez (A-556); Teniente Daniel Jukic and Cabo Primero Luis Toloza (A-523); and Teniente Hernán Calderón and Cabo Antonio Ramos (A-552). The aircraft were configured with two 318-liter wing tanks and one 1,000-liter center tank (ECO version).

Frag-O w/o no. Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-70. Mission: Pucará deployment support. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis Litrenta Carracedo, Vicecomodoro Eduardo Pessana and Vicecomodoro Roberto Tribiani; Suboficial Mayor (R) Giliberto Salvador and Suboficial Mayor (R) Guillermo Aguirre; Suboficial Ayudante Sergio A. Tulián, and Suboficial Ayudante Luis F. Sarmiento; Suboficial Auxiliar Roberto G. Puig; Suboficial Principal Roberto Caravaca; and Cabo Principal Jorge L. Contigiani.

The four Pucarás and the KC-130 took off at 1400 from the BAM Río Gallegos. The Hercules provided navigation support. The aircraft arrived in Malvinas at 1600, though the KC-130 did not land, but rather returned to Río Gallegos where it landed at 1800.

This Pucará formation had the distinction of being the first attack flight to touch down on Malvinas soil, and the first to be part of the air unit of the Malvinas Air Component. On 3 April aboard the C-130, registration mark TC-68, the rest of the crew arrived together with the technicians and brought deployment materiel. The Pucará flight, then, got ready for its first operational tasks.



The Pucará Squadron operating in Malvinas since 3 April - Photo courtesy of: Comodoro VGM (R) Aranda Durañona

British response and Argentine reaction

Since the end of March, Argentina had been requesting a Security Council meeting to discuss the crisis over South Georgia, but the US and the UK avoided setting a date and discussing the problem.

On 31 March, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had already decided to retake the Islands by force if Argentine troops landed in Malvinas. Sir Henry Leach, the First Sea Lord of the Royal Navy, had encouraged her to do so, assuring her that they could organize a powerful naval force, preceded by aircraft carriers HMS *Hermes* and HMS *Invincible*, and set sail in just forty-eight hours.⁷³

The Prime Minister, encouraged by Leach, had ordered her collaborators to go to war without previous discussion. Despite the many known reservations that Sir Michael Beetham (Air Force) and Sir Edwin Bramall (Army) may have expressed, they were never included in the cabinet's agenda. Their duties consisted in executing orders to get the task force moving. Only at a later stage, once the stimulus became constant, their opinion would be taken into account.⁷⁴

On 1 April, the British government decided to send the task force to the South Atlantic. On 2 April, after Argentina recaptured the Islands, the UK undertook a firm diplomatic action and succeeded in summoning a meeting of the UN Security Council. On 3 April, Security Council Resolution 502 was adopted, demanding the immediate withdrawal of Argentine forces. On that same day, the British fleet sailed from the port of Portsmouth to operate 8,000 miles (14,800 km) away from its usual naval stations, led by aircraft carriers which were soon to be scrapped or sold. A surprising speed on such short notice.⁷⁵

⁷³ JOHN WOODWARD AND PATRICK ROBINSON, *One Hundred Days: The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*, with a "Foreword" by Margaret Thatcher, Glasgow, HarperCollins Publishers, 1992, pages 11-12.

⁷⁴ MAX HASTINGS AND SIMON JENKINS, *La batalla por las Malvinas*, Buenos Aires, Emecé Editores, 1984, page 127.

⁷⁵ RUBÉN OSCAR MORO, *La guerra inaudita, Historia del conflicto del Atlántico Sur*, Buenos Aires, Edivérn, 2000, page 89.

The main Argentine assumption had vanished; British military assets were already being mobilized to remove the Argentine forces. The Royal Air Force (RAF) also made its initial movements on 3 April. A VC 10 aircraft from the 10th Air Transport Squadron took off from Brize Norton base (England) headed for Montevideo, in order to transport Governor Hunt and his family back home. At the same time, eight C-130s flew to Wideawake Airfield on Ascension Island.⁷⁶ The aircraft transported essential elements to reinforce the air station: a Martello long-range (400 km) air surveillance radar system to prevent possible air attacks, 30th Communications Regiment assets, and the mobile weather unit of the 38th Group.

Meanwhile, on that same day, the Argentine Air Force Secretary, Brigadier Mayor Rodolfo A. Guerra and Brigadier Mayor Sigfrido Plessl summoned Comodoro Bloomer Reeve so that he could report on the Malvinas military government organization carried out by General Menéndez organization of the military government in Malvinas. They also told him that they were staying in Stanley with no definite return date. In turn, Comodoro Bloomer Reeve asserted that events would negatively unfold. He highlighted the UK's position in NATO and the traditional distrust of Argentina since World War II. He also reminded them that the Humphrey-Kennedy Amendment⁷⁷ was still in effect despite the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR). And he added that European opinion regarding Argentina's diplomacy of that time was unfavorable.

On 4 April, faced with the British forces deployment, the Argentine government suspended the planned return and ordered the reinforcement of defenses. DEMIL 1/82 had assigned a level 3 probability to the UK's reaction, that is, deployment of forces seemed very unlikely to happen. Such an inaccurate hypothesis revealed that no real contingency plan had ever been considered: neither on 23 March when the COMIL decided to occupy the Islands, nor on 26 March when such decision was actually implemented; even less so on 2 April when the Islands were reincorporated into the national wealth. The only measure actually taken for such a scenario was the inactivation of the Malvinas Theater of Operations and the activation of the Teatro de Operaciones Atlántico Sur (TOAS, South Atlantic Theater of Operations).

Due to such lack of anticipation, the Outline Plan of the South Atlantic Theater of Operations would be issued on 12 April 1982, ten days after the Islands' occupation. This means that the UK launched the recapture operation before Argentina had even conceived a defense plan.⁷⁸

So as to understand the seriousness of having assumed that the UK would attempt to recapture the Islands only through claims before international organizations, it is only necessary to mention that the return of assets of the Task Force 40 included in the original plan was completed on the same 4 April. In fact, that same day the Argentine Navy corvette *Granville* set sail from Port Stanley to the mainland carrying on board a large number of troops and heavy materiel which would prove tactically significant during the battles fought as from 1 May.

The Argentine Air Force, taking into account the British reluctance to negotiate, had drafted four different plans: two of them were already being implemented, CAE's Azul y Blanco, and CAT's Aries 82; while CAE's Mantenimiento de la Soberanía and CAD's Caburé Azul y Blanco needed a few minor adjustments before the commanders' approval and signature and the Military Junta's authorization, which would not be given until 7 April 1982. Still, on 5 April the Air Force had created the Argentine Air Force Southern Command and kept deploying assets to airfields in Patagonia.

⁷⁶ Ascension Island belonged to the UK but its airfield was administered by and leased to the US.

⁷⁷ In 1978, the U.S. Congress passed the Humphrey-Kennedy Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act prohibiting military sales, aid and loans to Argentina or U.S. training of its troops.

⁷⁸ COMISIÓN DE ANÁLISIS... (*Rattenbach Report*), paragraph 167, subparagraph C.

The cabinet arrives in Malvinas

During the last cabinet meeting held before traveling to Malvinas, General Menéndez insisted on protecting and respecting Islanders' organization and customs, increasing their living standards, recognizing their private property rights and encouraging their gradual integration with Argentine citizens.

On the morning of 4 April, an Argentine Air Force Fokker F-28 took off from Jorge Newbery Airport carrying cabinet members and civilian personnel assigned the task of liaison and assistance to public officials. The aircraft landed in Malvinas at 1500, after a stopover in Comodoro Rivadavia.

Once they arrived, public officials received the news that Stanley would be renamed Gaucho Rivero. Looking rather alarmed, they informed General Menéndez that history did not justify the new name, at least for the Islands' most important city and seat of government. Immediately afterwards, the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs was consulted and the project was canceled. Other possible names were considered, such as Vernet or Mestiver, but the Argentine Ministry chose Puerto Argentino, with neither significant meaning nor socio-political connotations.

At noon, they met at Moody Brook —Marines' former lodgings— with the leader of the 25th Infantry Regiment, Teniente Coronel Mohamed A. Seineldín. There, they learned that most Navy troops had withdrawn and that the 2nd Marine Battalion (BIM 2) would be replaced by BIM 5, commanded by Capitán de Fragata Carlos H. Robacio. At dusk, Comodoro Bloomer Reeve stayed at the Upland Goose hotel, and General Menéndez and his assistants stayed at the Governor's residence.

First government measures

On 7 April, an Argentine Air Force F-28 arrived at Puerto Argentino carrying national authorities and military leaders, political personalities, and members of workers' unions and cultural organizations. All of them were to attend the inauguration of the military government. The austere ceremony was held at the Town Hall hotel. Within half an hour the National Anthem was sung and the usual oath was taken. Afterwards, attendants stayed at the hotel where a cocktail party was organized. Desmond King, the hotel's owner and manager, was a former World War II veteran sergeant.

Together with the entourage, journalists and film crews from TV news programs arrived. Some of them would achieve fame, such as Nicolás Kasanzew, Eduardo Rotondo, and others who would stay on the Islands risking their lives to record the events. The journalists' presence was yet another issue for the government to deal with. The Secretary General was responsible for the security and appointed Army Capitán Fernando O. Rodríguez Mayo to coordinate activities and, particularly, to prevent them from running risks.

During the subsequent days, they worked on lasting projects: the asphalt road to Darwin and water and fuel tanks were built, and filters were repaired. To that end, specialists from the Argentine National Highway Administration and other state-owned and private companies were summoned.⁷⁹

Another issue was to restrict the large number of the Islanders crowding the secretariats. Without discouraging them, but with the intention of delaying their arrival and, thus, gain time to get things going, Mrs. Nanette Pitaluga King, the hotel owner's wife, and a member of the Legislative Council, was asked to intervene. It was partly due to her intervention that the Islanders' anxiety was reduced.

Government measures were issued by executive orders. Coordinations were made every other day at cabinet meetings, where the Governor received the latest updates, orders were

⁷⁹ "Instituciones civiles en MLV...", *La Gaceta Malvinense*, No. 59, Year XV, Buenos Aires, March 2016, page 32.

signed, tasks were set up and public officials were briefed on the political and operative situation.

British blockade

On 7 April, the UK publicly announced its military response: it would send a Task Force and establish a 200-nautical-mile (370 km) “maritime exclusion zone” around Malvinas effective as from 12 April at 0000 (GMT). That date would coincide with the arrival of the first nuclear submarine in the area. On 10 April, to avoid a confrontation with the fleet and to allow the U.S. Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, to hold a new round of talks, the Argentine ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS) announced that the Argentine Navy would not break the blockade. With such a decision, the Military Committee abandoned the idea of using sea transportation to reinforce the island territory and bore the cost of undertaking the deployment operation only with aircraft.

The UK’s threat became effective on 12 April, i. e., any Argentine military or auxiliary ship found within the exclusion zone would be considered hostile and could be sunk. The Naval Command for Sea Traffic designated some logistic ships of Empresa Líneas Marítimas Argentinas (ELMA, Argentine Sea Shipping Company) and of private companies which, though running a high risk, transported cargo between different ports of the Islands in support operations.

Despite the risk of being sunk, the Argentine Coast Guard patrol ships GC 82 *Islas Malvinas* and GC 83 *Río Iguazú* arrived at Puerto Argentino on 13 April, towing one another due to fuel shortage. The British siege would also be evaded by transport ships ELMA *Formosa* on 20 April; ELMA *Río Carcarañá* on 26 April; and tug ship *Yehuín*, coming from Ushuaia, on 1 May at 1920 after the war had started.

Planning the Islands’ defense

After the recapture of 2 April and the forced withdrawal announced by the UK had taken place, Brigadier Mayor Hellmuth Weber ordered the Argentine Air Force to allocate all its resources, to immediately occupy convenient locations on the mainland, and conduct operations together with the Army and the Navy.

On 3 April, the COMIL summoned Naval Operations Commander, Vicealmirante Juan José Lombardo. He was informed he had been appointed Commander of the Teatro de Operaciones del Atlántico Sur (COATLANSUR, South Atlantic Theater of Operations), which would replace the TOM effective as of 7 April. DEMIL 1/82 was handed to him and the following governing ideas were established:

- Argentina would refrain from the use of force in the future, as per the provisions of UN SC Resolution 502. A defensive strategic position would be adopted. Opening fire would not be allowed even in the presence of the enemy, except when responding to a specific aggression.
- The Argentine Navy Fleet would have to return immediately to Puerto Belgrano, as per the provisions of Operation Azul plan (or Rosario, as it was also called). After its resupply, it would have to set sail and stay anchored in the protected waters of Rincón de Bahía Blanca.
- The theater’s territorial jurisdiction was a maritime zone beyond 12 miles and the archipelagos within it. The mainland would be excluded.
- The TOAS Commander would be assigned the same forces as the Naval Operations Command’s, together with all assets deployed in Malvinas, whether they belonged to the Army, the Navy or the Air Force. He would not command Army or Air Force’s troops or assets stationed on the mainland. He was not assigned reserves.

- He would coordinate with the CAE (activated on the basis of the Air Operations Command under orders of Brigadier Mayor Helmuth Conrado Weber) all aspects related to the Air Force actions in the theater, including exploration and reconnaissance, attacks to naval targets and direct and indirect fire support to ground forces on the Islands.⁸⁰

On that same 3 April, when the British armed reaction and blockade became a real threat, Vicealmirante Lombardo summoned the Islands' military governor and CAE's leader for a meeting at Edificio Libertad. They began with an update of the current situation and a discussion on the enemy's retained capabilities. Then, they set out the guidelines to coordinate air assets operations. The Air Force was formally requested the following:

- Maintaining the airlift to Malvinas, even after the blockade had been imposed.
- Performing long-range exploration and reconnaissance over the sea with KC-130s in coordination with the Navy's SP-2H Neptunes.
- Strategic air operations (interdiction) to enemy ships.
- Carrying out tactical air operations (close fire support, exploration and reconnaissance, search and rescue, direct and indirect air defense) on the Islands and airfields assigned to the FAS.
- Under the orders of commands to be set up, as appropriate, conducting defense and transport strategic air operations within the theaters as ordered by high-ranking officers.

Hence, as established by the COMIL, the Air Force was requested to intervene in the TOM (later called the TOAS), conducting air operations which were the Navy's primary responsibility. The Air Force had neither the time nor the resources to develop detection and navigation systems; neither did it have the appropriate weapons for such targets nor the assets to defend against the dangerous missiles on board. Moreover, the guidelines to immediately carry out the South Atlantic air exploration were set out.

In order to meet such requirements, the Air Operations Commander, Brigadier Mayor Hellmuth C. Weber, ordered the adjustment of the Operations Plan 2/82 - *Mantenimiento de la Soberanía* which, in practice, was already written in full. Said document included activating the CAE and maintaining its headquarters at the Edificio Cóndor and, as of 5 April, defining the mission of the FAS. The previously mentioned higher tactical command would report to the CAE and, stationed at the 9th Air Brigade in Comodoro Rivadavia, it would be responsible for conducting strategic, tactical, defense and transport air operations in the TOAS.

As initially planned, the FAS would coexist and operate together with the commands of the Air Defense Zone created by the Defense Command⁸¹ –reactivated as of 7 April– and also with the CAT, which was responsible for maintaining the airlift between the mainland and Malvinas, and complying with the operational and regular transport requirements of the Armed Forces.

The CAE's self-imposed mission stated in the Operations Plan 2/82 - *Mantenimiento de la Soberanía* included the following operations:

- Exploration and reconnaissance –together with the South Atlantic Theater of Operations Command based at Puerto Belgrano– in the areas adjacent to Malvinas (a 900-km radius around the Islands).
- Strategic interdiction against the British Task Force, when ordered to do so.
- Tactical air operations on the Malvinas Islands.
- Air defense of FAS's deployment airfields.
- Diversionary air operations.

⁸⁰ JUAN JOSÉ LOMBARDO, *op. cit.*, page 113.

⁸¹ Air Defense Zones are defined in the military strategic planning.

Brigadier Ernesto Horacio Crespo was appointed FAS Commander. The CAT was already under the orders of Brigadier Enrique R. Valenzuela. And the mainland air defense was assigned to the CAD, led by Brigadier Mayor Augusto J. Hughes since peacetime.

One of the most significant changes introduced to DEMIL 1/82 was that as of 7 April the TOM was inactivated and taken over by the TOAS⁸² based at Puerto Belgrano. Within its jurisdiction remained Soledad and Gran Malvina Islands, and the adjacent islets; San Pedro Island (South Georgia); and the air and maritime zones necessary to guarantee the integral defense of Argentina's Atlantic continental coast. As to its geographical reference, it extended from Punta Rasa —at the end of Samborombón Bay— southwards.

Under the authority of the COATLANSUR Commander, Vicealmirante Juan José Lombardo, was the Joint Command of the Malvinas Garrison in charge of the Malvinas Governor, General de Brigada Mario B. Menéndez, together with the commanders of the land component (General de Brigada Américo Daher⁸³), naval component (Contraalmirante Edgardo Otero), and air component (Brigadier Luis G. Castellano). Through their authority, Lombardo would lead the forces detached in Malvinas.

As regards the conduct of the conflict, the COMIL maintained the level of joint leadership with its advisory body, the Argentine Joint Staff.⁸⁴ Under the authority of the COMIL, the TOAS, the Comando Aéreo Estratégico (CAE, Strategic Air Command) and the Reserva Estratégica Militar (REM, Military Strategic Reserve) were assigned the same organizational level.

The FAS Commander and the Malvinas Air Component Commander would coordinate the reception of all kinds of supplies by air transport operations and, mainly, the provision of intelligence information and, thus, plan combat sorties against naval and ground targets.

As stated in the Outline Plan 1/82, the TOAS Commander was assigned the mission to deter and/or interdict possible British military reactions. Therefore, and complementing the Argentine Navy Fleet, the COMIL assigned him the elements of the three armed forces already in Malvinas since the recapture operation. The COMIL was requested the 8th Infantry Regiment as Reserva Estratégica Operacional (REO, Strategic Operational Reserve) in Comodoro Rivadavia, and Air Force assets on the mainland by the COATLANSUR.

On the other hand, since the hypothesis of an imminent conflict with Chile could not be dismissed, the activation of the TOS was considered for an eventual defense of the Argentine mainland, based on the provisions of DEMIL 1/81 and its amendments (Malvinas) introduced at the end of March by DEMIL 1/82.

As regards military aviation assets, in case the Argentine Air Force were to meet the requirements of both the TOS and TOAS theaters, through the CAE, at the operational strategic level, it would act on all fronts up to the flight range of its aircraft, under orders of the FAS Commander. Within that context, the FAS, at the higher tactical level, could simultaneously operate in both Chile's and Malvinas' theaters, maintaining the same permanent bases and coordinating assets allocation according to the urgency of the situation in either theater.

General Osvaldo García was removed from his position as TOM Commander, but kept his position as head of the Army 5th Corps in Bahía Blanca and all units of the Argentine Army in Patagonia.

As regards the Air Force's air assets, DEMIL 1/82 stated that the CAE reported directly to the COMIL; hence, except for exploration and reconnaissance tasks which had to be

⁸² Executive Order "S" No. 700 issued by the Argentine National Executive Power.

⁸³ As of 15 April, he will be succeeded by General de Brigada Oscar Luis Jofre.

⁸⁴ National Strategic Directive (DENAC) no. 2/82, page 17: "The COMIL shall exercise joint military leadership."

expressly coordinated with the COATLANSUR, the CAE had its own powers to interdict naval targets of the British Task Force and execute tactical air operations in support of the Islands.

However, the COATLANSUR plan stated that the conduct of Air Force operations to attack naval targets, after being requested by the COMIL, remained under the control of the Naval Operations Command together with the Argentine navy fleet and all land-based aviation.

To sum up, DEMIL did not assign the CAE or the TOAS Command (both at the operational strategic level) a defined mission and tasks for conducting air operations in the South Atlantic; it only gave them authority to coordinate tasks between them.

The organizational structure introduced by DEMIL 1/82 would not be the last one to be adopted during the conflict. After the landing in San Carlos on 22 May, the COMIL made the late decision to create the Centro de Operaciones Conjuntas (CEOPECON, Joint Operations Center) based in Comodoro Rivadavia. This body was composed of General Osvaldo García, Commander of the Army 5th Corps; Brigadier Mayor Hellmuth Weber, Air Operations and CAE Commander; and Vicealmirante Juan José Lombardo, Naval Operations Commander. The CEOPECON would act in an executive capacity over all the forces of the theater, including the Reserva Estratégica del Ejército (REE, Army Strategic Reserve). It would be conducted with the agreement of the parties; should disagreement arise, the decision-making power would rest with the highest-ranking officer (General García, in this case).

Planning characteristics

The lack of a joint doctrine

In case a conflict escalated into war, the defense doctrine in force in 1982 established that the highest leading authority for conflict resolution was the Argentine National Executive Power (PEN). This body was to decide on the national strategy and define the geographic area for military actions. According to the physical dimensions of the territory involved, one or more theaters would be established and military operations leaders or operational commanders would be appointed.

The next level of leadership referred to the military sectoral strategy which, coordinated by the Argentine Joint Staff, would draft a directive outlining the goals to be achieved by each theater operational commander.

The Staff of the TOAS focused on the Campaign Plan for the defense of the Malvinas Islands with only one reference document (DEMIL 1/82) and without previous planning:

There was no joint publication save for the Basic Doctrine. We had neither operational terms dictionaries, nor any joint planning manual. There were no codes, keys or operation manuals compatible among the three armed forces. Even administrative tasks were managed differently in each service.⁸⁵

On the other hand, DEMIL 1/82 was no longer in force as it had been drafted based on DENAC 1. The latter did not include the TOAS nor did it convey the enemy's real capabilities, so they had to be redefined.

Probably due to the fact it had been swiftly drafted and the Argentine Joint Staff's characteristics, DEMIL 1 turns out to be very confusing as it mixes already adopted decisions with future possibilities.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ JUAN JOSÉ LOMBARDO, op. cit., page 122.

⁸⁶ Ibid., page 109.

[...] it is interesting to highlight that after reading DEMIL 1, the Argentine Joint Staff and, consequently, the COMIL –that passed said document– believed that England’s military reaction was very unlikely to happen (enemy capability 2), and even if it did react, it would only employ one or two submarines (enemy capability 4).⁸⁷

The first records of the Argentine Joint Staff doctrine date back to 1986, when Regulation RC-20-01 “Joint Military Action Planning - Strategic Operational and Tactical Levels” was issued. On the other hand, the operational level and joint military action in the 1980s were not included in the curricula of the Armed Forces War Colleges. Hence, in 1982, commanding and high-ranking officers belonging to the different Staffs, including the TOAS’, had no training on the matter whatsoever.

There were practically no smooth relations among the Armed Forces. Joint military action was based on the efforts and willingness of those who were obliged to work with the other forces, and the documents issued lacked support as they were not part of any doctrine publication.

The TOAS Staff had to elaborate a campaign plan integrating the action of the three armed forces without any support doctrine for the planning of tasks and without any experience in joint military action.

Jurisdiction of operations

The delimitation of the South Atlantic theaters of operations also resulted from the lack of a duly consolidated joint doctrine. In fact, an area of operations in that region of our country was mentioned for the first time in DENAC 1/82, issued by the Argentine Joint Staff, which set up the creation of a TOM around the archipelago during the Islands’ recapture operations.

Likewise, the abovementioned directive included designating a Strategic Military Reserve in Patagonia for defense in case of aggression by Chilean forces in the soon-to-be-created Teatro de Operaciones Sur (TOS, Southern Theater of Operations). Thus, jurisdiction was determined and, in case of conflict, it would include part of the legally recognized Argentine territory.

In that regard, the UN Third Conference on the Law of the Sea, held in 1973, focused on determining the extent of the territorial waters and contiguous zones to allow coastal States to gain economic advantages, as well as the delimitation of the continental shelf. For such purposes, the baseline from which the breadth of the maritime zones would be measured was determined. As a general rule, the baseline was the low-water line along the coast. Waters from that line landwards were considered inland waters and belonged to the coastal State. Outward and up to 12 nautical miles from the baseline, the adjacent maritime zone or territorial waters extended which, legally, was also part of the coastal State and the latter had full sovereignty over it.

On the other hand, coordinating instructions included in DENAC 2/82 mentioned the inactivation of the Theater of Operations once the subsequent negotiations had started. The latter never happened since upon the issuance of Resolution 502, on that same 2 April –demanding the immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of Argentine forces from the Malvinas Islands– the Military Junta put up resistance as a way of urging for the compliance with the appeal to negotiate, which was also included in said resolution.

To that end, the TOAS was created in 1982 by Executive Order “S” No. 700, although its jurisdiction was determined on 8 April by the Military Junta’s Joint Statement No. 19. The latter established 200 nautical miles from the limit of the mainland (12 miles offshore from the baseline) and around Malvinas, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands. On

⁸⁷ JUAN JOSÉ LOMBARDO, *Ibid.*, page 110.

12 April 1982, the COMIL issued Outline Plan 1/82, which in Annex “A” included the inactivation of the TOM and the transfer of obligations to the TOAS, and in Annex “D” added a map showing the jurisdiction of the new theater.

It is worth mentioning that the TOS, seat of the Strategic Reserve, was not created by means of an executive order, since there was no conflict with Chile at the time. In addition to that, the capricious delimitation of the TOAS starting from the 12 nautical miles legally recognized as Argentine territory by international law, though without operative support, resulted in the Air Force and Naval Aviation air bases located in different places along the Atlantic coast falling outside the warfighting theater.

As per Resolution 1/69, the Air Force was restricted to conducting operations beyond 12 nautical miles from the coast. Thus conditioning the possibilities, during peacetime, of performing missions and training over the continental sea.

Under those circumstances, pilots would have to improvise new attack techniques, not only because they were carrying out operations over the sea, but also because they did not have the appropriate weapons to attack ships.

Guarnición Militar Malvinas

The Islands military governor, General de Brigada Mario B. Menéndez, was also in charge of the Malvinas Garrison Joint Command, which reported directly to the COATLANSUR Commander. Though originally conceived as a subordinate unit, this Joint Command would actually operate as an independent theater due to the tactical situation and British naval and air blockade would prevent providing support to deployed forces. Only air transportation would, once and again, evade the siege and carry weapons and essential elements and, most importantly, evacuate the most seriously wounded to the mainland.

The Joint Command was organized based on the land, naval, and air components, each of them commanded by General de Brigada Américo Daher,⁸⁸ Contraalmirante Edgardo A. Otero and Brigadier Luis G. Castellano, respectively.

Assets were organized according to the initial deployment, but no formal operations plan complementing the COATLANSUR 1/82 Campaign Outline Plan was drafted “though it can be deduced that there is a complementing plan, informally discussed, from meetings and verbal instructions given by the Malvinas Military Commander.”⁸⁹

The initial deployment consisted of approximately 2,500 troops of the 25th and 8th Infantry Regiments (RI) belonging to the 9th Infantry Brigade and commanded by General de Brigada Américo Daher. As of 4 April, the COMIL started the reinforcement of land forces by sending the 10th Mechanized Infantry Brigade with RI 3, RI 6 and RI 7, and a Cavalry Exploration Squadron, the Commando Company and the Engineers Company, with neither their corresponding armored vehicles nor the organic artillery group, commanded by General de Brigada Oscar Jofre.⁹⁰ The 5th Marine Battalion (BIM 5) was ordered to deploy that day as well, though actual deployment began on the sixth day.⁹¹

On 22 April, during his visit to Malvinas, General Galtieri met with Menéndez and Jofre to discuss the deployment performed. They agreed that they had not enough resources available, only two infantry companies and some helicopters and armored vehicles. Galtieri suggested sending an infantry regiment but the Commanders were doubtful since that could worsen the supply problems they already had. When Galtieri returned to Buenos Aires, however, he immediately ordered the dispatch of another brigade. Apart from the problems that originated

⁸⁸ As of 15 April, he would be succeeded by General de Brigada Oscar Luis Jofre.

⁸⁹ COMISIÓN DE ANÁLISIS... (*Rattenbach Report*), op. cit.

⁹⁰ RUBÉN OSCAR MORO, *Historia del Conflicto...*, ESGA, 1985, op. cit., page 154.

⁹¹ JUAN JOSÉ LOMBARDO, op. cit., page 106.



The Hercules C-130 unloading on the BAM Malvinas platform

Photo courtesy of: Comodoro VGM (R) Pavlovic

from the defense of Puerto Argentino, he was concerned about not having enough troops to occupy the entire area since that could weaken his negotiating position once battles began. Another brigade could take over the area.

Without prior consultation with other members of the Junta or the COMIL, Galtieri decided to send the 3rd Infantry Brigade from Corrientes province, commanded by General Omar Parada, with the 4th, 5th, and 12th Infantry Regiments, the 4th Artillery Group, and the 3rd Engineers Company. They were transported to Malvinas between 24 and 29 April.⁹²

Besides the above mentioned, the Army added a strength of 9,804 men including the following assets: the 601st Aviation Battalion, battalions and logistics centers, command and services companies, Air Defense Artillery groups and companies, Military Police companies, Intelligence sections, the Field Surgical Hospital and the 601^{st/2nd} Commando companies.⁹³

Afterwards, assets from the Gendarmería Nacional (GN, Argentine National Border Patrol) and from the Prefectura Naval Argentina (PNA, Argentine Coast Guard) were added as well, under the operational control of the corresponding component commands.

The Malvinas Naval Component, which took on the management of the port and its premises, was composed of the Forrester ship of the British government, seized by the Argentine 5th Marine Battalion; the *Monsunen* and the *Penelope* owned by the Falkland Island Company (FIC); and the tug ship *Yehuín*, transferred by the Navy from Ushuaia and used as a barge in Puerto Argentino. It counted on two Argentine Coast Guard patrol boats as well, the GC-82 *Islas Malvinas* and the GC-83 *Río Iguazú*; and three vessels owned by Transportes Navales, the ARA *Islas de los Estados* and the ARA *Bahía Buen Suceso*, and the ELMA *Río Carcarañá*.

The garrison Military Health Services was composed of health specialist officers belonging to the three armed forces, under orders of the Army physician Mayor Mariano Ceballos.

⁹² LAWRENCE FREEDMAN AND VIRGINIA GAMBA. *Señales de guerra - El conflicto de las islas Malvinas de 1982*, Ediciones Vergara, 1992, page 170. CARLOS AUGUSTO LANDABURU, *La Guerra de las Malvinas*, Buenos Aires. Círculo Militar, Biblioteca del Oficial, Vol. 739, 1988, page 134.

⁹³ JUAN JOSÉ LOMBARDO, op. cit., page 106.

Componente Aéreo Malvinas

Faced with the British reaction –that aimed at forcing the withdrawal of the Argentine troops deployed in Malvinas– the COMIL decided that the Air Force’s main efforts to defend the Islands’ sovereignty would lie with the Argentine Air Force Southern Command and the fighter aircraft stationed in the bases along the Patagonian coast. Meanwhile, the Malvinas Garrison Joint Command was assigned an Air Component under orders of Brigadier Luis G. Castellano, as already mentioned.

After meeting with the CAE Commander on 26 March, Brigadier Castellano met with Comodoro Knud E. Andreasen, head of the Planning Department, and Comodoro Alberto A. Ferraris, head of the Personnel Department. Castellano expressed his concern that the operation could lead to a serious conflict. Both Comodoros repeated what the Commander had already anticipated –that everything had been arranged.

Nevertheless, the Brigadier required a list of senior officers to organize his command’s Staff. He selected personnel with experience in operations, and others with specific knowledge in certain specialties. They were supposed to be in Comodoro Rivadavia to plan the operation by Sunday, 28 March at the latest.

During that meeting, Staff members were appointed as follows:

- A-1 Personnel. Chief Officer: Vicecomodoro Juan J. García de Diego. Assistant Officer: Mayor Jorge O. Fernández.
- A-2 Intelligence. Chief Officer: Comodoro Guillermo V. Mendiberri. Assistant Officer: Mayor Alcides J. Cerutti.
- A-3 Operations. Chief Officer: Vicecomodoro Alberto Alegría. Assistant Officers: Vicecomodoro Héctor R. Gilobert, Mayor Gilberto E. Oliva, and Mayor Alberto A. Catalá.
- Information and Control Center (CIC). Chief Officer: Vicecomodoro Oscar L. Aranda Durañona. Assistant Officers: Mayor Alberto Kajihara and Mayor Héctor M. Pergolini.
- A-4 Materiel. Chief Officer: Vicecomodoro (Engineer) Eduardo J. Giannattasio. Assistant Officer: Mayor Raúl Maiorano.
- A-5 Communications. Chief Officer: Mayor Antonio F. González Iturbe. Assistant Officer: Mayor Mario M. Módica.

After recapturing the Islands and facing an imminent confrontation, Brigadier Castellano gave the order to set up another Military Air Base (BAM) in the Darwin area, called Prado del Ganso (Goose Green), later renamed BAM Cóndor. The aim was to preserve the Pucará air materiel and avoid traffic congestion on the platform of the BAM Malvinas, the main airfield. The location was chosen because it was close to Puerto Argentino and, at the same time, it was far away from the coast, which would reduce naval bombardments effectiveness.

The ultimate Order of Battle of the Malvinas Air Component included two Military Air Bases, a command and control system, two air units (IA-58 and helicopters), one VyCA unit (TPS-43 radar), an antiaircraft artillery unit (one 35 mm Oerlikon battery and two 20 mm Rheinmetall batteries), and one GOE unit. All assets were based in two zones 80 km away from each other. The BAM Malvinas remained at the Puerto Argentino airfield with no air assets save for the Norman British Islander BN-2, registration mark FIGAS, seized from former governor Rex Hunt. The Staff and the Tactical Air Control System were placed in different houses around town.

BAM Malvinas creation and composition

The first Operations Plan Azul y Blanco of the Air Operations Command included setting up a military airfield, to be named Alfil, at the Stanley civilian airport. Its mission was to provide security and support services to Argentine aircraft. As the recapture operation



Military personnel placing a sign at Malvinas Airport on 2 April

Photo courtesy of: Comodoro VGM (R) Aranda Durañona

began earlier than expected, the initial idea was disregarded and, from the beginning, it was organized as a Military Air Base.

On 2 April, the Islas Malvinas Military Air Base was created, and Comodoro Héctor Luis Destri was appointed in command. That same day, the Argentine national flag was hoisted and a yellow sign bearing the inscription “Fuerza Aérea Argentina - Aeródromo Malvinas” (Argentine Air Force - Malvinas Airport) was placed in the front of the building. The unit was immediately organized with all its assigned and lodged squadrons. On 6 April, a short ceremony took place whereby Brigadier Luis Guillermo Castellano officially appointed to office Comodoro Héctor Luis Destri as Chief of the Malvinas Military Air Base. On another side of the building, a second sign was placed bearing the name of the Argentine Air Force new unit.

After the strategic situation changed on 4 April, the Malvinas Air Component undertook and imposed itself the mission of the BAM Malvinas, which would be fulfilled during the entire conflict:

“Maintain the Malvinas archipelago authorized airport fully operative and acting as the main point of air deployment from and withdrawal to the mainland, providing at all times the required services for aircraft operations which involve the deployment of troops and assets of the three Armed Forces, the conduct of tactical air sorties, the provision of all kinds of supplies or the evacuation of the wounded, in order to defend and consolidate the possession of and sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands and adjacent islets.”



Military formation of the VyCA Malvinas Squadron at the first radar emplacement

Photo courtesy of: VyCA Malvinas Squadron Archives

Functions:

- Providing communications and flight support services, as well as other services related to the operation of the airfield: marking and lighting, infrastructure, fire protection and prevention, medical services, etc.
- Conducting ground defense of the BAM premises with the assigned company of soldiers, including passive air defense (fortification, masking, explosive ordnance disposal, rubble and debris removal, and any other task which may arise during operations).
- Coordinating and supporting Army and Navy units' actions defending the BAM outer limits.
- Coordinating warnings transmission and weapons readiness with the three Forces' artillery units stationed at the BAM Malvinas.
- Supporting maintenance tasks and tactical air interdiction tasks, close fire support and search and rescue as ordered by the Tactical Air Component Command.

Once more personnel and supplies arrived, the parking apron was widened using the aluminum plates that had been transported aboard the C-130 Hercules to enable the operation of three aircraft at the same time. An air cargo terminal was also established.

At first, the BAM Malvinas was set up as follows:

- Base Commander: Comodoro Héctor L. Destri.
- Operations Department: Vicecomodoro Alberto J. Zeoli and Mayor Alberto L. Iannariello.
- A company of Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade Battalion with a 50 soldier-strength who arrived on 2 April under orders of Teniente Eduardo A. Luppo and Alférez Domingo E. Aguerre.
- Air Cargo Terminal: Capitán Mario Stocco.
- Communications Center: Primer Teniente Eduardo R. Zanardi.
- Supply Squadron, General and Special Services: Mayor Héctor M. Rusticcini. Assistant: Mayor Rodolfo L. Guerrero.



A 35 mm cannon of the Argentine Air Force 3rd Battery during an adjustment fire test

Photo courtesy of: Comodoro VGM (R) Rusticcini

- Technical Squadron: Mayor Carlos H. Argente.
- Combat Control Team (ECCO): Primer Teniente Rodolfo Yuse.
- Health Services: Capitán Luis M. Barusso.
- Religious Support Services: Monsignor Roque Puyelli. Later replaced by Presbyter Gonzalo E. Pacheco, who remained at his post voluntarily until the end of the conflict.

Within the BAM Malvinas facilities, the following lodged units were established:

- Pucará Squadron: Mayor Miguel M. Navarro (later redeployed to the BAM Cóndor).
- Helicopter Squadron with two Chinook and two Bell 212: Mayor Oscar J. Pose Ortiz de Rozas (later redeployed to the BAM Cóndor).
- Antiaircraft Artillery Squadron: Mayor Hugo Maiorano.
- Special Operations Group (GOE): Vicecomodoro Esteban Correa.
- Constructions Squadron: Mayor Raúl O. Maiorano.
- Airspace Surveillance and Control Squadron (VyCA): Mayor Miguel A. Silva.
- In one of the airport's sheds, the Argentine Navy set up the Estación Aeronaval Malvinas (Malvinas Naval Air Station) which was established as a lodged unit not reporting to the BAM Commander. It was equipped with a flight of four MB-339 Aermacchi (two aircraft would arrive on 24 Abril and the other two on 15 May)⁹⁴ and a Grumman S2E Tracker section for maritime exploration (which remained at the station between 3-11 April). The operation of these aircraft went on smoothly, but they occupied a portion of the reduced platform and hindered airlift aircraft operation.

During one of the first coordination meetings held with the three Components Operations Chiefs, they all agreed that neutralizing the runway would be one of the enemy's primary objectives, and that it was of vital importance for the Military Air Base to remain fully operative. Hence, in addition to the aeronautical contingent, the Argentine Army's following units were assigned for defense:

⁹⁴ On 26 May, the Argentine Navy would make a third deployment of three MB-339s. Two of them returned to Río Grande on 5 June.



A CH-47 Chinook helicopter at the BAM Malvinas - Photo courtesy of: Comodoro VGM (R) Pavlovic

- The Batallón de Infantería 25 (25th Infantry Battalion) (four companies): Teniente Coronel Mohamed A. Seineldín.
- Two 35 mm Oerlikon Antiaircraft Batteries with Skyguard fire-control system of the Army 601st GADA. One Battery was to be installed at the airport and the other one on the way to Puerto Argentino (operationally reporting to the BAM Malvinas Commander).
- Antiaircraft Battery with two optically-guided S-A Tigercat missile launchers installed at the airport.
- Roland Missile Battery near Puerto Argentino.

As regards the Argentine Navy's contribution to the antiaircraft defense system, an optically-guided S-A Tigercat missile launcher of Río Grande's Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion was installed on the outskirts of Puerto Argentino, and communication networks were established in the BAM Malvinas.

All posts were filled by Argentine Air Force high- and low-ranking officers. Deployed troops belonged to El Palomar 1st Air Brigade, Morón 7th Air Brigade, Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade, and the Escuela de Aviación Militar (EAM, Military Aviation School) and the Escuela de Suboficiales (Noncommissioned-Officer School), both located in Córdoba.

Chapter 4

Fuerza Aérea Sur



Responsibility of the Argentine Air Force

Getting ready for action

Using the available aircraft, suitable for other purposes, in flying testing was performed to determine the best procedure to penetrate the warships' defenses with a reasonable probability of survival. Depending on the approach, the most suitable weapons available were chosen.

Considering that the Argentine Air Force would only achieve the expected effect after dropping weapons on the target and attaining the desired level of damage, it was essential to determine which factors would influence the tasks: availability of aircraft and weapons, pilot training, conditions on the route and in the target area (weather, distance, flight profiles, navigation aids, defended areas), and target characteristics. Also, approach and attack techniques, go around procedures, return air navigation and, if necessary, in-flight refueling.

Everything was considered and verified in the effort calculation. The feasible percentages of failures, shoot downs, impacts on target and the probability of being detected were assessed.

The same happened with the radar systems that made up the air surveillance and control system in the Patagonian coast and in Malvinas. Although some flights were specifically made to determine the coverage of the AN/TPS-43 and AN/TPS-44 Cardion radars, most of the radar coverage charts were drafted using the numerous unscheduled flights that were performed during April between the different mainland bases and the air lift to and from the islands.

Due to the remoteness, the operation over Malvinas had serious limitations. Lack of autonomous navigation equipment, excessive fuel consumption, limited time to locate, identify, and engage the target, adverse weather conditions in one or several route segments, and especially at the target; fatigue from the journey combined with stress; and a greater possibility of human errors. Furthermore, the distance factor would significantly affect the chances of achieving the desired damage in the attacks, thus the number of required missions for doing so would increase.

Air superiority is measured in terms of the degree of freedom to conduct operations in an airspace given sector, the time each party uses to execute effective actions, and the cost in losses demanded by its use. During the Argentine Strategic Air Command planning, it became clear that the distance between the bases and the targets would prevent the permanence of combat aircraft over the islands, thus the Malvinas' bases defense would be limited to anti-aircraft artillery.

The Mirage III EA used as an interceptor-fighter aircraft could fly over the area for five to ten minutes, as long as it remained at a high altitude. If it engaged in combat and descended, it would not have enough fuel to return. Moreover, the runway was too short for any high-performance fighter aircraft, and the Pucará, which is not suitable for interception, lacked the appropriate equipment for air-to-air actions: sight, radar, and missiles.

In order to reduce the problems caused by excessive flight duration, civilian aircraft were procured, suitable for guiding fighter squadrons equipped with outdated navigation instruments, and meteorological stations were reinforced with more forecasters. In-flight refueling of A-4B/C with KC-130 was also planned. The approach routes were optimized, and the time on target was reduced. Additionally, the training of naval aviation pilots for Super Étendard and A-4Q aircraft in-flight refueling was coordinated.

As regards the risks that attacking British ships entailed, in mid-April, an agreement was reached with the Argentine Navy to conduct exercises with the Type 42 destroyers, *Santísima Trinidad* and *Hércules*, which shared similar characteristics. On that occasion, the detection capabilities of the Sea Dart anti-aircraft missile system were tested, which probability of shoot down was 90%, according to the manufacturer's technical specification. The testing was entrusted to Grupo 6 de Caza de Tandil (Tandil's 6th Fighter Group), which, at the Comandante Espora Naval Air Base, practiced different procedures to reduce shoot-down probability. None of them reduced the 50% loss rate.

Once the simulated attacks were completed, the M-5 flight commander flew over the ships at a very low altitude. Vicecomodoro Juan C. Sapolski, M-5 Squadron Commander, who was supervising from command booth, noticed that this low-level passage was undetected by the radar. The discovery and subsequent practice provided the tactic employed by the Argentine aviators to survive, even against the most pessimistic odds: to approach skimming the water surface was the only method to penetrate the defenses, attack and go around with some probability of success.

The bomb fuses had to be calibrated with the minimum delay allowed, and the attacking aircraft had to move away skimming the waves to avoid being hit by shrapnel. Nevertheless, it was known that the naval targets operated together, combining weapons of various ranges: Sea Wolf anti-aircraft systems (short-range anti-missile) and Sea Cat (optically guided missile), in addition to various anti-aircraft artillery weapons. Considering this situation, the calculated risk of being shot down increased by 25%, while the possibility of hitting the target was as high as 55% per aircraft that reached the launching point.

To their advantage, the Argentine Air Force counted on units well-trained in shooting and bombing. Low-altitude droppings were preferred by the pilots due to the higher accuracy. At the deployment bases, practices of navigation over the sea started, which ended in exercise bomb droppings against simulated maritime targets or, in the case of A-4B aircraft, against a ship grounded on the Patagonian coast. Considering there were no weapons available for long-distance droppings, bombs unsuitable for naval target attacks were used, since they required flying over the ship under attack. Most of the available bombs presented limitations in their fuse arming and delay-action for very low-level droppings, as their design was intended for high-altitude bombing.

The 250 kg parachute-braked Alaveses-type bombs (BRP 250), were tested in April only to find out they did not explode in the water. A direct hit — with properly armed fuses — on the ship's structure would be needed to cause damage.

As an alternative, the British MK-17 bomb, originally intended for the BMK-62 Canberra, was adopted in some weapon systems. This bomb weighed 1000 pounds (454 kg) and showed poor results in very low-altitude droppings due to the fuse arming time. In addition, it only allowed a single bomb per aircraft, reducing the probability of success compared to a multiple dropping. This would be confirmed during operations: in many cases, due to very low droppings, the bombs pierced the ship structure, and as the fuses failed to activate, they did not explode. Furthermore, to prevent the shock wave from the explosion of a smooth-tailed bomb from affecting the launching aircraft, it was necessary to count on delays not available in the fuses that would enable a safe escape.

On the other hand, to attack ships from low altitudes, the Argentine Navy counted on 250 kilogram American MK-82 Snakeye, mechanical delay-action bombs, but even with these bombs, the minimum dropping altitude had to be around 50/60 meters. The fact is that there was no fuse available in any arsenal around the world that would allow attacks on warships from altitudes lower than 50/60 meters above sea level. It was clear that this mode of attack had never been considered due to the low survival probability.

In summary, although the Argentine Air Force did not count on suitable weapons to attack naval targets, its personnel would show that despite all the limitations they were faced with, they would seriously affect the enemy fleet.

In order to attack naval targets, it is essential to know their location, number of elements, their course, and speed. Based on this information, it is possible to identify the meeting point and determine the necessary offensive force. Since the development of specific means to combat ships was not authorized by joint directives, the Air Force did not count on aircraft equipped for efficient maritime reconnaissance. Under these conditions, they accepted the risk of using C-130H Hercules and Boeing B-707 for distant exploration tasks, with their limited weather radars, without radar warning systems (RWS⁹⁵) or countermeasures, nor electronic intelligence (ELINT) or communications intelligence (COMINT) equipment.

Since they operated from Comodoro Rivadavia, Río Gallegos, Río Grande, San Julián, Santa Cruz, and Trelew, it was taken into account that due to the low seawater temperatures, flight crews would have to wear anti-exposure suits. Flying over the sea with a single-engine aircraft already involved risks. Considering that missions over the South Atlantic would take long hours, the most unexpected thermal protection suits were urgently sought and obtained to help crews survive in case of ejection⁹⁶.

After assessing these factors, the Argentine Air Force took on a high rate of losses.

A challenge for the Argentine Air Force

The probable theater of operations was essentially an air-naval one, thus neither the weapon systems nor the Air Force crews' training were the most appropriate. In addition to operations taking place in a maritime environment, the objective to be defended was an oceanic archipelago located at the limit of the operating range of aircraft based on the mainland. In order to set up an air defense system for such a target, with any chance of success, it was necessary to have an early warning system, whether airborne or ship-borne, in the potential avenues of approach. On the islands, beyond the range of naval artillery, it was necessary to count on at least one runway with a minimum extension of 2,300 meters to operate with fighters as well as shelters for aircraft.

Immediately after April 2, the Argentine Air Force, among many other requirements, considered the possibility of extending the runway for the operation of fighter aircraft, or for an alternative/emergency use.

Thus, one of the first requirements made to the Joint Staff on April 2 was the maritime transportation of the equipment necessary to extend the runway at Stanley. When analyzing the possibilities, the fact the runway was very close to the sea and, therefore, exposed to naval bombing represented a challenge.

During April, competent personnel from the National Highway Administration were summoned to estimate the magnitude of the task and, especially, the time required. However, due to the soil type, the work involved removing rocks and moving a considerable amount of earth that would take months, even counting on the necessary heavy machinery. The only possibility was to place aluminum plates on the rest of the already leveled ground.

There were some inconveniences in coordinating the departure of the shipping vessels in Buenos Aires, which delayed the shipment of 80 crates with 231 aluminum plates to extend the runway, a front-end loader, a bulldozer, a motor grader, two dump trucks, and a mobile workshop truck. It was only around April 7 that the equipment was finally loaded onto the ELMA Ciudad de Córdoba along with the 3rd Infantry Brigade heavy weapons.

During the voyage, the blockade was imposed, so instead of going to the Malvinas Islands, the ship headed for Puerto Deseado, and arrived on April 11. For unspecified reasons, the

⁹⁵ RWS, Radar Warning System.

⁹⁶ Luis Ponzi, a Tandil-based enthusiast close to the 6th Fighter Squadron, provided frogman suits adapted for the M-5 Dagger Squadron pilots. The Cressi Sub factory in Puerto Madryn supplied adapted neoprene wet suits for the crews of Mirage/Dagger, A-4B/C, and Canberra aircraft.



Installation of aluminum plates at BAM Malvinas - Photo courtesy of: Com. VGM (R) Grünert

transport vessel collided with the quay while berthing, causing a two-meter breach in the bulbous bow. C-130 Hercules aircraft carried the personnel and lighter equipment to the Malvinas, while the rest of the equipment was transported by land to the 9th Air Brigade, to wait for available cargo hold space. Because of the incident, the runway could not be extended in due time and manner, thus the possibility of using it as a recovery base was reduced. The only aluminum plates for field runways arrived in Malvinas on the *ELMA Formosa* transport vessel on April 20, under the responsibility of Cabo Oscar W. Doria, from the Quilmes Materiel Area. In the end, the plates were used both for enlarging the air base terminal platform maneuvering surface as well as for subflooring some Pucará shelters at BAM Malvinas, and reinforcing the port quay, which was in poor condition.

An attempt was made to extend the runway with eight aluminum plates at the threshold 08 (on the west end), and it was possible to build a 50 meter long floor with the same runway width. In order to do so, the Aerolíneas Argentinas B-737s participating in the air lift were ordered to take off from runway threshold 26 (on the runway east end) so that jet engines did not lift the plates. However, on 24 and 25 April, due to a strong tail wind, they were forced to take off from runway threshold 08 and ended up lifting the plates completely; therefore, the work done by the Base personnel to place them came to nothing.

In addition to the challenge of operating in a maritime geographical environment with no runway nearby for emergency landings, the 740 kilometer distance between the islands and the nearest mainland airfields posed another severe difficulty, especially for the Mirage aircraft. Considering the lack of in-flight refueling systems, the M-5 Dagger aircraft could stay in the target area for only two or three minutes due to their limited endurance, while the Mirage M-III EA interceptors could reach the vertical of the Malvinas and maintain altitude without descending.

As far as the A-4B/C and naval Q aircraft were concerned, which counted on endurance and equipment to reach the target, attack it, and return, in-flight refueling would be required to conceal their approach route, flying at low altitudes. On the other hand, this possibility was restricted since there were only two KC-130 tankers available. Moreover, any problem during refueling meant the pilots would have to abort the mission and return to their home base, and in the worst-case scenario, should they experience any serious or unexpected technical failure, they would have to eject over the sea.

As regards the Navy's Super Étendard - Exocet duo, when the United Nations requested Argentina to withdraw its forces, France imposed an embargo on the equipment to be delivered retaining 60% in the port of Marseille. Of the twelve aircraft acquired a year earlier, the first five, together with a similar number of uncalibrated missiles, had arrived on November 18, 1981.

Most of the Argentine aircraft would take off from bases on the mainland, while the British aircraft would advantageously take off close to the area of operations. In addition to this, the movement of their aircraft carriers would allow them to adjust their location and get even closer. Parked between 170 and 220 km away from the Malvinas, the Harriers could carry out several sorties on the same target and stay over it for longer periods (between ten and twenty minutes).

The probability of neutralizing a target is determined by the amount of weapons dropped on it and the number of firing passes made against it. These parameters depend on the air superiority available in the area as well as on four factors: aircraft quantity, flight endurance, daily sortie rate per aircraft, and payload capacity.

As the attacker, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command would count on the advantage of choosing the most suitable procedure, location, and time. According to information revealed after the conflict, the RAF addressed this Task Force disadvantage by sending Nimrod patrol aircraft from Ascension Island with two refuelings on the outbound and return flights, as well as from San Felix Island in the Pacific Ocean, counting on Chile's active and secret cooperation. They also lessened their limited exploration capability by using carrier based aircraft, radar picket ships, or submarines on the surface. Moreover, they counted on satellite information provided by the USA⁹⁷, which was clearly late and inaccurate, according to the results observed after the conflict. The latter is evidenced by the fact that they were never able to determine the Puerto Argentino runway's actual condition.

On the other hand, the tension with Chile remained in 1982. Only four years had gone by since both countries had been on the verge of war due to the Beagle Channel dispute. The Trans-Andean country was expected to support the United Kingdom. According to what the then Chilean Air Force Commander, General Fernando Matthei Aubel, later declared in 2003, he had agreed with the British liaison officer, RAF Gp. Capt. Sidney Edwards, on early warning support by means of the Punta Arenas radar:

[Edwards] counted on equipment that provided direct satellite communication with the British flagship, under the command of Admiral Sandy Woodward, Task Force Commander. For example, it was reported that four planes had taken off from a certain base heading for a particular direction, and that due to their speed, they appeared to be Mirage aircraft. The British were already informed of their arrival one hour before they reached destination⁹⁸.

Years later, Sidney Edwards would write his own account confirming the detailed support Chile provided to the United Kingdom during the conflict⁹⁹.

Considering the strengths and weaknesses known at that time, the Argentine pilots knew they were facing the most difficult choice in the Air Force history. Some pilots presumed that only two missions could be executed. Half the aircraft would be lost during the first mission while the rest would be lost in the second one, and no aircraft would remain. However, if a ship was sunk on either sortie, the effort would be justified.

⁹⁷ SIRO DE MARTINI, "Notas y comentarios a la conferencia del Almirante Train", *Boletín del Centro Naval* N.º748, Buenos Aires, 1987. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *Yearbook 1982*, page 89. "Malvinas: la CIA enviaba informes a Gran Bretaña", *El Cronista Comercial*, October 7, 1987. "CIA: le grand débailage", *L'Express*, October 16, 1987, page 13.

⁹⁸ PATRICIA ARANCIBIA CLAVEL e ISABEL DE LA MAZA CAVE, *Matthei. Mi testimonio*, Santiago de Chile, Editorial Random House Mondadori, August 2003, page 354.

⁹⁹ SIDNEY EDWARDS, *My Secret Falklands War*, United Kingdom, 2014.

It was not an exaggeration. Never before had there been an air-naval confrontation like the one being considered. Most of the fighter aircraft fleet — the Skyhawks, designed in the 1950s, purchased by our country in 1966, and equipped with unreliable and obsolete avionics— would face a fleet whose oldest unit was more modern than the most recent national aircraft (save for the Argentine Navy's Super Étendard) and was built with the latest missile and electronic warfare technological breakthroughs.

Order of Battle of the Argentine Air Force

The Air Order of Battle, or the operational organization structured with the Argentine Air Force units and their corresponding command and control centers, as well as the occupied geographical distribution to confront the British fleet, was the result of the planning done in three different moments:

In the first one, the tasks ordered by the Strategic Air Command “Azul” and “Blanco” plans and the Air Transport Command “Aries” plan for the recapture of the Malvinas Islands.

In the second moment, the movements ordered over the phone by the Strategic Air Command and the Air Defense Command to the unit commanders for their assets to be at the deployment airfields as from April 4. The aim of these deployments was to dissuade the United Kingdom from using force and make them negotiate. Once the Military Committee made the decision to engage in battle, the deployments were officially set out in the respective Operations Plans: CAE's 2/82 “Sovereignty Maintenance” (Mantenimiento de la Soberanía) Operations Plan, distributed on April 7; and CAD's “Caburé Azul y Blanco”, distributed on April 19.

In the third moment, the modifications ordered by the Argentine Air Force Southern Command (FAS, Fuerza Aérea Sur) when it took on the leadership of the elements under its command and control. After carrying out an analysis, it relocated some weapon systems so as to improve their relative position according to their endurance and range. Exclusive of the redeployments carried out during the actions, the Air Order of Battle that would engage in combat against the Task Force on May 1, 1982, is included in the Argentine Air Force Southern Command Schematic Plan issued on April 16.

Air Commands

During the conflict, the operational strategic leadership of the Argentine Air Force was exercised by the Strategic Air Command, which initially kept its headquarters at the Air Operations Command located at the Condor Building. As a consequence of the authority it had been delegated, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command (FAS), located in Comodoro Rivadavia, was the higher tactical authority that planned and conducted the air operations in support of the Argentine troops deployed on the islands and interdicted British naval units in the South Atlantic Theater of Operations and adjacent areas.

The Strategic Air Command retained control of distant reconnaissance and exploration tasks with the Boeing 707 and KC-130 aircraft (the latter would be deassigned on April 29 and deployed to the 9th Air Brigade) operating from El Palomar (Buenos Aires) or Comandante Espora (Bahía Blanca) to fulfill the South Atlantic Theater of Operations (TOAS) Command exploration requirements. A Joint Exploration Center was established at the Comandante Espora Naval Air Base on April 7 to that end, and coordinated flights began on April 10.

Meanwhile, the Air Defense Command exercised its leadership through two air defense zones: CODAZ Centro (Comando de Defensa Aérea Zona Centro, Air Defense Command of the Central Zone), which was the only one activated outside the South Atlantic Theater of Operations, and CODAZ Sur (Comando de Defensa Aérea Zona Sur, Air Defense Command of the Southern Zone).



5th Squadron's Boeing 707, 1st Air Brigade - BANIM DEH-FAA

Integrated into the FAS, air defense operations leadership was executed by the Southern Air Defense Command (CODASUR) over a single Air Defense Zone (CODAZ Sur)¹⁰⁰.

The Air Transport Command (CAT) carried out the air refueling operations from the 1st Air Brigade. In practice, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command, which initially had coordination authority, managed transportation flights to and from the islands through the POTA (Air Transport Operations Post) set up at the 9th Air Brigade. This organization, which became the Sección Operativa de Transporte Aéreo (Air Transport Operational Section, SOTA in Spanish) upon the establishment of the FAS Staff, was in charge of the 9th Air Brigade Cargo Terminal and of coordinating with the Army's 9th Infantry Brigade and the 1st Technical Group's aircraft maintenance echelon.

The transport, air defense, exploration and reconnaissance, search and rescue and offensive air operations carried out by the Argentine Air Force units settled on the Malvinas Islands were conducted by the Air Component lower tactical Command based in Puerto Argentino. In turn, it depended on the Malvinas Garrison Joint Command, which reported to the COATLANSUR. Similarly to what happened on the mainland, there was no centralized command of air assets on the islands; each branch of the military conducted its own.

Fuerza Aérea Sur

Around midnight on April 1, Brigadier Ernesto H. Crespo, Chief of the 4th Air Brigade in El Plumerillo, Mendoza, was urgently summoned to the Air Operations Command headquarters. According to the capabilities plan for that year, and completely unaware of the ongoing action planning, he had to take up his appointment as Air Commander of the Southern Theater of Operations (CATOS); in the form of a tactical air force, this air component was called Argentine Air Force Southern Command (FAS).

Accompanied by the Grupo 4 de Caza (4th Fighter Group) Chief, Comodoro José A. Juliá, Brigadier Crespo flew a MS-760 Paris to Jorge Newbery Airport. At 0400 on April 2, he appeared before his commander, Brigadier Mayor Hellmuth C. Weber, who informed him about the operation that was being carried out to recapture the Malvinas Islands.

Comodoro Knud E. Andreasen, Chief of the Air Operations Command's Planning and Programs Department, briefed him on the events and tasks that were going on in the South Atlantic. The meeting was attended by the Air Force Commander, Brigadier General

¹⁰⁰ CODASUR is the organic command structure. CODAZ Sur is the territorial or maritime area where air defense is executed.

Basilio A. Lami Dozo; the Chief of the General Staff, Brigadier Mayor Juan García; the Chief of the Air Operations Command Staff, Brigadier Héctor Roy; the Chief of the 2nd Intelligence Division (Jefatura II - Inteligencia), Brigadier Gustavo A. Revol; and other Institution leaders.

It was also pointed out that, in case of a potential conflict with Chile, the FAS should support the mission of the Southern Theater of Operations (not yet established), control and secure the western border to prevent Argentine military power from weakening if offensive actions were carried out on national territory.

Brigadier Crespo asked if there were plans for Air Force fighter aircraft to be used in operations over the sea. The response was categorical: that possibility was not considered. The Argentine Navy, with jurisdiction to exercise control over maritime areas of interest and primarily responsible for air-maritime operations, had assumed said responsibility and undertaken to keep the UK naval assets' movements at least 330 kilometers northeast away from the Malvinas.

Brigadier Crespo was also informed that the distant air reconnaissance and exploration task would be carried out using Strategic Air Command's assets, without being assigned to or controlled by the Argentine Air Force Southern Command.

On that same day, April 2, Brigadier Ernesto Crespo flew the same MS-760 (registration mark E-234) to Comodoro Rivadavia so as to organize the Argentine Air Force Southern Command. Brigadier Crespo made up his Staff and ordered the establishment of airfields for deploying the air units that would be under his command. Simultaneously, although the means of transport were not under its jurisdiction, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command coordinated through the Air Transport Operational Section (SOTA), all Air Transport Command's aircraft movements already operating from the 9th Air Brigade to the islands.

Staff of the Fuerza Aérea Sur

As a widely experienced professional, and aware of personnel's skills and air assets, Brigadier Crespo chose the men with whom he would share leadership. On 5 April, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command was officially established¹⁰¹ –it directly depended on the Chief of the Strategic Air Command– and an important deployment of assets to operate in the Teatro de Operaciones Malvinas (TOM, Malvinas Theater of Operations) started.

On 7 April, the TOM was no longer in effect and was replaced by the Teatro de Operaciones del Atlántico Sur (COATLANSUR, South Atlantic Theater of Operations) led by the Vicealmirante Juan J. Lombardo based in Puerto Belgrano. For that purpose, the FAS staff developed the Operations Plan 2/82 – Sovereignty maintenance Complementing Planning. Approved on 16 April, this new Argentine Air Force higher tactical level Staff would have the mission of «repulsing possible actions from the British Task Force by performing air and ground operations, and preventing any unexpected action from the Chilean Air Force».

FAS Staff departments were made up of the personnel already been designated by the CAE, plus the personnel required by Brigadier Crespo and those who had arrived from the 9th Air Brigade to organize the CODASUR. Though the simultaneous action of both operational organizations (FAS and CODASUR) within the same geographical area had been planned for, their commanders' common sense led them to merge the structures under a single leadership. Both commanders' proposal was submitted to their respective operational strategic commanders (Strategic and Defense commanders) who immediately accepted it. Brigadier Roberto Cambor, in charge of the CODASUR, was appointed Second-in-

¹⁰¹ Formatted as date-time group April 4 at 21:35, the Strategic Air Commander issued message No. 3137 by means of which the Argentine Air Force Southern Command was created.

Command and Chief of the FAS Staff, the Comodoro José Juliá as A-3 Operations of the Argentine Air Force Southern Command, and Comodoro Tomás Rodríguez as A-3 Defense Area of Comodoro Rivadavia and Chief of the Interdiction and Air Superiority Operational Section (Sección Operativa Superioridad Aérea e Intercepción - SOSAI).

The FAS Staff was made up of the following departments:

- A-1 Personnel, Comodoro Manuel R. Rivero
- A-2 Intelligence, Comodoro Jorge A. Espina
- A-3 Operations, Comodoro José A. Juliá
- A-4 Materiel, Comodoro José D. Marcantoni
- A-5 Communications, Vicecomodoro Antonio Á. Maldonado

Thanks to the sustained effort and flexibility of these men and their assistants, who promptly found solutions to every problem, in less than thirty days, the personnel were fully deployed, and the Command's organizational chart was adjusted to the needs of the impending conflict.

During that initial period, Brigadier Crespo divided the tasks, assigning responsibility for the deployed units' training to Brigadier Cambor, while retaining the organization of both the FAS and its Staff.

In the early weeks of April, the crews arriving from Buenos Aires provided information that suggested the conflict would be solved peacefully. While at the highest levels of military leadership the conflict was still considered a crisis that would be resolved diplomatically, both brigadiers understood that it was clearly a state of war, where the FAS would fight since the United Kingdom was assembling an overwhelming Task Force, presumably to punish what they understood as an aggression against their imperial policy.

Among the changes introduced to the organizational chart of the Staff, the position of General Coordinator, responsible for overseeing the ordered air operations, was established and taken up by Comodoro Juan M. Correa Cuenca. With previous experience in Staff work, Correa Cuenca allocated the tasks among Departments and Operational Sections. Likewise, Comodoro Héctor Valeri acted similarly as coordinator between the FAS Staff and the subordinate units, supervising the ordered offensive tasks and advising the commander on their fulfillment.

Furthermore, an immediate planning team was assembled. Located in the Operations Department, it was made up of the Deputy Commander, the General Coordinator, the Chief of the A-3 Operations Department, and the Chief of the Interdiction and Air Superiority Operational Section. It was tasked with analyzing the suitability and feasibility of prearranged or immediate missions, according to information provided by various sources from Malvinas, reports following combat missions, or the limited information gathered by their own intelligence.

By May 1, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command was fully working with its entire staff and, more significantly, with almost all crews trained and familiarized with the theater of operations.

FAS Staff Organization

A-1 Personnel Department

A unique personnel department was created and men were designated to carry out duties within the Southern Air Defense and Argentine Air Force Southern Commands. Five reinforced sections were established:

- **Records and Information**, in order to keep troop strength updated both in deployment bases and in Malvinas. Located at the 9th Air Brigade premises, it kept the record

of personnel traveling to and from the islands. It would keep the list of casualties and troops deployed in Malvinas updated.

- **Health Service**, at the deployment units in an organic way, in addition to other planning which included the Portable Hospital deployment at the 9th Air Brigade and the support of the Joint Military Hospital in Malvinas.
- **Postal Service**, set up by means of the normal services of the Empresa Nacional de Correos y Telégrafos (Encotel, Argentine Mail Company) and a mail plane flying between the deployed units and the home bases. This section would also handle Malvinas mail, of both the Air Force and the Army, and part of the Navy. The office, located in the 9th Air Brigade, would act as reception and dispatch desk.
- **Discipline, law and order**, section in charge of managing disciplinary issues and, when necessary, constituting courts-martial.
- **Donations**, section responsible for receiving the donations the population made to the operative forces. They rarely had a predetermined use. Due to their amount and diversity, those supplies would be a valuable contribution; specifically, the warm clothing and personal items aimed at raising the troop's morale: letters aimed at soldiers, cigarettes, chocolates, and personal care products, which were transported to the islands on the aircraft performing the air bridge.

A-2 Intelligence Department

The commander who counts on the latest and most complete information wins the battle. In the case of the South Atlantic, something unusual happened: due to the strict secrecy with which the Outline Plan was developed, the 2nd Intelligence Division had not been asked to take part. It was not until March 20 that the Joint Staff of the Argentine Armed Forces started the intelligence process; when the SIDE (Argentine Secretariat of State Intelligence) was ordered to gather information on Malvinas, they recorded in writing that they would compile the essential elements of information (EEI) by June. So, without a proper analysis from the higher level, both the Navy and the Air Force carried out the initial planning stage with their respective commands. On April 4, 1982, upon deciding to engage troops in combat and thanks to the measures taken by the Strategic Air Command (CAE), basic and quite general information on the United Kingdom war capacity was gathered. On April 16 of 1982, when the Argentine Air Force Southern Command finished the 1/82 Complementing Outline Plan, it was unaware of vital British strengths¹⁰².

In some way, this can be explained by the fact that military intelligence is an ongoing process directly linked to a country's hypothetical conflict scenarios, which leads to monitoring the capabilities and vulnerabilities of potential aggressors. That factor was not considered in the case of the United Kingdom.

A-3 Operations Department

It executed the Staff actions. In short, its importance lay in the effectiveness of planned air operations.

The following Operational Sections reported directly to the A-3 Operations Department:

- Operations Analysis and Assessment (SOAEO). Chief: Vicecomodoro César A. Torres
- Interdiction and Air Superiority (SOSAI). Chief: Comodoro Tomás A. Rodríguez

¹⁰² In the *Rattenbach Report*, drawn up to assess the commanders' performance in the conflict, it is stated that the intelligence was "at an appropriate level of detail and timeliness, which allowed for the smooth planning of its subordinate command..." That was not the case of the Argentine Air Force, which had to engage its own assets – which, in some cases, were not suitable – in order to gain information about the enemy, with a high cost as regards life and materiel losses during the campaign. ("Argentine Air Force Southern Command Final Report" submitted to the Strategic Air Commander). DEH-FAA Archives.

- Reconnaissance and Exploration (SOER). Chief: Comodoro Ronaldo E. Ferri
- Special Operations (SOOE). Chief: Comodoro Ronaldo E. Ferri
- Search and rescue (SOBYS). Chief: Mayor Norberto H. Barozza
- Air Surveillance and Control (SOVYCA). Chief: Comodoro Enrique Saavedra
- Air Transport (SOTA). Chief: Mayor Horacio A. Oréfi
- Security and Services (SOSS). Chief: Mayor Alfredo C. Aguirre
- Meteorology. Chief: Primer Teniente Eduardo A. Viotti

This structure and planning and operation mode were designed based on the experience of numerous previously carried out operational exercises, in which both orders to the deployed units and a Staff working in operations ensured a response to foreseeable needs. Its implementation would be highly suitable since, from the very beginning, it was integrated with all operational elements, which facilitated a unified command and the maximum economy of resources. Despite some technical flaws, the implemented C3 I2 system¹⁰³ allowed to widen control and delegate authority whenever it was necessary, without weakening leadership cohesion.

On a daily basis, the Commander used to meet with the Chiefs of the Staff Departments to get informed about the situation. The person in charge of each area presented the news in the presence of the general coordinator. After analyzing the state of affairs, the Commander gave the orders and the incumbent Chiefs relayed them to their units. This procedure emphasized that whenever orders were given, instructions were not unnecessarily repeated, and the personnel reporting them were well informed.

A direct liaison between the Departments Chiefs and the personnel responsible for military air bases specific areas was established.

The Staff actions were centralized at the headquarters mounted by the Operations Department, so that the Commander was informed about what was happening by only one spokesperson.

The personnel established a relationship with a strong sense of fellowship and professionalism that allowed them to work coherently and efficiently while conveying that feeling to the units reporting to them. The adopted organization arose from the operations dynamics. Practice always had priority over theory and planning ran smoothly. Only the necessary topics were put down on paper. Reaction time would reach acceptable levels since decisions would be orally transmitted to units so as to expedite assets readiness.

Setting up the Operations Analysis and Assessment Section (SOAEO), also reporting to A-3 and in close contact with the Interdiction and Air Superiority Operational Section (SOSAI), would be highly valuable since it would enable the personnel at the planning level to devote themselves only to receiving the conclusions without performing other activities.

The procedure improved in time. In general, for offensive air operations a consistent analysis pattern and order design would be followed. According to the targets to be beaten, every night the units would be informed beforehand the aircraft and configurations corresponding to the first mission, so that they would be ready at the break of day.

Target selection would be performed during the meeting of the Interdiction and Air Superiority Operational Section, in the presence of the Deputy Commander, the Chief of the Operations Department (A-3) and specialized analysts. The following would be determined:

- Meteorological situation.
- Analysis of the capabilities, feasibility and acceptability of the target area.
- Number and type of offensive and defensive aircraft and weapons to be employed.
- Malvinas radar information.

¹⁰³ C³ I²: command, control and communications, intelligence and interoperability system.

- In case diversion flights were required, the SOER/SOOE Chief would also participate in the meeting.
- Alerting search and rescue assets, with the involvement of the SOBYS Chief.
- Need to work with the Forward/Tactical Air Control Officer (OCAA)/(OCAT).
- Use of KC-130 tankers and rendezvous points determination, with the involvement of the SOTA Chief.
- Upon finishing the analysis, planning would be briefed to the commander.
- Drafting and handing on fragmentary orders by the corresponding section (that process used to take between 20 and 90 minutes, according to the topic complexity).
- A SOSAI senior officer would receive action development and update A-3 Department on the situation.
- Initial result analysis on the basis of briefings sent in advance by in-flight crews.
- Specialized intelligence personnel would question the crews after landing. Whenever possible and according to the attacked target importance, crews would be previously questioned by the SOSAI.
- Once the individual reports had been gathered, the ordered operation was analyzed in detail.
- Conclusions were recorded and considered by the SOAEO.
- Late at night, the day events were gathered, conclusions were analyzed and the next day missions were planned.

This process was not only applied to offensive and defensive air operations, but also to other actions: diversion, air transportation, search and rescue, reconnaissance and exploration. In those cases, the SOSAI established the guiding approach which was then conveyed to the corresponding section so that it could thoroughly understand the task. The operation was proposed to the A-3 Department, the latter submitted it to the commander and, if approved, it was immediately executed.

Reconnaissance and Exploration (SOER and SOOE)

Reconnaissance and Exploration tasks were divided into zones and focal areas covering the complete Patagonian coastal maritime area; said tasks were executed in order of frequency and according to patterns which had been pre-established with the assigned assets¹⁰⁴.

The respective deployment units chiefs which had exploration assets were responsible for performing sorties at the coastal exploration areas within their jurisdictions, and reported flight occurrences to the Air Force Southern Command on a daily basis.

The two sections (SOER and SOOE) under the responsibility of Comodoro Ronaldo Ferri submitted the information gathered to A-3 Operations. Likewise, they planned with Learjet-type assigned assets, diversion missions simulating fighter aircraft work-out profile against the fleet so as to weaken the British crews by attrition and force them to take off with the interceptors.

Search and Rescue (SOBYS)

It was assembled on April 5. On the 8, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command (FAS) issued a directive for its units to organize the search, assistance, and rescue sections for the personnel in danger¹⁰⁵. As from April 16, the directive became part of the FAS Plan. Search and Rescue operations in Malvinas were under the responsibility of the FAS sub-center.

¹⁰⁴ Reconnaissance and exploration assets deployment and organization is developed in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁵ Directiva 01/82 – Comando de la Fuerza Aérea Sur – Sistema de Búsqueda y Salvamento.



Learjet Learjet 35 A, registration marks T-23 and T-24, 2nd Air Brigade Air Photographic Group - DEH-FAA Archives

The SOBYS was made up of the headquarters and the situation room led by a senior officer together with an assistant junior officer. In order to assist with the search and rescue tasks at sea along the approach routes to target areas and back to base, the use of two vessels on which the Air Force had installed a radio beacon and a multichannel VHF radio system was coordinated with the Navy though, for various reasons, they were not used. The assigned vessels were the dispatch boats *ARA Alférez Sobral* on the Comodoro Rivadavia - Malvinas line and the *ARA Comodoro Somellera* between Río Grande and the islands.

Due to its favorable location considering its infrastructure and the distance to the islands, a coordinating search and rescue sub-center was established in Puerto Deseado on May 10. Two Sikorsky S-61 helicopters, with maritime search and rescue capability, and three Mitsubishi MU-2/60 search aircraft were assigned to it. Search and rescue operations in Malvinas were the responsibility of the Air Component Staff A-3 Department with the assigned helicopters.

Air Surveillance and Control (SOVYCA)

This operational section served mainly to centralize the deployed radars requirements in order to keep them in operational service. Air surveillance was carried out using the 2nd Air Surveillance and Control Group's assets (G2 VyCA) based in Merlo. The available Westinghouse AN/TPS-43 mobile radars made it possible to organize air defense sectors in Comodoro Rivadavia, Río Gallegos, Río Grande, and Malvinas. Of the two remaining TPS-43 radars, one was used as spare parts warehouse in Comodoro Rivadavia for the four deployed radars, and the last one remained at G2 VyCA as a test bench and laboratory for repairing out-of-order components sent from the deployment sites.

Subsequently, four TPS-44 Cardion "Alert" radars belonging to the Army were made available to and operated by the Southern Air Force Command, and installed in Puerto Argentino, San Julián, Santa Cruz, and the 9th Air Brigade as a Malvinas radar backup and spare parts warehouse.

Thanks to this distribution it was possible to control air traffic along the entire coast and in the mainland responsibility area, and to support crossings to and from the islands. At medium and low altitude, these radars served to keep the TOAS air situation updated, as well as the situation of interest for each base, within their corresponding ranges.

The radars were used for detection, identification, interception, and to support air traffic control and combat missions. The Malvinas radar was also used for tactical guidance tasks,

support in air-to-air combat, and for an unusual function: long-and-short-distance enemy ships' location, making it possible to provide night naval bombardment warnings.

Air Transport (SOTA)

After recapturing the islands, two C-130H, two F-28, one IA-50 G-II, and one SA-226 AT Merlin medical aircraft were assigned to the Argentine Air Force Southern Command, between April 4 and 17. Starting from April 7, the four largest aircraft joined those performing the airlift to Malvinas. In order to speed up the task, they reported directly to the A-3, through the Air Transport Operational Section (SOTA). In turn, SOTA controlled take-off times of all aircraft flying from the mainland to the Malvinas, coordinating unloading tasks with the island's Air Terminal so as to avoid aircraft congestion on a small-sized platform. SOTA coordinated, on a daily basis, with the Transport Command in El Palomar, the Army, and the Navy to decide transfers together with the 9th Air Brigade's Air Cargo Terminal. A maintenance echelon at the Comodoro Rivadavia 1st Technical Group ensured aircraft serviceability to guarantee round-the-clock continuous operation while the airlift was being executed.

Originally, crew members were housed at the 9th Air Brigade. Due to the fact that air transport did not stop, night and day, and that accommodations were close to the runway and platforms, rest was inadequate. Therefore, accommodations were arranged at Comodoro Rivadavia City.

Moreover, once the United Kingdom imposed the Maritime Exclusion Zone, naval transports ceased to cross to the islands, and all loaded supplies had to be reconfigured for air transport. The quantity of materials accumulating at the 9th Air Brigade was increasingly occupying more space at the air terminal. Although up to 120 tons were dispatched to the islands on a daily basis, the incoming amount exceeded the one outgoing one. On April 13, there were 600 tons, and two days later, that quantity amounted to 900 tons. Therefore, reinforcements were requested from the Air Transport Command.

From that moment onwards, the Air Transport Orders (Órdenes de Transporte Aéreo, OTA) were issued, and transport was coordinated with the 9th Infantry Brigade's Joint Operations Center, and then reported to the Argentine Air Force Southern Command through SOTA. SOTA updated the Air Traffic Information Desk (MITA) at Comodoro Rivadavia in order to control the schedule of flights departing from the mainland to Malvinas, avoiding traffic congestion and ensuring orderly unloading at the Malvinas Air Terminal.

The task was carried out between April 18 and 29; afterward, the means assigned for that purpose returned to El Palomar.

The KC-130s arrived at the 9th Air Brigade on April 30. They reported directly to the Commander of the Argentine Air Force Southern Command and received orders through the operations departments of the units they were to support.

Security and Services (SOSS)

Land defense, including anti-aircraft artillery, was directly dependent on unit commanders; in some cases, with their own assets and in other cases, with lodged units, exercising operational control over those assets. Through the Security and Services Operational Section, requirements and information requested from the FAS Staff were coordinated; thus, the situation and corresponding states of alert were permanently known.

Southern Air Defense

The Air Defense Command, led by Brigadier Mayor Hughes, organized the defense into two large zones through the Plan Caburé Azul y Blanco: CODAZ Centro and CODAZ Sur, the latter divided into Defense Sectors with their corresponding Information and Control



Mirage III EA of the 8th Air Brigade - DEH-FAA Archives

Centers and early warning mobile radars at Viedma (which reported to the CIC Buenos Aires at Merlo together with the Mar del Plata radar), Comodoro Rivadavia, San Julián, Santa Cruz, Río Gallegos, Río Grande, and the Malvinas Islands. After the integration of the CODAZ Sur with the Argentine Air Force Southern Command through the SOSAI, the organizational chart planned for the coastal bases to face air attacks made up a single command and control system.

On the mainland, the Active Air Defense was carried out with the assigned antiaircraft batteries and at least one section of M-5 Dagger or Mirage III EA interceptors configured with Matra 530/Magic 550 or Shafrir missiles, respectively. Furthermore, since the enemy's retained capabilities included special forces attacks, Passive Air Defense measures were taken (blackout, asset dispersal, among others) to mitigate the effects.

A-4 Materiel Department

Since there was no logistic planning suitable for the aeromarine environment, the Air Command of the Southern Theater of Operations' Campaign Plan 1/81 (CATOS 81) planning was used, in which only attacks on land targets were considered. For the Malvinas scenario, the operational airfields at San Julián, Santa Cruz, Río Gallegos, Comodoro Rivadavia, and Trelew were similar to those in CATOS 81, save for Río Grande. But, conversely, both weapons and survival equipment had to be adjusted to the aeromarine environment. These differences forced the introduction of modifications without the standard-required testing.

Most of the supply for the mainland air bases as well as the Malvinas Military Garrison was carried out using transport aircraft assigned to the Argentine Air Force Southern Command. It was an ever-changing situation, imposing endless unforeseen requirements which were attempted to be met by any means necessary, sparing no expense, though not always with the necessary quality.

A-5 Communications Department

The command and administration network was installed with the elements outlined in the Strategic Air Command Campaign Plan, save for the Malvinas Military Air Base. Materials

for the remaining liaisons were distributed according to users' requirements, and neither security nor reliability would be compromised by the enemy during the conflict.

Last-minute needs were met using equipment from the Argentine Air Force Western Command, Strategic Air Command Communications Department's provisions, and the services of the National Telecommunications Company (Entel).

* * *

In summary

On April 2, 1982, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command began operating as an organic unit with just five officers; it counted on no plans or communication support and was unaware of the conflict. They started from scratch.

On the same day, a few staff officers were appointed and transferred to Malvinas so as to enable the initial deployment; later on, reinforcements would be sent in response to the strategic situation change after the British Task Force set sail.

The Argentine Air Force Southern Command appointed the appropriate personnel and completed an organizational structure that was adjusted to the emerging needs of the conflict. Of course, they benefited from the time it took the British fleet to reach the South Atlantic, a period that would not have been possible in other circumstances.

While the air transport means were almost entirely committed to the deployment on the islands, the air units that needed to be relocated to favorable relative positions in the Patagonian bases and airports because of endurance reasons, counted on limited transport resources for their implementation. Nevertheless, by May 1 —the day of their baptism of fire— the Argentine Air Force Southern Command Staff was fully operational, their operational units were deployed, and they counted on an acceptable understanding of the theater of operations. This effort meant maximizing flexibility and versatility to their fullest extent. Despite all difficulties, the Air Force Southern Command was at its maximum operational capacity when it entered the conflict.

Chapter 5

Asset Deployment on the Mainland



Comando Aéreo de Defensa

In the Plan Caburé Azul y Blanco, the Argentine Air Defense Command (CAD), in coordination with the Strategic Air Command (CAE), included provisions for the division of two Air Defense Zones: The Central Zone Air Defense Command (Central CODAZ) and the Southern Zone Air Defense Command (Southern CODAZ). The Central CODAZ included most material targets of Argentina's national interest. As airstrikes seemed improbable, in any case, the following measures were taken: employing military units' remaining air assets, providing air surveillance with fixed and mobile radars, conducting air defense with anti-aircraft artillery in some military bases, and coordinating passive defense measures together with the Argentine Civil Defense.

Thus, during the war, the available mobile radars were deployed so as to set up VyCA surveillance stations and squadrons in the deployment bases. Moreover, this task was jointly performed with the Argentine Army's anti-aircraft artillery early-warning AN/TPS-44 Cardion Alert radars operated by the Grupo I de Vigilancia y Control Aéreo-Escuela (GIVA-E, 1st Air Surveillance and Control Group - Institute). Thus, the two major Air Defense Zones on the mainland were fully covered: the Central CODAZ and the Southern CODAZ.

Central CODAZ: operated from the Centro de Información y Control Baires (CIC Baires, Buenos Aires Information and Control Center) based in Merlo, Buenos Aires province. The CIC Baires was made up of different teams (operational roles) working eight-hour rotating shifts to provide round-the-clock coverage led by the following senior officers:

Combat role no. 1: Vicecomodoro Jorge Beracochea; no. 2: Mayor Facundo Corzo; no. 3: Mayor Ricardo Roberts; no. 4: Vicecomodoro Edmundo Peil. NCO in charge: Suboficial Mayor Roberto Peralta.

The following elements were under its operational control:

- CIC Baires: located in the 2nd Air Surveillance and Control Group (Merlo, Buenos Aires province). Interception Station: Bendix (BPS 1000-BPS 89) 3D radar.
- Ezeiza Surveillance Station: Thomson "LP 23M" terminal area radar.
- Mar del Plata Surveillance Station: AN/TPS-44 2D Cardion Alert radar (Argentine Army) under the command of Mayor Héctor González, and NCO in charge Suboficial Mayor Rafael G. Montenegro.
- Viedma Surveillance Station: AN/TPS-44 2D Cardion Alert radar (Argentine Army) under the command of Capitán Mario Charra, and NCO in charge Suboficial Principal Arnoldo E. Bernal. The Cotal LB and LV radar with telemetry capabilities was added as a complement—it was still under development at that time and belonged to the Instituto Universitario Córdoba (Córdoba Air University Institute)—under the command of Capitán Ladislao Mathe.
- Fighter-interceptor/maritime patrol units:
 - ◊ At Moreno 8th Air Brigade with the available M-III EA aircraft.
 - ◊ At Tandil 6th Air Brigade with the available M-5 Dagger aircraft.
 - ◊ At BAM Mar del Plata with the MS-760 Paris from Mendoza 4th Air Brigade.
 - ◊ At La Plata Airport with the IA-58 Pucará from Reconquista 3rd Air Brigade.
 - ◊ Fénix Squadron aircraft operating from El Palomar 1st Air Brigade.
 - ◊ Interception units which could be set up with naval aircraft at Punta Indio and Comandante Espora bases operating under a single coordinating authority.

Radar Sensor Deployment

Maximum coverage range - May 1

■ Argentine Air Force

■ Argentine Army



Southern CODAZ was assigned to the Argentine Air Force Southern Command (FAS) with the following radar stations:

- Comodoro Rivadavia VyCA Squadron. Interception Station: AN/TPS-43 radar under the command of Vicecomodoro Juan C. Fernández, and NCO in charge Suboficial Principal Osvaldo D. Pacheco.
- Río Gallegos VyCA Squadron. Interception Station: AN/TPS-43 radar under the command of Mayor Guillermo Porta, and NCO in charge Suboficial Principal Hugo G. Durán.
- Río Grande VyCA Squadron. Interception Station: AN/TPS-43 radar under the command of Mayor Manuel Valdevenítez, and NCO in charge Suboficial Principal Aldón Córdoba.
- San Julián Surveillance Station: AN/TPS-44 Cardion Alert radar (Argentine Army) under the command of Mayor Carlos Demaría, and NCO in charge Suboficial Ayudante Néstor N. Carmona.
- Santa Cruz Surveillance Station: AN/TPS-44 Cardion Alert radar (Argentine Army) under the command of Alférez Jorge Ierache and Alférez Guillermo Cocchi Cocchi, Cabo Primero Luis A. González and Cabo Primero Raúl C. Rodríguez.
- Malvinas VyCA Squadron ¹⁰⁶.

Antiaircraft artillery on the mainland

The available antiaircraft assets allocation was under the Air Defense Command responsibility at all times. On 3 April, the 20 mm TCM Battery with eight cannons was transported on a vehicle from BAM Mar del Plata to Moreno 8th Air Brigade in Buenos Aires, under the command of Primer Teniente Oscar Sarmiento, and NCO in charge Suboficial Auxiliar Enrique Rodríguez (gunner). Later, it was transported to Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade also by land. On 12 April, four NCOs were deployed to Malvinas to take up different posts; hence, as the number of combat roles was reduced, they were replaced by NCOs from the 8th Air Brigade, who were quickly trained and served as weapon chiefs. Finally, on 22 April, the Battery was deployed by air to the BAM Santa Cruz.

On 5 and 6 April, the 2nd Battery was deployed from BAM Mar del Plata to BAM Río Gallegos. It was a Super Fledermaus fire-control system with two 35-mm Oerlikon cannons, under the command of Capitán Rodolfo Savoia, Primer Teniente Edgar Gibeaud, Primer Teniente Marcos Zupanc, Alférez Gustavo Minuett, and NCO in charge Suboficial Principal Antonio Geiges (gunner). The 35 mm Oerlikon cannons belonging to the 5th Battery were under the command of Capitán Luis Martínez, and NCO in charge Cabo Principal Julio Oro (gunner). Besides, a 20 mm Rheinmetall Battery belonging to BAM Río Gallegos remained operational, with an ELTA radar under the command of Primer Teniente Ángel Villano, and NCO in charge Cabo Principal Horacio Arroyo (gunner).

The 5th Air Brigade had an Antiaircraft Artillery Squadron equipped with twenty-six 20 mm Rheinmetall (RH) cannons assigned to three Batteries. Deployment to the military air bases on the mainland was implemented as follows:

To the BAM San Julián: the 1st Antiaircraft Battery with nine 20 mm RH cannons under the command of Primer Teniente Oscar Bettiol, and NCO in charge Suboficial Ayudante Exequiel H. Donoso (radar operator and gunner).

To the BAN Río Grande: the 2nd Antiaircraft Battery with nine 20 mm RH cannons under the command of Primer Teniente Atilio Gobbini, and NCO in charge Suboficial Ayudante Julio Arballo (radar operator and mechanic).

¹⁰⁶ See *Malvinas Air Component*, Chapter 6, "Asset Deployment in Malvinas."

To the BAN Trelew: the 3rd Antiaircraft Battery with eight 20 mm RH cannons under the command of Teniente Fernando Corazza, and NCO in charge Suboficial Ayudante Ricardo Chavero (radar operator and mechanic).

For the antiaircraft defense of its premises, the Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade kept three 20 mm RH cannons and later added another three it received from the Trelew Battery—5th Air Brigade assets—, thus comprising a Battery (-)¹⁰⁷ with six 20 mm RH cannons under the command of Teniente Agustín Cruz, together with Alférez Luis Mannino and Alférez Sergio Heredia. The personnel that remained at the 9th Air Brigade and became members of the antiaircraft crew were: Suboficial Auxiliar Isidoro Gigena and Suboficial Auxiliar Victorio Vigliocco, Cabo Juan Garibaldi, and soldiers (class of 1963) Hugo Acosta, Jorge Basaldúa, Carlos Catrilef, Marcelo Emmanuelle, Blas Frontini, Eduardo Hadgilia, Enrique Lejsourowich, Marco Ostapezuk, Andris Shle, and Héctor Vitale.

Organization of the Fuerza Aérea Sur assets

The deployment of the Argentine Air Force operational and support assets was conducted as set forth in Annex “Charlie” to the Operations Plan No. 2/82 - Sovereignty maintenance and the changes included in the FAS Outline Operations Plan. Although the initial aircraft number and allocation changed as the conflict developed, by 1 May, the number of air assets deployed was higher than initially planned.

Units lodged at Base Aeronaval Almirante Zar, Trelew

- Base Group Leader: Vicecomodoro Roberto E. Giralt.
- BMK-62/64 Canberra Bomber Squadron: nine aircraft.
- Search and Rescue Section (S&R): one H-500 Hughes helicopter.
- AAA Battery: 20 mm Rheinmetall.

IX Brigada Aérea, Comodoro Rivadavia

- Brigade Commander: Comodoro Osvaldo A. Fabriessín.
- IA-58 Pucará 4th Attack Squadron: three aircraft.
- S&R Section: two F-27s, one DHC-6 Twin Otter, and one Bell 212 helicopter.

Lodged Units:

- Comodoro Rivadavia Air Defence Sector led by Comodoro Tomás A. Rodríguez.
- 1st Air Transport Group (FAS Air Transport Component) led by Comodoro Jorge F. Martínez and equipped with seven C-130Hs and two KC-130s.
- Learjet 35 A Air Photographic Squadron: two aircraft.
- M-III EA Mirage Interceptor-Fighter Squadron: five aircraft.
- VyCA Squadron - Interception Station in Comodoro Rivadavia: AN/TPS-43 radar.
- Reconnaissance and Exploration Section (R&E): same assets as S&R Section.
- AAA Battery: 20 mm Rheinmetall.
- Military Field Hospital.

Base Aérea Militar San Julián

- Base Commander: Comodoro Carlos A. Maiztegui.
- A-4C Skyhawk Fighter-Bomber Squadron: sixteen aircraft.
- M-5 Dagger Fighter-Bomber Squadron: six aircraft.
- Liaison and Exploration Section: one Learjet 35 A (VR-17).
- S&R Section: one Bell 212 helicopter and one H-500 Hughes helicopter.
- Surveillance Station at San Julián: AN/TPS-44 Cardion Alert radar.
- AAA Battery: 20 mm Rheinmetall.

¹⁰⁷ The (-) symbol indicates that the battery had less weapons than those provided for in organic units.

Argentine Air Force asset deployment on the mainland

May 1



Base Aérea Militar Santa Cruz

- Base Commander: Comodoro Hugo O. Giampaletti.
- Attack Squadron: eight IA-58 Pucará.
- Liaison and Exploration Section: one G-II.
- S&R Section: one H-500 Hughes helicopter.
- Surveillance Station at Santa Cruz: AN/TPS-44 Cardion Alert radar (Argentine Army).
- AAA Battery: 20 mm TCM.

Units lodged at Base Aérea Militar Río Gallegos

- Base Commander: Comodoro Nelsis N. Rodoni.
- Río Gallegos Air Defense Sector led by Comodoro Manuel M. Mir.
- Two A-4B Skyhawk Fighter-Bomber Squadrons: twenty-four aircraft.
- M-III EA Mirage Interceptor-Fighter Squadron: five aircraft.
- S&R Section: one Bell 212 helicopter.
- Two Aerolíneas Argentinas Boeing B-737 and one Austral BAC-111 aircraft were added to the airlift to Malvinas under the authority of the 1st Air Transport Group.
- VyCA Squadron - Interception Station in Río Gallegos: AN/TPS-43 radar.
- AAA Battery: One 35 mm Oerlikon cannon and one 20 mm Rheinmetall.

Units lodged at Base Aeronaval Río Grande

- Río Grande Air Defense Sector led by Comodoro Carlos E. Corino.
- Fighter-Bomber Squadron: six M-5 Dagger.
- S&R Section: one SA-330 Puma helicopter and one SC7 Skyvan aircraft (both belonging to the Argentine Coast Guard), and two S-61N helicopters.
- VyCA Squadron - Interception Station at Río Grande: AN/TPS-43 radar.
- AAA Battery: 20 mm Rheinmetall.

Operational and support assets on the mainland

BMK-62/64 Canberra Bomber

On 2 April 1982, the Canberra Squadron counted on nine aircraft at Paraná 2nd Air Brigade, five of which were undergoing 125-hour and 250-hour inspections. The Technical group undertook the arduous task of getting all aircraft ready in record time.

Deployment to the Naval Air Base (BAN) “Almirante Zar” in Trelew began on 10 April. Most aircraft arrived between 13 through 24 April, while the last one arrived on 2 May.

The Canberra Squadron was under the command of Mayor Ramón P. Vivas, and the pilots were Mayor Jorge A. Chevalier; Capitán Juan Tomás Martínez Villada, Capitán Juan C. Bertoldi, Capitán Roberto Pastrán, Capitán Juan C. Freijó, Capitán Juan J. Nogueira, Capitán Alfredo S. Arnau, Capitán Alberto Abraham Baigorri, Capitán Raúl A. Bredeston, Capitán Eduardo Rodino, and Capitán Eduardo García Puebla; Primer Teniente Roberto Eleazar Rivollier, Primer Teniente Antonio J. Mauad, Primer Teniente Ricardo A. Sproviero, Primer Teniente Juan C. Heredia, Primer Teniente Mario Baeza and Primer Teniente Antonio Beatrice; Teniente Eduardo de Ibáñez, Teniente Roberto Cooke, Teniente Daniel E. González, and Teniente Gerardo González.

The navigators were Mayor Aldo Escudero and Mayor Luis E. Rodeyro; Capitán Miguel Á. Sisco, Capitán Fernando Casado, Capitán Emilio J. Marín, and Capitán Raúl E. Sánchez; Primer Teniente Daniel A. Hernández, Primer Teniente Marcelo Siri, Primer Teniente Mario H. González, Primer Teniente Nicolás Pagano, Primer Teniente Ernesto Lozano, Primer Teniente Jorge Segat, Primer Teniente Jorge A. Annino, Primer Teniente Armando Dubroca,



2nd Bomber Group's BMK-62 Canberra at Paraná 2nd Air Brigade - Photo courtesy of: DEH-FAA Archives

Primer Teniente Raúl E. Acosta, Primer Teniente Juan J. Reyes, Primer Teniente Manuel F. Gerez, Primer Teniente Hugo A. Moreno, Primer Teniente Jorge G. Roco, Primer Teniente Jorge A. Cardo; and Teniente Carlos Mondino.

BMK-62s registration marks: B-101, B-102, B-104, B-105, B-108, B-109, and B-110.

BMK-64s (dual control) registration marks: B-111 and B-112.

The deployed technical echelon was led by Vicecomodoro Fernando Rezoagli and Teniente Ricardo Sánchez as an assistant.

Upon arriving at the deployment base, the Squadron members focused on studying the enemy's capabilities and naval air operations procedures, as they lacked experience on such matters. They also tested weapons to assess the performance of bombs and fuzes when they hit the sea. On 14 April, the B-110 commanded by Capitán Eduardo García Puebla, and aircrew Primer Teniente Jorge Segat (navigator) and Cabo Principal Dalosto (mechanic), conducted an over-the-sea sortie and launched four British manufactured MK-17 bombs following the squadron's operational firing procedures. One of the four 1,000-pound bombs was fitted with a delay-action tail unit on a low-altitude attack, two of them were fitted with extensible tail units on a high-altitude level attack, and the last one was fitted with an extensible tail unit on a dive attack. All of them were programmed to explode instantly and did so successfully when they hit the sea.

By order of the FAS, the squadron conducted three low-altitude (100/150 meters) sorties to carry out the tactical photographic reconnaissance of Malvinas. One of Canberra's original cameras was used, the F-95, mounted in the nose of the aircraft, in the bomb sight place. The aim was to record images of the coasts to assess the most probable enemy landing sites.

- First sortie: 21 April. Pilot: Capitán Juan T. Martínez Villada. Navigator: Capitán Fernando Casado.
- Second sortie: 22 April. Pilot: Capitán Alberto Baigorri. Navigator: Primer Teniente Mario González.
- Third sortie: 23 April. Pilot: Primer Teniente Mario Baeza. Navigators: Capitán Ernesto Lozano and Primer Teniente Raúl Acosta.

After taking photographs of the key sites, the aircraft landed in Comodoro Rivadavia, where Air Photographic Group specialists were waiting to develop the films.



5th Fighter Group's A-4B Skyhawk at Villa Reynolds 5th Air Brigade - Photo courtesy of: DEH-FAA Archives

From 15 to 23 April, the Squadron also conducted twelve high-low-high¹⁰⁸ altitude sorties from Trelew to the Malvinas Islands with the aim of training crew members for this kind of flight and surveying the islands' topography.

A-4B Skyhawk Fighter-Bomber

In April 1982, the 5th Fighter Group based at Villa Reynolds 5th Air Brigade (San Luis province) consisted of two Operational Squadrons. Its members had adequate training experience in attack operations against ground targets, long-range navigation, night flights, firing and bombing training at different angles of attack, and daytime air refueling. They had also participated in operational deployment exercises to several Air Force airdromes and units. In many cases, they operated as Airmobile Squadrons.

Although it had been acquired between 1966 and 1970, this weapon system proved very reliable. Besides the extensive flight range provided by their air refueling capability they shared with the A-4Cs, the A-4Bs added an enormous firepower of air launched weapons.

Moreover, the 5th Technical Group counted on considerable return-to-service experience of the air materiel in deployment bases; and it also had the advantage of being close to the Río Cuarto Materiel Area, and its overhaul capabilities as well as 2nd and 3rd echelon maintenance.

After learning about the retaking of Malvinas, they immediately began getting deployment equipment ready. By then, naval aviator Capitán de Navío Jorge Troitiño, who had received A-4B training in 1973, arrived at the 5th Air Brigade. He provided information on British ships' anti-aircraft defense, in particular missile frigates and Type 42 destroyers. In his professional briefing, Troitiño concluded that "of a wave of sixteen aircraft, only two of them would have the chance to reach the target." In other words, they were practically "invulnerable." To the relief of the 5th Technical Group, he added that "the weight of the attack to the ships would be borne by the Navy's Super Étendards and the Exocet missile."

After comparing their own capabilities to the ships' defensive systems, they concluded that aircraft approaches and attacks should be made at the lowest possible altitude, at maximum

¹⁰⁸ A fighter aircraft term used to plan navigation legs for attack missions: high-altitude for the first part (high), target approach at a minimum altitude (low), and high-altitude return (high).

speed, and in absolute radio silence so as to minimize surveillance radars, fire-control radars and signal acquisition passive systems, mainly to limit exposure to enemy weapons. Hence, pilot training was redesigned to familiarize them with flying and firing over water, below a 10-meter altitude and at maximum speed.

On 13 April, the A-4B 1st Air Squadron began deployment to the BAM Río Gallegos, which was completed ten days later. The Technical support echelon was transported aboard C-130H and F-28 aircraft. The Squadron Leader was Vicecomodoro Rubén G. Zini, and the pilots assigned included Capitán Hugo Palaver and Capitán Pablo Carballo; Primer Teniente Mariano Velasco, Primer Teniente Alberto Filippini, Primer Teniente Luciano Guadagnini, Primer Teniente Carlos Cachón; Teniente Fernando Robledo, Teniente Vicente Autiero, Teniente Daniel Gálvez, Teniente Carlos Rinke, Teniente Carlos Ossés; and Alférez Rubén Vottero, Alférez Hugo Gómez, Alférez Leonardo Carmona and Alférez Jorge Barrionuevo. Aircraft registration marks: C-206, C-207, C-208, C-212, C-214, C-215, C-221, C-222, C-224, C-225, C-228, C-239, C-240, C-244, and C-246.

In that same April, the following personnel joined the 1st Squadron: Mayor Carlos Bunge (attached pilot); Capitán Jorge Bergamaschi, who came from the 8th Air Brigade and had operated the A-4B until the previous year; and Primer Teniente Fernando Romero Casella, the 5th Fighter Group medical-assistance officer.

On 29 April, the C-224, C-228 and C-239 aircraft returned to Villa Reynolds.

On that same day, an A-4B section led by Primer Teniente Alberto Filippini and wingman Alférez Jorge Barrionuevo tested the performance on water of the BRP-250 bombs fitted with Kappa III fuzes. They were escorted by the S&R Bell 212 H-87 helicopter, commanded by Primer Teniente José García and Teniente Eduardo Trezzo as co-pilot. The bombs did not explode over the water surface.

In BAM Río Gallegos western area, a bombing range was marked out to test the real weapons; and the Gallegos river cliffs were also used. At first, the Air Squadron leader served as Airmobile Squadron commander; i.e., he led not only the air unit but the technical unit, logistic support and all other associated tasks as well.

Once settled in the BAM Río Gallegos and after the 370-km British blockade around Malvinas was imposed, minimum-altitude training flights continued, as well as the dropping of 25-pound (11 kg) dummy bombs at low-altitude. As a practice target, they used the hull of the *Marjorie Glen*, a wrecked small metal ship—former coal supplier to the region—which had been abandoned on Punta Loyola coast since the beginning of the previous century.

During the second half of April, the 1st Squadron performed reconnaissance flights over the islands to identify probable areas of operations and their orographic and climate features. Such training increased their competence for future missions. Unfortunately, officers of the 2nd Squadron could not undergo the training since they deployed on 1 May.

The 2nd Squadron did indeed deploy on 1 May with a stopover and overnight stay in Trelew and arrived at the BAM Río Gallegos on 2 May. The Squadron Leader was Vicecomodoro Ernesto Dubourg, and the pilots were Vicecomodoro Manuel Mariel; Capitán Antonio Zelaya and Capitán Carlos Varela; Primer Teniente Manuel Bustos and Primer Teniente Oscar Berrier; Teniente Sergio Mayor, Teniente Mario Nívoli, Teniente Luis Cervera, Teniente Juan Arrarás and Teniente Mario Roca; Alférez Alfredo Vázquez and Alférez Marcelo Moroni. Primer Teniente Fausto Gavazzi and Alférez Guillermo Dellepiane had arrived on 27 April. Primer Teniente Ernesto Raffaini also deployed but, since he was training to achieve the “Fit to fight” qualification for that weapon system, he did not participate in any sortie to Malvinas. Given his experience, however, he collaborated with the aircrew on mission set up and transportation flights. Aircraft registration marks: C-204, C-224, C-226, C-228, C-230, C-231, C-232, C-233, C-239, C-242, C-248, and C-250.

As a result of combat losses, during the second half of May and the beginning of June, four aircraft were added: the C-209, C-235, C-236, and C-237. This meant that a total of twenty-eight aircraft were deployed to the south.

Also, during May, the following personnel voluntarily joined the A-4B weapon system: Primer Teniente Danilo Bolzán (with a revalidated rating) and Teniente Jorge Ibarlucea, both from the Military Aviation School; Primer Teniente Héctor Sánchez from the 8th Air Brigade, and Teniente Omar Gelardi from the Córdoba Flight Test Center. All of them had experience in that aircraft type and performed combat missions up to the end of war.

The squadrons' technical echelon, one of the largest deployed, was led by Capitán Fernando Rico, Primer Teniente Héctor Pérez and Primer Teniente Carlos Arcos (maintenance), and Teniente Rocnal Córdoba (weapons). The following personnel were responsible for coordinating and controlling the entire technical support: Suboficial Mayor Norberto Palacios, Suboficial Mayor José Giménez, and Suboficial Mayor Bernabé Baigorria.

M-5 Dagger Fighter-Bomber

The deployment of the Dagger Airmobile Squadrons was initially planned to BAN Río Grande (1st Squadron) and 9th Air Brigade (2nd Squadron). From that same 2 April on, the Tandil 6th Air Brigade, homebase of the M-5s, started preparing for the deployment of personnel and materiel with operation self-sufficiency to both ordered units. On 6 April, both squadrons initially deployed to Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade.

The Dagger 1st Airmobile Squadron commanded by Mayor Carlos Napoleón Martínez included: Capitán Amílcar Cimatti, Capitán Carlos Maffeis, Capitán Horacio Mir González, Capitán Carlos Rohde, Capitán Roberto Janett, Capitán Carlos Moreno, and Capitán Higinio R. Robles; Primer Teniente Héctor Luna and Primer Teniente José Ardiles; Teniente Juan Bernhardt, Teniente Pedro Bean, and Teniente Ricardo Volponi.

Aircraft registration marks: C-401, C-410, C-412, C-428, C-430, and C-433.

The Technical echelon was led by Capitán Julio A. Gómez, Teniente Rubén Galletti and Teniente Martín Rolando as assistants; and NCO in charge Suboficial Mayor Juan Carlos Laino.

After landing in Comodoro Rivadavia, the transportation of the 1st Squadron to BAN Río Grande was postponed to the following day due to a delay in learning of the aircrafts' findings.

On 7 April, after learning of both squadrons' findings, completing the deployment was set as a priority; hence, the following eight aircraft departed to BAN Río Grande: C-410, C-421, C-428, C-429, C-430, C-431, C-433, and C-436.

Once deployed, a section performed flight training and ground alert activities for 23 days (8-30 April).

The Río Grande runway was 2,000 meters long, considering the thresholds widened with aluminum plates, and lacked arresting barriers. The operation of the Mirage faced serious limitations since the aircraft required a 2,400-meter runway with arresting barriers in case of aborted takeoffs or problems when landing. Under such conditions, M-5 takeoffs proved very demanding since they used a large portion of the runway, as the maximum take-off weight had to be employed to include both weapons and fuel.

There were no aircraft shelters, and parking aprons were small for the Navy's and the Air Force's aircraft, which prevented correct dispersal.

Different aircraft formations conducted high-low-high altitude navigation flights over the sea and over Malvinas and tested the flight ranges which were sometimes limited by adverse weather conditions and reduced daylight hours (nine hours a day considering the latitude and the time of the year).



6th Fighter Group's M-5 Dagger at Tandil 6th Air Brigade - Photo courtesy of: DEH-FAA Archives

Different fuel tanks and weapons configurations were also tested; simulated attacks and bombings were carried out against ships at minimum altitude, performing the same simulated bombing practices against ground targets.

The alternative airport was Río Gallegos, though it was difficult to reach due to the scarce fuel available when returning from Malvinas; thus, a controlled ejection zone was planned close to BAN Río Grande.

Naval environment specialists provided their advisory services, and the Task Force capabilities were assessed. This defined the tactical strategies to be employed, considering the long distance to be covered and that no stand-off¹⁰⁹ weapons were available.

Since the M-5 Dagger lacked an integrated navigation system and an all-weather fire control system, it could only operate during daylight, in good visibility conditions and with the naval target in sight.

On 9 April, the C-410 was replaced by the C-437 from Tandil. On 17 April, the C-414 and the C-435 were added, and the C-421 returned. Nine aircraft completed the fleet.

Afterwards, the following personnel would join the squadron: Primer Teniente Jorge Ratti (22 May), Primer Teniente José Luis Gabari Zoco (31 May), and Primer Teniente Carlos A. Antonietti (5 June).

The Dagger 2nd Airmobile Squadron was under the command of Mayor Juan C. Sapolski, and included: Capitán Raúl Díaz, Capitán Jorge Dellepiane, and Capitán Norberto Dimeglio; Primer Teniente Jorge Senn, Primer Teniente César Román, and Primer Teniente Mario Callejo; and Teniente Gustavo Aguirre Faget. On 6 April, they departed for Comodoro Rivadavia flying the M5s registration marks C-416, C-420, C-421, C-429, C-431, and C-436 (the last two aircraft were later added to the 1st Squadron).

The Technical echelon was led by Primer Teniente Guillermo Posadas, Primer Teniente Miguel Rocha as assistant, and NCO in charge Suboficial Mayor Daniel Álvarez.

Later, the Squadron was reinforced with the following personnel: Mayor Luis Villar, Mayor Gustavo Piuma Justo, and Mayor Luis Puga; Capitán Guillermo Donadille, and Capitán Augusto Demierre; Primer Teniente Carlos Musso (who was summoned while he was flying for Aerolíneas Argentinas); and Teniente Daniel Valente, and Teniente Carlos Julio Castillo.

¹⁰⁹ A stand-off weapon is launched at a long distance from the target.

Once the adjustment in Comodoro Rivadavia was completed, training started on nearby alternative runways: different weapons and external tanks configurations were tested planning for their use against ground or maritime targets.

On 12 April, the C-407 and the C-434 arrived in Comodoro Rivadavia; thus, completing the six-aircraft fleet.

On 16 April, the first flight to Malvinas performing an attack profile, and passages over Puerto Argentino was conducted by squadron commander Mayor Juan C. Sapolski (C-407) and Capitán Norberto Dimeglio (C-434). The most significant conclusion was that, departing from the 9th Air Brigade, they would not be able to operate using weapons in Malvinas. Endurance did not allow flying at a safe level before an attack.

We flew for 02:43 hours, of which only five minutes were flown over firm ground, at the most¹¹⁰. Unfortunately, we did not apply to get a Guinness World Records title. We went through an incredibly significant experience when we landed, myself in particular, as I could not move my legs. I had to grab each of them, raise them and place them on the brakes (top of pedals), and push them forward using my hands since I could not feel my legs. They were numb due to the anti-exposure suit –I was wearing the French model–, because the socks, the *osito azul*¹¹¹ and the suit itself did not fit inside common boots. So, we requested two sizes bigger flight boots. Until they arrived, I think that took a few days, we flew wearing non-steel toe combat boots. But the most important experience we had was that we confirmed what we had already told the Argentine Air Force Southern Command: “we cannot get to the Malvinas Islands with weapons, departing from Comodoro Rivadavia,” as it was physically impossible.

On 17 April, the C-428 was replaced by the C-420 that returned to Tandil.

On 22 April, an unsuccessful joint exercise was conducted with the Argentine Navy, which consisted in locating and visualizing fleet vessels to practice simulated attacks approaches. Even though the aircraft arrived in due time and manner assisted by the Learjet VR-17 navigation system, no vessel was visualized at the specified location.

The squadron was redeployed on the go. On 25 April, the 2nd Squadron was transported to the reactivated San Julián Military Air Base, where A-4C aircraft were already operating.

Logistic transportation involved a C-130 aircraft, an F-27 for personnel transportation, and a column of seven trucks carrying explosives and the rest of the spare parts by land.

The distance between permanent and deployment bases posed a serious problem for critical spare parts transportation. In order to provide quick responses to such requirements, the so-called “supersonic supply vessel” was implemented -this usually involved the use of a two-seater M-5. An empty chassis was placed, as a luggage carrier, inside the 30-mm cannon housing which was loaded with critical spare parts that kept coming within hours to learn of the aircraft’s findings.

Due to the lack of in-flight refueling, atypical configurations were used in order to achieve greater endurance (three 1,300-liter tanks and two 250-kg bombs, or two 1,700-liter tanks and an equal number of bombs), forcing maximum-weight take-offs from limited runways and with scarce self-defense possibilities in case of enemy fighters’ interception. Even if they could manage to evade them or engage with them in combat, they would not have enough fuel to return to the mainland.

On 29 April at 1900, BAM San Julián received an air raid warning-red, like all other deployment bases. The FAS ordered the withdrawal of 2nd Squadron aircraft which were already armed with bombs. The latter had to be removed. In a race against time and facing the great

¹¹⁰ Account given by Brigadier VGM (R) Norberto Dimeglio to the BANIM Commission.

¹¹¹ The expression *osito azul* refers to a plain blue overall.



4th Fighter Group's A-4C Skyhawk at Mendoza 4th Air Brigade - Photo courtesy of: DEH-FAA Archives

uncertainty of the situation, the aircraft were disarmed and ready to fly. As there were not enough bomb carriers, aircraft mechanics and armorers removed the fuzes, took down the 250-kg bombs by hand and placed them with great effort on the side of the platform. When some M-5s were already starting up, ready for taxiing towards the threshold, armorers were still working under the aircraft. The Daggers and A-4Cs had to break the radio silence imposed by the warning so as to order take-off. The last section take-off took place about 2000. They flew nonstop headed directly to Tandil 6th Air Brigade, equipped with tanks for maximum endurance just as they had been configured for attack.

They arrived in Tandil, with a closed fog almost upon them and which, in a short time, fully covered the brigade, rendering aerial activity impossible. In the end, there was no air raid in San Julián, and the 2nd Squadron remained in Tandil until the morning of 1 May, when the news spread immediately that BAM Malvinas had been bombarded. Once the aircraft were ready, they took off. The complete Squadron arrived at BAM San Julián about 1100, where they were immediately loaded with weapons and departed for their Baptism of Fire.

A-4C Skyhawk Fighter Bomber

Since 1978, due to the boundary dispute with Chile, the Argentine Air Force had been deploying airmobile squadrons to southern Argentina with the aim of maintaining an active Air Defense sector, and training pilots and aircraft mechanics in the Patagonian zone. They were rotated every fifteen days. To that end, seven A-4C aircraft carried out the relief corresponding to 30 March 1982, at BAM Río Gallegos, under the command of Capitán Mario Caffaratti.

When the Malvinas conflict began on 2 April, the CAE ordered that BAM San Julián be put into operation with all A-4C fighter bombers. The 4th Air Brigade began getting the aircraft which remained in Mendoza ready, as well as the logistics and technical assets to set up an operational military air base.

On 5 April, a flight including Capitán Mario Caffaratti (C-309), Primer Teniente José Vázquez (C-324), Teniente Atilio Zattara (C-310), and Alférez Andrés Codrington (C-302) took off from BAM Río Gallegos and conducted the first reconnaissance flight to Malvinas to test the aircrafts' performance in combat configuration, equipped with a three-station carriage system or TER¹¹² and bombs in the central station.

¹¹² The acronym "TER" stands for "Triple Ejector Rack."

The operation was repeated the following day, and the first in-flight refueling exercise was conducted. The flight included Primer Teniente José Vázquez (C-309), Teniente Daniel Paredi (C-324), Teniente Néstor López (C-310), and Teniente Ricardo Lucero (C-325). On the way back, the flight leader's aircraft lost power and, as he lacked information on the remaining fuel, he ejected the weapons but kept the external tanks.

On 11 and 12 April, the aircraft and aircrew were transported from Mendoza 4th Air Brigade and from BAM Río Gallegos. The support and aid materiel (supplementary tanks, bombs, spare parts, and others) were transported by land from BAM Río Gallegos during the night. After the air and ground transportation of the corresponding assets and the technical and operative support service (air surveillance and control, antiaircraft artillery, ground defense), about one thousand men were accommodated in the city of San Julián. Thus, the San Julián Military Air Base was completed with sixteen A-4Cs, twenty-three crew members, and the required support services to start operations.

The A-4C 1st Squadron was commanded by Mayor Juan Lupiáñez. Aircrew: Capitán Jorge Pierini, Capitán Fernando Castellano, Capitán Jorge García, Capitán Mario Caffaratti, and Capitán Daniel Almoño; Primer Teniente Normando Costantino, Primer Teniente José Vázquez, Primer Teniente Daniel Manzotti, Primer Teniente Ernesto Ureta, and Primer Teniente Omar Castillo; Teniente Daniel Paredi, Teniente Jorge Casco, Teniente Atilio Zattara, Teniente Jorge Bono, Teniente Daniel Méndez, Teniente Oscar Cuello, Teniente Jorge Farías, Teniente Ricardo Lucero, and Teniente Néstor López; Alférez Gerardo Isaac, Alférez Carlos Codrington, and Alférez Guillermo Martínez; and seven pilots who were still undergoing the initial training stage (known as 2nd Stage), including Alférez Sergio Donato, Alférez Enrique Amrein, Alférez Roberto Prior, Alférez Guillermo Julia, Alférez Héctor Palacio, Alférez Emilio Rodríguez, and Alférez Víctor Gutiérrez. Some of the latter rotated to perform offensive reconnaissance and exploration flights flying MS-760s departing from BAM Mar del Plata, as they were still rated.

Aircraft registration marks: C-301, C-302, C-303, C-304, C-305, C-309, C-310, C-312, C-313, C-314, C-318, C-319, C-321, C-322, C-324, C-325.

On 13 April, the first flights from BAM San Julián to the Islands were carried out. About 1000, a flight comprised of Capitán Eduardo Almoño (C-318), Teniente Oscar Cuello (C-324), and Teniente Jorge Farías (C-313) took off on a reconnaissance and familiarization mission. They returned three hours later. During the afternoon, Capitán Jorge García (C-318), Primer Teniente Daniel Manzotti (C-313), Alférez Gerardo Isaac (C-324), and Alférez Guillermo Martínez (C-310) performed a three-hour flight over the Islands.

On 16 April, four A-4C aircraft tested guns under the command of Capitán Mario Caffaratti (C-318), Primer Teniente José Vázquez (C-325), Teniente Atilio Zattara (C-313), and Teniente Ricardo Lucero (C-304). The A-4C was equipped with a Litton LTN-211 VLF (very low frequency) Omega Navigation System to which an IFF system and a radio altimeter were added.

In the second half of April, the Argentine Navy advisor Capitán de Fragata (naval aviator) Roberto Novais gave a briefing asserting that Type 42 destroyers were practically impregnable, and that the only way to attack them was to carry out a 360° simultaneous strike, so as to overload the enemy radar and air defenses. Such information about the enemy fleet antiaircraft capabilities worried crew members. Hence, they devoted themselves to thoroughly studying the enemy's weaknesses to make up an attack profile that would reduce the probabilities of being shot down.

They trained for low-altitude flying, side-by-side formation at a distance of 30 and 50 meters from one another (as air strikes would be carried out once engaged in the conflict) and changing course abruptly. However, such maneuvers were finally ruled out as they were considered dangerous: flight members crossing each other at low altitudes increased the probability of hitting the water and losing the original course towards the target.



8th Fighter Group's Mirage III EA at Mariano Moreno 8th Air Brigade - Photo courtesy of: DEH-FAA Archives

Aircrew training continued with the aim of recognizing the Islands, simulating attacks on vessels on the coast close to the BAM, conducting low-altitude flights over the sea, in-flight refueling, operating from bunkers, following sea survival techniques, etc. The goal was to complete the training of new crew members and to reach the operational level.

On 29 April at 0400, a section including Primer Teniente Daniel Manzotti (C-318) and Alférez Guillermo Martínez (C-310) took off for a simulated attack approach to the Argentine fleet. The vessels maneuvered with agility using, beforehand, the alert and approach course of our aircraft—no relevant conclusions were drawn.

They also tested an old 340-kg Mk-117 bomb, which made a late explosion after multiple tumbles; besides, it lacked high-speed aerodynamics and showed plenty of drag, which translated into excessive fuel consumption and decreased endurance. Likewise, they studied the available weapons to neutralize well defended, “soft” and mobile targets. They tested and experimented as the war unfolded, changing weapons’ configuration (bombs and fuzes).

Sea survival equipment as well as survival gear for extreme cold and inhospitable areas were prepared. The squadron recovered the orange American suits brought aboard the aircraft in 1976, but since they were not enough, dry French suits were requested. Eventually, diving neoprene wetsuits were received and worn, even though after wearing them for an hour on duty at the threshold, the crew’s extremities ended up black and blue as the suits restricted their blood flow.

As in the case of the M-5 Squadron, on 29 April, the BAM San Julián received an air raid warning—red. The aircraft were redeployed to Comandante Espora Naval Air Base and returned the following day.

M-III EA Mirage Interceptor

The events of May 1982 found the 8th Fighter Group equipped with the only Argentine Air Force new interceptor aircraft, very well-trained pilots, and a consolidated and unbeatable Technical Group. However, the tactical and operational situation was not ideal for the Mirage, which had to defend a target located 750 kilometers away from Río Gallegos, from where they operated.

On 30 March, the first four aircraft flights flew to BAM Río Gallegos without knowing the reasons for such an unexpected deployment. As they were refueling in Comodoro Rivadavia, a fellow officer told them in advance that Operation Rosario was well underway. Such

aircraft made up the M-III EA 1st Airmobile Squadron whose aircrew included Capitán Jorge Testa and Capitán Raúl Gambandé; Primer Teniente Juan Carlos Franchini, Primer Teniente Marcelo Puig, and Primer Teniente Carlos Perona. Aircraft registration marks: I-005, I-014, I-016, and I-017. Afterwards, between 2 and 30 April, Mayor Carlos Luna (his primary destination was to serve as chief of the CIC Gallegos, until the appointment of Vicecomodoro Carlos G. Velazco, where he stayed as second in command and, after his ratings were revalidated to fly M-III EA, he flew as attached pilot), Capitán Gustavo García Cuerva, and Primer Teniente Marcos Czerwinski and Primer Teniente Roberto Yebra would join the Río Gallegos Squadron.

On 2 April, after recapturing the Islands, the Air Defense Sector of the Southern Zone (Southern CODAZ) was organized with the assets belonging to two interception squadrons as well as those that could be added from the fighter-bomber squadrons. The Mirage III of the Río Gallegos Sector and those of Comodoro Rivadavia were assigned different missions which would last throughout the war.

The mission of the M-III EA 2nd Airmobile Squadron based at Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade was to conduct the direct air defense of the Southern Theater of Operations northern sector, which was the base of the FAS Staff and Headquarters. Besides, it had to be ready, by way of precaution, so as to neutralize a possible Chilean intervention. Due to that responsibility, the squadron remained alert for immediate take-off during the forty-five days of war.

The M-III EA 1st Airmobile Squadron based at BAM Río Gallegos was to conduct the southern sector direct air defense, carrying out air defense coverage tasks over Malvinas and guarding the probable west front.

Due to such demands, both squadrons' personnel had to rotate constantly to maintain the three-minute take-off alerts which required a great number of crew members, as it physically exhausted the crew.

After the recapture of the Islands, training and familiarization flights were conducted within the operations zone. Flights to Puerto Argentino were practiced in coordination with other units. Meanwhile, by 18 April, Matra 550 Magic missiles were received; said missiles had been acquired some time before but were available only then. Hastily, training could hardly be done during the remaining days of April, while a section maintained the three-minute take-off alerts, in both Air Defense Patagonian Sectors.

As from 1 May, the squadrons were made up of: chief of the Río Gallegos 1st Squadron, Mayor José Sánchez; the pilots were Mayor Carlos Luna, Capitán Raúl Gambandé, Capitán Jorge Testa, Capitán Gustavo García Cuerva, Primer Teniente Marcos Czerwinski, Primer Teniente Roberto Yebra, Primer Teniente Marcelo Puig, and Primer Teniente Carlos Perona; NCO in charge Suboficial Ayudante Ángel Sánchez. Chief of the Comodoro Rivadavia 2nd Squadron, Mayor Hugo J. Páez; the pilots were Capitán Carlos Arnau, Capitán Jorge Huck and Capitán Ricardo González, Primer Teniente Guillermo Ballesteros, Primer Teniente Álvaro Pérez, Primer Teniente Horacio Bosich, Primer Teniente Carlos Sellés, and Primer Teniente Raúl Federico; NCO in charge Suboficial Ayudante Tomás Molina.

Air materiel based at BAM Ríos Gallegos: I-014, I-015, I-016, I-017, I-019. Air materiel based at 9th Air Brigade: I-003, I-004, I-008, I-010, I-018.

As from 11 May, the two squadrons and the 8th Air Brigade would exchange pilots: on 11 May, Capitán Jorge Huck arrived; on 14 May, Capitán Jorge Testa was transferred to Buenos Aires and later assigned to the 9th Air Brigade. On that same day, Primer Teniente Atilio Maggi returned to the 8th Air Brigade; on 18 May, Primer Teniente Carlos Sellés arrived at Río Gallegos (and would later be assigned to Comodoro Rivadavia); on 22 May, Capitán Ricardo González and Primer Teniente Guillermo Ballesteros did so as well; and on 26 May, Capitán Carlos Arnau and Mayor Carlos Neme arrived (the latter would replace Mayor José Sánchez as chief of the 1st Squadron until 31 May).

IA-58 Pucará on the mainland

Apart from the Squadron deployment on the Islands, the 3rd Attack Group executed an air asset mobilization plan including BAM Santa Cruz (Santa Cruz province), under the command of Comodoro Hugo O. Giampaolletti, whose mission was to conduct offensive reconnaissance and exploration, offensive air patrolling and to provide the required replacement aircraft and aircrew support for the squadron operating in Malvinas.

The first aircraft took off from the Reconquista 3rd Air Brigade on 14 April with a technical stopover in Trelew. Once settled at the airfield, they started testing the weapons, which were mainly received from the Fábrica Militar de Aviones (Argentine Military Aircraft Factory).

Another 3rd Attack Group deployment airfield was located in the city of La Plata, Buenos Aires province. A section including Teniente Juan C. Montoya and Alférez Osvaldo Marchesini operated from that base until the end of the war. On 9 June, bad weather conditions caused an accident which left one of the aircraft out of service.

Also reporting to the 9th Air Brigade and the 9th Air Group, the 4th Attack Squadron, which set up was yet to be completed, performed offensive reconnaissance and exploration tasks. The Squadron was equipped with four aircraft and included eight pilots: Primer Teniente Raúl Federici, Teniente Miguel Filipanics, and Alférez Raúl Colla, Alférez Gustavo Gerez, Alférez Walter Ortellado, Alférez Roberto Bellini, Alférez José Taley, and Alférez Mario Valko.

A considerable amount of personnel and materiel rotated, as the aircraft, pilots and aircraft technicians who were originally deployed at BAM Santa Cruz would later cross to the Islands and make up the Pucará Airmobile Squadron in Malvinas, keeping it in operational service throughout the conflict.

Among the pilots who flew at BAM Santa Cruz and who, would be deployed to the Islands, after the conflict had begun, were: Vicecomodoro Saúl Costa, Primer Teniente Juan Micheloud, Primer Teniente Luis Martínez Chávez, and Primer Teniente Marcelo A. Ayerdi, Alférez Luis Blanchet, Alférez Ramón Galván, Alférez Eduardo La Torre, Alférez Rodolfo Hub and Alférez Rubén Manzur. On the other hand, another group of pilots, members of the planned relief crews, coming from Malvinas continued flying at the BAM: Capitán Roberto Vila and Capitán Ricardo Grünert, Teniente Tadeo Russo and Teniente Roberto Címbaro. The pilots' crew was completed with Teniente Carlos Rubial and Alférez Mario Decarre.

MS-760 Paris

On 21 April, in accordance with an order issued by the CAE, a Morane Saulnier 760 Paris (MS-760) flight was to deploy to BAM Mar del Plata to be part of the Air Reconnaissance and Exploration Group (GERA).

Among the personnel assigned to the flight were instructors Primer Teniente Juan Delgado and Teniente Juan Macaya; the pilots that had completed the Combat Aviator course and had flown solo in March the F-86F Sabre aircraft, Alférez Pedro Tur Baigorri, Alférez Eduardo Adaglio, and Alférez Walter Collado, and the A4-Cs as well, were also deployed, Alférez Enrique Amrein, Alférez Héctor Palacio, and Alférez Víctor Gutiérrez. As they had a valid rating to fly the MS-760, the above-mentioned officers joined the deployment group.

The technical personnel deployed included Cabo Primero Daniel Guerrero; Cabo Rogelio Pacheco, and civilian personnel Supervisor II Juan Morón.

Aircraft registration marks: E-204, E-220, and E-241.

On 22 April, Mayor Carlos Morillo, the 2nd Fighter-Bomber Group Squadron commander, ordered the flight deployment to BAM Mar del Plata.



4th Fighter Group's MS-760 Paris at Mendoza 4th Air Brigade - Photo courtesy of: DEH-FAA Archives

They were assigned the offensive reconnaissance and exploration mission and air patrolling over the “Alpha” Zone, defined up to 500 km or the aircraft maximum flight range, for the purpose of identifying vessels or aircraft at the Argentine sea and detecting possible British helicopter air raids or British vessels landings on the territory. Besides, the MS-760s would constitute a tactical reserve for the defense and support of the ground forces stationed on the coast. Such tasks would be ordered and controlled by CIC Mar del Plata, led by Mayor Héctor González, settled in the 601st Antiaircraft Defense Artillery Group (GADA 601).

These aircraft were also employed to train Army personnel in the 35 mm Skyguard Systems, Roland missiles and AN/TPS-44 surveillance radar, who would later depart for the Malvinas Islands. For that purpose, on their return flights from the ordered missions, they conducted planned simulated attacks flying at very low altitude like enemy aircraft. The training proved extremely useful for the systems operators as training with aircraft was not very frequent.

Deployment and organization of reconnaissance and exploration assets

As intelligence data was very scarce regarding the British fleet movements, on 13 April, the Air Reconnaissance and Exploration Group (GERA) was created, under the CAE's authority. It was based at BAN Comandante Espora, located in Bahía Blanca, so that its task could be carried out in coordination with the Naval Aviation Command. Vicecomodoro Arnaldo Pagotto was appointed FAA liaison officer before the Argentine Navy, and Comodoro Ronaldo Ferri was appointed Chief of the GERA. A few days later, both officers' transfer to the FAS Command located at Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade was ordered. At BAN Comandante Espora, they were replaced by Comodoro Roberto Mela and Vicecomodoro Eduardo Servático.

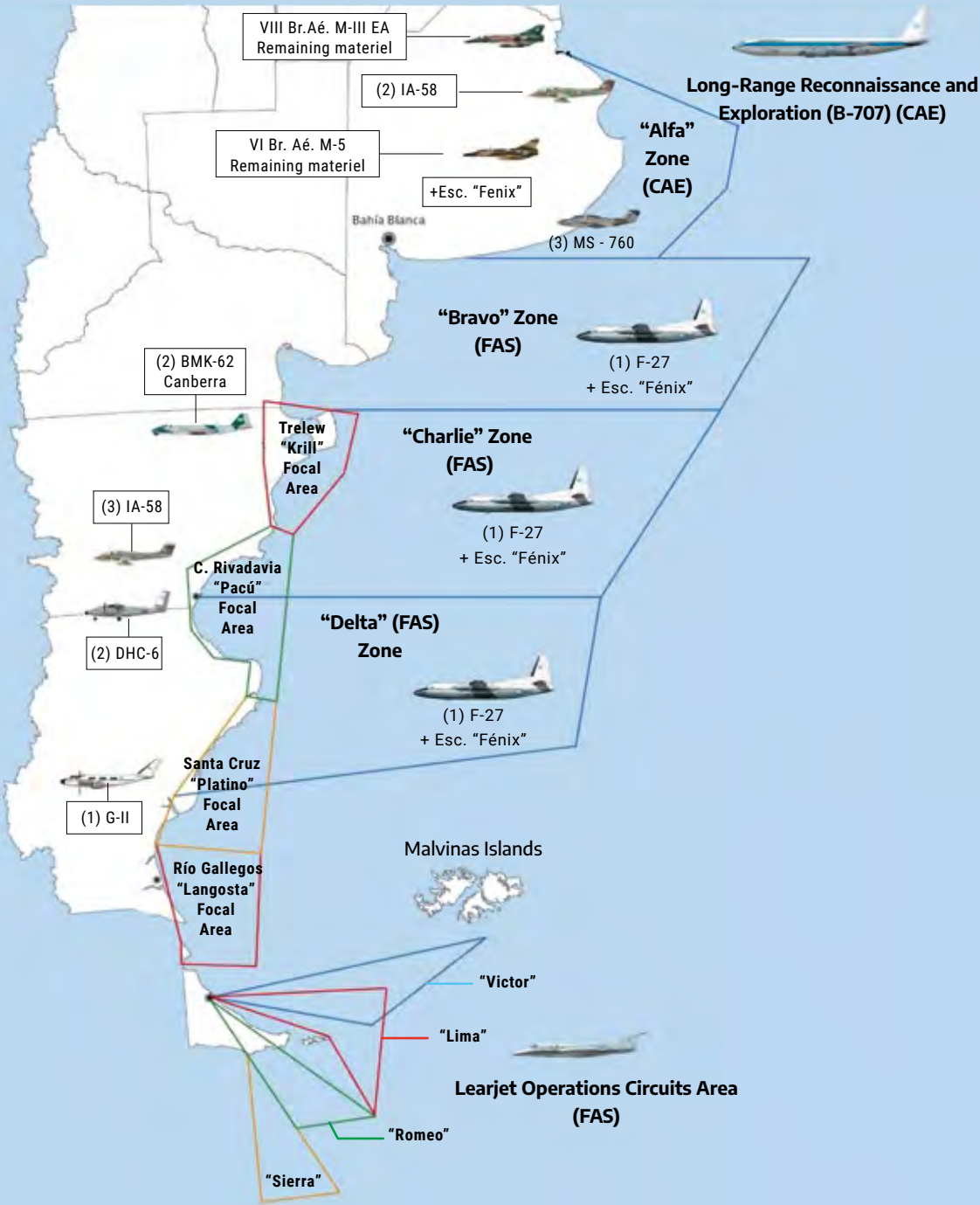
Initially, the exploration tasks were assigned to the B-707, C-130 and F-27 weapon systems, mainly because of their great range.

But the GERA was also assigned to scan the Argentine sea and coastal areas to prevent the British fleet's possible movements. In order to scan such a vast area, four major zones were defined: “Alpha,” “Bravo,” “Charlie,” and “Delta.”

The “Alpha” Zone would remain under the CAE's authority for surveillance and long-range reconnaissance and exploration using B-707 and C-130 aircraft, while short-range reconnaissance and exploration would be carried out using the following:

Grupo de Exploración y Reconocimiento Aéreo (GERA)

Areas of exploration and air materiel



- M-III EA from Moreno 8th Air Brigade with surplus aircraft on standby.
- M-5 Dagger from Tandil 6th Air Brigade with surplus aircraft on standby.
- Three MS-760s from BAM Mar del Plata with aircraft on standby and coastal exploration.
- Two IA-58 Pucará from La Plata airport for coastal exploration.
- Requisitioned civilian aircraft (which would later constitute the Fénix Squadron) from El Palomar 1st Air Brigade for coastal exploration.

The FAS was assigned Zones “Bravo”, “Charlie” and “Delta.” The F-27 aircraft were based at BAN Comandante Espora, BAN Almirante Zar (Trelew), 9th Air Brigade and BAM Santa Cruz. They would make daily flights according to a perfectly coordinated exploration pattern.

In order to increase coastal surveillance to prevent possible landings, five focal areas were defined in the bases’ proximities:

- “Krill” in Trelew included a BMK-62 Canberra, registration mark B-101, and requisitioned aircraft (which would make up the Fénix Squadron).
- “Pacú” in Comodoro Rivadavia included F-27s, DHC-6s and IA-58s from the 4th Attack Squadron of the 9th Air Brigade aircraft, and requisitioned aircraft (Fénix Squadron).
- “Platino” in Santa Cruz included IA-58s, a G-II, and requisitioned aircraft (Fénix Squadron).
- “Langosta” in Río Gallegos included requisitioned aircraft (Fénix Squadron).

The fifth focal area was defined to control, using Learjet 35 A, the sea traffic which could reach Malvinas from the Pacific Ocean. Four triangular search circuits were planned (“Victor,” “Lima,” “Romeo,” and “Sierra”) over a surface of 132,000 square kilometers, covering from the Río Grande latitude towards the south, and up to 59°30’S.

The Learjet 35 A aircraft would also be used to guide the M-5 Daguers and to conduct diversion missions. Likewise, photographic exploration missions (thermal and visual scanning) over certain areas in Malvinas were planned for these aircraft, from the 9th Air Brigade, BAM Río Grande, and BAM San Julián. They would also be assigned retransmission tasks, personnel transportation and cargo flights, air mail transport service and medical evacuation.

The GERA, which was assigned to the FAS and led by Comodoro Ferri (FAS Staff member), constituted two sections under the authority of A-3 Operations: the Reconnaissance and Exploration Operational Section (SOER) and the Special Ops Operational Section (SOOE).

The SOER was equipped with three F-27 Fokker aircraft and some requisitioned civilian aircraft.

The SOOE was assigned the four photographic Learjet 35 A aircraft belonging to Paraná 2nd Air Brigade, a verification Learjet 35 A from the Civil Aviation National Institute (INAC), and the photographic G-II aircraft—all of which had been operating at the 9th Air Brigade from 8 April—, as well as different capabilities requisitioned civilian and state-owned aircraft with their corresponding summoned crew. An air squadron was thus created, whose main characteristic included the joint operations of summoned military and civilian personnel: the so-called Fénix Squadron.

Escuadrón Fénix

By means of Military Committee’s Decrees No. 688 and No. 806, dated 23 April 1982, and through a Commission made up of senior officers —joined by retired Capitán Jorge Páez Allende—, the Argentine Air Force Commander-in-Chief ordered the selection and summoning of civil aviation flight crews according to the characteristics and performance

of air assets and electronic equipment which could be used in Argentine Air Force deployed units support missions.

After analyzing the legal conditions thereto, they coordinated with the Mobilization and Reserve Department, the Airworthiness Directorate and the Materiel Directorate, the recruitment and secondment of civilian pilots with the temporary rank of Alférez, and civilian mechanics with the temporary rank of Cabo. A vast number of the summoned personnel had retired or been discharged from the Armed Forces and Security Forces' active duty, and retained the rank they held in the Reserve.

On 28 April, at Morón 7th Air Brigade, the summoned civilian personnel received their military badges of rank according to the Geneva Convention rules. They immediately deployed aboard their requisitioned aircraft to Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade under the command of Mayor Juan Falconier.

Deployed aircraft fleet:

1. Learjet 35, registration mark LV-ALF
2. Learjet 25, registration mark LV-OEL
3. Learjet 25, registration mark LV-MBP
4. Learjet 24, registration mark LV-JTZ
5. Learjet 24, registration mark LV-JXA
6. Cessna Citation 500, registration mark LV-MGB
7. Cessna Citation 500, registration mark LQ-TFM
8. Cessna Citation 500, registration mark LQ-MRM
9. Cessna Citation 500, registration mark LV-MMR
10. Cessna Citation 500, registration mark LV-LZR
11. Cessna Citation 500, registration mark LV-MZG
12. Mitsubishi MU-2, registration mark LV-ODZ
13. Mitsubishi MU-2, registration mark LV-OAN
14. Mitsubishi MU-2, registration mark LV-MOP
15. Swearingen Merlin III, registration mark LV-MRL
16. Rockwell Turbo Commander 690, registration mark LV-LMU
17. Rockwell Turbo Commander 690, registration mark LV-LRF
18. Rockwell Turbo Commander 690, registration mark LV-LTU
19. Rockwell Turbo Commander 690, registration mark LV-LTX
20. Hawker Siddeley 125, registration mark LV-ALW

Besides the twenty aircraft mentioned above, a requisitioned Learjet 36, registration mark LV-LOG, was added and, on that same day, it departed towards Comandante Espora to conduct an exploration mission-it would later operate from Comodoro Rivadavia.

As from 1 May, according to the same protocol, other civilian aircraft would deploy from different locations of the country towards Comodoro Rivadavia, and would later be added to the different Patagonian bases, units, and airfields, as determined by the FAS, to perform CAE's and FAS' sorties:

1. Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, registration mark LV-MDM
2. Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, registration mark LV-MSN
3. Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, registration mark LV-MDH
4. Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, registration mark LV-MEJ
5. Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, registration mark LV-MEG
6. Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, registration mark LV-MEE

The Fénix Squadron was the only squad of the three Armed Forces constituted by civilian and military personnel. It operated from 28 April until the end of the war. Its first commander

was Mayor Roberto Cardoso, who had served as the 2nd Air Brigade Air Photographic Squadron commander until December 1981. Comodoro Rodolfo de la Colina replaced him from 14 May until 7 June, when he was shot down during a sortie mission over Estrecho de San Carlos (Strait). Vicecomodoro Rubén Román was the appointed commander from 9 June up to the end of the war.

Before deploying civilian aircraft, the following military aircraft conducted the reconnaissance and exploration tasks from Comodoro Rivadavia:

- Four Learjet 35 A aircraft, registration marks T-21, T-22, T-23 and T-24, with air photographic capabilities.
- One Learjet 35 A, registration mark VR-17, with radio aid verification.
- One G-II aircraft, registration mark F-34, with air photographic capabilities.
- Two requisitioned Learjet 35 A aircraft, registration marks LV-OFV and LV-ONN.

As from 29 April, the FAS allocated Fénix Squadron aircraft to bases, airfields, and airports along the Atlantic coast, according to each aircraft's features and the different missions to be conducted.

During May, two Aerostar 600 TS-60 aircraft, registration marks LV-MDE and LV-MII, were added, which operated from Río Gallegos.

Likewise, other requisitioned aircraft were added to perform tasks outside the Fénix Squadron operational organization:

- Learjet 25, registration mark LV-MMV
- Learjet 35, registration mark LV-OAS
- Mitsubishi MU-2, registration mark LV-MCV
- Rockwell Turbo Commander AC695C, registration mark LV-OOE
- Aero Commander AC 50, registration mark LV-LSY
- Aero Commander 500, registration mark LV-GXR
- Aerostar TS-60, registration mark LV-LZW
- Grand Commander AC68, registration mark LV-JLZ

Due to the missions' characteristics and risks, on 1 May, the FAS Commander ordered that the crew of every operational mission (fragmentary order) that implied entering the Malvinas Theatre of Operations be made up of military personnel in active duty. As the Argentine Air Force lacked rated crew members to operate Learjets 24, 25 and 36, a military pilot joined in as Aircraft Commander. For operational reasons, however, such a requirement was not always complied with.

As of 10 May, all Fénix Squadron aircraft (except those based at Comodoro Rivadavia) would come organically under the authority of the unit or base command where they had been deployed and would receive fragmentary orders issued by the Higher Commands (FAS/CAE/TOAS), through the corresponding Operations Department or unit commander. All local activities (training and maintenance) were controlled and managed by the authorities of the bases and units in which they were lodged.

The brigades, bases, and airfields along the Atlantic coast where Fénix Squadron aircraft operated were the following:

I Brigada Aérea de El Palomar

The aircraft carried out close-range reconnaissance and exploration missions within the so-called "Alpha" Zone, which covered the entire maritime coast of Buenos Aires. They received orders from the CAE through the Reconnaissance and Exploration Section of Comandante Espora Naval Air Base. They also carried out personnel transportation and

cargo flights, as required by the different commands.

- Learjet 25, requisitioned, registration mark LV-OEL
- Cessna Citation 500, requisitioned, registration mark LQ-TFM
- Cessna Citation 500, requisitioned, registration mark LQ-MRM
- Cessna Citation 500, requisitioned, registration mark LV-LZR
- Cessna Citation 500, requisitioned, registration mark LV-MZG
- Cessna Citation 500, requisitioned, registration mark LV-MMR

Base Aérea Militar Mar del Plata

The Fénix Squadron aircraft used this airfield as an alternative and/or a technical stopover for the exploration of the “Alpha” Zone.

Aeródromo Puerto Deseado

The aircraft performed close-range reconnaissance and exploration tasks over the “Platino” focal area and complied with the requirements of personnel transportation and cargo flights.

- Mitsubishi MU-2, requisitioned, registration mark LV-MOP
- Mitsubishi MU-2, requisitioned, registration mark LV-OAN

Aeródromo Trelew (Base Aeronaval Almirante Zar)

The aircraft performed close-range reconnaissance and exploration missions in the “Krill” focal area and complied with the requirements of personnel transportation and cargo flights.

- Rockwell Turbo Commander 690, requisitioned, registration mark LV-LTX
- Rockwell Turbo Commander 690, requisitioned, registration mark LV-LTU

IX Brigada Aérea de Comodoro Rivadavia

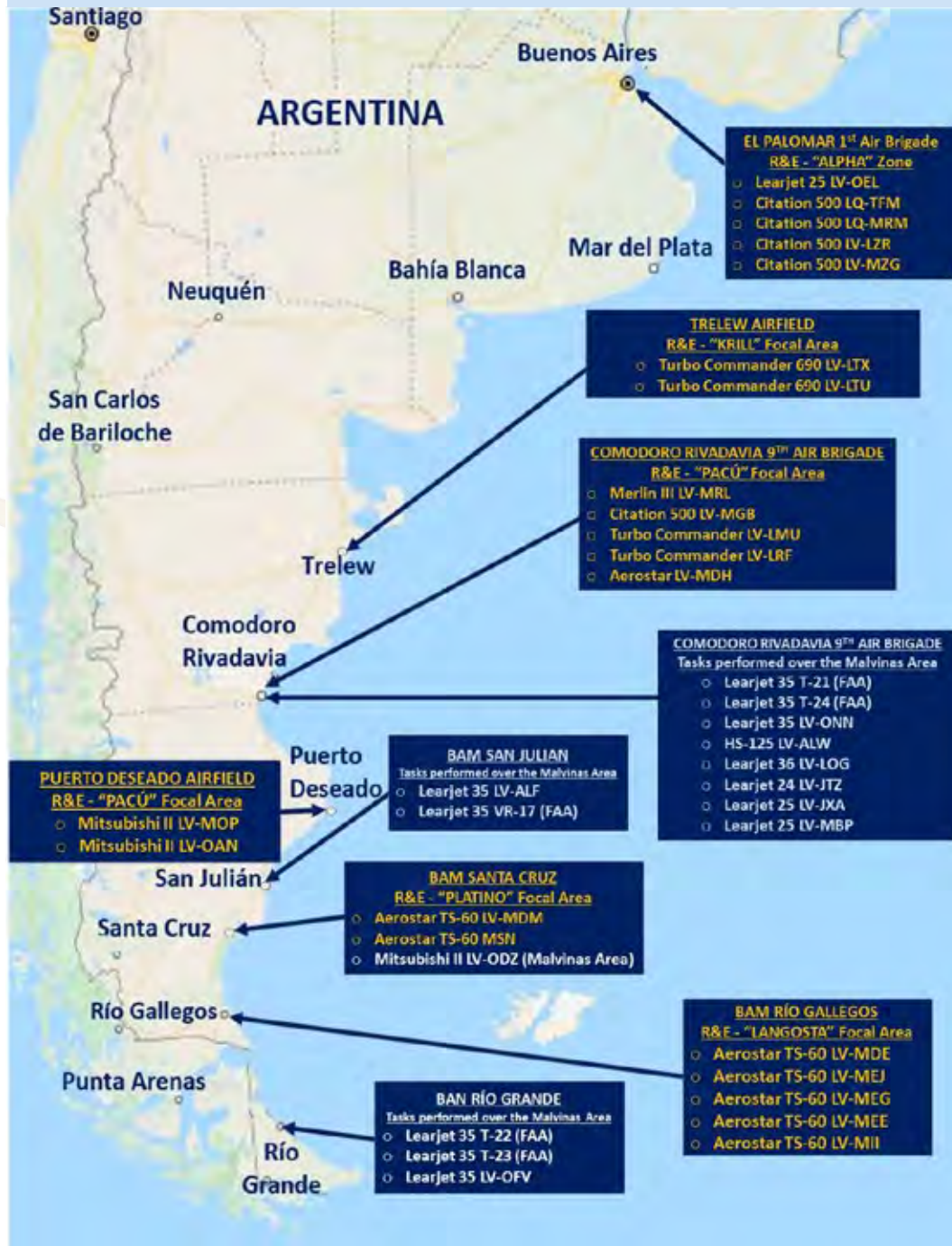
The aircraft performed close-range reconnaissance and exploration missions in the “Pacú” focal area and complied with the requirements of personnel transportation and cargo flights.

- Swearingen Merlin III, requisitioned, registration mark LV-MRL
- Cessna Citation 500, requisitioned, registration mark LV-MGB
- Rockwell Turbo Commander 690, requisitioned, registration mark LV-LMU
- Rockwell Turbo Commander 690, requisitioned, registration mark LV-LRF
- Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, requisitioned, registration mark LV-MDH

The following aircraft performed reconnaissance and exploration missions, air photographic reconnaissance, thermal and multispectral scanning (T-21), in-flight diversion and retransmission in Malvinas area of operations:

- Learjet 35 A, registration mark T-21 (FAA)
- Learjet 35 A, registration mark T-24 (FAA)
- Learjet 35, requisitioned, registration mark LV-ONN
- Hawker Siddeley 125, requisitioned, registration mark LV-ALW
- Learjet 36, requisitioned, registration mark LV-LOG
- Learjet 24, requisitioned, registration mark LV-JTZ
- Learjet 25, requisitioned, registration mark LV-JXA
- Learjet 25, requisitioned, registration mark LV-MBP

Grupo de Exploración y Reconocimiento Aéreo (GERA) Escuadrón Fénix Deployment- 1 May



Base Aérea Militar Santa Cruz

The aircraft performed close-range reconnaissance and exploration missions in the “Platino” focal area and complied with the requirements of personnel transportation and cargo flights.

- Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, requisitioned, registration mark LV-MDM
- Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, requisitioned, registration mark LV-MSN
- Mitsubishi MU-2, requisitioned, registration mark LV-ODZ. This aircraft guided the Pucará flights to Malvinas.

Base Aérea Militar San Julián

The aircraft performed reconnaissance, exploration, and diversion missions in the Malvinas area of operations, and complied with the requirements of personnel transportation and cargo flights.

- Learjet 35 A, registration mark VR-17 (FAA)
- Learjet 35, requisitioned, registration mark LV-ALF

Base Aérea Militar Río Gallegos

The aircraft performed close-range reconnaissance and exploration missions in the “Langosta” focal area and complied with the requirements of personnel transportation and cargo flights.

- Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, requisada, matrícula LV-MDE
- Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, requisada, matrícula LV-MEJ
- Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, requisada, matrícula LV-MEG
- Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, requisada, matrícula LV-MEE
- Ted Smith Aerostar TS-60, requisada, matrícula LV-MII

Base Aeronaval Río Grande

The aircraft performed reconnaissance, exploration, and diversion missions, simulated in-flight refueling, M-5 Dagger flight guide, and in-flight retransmission:

- Learjet 35 A, registration mark T-23 (FAA)
- Learjet 35 A, registration mark T-22 (FAA)
- Learjet 35, requisitioned, registration mark LV-OFV

Helicopters

As regards the Bell 212s, due to the continuous operational deployments carried out to the southern units, two helicopters were already assigned to BAM Río Gallegos and Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade since December 1981. The former counted on the Bell 212, registration mark H-87, manned by Primer Teniente José García and Teniente Juan Trezzo, and aircraft mechanics Cabo Principal Francisco Danna and Cabo Primero Rogelio Cruz. During the war, flight crews would be reinforced with Teniente Julio Sorgenti and Teniente Ricardo Pons.

The Bell 212 based in Comodoro Rivadavia, registration mark H-81, was manned by Teniente Víctor Rouge and Teniente Jorge Bacchiddú, and aircraft mechanics Suboficial Auxiliar Víctor Benítez and Cabo Primero Diego Cabral. Later, Cabo Primero Mario Gianelli would serve as cargo and crane operator. The crew was reinforced with Teniente César Romero and Teniente Miguel Ángel Lucero, Cabo Primero Claudio Bufarini, and Suboficial Ayudante Mario Deseta for pararescue operations. During the war, the H-81 would be replaced by the H-88 due to a technical failure.



7th Helicopter Group's Bell 212 at Morón 7th Air Brigade - Photo courtesy of: DEH-FAA Archives



7th Helicopter Group's CH-47 Chinook at Morón 7th Air Brigade - Photo courtesy of: DEH-FAA Archives



7th Helicopter Group's Hughes 500 at Morón 7th Air Brigade - Photo courtesy of: DEH-FAA Archives

At the time of the general deployment, the Bell 212, registration mark H-86, was providing operational support together with the Chinook, registration mark H-91, at the Marambio Base in Antarctica; from there, the Bell was transferred aboard a Hercules aircraft to the BAM Río Gallegos, where it was assembled and redeployed to the BAM San Julián. It operated from said air base and was manned by Primer Teniente Mario Gómez and Teniente Guillermo Lozada Acuña; Cabo Primero Pedro Pereyra and Cabo Primero Juan Rodríguez served as aircraft mechanics; Cabo Ismael Cuello and Cabo Luis Cabrera served as para-rescuemen. Later the Bell 212, registration mark LQ-CHP, owned by the Chaco Province Government, was added as reinforcement, and was under the command of Capitán (reservist) Exequiel Martínez, Primer Teniente (reservist) Héctor Tessio and Cabo Principal (reservist) Agustín Colombres as aircraft mechanic. In addition, on 11 April, the Hughes 500D, registration mark H-38, deployed and landed one day later at the BAM San Julián, manned by Alférez Marcelo Turdera and Cabo Primero Alejandro Moreyra.

Moreover, the Hughes 500 D, registration mark H-37, deployed to BAM Santa Cruz on 12 April, manned by Alférez José Pascuali and Cabo Primero Juan Umaño. On 21 April, it was replaced by the deployed Hughes 500 D, registration mark H-39, manned by Alférez Luis Secco and Cabo Primero José Ruiz. The H-37 returned to Morón 7th Air Brigade. At the beginning of June, it returned to Santa Cruz, equipped with long skis, a side crane and emergency floats, manned by Alférez Juan Carlos Zarza and Cabo Principal Sánchez as mechanic.

Whereas the Hughes 500 D, registration mark H-41, deployed on 13 April to BAN Trelew, manned by Alférez Omar Pereyra and Vicecomodoro (reservist) Asdrúbal Cimadevilla and Cabo Principal Oscar Barrionuevo.

Servicio Meteorológico Nacional

Meteorology played a key role in establishing the opponent's strategies and tactics during the South Atlantic conflict.

The Argentine National Weather Service contributed to the war effort by providing meteorological advisory services to leaders at all levels, including those at the National Strategic Level (presidential briefing), the Military Strategic and Operational Level (Argentine Armed Forces Joint Staff, Argentine Air Force General Staff, and specific commands) and up to assets deployment in support of the Tactical Level (airmobile squadrons and other users).

The FAS Staff was assigned two weather specialist officers who took turns to provide their advisory services -both in the FAS Operations Room as well as at the 9th Air Brigade- to the crews conducting the airlift. At the beginning, the task was easy to provide because the FAS was permanently based at the 9th Air Brigade, where the Comodoro Rivadavia Airfield Weather Office operated. A few days later, however, the FAS moved to LADE's premises located in the city, nine kilometers away from the Brigade. This led to the creation of another information office to provide weather services to the Staff. As weather specialist officers rotated, advisory services operated uninterruptedly from 6 April to 14 June.

Likewise, weather observers and forecasters were deployed and reinforced all deployment bases on the mainland.

Weather observers working in Malvinas would fulfill duties outside their area of expertise, taking up different roles as forward-deployed weather observers, serving in communications or in the armed defense of their bases.

The following personnel were deployed in Malvinas: Suboficial Ayudante Hugo Vegas, Cabo Principal Roberto Herger, Cabo Principal Paulo Mantello, Cabo Primero Félix Picasso, Cabo Primero Daniel Díaz, Cabo Primero Horacio Artola, and Cabo Eduardo Cuervo.

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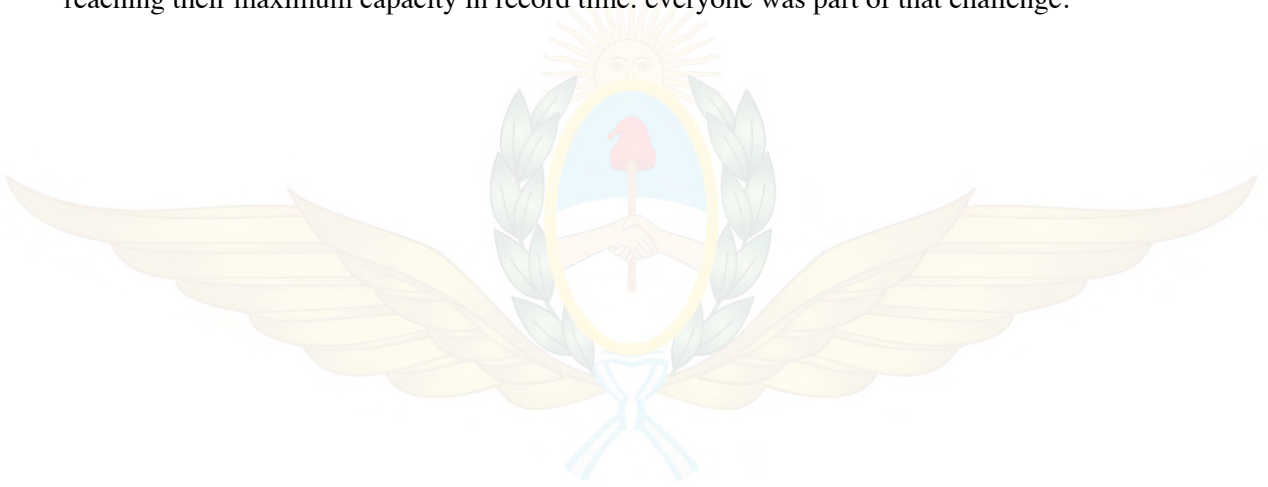
In summary

The enormous effort to deploy assets on the mainland meant that operational permanent units maximized the use of transportation means for their squadrons deployed in the south; due to the airlift to Malvinas, no heavy air assets were available, save for those used during the initial deployment to the Patagonian bases.

Be it by air, employing the FAA liaison aircraft (G-II, AC-500, C-182, among others), or by land (trucks, vans, jeeps, etc.), everything worked to ensure that any required element arrived on time. Even for urgent requirements, fighter aircraft maximized their scarce interior compartment space (such as the empty chassis inside the Mirage cannon housing).

Besides the training of the crews who made their first over-the-sea flights, all the weapon systems carried out multiple weapon launches to test their effectiveness and aircraft performances using different configurations (external tanks versus bombs); hence, the ranges were adjusted on different probable target points in Malvinas and the surrounding sea. This proved crucial for fighter-bombers and interceptors that lacked in-flight refueling capabilities.

This stage witnessed an unbreakable esprit de corps both in permanent and deployment bases. Recapturing our Malvinas Islands was the driving force behind all operational assets reaching their maximum capacity in record time: everyone was part of that challenge.



Chapter 6

Asset Deployment in Malvinas



Elements of Malvinas Air Component

During the period in which our country retook possession and sovereignty over Malvinas Islands, the Air Force assets located there acted at three levels. The first level was that of government and civilian management and was made up of Comodoro Carlos Bloomer Reeve, Government Chief Secretary; Mayor Antonio González Iturbe, Chief of the garrison¹¹³ Communication Station; Vicecomodoro Eugenio Miari, the Governor's legal advisor.

The second level referred to the performance at Malvinas Garrison joint agencies: Mayor Fernando Espiniella and other doctors at the Puerto Argentino Joint Military Hospital, and Mayor Hugo Maiorano from the Joint Central Antiaircraft Operations Center (COAaCj), among others.

The third level—the operational one—had the Air Component as its main agency. At the beginning, said Component depended on Malvinas Theater of Operations and, later, on the South Atlantic Theater of Operations through the Chief of the Malvinas Joint Garrison. The Component Commander, Brigadier Luis G. Castellano, received the following elements to accomplish his mission:

Under Command and Control

The staff officers of Malvinas Air Component Command were the following:

- A-1 Personnel: Chief, Vicecomodoro Juan J. García de Diego; Assistant, Mayor Jorge Fernández.
- A-2 Intelligence: Chief, Comodoro Guillermo V. Mendiberri; Assistant, Primer Teniente Nicolás Araoz.
- A-3 Operations: Chief, Vicecomodoro Alberto Alegría; Assistants, Vicecomodoro Héctor R. Gilobert, Mayor Gilberto H. Oliva and Mayor Alberto A. Catalá.
 - ◊ Malvinas Air Defense Sector Command - Information and Control Center (CIC): Chief, Vicecomodoro Oscar L. Aranda Durañona; Assistants, Mayor Alberto Kajihara and Mayor Héctor M. Pergolini.
 - ◊ Air Observers Network: NCO in charge, Suboficial Mayor Alfredo F. Ocampo.
- A-4 Materiel: Chief, Mayor Eduardo J. Giannattasio.
- A-5 Communications: Chief, Mayor Mario M. Módica.
- BAM Malvinas: Commander, Comodoro Héctor L. Destri. Personnel and assets for its set up and operation.
- BAM Cóndor: Commander, Vicecomodoro Wilson R. Pedrozo. Personnel and assets for its set up and operation.
- Special Operations Group: Chief, Vicecomodoro Esteban L. Correa.
- IA-58 Pucará Squadron: Chief, Mayor Miguel M. Navarro.
- Helicopter Squadron: Chief, Mayor Oscar J. Pose Ortiz de Rozas.
- Air Surveillance and Control (VyCA) Squadron: Chief, Mayor Miguel A. Silva.
- Antiaircraft Artillery Squadron: Chief, Mayor Hugo Maiorano.
- Construction Squadron: Chief, Mayor Raúl Maiorano; Assistants, Vicecomodoro Enrique Viñals and Primer Teniente Ignacio Galardi.
- Supply Squadron: under the responsibility of Mayor Néstor Giménez Ortiz and Mayor Rodolfo Guerrero.
- Communications Service: Chief Officer, Capitán Eduardo R. Zanardi.
- FAA Chaplaincy: Presbyter Gonzalo E. Pacheco.

¹¹³ Upon his arrival, Mayor Antonio González Iturbe, who flew to Malvinas to join the Staff of the Air Component, found out that the town telephone exchange was not working, in spite of the efforts of the assigned personnel. He made it work and continued in his position until the end.

Under Operational Control

- Joint Antiaircraft Artillery Group.
- Army 601st GADA Air Surveillance Group.
- The air units transferred by the FAS, flying within the area of influence.

Definitive composition of BAM Malvinas

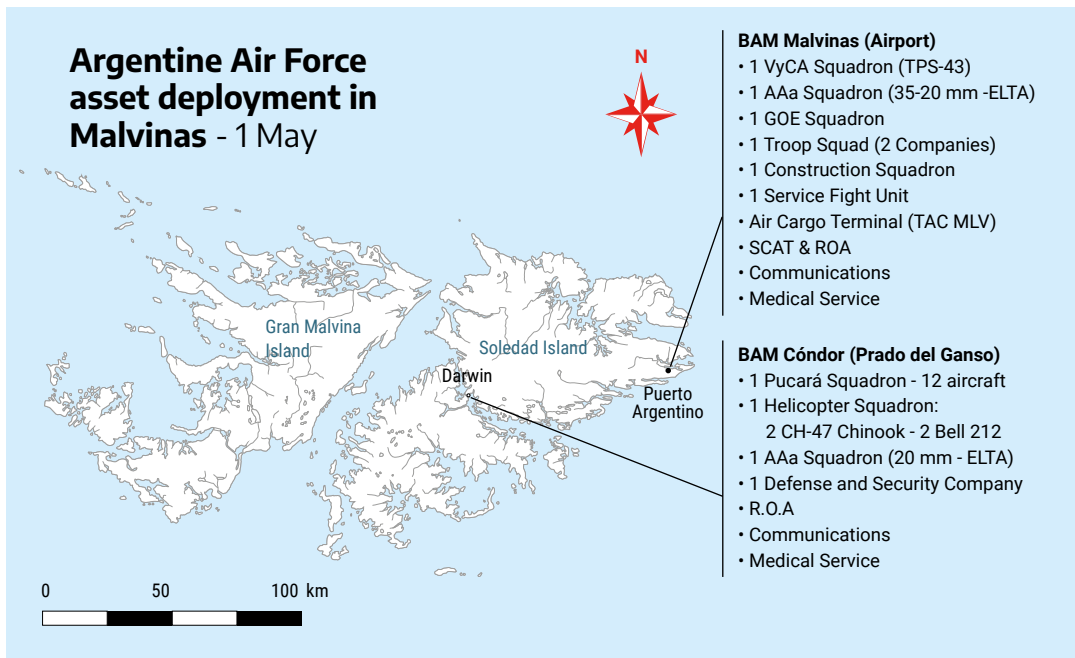
As days went by, elements of combat and operational support were gradually incorporated as units, integrated into the Air Component, located at the BAM, which was finally made up of the following agencies and chief officers:

- Base Commander: Comodoro Héctor L. Destri. By mid-April, Vicecomodoro Roberto M. Gamen and Mayor Alberto L. Iannariello would be appointed Deputy Base Commanders. Later, Vicecomodoro Enrique Viñals joined as advisor and coordinator.
- Troop Squad: two companies, with a strength of 225 men, including the 50 soldiers from the 9th Air Brigade in Comodoro Rivadavia who arrived on April 2 under the command of Teniente Eduardo A. Luppó and of Alférez Domingo E. Aguerre. Subsequently, on April 6, the Company from the 1st Air Brigade would be integrated; its Chief Officers were Capitán Alfredo O. Rivarola, until May 4 and, later, Capitán Neldo P. Mena.
- Air Cargo Terminal: Capitán Juan C. Hrubik and Capitán Guillermo N. Cardetti, who worked alternating shifts.
- Operations Department: Vicecomodoro Alberto J. Zeoli and Mayor Alberto Iannariello, who were in charge of the Flight Safety Service, Meteorology, Flight Plan and Service Flight Unit.
- Service Flight Squadron, with transport, fuel and fire-prevention elements, track lights and power generators: Mayor Héctor M. Rusticcini, Assistants Mayor Rodolfo L. Guerrero and Primer Teniente Pedro Altamirano Bernahola.
- Technical Squadron: Mayor Carlos H. Argente.
- Combat Control Team (ECCO): Primer Teniente Rodolfo Yuse and Primer Teniente Horacio Alzamora.
- Air Service Flight Unit: Primer Teniente Luis E. París.
- Flight Safety Service: Capitán Dante Dovichi, Primer Teniente Antonio Sangrá and Primer Teniente Carlos Zorreguieta, and Luis E. París (pilots who were initially assigned to fly FIGAS¹¹⁴ aircraft).
- Communication Station (which was later moved to Puerto Argentino): Primer Teniente Eduardo Zanardi.
- Medical Service: Mayor Fernando Espiniella.
- Religious Support Services: Presbyter Gonzalo E. Pacheco, who voluntarily stayed at the base until the end of the conflict.
- Supply Squadron: Vicecomodoro Néstor F. Giménez Ortiz, from 24 April to 1 May, when he was transferred to Puerto Argentino (Casa de Piedra); Assistant, Mayor Alcides José Cerrutti.

In the BAM Malvinas, the following lodged units were set up:

- Antiaircraft Artillery Squadron, under the command of Mayor Hugo Maiorano, it was made up of: the 3rd Battery, made up of 35 mm Oerlikon cannons with Superfledermaus fire-control system, belonging to BAM Mar del Plata, under the command of Primer Teniente Oscar H. Spath (which arrived on 5 April); and the 10th Battery with

¹¹⁴ FIGAS: Falklands Islands Government Air Service.



nine 20 mm Rheinmetall cannons and a close-range surveillance Elta radar from BAM Río Gallegos, under the command of Primer Teniente Alberto E. Dalves (which arrived on 2 April). From 10 April on, Capitán Rodolfo Savoia was appointed Chief of Antiaircraft Artillery Command Post (PCAAa) and settled in the airport.

- Special Operations Group (GOE): Vicecomodoro Esteban Correa.
- Construction Squadron: Mayor Raúl O. Maiorano.
- Air Surveillance and Control Squadron (VyCA) under the command of Mayor Miguel A. Silva, with a TPS-43 radar with “Charlie”¹¹⁵ configuration which was installed within the airdrome premises where it operated until 12 April, when it was moved to its definitive location to the south of Puerto Argentino.
- Pucará Squadron and Helicopter Squadron, initially based at this BAM and, later re-deployed to BAM Cóndor.

Pucará Squadron at BAM Malvinas

The first IA-58 Pucará flight deployed to Malvinas immediately started performing familiarization and operational flights. Some British forces, which had fought against the Argentinian ones on 2 April, escaped and concealed themselves at neighboring farms and in the so-called “stone runs” where they hid weapons. On 4 April, one section performed the first offensive reconnaissance flight of the conflict searching for fugitives.

Frag-O. w/o. no. (Malvinas Air Component, CAM). Aircraft: two IA-58 Pucará. Call sign: TIGRE armed with guns and machine guns. Mission: providing support to a Navy Sea King in the search of fugitives. Crew: Capitán Jorge Benítez and Primer Teniente Francisco Navarro (A-523), and Capitán Roberto Vila and Teniente Daniel Jukic (A-556). They took off from BAM Malvinas at 1600 and landed at 1820.

In the subsequent days, missions for familiarization and the search of enemy troops were repeated. 38 sorties were carried out from BAM Malvinas altogether. During that period, the 3rd Air Brigade technical personnel deployed at that field air base, in collaboration with

¹¹⁵ The TPS-43 radar with “Charlie” configuration comprises the antenna, a shelter (with two PPI UPA-62 consoles, VHF, HF), operation cabin (with three consoles similar to the previous ones), fuel tank, FM 200 microwave system and two Caterpillar generators.

the system pilots, replaced the previous silver color of the aircraft with a new ochre-colored pattern with some patches in order to blend them in the operational environment.

On 9 April, a radar lobe coverage test was performed with two sections:

Frag-O w/o. no. Aircraft: two IA-58 Pucará. Call sign: PALA, armed with guns and machine guns. Crew: Primer Teniente Francisco Navarro (A-556) and Teniente Hernán Calderón (A-552). They took off from BAM Malvinas at 0910 and landed at 1110.

Frag-O w/o. no. Aircraft: two IA-58 Pucará. Call sign: TAURO, armed with guns and machine guns. Crew: Teniente Daniel Jukic (A-523) and Teniente Héctor Furios (A-529). They took off from BAM Malvinas at 1020 and landed at 1220.

On that same 11 April, upon arriving at Malvinas, Mayor Miguel Manuel Navarro took on the IA-58 Squadron command. On the following day, he devoted his efforts into seeking a suitable site for Pucará operation. Aboard the Islander, Navarro and Vila recognized Bahía Fox (Fox bay) and San Carlos settlement which were disregarded due to shortness of the runways (350 meters). In the afternoon, they landed at Darwin isthmus and chose a 400 meter long ground area which could be enlarged to 450, and be used as the Pucará aircraft operational base.

Actually, the best runway was situated in Puerto San Carlos (Port San Carlos); however, its location was vulnerable to artillery fire or to a navy landing from the strait. Though the land was undulating and prone to flooding, the 450 meter long and spongy peat-covered field of Puerto Darwin (Port Darwin) was chosen since it was the most suitable site. Once the decision of deploying the base had been taken, the requirements to operate a new Air Base were defined, being clearly aware of the environmental limitations both for fighter crews and aircraft. Conditions were far from ideal. There were no hangars, support assets or suitable facilities: mechanics' work would be seriously hampered by the lack of shelters or safe dispersal areas. That deficiency was clearly noticed when CH-47 and Bell 212 helicopters took from Puerto Argentino to Darwin all the materiel necessary to set up the new air base, by means of consecutive flights starting on 12 April. Within that context, equipment and munitions had to be manually dispersed.



Pucará armorers from BAM Cóndor: on top of the platform, Cabo Primero Andrés Brashich and Cabo Primero José Peralta; on the ground, Cabo Rubén Tarquini and Cabo Principal José Piaggi. The first two would die during the 1 May attack, while the other two would be taken severely injured to Puerto Argentino. Photograph taken on 29 April, two days before the attack was carried out.

Photo courtesy of:
S.A. VGM (R) Norberto Bazález

On 13 April, an exchange between IA-58 mainland and island pilots was made so that everyone could be trained in the operational area. Capitán Ricardo Grünert and Teniente Alcides Russo, Teniente Abelardo Alzogaray and Teniente Eduardo Túñez arrived to Malvinas. With that purpose, Pucará crewmembers practiced low altitude tactical navigation, firing exercises, bombing and rocket launch tests over land.

On 18 April, the Air Component Command ordered the take-off of two IA-58 to conduct reconnaissance on a sea position, at a distance of 220 km, where the Information and Control Center (CIC) had received a radar contact. Crew: Capitán Roberto Vila (A-529) and Teniente Miguel Giménez (A-523). They took off from BAM Malvinas at 1145 and landed uneventfully at 1225.

On 23 April, Teniente Hernández returned to Comodoro Rivadavia and joined the group that was getting ready to cross –from Río Gallegos– eight aircraft which would complete the Pucará Airmobile Squadron in Malvinas.

The technical support echelon deployed in Malvinas was made up of: Capitán Nelson Robledo, Teniente Héctor Santini and Teniente José Lombardi and, as NCO in charge, Suboficial Ayudante Luis Suárez.

After the redeployment to BAM Cóndor, the technical support at BAM Malvinas was left under the responsibility of Mayor Horacio Argente and Suboficial Ayudante Roberto César Pérez. Both of them volunteered in Puerto Argentino, where they assisted with wit and care the Pucará Squadron aircraft until the end of war.

Helicopter Squadron

It was made up of two heavy helicopters Boeing CH-47 Chinook which flew to the islands, plus two Bell 212 transferred aboard the C-130 Hercules. They would remain active during the entire conflict. At the beginning, they operated from BAM Malvinas and, later, from BAM Cóndor until surrender, when they returned to the first base.

Deployment sequence:

3 April

Aircraft: Bell 212, registration mark H-85: it was transferred aboard the C-130 TC-64 which took off from Comodoro Rivadavia at 0030 and landed in Puerto Argentino at 0230. Bell Crew: Teniente Luis Longar and Teniente Alejandro Vergara, Suboficial Ayudante Jesús Martínez, Cabo Principal Horacio Carmona and Cabo Principal Eulogio Gómez, Cabo Primero Ernesto Palacios, Cabo Primero Sergio Quiñónez and Cabo Primero Eduardo Gómez, and Cabo Bernardo Dobrenik.¹¹⁶

7 April

Aircraft: CH-47 Chinook, registration mark H-93. Mission: transfer to Puerto Argentino. Crew: Mayor Oscar Pose Ortiz de Rozas, Primer Teniente Alberto Beltrame and Primer Teniente Juan Grifol, Suboficial Ayudante Roberto Prats and Suboficial Ayudante Juan Cantón, Suboficial Auxiliar José Álvarez, Cabo Principal Atilio Pistoni, and Cabo Primero Mario Vera and Cabo Primero Ángel Chocrón. It departed from Río Gallegos at 1325 and arrived in BAM Malvinas at 1705. On the night preceding the crossing, the helicopter painted in Antarctic scheme (red and grey) was repainted at the 9th Air Brigade, by a team from the 7th Air Brigade, using camouflage colors (brown, green and yellow) suitable for the islands terrain.

¹¹⁶ ALEJANDRO ROBERTO VERGARA, *Malvinas - Palas al rescate*, "Colección de Historia Aeroespacial", Buenos Aires, 2019.



CH-47 Chinook performing loading tasks in Malvinas

Photo courtesy of:
Brig. VGM (R) Giaigischia



Bell 212 H-85 ready to depart from BAM Cóndor

Photo courtesy of:
Com. My. VGM (R) Vergara

10 April

Aircraft: Bell 212, registration mark H-83. Frag-O w/o. no.: it was transferred to Puerto Argentino aboard C-130H registration mark TC-62. Bell Crew: Teniente Marcelo Pinto, Teniente Ricardo Ludueña, and Cabo Principal Alberto Pilar López.

11 April

Aircraft: CH-47 Chinook, registration mark H-91. Frag-O w/o. no.: crossing to Puerto Argentino. Crew: Primer Teniente Manuel Fernández, Primer Teniente Julio Brouwer de Koning and Primer Teniente Horacio Giaigischia; Suboficial Ayudante Hugo White; Cabo Principal Raúl Fernández and Cabo Principal Hugo Herrera; and Cabo Primero Rubén Lavoratto. It took off from Río Gallegos at 1400 and arrived in BAM Malvinas at 1700. This helicopter belonged to Base Marambio aircraft; on 10 April it had flown to Río Gallegos, with a previous stopover in Río Grande, together with the KC-130 registration mark TC-70. The same as the other Chinook, the H-91 was repainted in camouflage scheme. For self-defense reasons, the helicopters were armed with three 12,7 mm gunner-operated Browning machine guns, one on each side and another one mounted on the rear loading ramp. Those weapons had been adjusted at the home base the previous year using the F-86 Sabre machine guns.

23 April

Teniente Saturnino Santiago Sánchez and Teniente Gustavo Luis Brea arrived from the mainland and joined the three Bell 212 aircrews, which had six pilots in all.

Once assembled, the Bell 212 started ground familiarization flights, they deployed and supplied ROA lookouts, and from 12 April on –the date the Pucará arrived at the BAM Cónдор– they set up, together with Chinook helicopters, an air bridge between BAM Malvinas and Darwin. For several days, the Helicopter Squadron transported Pucará technical personnel, antiaircraft artillery, fuel supplies together with air, antiaircraft and ground munitions. Six 20 mm RH antiaircraft artillery pieces and one 35 mm Skyguard battery with two cannons and a fire station unit belonging to the Argentine Army were transferred hanging from the Chinook cargo hook, and, therefore, the helicopter maximum capacity was tested.

As regards supplies, due to the blockade against the islands, there was no JP-1 jet fuel available, so the excess from C-130 aircraft was extracted. Because of the gradual arrival by air of JP-1 drums to the airport and of a ship carrying logistics items, a field refueling equipment was transferred to Darwin; it comprised a pillow tank, pumping equipment and hoses. The fuel for Pucará and helicopter operation at the BAM Cónдор was supplied in special cylindrical rubber tanks (rolling tanks) to be manually rolled and flown hanging from the Chinook.

Both systems technical echelon was made up of the same aircrew NCOs who carried out maintenance inspector duties and they were Suboficial Ayudante Roberto Prats for CH-47, and Suboficial Ayudante Jesús Martínez for Bell 212.

Likewise, BAM Cónдор staff officers were transferred, as well as the Compañía de Defensa y Servicios (Defense and Services Company) of the Military Aviation School, a Medical Service section with combat support capability, fire-prevention equipment and field kitchens, firewood and supplies for the personnel; besides, more than eight hundred men belonging to Corrientes 12th Infantry Regiment were transferred from Punta Camino (12 km away from Puerto Argentino) for BAM Cónдор external security purposes. A 5500 kg truck –that the kelpers had buried in peat so as to leave it out of action– was rescued in Punta Camino. Employing the external load procedure, it was vertically extracted and, after overflying the city, it was left at the airport. The retrieved vehicle rendered valuable services in Puerto Argentino.

Service Flight Unit

Brigadier Guillermo Castellano ordered adding the Britten Norman Islander aircraft –owned by former Governor Hunt and which had belonged to the FIGAS– to BAM Malvinas air unit as a Service Flight Unit.

Aboard that aircraft, on 9 and 10 April, Vicecomodoro Roberto Gamen and Mayor Alberto Catalá performed special tasks from BAM Malvinas; on the first day, tasks were performed with logistical purposes in relation to Darwin set up and, on the second one, to detect the probable landing sites of British task forces. The aerial reconnaissance conducted over the terrain revealed that Port San Carlos, located in the northwest end of Soledad Island, was a potentially suitable location since it gathered some natural characteristics to carry out an amphibious troop and logistical assets landing operation.

Nevertheless, the Naval Component Commander dismissed the pilots' assessment; which would be proven to be a mistake on 21 May, when the British forces started the Sutton operation exactly at that same location.

On 12 April, aircrews arrived at Puerto Argentino in order to put the different FIGAS aircraft into operation to carry out liaison and air transport tasks over the islands. After visiting all the places where the aircraft were kept, it was found out that most of them were missing essential parts, clearly to prevent possible seizures. Aircrew members assigned to fly those aircraft were Capitán Dante Dovichi, Primer Teniente Antonio Sangrá, Primer Teniente Carlos Sorreguieta and Primer Teniente Luis Edmundo París. Only the latter served as



The BN Islander at BAM C ndor during one of its April liaison flights

Photo courtesy of:
Brig. My VGM (R) Par s

Commander of the BN Islander in several liaison flights from BAM Malvinas to Bah a Fox, Darwin, El Salvador Settlement, San Carlos, among others.

On 20 April, the aircraft BN Islander performed the medical evacuation of a soldier who had had an accident in Bah a Fox, where the 8th Mechanized Infantry Regiment and an Engineers Company were deployed. The medical flight to Malvinas Military Air Base enabled the immediate assistance of the soldier at the Joint Military Hospital and his subsequent evacuation to the mainland.

Until its destruction on 1 May, more than thirty-five hours were flown on that aircraft. On different occasions, Vicecomodoro Alberto Iannariello, the Chief of BAM Malvinas, Comodoro H ctor Destri, and Teniente Daniel Jukic flew the Islander as co-pilots.

VyCA Squadron

The 2nd Air Surveillance and Control (VyCA) Group, with its headquarters in Merlo, was responsible for getting ready and deploying four mobile squadrons with Westinghouse TPS-43E radars. The first one departed from the 1st Air Brigade on the night of 1 April 1982, being its initial destination the 9th Air Brigade in Comodoro Rivadavia. From there, it flew to Puerto Argentino on 2 April aboard two Hercules C-130 aircraft.

That first aircrew, commanded by Mayor Miguel  ngel Silva, included Primer Teniente Juan Carlos Romero and Primer Teniente Norberto Faber, Teniente Guillermo Saravia, and Alf rez Rub n Scacchi and Alf rez Hugo Mercau; Suboficial Mayor Antonio Cassani as the NCO in charge of the Squadron, Suboficial Ayudante N stor Tambussi, Suboficial Auxiliar Jos  Palma; Cabo Principal Jos  Barrios, Cabo Principal Carlos Quintana, Cabo Principal Enrique Sierra, Cabo Principal Carlos T vez and Cabo Principal Roberto Ullua; Cabo Primero Roberto Baiz, Cabo Primero Ra l Ram rez and Cabo Primero Rolando Ulrich; Cabo Oscar Di Stefano and Cabo Alejandro Matarazzo; and conscript soldiers class of 1963 Jorge Cerana, Fernando Escalante, Rogelio Escobar, Alejandro Rodr guez and Juan Wozniak.

Although the radar arrived on 2 April aboard two C-130 with their crews, it was not until the next day in the afternoon that the generators were received; they had been left at Comodoro Rivadavia cargo terminal due to lack of space in the cargo hold. On 4 April, the radar was finally assembled and serviceable, after two days of adjustments, calibration and flight trials with opportunity traffic. Two days later, at 0800, the air bridge support continuous operation started. The radar was installed at an elevated position, 800 meters to the southwest of runway threshold 08. Later, after both radar and personnel combat survival



First radar site at the airport - Photo courtesy of: VyCA archives

possibilities had been assessed, on 13 April it was relocated on the town limit since that site offered greater coverage should any attacks coming from the sea or the air¹¹⁷ be performed.

Between 2 April and the morning of 6 April, airspace surveillance was carried out with the radar of corvette ARA *Granville* moored in front of Puerto Argentino, which was operating under call sign TORREÓN.

On 9 April, in coordination with the CIC Malvinas and the Pucará Squadron, two flights were carried out to check radar coverage and determine close low-level coverage.

The flights were performed in the morning by PALA and TAURO sections, and their approximate duration was two hours each.

In spite of the short time available to plan air control and surveillance operations over a completely unknown terrain, the ongoing training the technical and operational personnel had been receiving since 1978 in joint deployments with the Argentine Air Force different weapon systems –most of them within the Patagonian territory– minimized said deficiency allowing said personnel to quickly adapt to the operational area's environment.

The crew, which initially had twenty-four members, was reinforced and amounted to forty-five men including officers, NCOs and soldiers by 29 April. That increase occurred mainly because the radar was moved from the airdrome to the south of the town, to the highest area so that coverage would be extended, mostly at low level.

That change in location meant that the Squadron would no longer count on the security and logistical support it had been receiving from BAM Malvinas until 13 April. In order to overcome that deficiency, on 15 April, Cabo Primero Víctor Romero, Cabo Néstor Herrera and Cabo Luis Rivero (Escuela de Radar (Radar School) student), and twelve soldiers of class of 1963 arrived from 2nd VyCA Group to carry out the squadron's security and defense tasks. Likewise, Suboficial Principal Carlos Taborda (vehicle operator) and Cabo Primero Juan Carlos Nievas (radar operator) arrived as reinforcing operational personnel. On 17 April, Cabo Víctor Lescano (vehicle operator) arrived, on the 20th, Primer Teniente Carlos A. Mazzocchi (controller) and Cabo Primero Juan D. Egañas (radar operator) arrived from

¹¹⁷ MIGUEL ÁNGEL SILVA, *Diario de Guerra del Radar Malvinas*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Dunken, 2007.

Comodoro Rivadavia VyCA Squadron and, finally, Cabo Primero Gabriel Merlino (radio communications mechanic) arrived on 29 April.

The Squadron comprised the Operational, Technical and Logistics Sections. It worked as a self-sufficient unit, obtaining by itself the assets necessary for the system operation and survival.

The Operational Section, made up of controllers and navigators, was responsible for the detection and identification of Argentine and British aircraft within the Malvinas Theater of Operations (TOM) airspace, and for controlling its own aircraft –allocated by the Information and Control Center (CIC)– during mission execution.

The Technical Section, made up of radar and radio communications mechanics, was in charge of keeping radar equipment in operational service and servicing VHF, HF as well as microwave equipment.

The Logistics Section was responsible for ensuring the Squadron's smooth operation as regards medical service, transport, security, rationing, and lodging.

The Malvinas Mobile VyCA Squadron was part of the Tactical Air Defense and Control System which included the squadrons deployed in Río Grande, Río Gallegos and Comodoro Rivadavia with Westinghouse TPS-43 3D radars, and the four mobile squadrons allocated to Mar del Plata, Viedma, Santa Cruz and San Julián, which operated the Argentine Army Cardion TPS-44 2D radars.

Likewise, the Cardion radar deployed in Puerto Argentino performed surveillance and detection functions every time the TPS-43 required maintenance. Until the outbreak of hostilities, the main task was rendering support to the transport aircraft belonging to the Argentine Air Force, the Argentine Navy and Aerolíneas Argentinas and Austral companies, which conducted the airlift. Everything would be different on 1 May.

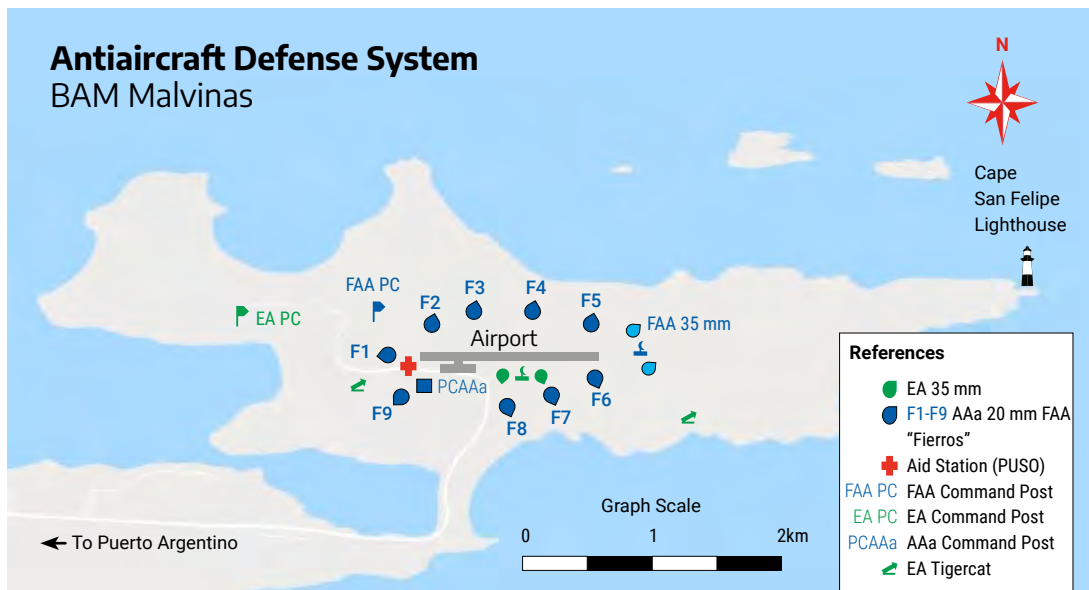
On 23 April at 0218, the on-duty combat role detected, for the first time, a non-identified contact with flight parameters compatible with a British helicopter at an azimuth of 140°, at a distance of 27 km and an altitude of 1,000 meters. Between 23-30 April, detections increased and at least 60 British aircraft were plotted; most of them matched helicopter flight parameters within an average range of 27 to 60 km and mainly at night time.

On 26 April at 1158, the on-duty combat role detected, for the first time, a contact with flight parameters matching a Sea Harrier at an azimuth of 032°, at a distance of 280 km, heading 123° and at an altitude of 10,000 meters; it continued flying on what seemed to be a combat air patrol (CAP) mission until it disappeared at 1215, at an azimuth of 055°, at a distance of 330 km. Another interesting detection was registered on 28 April at 1615, when the on-duty combat role detected a contact with parameters matching a distant reconnaissance flight at an azimuth of 068°, at a distance of 400 km and an altitude of 14,000 meters which disappeared at an azimuth of 033°, at a distance of 430 km.

According to the Squadron's War Diary records, from 6 through 30 April, the radar operated 423 hours in support of airlift operations from mainland bases. It was 128 hours out of service due to weather conditions (out of the standard winds) which meant twenty antenna rotation and power interruptions, and two hours out of service due to technical failure (four high data and power interruptions).

Antiaircraft Artillery

Between 2 and 3 April, the personnel and assets of a Rheinmetall (RH) battery with nine 20 mm cannons and a short-range ELTA radar belonging to BAM Río Gallegos were deployed to BAM Malvinas, under the command of Primer Teniente Alberto Dalves, and NCO in charge Suboficial Mayor Hugo Gómez. At first, only one section of three pieces was transferred and, on 3 April, the rest of the battery was transported.



On 4 April, once the Operations Plan 2/82 was received, BAM Mar del Plata 3rd Battery was deployed –it comprised a Superfledermaus fire-control system and two 35 mm Oerlikon cannons, under the command of Primer Teniente Oscar Spath, Teniente Jorge Reyes and Alférez Pedro Iraizoz, and NCO in charge Suboficial Principal Rodolfo Antonio Ledesma. The transfer was carried out on board a C-130 in three consecutive days. Mayor Hugo Maiorano was appointed Squadron Leader.

At BAM Malvinas, the battery with 20 mm RH cannons deployed the nine *fierros*¹¹⁸. The first piece was placed near threshold 08 and, from there on, four positions were placed to the north and four to the south of the runway. After having assessed the site, the 35 mm Superfledermaus Oerlikon battery belonging to BAM Mar del Plata was installed on the opposite threshold, the 26, thus achieving an effective 360° omnidirectional defense of the airport.

Once the deployment had finished, on 12 April an anti-aircraft fire test was made to assess the 35 mm Superfledermaus Oerlikon system performance. In the morning, a bundle of gas-inflated balloons with food cans hanging from it was released so that the radar could detect it and record fire parameters.

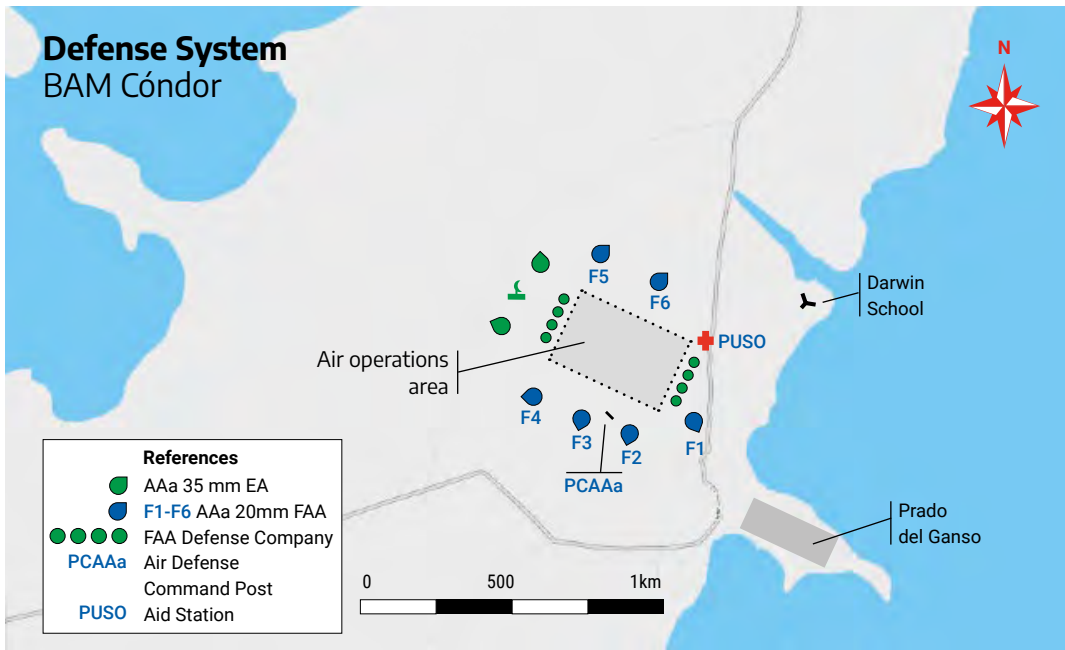
For BAM Cóndor defense, a 20 mm RH cannons Battery (-)¹¹⁹ and a low-altitude detection and short-range ELTA radar were deployed; the latter was transferred from the Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade, under the command of Alférez Arnaldo Favre, and NCO in charge Suboficial Auxiliar Miguel Forni. Since the previously mentioned officer was not specialized in anti-aircraft artillery, Teniente Darío Valazza was deployed from BAM Mar del Plata, who took on the command of the Battery on 12 April.

On 17 and 18 April, aboard Argentine Air Force helicopters, pieces were transferred to BAM Cóndor and positions were immediately set up on the ground.

On 19 April, at the request of the CIC before the FAS Command, own aircraft performed simulated attacks so that the Anti-aircraft Artillery (AAA) distant and close surveillance could check lobe coverage and practice real-time communications and the transmission of alerts and fire instructions: azimuth, distance, speed, altitude and other data necessary

¹¹⁸ "Fierro" is the term used by anti-aircraft artillery personnel to refer to 20 and 35 mm cannons.

¹¹⁹ Battery (-): battery with reduced number of pieces.



to assess the defensive system. That practice proved to be useful since, from that moment on, with the information obtained by both the TPS-43 radar and own AAA assets, and after parallax corrections were made, it was possible to speak the same operational language without misunderstandings and counting on reliable information.

On 27 April, a battery with two 35 mm cannons and Skyguard fire station unit belonging to the Argentine Army 601st GADA¹²⁰ was added to the BAM C ndor antiaircraft defense; it was under the responsibility of Subteniente Claudio Braghini and Sargento Ayudante Mario Abel Tardihi as NCO in charge, and under the operational control of the Base commander.

On the night of 27 April, as time went by, tension escalated at BAM Malvinas and the red alarm was issued on several occasions. Under such circumstances, the Argentine Army 105 mm OTO Melara pack howitzers located to the south of Puerto Argentino were bombarding nearby beaches. On another occasion, around 2200, an early warning was issued to report that a helicopter was possibly overflying the area.

At the break of day, the TPS-43 radar on-duty operator detected two contacts from the east (behind the lighthouse), one at a distance of 6 km and the other at 10 km, at an altitude of 50 meters and an estimated speed between 10 and 12 meters per second (36 -43 km/h), heading 270 . Under such unexpected circumstances, the battery was instructed to get ready for combat; simultaneously, the Command Post was duly alerted and information was requested from the CIC about the existence of Argentine flights within the area. A negative answer was received.

One of the contacts disappeared from the radar screen and attention was focused on the other mobile object which kept approaching at slow speed. When the contact entered the firing distance (3.5 km), the weapon chiefs were instructed to release the trip trigger safety. Once the order was executed and notice received, Primer Teniente Spath performed a burst of gunfire. Immediately after, the contact disappeared from the radar screen and the weapon chiefs observed an object explode and fall to the sea on fire. This was also observed by the TWR on-duty personnel. Although remains of what had been seen in the darkness were searched for the following day, nothing was found.

¹²⁰ GADA: Antiaircraft Defense Artillery Group.

During the night of Wednesday 28 April, the defense system was activated on several occasions. The western wind, 40 knots (74 km/h) on average, was the triggering factor since it affected the fire-control system –one small engine, which was responsible for turning and stopping the antenna to acquire air targets, broke down. That failure left the fire-control system out of service and unable to command and control the 35 mm cannons fire, which had to be used as isolated weapons until the end of the conflict.

On 29 April, the readiness phase was completed. Despite the difficulties encountered with transport, installation and logistics, the batteries were combat-serviceable with their respective Command Post, communications network, positions, munition and personnel shelters on sites. Therefore, adjustment of fire tests were carried out.

The Antiaircraft Artillery Command Post (PCAAa) was placed in a reinforced concrete magazine, where some rusty World War II coast defense cannons were kept, about 250 meters from the TWR facing the southwest. The ELTA radar was located in the vicinity of the PCAAa.

Special Operations Group

The Special Operations Group (GOE) was completely deployed to Malvinas on 2 April aboard the C-130H TC-68, together with the Staff of the Air Component. The GOE took charge of the airport¹²¹ security.

The GOE was made up of: Chief, Vicecomodoro Esteban Luis Correa; Primer Teniente Luis Castagnari, Primer Teniente Salvador Ozán and Primer Teniente Eduardo Spadano; Teniente Juan Bruzzo, Teniente Alfredo Sidders, Teniente Dante Amaya, Teniente Ernesto París, Teniente Víctor Gutiérrez and Teniente José Sorensen; Suboficial Ayudante Martín Yulman; Cabo Principal Guillermo Kormann, Cabo Principal Rodolfo Villaverde, Cabo Principal Miguel Fonseca, Cabo Principal Juan Benaiges and Cabo Principal Mario Rodríguez; Cabo Primero José Orequi, Cabo Primero Juan Chiantore, Cabo Primero Juan Vázquez, Cabo Primero Alfredo Aguayo, Cabo Primero Alfredo Vanzetti, Cabo Primero Omar Godoy, Cabo Primero Walter Abal, Cabo Primero Roberto Agüero and Cabo Primero Roberto Barrientos; and Cabo Juan Costa, Cabo Jorge Santucho, Cabo Hugo Riquelme and Cabo Manuel Córdoba.

In April, the GOE guarded the British prisoners before they were transferred to the mainland, captured seven enemy marines who were taking refuge in a farm, set booby traps and mined the beach areas which could be used for landing. Also, it built field ammunition storage facilities, provided security to the Intelligence personnel who inspected several facilities, mounted guard at the lighthouse and at the fuel station. Furthermore, it built trenches and defenses on the beaches, and diving specialists removed the anchor chain of a ship which was stuck at the port.

On 28 April, the GOE Squadron settled permanently on one of the airport thresholds, where the airdrome Command Post would operate until the beginning of hostilities.

Construction Squadron

The Squadron's deployment began on 5 April in order to carry out construction works and maintain BAM Malvinas facilities. The personnel was transported by air, while road and loading machines were sent on maritime transport ships.

Repair and extension works were carried out on the runway, taxi road and apron; shelters, artillery sites and an alternate Command Post were built; also, the quays where supplies arrived were repaired.

¹²¹ See 'The air assault begins,' Chapter 3, "Recapture of the Islands."

On 5 April, Mayor Raúl Maiorano, Suboficial Mayor Gerardo González, Suboficial Ayudante Ricardo Díaz, Suboficial Auxiliar Alberto Natalino and Suboficial Auxiliar Miguel Muñoz, Cabo Principal Erio Moyano and Cabo Edgardo Acosta, Cabo Víctor Gutiérrez and Cabo Carlos Montoya were deployed. Some days later, the reinforcing members deployed included Primer Teniente Ignacio Galardi, Cabo Principal Eduardo Cubi, civilian personnel Carlos Alfonso Corona and Carlos Alberto Corona and, then, Vicecomodoro Enrique Viñals, and Cabo Primero Jorge Ortiz and Cabo Primero Carlos Casal.

The Squadron was equipped with three bulldozers, two front-end loaders, a motor grader, three dump trucks, a flatbed truck and an impounded jeep.

Services Squadron

This Squadron comprised transport, fire-prevention and marking items, as well as power generators. From 2 April, it was under the responsibility of Mayor Rodolfo Guerrero, until 11 April, when Mayor Héctor Rusticcini arrived at BAM Malvinas and took on the responsibility –Mayor Guerrero was left as his assistant. At the beginning, it also had available Medical Service, headed by Mayor Fernando Spiniella, and Religious Support Service, under the responsibility of presbyter Gonzalo Pacheco.

Supply Squadron

From the beginning, Vicecomodoro Néstor Giménez Ortiz organized the logistic supply for the BAM Malvinas deployed assets. In a few days, a supply storage shed was available in the city, where the Depósito Mayor de Abastecimientos (Grand Supply Depot) was set up; it was commonly known as “La Casa de Piedra” (The Stone House) due to its physical features, and was at a short distance from the Air Component Command. Some weeks later, Mayor Alcides José Cerutti arrived from the mainland and took charge of the tasks carried out at the BAM as an assistant, while Giménez Ortiz regulated distribution from La Casa de Piedra. At the Base, Mayor Cerutti took turns with Mayor Guerrero from the Services Squadron to support the reception and loading of the aircraft participating in the air bridge, and the operation of Pucará and helicopters from the airdrome.

Malvinas Air Cargo Terminal (TAC MLV)

On 28 March 1982, Palomar Air Cargo Terminal personnel were instructed to set up an Air Cargo Terminal in Malvinas, and to supplement the 9th Air Brigade TAC. With that purpose, it prepared the assets of a Combat Control Team (ECCO) under the responsibility of Primer Teniente Rodolfo Yuse and Primer Teniente Horacio Alzamora as Chief of the Air Transport Control Element (ECTA), and the Cargo Terminal assistants. On 30 March, those assets were transported to Comodoro Rivadavia.

On 2 April, TAC MLV personnel and some of the materiel were transported on the first two flights to Malvinas, under the command of Capitán Carlos Mario Stocco. The remaining material would arrive a few days later. When the decision to defend the islands was taken, the airlift began and lasted until 29 April. During those days, Malvinas Air Cargo Terminal received and unloaded all the materiel continuously arriving from the mainland.

The operation’s magnitude demanded the reorganization of the group, which was divided into two working teams. One of them was under the command of Capitán Juan Carlos Hrubik, who replaced Capitán Stocco as Chief of TAC MLV on 10 April, and the other, under the command of Primer Teniente Daniel Lambri. Tasks were carried out in daily twelve-hour rotating shifts. They managed to receive seventy six aircraft in only twenty-four hours, both of the Argentine Air Force and the Navy, with an average assistance time of fifteen minutes for parking, unloading and taxiing per aircraft. In most cases, movements were made with, at least, one engine on. Naturally, aircraft flow changed according to weather conditions, fluctuating between forty and seventy-six flights a day during the airlift period.



Scene showing intense activity at BAM Malvinas during the Airlift in April - BANIM DEH-FAA

The greatest problem was the limited surface of the airport's apron; therefore, it was widened using modular aluminum plates. The task was accomplished in record time by personnel both from the Terminal and 1st Construction Group. That way, the apron width was almost doubled. Six aircraft could simultaneously operate on the ramp plus one on the taxiway or on the runway. The transport aircraft which arrived at BAM Malvinas were the following: C-130 Hercules, Fokker F-28 and F-27, Lockheed Electra, Boeing 737 and BAC 500.

Furthermore, TAC MLV personnel worked in airport maintenance works, water supply, facility and sewer cleaning, vehicle service and maintenance, runway track lights, support to fire-prevention service and provision of ground support equipment for aircraft start-up, towing and repair, among other activities.

The main item used by Malvinas Air Cargo Terminal was a Terex forklift. It worked round the clock for twenty days. It was used to load and unload aircraft and ships at the port quays, 5 km from the BAM. It was also used for recovery services whenever trucks and tractors got bogged down on wet muddy ground. Another forklift was requested from Comodoro Rivadavia TAC and a similar one was rented from Falklands Island Company (FIC); however, both of them were ruled out due to multiple failures and events that took place during operation.

Troop Squad

Two companies arrived at BAM Malvinas, with a strength of 225 soldiers. The troop personnel included fifty soldiers from Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade under the command of Teniente Eduardo Luppó and Alférez Domingo Aguerre who arrived on 2 April: they were the first Argentine Air Force contingent to set foot on Malvinas ground. On 6 April, they were joined by the 1st Air Brigade Defense Company, under the command of Capitán Alfredo O. Rivarola until 4 May and, later, Capitán Neldo P. Mena.

The company was commanded by the previously mentioned officers, an NCO in charge —Suboficial Ayudante Eduardo Mure—, in addition to two marksmen rifle sections under the responsibility of Primer Teniente Tulio C. Felici and Primer Teniente José A. Guerra, a MAG machine gun section under the command of Alférez Alejandro Alonso, and a 12.7 mm machine gun section under the responsibility of Alférez Gustavo E. Fosch from



Defense positions of combat sections at BAM Malvinas, on the beach area - BANIM DEH-FAA

the 7th Air Brigade. As its very first duty, it provided airport security by patrolling and by way of sentry posts located at the fuel plant, runway thresholds, control tower, airport entrance and weapon room.

As regards ground defense, at the coordination meetings held by the three components Chiefs of Operations, it was agreed British forces' priority objective would be to neutralize BAM Malvinas runway and, in consequence, keeping the Base operational was extremely important.

Therefore, the ground defense perimeter –covering the complete airport surrounding and coastal areas– was divided into surveillance zones guarded by Air Force troop squads, in addition to four companies belonging to the 25th Infantry Regiment and three sections of the Army 1st Patricios Infantry Regiment, all of them commanded by Teniente Coronel Mohamed A. Seineldín.

The Defense Company personnel were distributed into sections along the peninsula perimeter, at the sites where the enemy could possibly land. It is worth mentioning that, though defense was under the responsibility of the 25th Infantry Regiment, joint combat groups were created in order to properly cover all areas as it was impossible to keep the distance among the different services.

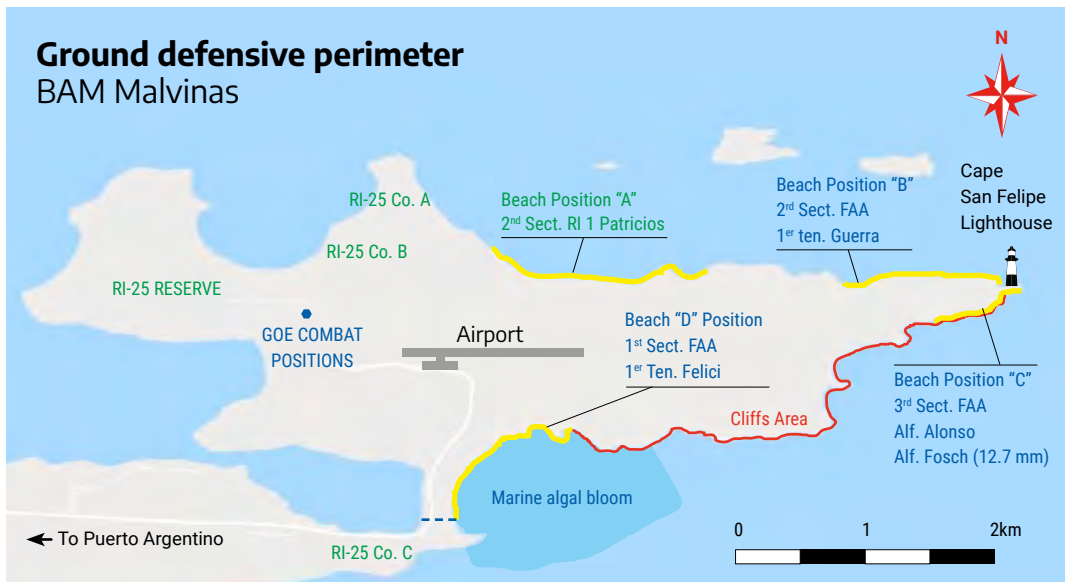
Four beaches were chosen to set up defense positions (A-B-C-D), among which the 1st Air Brigade Defense Company was distributed into sections. The pieces of the 12.7 mm machine guns section commanded by Alférez Fosch were distributed among the other sections.

At the beginning, the first section commanded by Primer Teniente Felici took up position A to the north of the peninsula, but later they were reassigned to position D (Surf Bay), a southern large beach stretching about 1000 meters up to a rocky cliff. The north position was taken up by the 1st Patricios¹²² Infantry Regiment.

The deployment was completed by the GOE combat positions located in Cantera de Piedra, northwest of threshold 26, very close to BAM Malvinas headquarters.

* * *

¹²² Account given by Comodoro VGM (R) Tulio César Felici before the BANIM Commission.



At BAM C3ndor, a Ground Squadron, commanded by Mayor Jorge Zaporta, was established with a Defense and Services Company made up of conscripts belonging to the Ground Group of the Military Aviation School.

The Defense and Security Company —under the command of Primer Teniente Ricardo Sif3n, and made up of two sections of 55 marksmen each, reinforced with two mortars, and under the responsibility of Teniente Osvaldo Bustillo and Teniente Dar3o Rosas— was in charge of close defense, i.e., the facilities of the BAM. The NCOs in charge of the company and sections were Suboficial Ayudante H3ctor R. Queiruga, Suboficial Ayudante Juan Carlos Le3n and Suboficial Ayudante Eduardo Maidana. As far as perimeter and surrounding defense was concerned, as stated by joint doctrine, it was under the responsibility of the Army regiment assigned to Darwin.

The Services Section, commanded by Teniente Edgardo Serra, guaranteed the companies' logistics and carried out support tasks in the Air Base.

Implementation of the Air and Tactical Control System (SCAT)

Malvinas Air Component Commander had planned to conduct air operations through its Staff A-3 and its Air and Tactical Control System (SCAT). The command post (CP) included the Air Defense and Direct Air Support operational sections. During most of the conflict, the PC was located in an old residence called "Stanley House."

The SCAT headquarter was the Information and Control Center (CIC) and shared the same building with other Services' commands. To facilitate integration, they were placed in a room next to the Centro Coordinador de Fuegos de Apoyo del Componente Terrestre (Supporting Fire Coordination Center of the Land Component). From the outset, Army and Navy liaison officers worked uninterrupted shifts. This allowed for acceptable interoperability among the Services thanks to the continuous data exchange and the fast and accurate joint assessment of threats.

Considering the operational environment features, the CIC was assigned the following functions:

- Exercising airspace surveillance and control within its jurisdiction.
- Coordinating air traffic.
- Performing air defense or direct air support tasks with the assets coming from the mainland and under its operational control.

- Conducting tactical air missions with the assets assigned to the Component.
- Dealing with Passive Air Defense and Alarm Spreading
- Supervising by the right to veto the actions of the anti-aircraft defense assets.

In order to successfully fulfill those responsibilities, the essential requirement was to record and keep updated the situation of Argentine air movements, and to detect and identify hostile aircraft flying over its jurisdiction.

The CIC's main offensive and defensive air control and detection asset was the Interception Station set up by the Air Surveillance and Control Squadron (VyCA) under the command of Mayor Miguel A. Silva, which was equipped with a powerful 3D¹²³ radar, the 400-km range AN/TPS-43 Westinghouse¹²⁴.

That sensor was complemented by a Surveillance Station provided by the Army 601st GADA together with a 2D radar, the TPS-44 Cardion "Alert" of their own. Both made up the early warning system, whose operation was coordinated by the Information and Control Center set up and operated by the Argentine Air Force.

During April, the CIC arranged for simulated attacks performed with FAS aircraft. Those flights were used by the VyCA Squadron Chief to demarcate its radar coverage blind areas. In the face of that limitation, the FAS representative was required to send personnel and equipment to deploy an Air Observers Network (ROA).

Although initially the runway length had been planned to be extended, the idea soon came to nothing because of the type of soil and the time such works would take. Due to the airport's and the parked aircraft's vulnerability to attacks with naval artillery, the Air Defense Command decided not to deploy high-performance interceptors to Malvinas airport from the very beginning. For that reason, the Islands Defense Sector Command only counted on the Argentine Armed Forces anti-aircraft units to repel enemy aircraft raids. Fighter aircraft would fly from the mainland, as required and for short periods of time to provide coverage for other air operations.

Consequently and because most anti-aircraft materiel belonged to the Army and Navy, one of the first measures adopted by the A-3 was coordinating with the respective Chiefs of Operations to set up a Joint Central Anti-aircraft Operations Center (COAaCj) which — with capabilities similar, though more limited, to those of the Information and Control Center— would conduct anti-aircraft defense according to the CIC fire instructions. It started operating on 10 April under the responsibility of Mayor Hugo Maiorano in an office near the CIC.

The first coordination meetings were not easy since each Service had different anti-aircraft defense procedures and doctrines. After several coordination efforts and many discussions, a system that proved to be efficient during operations was agreed by the parties; therefore, an excellent joint action was achieved¹²⁵.

In order to control close fire tasks in support of surface forces, the Air Force Component allocated six Air Control Equipment (ECA) to the infantry brigades, with their corresponding vehicles and communication equipment. Each ECA was operated by a vehicle operator and a communications technician, and led by a military aviator experienced in fighter aircraft called Forward Air Control Officer (OCAA).

¹²³ 3D radars provide information in three dimensions: range, azimuth and elevation, while 2D radars only provide range and azimuth.

¹²⁴ The TPS-43 coverage was good 6° above the horizon. In the radar vicinity (20/30 km), discrimination was cluttered by ground contacts. Because of the hill chain to the west, there was no coverage under 3,000 meters. Due to a local phenomenon, mobile objects were detected on the sea surface, to the north and northwest and to the south and southeast, on occasions, at a distance of up to 200 km from Puerto Argentino.

¹²⁵ Account given by Brigadier Mayor VGM (R) Alberto Alegría before the BANIM Commission; at that time, Chief of A-3 Operations holding the rank of Vicecomodoro.

The SCAT Operations Center included three sections:

1) Air Defense Operational Section (SODA). Chief, Vicecomodoro Oscar L. Aranda Durañona.

- Information and Control Center (CIC).
- Interception station (TPS-43 radar operated by the VyCA Squadron).
- Surveillance station (TPS-44 Cardion “Alert” radar operated by the EA 601st GADA).
- Forward surveillance station (ELTA radar mounted on the north of Gran Malvina Island - POA 9).
- Air Observers Network, with nine Air Observation Posts (POA).

2) Air Support Operational Section (SOAA). Chief, Mayor Gilberto Oliva.

- Two Air Force liaison officers.
- Six Forward Air Control Equipment.

3) Communications station. Chief, Primer Teniente Eduardo R. Zanardi.

Air Observers Network (ROA)

After the visit of Brigadier Ernesto Crespo and Brigadier Roberto Camblor on 6 April to Malvinas, Vicecomodoro Oscar Aranda Durañona, who was deployed in Comodoro Rivadavia, turned up voluntarily to take charge of Malvinas Command Post. Bearing in mind the 1979 Villa Reynolds experience, once he reached Malvinas, the first measure he took was the immediate implementation of the Air Observers Network.¹²⁶

The ROA was made up of an air observation post (POA) network which covered the blind areas of both surveillance and antiaircraft artillery radars. In general, each post included an officer or NCO, and a soldier with communications equipment and overnight gear. Two networks were set up: one reported to CIC Malvinas and warned all the garrison and antiaircraft artillery, while the second one was local and reported to BAM C ndor.

Those posts were deployed out in the open, isolated, without ground protection and in extreme weather conditions. The British knew about their existence and would permanently look for them with neutralization purposes.

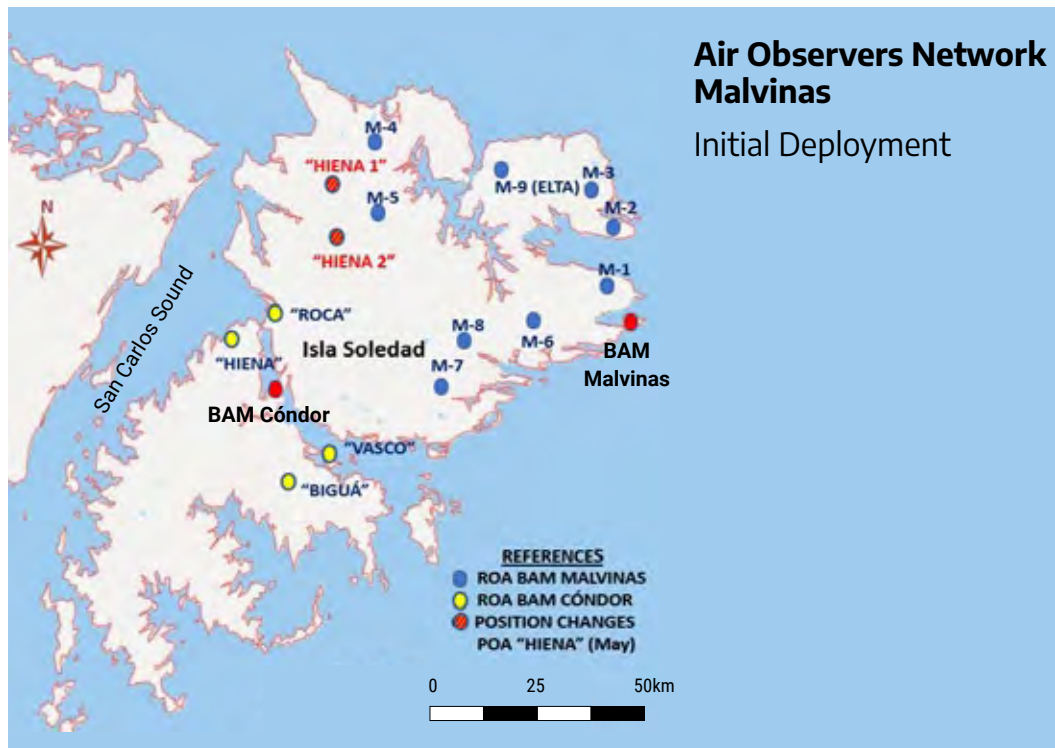
At BAM C ndor, four POAs were established, with call signs “Roca”, “Bigu ”, “Hiena” and “Vasco”, as well as the Information Filtering Center “Nido” where information was centralized. It was made up of Alf rez Jorge Bl zquez, Alf rez R mulo Sasone, Alf rez Mario Egurza, Alf rez Eduardo Daghero and Alf rez Andr s Gazzo. The previously mentioned officers worked together with soldiers of class 1963 Rub n Junco, Andr s Daniel Coronel, Jos  Luis Morales, Oscar C sar Vaca and Jos  Dionisio Sosa (who belonged to the 1st Air Brigade), and soldiers Sergio Bustos and Julio C sar Arroyo (from the EAM) who alternately occupied the positions.

Most civilian observers who arrived in Puerto Argentino on 20 April belonged to Radio Club C rdoba. In a week, nine POAs were set up in the vicinity of the airport and the city.

BAM Malvinas ROA reported directly to the CIC Malvinas and it was under the responsibility of Suboficial Mayor Alfredo Ocampo as NCO in charge, Suboficial Ayudante  lvaro Portal and Mr. Carlos Biasotto as assistants. The previously mentioned personnel alternated between operating the network Information Filtering Center and operating at the ROA Information Desk at the CIC.

The following civilian ham operators started moving on 23 April to different sites on the islands to mount the POA: M-1 Gustavo Lezcano and Carlos Lore; M-2 Enrique Font, Abel

¹²⁶ “We need to bring the ROA,” expression used by Comodoro VGM (R) Oscar Aranda Dura nna in a BANIM Commission conference, on 16 December 2020.



Geographical location of the two observer networks reporting to both Military Air Bases

Ramírez Capdevila and Roberto O. Paret; M-3 Sergio R. Ridelnik and Jorge Noguera; M-4 Rafael Escuti and Luis A. Monti; M-5 Suboficial Principal Manuel E. del Pino and Enrique A. Guevara; M-6 Erio O. Díaz and Raúl M. Bottin; M-7 Julio O. Rotea and Terciano Zampieri; M-8 José R. Consigli and Juan L. Olivier; and M-9 Norberto Poletti and Cabo Primero Jorge Lanza from the 9th Air Brigade, an ELTA radar operator.

As a security measure, each POA was assigned an armed soldier. With that purpose, the following soldiers of class 1963 were deployed from the 1st Air Brigade Defense Company of BAM Malvinas: Armando Schachtner, Guillermo Scortio, Albino Roque Almeida, Basilio de Sousa, Indalecio Rosas, Héctor O. Chazarreta, José E. Zirk, José Sosa, Guillermo U. García (who would die in Puerto Argentino) and Blas F. Frontini, ELTA radar operator assistant (from the 9th Air Brigade).

Five days and nine helicopter flights later, nine POA were set up; however, on the first night, a heavy storm broke and the M-4 personnel had to be rescued on the following day. The same happened with the M-6 personnel some nights later. In short, seven posts remained deployed.

Because of the urgency, the legal formalities necessary to make them join service had not been complied with. When hostilities began on 1 May, they became aware of the civilians' lack of legal protection. In the face of that situation, on 7 May Brigadier Castellano ordered replacing them with military personnel. With great effort, they were gradually replaced with officers and NCOs whose tasks ended as operations developed.

At the different stages of war, the following personnel would carry out observer duties: Primer Teniente Pedro Altamirano Bernahola and Primer Teniente Luis Edmundo París; Teniente Eduardo M. Túñez and Teniente Abelardo F. Alzogaray; Suboficial Auxiliar Roberto O. Alonso and Suboficial Auxiliar Ramón Campos; Cabo Principal Raúl H. Guerra, Jorge R. Irusta and Cabo Principal Jorge H. Capellino; Cabo Primero Omar A. Canesini and Cabo Primero Ricardo José González Ávalos; and Cabo César Roca, Cabo Carlos A. Funes, Cabo Roberto A. Pochetti, Cabo Oscar W. Doria and Cabo Carlos O. Gómez.



Air Control Equipment (ECA) vehicles belonging to the 1st Communications Group Institute - Photo courtesy of: G1CE Archives

Communications

On 29 March, the 1st Communications Group Institute (G1CE) of the Paraná 2nd Air Brigade received a request to carry out an operation in the south. Without a specific requirement, experience from previous exercises suggested taking a small amount of equipment. It would be for just one week, according to the requirement imprecision. Likewise, the number of personnel to go would be minimum: an officer and four NCOs. The assigned personnel were Primer Teniente Eduardo Zanardi, Suboficial Ayudante Ricardo Rodríguez, Cabo Primero Ricardo Álvarez and Cabo Primero Osvaldo Valdata, and Cabo Gerardo Romero.

They were deployed to the 9th Air Brigade, where they would be joined by Suboficial Mayor Francisco Barbe who was assigned to the Military Aviation School and had been in Malvinas for two years.

On 1 April, Brigadier Castellano informed the group about the islands recapturing and left Mayor Antonio González Iturbe in command, who would act as Chief of A-5 Communications at the Air Component Staff, and Mayor Mario Módica as assistant.

Communication networks were planned; the necessary items and equipment to be installed in the airport for operations security reasons were defined, as well as the minimum and most convenient links so as to provide a good operational service.

Having fulfilled the corresponding requirement, but lacking the elements, the group boarded the first C-130 which took off to Malvinas at 0515 –the TC-68, call sign LITRO 1.

After landing, the group devoted its effort to set up an HF radio-connection to establish a radio link with the mainland. With that purpose in mind, Cabo Primero Álvarez and Cabo Primero Valdata installed a dipole antenna on the airport roof, while the rest of the personnel were unpacking the equipment.

Equipment was set up and the first communication was made via the Air Military Mobile Service (Servicio Móvil Militar Aéreo, SMMA, a network of Air Force ground stations providing support to Argentine aircraft); contact was established with Comodoro Rivadavia station to report the uneventful arrival of personnel and materiel. After that communication, they went ahead with the established radio link plan, they greeted Cóndor (main station)

and Mendoza station, and the Military Aviation School among others, and congratulated them for the task and finally kept the link working round the clock.

Once communications with the mainland were established, coordinations were made to transfer four members of the Navy who had been wounded during the recapturing of the Malvinas. At first, they had been transferred via helicopter to a ship for first aid care, but they needed aeromedical evacuation to the mainland because they required surgery. Both diagnoses and the type of recommended surgery were submitted.

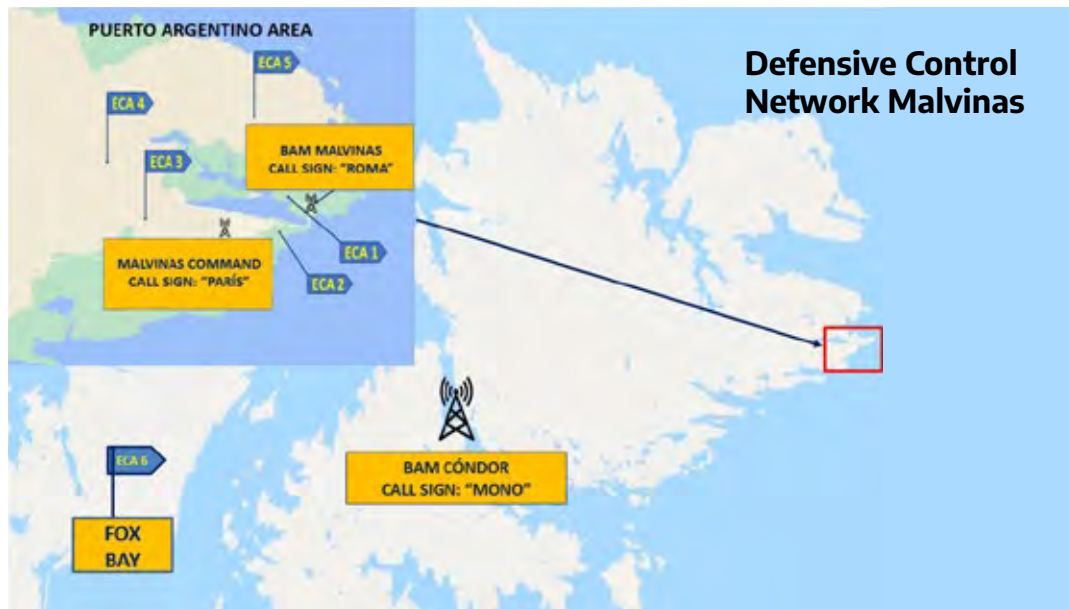
Likewise, arrivals and departures were coordinated, weather conditions, personnel and island situation and any other request made by the Argentine Air Force General Staff were reported.

Reinforcing members and equipment from the 1st Communications Group Institute, as well as communications personnel from other units and the Air Regions Command arrived on 12 April. Networks were dynamically set up according to what had been planned, and all the personnel put a great deal of effort into fulfilling all requirements.

Next to the Governor's house, the operational plant of Cables & Wireless company was located. Communications on the islands —both domestic and external— had been under the responsibility of said company for years. However, after the landing, such a sensitive area from the strategic point of view should be under the command of Argentine personnel. In the original planning, no provisions had been made in that respect, let alone defining who would be responsible for leading and operating the communications station. When General Menéndez took charge of government, the station responsibility was undertaken by Coronel Machinandiarena, who was appointed the islands Communications Secretary.

Mayor González Iturbe, an Argentine Air Force engineer specialized in communications, volunteered to put Cables & Wireless station in operation. After turning the equipment on and setting the ordered frequencies, he established the first contact with Buenos Aires International Center. The system used different and duplicated HF frequencies for both receiving and transmitting from the island to the mainland. Don Bosco ENTEL (Argentine National Telecommunications Company) receiving station and Pacheco relay station were used. Both plants were linked to Buenos Aires International Center, via microwaves, from which they were communicated —either by means of the national network or by satellite— with any part of the world.

Operational communications were established with HF equipment encrypted by frequency hopping (Grinel).





CIC Malvinas - Photo courtesy of: 1st Communications Group Institute

The first floor of an old big house, known as Stanley House, was occupied by the Joint Command. On the upper floor of the building, in addition to the Army Supporting Fire Coordination Center, Brigadier Castellano established the Command Post, the Air and Tactical Control System (SCAT) Operations Center, and the Information and Control Center (CIC) which were linked to the following points:

- Interception Station: TPS-43 radar operated by the VyCA Squadron.
- Surveillance Station: TPS-44 radar operated by the Army 601st GADA.
- Forward Surveillance Station: ELTA radar installed to the north of Gran Malvina Island.
- BAM Malvinas Air Observers Network: initially, it counted on nine Air Observation Posts (POA).
- Two Argentine Air Force Liaison Officers (OEFA): settled in the Army large units.
- Five Forward Air Control Officers (OCAA) per Infantry Regiment, deployed with an Air Control Equipment (ECA) and an NCO communications operator.
- BAM Malvinas Antiaircraft Artillery Command Post (PCAAa).
- Command and control point-to-point links

Capitán Eduardo Zanardi served as Chief of the Radio Communications Station and Suboficial Mayor Francisco Barbe, as assistant.

At BAM Cóndor, communications were established as from 9 April operating with HF-BLU¹²⁷ equipment installed by the 1st Communications Group. Once the base was set up, the Communications Service was left under the command of Capitán Héctor Eduardo Re and Suboficial Auxiliar Norberto Bazáez as NCO in charge.

In the case of communications networks, radio equipment was used as it offered more advantages than using wires. Whereas, in the case of the telephone network, a “point-to-point” system was used. Once the infrastructure works necessary for base operation

¹²⁷ HF-BLU High Frequency, single side band.

(Command Post, alternative medical service center) were finished, the installation of a telephone exchange was planned but the idea had to be abandoned when hostilities began on 1 May.

The Air Observers Network posts were equipped with HT-VHF/FM¹²⁸ for ham operators and a VHF/FM system for identical purposes.

The communications service was covered round the clock with two specialists per day who simultaneously operated several equipment: the HF-BLU, a link to Puerto Argentino; the telephones to connect with the control tower and with the Defense Company marksmen rifle section; and the VHF/FM to communicate with ROA posts and with Mercedes Task Force, the Army strength deployed around BAM Cóndor. That equipment was also used in BAM Malvinas to maintain contact with the Defense Company and the Antiaircraft Artillery for alarm spreading.

Medical Service operation

On 29 March, the Hospital Aeronáutico Central (Central Aeronautical Hospital, HAC) Director received a message appointing Capitán Luis M. Barusso, Cabo Principal Miguel A. Lucarelli, nurse —both of them assigned to the Medical Headquarter (DGS)— and two stretcher-bearers from the HAC, soldiers of class 63 Marcelo Naón and Gustavo Funes, to participate in an operation in the south of the country for ten days. On the next morning, they departed to Comodoro Rivadavia aboard a Boeing 707.

In a meeting on 31 March, Brigadier Castellano told them that on 1 April they would probably be transferred to Malvinas aboard two Hercules to participate in the recapturing of the islands. They were tasked with setting up a medical service post and assisting the Argentine Air Force strength. They were ordered to have absolute secrecy and avoid any type of conversation about the issue with third parties.

When Barusso was informed about the mission, he contacted the DGS and required the urgent submission of health sanitary materiel. Furthermore, and allowing for contingencies, a similar request was made to the Chief of Comodoro Rivadavia Medical Squadron.

On 2 April, the C-130H, registration mark TC-68, call sign LITRO 1, departed from Comodoro Rivadavia heading to Malvinas. Once on the islands, while the GOE guarded the unloading tasks and personnel movements, Capitán Barusso together with personnel under his command transformed the pre-boarding area into a first aid room for the three Services. At the beginning, sutures, wound care and treatment and general medical attention were carried out. Circumstances showed that organizing a joint hospital would be really hard; therefore, the urgent submission of the health care items stored in Comodoro Rivadavia was required, together with reinforcement personnel.

On 3 April, field mobilization equipment for fifteen and twenty-five people arrived. That materiel was used to fulfill the medical needs of Air Force, Army, and Navy personnel.

According to the islands recapturing plan provisions, the number of personnel in Malvinas would not be increased since, once the operation was consolidated, part of the personnel would be sent back to the mainland. Meanwhile, the Medical Service personnel remained twenty four hours in the airport executing window-sealing and blackout orders.

On 4 April, the diplomatic situation did not seem to be following the planned course, and everything suggested that the means of warfare would increase on the islands. General Menéndez had ordered not to use the British hospital to assist Argentine personnel. In consequence, Capitán Barusso asked Brigadier Castellano for authorization to contact —accompanied by the Teniente Primero Juan Carlos Isola of the Army— the hospital Director with the purpose of asking him for assistance to sterilize the surgery material.

¹²⁸ HT-VHF/FM: Handy Talkie which is operated in Very High Frequency/ modulated frequency.

The tone of the meeting, during which the British doctor reminded the Argentine military personnel of the Geneva Convention provisions relative to carrying firearms in medical units, convinced Capitán Barusso of the need to set up the Field Military Hospital (Hospital Militar Reubicable¹²⁹ HMR) and increase the number of professionals.

On 6 April, Brigadier Enrique Irrgang, Medical Service Director, and Vicecomodoro Roberto Costa, Chief of the HMR, traveled to Malvinas to control the medical service facilities. After assessing the situation, they concluded that it was necessary to install the hospital far from the airport. On 8 April, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command ordered the Medical Headquarter the transfer of the Field Military Hospital to Comodoro Rivadavia, as a precaution against a possible deployment to the islands.

On 9 April, the DGS increased BAM Malvinas military health service personnel and appointed doctors Mayor Fernando Espiniella, Mayor Juan Martín and Mayor Roberto Stvrtecky from the HAC, and Primer Teniente Fernando Miranda Abos (HACba¹³⁰ doctor) and Primer Teniente Alberto Fernández (HAC biochemist), as well as nurses Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos Ortiz and Cabo Principal Osvaldo Quiroga. All of them traveled on 10 April aboard an Hercules which flew from the 1st Air Brigade to Reconquista, loaded spare parts for the Pucará and headed to Malvinas.

Upon arrival, they met with Brigadier Castellano, and after receiving an updated picture of the situation, they inspected the terrain, buildings, health service facilities, tents, means of transport and communications. Mayor Espiniella visited Malvinas hospital and he inferred that it would not be very useful should warfighting actions arise.

Immediately afterwards, field planning started to allow the assistance of a larger number of wounded, and it required reinforcements of surgeons, traumatologists, anesthetists, nurses, stretcher-bearers, surgical material, and even ambulances. The short time available before the complete air and naval blockade that the British fleet would enforce by the end of April was the most serious obstacle to overcome so as to reach the stated objectives. On that same day, the planning including the requirements of personnel and material deemed necessary were submitted to the FAS. Following DGS orders, Capitán Barusso had returned to the mainland.

On 13 April, the Chief of the Helicopter Squadron asked Mayor Espiniella to be allotted a medical service for BAM Cóndor. In response to that request, Espiniella ordered Miranda Abos to travel to Darwin carrying health material, and to appoint three or four Air Force soldiers from that base as stretcher-bearers until reinforcements and material arrived from the mainland.

In the afternoon, after 1800, in a building the Argentine Army used as a hospital, a meeting with doctors from the three Branches of Service was held summoned by Mayor Fernando Espiniella, who thought it was necessary to count on a single follow-on echelon hospital for the three Services.

As there was a strong possibility of being left isolated from the mainland, the advisability of combining efforts and mounting a single hospital with the necessary medical and surgical complexity was understood. Every Service contributed with the equipment they counted on and, therefore, the Joint Military Hospital was established. The Army doctor Mayor Enrique M. Ceballos was appointed Director.

¹²⁹ The Argentine Air Force Field Military Hospital (HMR) consists of a group of interconnected modules which make up a complex medical care system. Containers constitute two hospitalization rooms with space for twenty beds each, two operating rooms which may be extended to other two rooms, an emergency room, an intensive care unit amounting to 50 beds for hospitalization, a dentist's office, a laboratory, a kitchen and bathrooms. Furthermore, some areas could be extended if necessary, using tents. As it is a modular system, it can be transported by air on C-130 Hercules aircraft.

¹³⁰ HACba, Córdoba Aeronautical Hospital.

On the 14th the blood bank under the responsibility of Primer Teniente Fernández was already working. Mayor Espiniella and his team started organizing aid stations in the proximity of Malvinas and Cóndor air bases, the enemy's primary objectives.

The arrival of personnel from the Military Aviation School to the BAM Cóndor, among which there were a doctor (Primer Teniente Carlos Beranek) and two nurses (Suboficial Auxiliar José Pérez and Cabo Principal Antonio Sosa), brought some peace to the airport health care group.

The Argentine Air Force Field Military Hospital was permanently settled in Comodoro Rivadavia and acted as a liaison with the personnel at the islands' Joint Military Hospital. In the latter, the aeromedical evacuation group was organized and the construction of an heliport in a neighboring area was decided.

On 18 April, both hospitals started operating. In the meantime, the need of personnel and material reinforcements, according to the submitted plan, was requested again from Puerto Argentino.

Mayor Espiniella went to Darwin to plan and organize the aid station with the approval of Brigadier Castellano and Vicecomodoro Pedrozo.

On the 19th, the Director of the DGS traveled to Malvinas in order to control the Joint Military Hospital organization and operation. On the 21st, a significant amount of health material arrived and was distributed among the aid stations (giving priority to Darwin) and the Hospital.

On the 22nd, the following personnel arrived in Puerto Argentino as health care reinforcements: Capitán Jorge A. Fernández Reuter and Capitán Rubén H. Loncharich Stemberger; Primer Teniente Gustavo Revol and Primer Teniente Antonio Borraccio; Suboficial Ayudante Carlos A. Rosales; Suboficial Auxiliar Eduardo V. García; Cabo Principal Carlos H. Saldivia and Cabo Principal José C. Albet; Cabo Primero Pedro R. Campos and Cabo Primero Jorge A. Fulleringer; civilian personnel Universitario I Raúl A. Morales and eight stretcher-bearer soldiers.

On the 23rd, the aid station tent installation and a close shelter construction started; furthermore, massive casualty treatment drills were carried out. On the 25th, Army soldiers suffering from viral hepatitis were evacuated to the mainland. On the 26th, the Joint Military Hospital surgery rooms, laboratory, blood bank, and x-ray room were finished. Argentine Air Force civilian personnel coming from the mainland installed the sterilization and autoclaving equipment in the hospital.

In the subsequent days, the operation of the airport aid station (PUSO) was planned with 24-hour shifts (two doctors, three nurses and four stretcher-bearers). The aid stations and the Joint Military Hospital were in full operational capacity.

Other air assets in the Malvinas Garrison

On 24 April, a Navy MB-339 Aeromacchi section, commanded by Capitán de Corbeta Carlos Molteni, and a T-34C-1 Turbo Mentor section under the command of Teniente de Navío Pereyra Dozo, landed at BAM Malvinas and remained there until the end of the conflict.

On 29 April, the two T-34C-1 based on BAM Malvinas deployed to Naval Air Station (EAN) Calderón¹³¹, on Borbón island, followed by other two Turbo Mentor from BAN Río Grande under the command of Teniente de Fragata Batllori; therefore, four aircraft were added to EAN Calderón.

Moreover, on that same day, two other Navy MB-339 Aeromacchi landed at BAM Malvinas therefore completing a flight of four training jets with strike capability. When the Flight

¹³¹ The original name was EAN Borbón, and its call sign was "Calderón". Because of usage, it was finally known as EAN Calderón.

Commander arrived, he stated he was under orders of the Argentine Navy Aviation Command and refused to fulfill the reconnaissance tasks instructed by the Air Component Command. That controversy was not accepted. Once it was hierarchically clarified, the responsibility and coordination of the competent authority was observed, and the Chief of BAM Malvinas kept the duly granted powers and responsibilities.

Likewise, two Short Skyvan aircraft belonging to the Argentine Coast Guard, registration marks PA-50 and PA-54, were allocated, as well as a SA-330 Puma helicopter, registration mark PA-12.

In turn, the Argentine Army deployed the 601st Combat Aviation Battalion that until 1 May counted on nineteen helicopters including UH-1H, SA-330 Puma, Agusta A-109 and CH-47 Chinook. The Battalion was made up of two assault helicopter companies that would operate in the vicinity of Mount Kent.

Cóndor Military Air Base

While looking for a suitable site to establish a field airdrome, Mayor Miguel Navarro, Chief of Pucará Squadron, and Capitán Roberto Vila performed reconnaissance tasks over the rudimentary runways used by civilian aircraft, most of which belonged to FIGAS airline, flying in Malvinas. They were located in Fox Bay, in San Carlos settlement, in Elefante Marino Bay on Borbón island and in Prado del Ganso settlement, the second most significant town situated on Darwin isthmus in the center of Soledad Island. Only the latter runway showed better operational conditions since it could apparently bear aircraft weight, though with some limitations. For the same reason, Vicecomodoro Roberto Manuel Gamén and Primer Teniente Luis París had flown over the same sites operating the former governor's BN-2 Islander. As from 9 April, Primer Teniente Ernesto Basilio and an NCO from the 1st Communications Group Institute (GICE) with an HF equipment were operating at Prado del Ganso school or Darwin School House (DSH), settlement of Company C of the 25th Infantry Regiment.

On 4 April, the place had been named Base Militar Santiago (Santiago Military Base) in honor of Teniente Primero Carlos Esteban's son, Chief of the Army unit which took charge of the base. Some days later, upon learning that Argentine Air Force helicopters would operate there, it was renamed Helipuerto Santiago (Santiago Heliport).

On 10 April, Vicecomodoro Wilson Rosier Pedrozo was summoned to the Air Operations Command at the Cóndor Building, where he was assigned the task of establishing a Military Air Base in Malvinas, and Vicecomodoro Oscar Vera Mántaras was appointed future Chief of Operations. On the following day, both officers –with the plan of deploying units from the interior of the country which would make up the different commands and assets allocated to the future base– departed to the Argentine Air Force Southern Command in Comodoro Rivadavia in order to receive more tactical information.

On 13 April, Vicecomodoro Pedrozo and Vicecomodoro Vera Mántaras arrived at BAM Malvinas on different flights from Comodoro Rivadavia, accompanied by Mayor Raúl Zaporta, who was appointed Chief of the future Base Squadron, and by hundreds of officers, NCOs and soldiers, most of them from Córdoba Air Garrison (EAM, ESFA and FMA), so that the new unit could immediately start operations.

Brigadier Luis Castellano, Malvinas Air Component Commander, received the newly-arrived senior officers and briefed them, through his Staff, on the updated and detailed situational analysis of the islands operational environment. He also ordered them to occupy the assigned area on Darwin isthmus.

The task involved setting up an air base to start operating immediately so as to perform and support Pucará Airmobile Squadron combat air operations, providing ground and anti-aircraft defense. Besides, the garrison would be allocated the Argentine Air Force helicopters operating in Malvinas, two Chinook CH-47 and two Bell 212.



Formation at BAM Cóndor on 29 April

Photo courtesy of:
Brig. VGM (R) Daghero

The creation of an alternative or redeployment base was established on the Outline Plan 1/82 “S”, signed by the South Atlantic Theater of Operations Commander, Vicealmirante Juan José Lombardo in Puerto Belgrano on 12 April. The base location had not been specified, which gave Malvinas Air Component Commander considerable leeway. As the Air Base did not have an identification name, Vicecomodoro Wilson Pedrozo, the appointed Chief, did not hesitate to name it Cóndor, since it was his call sign.

When dawn broke on Wednesday 14, personnel started to arrive at Prado del Ganso by heli-carrier means with the Bell 212 and CH-47, since moving by land was impossible not only because of the lack of vehicles, but also due to the bad conditions of the road connecting Puerto Argentino with Prado del Ganso.

The first flights arrived carrying the staff officers and some security and communications elements. They were welcomed by Company C of the 25th Infantry Regiment Commander and Primer Teniente Basilio.

The base was officially inaugurated on 15 April in Darwin, Prado del Ganso, and organized as follows:

- Base Commander, Vicecomodoro Wilson R. Pedrozo.
- Chief of Operations and Base Second-in-Command, Vicecomodoro Oscar Vera Mántaras.
- Base Squadron. Chief, Mayor Jorge R. Zaporta, who was in charge of:
 - Antiaircraft defense, a battery with six 20 mm Rheinmetall cannons, with an Argentine Air Force close surveillance Elta radar under the command of Alférez Arnaldo Fabre and, as from 12 April, of Teniente Darío A. Valazza; in addition to a battery with 35 mm Oerlikon cannons belonging to the Army, under the command of Subteniente Claudio O. Braghini. On 9 May, they would be reinforced with two SAM-7 Strela¹³² portable missile launchers.
 - Defense and Security Company. Chief, Primer Teniente Ricardo A. Sifón with a strength of 110 soldiers, divided into two sections of 55 marksmen each commanded by Teniente Darío Rosas and Teniente Osvaldo Bustillo respectively.
 - Services Section, under the command of Primer Teniente Edgardo Serra with a strength of 30 soldiers.
 - Communications and Air Observers Network. Chief, Capitán Héctor E. Re. POA members: Alférez Jorge A. Blázquez, Alférez Rómulo A. Sasone, Alférez Mario E. Egurza, Alférez Eduardo J. Daghero and Alférez Andrés A. Gazzo.
 - Military Health Service – Aid Station (PUSO). Chief, Primer Teniente Fernando

¹³² Ecuador provided 35 mm munitions; and Peru, portable launchers and SAM-7 missiles.

Miranda Abos, assistant Primer Teniente Carlos R. Beranek.

- Intelligence Section. Chief, Primer Teniente José E. Basilio.
- Pucará Squadron, with twelve IA-58 (four aircraft deployed on 2 April; the remaining eight aircraft, on 8 April). Chief, Mayor Miguel M. Navarro.
- Helicopter Squadron, with two CH-47 Chinook and two Bell 212. Chief, Mayor Oscar Pose Ortiz de Rozas.

Pucará Squadron at BAM Cónдор

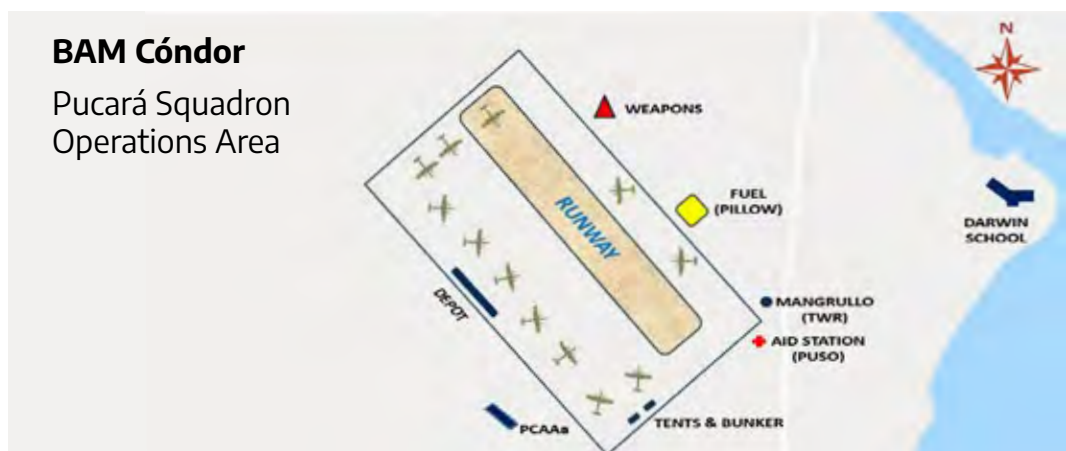
Air activity started on 24 April. On that day at 1600, the IA-58 registration mark A-529, commanded by Capitán Roberto Vila and Mayor Miguel Navarro, took off from BAM Malvinas to check the future BAM Cónдор runway operational efficiency. The uneventful flight returned at 1730.

Once the Base had been inaugurated in Darwin isthmus on 25 April, Mayor Navarro departed to Río Gallegos in order to command the crossing of the two Pucará flights that would complete the squadron aircraft. The operation was carried out on 26 April, supported by a Fokker F-27.

The first flight was made up of Mayor Miguel M. Navarro (A-528) and Teniente Miguel Giménez (A-517), Teniente Daniel Jukic (A-502), Teniente Hernán R. Calderón and Teniente Roberto Címbaro (A-520). The second one was made up of Teniente Francisco M. Navarro (A-509) and Teniente Héctor S. Furiós (A-506), Teniente Rafael J. Hernández (A-513) and Teniente Néstor F. Brest (A-527).

Mayor Navarro's A-528 had problems with the cockpit locking system, and that was the reason why the pilot returned to Río Gallegos in the company of Teniente Giménez on the A-517. Once issues had been settled, on 27 April at 1100 they took off and arrived in BAM Malvinas at 1300, thus completing the aircraft of Malvinas Joint Garrison Pucará Airmobile Squadron. BAM Santa Cruz would be used as a recovery base throughout the conflict.

On 29 April at 0900, the first IA-58 Pucará –out of the twelve aircraft– IA-58 Pucará from BAM Malvinas, armed with four LAU-60 rocket launchers per aircraft. At approximately 1030, BAM Cónдор Commander ordered the formation of all base members in front of the flagpole located to the left of the corrugated metal shed serving as control tower, fire-fighting service and IA-58 mobile operational control. After Vicecomodoro Pedrozo had delivered his speech, the national flag was raised and the national anthem was sung; thus, the BAM Cónдор was operationally established with its men and assets.



Order to deploy to BAM C ndor:

Crew: Mayor Miguel M. Navarro (A-527), Capit n Jorge Alberto Ben tez (A-552), Capit n Roberto Vila (A-528), Capit n Ricardo Gr nert (A-509), Primer Teniente Francisco M. Navarro (A-520), Teniente Miguel A. Cruzado (A-523), Teniente Rafael J. Hern ndez (A-502), Teniente Alcides Russo (A-513), Teniente N stor F. Brest (A-556), Teniente H ctor S. Furios (A-517), Teniente Miguel Gim nez (A-506) and Teniente Hern n Calder n (A-529).

On 30 April at 1200, under the control of the Malvinas Information and Control Center, a reconnaissance in force was carried out from BAM C ndor to the north, up to 280 km offshore.

Frag-O w/o. no. (Malvinas Air Component). Aircraft: two IA-58. Call sign: NAHUEL. Weapon: armed with 76 2.75-inch FFAR rockets, machine guns and cannons. Mission: reconnaissance in force. Crew: Capit n Roberto Vila (A-528) and Teniente H ctor S. Furios (A-502). They departed from Darwin at 1200. Once the task was accomplished, they landed at 1400 in BAM Malvinas.

During taxiing, the A-528 nose wheel retracted. The failure caused the first material loss of the squadron. Other aircraft would encounter that same problem since the nose gear bushing would rust due to the salty environment, preventing the action of the support nose landing gear lock. The A-528 would be taken to the runway side to be used as a decoy and would not fly again during the conflict. Teniente Furios performed a second flight on that same day; he departed on the A-502 at 1630 and landed in BAM C ndor at 1730.

On that same 30 April, Mayor Carlos Tomba, Primer Teniente Ricardo Fasani, Teniente Carlos Morales and Alf rez Rub n Sassone and Alf rez Jos  Pontecorvo arrived at BAM C ndor. In April, the Pucar  Squadron conducted 105 sorties.

* * *

In summary

The deployment of Argentine Air Force assets in Malvinas was an example of effort and organization, an achievement accomplished by the units' training which involved carrying out yearly air operations with operating systems at bases and aerodromes in Patagonia. Those exercises enabled them to gain appropriate experience, mainly as regards the Airmobile Squadron deployment.

In April 1982, two military air bases were established. One at Stanley airport, with a reduced infrastructure and severe limitations for air operation, which became the focal point of logistics and personnel reception through the significant effort the airlift demanded. An anti-aircraft defense network was set up at the base; it was made up of tube and missile weapons belonging to the Argentine Air Force itself and the Army, which would protect the base against air raids. Both the runway and the elements detached for air operation kept working and were maintained operational from that same deployment day until the last day of the conflict, in spite of the British siege.

BAM C ndor, on Darwin isthmus, was started from scratch, over a field quite suitable for light aircraft landings and take-offs. Pucar  and Helicopter Squadrons would operate from there. All the logistical assets necessary to mount a field airdrome (technical support, ordnance, fuel, anti-aircraft artillery, communications, rationing) had to be exclusively transported by means of helicopters, in addition to the operational, security and services personnel in its entirety.

In relation to air activity, Pucar  and Helicopter Squadrons (Chinook and Bell 212), worked around the clock during the whole month of April. The rotary wings addressed numerous



Base Aérea Militar Cóndor - Painting by Cap. VGM (reservist) Exequiel Martínez

personnel and materiel transport needs of both the Argentine Air Force and the Army. Also, ROA posts from each air base were distributed and only accessed by air. Finally, helicopters were based at BAM Cóndor, relatively located in the island's central geographical area, which would enable search and rescue flights with greater access towards different points.

Simultaneously, the Pucará Squadron familiarized itself with the terrain, recognizing obstructions for flying over the islands, performed weapon tests and adjustments, and standardized normal and emergency procedures.

Precautions had to be taken with both weapon systems because of harsh weather conditions during flights (low ceilings, extreme winds, reduced visibility) and, also, on the ground at BAM Cóndor site, since the aircraft had no protection or shelters there and were exposed to premature wear which could hinder their operation.

Besides the organization of the Staff of the Air Component with all its personnel, the Malvinas Air Defense Sector was swiftly implemented and enabled real-time detection of coastal air and sea movement by means of VyCA Squadron TPS-43 radar. Range tests were performed in all sectors, and blind areas due to elevations were determined; the information collected was centralized at CIC Malvinas, which would give the corresponding alarms. Furthermore, in order to compensate for the vulnerable sectors of radar vision, two air observation networks were deployed –one for BAM Malvinas and the other for BAM Cóndor; the latter fulfilled the early warning role since that base did not count on a surveillance radar.

In twenty seven days, the Argentine Air Force was fully operational in Malvinas, thanks to both its personnel effort and the support received from the mainland. Although countless deficiencies arose, they were solved with wit and a tremendous spirit of service as days went by.

Chapter 7

Air Operations in April



Airlift

During D-day and D+1 (2 and 3 April) thirty-three tasks were carried out (fifteen of them were conducted using the C-130H aircraft and one using the KC-130), by which Army and Air Force requirements were fulfilled. After recapturing the Islands on D-day, the Air Assault phase of Operation Aries 82 was completed and the Sustainment phase started.

On 6 April, the Argentine Air Force Chief of Staff, reporting to the Commander-in-Chief, issued aeronautical message number AS 3366 ordering the reactivation of the Air Transport Command (CAT) constituted by 1st Air Brigade personnel.

With the objective of reinforcing assets in Malvinas to dissuade the British from responding, the CAT would carry out several troop transport and supply missions to Puerto Argentino: this would be referred to as Airlift.¹³³ For the Sustainment phase, two C-130H aircraft and two F-28s allocated to the Air Transport Component (CTA) of the Argentine Air Force Southern Command (FAS) were ordered to assemble in Comodoro Rivadavia. The four aircraft had the capability to transport a total strength of 350 men or, otherwise, a cargo of 45/50 tons every time.

Unlike surface (sea or land) means of transport, air transport offers the advantages of speed, versatility, and flexibility; besides, it requires less infrastructure and logistic support. The disadvantage, however, is that it has less volume and less tonnage capacity. Such weakness, well known to an enemy like the UK, led to the first aggressive action: on 7 April, they established an Exclusion Zone covering a 200 miles radius (about 370 km from the geographic center of the Malvinas archipelago) in the Argentine territorial sea, effective as from 12 April.

On the same 7 April, when the Military Junta decided to organize the Armed Forces to reinforce the defense of the Malvinas and South Atlantic Islands, the CAT centralized the Argentine Strategic Air Command (CAE) and FAS requirements. In turn, the Joint Staff of the Argentine Armed Forces (EMC) centralized the Army and Navy requirements, determined the priorities and decided the transportation means (sea or air) to meet them. The 1st Air Brigade Operations Department became the headquarters of the Air Transport Command (CAT).

For the reinforcement tasks, trunk routes were established to transport personnel and materiel from Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Resistencia, Paraná and Reconquista to Comodoro Rivadavia, Río Gallegos and other Patagonian air bases (which would later on be transferred to Malvinas). Five B-707s (three from the Air Force and two from Aerolíneas Argentinas), two C-130Hs, one F-28, and three F-27s were employed for such purposes.

For flights covering secondary routes (on the mainland and within the Southern Theater of Operations, TOS), C-130H, F-28, F-27 and G-II aircraft were used; meanwhile, the above-mentioned CTA was in operation to carry out the Airlift. Later on, the CTA would become part of the FAS A-3 Operations Department in Comodoro Rivadavia.

The aircraft covering secondary routes assembled personnel, weapons, equipment and spare parts in Comodoro Rivadavia. From there, they were embarked and transported to the bases settled at the airfields of San Julián (A-4C and M-5 Dagger), Santa Cruz (IA-58 Pucará), Río Gallegos (A-4B and M-III EA), Río Grande (M-5 Dagger), and Trelew (BMK-62/64 Canberra).

¹³³ The term "Airlift" refers to the supply flights (transport of supplies and services in general, except personnel) connecting places which are otherwise impossible or very difficult to reach by other surface transport means (sea or land) due to geographical or operational reasons. RUBÉN OSCAR PALAZZI, *Puente Aéreo a Malvinas*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones Aeroespacio, 1997, page 23.



C-130H despegando en la BAM Malvinas durante el Puente Aéreo – BANIM DEH-FAA

Air transport efforts entailed unforeseen scales and characteristics both for crew members and aircraft maintenance. In addition to the Air Force flights, on 7 April, a Navy strength of 370 men and 140 tons of cargo were transported between Espora and Malvinas on board two C-130H aircraft which flew two days in a row. On 8 April, twenty-nine C-130H flights transported the 601st Antiaircraft Defense Artillery Group (GADA) from Mar del Plata to Malvinas. Thus, the CAT requested it be allocated commercial aircraft under coordination authority.

On 11 April, one Austral Líneas Aéreas BAC-1-11 aircraft (registration mark LV-OAX) and two Aerolíneas Argentinas B-737 Advance aircraft (registration marks LV-JTD and LV-LEB) were added to the Airlift. Cabin seats, carpets and cabin lining were removed from the aircraft in record time, so as to reduce their basic empty weight. At the same time, the Operations Management, through the Department of Engineering and Operational Standards, determined the feasibility of transporting cargo of up to 10 tons to Puerto Argentino's 1,250-meter runway. Boeing 737 line management appointed twenty captains to fly in pairs and carry out the crossings. Aerolíneas Argentinas Operations Manager, retired Vicecomodoro Federico Pockorny, took on the coordination tasks of all those flights and stayed more than a week in Puerto Argentino.

Likewise, Aerolíneas Argentinas and Austral aircraft, which transported mainly Army troops, started using the Río Gallegos airfield as a point of departure towards Malvinas. This meant lower fuel consumption as the airfield was located 185 km closer to the Islands.

However, that was not the only contribution of Aerolíneas Argentinas commercial aircraft and pilots to the war effort. Argentina flag carrier Boeing 707 regular fleet made two strategic and logistic flights to Israel in April. The first flight was made between 7 and 9 April, and the itinerary included stopovers in Ezeiza, Las Palmas, Tel Aviv, Las Palmas, and El Palomar. The second flight was made between 9 and 12 April, and included stopovers in Ezeiza, Las Palmas, Tel Aviv, Las Palmas, Río de Janeiro, and El Palomar.

In order to speed up decision-making in view of the ever the increasing requirements to reinforce the Comodoro Rivadavia and Río Gallegos Airlift to Malvinas, the CAT contributed to setting up the following units in the 9th Air Brigade:

- An Air Transport Control Element (ECTA) reporting to the A-3 Operations Department of the Argentine Air Force Southern Command (FAS) Staff; as an Air Transport Operational Section (SOTA), led by Mayor Horacio Oréface and Mayor Hugo César Chunco, it was planned as an Air Transport Component and organized with an Air Transport Operations Post (POTA) operating around-the-clock.
- An Air Cargo Terminal (TAC) that incorporated the 9th Air Brigade suitable assets, led by Primer Teniente Raúl Eduardo Federici.
- A technical support echelon.

On the afternoon of 14 April, the F-28, registration mark TC-53, overran the runway when it attempted to land in Malvinas under severe crosswind conditions, and its left tire burst and the nose gear broke. The aircraft finally stopped 50 meters away from the threshold, with its tail raised. The crew included Vicecomodoro Héctor Pupek and Vicecomodoro Pascual Soler, Cabo Principal Jorge Gamba and Suboficial Mayor Antonio Pereyra.

Considering the location where it had stopped, the TC-53 aircraft posed such a danger that night operations were suspended. Although the 1st Construction Group personnel were not specialists, they managed to raise the nose by making people climb on the tail. Afterwards, they placed two mounts in place of the missing nose wheel and, once the fuselage was secured, they used road machines to tow the aircraft away from the danger zone. As it was impossible to repair it, 1st Technical Group specialists from the 1st Air Brigade (Teniente Gustavo Salas Martínez, Suboficial Principal Orlando Santiago; and civilian personnel Antonio Batista; Alberto Roncheri; Pedro Dellagiovana and Marcelo Arigo) welded the nose landing gear in the “gear down” position. The TC-53 aircraft manned by Comodoro Jorge Martínez, 1st Transport Group leader, Capitán Agustín Miguez, and Suboficial Principal Orlando Santiago and Suboficial Principal Juan Muñoz, was flown to Comodoro Rivadavia on 22 April, with the landing gear in the “gear down” position. It was the only transport aircraft involved in an accident during the conflict.

On 15 April, three days after the British naval blockade was in effect, the Military Committee permanently suspended sea transportation. Only air transportation remained to supply the islands, in spite of the blockade imposed from 17 April. From then on, the use of cargo aircraft to fulfill troops’ and means of warfare requirements would become more difficult. From 18 April until the end of the conflict, the CAT would be responsible for arranging all air transportation to Malvinas.

One of the obstacles encountered by supply flights was the limited BAM Malvinas arrival capacity; so aircraft arrivals and departures were staggered and, thus, an adequate in-and-out traffic flow was established. Consequently, from 18 April, all cargo transport was carried out only by C-130H aircraft, and transfers carried out by F-27s and F-28s cargo aircraft were suspended to avoid the congestion of the Malvinas airport platform.

On 22 April, Teniente General Leopoldo Galtieri, then President of Argentina, visited Malvinas and ordered the deployment of the 3rd Infantry Brigade together with its fire support, transport and combat support elements to occupy Soledad Island. Initially, heavy equipment and supplies would be transported aboard the ELMA *Ciudad de Córdoba* ship, but the British issued a naval blockade threat during the voyage, and the ship docked at Puerto Deseado. During the docking maneuvers, the ship collided against the quay damaging its structure, and preventing it from sailing.

Due to the setback, the Brigade was to be transported by air. The total cargo would imply hundreds of C-130H flights between Puerto Deseado and Malvinas, without considering the extremely large-sized elements which were impossible to ship. Such transportation would have taken a whole week of non-stop operations with an average of fourteen flights per day made by five or six C-130H aircraft. Apart from that, the Puerto Deseado runway was not suitable for takeoffs at heavy weight.



B-737 de Aerolíneas Argentinas aterrizado en la BAM Malvinas - Gentileza: BANIM DEH-FAA

Hence, though some crossings were made from that airfield, most materiel was transported to Comodoro Rivadavia by land and later to Malvinas by air; consequently, time was lost and risks increased. The plates to extend the Puerto Argentino runway remained on the ship, together with the road machinery, weapons and vehicles. All of these were extremely necessary.

While the landing of passengers at the Malvinas airport was a matter of minutes, the time to unload materiel depended on the elements transported and on whether pallets were used. In this way, one day there were two C-130H and two F-28 aircraft on the platform, another Hercules was on the access road, while passengers descended from a B-737 on the runway. A great effort was put in adjusting the time of arrival to avoid congestion in the airport area.

All of the above revealed not only the flawed assumption that Great Britain would not try to use the force but also the lack of foresight to transport such a large number of passengers and cargo by air to a small airport affected by the usual adverse weather conditions of the area.

Another problem related to, but not directly derived from, air transport was the distribution of troops and cargo after arriving at Malvinas, which was the responsibility of each Armed Force. Nevertheless, the Air Force helicopters on the Islands (two CH-47 Chinook and two Bell 212) transported the Army's assets from Puerto Argentino to other deployment positions.

The early morning of April 29 started with a red alert in Malvinas. In spite of that, fourteen flights (six C-130H and eight F-28 aircraft) transported 158 cargo tons and 126 passengers. Operations finished at 1700 with a similar alert. The Airlift, which had started four weeks before, ended on that day.

The following statistics were prepared using the flight reports, cargo and passengers' manifests kept in the archives of the 1st Air Brigade and the Argentine Air Force Directorate for Historical Studies:

- **From 2 to 29 April**, 3,509 hours were flown, and 20,233 passengers and 6,367 tons of cargo were transported between the Interior Zone (IZ) and the Southern Theater of Air Operations, including Malvinas. Up to this date, the Air Force transport aircraft had transported to Malvinas 9,215 passengers and 5,008 tons of cargo in 1,929 flight hours.
- **From 11 to 27 April, Aerolíneas Argentinas and Austral:** B-737 aircraft, call signs Petrel 8 and Petrel 9, flew 89 out of the 92 planned flights, carrying 6,500 passengers and 270 tons of cargo from Río Gallegos and Comodoro Rivadavia to Malvinas, according to the companies' records.

The enormous effort put in the Airlift, transporting materiel and thousands of troops to Malvinas and the southern bases, mobilized the entire Air Force transport aviation fleet with the valuable contribution of Argentina's flag carrier together with all its support personnel. Annex 2 includes a list of transport aviation personnel who participated in the Airlift.

Searching for the British fleet

On the same 2 April, the United Kingdom decided to recapture the Islands by force and, instead of negotiating with Argentina as per UN Resolution 502, it took very aggressive and intimidating actions, such as the successive blockades and the concentration of forces on Ascension Island.

From then on, the Argentine Air Force started a progressive escalation of air operations, firstly, to locate and follow the advance of the invading fleet and then, if possible, to execute a surprise air attack on a naval target.

To that effect, on 7 April a joint reconnaissance and exploration center was created at the Comandante Espora Naval Air Base (BAN), together with the Argentine Navy. Regardless of their different doctrines, lack of joint operational standards and regulations, from the start of operations both armed forces cooperated with each other and carried out actions coordinated at the highest level of operational leadership.

From 2 April, the Hercules C-130s carried out long-range reconnaissance and exploration (ERL) tasks, together with the Navy's SP-2H Neptune aircraft. On that day, they took advantage of the flights involved in the recapture of the Islands to identify the ships navigating around the area and record their positions.

On 3 April, the first specific mission of this type was performed.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-70. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis Litrenta Carracedo, Vicecomodoro Enrique Pessana and Vicecomodoro Roberto Tribiani; retired Suboficial Mayor Salvador Giliberto; Cabo Principal Jorge Contigiani; retired Suboficial Mayor Guillermo Aguirre; Suboficial Ayudante Sergio Tulián and Suboficial Ayudante Luis Sarmiento; and Suboficial Principal Roberto Caravaca. Take-off: BAM Río Gallegos, 0810. The aircraft sighted several ships, including an oil tanker, and returned at 1620.

While the main air transport flights and the Airlift continued on a regular basis, the first operational sighting took place on 11 April:

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-69. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Vicecomodoro Enrique Pessana; Primer Teniente Gerardo Vaccaro; Mayor Eduardo Gómez; Cabo Principal Mario Cemino, Cabo Principal Mario Rulli and Cabo Principal Jorge Capellino; Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar Ardizzoni and Suboficial Auxiliar Manuel Lombino; and Suboficial Principal Juan Luján. Take-off: BAN Comandante Espora, 0900. Landing: El Palomar 1st Air Brigade, 2140. During the flight, the crew sighted a submarine navigating on the surface at coordinates 40°10'S/58°46'W (about 170 km south of Necochea). They descended so as to identify it, but the submarine dived.

The next day, on 12 April, the TC-70 aircraft relieved the TC-69 and continued with the reconnaissance and exploration tasks.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-70. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis Litrenta Carracedo, Capitán Guillermo Destéfanis, Mayor Francisco Mensi, Cabo Principal Juan D. Perón and Cabo Principal Juan Tello, Suboficial Auxiliar Hugo González, Suboficial Principal Andrés Manyszyn, and Cabo Primero Eduardo Barrionuevo and Cabo Primero Marcos Quiroga. Take-off: El Palomar, 1140. Landing: BAN Comandante Espora, 2130. Flight

time: approximately ten hours. At coordinates 42°30'S/55°01'W (about 820 km east of Puerto Madryn), the crew spotted the wake of a periscope while navigating at an estimated speed of five knots.

Just as the submarine was sighted by the TC-69 the previous day, the CAE received the news that an Aerolíneas Argentinas aircraft had observed an aircraft carrier and a frigate navigating south of Morocco. Such was the farthest enemy fleet elements were detected by an Argentine aircraft.

This was not the only piece of data supplied by commercial aircraft. British counterintelligence services were also aware of Argentine airlines activities and, apparently, feared that they were more than just simple observations. When the SS *Atlantic Conveyor* navigated towards the exclusion zone, one of the Sea Harriers on board was on standby with all its weapons ready to respond to an Argentine attack which might be launched based on such information.

On 14 April, the Argentine Navy SP-2H Neptune, surveilling the south Atlantic area up to the Argentine Antarctic Sector border, went out of service and was replaced by a C-130 aircraft. Attempts were made to locate the HMS *Exeter*, Type 42 destroyer, and the *Tidepool* oil tanker allegedly sailing on that area, en route towards South Georgia Island, passing through Cape Horn.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-30. Registration mark: TC-70. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis Litrenta Carracedo, Capitán Guillermo Destéfanis, Mayor Francisco Mensi, Cabo Principal Juan D. Perón and Cabo Principal Juan Tello, Suboficial Auxiliar Hugo González, Suboficial Principal Andrés Manyszyn, and Cabo Primero Eduardo Barrionuevo and Cabo Primero Marcos Quiroga (the same crew that had spotted the submarine periscope on 12 April). Take-off: BAN Comandante Espora, 1245. The aircraft returned at 2400 after repeatedly flying over the 56th parallel south without locating the ships.

On 18 April, the TC-70 aircraft conducted another thirteen-hour search in the same area, with identical results.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-70. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Vicecomodoro Enrique Pessana, Capitán Roberto Perroto, Primer Teniente Gerardo Vaccaro, Mayor Eduardo Gómez, Cabo Principal Mario Cemino and Cabo Principal Francisco Martínez, Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar Ardizzoni and Suboficial Auxiliar Mario Amengual, Suboficial Principal Roberto Caravaca, Suboficial Ayudante Luis Sarmiento and Cabo Juan Fumez. Take-off: BAN Comandante Espora, 0505. The aircraft returned at 1805.

On 20 April, the crew explored the northeast area of Malvinas and sighted a British destroyer.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-70. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Vicecomodoro Enrique Pessana, Capitán Roberto Perroto, Primer Teniente Gerardo Vaccaro, Mayor Eduardo Gómez, Cabo Principal Mario Cemino and Cabo Principal Francisco Martínez, Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar Ardizzoni and Suboficial Auxiliar Mario Amengual, Suboficial Principal Roberto Caravaca, Suboficial Ayudante Luis Sarmiento and Cabo Juan Fumez. The aircraft operated from BAN Comandante Espora. Flight time: 14 hours.

First sightings of the fleet

On 21 April, Boeing B-707 aircraft were added to the long-range reconnaissance and exploration tasks under orders of the CAE.

Frag-O ERL no. 01 (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-91. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Vicecomodoro Horacio Genolet,

Vicecomodoro Marcelo Conte, Vicecomodoro Jorge Riccardini, Vicecomodoro Joaquín Argüelles Benet and Vicecomodoro Francisco López; Suboficial Principal Andrés Hustey and Suboficial Principal Manuel Rivarola; and Suboficial Ayudante Narciso Zárate. Take-off: Ezeiza, 0500. Arrival: El Palomar, 1540.

The planning of the first mission included Ascension Island as starting point, and an estimated advance ratio of the fleet towards the south heading to Malvinas was calculated, at three different navigation speeds: 5, 10, and 17 knots.

About 600 miles (1,120 km) from Ascension Island, a parallel grid search was designed and the first flight was sent to the mean coordinates as a first attempt to intercept the fleet bearing; this was achieved at approximately 1000 on 21 April.¹³⁴

Before the operation, as the B-707 aircraft had no search elements other than monochrome Bendix weather radar operating with transponders, we drew on Atlantic crossings previous experiences. On several occasions during those flights, the radar was set to the mapping mode¹³⁵ and, by lowering the antenna a few degrees, for mere entertainment, it was possible to pick up echoes from regular sized ships. In fact, that was how the first and all subsequent contacts were detected, especially during night R&E missions. A few days later, a rudimentary procedure was designed to avoid being detected by ships' radars: we combined the operation of our own radars with the transponder. This was occasionally achieved. Navy personnel traveled as advisors during the first missions with the aim of identifying the type of vessels to be eventually observed; this proved useful since our knowledge on the matter was almost null.

We then became aware of the real extent of the sea to be explored and controlled whenever the 317 Task Force¹³⁶ advanced, undoubtedly, towards the South Atlantic. This huge area covered, in principle, a triangle formed by Ascension Island at its upper vertex, South Georgia and the Malvinas Islands at the other two vertices. The enclosed area of the triangle is approximately 1,289,600 nm², or about 2,385,760 km², to use a more familiar unit of measure. So as to get a better idea of the distances we are referring to, the sides of such triangle measure as follows: Ascension - South Georgia 3,000 nm (5,460 km), South Georgia - Malvinas Islands 804 nm (1,487 km), and Malvinas Islands - Ascension 3,400 nm (6,290 km).

This area was widened as the advance of the formation became less linear and more scattered. The long-range R&E missions had to make longer flights to meet its goals. The limits of the exploration area changed; the new coordinates were the ones reported by our own (FAA or ARA) intelligence departments, those obtained by the B-707 aircraft or by tracking certain naval units and other unrevealed sources. Thus, the exploration area was not limited to the above mentioned triangle, but it extended to wherever there were ships to be controlled or identified.

At exactly 0938, at coordinates 19°40'S/21°37'W (about 1,900 km east of Belo Horizonte, Brazil), the British war fleet was sighted for the first time heading towards the Malvinas Islands. It consisted of two aircraft carriers, three destroyers, five frigates and six support ships. Immediately, Argentine Navy and Air Force specialists photographed the vessels. This caused an immediate reaction. Just twelve minutes later, the Sea Harrier registration mark XZ-460 of the 800 Squadron armed with air-to-air missiles, piloted by Lt. Simon Hargreaves, flew next to the TC-91 aircraft. It remained in formation for a few minutes and, after confirming that it posed no threat and having photographed it, it returned to HMS *Hermes*.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ MARCELO AUGUSTO CONTE, "Exploración y Reconocimiento en el Conflicto del Atlántico Sur," in *Actas del III Congreso Internacional de Historia Aeronáutica Militar Argentina*, Buenos Aires, DEH-FAA, 2014.

¹³⁵ Radar mode that projects real surfaces images.

¹³⁶ 317 Joint Task Force.

¹³⁷ RODNEY BURDEN et al., *Falklands: The Air War*, London, Arms Armour Press, 1986, page 85.

From then on, the B-707s and Sea Harriers' encounters would become frequent. On the night of 21 April, the TC-92 aircraft relieved the TC-91.

Frag-O ERL no. 02 (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-92. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration over the Southern Atlantic. Crew: Vicecomodoro Otto Ritondale, Vicecomodoro Rubén Montenegro and Vicecomodoro Luis Castiella López; Mayor Armando Buirra, Suboficial Principal Armando Rosales and Suboficial Principal Ernesto Wagner, Suboficial Ayudante Diego Callejón, and Suboficial Mayor Aroldo Bonorino. Take-off: Ezeiza, 2150. Landing: 0820. On 22 April at 0145, the crew found the ships by electronic means; this time, they could not be seen through the darkness, but the radar pickup was accurate. Another Sea Harrier intercepted them and flew next to them about sixty meters away. After a few minutes, the aircraft returned to the site where the vessels were located, according to the onboard.

On the same day, the TC-91 made a second flight.

Frag-O ERL no. 03 (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-91. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration over the Southern Atlantic. Crew: Vicecomodoro Joaquín Argüelles Benet and Vicecomodoro Horacio Genolet, Mayor Juan Carlos Ossa, Suboficial Mayor José G. Nóbile, and Suboficial Principal Andrés Hustey, and Suboficial Principal José Ramos. They operated from El Palomar. The aircraft was intercepted by Sea Harriers at 1810.

23 April flight:

Frag-O ERL no. 04 (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-92. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration over the Southern Atlantic. Crew: Vicecomodoro Otto Ritondale and Vicecomodoro Luis Castiella López, Mayor Armando Buirra, and Mayor Walter Videla, Suboficial Principal Narciso Zárate and Suboficial Principal Ernesto Wagner, Suboficial Ayudante Diego Callejón. They operated from Ezeiza. The aircraft was intercepted by Sea Harriers at 1105.

On 24 April, the TC-91 aircraft once again flew over the vessels:

Frag-O ERL no. 05 (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-91. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration over the Southern Atlantic. Crew: Vicecomodoro Héctor Cid, Vicecomodoro Rubén Montenegro and Vicecomodoro Horacio Genolet, Capitán Víctor Parejas, Suboficial Ayudante Diego Callejón and Suboficial Principal Ernesto Wagner. Take-off: Ezeiza, 0705. The aircraft returned at 1655.

This time, the crew picked up the conversation between the Sea Harrier pilot and the carrier's controller. Although both seemed to be familiarized with the TC-91 incursion, they still checked if the Boeing had any suspicious antenna or external device. After this event, the British government informed —through diplomatic channels— that the 707 aircraft would no longer be welcome and were at serious risk.¹³⁸ The report was made on 25 April; on the same day, the United Kingdom announced the modification of the Rules of Engagement (ROE): any military or civilian aircraft within 40 miles (74 km) of any ship of the British fleet could be shot down.¹³⁹ This measure did not stop the Boeing and KC-130 aircraft from carrying out long-range reconnaissance and exploration missions, though they would proceed with greater caution.

On the night of 27-28 April, the TC-92 radar detected a logistics group composed of ten support ships and three frigates. On 30 April, the TC-92 and the KC-130 aircraft (TC-69 and TC-70) picked up many echoes on the assigned search grids.

¹³⁸ RODNEY BURDEN et al., op. cit., page 209.

¹³⁹ The National Archives. Margaret Thatcher's Cabinet Office meeting minutes of 25 April - Defence and Overseas Policy Committee. Released in 2012, page 54.



Sea Harrier forming next to the TC-92 during one of many flight interceptions - Photo courtesy of: Com. VGM (R) Conte

27 April:

Frag-O ERL no. 09 (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-92. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration over the Southern Atlantic; coordinates 46°17'S/57°00'W (about 800 km east of Comodoro Rivadavia). Crew: Vicecomodoro Otto Ritondale, Vicecomodoro Horacio Genolet and Vicecomodoro Marcelo Conte; Suboficial Principal Andrés Hustey and Suboficial Principal José Ramos, and Suboficial Mayor José Nóbile. They operated from Comandante Espora.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-69. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis Litrenta Carracedo, Capitán Guillermo Destefanis, Mayor Francisco Mensi; Cabo Principal Juan Perón, Cabo Principal Juan Tello and Cabo Principal Alberto Gómez; Suboficial Auxiliar Hugo González and Suboficial Auxiliar Vicente Reynoso, Cabo Principal Alberto Gómez, and Cabo Primero Eduardo Barrionuevo. They operated from Comandante Espora. Landing: Comodoro Rivadavia. Flight time: 10 hours and 25 minutes.

28 April:

Frag-O ERL no. 10 (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-92. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration over South Georgia. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis Castiella López and Vicecomodoro Argüelles Benet, Mayor Armando Buirra, Suboficial Mayor Guillermo Oviedo, Suboficial Principal Flavio Lución, and Suboficial Principal Enso Simeoni. They operated from Comandante Espora.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-69. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis Litrenta Carracedo, Capitán Guillermo Destéfanis, Mayor Francisco Mensi; Cabo Principal Juan Perón, Cabo Principal Juan Tello and Cabo Principal Alberto Gómez; Suboficial Auxiliar Hugo González and Suboficial Auxiliar Vicente Reynoso, and Cabo Primero Eduardo Barrionuevo. They operated from Comodoro Rivadavia. Flight time: 10 hours and 10 minutes.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-70. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration over South Georgia. Crew: Vicecomodoro Enrique Pessana, Capitán Roberto Perroto, Primer Teniente Gerardo Vaccaro, Mayor Eduardo Gómez, Cabo Principal Mario Cemino and Cabo Principal Francisco Martínez, Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar Ardizzoni and Suboficial Auxiliar Mario Amengual, Suboficial Principal Roberto Caravaca, Suboficial Ayudante Luis Sarmiento and Cabo Juan Fumez. They operated from Comodoro Rivadavia. Flight time: 11 hours and 40 minutes.

29 April:

Frag-O ERL w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-92. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration over the Malvinas-South Georgia leg. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis Castiella López, Vicecomodoro Héctor Cid, Mayor Armando Buirra, Suboficial Mayor Guillermo Oviedo, Suboficial Principal Flavio Lución and Suboficial Principal Ernesto Wagner. They operated from El Palomar.

Frag-O ERL w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-92. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration over the Malvinas-South Georgia leg. Crew: Vicecomodoro Otto Rintondale, Vicecomodoro Horacio Genolet, Mayor Juan Carlos Ossa, Suboficial Principal Carlos Blazer and Suboficial Principal Conrado Ghietto, and Suboficial Auxiliar Ángel Salvador. They operated from El Palomar.

30 April:

Frag-O ERL w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-92. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration northeast of the Malvinas Islands. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis Castiella López, Mayor Armando Buirra, Suboficial Mayor Guillermo Oviedo, Suboficial Principal Flavio Lución and Suboficial Principal Ernesto Wagner. They operated from El Palomar.

Combat crew training

During April, combat weapon systems were engaged in intense activities.¹⁴⁰ From the beginning, assets got ready at permanent bases to conduct operations from the Patagonian bases where they had to settle in the shortest possible time. During this period, besides standardizing each airfield's particular and emergency procedures, training was modified so as to be suitable for the maritime theater of operations, which was completely different from regular crew training.

Multiple 4-ship element flights were carried out to the Malvinas Islands, during which high-altitude and low flying over-the-sea flight profiles were tested, and points of minimum amount of fuel were set (Bingo fuel), both carrying and not carrying weapons.

Simultaneously, radar coverage was verified on the mainland and particularly in Malvinas. This made it possible to plan and locate ROA's (Air Observers Network) posts, with the aim of mitigating orographic effects that caused radar blind spots.

Some squadrons, like A-4B's, were able to conduct firing practice and bombing exercises approaching from the sea over an abandoned ship ran aground on the coast south of Río Gallegos.

During such activities, weapon testing was important since there were no bombs appropriate for striking naval targets. Different options of bombs and fuses were tested for attack parameters (height, speed, exposure) compatibility, and the most appropriate were selected.

¹⁴⁰ Each squadrons' deployment is detailed in chapter 5 "Asset Deployment on the Mainland" and chapter 6 "Asset Deployment in Malvinas."

Both KC-130 aircraft (TC-69 and TC-70), having better equipment and greater endurance, conducted reconnaissance and exploration tasks and, at the same time, performed in-flight refueling with the Navy's A-4B and C and A-4Q and Super Étendard aircrew.

On 10 April, the TC-69 aircraft flew up to Comandante Espora Naval Air Base, and in a 48-hour period performed eighteen refueling tasks with two aircraft each. On 13 and 17 April, the TC-70 replaced the TC-69 during naval aviators' training.

Aerial photographic operations

After recapturing the Islands, the CAE ordered the Paraná 2nd Air Brigade to deploy two photographic Learjet 35 A aircraft, a photographic IA-50 G-II aircraft, and a sub-center for aerial photographic operations to El Palomar 1st Air Brigade, with final destination Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade. They would be joined by the personnel and equipment necessary to obtain and process the surveyed material as required by the FAS.

The first photographic survey mission ordered by the FAS took place on 5 April with the aim of locating potential airstrips for Pucará aircraft operation. Initially, the sub-center for aerial photographic operations and the G-II F were deployed to Comodoro Rivadavia under FAS orders. The G-II, however, was not used, as it would have needed refueling in Malvinas; the photographic Learjet aircraft was used instead, since they would not require such support.

The mapping cameras mounted on the aircraft needed a two-man crew to operate them, since the photographic Learjet 35 A featured a sophisticated aerial photography system whose accuracy was based on a state-of-the-art inertial navigation system. Cameras could be programmed and operated from the cockpit through a system called PICS (Photogrammetric Integrated Control System), using the navigation system in search mode so that photographic passages would have the same gaps without any variation if navigating in larger circles.

After this first mission, many operations would be carried out until 22 April.

Detail of flights:

7 April

Aerial Photography Targets: survey of three airstrips in the Fox Bay area.

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-22. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance and M-5 crew transportation for observation of the Islands. Crew: Capitán Narciso Juri and Capitán Carlos Ronconi, Teniente Oscar Domínguez, Suboficial Auxiliar Ricardo Freijo, Cabo Principal Eduardo Elvira and Cabo Primero Alejandro López. Take-off: Río Grande, 1040. Landing: 1245 via Malvinas.

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-23. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance. Crew: Vicecomodoro Rodolfo de la Colina, Capitán Carlos Pane and Capitán Eduardo Glogger, Suboficial Ayudante Antonio Micheli, Cabo Principal Juan Falchi and Cabo Primero Juan Mothe. Take-off: Río Grande, 1240. Landing: 1600 via Malvinas.

8 April

Aerial Photography Targets: survey of San Salvador settlement (north of Soledad Island).

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-23. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance. Crew: Vicecomodoro Rodolfo de la Colina, Capitán Carlos Pane and Capitán Eduardo Glogger, Suboficial Ayudante Antonio Micheli, Cabo Principal Juan Falchi and Cabo Primero Juan Mothe. Take-off: Río Grande, 0940. Landing: 1255 via Malvinas.



Puerto Argentino image taken by T-23 aircraft on 18 April - Photo courtesy of: 1st Air Photographic Group Archives

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-22. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance. Crew: Capitán Narciso Juri and Capitán Carlos Ronconi, Teniente Oscar Domínguez, Suboficial Auxiliar Ricardo Freijo, Cabo Principal Eduardo Elvira and Cabo Primero Alejandro López. Take-off: Río Grande, 1015. Landing: 1355 via Malvinas.

9 April

Aerial Photography Targets: survey of five airstrips at Chartres settlement (9 de Julio Bay on Gran Malvina Island), Port Mitre (west coast of Gran Malvina Island on San Carlos Sound), Mount Alberdi (Mount Osborne, southeast of San Carlos inlet on Soledad Island), Port Esteban (San Felipe Bay, south of Gran Malvina Island) and North Arm settlement (De los Abrigos Bay, south of Soledad Island).

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-22. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance. Crew: Capitán Narciso Juri and Capitán Carlos Ronconi, Teniente Oscar Domínguez, Suboficial Auxiliar Ricardo Freijo, Cabo Principal Eduardo Elvira and Cabo Primero Alejandro López. Take-off: Río Grande, 1000. Landing: 1315 via Malvinas. Take-off: Río Grande, 1400. Landing: 1715 via Malvinas.

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-23. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance. Crew: Vicecomodoro Rodolfo de la Colina, Capitán Carlos Pane and Capitán Eduardo Glogger, Suboficial Ayudante Antonio Micheli, Cabo Principal Juan Falchi and Cabo Primero Juan Mothe. Take-off: Río Grande, 1425. Landing: 1745 via Malvinas.

10 April

Aerial Photography Targets: survey of twelve airstrips in the areas of Port Mitre, Hill Cove settlement (San Francisco de Paula Bay, northwest of Gran Malvina Island), Darwin, Douglas and San Salvador settlements (on Del Aceite Bay, north of Soledad Island), Port San Carlos (on San Carlos inlet) and San Luis settlement (De la Anunciación Bay, northeast of Soledad Island).



View of BAM Malvinas runway after the TC-23 survey on 18 April - Photo courtesy of: 1st Air Photographic Group Archives

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-23. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance. Crew: Vicecomodoro Rodolfo de la Colina, Capitán Carlos Pane and Capitán Eduardo Glogger, Suboficial Ayudante Antonio Micheli, Cabo Principal Juan Falchi and Cabo Primero Juan Mothe. Take-off: Río Grande, 1420. Landing: 1740 via Malvinas.

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-22. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance. Crew: Capitán Narciso Juri and Capitán Carlos Ronconi, Teniente Oscar Domínguez, Suboficial Auxiliar Ricardo Freijo, Cabo Principal Eduardo Elvira and Cabo Primero Alejandro López. Take-off: Río Grande, 1405. Landing: 1720 via Malvinas.

16 April

Aerial Photography Targets: areas not surveyed in previous missions due to weather conditions (cloud cover, visibility, etc.).

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-23. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance. Crew: Capitán Miguel Arques, Capitán Antonio Buirra and Capitán Marcelo Lotufo, Suboficial Auxiliar Víctor Martínón and Cabo Principal Hugo Bornices. Take-off: Comodoro Rivadavia, 0915. Landing: Río Grande, 1255 via Malvinas.

17 April

Aerial Photography Targets: areas not surveyed in previous missions due to weather conditions (cloud cover, visibility, etc.).

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-24. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance and pilots' transportation for observation of the Islands. Crew: Vicecomodoro Rodolfo de la Colina, Primer Teniente Eduardo Bianco and Cabo Principal Eduardo Lager. Take-off: Río Grande, 1135. Landing: 1315.

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-23. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance. Crew: Capitán Miguel Arques, Capitán Antonio Buirra and Capitán Marcelo Lotufo, Suboficial Auxiliar Víctor Martínón and Cabo Principal Hugo Bornices. Take-off: Río Grande, 1640. Landing: 1845 via Malvinas.

Materiel targets aerial photography



Areas photographed by the 1st Air Photographic Group Learjet 35 A

- Puerto Argentino: 24, 25, and 26 February; 19 March; 18 and 19 April.
- Survey of three airstrips (no. 19): 7 April.
- Land survey (nos. 4 and 20): 8 April.
- Survey of five airstrips (nos. 5, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, and 18): 9 April.
- Survey of twelve airstrips (nos. 1, 2, 3, 6, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, and 21): 10 April.

18 April

Aerial Photography Targets: Survey over Puerto Argentino.

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-23. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance. Crew: Capitán Miguel Arques, Capitán Antonio Buirra and Capitán Marcelo Lotufo, Suboficial Auxiliar Víctor Martinón and Cabo Principal Hugo Bornices. Take-off: Río Grande, 0905. Landing: 1345 via Malvinas.

19 April

Aerial Photography Targets: Survey over Puerto Argentino.

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-23. Mission: aerial photographic reconnaissance. Crew: Capitán Miguel Arques, Capitán Antonio Buirra, Capitán Marcelo Lotufo, Suboficial Auxiliar Víctor Martinón, and Cabo Principal Hugo Bornices. Target areas were photographed on both Islands. Minimum-altitude 30-meter flights were performed to check aircraft attitude and parameters at extremely low altitudes. Take-off: Río Grande, 0900. Landing: Comodoro Rivadavia, 1355 via Malvinas.

21 April

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-24. Mission: reconnaissance by multispectral scanning and thermal imaging of Malvinas. Crew: Capitán Clemente Velasco and Capitán Jacinto Despierre, Primer Teniente Ángel Bonaz, Suboficial Ayudante Carlos Ojeda and Cabo Principal Jorge Bazán. Take-off: Río Gallegos, 1245. Landing: 1545.

22 April

Aircraft: Learjet 35 A. Registration mark: T-21. Mission: reconnaissance and search for vessels detached from the British fleet. Crew: Capitán Miguel Arques and Capitán Carlos Pane, Suboficial Auxiliar Víctor Martinón, Cabo Principal Juan Carlos

Hernández and Suboficial Auxiliar Héctor Hoet. Take-off: Tandil. Landing: Tandil. Flight time: 4 hours and 40 minutes.

During April, sixteen aerial photographic flights were made, amounting to sixty five hours. Four rolls of 350 meters of photographic film were used and 1400 frames were taken. Forty specialists were responsible for developing, gluing and creating a mosaic with 7,000 photographs, duly meeting the requirements. Following its great support for the 2 April landing operation, the 1st Air Photographic Group made an invaluable contribution to the dispersal and deployment of aircraft and troops on the ground.

Once such stage was completed, the 1st Air Photographic Group Learjet 35 A belonging to the 2nd Air Brigade would operate from Comodoro Rivadavia and Rfo Grande, constituting the Fénix Squadron which reported to the FAS.

The Fénix Squadron was first commissioned on 28 April and disbanded on 15 June. Mayor Roberto F. Cardoso was appointed squadron commander who received, at the Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade, most of the requisitioned civilian and State aircraft, together with the corresponding crews summoned under the command of Mayor Juan J. Falconier.

Argentine Air Force first offensive operation

On the night of 25 March, the Grupo Alfa de Infantería de Marina (Alfa Marine Group), commanded by Teniente de Corbeta Alfredo Astiz, had disembarked from the ARA *Bahía Paraíso* on South Georgia to protect the Argentines hired by Davidoff from the Royal Marines, who were approaching on board HMS *Endurance* to expel them.

On 2 April, the same day the Malvinas were recaptured, the ARA *Guerrico* corvette, with the support of the ARA *Santa Fe* submarine, was to reinforce the Alfa Marine Group. Due to different reasons, such action did not take place until the following day. From that moment on, the Argentine garrison in South Georgia was divided into two groups: one group was located at Grytviken with Teniente de Navío Luna and forty men, while the other group was located at Port Leith, with Teniente Astiz and fourteen men, plus the thirty-nine workers.

During the last week of April, the bulk of the Task Force was sailing in the Malvinas area. To recapture South Georgia, Admiral Woodward detached a flotilla named CTG 317.9¹⁴¹ constituted by the frigates HMS *Antrim* and HMS *Plymouth*, the Antarctic ship HMS *Endurance* and the logistic ship RFA *Tidespring*. Upon arrival, they damaged the ARA *Santa Fe* submarine and attacked the Argentine garrison. The ships' movements were detected by the B-707s and the KC-130 belonging to the Reconnaissance and Exploration Group which followed the sequence detailed below:

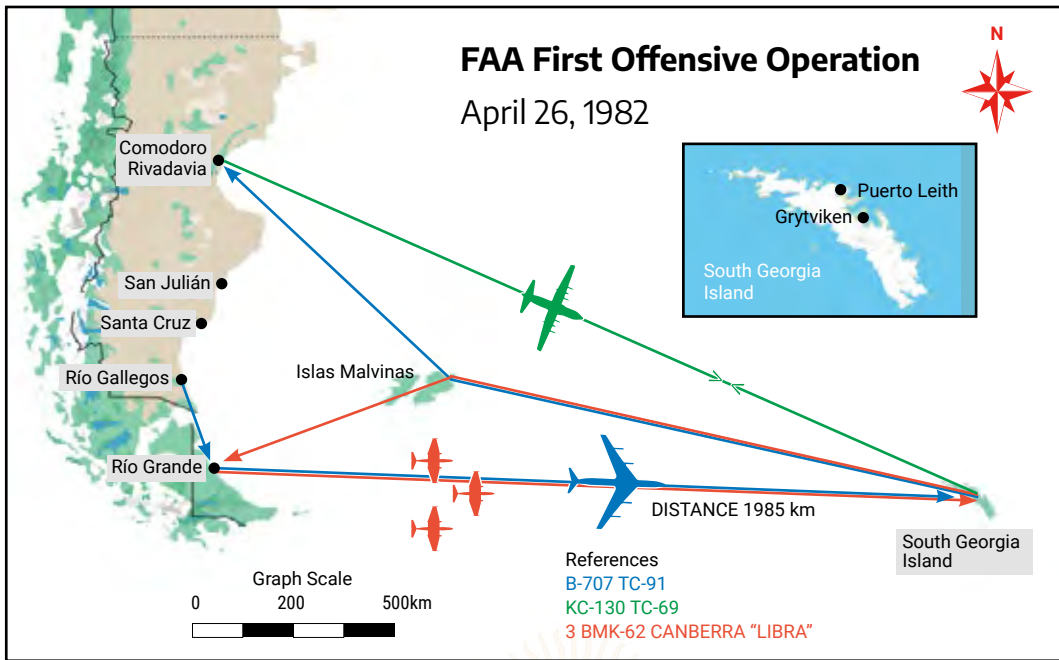
On 23 April, the KC-130 detected the movements of the flotilla near Grytviken and informed the news immediately.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-70. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration over South Georgia. Crew: Vicecomodoro Enrique Pessana, Capitán Roberto Perroto, Primer Teniente Gerardo Vaccaro, Mayor Eduardo Gómez, Cabo Principal Mario Cemino and Cabo Principal Francisco Martínez, Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar Ardizzoni and Suboficial Auxiliar Mario Amengual, Suboficial Principal Roberto Caravaca, Suboficial Ayudante Luis Sarmiento and Cabo Juan Fumez. The aircraft operated from Comandante Espora. Flight time: 12 hours and 50 minutes in total.

On 24 April, a B-707 sighted HMS *Endurance* southeast of Grytviken.

Frag-O ERL no. 06 (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-92. Mission: radar long-range reconnaissance and exploration in the vicinity of Grytviken (South Georgia).

¹⁴¹ CTG: Combined Task Group.



Crew: Vicecomodoro Eduardo Fontaine, Vicecomodoro Joaquín Argüelles Benet and Vicecomodoro José Baroni; Suboficial Principal Andrés Hustey, Suboficial Principal José Ramos, and Suboficial Principal Manuel Rivarola. Take-off: Comandante Espora, 0530. Returned: 1430.

Due to such a situation, the CAE ordered the FAS to plan and execute the first offensive mission to be carried out on 26 April.

Configured with maximum fuel capacity (Eco version), the bomb bay fully occupied by an auxiliary tank of 5,200 lb (2,800 liters), and a high-low-high flight profile, the BMK-62/64 Canberra had a flight range of 1,760 km, while South Georgia was located 2,000 km from the nearest runway (Río Grande). However, Mayor Ramón Vivas (Squadron Commander) and Mayor Aldo Escudero advised the FAS that this operation would be possible by adopting a series of limiting measures: the first measure was to jettison the wing tip tanks as soon as the fuel had been consumed, thus reducing drag. The second measure was to return, with a stopover in Puerto Argentino, for the necessary refueling to get to the mainland. The planning anticipated a constant strong wind on the Islands, which would allow them to take off using the 1,200 meters available.

Three aircraft configured with maximum fuel capacity were ready and armed with two 1,000 lb MK-17 retarded bombs for low-altitude bombing.

On 26 April at 0700, the three aircraft took off from Trelew to Río Grande. The leg was performed at low-flight levels (approximately 1,500 meters) so as to speed up the consumption of the wing tip tanks fuel and to check the operation of the recently installed ventral tank and the fuel transfer pumps.

Overflying the coast, at Puerto Deseado, the flight unit spotted on the sea (5 to 9 km off the coast) a significant group of vessels navigating north. Radio communication was attempted using the frequency links assigned with the Argentine Navy and the corresponding authentication table, but no contact could be established.

Several fragmentary orders were issued to comply with the following sorties from Río Grande, Comodoro Rivadavia and Comandante Espora. The mission detailed planning as regards take-off times from the different airfields was carried out by the flight navigators who would perform the flights with each weapon system.



Exploration flight in Grytviken - Oil painting by Carlos Adrián García (90 x 60 cm)

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: Three BMK-62, call sign LIBRA. Mission: Neutralization of the flotilla with the primary materiel target being the HMS *Endurance* and secondary targets were the accompanying ships, with the support of a B-707 and a KC-130 aircraft. Crew: Mayor Ramón Vivas and Mayor Aldo Escudero (B-105), Primer Teniente Ricardo Sproviero and Primer Teniente Hugo Moreno (B-108), and Primer Teniente Mario Baeza and Primer Teniente Jorge Cardo (B-109). Take-off: BAN Río Grande, 1330.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-69. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration, and support to the BMK-62. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis Litrenta Carracedo, Capitán Guillermo Destefanis, Mayor Francisco Mensi; Cabo Principal Juan Perón, Cabo Principal Juan Tello and Cabo Principal Alberto Gómez; Suboficial Auxiliar Hugo González and Suboficial Auxiliar Vicente Reynoso, and Cabo Primero Eduardo Barrionuevo. For this flight, Mayor Horacio Oréface served as Tactical Air Control Officer (OCAT) in contact with the FAS command. The aircraft operated from Comodoro Rivadavia. Flight time: 8 hours and 35 minutes.

Frag-O ERL no. 07 (CAE). Aircraft: B-707. Registration mark: TC-91. Mission: reconnaissance and exploration, and LIBRA flight unit guiding. Crew: Vicecomodoro Jorge Riccardini, Vicecomodoro Rubén Montenegro and Vicecomodoro Adrián Speranza; Suboficial Mayor Miguel Diap and Suboficial Principal Armando Rosales. Take-off: Río Gallegos, 1245.

Immediately after take-off, the BMK-62 flight unit joined the B-707 aircraft. At a flight level of 15,000 meters, the Canberras used the Boeing's condensation trail as a reference. A failure in the B-105 prevented one of its additional tip tanks from being jettisoned. When it increased its speed, the aircraft found it impossible to control its rolling due to the asymmetric load. It came back and landed in Río Grande at 16:10, while its wingmen continued.

90 km away from the islands, the bombers abandoned the B-707 and moved towards the target. Shortly afterwards, the KC-130 reported that weather conditions had changed as well as the location of the vessels. During the briefing, Vicecomodoro Litrenta had provided the most accurate information regarding the islands' topography. He stated that, if the vessels entered the port of Grytviken with low clouds, it would be impossible to enter Cumberland Bay, attack and maneuver out of the bay, since it was surrounded by very high elevations



The B-109 aircraft has the honor of having participated in the first planned attack mission as well as in the last mission of the conflict on the night of 13 June. In April 2000, it made its final flight towards the Museo Nacional de Aeronáutica (Argentine National Aeronautical Museum), where it is still nowadays on exhibition - BANIM DEH-FAA.

within a short distance from the port. The only way to escape was to carry out visual maneuvers around such elevations.

Now the ships were outside the bay. The patrol ship and the *Endurance*, attached to the frigate, maneuvered in a block and faced the Hercules each time the Argentine aircraft began an approach. Afterwards, the KC-130 reported to the section leader, Primer Teniente Sproviero, that the vessels were heading towards the interior of the bay. As it was clear that the vessel's CIC had been alerted, and since the vessels were in the interior of the bay, after consulting with the FAS command, the tactical air control officer (OCAT), on board the KC-130, called off the attack.

Since the mission was not carried out, the Canberra headed to Puerto Argentino, while repeatedly calculating their range against the remaining fuel. About 150 km from Malvinas, and again in formation with the B-707, they calculated that they could reach Río Grande without any problems since the minimum-altitude leg had not been covered. So they called off the stopover in Puerto Argentino. At that point, they separated from the B-707 which continued to Comodoro Rivadavia. B-108 and B-109 landed at 1900, after a flight time of 5 hours and 30 minutes. The Boeing landed at 1935.

On the night of 26 April, the Canberra technical echelon deployed in Río Grande mounted new tip tanks and got the three aircraft ready once again.

In the early morning of April 27, the KC-130, registration mark TC-70, took off from Comodoro Rivadavia in order to repeat the previous day's operation, ahead of the other aircraft's departure.

Frag-O: w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: KC-130. Registration mark: TC-70. Mission: long-range reconnaissance and exploration, and support to the BMK-62s. Crew: Capitán Eduardo Senn, Mayor Roberto Brien and Mayor Eduardo Gómez, Suboficial Mayor Vianey Cufre, Cabo Principal Carlos Golier, Suboficial Auxiliar Héctor Sosa, Suboficial Principal Julio Lastra, Suboficial Ayudante Luis Martínez, and Cabo Principal Eduardo Bordenave. Take-off: Comodoro Rivadavia, 0735.

At noon, the same crews of the BMK-62s and B-707 headed for the runway threshold to fly to South Georgia in search of the British flotilla. However, they were ordered to return to the aerodrome platform. The mission was canceled by the FAS when they found out that the British CTG 317.9 had regained control of the islands, after fighting against Argentine forces.

The TC-70 was already flying near the vicinity of Grytviken when it was ordered to return. The aircraft landed in Comodoro Rivadavia at 1745.

Sighting of the fleet on the night of 29 April

On 29 April at 0400, an A-4C section took off from BAM San Julián on a night exploration mission. The aircraft, manned by Primer Teniente Daniel Manzotti (C-318), and Alférez Guillermo Martínez (C-310), departed with an initial heading of 60° degrees and, at 200 miles (370 km) sighted a large formation of vessels with their lights on, and in an inverted-V formation. Once they landed, Manzotti said: “The size of the fleet is scary.”

Fénix Squadron: first exploration flights with civilian aircraft

On 28 April, a ceremony took place at the Morón 7th Air Brigade, whereby the military rank insignia were given to the crew of the twenty civilian aircraft which were officially incorporated into the Fénix Squadron. Afterwards, the aircraft departed to their deployment bases to join the Air Reconnaissance and Exploration Group (GERA), which would cover the extensive coastal surface of the Buenos Aires province and the entire Patagonian maritime area.

The Learjet 36, registration mark LV-LOG, owned by the company Bunge y Born, departed from Morón to Comandante Espora manned by Capitán (reservist) Emil Williams, Alférez (temporary rank) Federico Arocena and Cabo (temporary rank) Adrián Petrocello as mechanic. Upon arrival, it was assigned a long-range exploration mission over an area near the Buenos Aires province to detect the British fleet. Once in flight, the aircraft had a fuel transfer failure that prevented it from continuing navigation.

On 29 April, the aircraft flew from Espora to Comodoro Rivadavia with the same crew, which was joined by Comodoro Ronaldo Ferri, who would be in charge of the Reconnaissance and Exploration Operational Section (SOER), the Special Ops Operational Section (SOOE), and of GERA reporting to the FAS.

During the flight, the crew discussed with Comodoro Ferri the possibility of detecting vessels using the weather radar on board the aircraft; even though the mapping function was faulty, it was possible to use such a capability.

When the aircraft arrived in Comodoro Rivadavia, the crew went before the FAS command, where they were ordered to execute an exploration mission to Malvinas, as explained by Comodoro Tomás Rodríguez from the General Staff A-3 Operations Department.

The mission would be carried out at night on the 29, with the purpose of crossing over¹⁴² Puerto Argentino at 40,000 feet (12,200 meters); from that point, the aircraft would begin to fly outbound on radial 045° up to 150 miles (278 km) and establish on an arc up to radial 135° keeping the same distance, regularly turning to heading 090° in order to search for the fleet with the radar. From there it would return to the Puerto Argentino vertical and then back to Comodoro Rivadavia. Besides the three LV-LOG crewmen, Mayor Francisco Mensi joined in as an observer.¹⁴³

The Learjet 36, call sign NEGRO, took off from Comodoro Rivadavia with no record of take-off time. According to the Diario de Guerra del Radar Malvinas (Malvinas Radar War Diary), the first contact was made on 29 April at 2100; the path was constantly tracked by the Malvinas radar, with Primer Teniente Juan Carlos Romero operating the TPS-43 radar.

The exploration resulted in no radar detection. According to the path and distance, the NEGRO could have been very close to the fleet and probably detected by the latter. Perhaps they did not take any counteraction measures against the flight so as not to reveal the operation to be executed on the early morning of May 1.

¹⁴² Crossing over: to reach the vertical of a point or reference.

¹⁴³ Written account given by Capitán (reservist) Emil Williams to the BANIM Commission.

This LV-LOG flight was the first mission of the Fénix Squadron with a civilian aircraft and mixed crew over the Malvinas area.

Search and Rescue

On 30 April, contact was lost with the Bell UH-1H, registration mark AE-419 of the Argentine Army Aviation Command. To carry out the search, the FAS allocated the Bell 212, registration mark H-81, from the Comodoro Rivadavia Search and Rescue Operational Section. Shortly after, the helicopter found the aircraft had crashed close to Caleta Olivia. Unfortunately, the pilot, the two crew members and eight passengers died.

* * *

Review of deployment and operations in April

On 4 April, without prior notice, the Argentine Air Force began the deployment of its combat and transport units to the southern airfields and bases in Comodoro Rivadavia, San Julián, Santa Cruz, Río Gallegos, and Malvinas. Personnel and materiel transportation, mostly carried out by air means, demanded a great logistics effort. Besides, through the CAE, there were coordinations for Air Force fighter aircraft to operate from naval air bases of the Argentine Navy in Trelew, Bahía Blanca and Río Grande.

During the deployment phase, the following was observed:

- Great flexibility and promptness of the deployed assets.
- Quick adjustment, without prior notice, from organic peace goals to war goals and all associated planning.
- Efficient adjustment to naval air operations.
- Commendable dedication to service of all personnel. The embraced doctrine contributed to the flourishing of creativity, at all levels, to conceive and execute alternatives to compensate for adversities that would have resulted in less activity. Thanks to this, it was possible to rationally exceed limits imposed during peacetime.
- Clarity and firmness applied by the CAE, taking on the mission and accurately defining the action of the Air Force assets.
- Efficiency of the FAS taking on the tasks of three Commands (Strategic Air, Transport, and Defense), including the Chilean case, in an extremely hostile and unfamiliar naval air operational environment showing great limitations.

Within twenty-seven days, the Air Force got all its assets ready and completed their deployment. On 1 May, the Argentine Air Force's Baptism of Fire, it already had all its offensive potential available and operational in the deployment bases.

Annex 2

Transport aircraft personnel who participated in the Airlift during the South Atlantic conflict¹⁴⁴

Argentine Air Force

1st Air Transport Group Chief: Comodoro Jorge F. Martínez.

C-130 1st Squadron

Crew no. 1:

Viccomodoro Rubén Cabanillas, Mayor Adolfo Martínez, Viccomodoro Adrián Speranza, Suboficial Ayudante Juan Rydzik, Suboficial Principal Juan Vottchevitch, Suboficial Auxiliar Ricardo Bressan, Suboficial Ayudante Roberto Pajón, Suboficial Principal Bernabé Plascencia and Suboficial Auxiliar Jorge Lanzani.

Crew no. 2:

Viccomodoro Alfredo Cano, Capitán Juan Hrubik, Viccomodoro Eduardo Servático, Mayor Carlos Torielli, retired Suboficial Mayor Salvador Giliberto, retired Suboficial Mayor Guillermo Aguirre, Suboficial Auxiliar Eduardo Fattore, Suboficial Ayudante Néstor Molina and Suboficial Ayudante Luis Martínez.

Crew no. 3:

Viccomodoro Litrenta Carracedo, Capitán Guillermo Destefanis, Mayor Francisco Mensi, Cabo Principal Juan Perón and Cabo Principal Juan Tello, Suboficial Auxiliar Hugo González, Suboficial Auxiliar Vicente Reynoso and Suboficial Auxiliar Manuel Lombino, Cabo Primero Eduardo Barrionuevo and Cabo Principal Alberto Gómez.

Crew no. 4:

Viccomodoro Eduardo Pessana, Capitán Roberto Perroto, Primer Teniente Gerardo Vaccaro, Mayor Eduardo Gómez, Cabo Principal Mario Cemino and Cabo Principal Francisco Martínez, Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar Ardizzoni and Suboficial Auxiliar Mario Amengual, Suboficial Principal Roberto Caravaca, Suboficial Ayudante Luis Sarmiento, and Cabo Juan Fumez.

Crew no. 5:

Viccomodoro Juan Demarco, Mayor Juan Maclay, retired Capitán Juan Martiarena, Suboficial Auxiliar Emilio Farina, Cabo Principal Mario Rulli, Suboficial Mayor Miguel Castillo, and Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos Cortez.

Crew no. 6:

Viccomodoro Roberto Noé, Capitán Eduardo Senn, Mayor Roberto Briend, Capitán Osvaldo Bilmezis, Suboficial Mayor Modesto Cufre Vianey, Cabo Principal Carlos Golier, Suboficial Auxiliar Héctor Sosa and Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar Gatto, and Suboficial Principal Andrés Manyszyn.

¹⁴⁴ This list was compiled by retired Brigadier Mayor VGM Rubén Palazzi and published in his book *Puente Aéreo a Malvinas*, Editorial Dunken, Buenos Aires, 2006, pages 87 to 98.

Crew no. 7:

Vicecomodoro Alberto Vianna, Capitán Andrés Valle and Capitán Roberto Cerruti, Suboficial Principal Pedro Razzini, Cabo Primero Carlos Ortiz, Suboficial Ayudante Juan Marnoni, and Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos Nazzari.

Crew no. 8:

Vicecomodoro Jorge Domínguez, Mayor Miguel Sánchez, Mayor Enrique Bernardi and Mayor Walter Videla, Capitán Miguel Sisco, Suboficial Principal Domingo Farias, Suboficial Auxiliar Ranulfo Lozano and Suboficial Auxiliar Juan Hümoller, Cabo Principal Horacio González.

Crew no. 9:

Mayor Walter Véliz, Capitán Cristóbal Villegas, Vicecomodoro Francisco López, Mayor Jorge Valdecantos, Cabo Principal Jorge Contigiani and Cabo Principal Nicolás Segovia, Suboficial Ayudante Sergio Tulián, and Suboficial Auxiliar Roberto Puig.

Crew no. 10:

Mayor Rubén Palazzi, Vicecomodoro Julio Sanchotena and Vicecomodoro Roberto Tribiani, Suboficial Auxiliar Juan Romero, Cabo Principal José Torres, Suboficial Principal Américo Arévalo and Suboficial Principal Carlos Sánchez.

Crew no. 11:

Mayor Ricardo Bolzi, Capitán Sergio Sampietro, Mayor Orestes Vila, Cabo Principal Ricardo Camino and Cabo Principal Oscar Fraire, Suboficial Auxiliar Roberto Ovejero, and Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos Salzano.

Crew no. 12:

Mayor Julio Domínguez, Vicecomodoro Roberto Regueiro, Mayor Roberto Bagnasco, retired Suboficial Principal Carlos Bill, Cabo Principal Juan Reynoso, Suboficial Auxiliar Rodolfo Godoy, Cabo Principal Oscar Gardenal, and Suboficial Auxiliar Miguel De Robles.

Crew no. 13:

Mayor Antonio Bruno, Vicecomodoro Rubén Moro, Mayor Hugo Maldonado, Cabo Principal Ricardo Figueroa and Cabo Principal Delfino Fretes, Suboficial Principal Julio Daverio and Suboficial Principal Juan Luján.

Crew no. 14:

Capitán Víctor Borchert, Comodoro Roberto Mela, Mayor Pedro Maye, Capitán Hernán Daguerre, Suboficial Ayudante Carlos Moyano, Suboficial Auxiliar Hugo Castellini, Cabo Principal Carlos Sosa, Suboficial Ayudante Roberto Carabajal, and Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos Paoloni.

Crew no. 15:

Capitán Rubén Martel, Capitán Carlos Krause, Vicecomodoro Hugo Meisner, Cabo Principal Miguel Cardone, Cabo Principal Carlos Cantezano, Suboficial Principal Julio Lastra, and Suboficial Ayudante Manuel Albelos.

F-28 2nd Squadron¹⁴⁵

Stage III Pilots:

Vicecomodoro Manuel Villagrán, Vicecomodoro Norberto Trillini, Vicecomodoro Eduardo Amores, Vicecomodoro Ángel Toribio, Vicecomodoro Oscar Bahamondes, Mayor Raúl

¹⁴⁵ It flew during the air assault phase of Plan Aries 82, during the Airlift in April and then performed trunk flights from the Interior Zone (IZ) to personnel and cargo redistribution sites.

Echenique, Mayor Francisco Serrat, Mayor Carlos González, Mayor Héctor Pupek, Capitán Damián Peterson, Capitán Agustín Miguez, Capitán Antonio Fazio Carreras, Capitán Adán Dávila, Capitán José Novelli and Capitán Ricardo Altamirano.

Stage II Pilots:

Vicecomodoro Vicente Manuel Hermida and Vicecomodoro Pascual Soler, Mayor Walter Barbero, Mayor Víctor Alba, Mayor Raúl Iriberry, Mayor Rubén Ábalos Aliaga and Mayor Luis Sabolo, Capitán Alberto Borsato, Capitán Ángel Carrizo, Capitán Juan Giménez and Capitán Miguel González.

Flight Mechanics:

Suboficial Principal Julián Rodríguez, Suboficial Principal Manuel Tessi and Suboficial Principal Roberto Verdu, Suboficial Ayudante Miguel A. Gonzales and Suboficial Ayudante Héctor García, Cabo Principal Juan Olmedo, Cabo Principal Jorge Gamba, Cabo Principal Juan Medina and Cabo Principal Juan Osore, Cabo Primero Guillermo Ramírez, Cabo Primero Gerardo Roldán, Cabo Primero Osvaldo Puñet, and Cabo Primero José Maldonado.

Cargo Handling Assistants:

Suboficial Mayor Antonio Pereyra, Suboficial Ayudante Enrique Prince and Suboficial Ayudante Juan Muñoz, Suboficial Auxiliar Hugo Ochoa, Suboficial Auxiliar Raimundo Álvarez, Suboficial Auxiliar José Amaya, Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos Martínez and Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos Verasay, Cabo Principal Ramón Méndez, Cabo Principal Carlos Aragón, Cabo Principal Juan Conde, Cabo Principal Rafael R. Cohn and Cabo Principal Oscar H. Dramisino.

F-27 4th Squadron¹⁴⁶

Pilots:

Vicecomodoro Jorge Benavente, Vicecomodoro Carlos Velazco, Vicecomodoro Mario Andelique, Vicecomodoro José Ribeiro, Vicecomodoro Jorge Novais, Vicecomodoro Ricardo Quellet, Vicecomodoro Juan E. Rivarola, Vicecomodoro Luis Ronconi and Vicecomodoro Héctor Vanden, Mayor Osvaldo Botto, Mayor Roberto Montaldo, Mayor Mario Núñez, Mayor Adolfo Rodríguez, Mayor Juan M. Rodríguez and Mayor Ramón Diaz, Capitán Hugo Olmos, Capitán Julio Mirgone, Capitán Guillermo Testoni and Capitán Carlos Filippi, Primer Teniente Ricardo Grunale and Primer Teniente Eduardo Rodríguez.

Flight Mechanics:

Suboficial Mayor Gustavo Mayer and Suboficial Mayor Amílcar Reyes, Suboficial Auxiliar Antonio Conde, Cabo Principal Eduardo Docters, Cabo Principal Misael Lombardo and Cabo Principal Manuel Rojas, Cabo Primero Eduardo Muñoz, Cabo Primero José Brandana, Cabo Primero Mario Simón and Cabo Primero Orlando Domínguez.

Cargo Handling Assistants:

Suboficial Mayor José Germann, Suboficial Ayudante Luis Ríos, Suboficial Ayudante Mauricio Ceballos, Suboficial Ayudante Miguel Alonso and Suboficial Ayudante Esteban Godoy, Suboficial Auxiliar Alberto Lorenzi, Suboficial Auxiliar Alberto Campelo and Suboficial Auxiliar Alfredo Albertengo, Cabo Principal Daniel Medina, Cabo Principal Luis Zenteno, Cabo Principal Oscar Heredia, Cabo Principal Anselmo Abasto, Cabo Principal Carlos Bassano and Cabo Principal Walter Morelli, Cabo Primero Roberto Herger, Cabo Primero Ramón Contreras and Cabo Primero Santiago Cabral.

¹⁴⁶ It performed reconnaissance and exploration flights, as well as search and rescue flights, and transportation from the IZ to personnel and materiel to distribution sites.

B-707 5th Squadron¹⁴⁷

Pilots:

Vicecomodoro Eduardo Fontaine, Vicecomodoro Luis Castiella López, Vicecomodoro Jorge Riccardini, Vicecomodoro Juan Paulik, Vicecomodoro Otto Ritondale, Vicecomodoro Joaquín Argüelles Benet, Vicecomodoro Héctor Cid, Vicecomodoro Horacio Genolet, Vicecomodoro Marcelo Conte, Vicecomodoro José Baroni, Vicecomodoro Rodolfo Muñoz and Vicecomodoro Rubén Montenegro, Mayor Walter Barbero, Mayor Juan Carlos Ossa, and Mayor Armando Buirra.

Navigators:

Vicecomodoro Mauro López, Vicecomodoro Adrián Speranza, and Mayor Walter Videla.

Flight Mechanics:

Suboficial Mayor Carlos Blazek and Suboficial Mayor Guillermo Oviedo, Suboficial Principal José Ramos, Suboficial Principal Flavio Lucion, Suboficial Principal Armando Rosales and Suboficial Principal Andrés Hustey, Suboficial Ayudante Nicolás Zarate, Suboficial Ayudante Diego Callejón and Suboficial Ayudante Héctor García, Suboficial Auxiliar Carmelo Bessi and Suboficial Auxiliar Ángel Salvador, Cabo Principal Jorge Amengual and Cabo Principal Luis Acevedo.

Cargo Handling Assistants:

Suboficial Mayor Conrado Ghietto, Suboficial Mayor Casimiro Martínez, Suboficial Mayor Miguel Diap, Suboficial Mayor Adolfo Recalde, Suboficial Mayor Oscar Vignolo, Suboficial Mayor Guillermo Nóbile, Suboficial Mayor Aroldo Bonorino and Suboficial Mayor Enzo Simeone, Suboficial Principal Ernesto Wagner and Suboficial Principal Manuel Rivarola.

Personnel of the Combat Control Team (ECCO) and pararescuers deployed in the Malvinas Islands:

Primer Teniente Rodolfo Yuse, Primer Teniente Daniel Lambri, Primer Teniente Horacio Alzamora, Suboficial Principal Máximo Oviedo, Suboficial Ayudante Eduardo Guzmán, Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar Ochoa, Suboficial Auxiliar Julio Barros and Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar Espíndola, Cabo Principal Rafael Messuti and Cabo Principal Jorge Capellino, Cabo Primero Alberto Gómez, Cabo Primero Rubén Palacios, Cabo Primero Rodolfo Fernández and Cabo Primero Hugo Lepez, Cabo José Orazi, Cabo Carlos Trimboli, Cabo Carlos Gómez, Cabo Juan José Fumez, Cabo Hugo Ferreyra, Cabo César Roca, Cabo Daniel Cuello, Cabo Fernando Roldán, and Cabo Miguel Quiroga.

Personnel who participated in the Air Transport Control Element (ECTA) and later in the Air Cargo Terminal in Puerto Argentino:

Capitán Juan Hrubik, Capitán Guillermo Cardetti and Capitán Carlos Stocco, Suboficial Principal José Cabrera, Suboficial Ayudante Carlos Martínez, and Suboficial Auxiliar Eduardo Fattore, Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos Cortez, Suboficial Auxiliar Julio Barros and Suboficial Auxiliar Juan Lanzani, Cabo Principal José Gauto and Cabo Juan José Fumez.

¹⁴⁷ It performed long-range reconnaissance and exploration flights, logistics flights abroad, and flights from the IZ to personnel and materiel distribution sites.

Aerolíneas Argentinas¹⁴⁸**Boeing 737**

Pilots:

Captains Juan Andino, Martín Arana, Roberto Arostegui, Eduardo Blau, Osvaldo Canepa, Mario Cerrezuela, Nestor Echeverría, Juan Ferrari, César Gatti, Miguel Giroud, Martín Kriegjer, Ernesto Langhoff, Osvaldo Larumbe, Daniel Mauriño, Antonio Medina, Jorge Pérez Tamayo, Alberto Paracampo, Horacio Reinoso and Hugo Solimo.

Boeing 707

Pilots:

Captains Ramón Arce, Juan Carlos Ardalla, Leopoldo Arias, Jorge Aydar Paz, Mario Bernard, Valentín Biro, Horacio Botte, Jorge Prelooker, Gazio Bresciani, Rubén Cudicio, Gustavo De Gainza, Norberto Feo, Luis Giordano, Carlos Gutiérrez Morchio, Carlos Lefevre, Ángel Levaggi, Héctor Brutti, Enrique Busch, Ricardo Contreras, Luis Cuniberti, Juan Lombardini, Jorge Minuzzi, Hilario Moglia, Rafael Pichiello and Juan Carlos San Juan.

Flight technicians:

Daniel Amin, Osvaldo Beccan, Carlos Bielli, Carlos Camacho, Miguel Carrizo, Norberto Cobelo, Marcelo Lima, Oscar Marandet, Carlos Matricardi, Raúl Méndez, Vicente Menéndez, Alberto Mendoliccio and Rodolfo Zambonini.

Navigators:

Héctor Marín and Luis Pagani.

Stewards:

Carlos Bernard, Florencio Molina Campos, and Carlos Terranova.

Austral Líneas Aéreas**BAC 1-11¹⁴⁹**

Pilots:

Captains Mariano Iribarne, Aldo Ríos, and Bernardo Schónfeld, Co-Pilots Juan Bassini, Jorge Canese, and Eladio Gosso.

Technicians:

Raúl Pernigotti (engineer), Aldo Comisso, Víctor Connor and Carlos Ruiz (mechanics), Hugo Zachert (electrician).

Cargo Handling Assistant Hugo Cochello.

¹⁴⁸ The B-737 line conducted Airlift flights during April departing from Comodoro Rivadavia and Río Gallegos to Malvinas, and trunk flights from the ZI to personnel and materiel redistribution sites. The B-707 line performed flights abroad as well as trunk flights from the ZI to the personnel and materiel redistribution sites.

¹⁴⁹ It flew in April from Comodoro Rivadavia to Malvinas.

Part 3

45 Days of War



Chapter 8

The Argentine Air Force Baptism of Fire



«The Argentine Air Force
fiercely attacked our Task Force
that day».

Margaret Thatcher's Personal Diary

Meteorology

A high-pressure system between Malvinas and Río Gallegos formed low and mid-level broken clouds over Puerto Argentino, with winds not exceeding 18 km/h. In the afternoon, the sky would gradually clear with decreasing winds.

Bases continentales a las 09:00:

- Comodoro Rivadavia: sky covered with low clouds at an altitude of 600 meters, good visibility, wind at 18 km/h.
- Río Gallegos: sky partly covered with low clouds at an altitude of 900 meters, good visibility, wind at 18 km/h.
- Río Grande: sky covered with low clouds at an altitude of 100 meters, reduced visibility to 4 km due to fog, wind at 24 km/h.
- Trelew: sky partly covered with low clouds at an altitude of 300 meters, good visibility, wind at 15 km/h.
- San Julián: sky covered with low clouds at an altitude of 100 meters, visibility reduced to 10 km due to fog, wind at 15 km/h.
- Santa Cruz: sky covered with mid-level and low clouds at an altitude of 600 meters (3/8)¹⁵⁰, good visibility, wind at 15 km/h.

The Situation of the British Task Force

The Staff of the British Task Force met on Ascension Island, aboard HMS *Fearless*, and set three initial goals:

- Executing a series of selective attacks from Ascension Island on the Malvinas Joint Garrison, gathering intelligence and achieving naval and air superiority.
- Sailing towards the Exclusion Zone and remaining on board until a landing spot was found.
- Setting up a beachhead on the islands and advancing towards Puerto Argentino by land.

Even though they knew the greatest danger to the fleet were the five Exocet missiles of the Argentine Navy's Super Etendard, the main threat was posed by the four A-4B/C fighter bomber squadrons of the Argentine Air Force. The U.S. naval aviation provided the British with information on the squadrons' capabilities. Thus, and since they knew that the Argentine troops were superior in number, the idea of landing on the first day, either by ship or helicopter, was quickly dismissed.

In spite of that, as they believed Argentina was not committed to fighting for the possession of the Malvinas Islands, and stated jokingly that a threatening telephone call from Margaret Thatcher to General Galtieri would be enough, they decided to show their military force, to make a simulated landing, to demand surrender and assess their response while, at the same time, to infiltrate special forces¹⁵¹.

In this regard, according to information provided by the ROA to the CIC Malvinas, two days before hostilities began, helicopters had been observed flying around. Apparently, they

¹⁵⁰ Scale in oktas X/8: scale used to measure the fraction of the sky covered by low clouds. Thus, 8/8 means the sky is completely covered by clouds (overcast), while 4/8 means half the sky is covered by clouds, and so on.

¹⁵¹ PAUL EDDY, MAGNUS LINKLATER AND PETER GULLAM, *The Falklands War, The full History*, London: Sphere Books, 1982, pages 181-185.

had infiltrated British commandos at different locations of the island to gather information on the Argentine forces' deployment¹⁵².

On 30 April, the bulk of British units were located 400 km to the northeast of Puerto Argentino. The day after arriving aboard the HMS *Invincible*, Task Force commander Admiral John Woodward ordered the execution of Operation Corporate to retake the Islands. The fleet planned the action of three naval air groups:

- Group 1: it would be deployed 185 km to the northwest of Puerto Argentino, and comprised eight 801 Squadron Sea Harriers aboard HMS *Invincible* aircraft carrier together with escort vessels for air defense missions.
- Group 2: it would be deployed 180 km to the east-northeast of Puerto Argentino, and comprised twelve 800 Squadron Sea Harriers aboard HMS *Hermes* aircraft carrier as well as escort vessels to attack reconnaissance and ground targets.
- Group 3: it would be deployed to the east of the Islands, on the Tug, Repair and Logistic Zone (TRALA¹⁵³), and comprised naval transport units, helicopters and amphibious lighters on stand-by to advance and perform tasks on the field.

After the experience gained from recapturing South Georgia, Woodward noted that if he could neutralize the Argentine navy fleet, the commander of Argentine joint forces in Malvinas would most likely surrender faced with such an overwhelming display of military power. Likewise, he relied on the weather forecast showing ceilings below minimum levels over the mainland, which would prevent the operation of fighter aircraft deployed in southern Patagonia.

The bombing of BAM Malvinas (Operation Black Buck)

The British attached particular strategic importance to neutralizing the runway at BAM Malvinas and disrupting air supply lines with the mainland. With that in mind, Royal Air Force Air Chief Marshall Michael Bentham executed Operation Black Buck on 30 April at 1930 local time in Argentina. At that moment, two Avro 698 Vulcan long-range bombers (registration marks XM-598 and XM-607) took off from Wideawake, Ascension Island, under the command of Sqdn. Ldr. John Reeve and Flt. Lt. Martin Withers, respectively. Each aircraft was loaded with twenty-one 1,000 lb. bombs with different delay-action times.

The primary target was to destroy the BAM Malvinas runway, reach the ground defenses around the airport and, particularly, act as a deterrent, since the mainland targets would be within reach of the RAF aircraft.

The air operation was planned and executed with the support of eleven Handley Page Victor K-2 from the RAF 55 and 57 Squadrons. One of the Vulcans and one Victor were in reserve; hence, shortly after take-off, the XM-598 aircraft returned and the mission was taken over by the XM-607.

The tankers refueled each other so as to achieve a greater range at the last Vulcan support location. Meanwhile, the bomber refueled at the intermediate refueling points. On the outbound flight, it had to refuel five times and reach the target 7,200 km away. On the return flight, a similar operation would be carried out with the other Victor K-2s to cover a total round trip distance of 14,400 km.

While the Vulcan was flying to the Islands, the Malvinas Air Component command, aware of the continuous advance of the British Task Force, put the BAM Malvinas and BAM C ndor on full alert at 0100. The appointed men kept a careful watch which was coordinated by the CIC (Mayor Alberto Kajihara was in charge that night) and in constant communica-

¹⁵² Account given by retired Brigadier VGM Alberto A. Catal  before the BANIM Commission.

¹⁵³ The acronym "TRALA" stands for Tug, Repair and Logistic Area.

tion with the COAaCj¹⁵⁴, with ROA observers and VyCA's Westinghouse TPS-43 radar. All of which would work uninterruptedly.

No intelligence alert was received on the island, not even a warning about the possibility of a Vulcan bomber flying from Ascension Island and attacking BAM Malvinas; hence, neither the surveillance system nor the antiaircraft defense system was prepared to face such an attack. During the night shift, the TPS-43 radar was set for a 360°-view navigation display centered on Puerto Argentino at maximum range (220 miles/407 km), thus surveilling both Argentine and British forces' movements.

The radar acquisition was set in decentralized mode, with changing expansion range and video variations for detecting air and/or naval targets in its two main search modes: medium range (from 185 to 277 km, covering the Task Force's position), and short range (helicopters and ships near Puerto Argentino).

Gunners operating 20 and 35 mm batteries were on alert, ready to fire at the slightest sign of movement. As in previous days, on 30 April afternoon, Mayor Hugo Maiorano, who was at the PCAAa, had repeated that the airport would be closed during the night for all flight operations, and ground movements to and from the airport were prohibited. According to the directive, every movement, either in the air or on the ground, had to be considered an enemy.

After the last refueling, 450 km away from BAM Malvinas, the Vulcan XM-607 made a stepped down descent until low flying at an altitude of 90 meters¹⁵⁵. Once the aircraft was 75 km off the Islands, it climbed to confirm its position and kept climbing up to 3,000 meters to make the final strafing run, heading 235°.

Based on the flight pattern, the enemy always flew below the TPS-43 radar coverage and was not detected until it entered the fixed echoes zone (sea and ground clutter¹⁵⁶). The CIC chief on duty, Mayor Kajihara, reported that 10 to 15 minutes before the attack, the radar acquired an echo to the north in an antenna rotation, and that the first real alarm, 30 seconds before the first bomb exploded, came from POA 9 installed 30 km northwest of Puerto Argentino, which heard the passage of a powerful jet engine. There was no time to issue the red alarm.

In spite of that, the aircraft was detected at 8 km on the Skyguard radar of the Army Oerlikon GDF-005 35 mm battery, which was on operational duty. It was the only radar stationed at BAM Malvinas. The battery chief called his senior officer, Teniente Primero Jorge Reyes, who was temporarily assigned to the PCAAa, over the field telephone to ask him for further instructions. He was ordered to wait since his senior officer had to gather information from the COAaCj. As the intruder kept advancing, the battery chief called again and announced that the aircraft was 6 km away and urgently asked for further instructions. Once again, his senior officer ordered him to wait. This conversation was heard, in real time, by the 3rd Battery chief, Primer Teniente Oscar Spath. As he was not ordered "to open fire," the battery chief did not repel the attack.

At 0440, heading northeast-southwest, the Vulcan made the final run and dropped the bombs. The first one exploded on the runway edge (400 meters from threshold 26) and left it partially out of service. The other twenty bombs fell in a line that ran diagonally across the runway and towards the air station, the bivouac, the Elta 2106 radar antenna and the PCAAa. They exploded randomly for more than three hours, with different delay-action times, in order to instill fear and make rescue and debris removal tasks difficult.

¹⁵⁴ Resolution no. 1, dated 31 January 1969, drafted by the Joint Staff of the Argentine Armed Forces, and enacted at the time by the Military Committee, assigned the Air Force the primary responsibility, among others, for the planning and execution of the Joint Air Defense system.

¹⁵⁵ ROWLAND WHITE, *Vulcan 607*, Corgi, United Kingdom, 2007. See also RODNEY BURDEN et al., op. cit., pages 363 to 365.

¹⁵⁶ The term "clutter" refers to unwanted echoes in electronic systems, particularly in reference to radars.



**Crater left by a 1,000 lb. bomb
dropped by the Vulcan on 1 May.
The heavy machinery of the Construc-
tion Squadron is shown filling the big
hole in the ground**

Photo courtesy of: 1st Construction
Group Archives

Fifty meters away from the PCAAa, a bomb exploded¹⁵⁷ on top of a mound of earth higher than the shelter. Huge clods of earth fell on the roof of the Command Post, which resisted the attack. Amid total darkness, screams were heard from a group of men who moved around in the distance, stunned, disoriented and half-dressed. Gunners led them to their shelters using flashlights. The bomb had exploded near their tent and destroyed it. Marine conscript class of 1962, Ricardo Raúl Romero, died instantly.

Argentine Air Force Suboficial Mayor Hugo Gómez was trapped by the collapse of the tent; he hit his scalp open and the earth after the explosion buried him almost completely. He prayed and yelled for help. Cabo Oliva heard him and, with great effort, dug him up. Gómez was gasping for breath. Doctors, nurses and stretcher-bearers came out of the field hospital tent immediately to assist the wounded, guided by their flashlights and by the screams and cries for help from their fellow combatants. The PUSO ambulance followed the flashlights, moving the wounded very slowly. Meanwhile, at the air station building, Capitán Dante Dovichi had suffered serious backbone traumatism caused by the shock wave that threw him out down the stairs of the TWR.

Once the wounded were inside the field hospital tent, they were divided according to a *triage* procedure¹⁵⁸. They were hemodynamically compensated, superficial wounds were sutured, and oxygen masks were given to those who needed them.

As a result of the attack, the Argentine Air Force suffered its first casualties: conscripts class of 1963 Guillermo Ubaldo García and Héctor Ramón Bordón, belonging to the company of soldiers of the 1st and 9th Brigade, respectively. Both of them served as sentries near one of

¹⁵⁷ Account given by Mayor Hugo A. Maiorano, Argentine Air Force Antiaircraft Artillery Squadron chief at BAM Malvinas.

¹⁵⁸ The French term "triage" in medicine refers to the method of sorting out patients according to their need for emergency medical care.

the Squadron's tents when they were caught by surprise by the bombing and could not seek shelter in time.

Shortly after the attack and until sunrise, Construction Squadron members focused on repairing the runway and simulating a big crater in order to deceive British intelligence as regards the result of the bombing. First, they filled in the crater (which extended over half the runway width) and then they covered it with a quick setting cement, according to the roadway's thickness. It was then that they noticed the color difference and came up with the idea of "staining" the runway with mud to simulate more craters. Besides the first bomb's crater repair, they made three more "stains"¹⁵⁹. Everything indicates that the goal was achieved: the British press spread the news that the runway had been neutralized, but it was actually fully operative.

At 0600, Antiaircraft Artillery Squadron chief, Mayor Hugo Maiorano, informed the CIC that there was nothing to report from his PCAAa post. He ordered the 35 mm Superfledermaus battery radar to be turned on for air surveillance, as the fire control system had been out of service since the night of 28 April. The radar was working with good gain.

At 0715, both anti-aircraft artillery radars (the Superfledermaus and the Army's Skyguard) simultaneously detected an unknown air raid. The "bandits" were closing in from the east. Towards Cape San Felipe lighthouse (at Cape San Felipe, east end of the Freycinet Peninsula), two dark spots were seen very high in the sky leaving contrails behind. As Argentine flights over BAM Malvinas were banned, Argentine gunners thought they were two Sea Harriers; hence, as opposed to earlier events, Cabo Albornoz—assigned to the 35 mm 303 Oerlikon cannon—opened fire without waiting for the order. The same was done by the rest of the "Fierros"¹⁶⁰.

However, the intruders were not Sea Harriers, but rather the first two Argentine Mirage aircraft arriving at the Islands. Due to the fact that communications between the CIC and BAM Malvinas were temporarily cut off, M-III EA aircraft movements had not been informed to the PCAAa.

The aircraft flew east-west, fortunately at a very high altitude, outside the range of the munitions which self-destructed before reaching them. From the cockpits, a yellow-reddish light and then a tiny dark gray cloud could be seen well under the aircraft. The M-III reached Puerto Argentino and returned to the mainland.

The last of the twenty-one bombs dropped by the Vulcan exploded at 0800.

* * *

To sum up, even though the strategic bombing inflicted two Argentine Air Force soldiers casualties and affected the runway and facilities, it did not neutralize the airport. Most of the damage was done to the tents area, near the airport buildings, where troops had been lodged. As a preventive measure, that night they had been moved to a different location, thus minimizing the number of victims.

Although the resulting damage was relative, the significant deployment of Operation Black Buck was justified since it achieved the following goals: affecting the ground defense and acting as a deterrent element.

British naval aviators considered Operation Black Buck a wasted effort. If carrier based fighter-bombers had been used, it would have been more effective and economical¹⁶¹.

¹⁵⁹ Account given by retired Comodoro VGM Héctor Rusticcini before the BANIM Commission; at the time, he held the rank of Mayor and commanded the Ground Squadron at BAM Malvinas.

¹⁶⁰ The term "Fierros" is used as a generic call sign for the Argentine Air Force anti-aircraft cannon.

¹⁶¹ SHARKEY WARD, *Sea Harrier over Falkland*, London, Cassell Publishing House, 2000, page 186. Lt. Cdr. Nigel "Sharkey" Ward was Sea Harrier Squadron chief during the conflict.

In spite of the clear absurdity of the operation, the Staff of the FAS inferred that it would not be the only one, but rather the first of many. A new and enhanced defensive scheme was adopted as an immediate goal and according to the assets available; also, the risk of some targets on the mainland—in case warfighting actions did not favor the British—was assessed.

After enduring the first attack on the main target to defend, the Malvinas Air Component air defense system (surveillance, air control and anti-aircraft artillery) adjusted the procedures. Everything would change from then on.

Air Operations on 1 May

After being informed about the attack and because the mission so established, at 0443, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command (FAS) alerted the units under its authority to be ready to repel new air raids against Malvinas, and gave the order for the M-III EA and M-5 Dagger interceptor-fighter aircraft to carry out defensive air coverage tasks, under orders of the CIC Malvinas.

First fragmentary orders of the Argentine Air Force Southern Command

Frag-O no. 1090. Aircraft: Two M-III EA, call sign FIERA, armed with one Matra 530 EM¹⁶² medium range missile, two Matra 550 Magic IR¹⁶³ combat missiles, and cannons. “Hotel” version with two 1,700-liter external fuel tanks. Mission: defensive air coverage over Puerto Argentino. Crew: Mayor José Sánchez (I-019) and Capitán Marcos J. Czerwinski (I-014). They took off from Río Gallegos at 0640.

Frag-O no. 1091. Aircraft: Two M-5, call sign TORO, armed with two Shafrir IR air-to-air missiles, and cannons. “India” version with three 1,300-liter external fuel tanks. Mission: defensive air coverage over Malvinas. Crew: Capitán Carlos Moreno (C-437) and Teniente Héctor Volponi (C-430). They took off from Río Grande at 0745.

Malvinas TPS-43 radar combat role for both missions: Mayor Miguel Silva, Teniente Guillermo Saravia, and Cabo Primero Roberto Baiz.

When the M-III EA aircraft were 90 km away from the Malvinas radar, the controller gave them the order to intercept four echoes which were orbiting 220 km from Puerto Argentino, at 5,500 meters, apparently on stand-by. The Sea Harriers from HMS *Invincible*, configured with air-to-air missiles, formed an air umbrella to intercept attacks from the Argentine fighter aircraft on the fleet¹⁶⁴. The CAPs took turns relieving each other in flight and avoided facing the Argentine fighters, since at a high altitude they did not pose a threat.

The FIERA section started the descent heading directly towards the British aircraft to confront them head-on. After a few minutes, the radar controller informed them that the targets were heading towards Puerto Argentino and, as they descended, they approached inbound on radial 060°. When the Sea Harriers were 75 km away from the airport, they disappeared from the radar screen. Flying above 6,900 meters, the M-III section returned to BAM Malvinas and, in column formation, flew over it in circles waiting to detect an hostile air target.

From a high altitude, the M-III identified the flashes of the Argentine anti-aircraft artillery which was supposedly repelling a British raid, when actually the 35 mm and 20 mm batteries were aiming at them. Eighteen minutes later, and 200 liters below the established minimum fuel, since the radar did not detect any targets, the FIERA returned to the BAM Río Gallegos and landed at 0838.

¹⁶² The acronym “EM” stands for “Electromagnetic guidance.”

¹⁶³ The acronym “IR” stands for “Infrared guidance.”

¹⁶⁴ SHARKEY WARD, op. cit., page 198.

First air combat

In the meantime, with the same goal of carrying out flight alert and intercepting air raids on Argentine air bases, the FAS had given the TORO section, two M-5 interceptor aircraft, the order to depart from Río Grande. At night, and with maximum takeoff weight, the aircraft took off on a very short runway, while a heavy rain was falling and low clouds covered the sky. About 0825, ninety kilometers away from Puerto Argentino, and flying at 9,500 meters, the aircraft communicated with the Malvinas radar. The controller informed them that, at that moment, Sea Harriers were attacking the airport, so he guided them towards a CAP standing 200 km away from them. They turned to heading 020° and Capitán Moreno ordered full throttle (dry thrust with no afterburner). Teniente Volponi flew next to him, 500 meters to the left and 10° behind.

A few minutes later, the radar warned them that the enemy was 55 km away and heading in the opposite direction. Moreno requested a side approach, since a smaller angle would allow them to enter the tail cone to launch his Shafrir. When they were 17 km away in front of him, and 1,8 km to his right, Moreno ordered the jettison of the exterior wing tanks while keeping the exterior central wing tank to make full use of the fuel.

When the radar controller warned them that they were about to cross the enemy, they jettisoned the last tank, lit the afterburners, and made a max-G turn towards the Sea Harriers. They were flying at an altitude of 6,700 meters, while the British were flying at 5,500 meters. Among the clouds, they flew in circles trying to see each other. Volponi screamed: “Missile to the left!” In order to avoid it, Moreno made an 8.6 G violent turn which caused him a black-out¹⁶⁵. His vision returned when he relaxed G.

Moreno could not believe his own eyes when he saw the Sea Harriers’ maneuvers: they almost “stopped” in the air and reversed their course. Guided by their corresponding GCI controllers, Argentine and British fighters intended to surprise each other. Unaware of time, which seemed an eternity to Moreno, they engaged the afterburners and climbed towards Tierra del Fuego with the remaining 2,450 liters (the minimum necessary to return). The controller told them the enemy was also moving away.

The Sea Harrier section was made up by Lt. Cdr. Robin Kent and Lt. Brian Haigh from 801 Squadron. Their accounts agree and confirm that they launched two Sidewinder missiles out of range¹⁶⁶.

As the TORO section returned, they communicated with the Río Grande radar, which suggested they should go to Río Gallegos due to severe weather conditions. They disregarded this instruction and performed an instrument approach at Río Grande with minimum cloud ceiling. The flight was uneventful and landed at 0945.

Organization of the British carrier-based air offensive

Admiral John Woodward gave the carrier based aircraft the order to attack the Malvinas air bases and to patrol possible approach routes with fighter aircraft. Likewise, he tasked a smaller flotilla made up of one destroyer and two frigates to harass the BAM Malvinas defense positions from the southeast of Puerto Argentino.

Three Sea Harrier flight units¹⁶⁷ (twelve aircraft) from 800 Naval Squadron were to take off from HMS *Hermes* aircraft carrier at 0750 and attack BAM Malvinas and BAM Cóndor at 0830. They were assigned the following tasks:

¹⁶⁵ Effect produced by high acceleration, when blood flows to the feet (instead of following the movement of the body) momentarily denying an adequate blood supply to the brain; in some cases, it may cause loss of consciousness.

¹⁶⁶ RODNEY BURDEN et al., op. cit., page 210.

¹⁶⁷ RODNEY BURDEN et al., op. cit., pages 193 and 194.

First flight unit of four Sea Harriers, call sign RED, pilots: Lt. Cdrs. Neil Thomas, Tony Ogilvy and Gordon Batt, and Lt. Clive Morrell. It would launch a toss-bombing attack (over-the-shoulder) from the northwest on the BAM Malvinas anti-aircraft artillery positions. The three aircraft would carry three 1,000-lb (454 kg) bombs each, with variable time fuses (VT), and the fourth one would carry the same number and type of bombs but with Direct Action (DA) instantaneous fuses.

Second flight unit of five Sea Harriers, call sign BLACK, pilots: Lt. Cdrs. Andy Auld and Mike Blissett, Flt. Lts. Ted Ball, Robert Penfold and Dave Morgan (RAF). It was divided into two sections, from the north and northwest it would launch a low-flying attack on the airport facilities and the runway. Four aircraft were equipped with BL-755 cluster bombs¹⁶⁸ and the fifth one with three 1,000-lb bombs with DA fuses.

Third flight unit of three Sea Harriers, call sign TARTAN, pilots Lt. Cdr. Rod Frederiksen, Lts. Mike Hale and Andy Mc Harg. It would launch a low-flying attack on BAM C ndor runway and facilities, on the Darwin isthmus. Two aircraft were equipped with BL-755 cluster bombs and the third one with three 1,000-lb bombs with DA fuses.

During the Sea Harriers attacks, a total of 36 bombs were launched (BL-755 and 1,000-lb bombs with DA instantaneous and VT fuses).

From 0950, the *Hermes* crew had to reconfigure all aircraft to carry out air defense and photographic reconnaissance tasks.

Sea Harrier attack on BAM C ndor

Two minutes after the Vulcan bombing on BAM Malvinas airport, Brigadier Luis Castellano ordered Vicecomodoro Wilson Pedrozo to evacuate the Pucará Squadron to Calder n Naval Air Station, on Borb n Island, in order to prevent any materiel losses if BAM C ndor were to be targeted next¹⁶⁹.

Pedrozo summoned the 12th Infantry Regiment and BAM Squadron commanders to coordinate the defense of the base. Orders were given for the anti-aircraft artillery and the Elta radar to be ready, and for the security company to be deployed to the foxholes. Simultaneously, 12th RI Navy Marines occupied combat positions. As dawn was breaking, activity was feverish. At first light, CH-47 Chinook and Bell 212 helicopters were transferred closer to the village in order to camouflage them and, after deactivating the red alert for the anti-aircraft artillery, orders were given for the aircraft to take off.

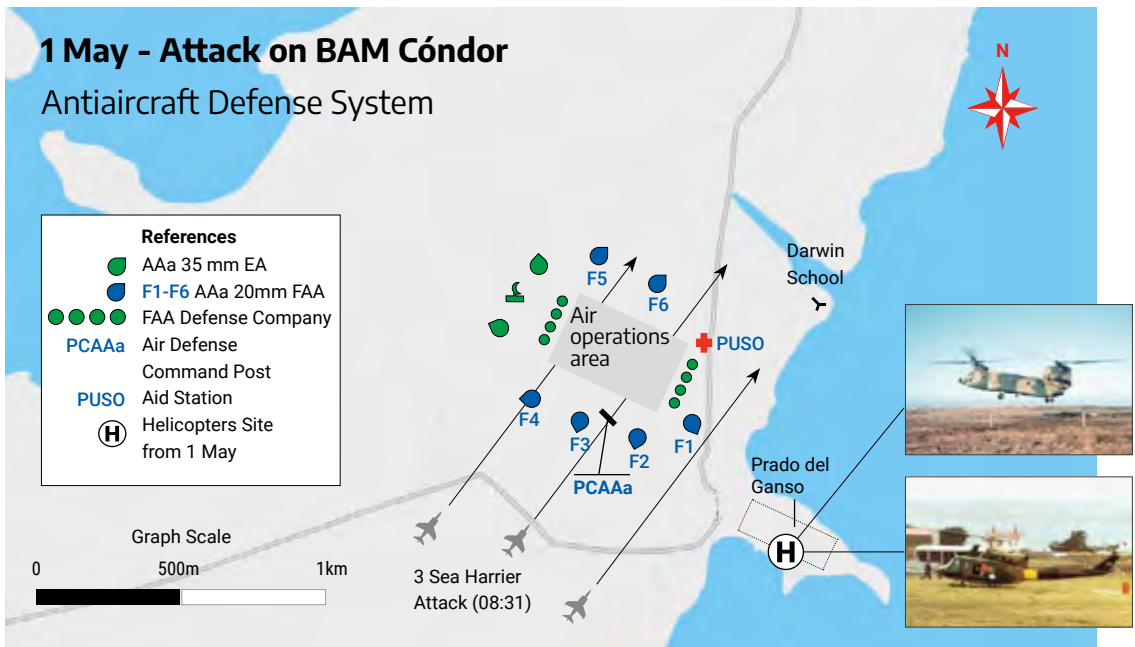
At 0730, still in darkness, the first Pucará flight unit made up of Teniente Alcides Russo and Teniente Roberto C mbaro started takeoff. The aircraft were to run about 250 meters on a downward slope which later turned upwards; such a circumstance demanded the pilot's attention and the aircraft structure's resistance, particularly in the landing gear.

The first section took off uneventfully; however, the third aircraft, the A-506 commanded by Capit n Ricardo Gr nert, broke the front wheel strut and the aircraft stuck nose first during takeoff. The pilot was assisted by Capit n Roberto Vila, who ran to his help. Gr nert had only suffered minor injuries. The runway was blocked, preventing the takeoff of the remaining nine Pucará aircraft.

As there were neither cranes nor towing vehicles available, moving the aircraft out of the runway was a complex task. The ground was muddy, and the aircraft was fully loaded with fuel and weapons. At 0815, the runway was finally unblocked and evacuation tasks were resumed.

¹⁶⁸ BL-755 bombs are referred to as "cluster bombs," as they open in the air with a detonator and, before falling to the ground, they release 147 submunitions or bomblets weighing 1,18 kg each.

¹⁶⁹ Account given by retired Brigadier VGM Wilson Rosier Pedrozo before the BANIM Commission. This section was written based on his report.



At that moment, the Elta radar alert was issued, since it had detected an approaching moving object. The alarm was not transmitted because it was assumed that they were Argentine aircraft; but when they were detected again just 4 km away, Sea Harriers could be seen approaching at a minimum-altitude, dropping conventional and submunition bombs. As combatants ran for shelter, they felt the ground shaking and the deafening explosions.

One of the bombs hit the A-527 aircraft which Teniente Daniel Jukic was starting up, surrounded by mechanics and gunners NCOs. The aircraft caught fire and the flames caused the gradual explosion of on-board weapons. The area turned into a deadly trap for those who were helping with the aircraft.

Another bomb flew over the Command Post and exploded 60 meters away, leaving a large crater in the peat. The rest of the weapons dropped exploded in different places along the runway, damaging two other aircraft, together with trucks and vehicles, and maintenance equipment, and hurting even more people. The devastating attack caused utter chaos.

On the one hand, the Pucará was in flames so nobody could get close to it to extinguish the fire which, at the same time, was causing the explosion of the weapons aboard. Rockets and munitions burst in all directions, turning the rescue of the wounded into a do or die situation, as they ran the risk of being hit by a projectile.

Officers and NCOs trying to assist the wounded had to crawl or go down on their knees a certain distance so as to avoid the shrapnel. When they reached a wounded casualty, they dragged them a few meters, and then carried them over their shoulders up to the Command Post, where they would be put to safety and receive medical aid. The fire and blasts continued for more than an hour.

Doctors Primer Teniente Fernando Miranda Abos and Primer Teniente Carlos Beranek, and nurses Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar P rez and Cabo Principal Domingo Sosa received the wounded and arranged them in sleeping bags on the floor. After delivering primary health care, Primer Teniente Miranda requested that the most seriously wounded be evacuated to the hospital in Puerto Argentino. The aeromedical evacuation was carried out about 0900 on board the Chinook helicopter, registration mark H-91. The deceased remained in the base so as to be buried whenever possible.

On the other hand, a fire had started in a two-meter high bushy area, the only existing thicket and ammunition storage hiding place of the BAM. A group was assisting the wounded

while, at the same time, another group was attempting to fight the fire using manual equipment, since the engine of the fire-fighting vehicle had been destroyed by a bomb. After an enormous effort, they controlled the fire just when the munition boxes started getting scorched.

As a result of the air attack, eight combatants lost their lives: Teniente Daniel Antonio Jukic; Cabo Principal Mario Duarte and Cabo Principal Juan Antonio Rodríguez; and Cabo Primero José Luis Peralta, Cabo Primero Miguel Ángel Carrizo, Cabo Primero José Alberto Maldonado, Cabo Primero Agustín Hugo Montaña and Cabo Primero Andrés Luis Brashich; 42 NCOs suffered different injuries (Carrizo passed away during the transportation flight to Puerto Argentino, while Brashich died on the way to the Joint Hospital).

Moreover, an aircraft was destroyed, and severe damage was inflicted on two aircraft as well as ground materiel and several flight support equipment. Besides the human and material losses, the morale of the people was affected. The dead and the wounded were mostly armorers, which jeopardized aircraft operativity.

But it did not end there. In the early afternoon, the Command, without revealing the source of the information, warned that enemy vessels had been detected moving towards the Choiseul Sound, with the clear intention of landing or attacking BAM Cóndor. The antiaircraft artillery was then relocated near the coast and joined the defense against a possible landing. Though personnel were exhausted, lacking in sleep and food, the order was executed until the darkest of nights closed in. They kept a vigil of arms evoking the vivid memory of the dead, while they waited for the attack. "I've never experienced a night like this," said retired Brigadier VGM Wilson Pedrozo¹⁷⁰.

Pucará Squadron

After the Vulcan attack on Puerto Argentino, preventive deployments were carried out at a good pace. Helicopters were to be transferred to the Prado del Ganso settlement, and the Pucará were to be redeployed to EAN Calderón. During the clear night, service flight squadron personnel marked off with portable oil beacons¹⁷¹ the opposite threshold of the runway, while the flames of a burning 200-liter-fuel drum marked off the runway centerline. At 0600, the BAM Cóndor command issued the fragmentary orders.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAM). Aircraft: Four IA-58, call sign BAGRE, armed with 76 FFAR 2.75 rockets, machine guns and cannons. Mission: offensive reconnaissance and transportation to EAN Calderón. Crew: Capitán Ricardo A. Grünert (A-506), Teniente Hernán R. Calderón (A-509), Teniente Alcides T. Russo (A-529), and Teniente Roberto F. Címbaro (A-523).

Engines were started slowly at 0645 with only one starting equipment available. Because of the delay, the flight commander gave the wing section the order to take off. At 0705, as he was taking off, Russo came across an unforeseen depression. Without sufficient lift, the aircraft climbed and touched the ground a few meters ahead. Due to the impact, the nose shock absorber broke, though it could lift on the last segment, grazing the furthest marker. Címbaro took off uneventfully.

At 0730, once he could start, Grünert occupied the threshold and started the run without noticing the depression on the runway the 3 had encountered. This time, the nose gear strut broke.

The aircraft dragged a few meters along the runway until it stopped, blocking it. Using a tractor, it was possible to move the aircraft and the deployment was ordered to continue.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAM). Aircraft: Four IA-58, call sign TIGRE, armed with 76 FFAR 2.75 rockets, machine guns and cannons. Mission: offensive reconnaissance and trans-

¹⁷⁰ RUBÉN OSCAR PALAZZI, *Malvinas: otras historias*, Buenos Aires, Claridad Publishing House, 2006, page 190.

¹⁷¹ Portable wick lamp with kerosene or JP1.

portation to EAN Calderón. Crew: Capitán Jorge A. Benítez (A-552), Teniente Néstor F. Brest (A-513), Teniente Rafael J. Hernández (A-520), and Teniente Daniel A. Jukic (A-527).

At 0815, the TIGRE flight unit engines were started.

And at 0831, the Sea Harrier attack takes place: the bomb falls on Teniente Jukic's Pucará and kills the pilot and seven NCOs, the wounded are rescued amid the explosions and the shrapnel of the Argentines' own weapons which had caught fire.

At 0910, the wounded were evacuated to the Puerto Argentino hospital aboard a CH-47.

Meanwhile, Teniente Russo and Teniente Címbaro, the only ones who had been able to take off, flew for three hours, as the other bases were on red alert. At 1030, they landed in EAN Calderón. Russo arrived aboard the A-529 which was out of service due to the take-off incident at BAM Córdor.

At 1000, Captain Benítez took off from BAM Córdor aboard the A-552. He returned at 1200 without having landed on Borbón Island as he had found the runway blocked by the A-529.

After noon, the transportation of the Pucará to EAN Calderón continued.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAM). Aircraft: Two IA-58, call sign TIGRE, armed with 76 FFAR 2.75 rockets, machine guns and cannons. Mission: offensive reconnaissance over the San Carlos Sound and transportation to EAN Calderón. Crew: Capitán Benítez (A-520) and Teniente Hernández (A-552). They took off from BAM Córdor at 1300 and, after carrying out offensive reconnaissance, landed in EAN at 1420.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAM). Aircraft: Two IA-58, armed with 76 FFAR 2.75 rockets, machine guns and cannons. Mission: offensive reconnaissance and transportation to EAN Calderón. Crew: Teniente Hernán R. Calderón (A-509) and Teniente Miguel A. Giménez (A-517). They took off from BAM Córdor at 1330 and returned separately; the former landed in BAM Córdor at 1500, while Teniente Giménez was given the order to join Teniente Brest and head to BAM Malvinas.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAM). Aircraft: IA-58, armed with 76 FFAR 2.75 rockets, machine guns and cannons. Mission: offensive reconnaissance and transportation to EAN Calderón. Crew: Teniente Néstor F. Brest (A-513). It took off from BAM Córdor at 1400 and was joined by Giménez. They both headed to Puerto Argentino instead of EAN Calderón under orders of the Air Component command, since they expected a landing in Darwin.

They remained in a holding pattern near BAM Malvinas since a CAP was flying in the area. Using radar frequency, wingman number 2 warned of an emergency in one of the engines. Once danger had passed, they were cleared for landing in BAM Malvinas. They arrived at 1500. Teniente Brest landed with one engine shutdown with over pressure. After checking the A-513's damaged engine, they confirmed the impact of a 7.62 mm projectile; definitely, it had been fired by Argentine troops, as no British forces were known to be operating in the Islands¹⁷².

Once the aircraft was refueled, Teniente Giménez was given the order to return to BAM Córdor immediately:

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAM). Aircraft: IA-58 armed with 76 FFAR 2.75 rockets, machine guns and cannons. Mission: offensive reconnaissance and transportation to BAM Córdor. Crew: Teniente Miguel A. Giménez (A-517). It took off from BAM Malvinas at 1600 and arrived at BAM Córdor at 1700; the nose gear strut broke during landing.

¹⁷² Account given by retired Comodoro VGM Carlos H. Argente before the BANIM Commission.

Malvinas TPS-43 Radar Combat Role: Teniente Guillermo Saravia, Primer Teniente Juan Romero, and Cabo Principal Carlos Quintana.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAM). Aircraft: Two IA-58 armed with 76 FFAR 2.75 rockets, machine guns and cannons. Mission: offensive reconnaissance and transportation to EAN Calderón. Crew: Teniente Héctor S. Furios (A-556) and Teniente Carlos Morales (A-509). They took off from BAM Cóndor at 1700 and landed uneventfully at EAN Calderón at 1830.

The situation of the Pucará aircraft became critical. Only five of the initial twelve aircraft were still operational (A-509, A-520, A-523, A-552, and A-556); the remaining aircraft had suffered different levels of damage. At BAM Cóndor: the A-527 was destroyed; and the A-502, A-506 and A-517 were damaged. In Puerto Argentino: the A-513 had one engine out of service and the A-528 was damaged. At Elefante Bay: the A-529 was damaged. Of these seven aircraft, only the A-529 and A-502 could be repaired.

The aircraft damaged during takeoff and landing (A-506 and A-517) would be decommissioned and used as decoys for future attacks. Although they were repairable, they could not be put back into service due to lack of parts.

Helicopter Squadron

Between 0800 and 0830, the Chinooks and Bell 212s were transferred to be protected and camouflaged among the houses of Prado del Ganso. As soon as they landed, the Sea Harriers attack took place. Once the wounded had been gathered, the first aeromedical evacuation was carried out on board a helicopter within a combat zone.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAM). Aircraft: CH-47, registration mark H-91, call sign GRINGO, armed with two 12.7 mm Browning machine guns operated by gunners. Mission: medical evacuation. Crew: Primer Teniente Horacio Giaigischia and Primer Teniente Julio R. Brouwer de Koning; mechanics, Suboficial Auxiliar Orlando G. Ruiz; cargo operator, Cabo Primero Rubén D. Lavorato; gunners, Cabo Principal Hugo A. Herrera and Cabo Primero Luis M. Villareal; and nurse Cabo Primero José Sosa. It took off from BAM Cóndor at 0910.

After the Squadron commander gave the order to depart, the helicopter took off from an area of open ground in Prado del Ganso and touched down on the BAM Cóndor runway. While the wounded were being evacuated, with the engine running, the FFAR rockets of Jukic's Pucará started self-destructing. The H-91 was dangerously close to the fire line. Under such conditions, it finally took off to Puerto Argentino.

There were eleven wounded men on board, who required urgent medical attention. Cabo Primero Miguel Ángel Carrizo could not survive and passed away during the flight. The H-91 would then become the first temporary war grave of the first NCOs killed in a warfighting action.

When it was close to Puerto Argentino, the Chinook was not cleared for landing: the zone was on red alert since a CAP was nearby. Due to this delay, the H-91 landed near Mount Longdon, where Argentine Army troops opened fire on it, as they mistook it for a British helicopter. Once the incident was dealt with, the helicopter resumed flight towards Puerto Argentino and landed near the Joint Military Hospital, where the wounded were transferred to. Cabo Primero Andrés Brashich died on the way to the Hospital..

In the afternoon, around 1700, when it was cleared for take-off, the CH-47 crew were to witness the attack of the TORNO M-5 flight unit on three vessels that were bombarding the Argentine defenses. They saw a huge smoke cloud over one of the attacked vessels.

They landed in BAM Cóndor (Prado del Ganso) at 1750¹⁷³.

¹⁷³ Account given by retired Brigadier VGM Horacio M. Giaigishia before the BANIM Commission.

Sea Harrier attack on BAM Malvinas

At the Puerto Argentino CIC, this second British aircraft aggression was picked up by the VyCA radar and recorded by the book. Around 0820, the red alarm was transmitted to BAM Malvinas, to the Antiaircraft Artillery Command Post and to the three Armed Forces through their liaison officers in the control room.

The Fierro 6, the 20 mm battery placed to the east end of the runway, under the command of Cabo José Ruíz, was the first to visually detect the intruders heading to Cape San Felipe. He sent an HT radio warning: “Behind the lighthouse!”

Through the high-magnification P-56 sight, the gunners clearly distinguished two groups of aircraft out of range of the 20 mm cannons. There were nine Sea Harriers moving towards the peninsula to the north of the airport and overflying the ground elevations to the west of Celebroña Point, about 10 km away, where they were no longer visible.

Given the distribution of the Fierros, the BAM Malvinas defense system covered 360° around the runway with nine batteries of 20 mm cannons, two of 35 mm cannons (one belonging to the FAA and the other to the EA), two EA Tigercat missile launchers, and near Puerto Argentino another Tigercat missile launcher belonging to the Navy.

A few minutes later, the airport siren was activated, signaling an air attack. The Superfledermaus radar operator warned that the aircraft were approaching from the north. The 35 mm battery chief, Primer Teniente Oscar Spath, confirmed a large number of approaching contacts, according to the fire-control system PPI (Plan Position Indicator)¹⁷⁴ screen.

Spath repeated the open fire order, even though it was still in effect, and went to a nearby dune to search for the aircraft. Taking a quick look around, he saw several Sea Harriers entering from the north, covering a wide front and following different paths. The aircraft would be encountered firstly by the Fierros 2, 3, 4 and 5, which were placed parallel to the runway.

For a moment, the external sounds seemed to disappear. Then, there was a deafening noise. The whistling sound of the jet engines mixed with the rattling of antiaircraft cannons and the booming explosions bursting everywhere.

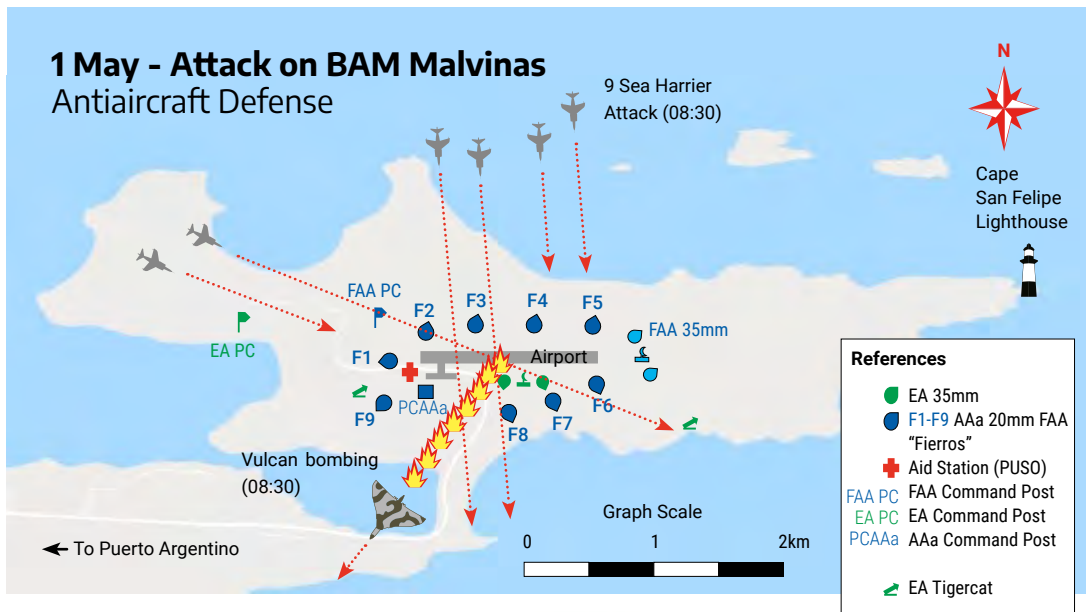
Four Sea Harriers approached from the northeast and, once they flew over the land to the north of the airport, they performed minimum-altitude flights over the water. From a distance, the first aircraft climbed about 30° to 45° and dropped bombs beyond the Fierros' positions, heading for the airport facilities (runway, control tower, hangars, etc.) and immediately made a max-G turn to the left heading east (account given by Fierros 3, 4, 5, 303 and 304¹⁷⁵). This Sea Harrier was not repelled, as it performed the procedure out of range (Attack no. 1).

The second aircraft entered from the same sector and performed the same procedure. Cannon 303 shot a rapid burst of gunfire at it and the Sea Harrier turned left, after launching the bombs; at that moment, it was shot at again by Cabo Rodríguez, Fierro 5 weapon chief. The latter calculated possible impacts, though the aircraft kept flying on an escape route to the east (Attack no. 2).

The third intruder coming from the same attacking direction was repelled by Cabo Principal Almada, Fierro 3 weapon chief. The Sea Harrier performed the launching maneuver and, when turning east, it was directly hit in the lower side of the fuselage (the “belly”). The aircraft made a turn as if returning to the place of origin and, full of smoke, disappeared behind the elevations to the north, in the vicinity of Mount Bajo. The shoot down could not be confirmed (Attack no. 3).

¹⁷⁴ Position indicator on the screen.

¹⁷⁵ Fierros 303 and 304 refers to the 35 mm Superfledermaus battery cannons.



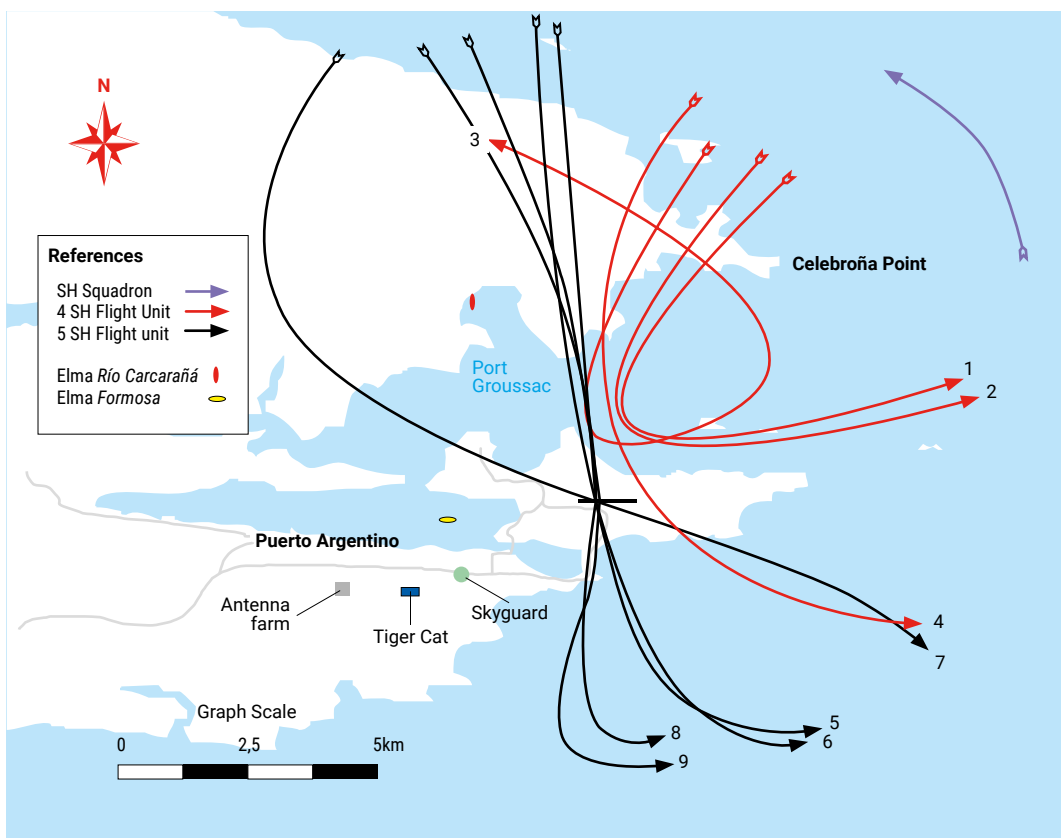
Cabo Julio Sánchez, Fierro 4 weapon chief, was concentrated on the combats taking place right to the east of his position (those concerning Fierro 5 and cannon 303), when soldier Juan José López, who was part of his crew, warned him that a Sea Harrier was coming directly towards him. As he turned the cannon searching for it, Sánchez first saw the aircraft repelled by Fierro 3, full of smoke, turning to return north, the starting point of the attack. Returning to his combat, Sánchez searched the sky for the Sea Harrier but did not see it. The soldier once again told him that the aircraft was coming in at very low altitude over the water. The gunner obtained it with his P-56 sight, and fired a burst with a negative angle of sight. Due to the gunpowder smoke, he lost sight of it. But he had fired a well-aimed burst and estimated that there had been possible impacts. He looked up in an attempt to locate the aircraft again, until he saw it coming, firing cannons. The aircraft climbed and dropped bombs which exploded about 100 meters ahead, on the beach. The shock wave reached them. The Sea Harrier continued firing cannons and flew a few meters by his position heading south.

This same aircraft was also engaged by cannon 304, passing about 10 meters above Primer Teniente Spath's vertical, who saw it on an escape route flying at very low altitude, heading south. It might have been Lt. Morrell's¹⁷⁶ flight, who was supposed to overfly the zone in order to photograph results (Attack no. 4).

Meanwhile, in the opposite sector, to the west of the runway, Cabo Sergio Chazarreta, Fierro 2 weapon chief, saw two Sea Harriers heading across the runway, passing about 400 meters to the east of his position with a north-south general attacking direction, directly towards the airport facilities, firing cannons and launching bombs. Chazarreta was able to fire a few bursts at them. This attack set the Navy's hangar on fire and coincided with the passage of Lt. Cdr. Blissett and Fl. Lt. Ball. The Sea Harriers followed an escape route directly to the south (Attacks nos. 5 and 6).

As Soldier Luis Desiderio was surveilling the assigned defense zone, he saw an aircraft coming from the northwest which, after overflying the hills, descended and started a low altitude over-the-water flight. He warned the weapon chief, but as he could not hear him due to the intense noise, he approached him and touched his shoulder to indicate where the attack was coming from. Chazarreta had to turn the cannon almost 180° to be able to

¹⁷⁶ DAVID MORGAN, *Hostile Skies – The Battle for the Falklands*, Orion Books Ltd., United Kingdom, 2012, page 193. This account, as all other references to British pilots in this section, are based on Morgan's work.



The Sea Harriers' attack flights, according to Dave Morgan's book entitled *Hostile Skies - The Battle for the Falklands* and accounts given by the Fierros' operators

see the attacking aircraft. Fierro 2 aimed at the intruder as it passed about 30 meters to its right side, and Chazarreta fired a long burst that hit it behind the canopy. Soldier Desiderio observed metal coming off the aircraft but it did not prevent it from escaping in the direction of Fierro 7. This escape trajectory was observed by Fierro 8, which also fired a burst at it as the aircraft passed in front of it (Flt. Lt. Penfold - Attack no. 7).

Cabo Daniel Oyola, Fierro 1 weapon chief, observed the attack of the Sea Harriers coming from the north, heading to the airport. He saw the aircraft dropping bombs and firing all along their path until they disappeared towards the sea. The attack not only set the Navy's hangar on fire, but also made those men in the surrounding area run to their positions; therefore, they had to call for a ceasefire (Attacks nos. 5 and 6).

As he was located on an elevated position, Oyola had a sort of panoramic view of all the airport's surroundings and observed the impacts of Fierro 3 on a Sea Harrier (Attack no. 3).

Some of the aircraft passed within 500 and 700 meters of his weapon, but this did not stop him from firing several bursts at them. At some point, there were several impacts close to his position, but he was unable to see where they came from.

Cabo Principal Diego Bartis, Fierro 8 weapon chief, could clearly observe the Sea Harriers striking from north to south. His position was very close to the airport access road and, therefore, close to the airport facilities. Bartis observed the passage of the first aircraft attacking across the runway; when it passed over the air station, west of his position, he fired a burst at it. During that maneuver, the aircraft fired cannons and dropped BL-755 cluster bombs that damaged the air station and set the Navy's hangar on fire (Fierros 1 and 2 made the same observation). (Attacks no. 5 and 6).

Later, he saw another Sea Harrier passing diagonally to the runway from Fierro 2 to Fierro 7. When it was in front of him, about 100 meters, he fired a burst at it. (This coincides with the path of the aircraft engaged by Fierro 2). (Attack no. 7).

Soldier Claudio Viano warned him that two Sea Harriers were coming from the north, from behind the hangar. As he could not see them yet, he aimed his cannon at the edge of the hangar's gable roof, and waited. When the first aircraft appeared, its silhouette covered the whole P-56 sight and, immediately, Bartis fired a 2-second burst (70 projectiles) at it. As he knew the second aircraft was coming behind, he lifted his head away from the sight to search for it. At that moment, he observed that the left wing of the aircraft he had just repelled was damaged and black smoke was coming out of it.

Immediately afterwards, the second Sea Harrier appeared. Bartis could not aim the P-56 sight at it, but he fired short bursts guided by the tracer projectiles. The aircraft, which was firing cannons along its path, fired over the position of Fierro 8 as well. Both Sea Harriers followed the same path: from Fierro 3 directly to Fierro 8, passing near the air station and then, on the escape route, diverted from Bartis' position by a scarce distance of 60 meters and an altitude of 50 meters (flying over the airport access road) and continued in that direction to the sea. The weapon chief lost sight of them as they flew towards the ocean (Lt. Cdr. Auld and Fl. Lt. Morgan - Attacks nos. 8 and 9).

Cabo José Ruíz, Fierro 6 weapon chief, was the first to see the Sea Harriers behind the lighthouse heading north, where the attack had been launched. Since he had a poor view in that direction from his position due to the elevations and the dunes to the north of the runway, he could only observe the first two attacks that entered from the northeast and escaped to the east. He had only one chance to engage in combat and he took it. From the west side of his position, an escaping Sea Harrier (according to him, from the position of Fierro 2) appeared and made a max-G turn to the left about 150 meters from his weapon, so he got a view of the upper part (canopy facing Fierro). Ruíz took aim and the aircraft completely covered the P-56 sight. He fired a burst hitting right at it. The Sea Harrier followed a path to the southeast flying progressively lower, until it disappeared towards the sea (Attack no. 7).

Such observation —an aircraft flying progressively lower in that direction— was confirmed by Primer Teniente Spath, who was at the 35 mm battery position, standing at the foot of the dune close to the Superfledermaus radar. Seconds earlier, Spath had observed what he, at first, thought was a damaged aircraft with fire coming out of the discharge nozzle. After a moment, he confirmed that it was a Tigercat missile. It had been launched from a position further west and was flying parallel to the coast, and as it failed to find its target or its guidance was interrupted, it climbed to explode at a high altitude. And it was right at that moment that he saw the Sea Harrier heading southeast flying progressively lower until it disappeared. (It could have been the aircraft repelled by Fierro 6 and the missile, one that was pursuing that same aircraft).

Still watching the mentioned aircraft escaping and black smoke coming out from its nozzles, Spath then observed that the cannon 304 almost aligned with his line of sight made a burst over his position; an instant later, he saw a Sea Harrier passing almost over his vertical following an escape route to the south. It was flying so low that he could clearly see the pilot's helmet. (It was the aircraft that had been first repelled by Fierro 4 and then by Fierro 304). (Attack no. 4).

* * *

In summary: the first four Sea Harriers approached from the northeast and launched a toss-bombing attack, departing at minimum altitude over the water; two of them escaped to the east, the damaged one escaped to the north, and the last one to the south. The goal was to neutralize the air defense, and to cause damage to property and on personnel by dropping bombs from a distance, and keeping out of the effective range of the anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) weapons. Using mathematical calculations, it could be determined that the trajectories of the bombs —taking into account the 250 m/sec attack speed and the 30° to

45° climbing angle— would allow them to reach a range of at least 6 km, launching outside the AAA effective range (except on two occasions, as described by Fierros 3, 4 and 304).

Seconds after the first attacks, a second wave of two Sea Harriers arrived with a general north-south flight direction. They flew directly towards the airport facilities and dropped BL-755 cluster bombs which hit the air station and set the Navy's hangar on fire.

Afterwards, a Sea Harrier attacked with parachute-retarded bombs with the goal of damaging the runway; but it was not achieved as the launching was done far from the target (since it was repelled by Fierro 2 and escaped towards Fierro 7). Immediately after, two aircraft loaded with BL-755 bombs and cannons flew in following a general northwest-southeast flight direction (from Fierro 3 to Fierro 8).

* * *

While the actions and observations of gunners were taking place, Capitán Osvaldo R. Battioni, who was serving as Forward Air Control Officer (OCAA) at an antenna farm located between the town and the airport, could see a Marine Tigercat missile fail; it had been launched from the eastern limit of the town. Battioni approached that battery with the intention of explaining to them the maneuvers that could be performed by a fighter-bomber during an escape maneuver. At that moment, the gunners obtained a new target, and he saw the flying missile as it hit a Sea Harrier, the large explosion that engulfed it and the wreckage that later fell into the sea. He did not see the pilot ejecting, and was overcome with emotion, as he was a pilot like himself.

According to Battioni, the aircraft was following a general northeast-southwest flight direction, that is, from the Tussac Islands towards the inner bay, overflying the air station with a wide left turn. He perfectly distinguished the pilot's helmet inside the cockpit at the moment he was turning over the open sea, just when he was intercepted by the missile. What he observed could correspond with flights no. 8 or 9. In spite of this, the shoot down was not claimed by the Navy battery.

On the other hand, Capitán de Ultramar Edgardo Dell'Elicine, in command of the ELMA *Río Carcarañá*, also witnessed a shoot down. He was moored in Port Groussac (Sparrow Cove) when he clearly saw a Sea Harrier making a close-in 180° turn and heading for them, firing 30 mm cannons at them. The projectiles hit the water, 20 meters to port. A few seconds later, the pilot began a hard climb, trying to evade the defensive fire. A missile fired from somewhere in the nearby hills hit him. The aircraft exploded in the air right in front of his eyes and fell far away towards the sea, engulfed in an orange fireball. Everyone on the vessel's bridge and many of the crew on deck witnessed such an unforgettable scene.

From the *Río Carcarañá*'s position and along the same line of sight, the shoot down observed by Battioni occurred about 7 km away, behind the airport's elevations; hence, it is deduced that what the sea captain saw could have been the combat of Fierro 3, about 2 km away, or could have been confused with the self-destruction of a Tigercat missile, which occurred at a high altitude and resulted very spectacular due to the 16 kg of explosives it carried.

* * *

Meanwhile, moments before the Sea Harrier attack, personnel from the BAM aid station (PUSO) had tried to evacuate the most seriously wounded during the Vulcan bombing. Eight wounded men were carried on a truck, but when they were driving, they found a bomb crater which prevented them from moving forward, so they tried to return to the station. As it was impossible to continue on the vehicle, nurse Suboficial Auxiliar Carlos Ortiz, together with Cabo Principal Carlos H. Saldivia and Cabo Principal José C. Albet, and stretcher-bearer soldiers, transferred the wounded up to the PUSO shelter, about 150 meters away.

Capitán Dovichi, lying still on a stretcher, was waiting for the transfer uncovered when the alarm went off as the Sea Harrier attack began. Bombs began exploding all around. Men

searched for shelter, except for Suboficial Auxiliar Ortiz who ran back to Capitán Dovichi; he jumped on the stretcher and covered him with his own body, and told him: “We are getting through this bombing together, Sir.” After the war, Ortiz was awarded the Cross to the Heroic Valor in Combat for his deeds. Once the attack ended, other stretcher-bearers helped Ortiz to get Capitán Dovichi in the ambulance to be transferred to the PUSO and finally to the Joint Military Hospital with the rest of the wounded.

After the Sea Harrier attack, Mayor Héctor Rusticcini, Ground Squadron leader, took on the responsibility of “cleaning” the airport platform:

About 1,000 bomblets¹⁷⁷ were lying scattered on the platform in front of the air station. Taking into account our personnel’s safety and protection, my partner, Mayor Raúl Maiorano, and I called Suboficial Ayudante Ricardo Díaz, road machinery operation specialist and blasting expert, and explained to him our intention to “clean” the platform. As cool as a cucumber, Díaz said: “Well, chief,... let’s shovel them up.” He was referring to a Caterpillar 412 vehicle with mechanical shovel that had just come from filling the crater left by the first bomb blast of the Vulcan raid. The runway was already operational [...]. “What if one of them blows up?,” I asked. “Chief, we tilt the shovel a bit and that’s it.” Well, we got on the vehicle and slowly started making a big mountain of bomblets. Once we finished, we asked Comodoro Destri, BAM Malvinas chief, to summon the Marines, responsible for detonating UXO. Comodoro Destri could not believe the pile that was ready to be blown up. Very politely, the Marine Suboficial Mayor told us: “Excuse me, gentlemen, but with all due respect, you are all mad.” What is certain is that with this “madness” we avoided a misfortune resulting from an explosion that would have significantly injured our people¹⁷⁸.

Analysis of the shoot downs

On 1 May, different pieces of information overlapped and thus it was difficult to check the veracity of the shoot downs. The same event was observed by different people from different angles and distances. It was hard to keep track and to record the reports, especially when there was no accuracy regarding the time and place of the event. On the other hand, since BAM Malvinas—the target of the air attacks—was connected to the Freycinet peninsula’s landmass by a narrow isthmus and almost completely surrounded by water (340°), the possible shoot downs would have occurred over the sea, with no possibility of finding any wreckage.

The BANIM Commission requested retired Brigadier VGM Rodolfo Savoia and retired Comodoro VGM Oscar Spath (BAM Malvinas Antiaircraft Artillery Command Post Chief and AAA 3rd Battery Chief, respectively) to investigate and write a report as qualified witnesses of the antiaircraft actions carried out that day, on which the British claim that only Fl. Lt. David Morgan’s Sea Harrier ZA-192 was damaged.

With the intention of reducing uncertainty but aware that the truth will remain concealed for many years to come, the investigation was carried out based on supporting documents which had not been considered before. Such documents include 800 Squadron Flt. Lt. Morgan’s air navigation chart, which coincides with his book *Hostile Skies - The battle for the Falklands*¹⁷⁹, with very descriptive graphics of the actions carried out. Likewise, the intended goal was to find a logical relationship between the accounts of combatants and of other observers not involved in the air defense engaged in the barely two minutes of fighting. To that end, retired Comodoro VGM Oscar Spath got in contact with most of the weapon chiefs and with many former serving soldiers, and a logical coherence was found among so many traumatic and simultaneous events.

¹⁷⁷ Submunitions, minibombs or bomblets contained within BL-755 cluster bombs.

¹⁷⁸ Account given by retired Comodoro VGM Héctor Rusticcini before the BANIM Commission; at the time, he held the rank of Mayor and commanded the Ground Squadron.

¹⁷⁹ DAVID MORGAN, *Hostile Skies - The Battle for the Falklands*, London, Orion Books Ltd., 2007.

The abovementioned corresponds to that report, which arrived at the following conclusions:

- There were considerable differences between the planning of the Sea Harrier attack on BAM Malvinas and the actual mission carried out, particularly as regards the trajectories followed by each pilot and the result of the use of weapons. Obviously, the pilots tried to minimize their time over the airport and none of them made a second passage. Some “over-the-shoulder” toss bombings were delivered behind the target (near ELMA *Formosa*, at the Puerto Argentino roadstead) and others were released short of the target, barely reaching the beach (Fierro 4); several cluster bombs were dropped at a very low level and did not scatter the submunitions (air station); retarded bombs released on the runway caused no damage, and the final aerial photography passage is supposed to have been tangential to the airport via the eastern threshold.
- Based on the observer’s professionalism, the one achieved by the Marines using a Tigercat missile can be considered a shoot down (Flights nos. 8 or 9).
- The combat of Fierro 3 is consistent with what was reported by several observers, as regards an aircraft that did not follow the northeast escape route as the Sea Harrier RED section should have done, and began to lose altitude until it disappeared over land with apparent damage and surrounded by thick smoke. The end of the flight was not seen but it is reasonably considered a shoot down.
- The flight identified as no. 7, belonging to the BLACK section, was repelled by Fierros 2 and 6, with good firing opportunities, and flew outbound to the east at a very low altitude until it disappeared from sight. Such a result deserves to be considered as a probable shoot down.
- The Fierro 8 was able to effectively repel two aircraft which had launched bombs on the air station, observing significant damage and thick smoke coming out of the first one. Both aircraft continued flying to the south. They could be flights number 8 and 9 (whereas no. 9 could have been Morgan, who received a 20 mm impact in the empennage and, due to the proximity, the projectile impact fuse failed to activate).

Finally, and as an interesting fact, on 6 May, the British declared two Sea Harriers were lost, without stating the cause. Besides, British pilots would not carry out again during the following days a low-altitude attack like the one which took place on 1 May.

The Response from the Argentine Air Force Southern Command

As the mainland kept receiving information about the attacks on the Malvinas bases, and the enemy fleet’s magnitude and location was deduced from the sporadic observations made from the coast and detections by the VyCA Squadron’s TPS-43 surveillance radar, there was a growing awareness of the leading role the aviation would perform. Brigadier Ernesto Crespo, leading the Argentine Air Force Southern Command, as per the Operations Plan No. 2/82 - Sovereignty Maintenance, which established the execution of tactical air operations to be requested to the Air Force, took on the responsibility of responding to the British aggression at his own risk, even attacking naval targets.

Meanwhile, around 0950, the FAS received confirmation from the TOAS Command that the British commander had demanded surrender, but the Argentine commander had refused.

On the other hand, the proximity of many enemy vessels could be inferred from the British air assaults and the visual and electronic detections carried out by the Argentine surveillance. Faced with the possibility of an imminent amphibious assault on an undefended beach, and without having received any specific requirement, the FAS ordered most of the fighter aircraft to take off. Two-aircraft sections were to carry out staggered departures, configured alternatively for interception tasks or bombing attacks on ground and surface targets (land or sea); and, based on a verbal coordination made days before, they would be under the orders of the

CIC Malvinas. One way or another, the FAS air units flew to the Islands and remained on flight alert.

Frag-O no. 1092. Aircraft: Four A-4B, call sign TOPO, armed with three 250-kg parachute-retarded bombs, and cannons. Mission: attack on naval targets, with AAR. Crew: Capitán Hugo A. Palaver (C-244), Teniente Daniel E. Gálvez (C-206), Primer Teniente Luciano Guadagnini (C-221), and Alférez Hugo E. Gómez (C-225). They took off from Río Gallegos at 0830.

Frag-O no. 1093. Aircraft: Two M-III EA, call sign TABLÓN, armed with two 550 Magic IR missiles, one Matra 530 EM interception missile, and cannons. “Hotel” version with two 1,700-liter external fuel tanks. Mission: defensive air coverage over Malvinas. Crew: Capitán Gustavo A. García Cuerva (I-015) and Primer Teniente Carlos E. Perona (I-016). They took off from Río Gallegos at 0859.

Malvinas TPS-43 radar combat role for both missions: Primer Teniente Norberto Faber, Alférez Hugo Mercau and Cabo Principal Enrique Sierra.

As the optical and radioelectric surveillance system of the Malvinas Garrison did not detect any vessels assembled anywhere along the coast, nor preparatory naval bombardment nor landings, or as no requirement had been received, the CIC assumed that the TOPO flight unit was carrying out a defensive air coverage mission. Hence, it instructed the radar to guide the flight unit to intercept a combat air patrol.

Ten minutes after arriving at the A-4B point of coverage and reaching the Bingo fuel or minimum fuel level for a safe return to base, the M-IIIs heard that the TOPO flight unit was being guided to intercept a British CAP of 801 Squadron (Lt. Cdr. John Eyton Jones and Flt. Lt. Paul Barton-RAF)¹⁸⁰.

Capitán Palaver, TOPO flight commander, warned the radar operator that the British were armed with bombs. Immediately, the controller ordered the A-4Bs to follow an escape route and directed the M-IIIs on a tail-chase intercept towards the Sea Harriers which were flying behind the TOPOs. When they realized they were threatened, the British abandoned the TOPOs and confronted the Mirages which were still carrying the 1700-liter fuel tanks, as had been ordered by the FAS. Both sections crossed each other at different altitudes but were not able to launch missiles. As they were already flying below the minimum fuel level for a safe return, and simultaneously with the CAP, both fighters’ formations headed towards their corresponding bases.

García Cuerva and Perona contacted each other on the same tactical frequency only when the coastline was seen on the horizon. They landed at 1058 with 100 to 200 liters of fuel left (approximately three minutes of flight time) and the emergency red light on. When they met with the TOPOs at the Officers’ Mess —who arrived one hour later, after refueling—, they celebrated their safe return and discussed the circumstances they had experienced in their baptisms of fire.

* * *

Frag-O no. 1099. Aircraft: Two M-5, call sign LIMÓN, armed with two Shafrir IR missiles, and cannons. “India” version with three 1,300-liter external fuel tanks. Mission: defensive air coverage over Malvinas. Crew: Mayor Carlos N. Martínez (C-435) and Primer Teniente Héctor H. Luna (C-429). They took off from Río Grande at 1000.

The radar guided them towards two Sea Harriers approaching at 4,300 meters on Malvinas radial 340°. The M-5s faced them without leaving the 8,500-meter altitude; they jettisoned the external tanks, began accelerating and engaged the weapons. At that moment, Martínez reported failures in his two missiles; however, they continued towards the British aircraft. Within 110 km, the Sea Harriers evaded the encounter and headed towards the aircraft

¹⁸⁰ RODNEY BURDEN et al., *op. cit.*, page 212.

carrier. The radar ordered the LIMÓN aircraft to return to base. As they were flying outbound, they heard the radar reporting that the Sea Harriers had reversed their course and were returning; hence, it assigned that target to the FOCOs. The M-5s landed at Rio Grande at 1215.

Frag-O no. 1098. Aircraft: Two M-III EA, call sign FOCO, armed with two 550 Magic IR missiles, and cannons. “Hotel” version with two 1,700-liter external fuel tanks. Mission: defensive air coverage. Crew: Primer Teniente Roberto L. Yebra (I-017) and Primer Teniente Marcelo E. Puig (I-014). They took off from Río Gallegos at 1023.

Malvinas TPS-43 radar combat role: Primer Teniente Norberto Faber, Alférez Hugo Mercau and Cabo Principal Enrique Sierra.

The radar controller gave them the order to intercept two echoes approaching Puerto Argentino. Even though the M-IIIs were below minimum fuel, the aircraft began the interception. Just as they had done with the FIERAs (Frag-O no. 1090) and, showing the British pilots’ respect for the Matra 530 EM¹⁸¹ medium range missiles, the Sea Harriers made a 180° turn and flew outbound. The M-IIIs started their return to the mainland. They landed at 1213.

* * *

Frag-O no. 1095. Aircraft: Four A-4C, call sign OSO, armed with three 250-kg parachute-retarded bombs, and cannons. Mission: tactical air interdiction, with AAR. Crew: Capitán Fernando A. Castellano (C-322), Teniente Daniel A. Paredi (C-318), Capitán Mario J. Caffaratti (C-319), and Teniente Ricardo Lucero (C-302). They took off from San Julián at 1100.

Malvinas TPS-43 radar combat role for both missions: Primer Teniente Norberto Faber, Alférez Hugo Mercau and Cabo Principal Enrique Sierra.

After the in-flight refueling, the OSO flight unit entered on a southeast route overflying the first island foothills and, at Salvajes islands, it was already at a minimum altitude. The crew tried to contact the Puerto Argentino radar operator but, due to the low altitude, they could not do so at first. A few minutes later, they were able to make contact and received the order to head towards Borbón Island —Elefante Bay, to be precise— due to a probable landing of a helicopter assault force. The first few days the crews did not have the adequate air navigation charts to pinpoint the indicated location; so, the OSOs flew in circles in order to locate it. They entered a zone where there was a steady drizzle which prevented them from flying at a low altitude and looking for landmarks. Under these circumstances, they climbed to 1,600 meters in a tactical staggered formation to the left, keeping a separation of 900 meters among the aircraft.

Five minutes later, the TPS-43 controller informed them that a CAP was approaching to intercept them, which was 20 km away. The flight unit commander ordered a close formation and an IFR escape. Meanwhile, the radar controller informed them that the CAP was approaching. In a close formation, the leader applied almost full throttle, banked to the right and plunged them into the clouds heading 270°. Once the shower was over, the leader searched for lower flight levels, and descended in formation until the sea came into sight.

They were surprised to find two dark islets a few meters from the wings of the wingmen. They flew at a minimum altitude for another fifteen minutes, navigating through minor islands and adjusting the return route. Then, they climbed to 10,600 meters and leveled off. At that moment, wingman 3 broke the silence and reported that he had heard an explosion below the right wing. The leader slowed down and checked Caffaratti’s aircraft, but did not find anything. They assumed that the cannons’ air bottle had broken. They landed at 1330 and confirmed said damage.

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¹⁸¹ SHARKEY WARD, op. cit., page 200.

During the conflict, the Comodoro Rivadavia Defense Sector maintained a three-minute alert with an interceptor. For both pilots and mechanics to be in a state of constant readiness, they were often ordered alert sorties, not exactly to respond to a real threat, but to carry out air patrol or to conduct radar-controlled intercept (ICV) of Argentine aircraft not properly identified.

On 1 May, in the Comodoro Rivadavia Defense Sector, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command ordered an M-III EA to carry out an alert sortie:

3-minute Standby Alert. M-III EA, call sign POTRO. “Bravo” version with two 500-liter external tanks, armed with a Matra 530 IR/EM missile and cannons. Mission: air patrol. Crew: Capitán Carlos A. Arnau (I-018). Operated from Comodoro Rivadavia. Flight time: 40 minutes.

* * *

Around noon, the Malvinas Air Defense system detected three echoes at sea level approaching from the south of Puerto Argentino. Although the bulk of the fleet was deployed in the northern sector, the FAS inferred that such movements could be consistent with a probable landing operation on the south coast of Soledad Island. Therefore, it ordered attack sorties to prevent it. The tactic employed was to send formations with air-to-air capability to attract combat air patrols and thus infiltrate the raids against the naval targets.

Frag-O no. 1101. Aircraft: Two M-5, call sign FIERRO, armed with two Shafrir IR missiles, and cannons. “India” version with three 1,300-liter external fuel tanks. Mission: defensive air coverage. Crew: Capitán Raúl A. Díaz (C-421) and Teniente Gustavo E. Aguirre Faget (C-412).

The latter aircraft failed at ignition. After several attempts, the engine started, but there was fire in the tail pipe area. While the problem was being solved, Capitán Díaz continued with the mission and became the first pilot to take off alone to carry out a combat mission. He departed from BAM San Julián at 1200 and arrived at 1440.

Malvinas TPS-43 Radar Combat Role: Teniente Guillermo Saravia, Primer Teniente Juan Romero, and Cabo Principal Carlos Quintana.

In the subsequent debriefing, Capitán Díaz explained that on the outbound leg he encountered low and medium clouds that, at times, blocked the sea from sight. When he was near Malvinas, he communicated with the CIC’s TPS-43 radar which directed him to a CAP, 110 km away to the east of the Islands. He armed the cannon and missiles panel and turned to the indicated intercept heading 090°. The controller informed him that the enemy was 1,800 meters below and kept guiding him. The CAP descended sharply 22 km away to disappear from the radar. This encouraged Díaz, as he assumed the opponent did not want to engage in combat. The controller ordered him to set a return route over the Islands and warned him that he might possibly fly over a frigate. When he arrived at the Islands, he saw at a distance the San Carlos Sound and the Darwin area.

Shortly afterwards, the radar alerted him to the presence of an echo heading towards him from the southeast and climbing at high speed, 30 km away. Díaz accelerated to 830 km/h, turned to the south on a collision course and maintained an altitude of 7,900 meters. He looked at the instruments one last time before the encounter and, filled with apprehension, found that he had no more than five minutes of fuel left before returning. When he was about 15 km from the enemy and 900 meters above, the British fighter abandoned the encounter and descended until the TPS-43 lost him. A few minutes later, upon reaching the fuel limit, the controller wished him good luck and instructed him on heading “back home.”

Frag-O no. 1100. Aircraft: Two M-5, call sign CICLÓN, armed with two Shafrir IR missiles, and cannons. “India” version with three 1,300-liter external fuel tanks. Mission: defensive air coverage. Crew: Capitán Horacio Mir González (C-430) and Teniente Juan D. Bernhardt (C-437). They took off from Río Grande at 1230.

Malvinas TPS-43 Radar Combat Role: Teniente Guillermo Saravia, Primer Teniente Juan Romero, and Cabo Principal Carlos Quintana.

While the section was being vectored to possible intruders, it maintained an altitude of 11,500 meters, which was essential to keep fuel consumption under control. The radar informed them that a section of Harriers was approaching the Islands, on an intercept course towards the CICLÓN M-5s.

Once informed that they were very close to the Harriers and that the latter maintained an altitude fluctuating between 3,000 and 5,500 meters, the section jettisoned the tanks for better aircraft performance to engage in combat. The Daggers and the intruders were both moving and maneuvering among different cloud layers, which reduced visibility. At that moment, Bernhardt reported that he caught a glimpse of a Harrier flying below and in a close-in turn.

The M-5s descended to an altitude of 7,500 meters so as not to lose sight of the enemy. This descent was made with max-G turns and among cloud layers. The Daggers performed several maneuvers trying to reach the position and distance that would allow them to launch their Shafrir missiles.

Despite their best efforts, they could not get sight of the enemy. Without external tanks, they quickly reached the “mosca” level, that is, the minimum fuel level for a safe return to Río Grande. For this reason, the section leader informed the Malvinas radar that they had to leave the zone. At the same time, the radar indicated that the Harriers were already flying away from the island. The CICLÓN section landed at 1430 in severe weather conditions.

Frag-O no. 1103. Aircraft: Two A-4C, call sign PAMPA, armed with two Shafrir IR missiles, and cannons. Mission: defensive air coverage, with AAR. Crew: Primer Teniente José D. Vázquez (C-313) and Teniente Atilio V. Zattara (C-304). They took off from San Julián at 1330.

Malvinas TPS-43 Radar Combat Role: Teniente Guillermo Saravia, Primer Teniente Juan Romero, and Cabo Principal Carlos Quintana.

The radar operator indicated three targets which could be helicopters, but when the A-4Cs tried to repel them, they were instructed to return to San Julián, since a CAP was 28 km away on an intercept course. They landed at 1610.

Frag-O no. 1104. Aircraft: Two A-4C, call sign PINGO, armed with two Shafrir IR missiles, and cannons. Mission: defensive air coverage, with AAR. Crew: Primer Teniente Daniel Manzotti (C-310) and Teniente Néstor López (C-303). They took off from San Julián at 1400, and could not refuel due to technical problems and returned at 1500.

First attack on a British fleet unit

The Argentine Air Force Southern Command received confirmation that three vessels had detached from the escort and were heading to bombard Argentine positions. The vessels were sighted on the horizon around 1400, because of their masts, sailing from east to west, south of the airport. They then changed direction and headed north (airport). At that moment, the three ships were clearly distinguished. One of them stood out due to its size, compared to the other two.

They positioned themselves approximately 12 km off the coast, and two Sea King helicopters transported troops that descended west of Celebroña Point (far northeastern area of the Freycinet Peninsula) on several flights. Coordinations were made with the Army's Tigercat weapon system personnel, and a missile was fired which, halfway, started climbing and was self-destructed (out of range).

At approximately 1600, one of the Sea Kings started hovering about 6 km away behind the lighthouse, at a height of 100 meters, and the naval bombardment started immediately afterwards¹⁸².

According to British sources, these were the Type 21 frigates Arrow and Alacrity and the County-class destroyer *Glamorgan*, which were to approach up to 9/18 km southeast of Puerto Argentino and open fire against the Malvinas Military Air Base airport¹⁸³. After a brief planning, the Argentine Air Force Southern Command ordered:

Frag-O 1105. Aircraft: three M-5. Call sign: TORNO. Weapons: two 250-kg parachute-retarded bombs and 30-mm cannons. "India" version with three 1,300-liter external tanks. Mission: close air support, naval target attack. Crew: Capitán Norberto R. Dimeglio (C-432), Teniente Gustavo E. Aguirre Faget (C-412), y Primer Teniente César F. Román (C-407). Take-off: San Julián, 1545.

TPS-43 Malvinas radar combat role: Mayor Miguel Ángel Silva, Teniente Guillermo Saravia, Primer Teniente Juan Romero, and Cabo Principal Carlos Quintana.

The TORNOS entered from the north of Gran Malvina, flew over the San Carlos Sound, and 270 km away from Puerto Argentino, the TPS-43 radar contacted them and indicated their approach route. The flight unit approached the target from the east-northeast quadrant undetected. The three vessels, arranged in a triangular formation (two ahead and one behind), and 1,000 to 3,000 meters apart from each other, completed a closed circuit by changing course, while bombarding Argentine positions.

The flight unit made a high-speed, low-level approach. Capitán Dimeglio dropped two bombs on the vessel located on the left vertex of the base of the triangle, and made out a considerable number of crew members on the deck. On the outboard course, he directed a burst of gunfire towards the vessel at the rear or farthest vertex in the direction of advance, and observed that he hit the target¹⁸⁴.

Teniente Aguirre Faget was assigned the vessel on the left vertex. He began a low-level firing from about 2500 meters. He exhausted the entire 30mm ammunition load on the target which was aligned bow-to-stern with his flight direction, he climbed up to about 60 meters, then lowered the nose immediately and released the bombs in a gentle dive right above the destroyer, without seeing the result.

Primer Teniente Román bombed the vessel located on the right vertex. All three aircraft were under intense anti-aircraft fire. Each made their individual escape and a CAP was immediately after them. They managed to evade the patrol thanks to the intervention of the M-5 FORTÍN section. The interceptors pursued the Harriers which retreated. The TORNO flight unit arrived at San Julián at 1825.

Account given by the then Teniente Aguirre Faget¹⁸⁵:

We were on standby alert at noon with Capitán Dimeglio and Primer Teniente Román. We received an initial call to the aircraft, but after a while onboard, it was suspended. We were able to grab something to eat, adjust and update data: some remembered after the briefing, and others to change papers in the kneeboard: frequencies and call signs.

Our Flight Commander was a stickler for punctuality so, at 1545, we released the brakes and began the take-off run. The three of us lined up, and we would take off every six seconds. TORNO 1 (Dimeglio) took off first, then it was my turn as wingman number 2, followed by TORNO 3 (Román). The runway threshold position was a bit uncomfortable;

¹⁸² Account given by retired Comodoro VGM Oscar H. Spath before the BANIM Commission.

¹⁸³ IAN INSKIP, *Ordeal by Exocet*, London, Frontline Books, PDF Edition, 2012, page 67.

¹⁸⁴ Questions to combat crews. DEH-FAA Archives

¹⁸⁵ Account given by retired Comodoro VGM Gustavo Aguirre E. Faget before the BANIM Commission, based on his own notes taken in May 1982.

we were aware that we had to use the entire runway at San Julián for the take-off run. We took off with over 7200 liters, two 250-kg bombs, and the 30-mm cannon magazines fully loaded.

We had to avoid using the brakes during the take-off run to correct the aircraft direction. With a bit of speed and the surface wind, we had rudder control.

This optimized our take-off run, exceeding 180 knots (330 km/h), and smoothly lifting the nose wheel while trying not to “sit” the aircraft on its main gear. The initial segment felt very heavy until the aircraft reached a speed over 300 knots (550 km/h); only then did it start to feel like an M-5!

We had briefed everything to avoid the need for VHF communication, relying only on signals and other frequency-tapping. It was a stepped climb until about 37,000 feet (11,300 meters). More than twenty minutes later at cruising speed, time enough to say a Hail Mary prayer, we began a gentle descent. By that time, the weapon control panel was already engaged. The Flight Commander increased the descent rate, and the Malvinas radar read back on frequency.

There were two VHF radios in the Dagger; we used one for the flight unit’s internal frequency, and the other one was used for listening to the Malvinas TWR, for the radar, and tactical airborne relay receiver.

When in formation, we had to be careful with power changes —a basic way to avoid wasting the precious and scarce fuel. We started low-level flying over the Sebaldes Islands and passed by north of Gran Malvina at a speed of 420 knots (780 km/h), formed in line and keeping a separation of 100 meters from each other. As we crossed the widest part of the San Carlos Sound, we all looked left ahead at ten o’clock and saw a threatening figure. It resembled the distant silhouette of a large vessel, surrounded by waves and foam as if it were advancing. It was actually the Remolinos Rock (Eddystone Rock), a sight we would later become familiar with. We continued skirting around the Soledad Island north coast at a low altitude. We were then flying at 480 knots (890 km/h). The Flight Commander and the wingman number 3 saw a Harrier at medium altitude, heading in a direction opposite to ours. Dimeglio ignored it, thinking about our speed of separation.

Although there were very few radio calls, almost none at all, a lot of things happened in just a few seconds. The last calm moment was reaching the Bingo fuel close to De la Anunciación Bay. The vessels were not there. The leader ordered: “Three more minutes.” A few seconds later, I heard on the other frequency (I listened to the Flight Unit on one VHF and the Malvinas TWR on the other one), “Don’t shoot, idiots!... Don’t shoot, idiots!” It was the distinctive voice of “Gusha” González from his Forward Air Control position. A desperate cry. At the same time, I looked towards the coast and saw tracers disappearing into the clouds, on the horizon. I would later learn that it was our own antiaircraft artillery firing at García Cuerva’s M-III EA.

We continued the low-level flight, and possibly as the speed increased, it became instinctively harder to keep it at a minimum altitude. After each change of heading, we had to adjust position and look ahead as well as behind. “Toé” Román almost collided with a British Sea King hovering over the coast. We overflew the Freycinet Peninsula coast, and when heading south, we encountered three vessels, between sun and shadow, 6/8 of the sky covered with low and medium clouds.

If orders were given during those seconds, I can’t say. I focused on the vessel in front of me, about three miles (5 km) away. I could see a stern of considerable size —without a doubt, it was a destroyer. They weren’t shooting at me, and neither was I. A couple of seconds later, I pulled the aircraft up with the idea of attacking at an angle. It was something instinctive, not planned, but it came into my head at that moment. Then, subjected to negative G, I suddenly lowered the nose. During the seconds the climb lasted, the vessel was

blocked from view. I lowered the Dagger long nose, to find a firing show; all imaginable artillery was coming towards my aircraft! This would enable me to calculate my distance as well as the artillery's because they didn't fall short—they were coming towards me, but miraculously they opened up a few meters before reaching my position. The source was where I had seen the stern, but I couldn't see anything else any longer, just my sight, my altimeter, the speed indicator, and as strange as it may sound: I remember having throttled back a bit, so as not to exceed 500 knots (925 km/h). I spent these incalculable seconds—it was impossible to count them but I know they were very few—with my forefinger pressing on and firing my DEFA cannons. This encouraged me in the approach! Just the sight was in front of me. I could also see tracers, white and gray smoke trails passing very close to me. According to Vicecomodoro Iannariello and other witnesses who were observing our attack from the coast, just when I climbed the path, a missile passed under my aircraft. I did not see it. I was advancing nose down, a bit subjected to negative G so as not to move towards the bow, and when I reached the firing altitude—the nose-cone of my aircraft coincided with the sight depression and the stern of the vessel—I leveled, dropped the bombs, and immediately felt the relief of the tail. Then I abruptly took an outboard course to the left, eastward, descending even more to resume the minimum-altitude flight. In this maneuver, and after breaking my concentration, I almost flew into the water, I was flying very low and heading towards South Africa... I wanted to get away! I couldn't see if they kept shooting at me or the effect of the bombs I had dropped. I couldn't see nor hear my fellow officers at all in this attack. I was aware that we were running low on fuel; still, I think I flew more than 15 miles (55 km) in that heading.

Almost certainly Dimeglio had called to make sure we were alive. I didn't hear the first call, but then I heard loudly: "Answer!" So then I replied: "Two!" and immediately after, Román said: "Three!"

In order to return, I had to pass near Puerto Argentino knowing that it was prohibited because of their anti-aircraft artillery, so I climbed to a safe altitude to fly over the coast. Close to 20,000 feet (6,000 meters) and to the north of Soledad Island, the radar reported that a PAC was chasing us. I was the last TORNO, so the bandits were behind me. Román was very high, and Dimeglio was much further ahead. I had lost speed in the climb, running on low fuel, aiming for 300 knots (550 km/h); I wanted to level and open throttle, but the Harriers made me change my mind.

Since the first radar contact was received, they were behind, at 12 miles (22 km). In subsequent contacts, they were already dangerously close, at 6 miles (11 km) and closing in. I had jettisoned one tank in the climb; I didn't want to jettison all three; it seemed too costly. Then I confess I forgot to do it. I didn't consider it.

I couldn't descend to gain speed, I couldn't open throttle, or think about afterburning. I hadn't finished my climb, I saw nothing ahead except for the big sun on the horizon, I had neither cannons nor fuel.

Then, I miraculously heard the Malvinas radar arranging the FORTÍN behind me. During those seconds, in another antenna turn, the VyCA—in the middle of a great congestion of orders and attack updates, dealing with rescues, threats and other priorities as urgent as mine—confirmed that the CAP had abandoned this pursuit in a 90-degree turn and was heading south in descent. We were already over the San Carlos Sound.

Capitán Donadille and Primer Teniente Senn, the FORTÍN crew members, saved my life in this way. They counted on Shafrir missiles and had left about 15 minutes after our departure from San Julián. I would later find out that "Poncho" Donadille was having weapon problems. As he puts it: "he chased them away with the casing." His performance was excellent as well as the VyCA's, of course!

I was the third to land at San Julián; I flew the last miles surrounded by a "mist of cloudiness." Nothing special happened, it was just that the fuel flow indicator and the low-level

warning lights were distressing, but I was already there. I followed the friendly aircraft mandatory safe passage corridor. The TORNO landed uneventfully.

When I went down the ladder, I felt an incredible sense of relief. Fellow officers helped me off my gear and we exchanged a few words about what we had experienced. I was sweating a lot, and my sweat trickled down the sleeve of my neoprene suit into a puddle: I couldn't believe it was the result of my perspiration. We shared a bottle of champagne among the TORNO, the FORTÍN, and Primer Teniente Callejo who had assisted us in the TWR. But soon afterwards, someone said: "Come on, move! This has just begun!"

We were called for the intelligence debriefing, and I was a little late... I wasn't able to write.

* * *

According to British publications¹⁸⁶, as a consequence of the Dagger attack on 1 May at 1650, the destroyer *Glamorgan* (left vertex of the triangular formation encountered by the M-5) suffered minor hull damage due to the shock wave of two bombs that narrowly missed their target and exploded nearby.

Upon changing course, the destroyer barely diverted from the trajectory of the 250-kg bombs that fell on both sides of the deck. Two enormous explosions took place, which lifted the stern nearly 5 meters out of the water. The tillerflat¹⁸⁷ housing rose 4.5 meters. It was later discovered that the steering gear fairing and the propeller guard mount had come loose. The hull plates were crushed, and there were shrapnel holes in the rudders. The tillerflat pillar was bent, and a shaft bearing case was also cracked. "In other words, we were very close to becoming inoperative by Argentine weapons in broad daylight on the first day of the war!"¹⁸⁸

Meanwhile, the *Arrow* (rear vertex) received eight 30 mm hits from Capitán Dimeglio, which wounded one crew member; and shrapnel from a bomb launched by Primer Teniente Román caused a breach in the *Alacrity* (right vertex) hull, which was later repaired.

Argentine combatants, witnesses to the attack at approximately 10 km from the coast, confirmed that there were three vessels and that the largest one had a square antenna mounted on the masts¹⁸⁹. From his 35 mm battery command post, Primer Teniente Spath described that, in response to the attack, the two smaller vessels maneuvered south, abandoned the destroyer, and fled full ahead, expelling whitish smoke from the funnel. A helicopter, which had acted as fire-control system a few minutes earlier, flew to find a vessel to land on¹⁹⁰. The destroyer was surrounded by dark, dense smoke as it slowly turned to port towards the fleeing frigates. When its stern faced the coast, it was seen listing to starboard, and gray to dark gray smoke with black puffs were coming out, which indicated that it had suffered damage¹⁹¹. Despite the fact that haze reduced the visibility, no air activity was observed over the ships, thus it could be inferred that they did not receive assistance from neighboring vessels¹⁹².

¹⁸⁶ IAN INSKIP, op. cit., pages 75 and 76.

¹⁸⁷ Tillerflat: device on the vessel's stern where the ship's steering gear control is lodged.

¹⁸⁸ Ian Inskip, *Glamorgan* Navigating Officer and author of the already mentioned *Ordeal by Exocet*, in an e-mail sent to retired Comodoro VGM Gustavo E. Aguirre Faget in 2005.

¹⁸⁹ Account given by retired Brigadier VGM Alberto A. Catalá before the BANIM Commission, when he was Malvinas Air Component Operations Assistant holding the rank of Mayor.

¹⁹⁰ Meanwhile, the *Forrest* —an island navigation vessel requisitioned by the Argentine Navy in order to support the loading and unloading of supplies at the Malvinas Naval Station— was being escorted by the Argentine Coast Guard patrol ship GC-82 *Islas Malvinas*. Both vessels were returning to Puerto Argentino when they were attacked by a Sea Lynx (ZX-736) helicopter from the *Alacrity* frigate. The Argentinians fired back with rifles and machine guns. The Sea Lynx took some hits and escaped. See RODNEY BURDEN et al., op. cit., page 299.

¹⁹¹ OSCAR HUMBERTO SPATH, *Desde el punto del impacto*, Edivern Publishing House, Buenos Aires, 2012, page 96.

¹⁹² "Air Observers Network, NW Region, Malvinas Operational Report", Suboficial Mayor Alfredo F. Ocampo, NCO in charge of the Puerto Argentino ROA in 1982. Malvinas Archives, Folder 5/1V, DEH-FAA.

Another witness to the TORNO attack was Teniente de Navío Rodolfo Cionchi, observing from an elevated position on Sapper Hill, who stated that the destroyer matched a Type 42 profile, similar to those belonging to the Argentine Navy, not a County-class one.

When darkness fell, between 1830 and 1900, Suboficial Mayor Alfredo Ocampo, in charge of the ROA M-1 lookout, notified the CIC that in the direction where the vessels attacked by the TORNO flight unit had fled, a succession of flashes and explosions indicating a naval battle could be made out. Flashes of lightning could be seen on the horizon, whose explosions were faintly heard far into the night. Later, Ocampo reported that an orange glow illuminated the horizon in that same direction.

Regardless of the British information, there are still significant doubts as regards the identity and real damage to the sighted destroyer, since many eyewitnesses who saw the bombs explode on the vessel and the events that unfolded that very night state that said vessel sailed away out to sea having suffered more than “minor damage.”

However, Mrs. Thatcher gave us perhaps the most important piece of evidence of what happened that day. At 10 Downing Street, she wrote in her personal diary and in her own handwriting, about her feelings about the war events. In a publication made in 2015 by Christopher Collins, director of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation, as regards May 1, 1982, she pointed out:

“That day (Saturday) the Argentine Air Force attacked our Task Force very heavily indeed.”¹⁹³

* * *

While the fight against enemy vessels provided sufficient basis to uphold a favorable outcome for the Argentine combat aviation, that afternoon, fighter pilots from both nations confronted each other to achieve air superiority over the Malvinas archipelago. Without prior coordination, this was undertaken by the FAS Commands and the Malvinas Air Component and, obviously, by the British fleet air control. It was clear that the dispute would be as unequal as the contenders' aircraft technological difference.

In order to provide air coverage for the TORNO flight unit, the following aircraft took off:

Frag-O 1106. Aircraft: two A-4C. Call sign: PAMPA. Weapons: two Shafrir missiles and cannons. Mission: defensive air coverage. Crew: Capitán Eduardo D. Almoño (C-322) and Alférez Carlos A. Codrington (C-325). Take-off: San Julián, 1520.

The leader, experiencing some VHF equipment and left tank transfer failures, was informed of the proximity of patrols heading towards them; he aborted the mission and gave the order to return. Landing at 1720.

Frag-O 1107. Aircraft: two M-5. Call sign: FORTÍN. Weapons: two IR Shafrir missiles and cannons. “India” version with three 1,300-liter external tanks. Mission: defensive air coverage. Crew: Capitán Guillermo A. Donadille (C-403) and Primer Teniente Jorge D. Senn (C-421). Take-off: San Julián, 1600.

Malvinas TPS-43 radar combat role for both missions: Mayor Miguel Ángel Silva, Teniente Guillermo Saravia, Primer Teniente Juan Romero and Cabo Principal Carlos Quintana.

The FORTÍN had to provide coverage for the TORNO flight unit's escape. After takeoff, the section leader, Capitán Donadille, ordered a brief burst to test the cannons. Although his weapons failed, he decided to continue. Upon arrival at the area assigned by the CIC radar, the M-5s flew over Gran Malvina at an altitude of 9,000 meters.

¹⁹³ RUBÉN OSCAR MORO, *Falsa bandera y traición*, Argentine Air Command and Staff College, Buenos Aires, 2019, page 130.

While flying in a waiting circuit, they heard communications from an M-III EA section with the call sign DARDO, and fifteen minutes later, they learned that the TORNO were returning. TORNO 3, having reception problems with his VHF, did not hear the radar warning about two Sea Harriers heading towards them and continued at 7,600 meters, flying away while his fellow officers escaped flying at a low altitude.

While Captain Dimeglio, the TORNO leader, was giving his wingmen the order to jettison their fuel tanks and accelerate to Mach 1.4, the radar controller guided the FORTÍN to intercept the Sea Harriers. They formed a column: TORNO 2 (Aguirre Faget) was at the front; the British section came 5 km behind; and 3.5 km from them were the FORTÍN. The last intercept heading received by Donadille was 320°. This heading left him facing the sun, thus the Shafirir missiles locked onto that heat source. This caused him greater concern, since his cannons were malfunctioning. However, upon realizing that the FORTÍN were approaching on an intercept heading, the British fighter aircraft controller ordered the Sea Harriers to escape and stop pursuing TORNO 2.

The FORTÍN section arrived at San Julián at 1840.

Frag-O 1108. Aircraft: two M-III EA. Call sign: BUITRE. Weapons: two 550 IR Magic missiles and cannons. “Hotel” version with two 1700-liter external tanks. Mission: defensive air coverage. Crew: Capitán Raúl A. Gambandé (I-016) and Primer Teniente Roberto L. Yebra (I-014). Take-off: Río Gallegos at 1550. They remained at the holding point in contact with the Malvinas radar up to the limit of their endurance, and returned at 17:40.

First losses in the air domain

Frag-O 1109. Aircraft: two M-III EA. Call sign: DARDO. Weapons: two 550 IR Magic missiles and cannons. “Hotel” version with two 1700-liter external tanks. Mission: defensive air coverage for the TORNO. Crew: Capitán Gustavo A. García Cuerva (I-015) and Primer Teniente Carlos E. Perona (I-019). Take-off: Río Gallegos, 1545.

Malvinas TPS-43 radar combat role for both missions: Mayor Miguel Ángel Silva, Teniente Guillermo Saravia, Primer Teniente Juan Romero and Cabo Principal Carlos Quintana.

After performing an air coverage flight that same morning, Capitán García Cuerva and Primer Teniente Perona were carrying out their second sortie of the day. They approached the islands minutes before the TORNO flight unit, the Dagger aircraft that would attack the naval formation bombarding BAM Malvinas.

The first mission —Perona¹⁹⁴ recalls— had helped us to reconsider, among other things, the order imposed on the Squadron not to jettison the 1700-liter tanks, which conflicted with air-to-air combat doctrine. We also agreed on possible fuel level contingencies if we were to engage in air-to-air combat or to return to the mainland with or without tanks, or even if we were to land in Puerto Argentino in case we were unable to disengage from combat and were left with no other option than to attempt landing or to eject.

Perona was formed to the left of García Cuerva when the CIC radar indicated the target: a PAC holding over Soledad Island. The controller sent them for a 45° head-on intercept (pincer-like).

During the opening turns to bracket the target, García Cuerva ordered them to check their weapons and jettison the 1700-liter tanks. Unfortunately, Perona’s right tank failed and dangled from the aircraft; now the only alternative was to jettison it in emergency mode, which would imply also losing the 550 Magic missiles. Nevertheless, the wingman decided to continue with the asymmetrical aircraft. They were approximately 180 km away from

¹⁹⁴ Account given by retired Brigadier VGM Carlos E. Perona before the BANIM Commission.

the Sea Harriers which reversed their course to confront the Argentine fighters, guided by the vessels' radar operators.

After the opening, the Mirages turned inward as regards the bracket to face the Sea Harriers head-on at a 45° angle. During the maneuver, Perona definitely lost visual contact with his leader and, after completing the turn, found himself about 60 km from the target which was advancing head-on. He tried to contact the radar, but he was not able to because of overlapping communications on the same frequency.

The VyCA controllers heard that García Cuerva had visualized the Sea Harriers and assigned the target to his wingman.

About 15 and 18 km away, against a cloud layer, Perona spotted a Sea Harrier on an opposite heading. This time he was able to inform the combat controller about the visual contact. Since the British aircraft was flying lower than him, Perona began a gentle dive looking for it.

Before the crossing, Perona pulled up sharply to gain altitude. "I intended to climb as high as possible without engaging in close combat because I was aware of the adversary's strengths at low speeds." Perona was unaware that the Sea Harriers were already armed with AIM-9L Sidewinder missiles.

The climb maneuver was very limited due to the asymmetrical aircraft with the tank dangling below the wing. Three hundred meters to his left, Perona clearly saw the Sea Harrier. Moments later, García Cuerva warned his wingman over the radio: "They've launched a missile, max-G turn! Max-G turn!"

After the crossing, Perona felt a severe jolt, together with a sound like a paper bag exploding, and a sharp deceleration, as if the aircraft had stopped in mid-air. He tried to keep flying for a moment that seemed to go on forever. He had almost no control due to loss of hydraulic fluid, and the aircraft tended to roll to the right because of the dangling tank. Perona ejected over the coastline of Borbón Island.

The British pilots were RAF Flt. Lt. Paul Barton aboard the Sea Harrier XZ-453 and Royal Navy Lt. Steve Thomas aboard the XZ-452, both aircraft were from the *Invincible* aircraft carrier. The British version indicates that Thomas visually located the approaching Argentines. According to the onboard radar measurement, Barton broke from the formation at 15 km and executed a chandelle¹⁹⁵ in order to engage the Mirages from behind after the crossing. Thomas was not able to lock onto García Cuerva's aircraft to launch a missile head-on. As they crossed at a close range and above the Mirages, Thomas saw Barton approaching Perona's tail and firing a Sidewinder¹⁹⁶.

After warning his wingman about the missile, García Cuerva made a descending left turn, pursued by another Sidewinder, this one launched by Thomas¹⁹⁷. The pilot managed to disengage from combat by passing through a thick cloud layer, while communicating his position to make it easier to rescue Perona. This information complemented the location data obtained by the TPS-43 radar operators who had visualized the combat on their screens.

A few minutes later, the same controllers heard García Cuerva say his fuel was low and was heading to Puerto Argentino to land. Five minutes later, he requested via VHF that the VOR be turned on because he was "a bit lost." From the CIC, through radar control, he was given the order to head for the airport northern sector and eject there. This order was given because enemy vessels were bombarding the runway, which was already damaged, and it would be impossible to coordinate a ceasefire with the anti-aircraft artillery. The controller repeated the order three times, but the pilot still insisted on landing, stating that his aircraft was intact and he already had Puerto Argentino in sight.

¹⁹⁵ Maneuver consisting in a climbing turn.

¹⁹⁶ STEVE THOMAS, "The Falkland war begins," *Falkland war, then and now*, Essex, Gordon Ramsey Publishing House, 2008, page 132.

¹⁹⁷ SHARKEY WARD, op. cit., page 201.



García Cuerva's Mirage III moments before being shot down by friendly fire. Footage by Alfredo Lamela, cameraman working for Malvinas war correspondent, Nicolás Kasanzew

Faced with the inevitable, the CIC gave the order for a ceasefire to the Antiaircraft Artillery Command Post (PCAaA); such a procedure required excellent coordination among the Joint Central Antiaircraft Operations Center (COAaCj), battery chiefs, and, in turn, between the latter and the weapon chiefs.

From Mount Longdon, García Cuerva headed east, flying over the area where the 7th Infantry Brigade was deployed, so that he could make a long initial approach to face the runway westwards. Thus, he would try to enter the landing approach through the air corridor crossing the middle of Puerto Argentino Bay.

At the Information and Control Center, the 7th Brigade liaison officer reported they were suffering an air raid. It could be presumed that the ceasefire order did not arrive on time or was misinterpreted by one of the links. However, it is worth highlighting that the Army's antiaircraft gunners were not familiar with the silhouettes of either British or Argentine aircraft, a situation that would cause several incidents of friendly fire during the conflict.

Soldier class of 1963, Gerardo Mancisidor, 12.7 mm machine gunner on the Panhard light reconnaissance vehicles belonging to the 181st Armored Cavalry Exploration Detachment from Esquel, was located to the west of Puerto Argentino, more than 8 km from the airport, when he heard machine gun and rifle fire. Immediately after, he saw an aircraft crossing in front of him, which exposed its belly by way of a sudden movement. Mancisidor tried to aim and follow it with the turret, but it was useless due to its speed. He heard more machine gun fire nearby. Through his sighting scope, he saw the luminous trails hit the aircraft. When he looked out of the hatch, he noticed small pieces falling off the aircraft and saw it slightly change course. Mancisidor realized the aircraft had been damaged¹⁹⁸.

From his home in Puerto Argentino, John Fowler, an islander, saw García Cuerva's aircraft flying east without making any attempt to land or evade fire, since it was suddenly surrounded by clouds of black smoke and, seconds later, by a white flash¹⁹⁹.

Soldier class of 1963, Alejandro Lombardi, from the Army's 601st GADA, belonging to one of the 35 mm antiaircraft batteries with Skyguard fire-control system located in Puerto Argentino, observed the trajectory of the M-III over the bay, the impacts of his artillery weapon on the aircraft, and saw the aircraft fall into the sea²⁰⁰.

¹⁹⁸ Account given by Soldier Class of 1963 VGM Gerardo Santiago Mancisidor before the Directorate for Historical Studies of the FAA.

¹⁹⁹ PAUL EDDY, MAGNUS LINKLATER AND PETER GULLAM, op. cit., page 155.

²⁰⁰ Account given by VGM Alejandro Lombardi before the BANIM Commission.

Both Mayor Héctor Rusticcini, specializing in Antiaircraft Artillery and Ground Squadron Commander near the airport, and Capitán Osvaldo Battioni, a fighter pilot and Forward Air Control Officer (OCAA) at Puerto Argentino near the Army's 35 mm artillery piece, observed the M-III's trajectory, its shoot down by fire from that battery, and the point of impact on the sea, near Surf Bay²⁰¹.

All testimonies consistently report —as recorded in the footage by war correspondent Nicolás Kasanzew— that during the approach to BAM Malvinas, García Cuerva's aircraft came under fire opened by a large number of weapons belonging to units located both outside and inside the defensive perimeter, from the position of the Panhard tanks to the fatal burst shot by the 601st GADA's 35 mm artillery piece.

“You're shooting at me, damn it!” the pilot was heard saying on VHF for the last time. It was 1640. Captain García Cuerva failed to eject and crashed with his M-III into the sea, where he remains in his war grave.

Shortly before García Cuerva lost his life due to the Argentine inexperience, Perona parachuted onto Borbón Island. Upon parachute landing fall, he fractured one of his legs. Meanwhile, near the Calderón Naval Air Station, two Agusta A-109s and one UH-1H helicopters belonging to the Army were refueling, piloted by Teniente Primero Martín Rubio and Cabo Primero Sergio Gudiño (AE-331), Teniente Enrique Riis and Cabo Primero Orlando Romero (AE-337), and by Teniente Manuel Jardel and Sargento Primero Carlos Medina (AE-417).

While refueling, Cabo Primero Romero, AE-337 mechanic, reported seeing an aircraft fall into the sea whose pilot had ejected; the parachute opened normally. Teniente Riis requested permission from the section leader to search for the pilot. The A-109 is an attack helicopter lacking skis or a rescue crane, so Riis and Romero improvised a fifteen-meter rope tied to one of the external mounts. They took off and headed out to sea. The first sortie was unsuccessful, but during the second one they found Perona on land with a leg injury. They immediately transported him to Calderón, where he received first aid care.

The following day, an Argentine Navy's Beechcraft B-200, coming from BAN Río Grande, transported him to the mainland for final medical attention.

* * *

Frag-O 1113. Aircraft: two M-5. Call sign: RUBIO. Weapons: two IR Shafrir missiles and cannons. “India” version with three 1,300-liter external tanks. Mission: defensive air coverage. Crew: Capitán Carlos A. Rohde and Primer Teniente José L. Ardiles (C-433). Take-off: only the wingman, from Río Grande at 1554.

TPS-43 Malvinas radar combat role: Mayor Miguel Ángel Silva, Teniente Guillermo Saravia, Primer Teniente Juan Romero, and Cabo Principal Carlos Quintana.

The section leader experienced startup failures, so the 1st Squadron Commander, Mayor Martínez, reported the situation to the FAS. Despite the fact that the minimum combat unit is a section of two aircraft, he received orders to fulfill the mission with just one aircraft. There was no doubt that the situation on the islands was very complex and demanded great coordination for the arrival of interceptor fighters to Malvinas coming from different bases. The FAS sought to overload the area to contest air superiority.

Primer Teniente Ardiles took off alone towards the Malvinas, restricted to performing one-versus-one combat tasks, or reconnaissance and diversionary tasks. Upon reaching the islands, the pilot communicated with the TPS-43 radar controller, who, following CIC orders, guided him to intercept a single enemy contact, i.e., a one-versus-one engagement.

²⁰¹ Accounts given by retired Comodoro VGM Héctor M. Rusticcini and retired Comodoro VGM Osvaldo R. Battioni before the BANIM Commission.

When reaching the interception distance, the contact displayed on the radar screen got split into a Sea Harrier section flying in close formation, which switched positions with a greater distance. The radar controller warned him, “Watch out, there are two Sea Harriers.” Back in the CIC, through the VHF equipment, the calm voice of the pilot was heard reporting, “Visual contact.”

The British pilots were Flt. Lt. Bertie Penfold aboard the XZ-455, and Lt. Martin Hale aboard the XZ-460²⁰². They had taken off from the *Hermes* at 1630 to intercept two contacts²⁰³ to the northeast of Soledad Island. The Sea Harriers were flying at 6,000 meters, while the M-5 was 4,000 meters higher. When they were 9 kilometers apart, Ardiles fired an air-to-air missile at Hale’s aircraft, who inverted it and dived 90 degrees downward; seconds later, Hale recovered, opened the airbrakes and released chaff²⁰⁴. Before entering a cloud layer, Ardiles’ missile veered off, maybe due to loss of power or chaff interference. It missed its target narrowly. Meanwhile, Penfold had positioned himself behind Ardiles’ tail and, at a distance of 5 kilometers, fired an AIM-9L missile and struck the Dagger. The British pilot did not observe Ardiles ejecting. This occurred around 1640.

This account differs from our analysis, since it was not possible for Ardiles to have launched the Shafrir missile as he was positioned 9 kilometers away facing the CAP, outside the firing range, which required being within the tail cone. Additionally, Ardiles did not inform the radar of having launched any missile.

The British account also differs from what was observed on the TPS-43 radar screen. The Sea Harrier’s interception and missile launch could have occurred head-on or during aircraft crossing. Ardiles’ exclamation heard on VHF frequency suggests the impact might have surprised him. According to the Malvinas Radar War Diary data, after crossing paths with the CAP, Ardiles’ aircraft maintained its course for two turns of radar (20 seconds), disappearing from the screen without responding to controller’s calls, from which it can be inferred he could not maneuver since he had been hit.

Members of ROA Post 7 (M-7), Terciano Sampieri and Julio Rotea, were eyewitnesses to the shoot down. They witnessed the aircraft crash on Bougainville Island, 56 kilometers to the southwest of Puerto Argentino, far from the combat zone. They did not see the pilot eject.

Bertie Penfold, the pilot who shot Ardiles down, returned to the *Hermes* and did not fly again during the conflict, due to personal reasons. He would return to the UK some days later²⁰⁵.

The first loss suffered by the 1st Dagger Squadron had serious repercussions on the morale of its members. Nevertheless, the group quickly rallied in his honor.

In a gesture that deserves praise, Primer Teniente José Leónidas Ardiles (PULQUI) did not hesitate to follow an order that exceeded planned procedures and embarked on a solo combat mission without his section leader. He met his destiny with the bravery of a warrior, demonstrating firm convictions, strength of character, and courage. By way of his actions and commitment, Ardiles became a true archetype, ennobling the fighter pilots’ breed.

* * *

Meanwhile, the FAS had completed the study of the possible enemy targets location, and despite the fact that it was almost nightfall, it assumed that the fleet’s second combat group together with the aircraft carrier *Invincible* were positioned in front of Anunciación Bay.

²⁰² RODNEY BURDEN et al., op. cit., pages 194 and 195.

²⁰³ Editor’s note: there is a mistake in the British version, when they refer to two Argentine aircraft.

²⁰⁴ Decoys dispersed into the air so as to confuse the missile. They are tiny strips of metal long enough to be reflected by radar wavelengths.

²⁰⁵ SHARKEY WARD, op. cit., page 210.

Consequently, the FAS arranged for more sorties to be carried out with available aircraft, including BMK-62 bombers deployed at the Almirante Zar Naval Air Base at Trelew.

Due to the prior notice received from the FAS, and under the orders of the Canberra squadron commander, two BMK-62 squadrons maintained a standby alert since 0800, with the crews on the aircraft, ready to take off as soon as the order was given.

Frag-O 1111. Aircraft: three BMK-62. Call sign: RUTA. Weapons: five MK-17 1,000-pound retarded bombs. Mission: air tactical interdiction, attack against vessels at Anunciación Bay (Berkeley Sound). Crews: Capitán Juan J. Nogueira and Capitán Raúl E. Sánchez (B-105); Teniente Juan C. Cooke and Primer Teniente Ernesto Lozano (B-109); Capitán Eduardo Rodino and Primer Teniente Armando J. Dubroca (B-108). Take-off: Trelew, 1530.

During the outbound navigation, flying at 9,000 meters and 350 km abeam Puerto Deseado, they observed a vessel formation (it was later confirmed that it was Argentinean), so they turned left to heading 200° and descended to a low-level flight. At about 75 km from the target, they sighted a frigate from which several missile trails emerged. Despite evasive maneuvers and the release of electromagnetic decoys (chaff), a missile hit the leader's aircraft on the left wing tip. After the jolt caused by the impact, Capitán Nogueira maintained control, ordered the wing tip tanks to be jettisoned, and headed towards Malvinas for an emergency landing.

The wingmen turned to follow him but unexpectedly encountered the aircraft carrier *Invincible*, over which two aircraft were hovering: CAP helicopters or aircraft. In the face of this situation, after confirming he was still in control of the aircraft, the leader gave the order to change course towards Trelew. The return flight was difficult. Communications and radio aids reception were disrupted by electronic interference. Fuel was another limitation. Having flown longer at a low altitude, the B-108 headed to Puerto Deseado, which was closer than its home base, where it landed at 1830. The other two Canberras landed in Trelew at 1930. Once on the ground, it was observed that the B-109 had only 480 liters of fuel left, and the upper surface of the B-105 wing had been lifted due to the missile damage.

Frag-O 1117. Aircraft: three BMK-62. Call sign: RIFLE. Weapons: four MK-17 1,000-pound retarded bombs. Mission: air tactical interdiction, attack against vessels at Anunciación Bay. Crews: Capitán Alberto A. Baigorri and Mayor Luis E. Rodeyro (B-102); Teniente Eduardo J. de Ibáñez and Primer Teniente Mario H. González (B-110); Capitán Eduardo O. García Puebla and Primer Teniente Jorge J. Segat (B-104). Take-off: Trelew, 1620.

The flight unit flying after them was navigating at a high altitude and then descended to low-level flight, 350 km away from the target. At approximately 270 km from the target, they were intercepted by two Sea Harriers piloted by Lt. Cdr. Michael Broadwater and Lt. Alan Curtiss²⁰⁶. The latter, using a Sidewinder missile, hit wingman number 2 right engine. The Canberra continued flying, leaving smoke behind. Curtiss launched the second missile and observed the crew ejecting just before impact, while the aircraft crashed into the sea. Broadwater then fired his missiles at another Canberra but missed. Lacking a self-defense system, the remaining aircraft reported the location where De Ibáñez and González had ejected and returned to Trelew at 1920.

Aware of the ejection coordinates (49°30'S/59°35'W, 300 km northwest of Puerto Argentino), the FAS requested maritime rescue of the crew from the TOAS Command. Immediately, the dispatch boat ARA *Alférez Sobral* was given the order to search for them.

* * *

²⁰⁶ SHARKEY WARD, op. cit., pages 202 and 203.

Frag-O 1110. Aircraft: four A-4B. Call sign: TRUENO. Weapons: three 250-kg parachute-retarded bombs and cannons. Mission: maritime traffic air interdiction, with AAR. Crews: Capitán Pablo M. Carballo (C-215); Teniente Carlos A. Rinke (C-212); Primer Teniente Carlos E. Cachón (C-225) and Alférez Leonardo S. Carmona (C-240). Take-off: Río Gallegos, 1600.

Carmona returned due to technical problems. After the in-flight refueling, the flight unit continued low-level flying towards Malvinas. South of Bahía Enriqueta, between Puerto Argentino and Bougainville Island, they spotted the imposing silhouette of a vessel in the sunset horizon. Capitán Carballo ordered them to accelerate and descend as much as possible. It was possible to make out an iron framework similar to the tankers accompanying the fleet, as they had seen in photographs. Carballo gained altitude and released the bombs. He went on skirting the islands up to Puerto Argentino, made a low-flying turn, and reversed course. From a distance, he confirmed that the attacked vessel was sailing unscathed. Disappointed, he armed the cannons and fired a burst over the chimneys. He pulled away while hearing on the radio the joy from the other wingmen returning unharmed. The joy turned into concern when Carballo learned that he had bombed the Argentine ELMA vessel *Formosa*. Fortunately, there were no casualties. An unexploded bomb remained lodged in the hold. The TRUENO landed at 1930.

The A-4B 1st squadron commander, Vicecomodoro Gustavo Zini²⁰⁷, had requested in person from the Navy liaison officer the position of friendly or Argentine vessels in the Malvinas area. This information was crucial for the crews heading into combat. On that occasion, they confirmed there were no friendly vessels in the assigned area, and therefore, before takeoff, the flight unit was ordered to attack any vessel found navigating or engaged in landing operations. However, the Navy had reportedly notified the FAS and CAE of the route followed by the vessel²⁰⁸.

The offensive action was led by the conviction that, should any vessel be encountered, it would definitely be an enemy vessel, so the squadron commander strongly needed to make sure his men were completely free to attack. Once the flight unit had returned to its deployment base and in the face of the information given, they learnt they had attacked their own logistics vessel.

The *Formosa* returned to Río Grande and was anchored outside the harbor. The bomb would be deactivated by Suboficial Auxiliar Pedro Miranda, an armorer from the 1st Dagger Squadron based at the Río Grande Naval Air Base. For this action and for disarming the bombs from a Navy's damaged A-4Q at the same base, Miranda would be decorated with "The Cross to the Heroic Valor in Combat."

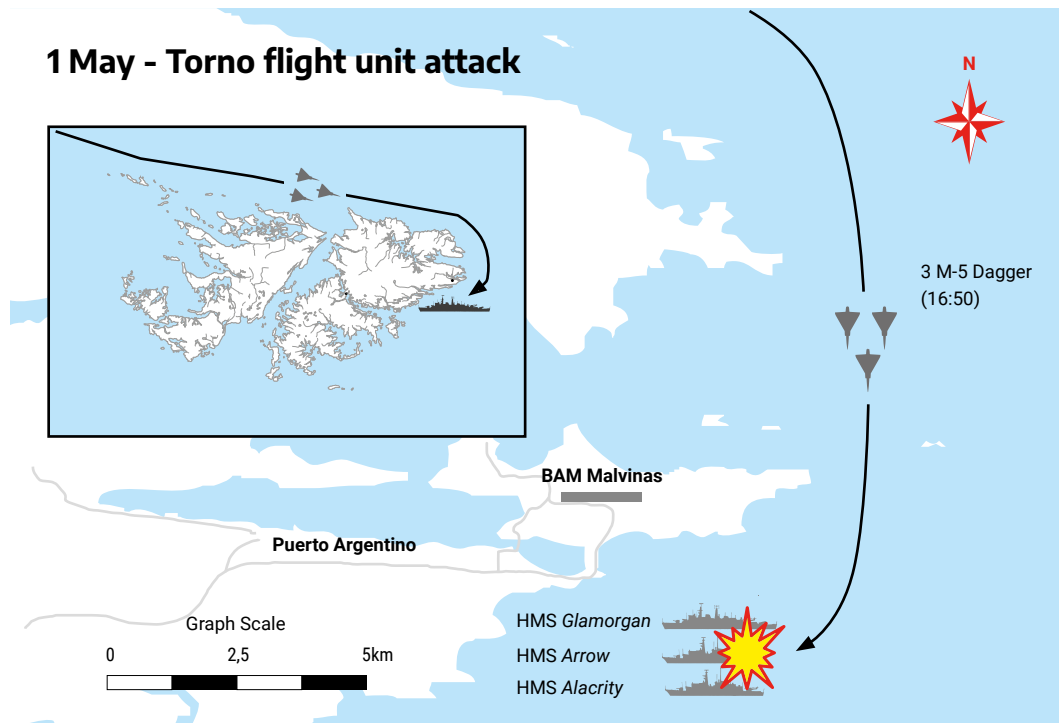
Frag-O 1114. Aircraft: four A-4C. Call sign: LANA. Weapons: two 250-kg parachute-braked bombs. Mission: attack against naval targets at Anunciación Bay, with AAR. Crews: Capitán Jorge O. García (C-318), Teniente Jorge E. Casco (C-319), Alférez Gerardo G. Isaac (C-309) and Teniente Jorge R. Farías (C-302). Take-off: San Julián, 1630.

Although communication with the Malvinas radar was difficult due to heavy air traffic, Capitán Carballo (TRUENO flight commander) relayed the order given by the CIC to return to the mainland since there was a CAP ahead of them. They landed at 1830.

TPS-43 Malvinas radar combat role: Primer Teniente Carlos Mazzocchi, Alférez Rubén Scacchi and Cabo Primero Juan Egañas.

²⁰⁷ Account given by retired Brigadier VGM Gustavo Zini before the BANIM Commission.

²⁰⁸ HORACIO MAYORGA, *No vencidos*, Buenos Aires, Planeta Publishing House, 1998, page 246. «The vessel had been attacked by an Argentine aircraft, even though both the CAE and the FAS had been informed of her departure and route.»



The fighting spirit becomes stronger

After the conflict, numerous hypotheses were formulated about the outcome of the TORNO flight unit's mission against the three vessels bombarding the Malvinas Military Air Base. It should be kept in mind that during April 1982, tests had been conducted with the bombs that would be dropped from low altitudes, the parachute-retarded 250kg-Alaveses bombs. In all cases, the bombs did not explode upon impact with the sea since the fuse required a deceleration of 20G²⁰⁹ in order to detonate. The impact in the water, at low speed, did not reach that force. Therefore, it was concluded that they would only detonate upon direct impact against a vessel's structure. Additionally, the second fuse used for low-level droppings, the KAPPA III, required a minimum three-second flight for the firing circuit to align and for a mechanical actuation. This could only be achieved if the bombs were dropped from an altitude of at least 30 meters.

After comparing investigations, it is possible to reach the conclusion that the bombs from TORNO 2, dropped from a higher altitude and with a slight dive angle, were responsible for the explosion alongside the larger vessel, causing the damages mentioned before, which did not prevent the vessel from sailing and requiring aid from escort vessels.

Nonetheless, the M-5 Dagger attack had a strategic effect on the development of the 1982 confrontation and saved several Argentine lives. Firstly, it showed the actual range of fighter aircraft and revealed the limited effectiveness of the British fleet's anti-aircraft systems, which were facing not only stand-off²¹⁰ threats with Exocet missiles but also aircraft equipped with conventional weapons that executed successful attacks. As evidence, it is worth remembering that most of the shoot-downs during the conflict were caused by the Sea Harriers armed with AIM-9L Sidewinder air-to-air missiles, urgently provided by the United States.

²⁰⁹ 20 G: twenty times the terrestrial gravity force (9.82 m/seg²).

²¹⁰ Stand-off: out of reach of the weapons defending the target.

Likewise, due to the TORNO flight unit's action, British vessels refrained from further daylight naval bombardments —except for rare exceptions. In fact, that same night, three vessels approached from the south and bombarded Sapper Hill, where the Army's 601st GADA TPS-44 Cardion Alert radar was located²¹¹.

But beyond the tactical consequences as far as actions were concerned, the massive attack executed by the TORNO had a morale-boosting effect on the Argentine troops who, until then, had witnessed frigates bombarding at will suffering no retaliation.

Medical Officer Mayor Fernando Espiniella, Chief of the Medical Service in Malvinas, observed that García Cuerva's shoot down due to friendly fire, as well as the sense of frustration that there was no active defense against the naval bombardment, had given rise to a feeling of despair that worsened the humiliating surrender of the Georgias Islands. However, amidst the bitterness, all of a sudden the roar of jet engines alerted defenders who, within seconds, saw one of the powerful frigates start to smoke. The aviation had come to their aid, and the British began to flee.

The sense of uneasiness turned into euphoria and uncontrollable emotion, sparking hugs among the troops who waived their weapons in the air, and cheered for their nation and the Argentine Air Force²¹².

Air transport and in-flight refueling

Throughout the day, the KC-130 aircraft were assigned to the attack flight units. The TC-70 refueled the A-4s of TOPO, OSO, TRUENO, LANA and PAMPA units.

Frag-O w/o. no. Aircraft: KC-130, registration mark TC-70, call sign PERRO. Mission: in-flight refueling. Crew: Vicecomodoro Enrique J. Pessana; Primer Teniente Gerardo R. Vaccaro; Mayor Eduardo R. Gómez; Cabo Principal Francisco L. Martínez; Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar A. Ardizzoni, Suboficial Auxiliar Mario N. Amengual and Suboficial Auxiliar Manuel O. Lombino; and Cabo Principal Ramón F. Suárez and Cabo Principal Mario E. Cemino. Take-off: Río Gallegos, 0840. Landing: 1230. It refueled the TOPO and OSO flight units (four A-4Bs and A-4Cs each).

Frag-O w/o. no. Aircraft: KC-130, registration mark TC-70, call sign LOCO. Mission: in-flight refueling. Crew: Comodoro Carlos J. Beltramone; Capitán Carlos E. Krause; Vicecomodoro Hugo C. Meisner; Cabo Principal Miguel A. Cardone and Cabo Principal Carlos D. Cantezano; Suboficial Auxiliar Oscar A. Gatto and Suboficial Auxiliar Mario N. Amengual; and Suboficial Principal Roberto Caravaca and Suboficial Principal Carlos J. Guerra. Take-off: Río Gallegos, 1530. Landing: 1900. It refueled the TRUENO and LANA flight units (four A-4Bs and A-4Cs each).

Frag-O w/o. no. Aircraft: KC-130, registration mark TC-69. Mission: in-flight refueling. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis J. Litrenta Carracedo; Capitán Guillermo L. Destéfanis; Mayor Francisco F. Mensi; Cabo Principal Juan D. Perón and Cabo Principal Juan D. Tello; Suboficial Auxiliar Hugo H. González and Suboficial Auxiliar Vicente L. Reynoso; Suboficial Principal Andrés W. Manyszyn; and Cabo Primero Eduardo Barrionuevo. It refueled the PAMPA flight unit. Take-off: Santa Cruz, 1300. Landing: 1845.

Reconnaissance, exploration and special tasks

During the morning, the TC-69 carried out reconnaissance and exploration tasks.

²¹¹ A projectile destroyed a Unimog vehicle belonging to the FAA Air Control Equipment (ECA) parked nearby. Following the VyCA Squadron's advice, the Cardion radar was relocated, early the following morning, near the Argentine Air Force TPS-43 radar.

²¹² Account given by retired Comodoro VGM Fernando Espiniella before the BANIM Commission.

Frag-O w/o. no. Aircraft: KC-130, registration mark TC-69. Mission: reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Vicecomodoro Luis J. Litrenta Carracedo; Capitán Guillermo L. Destéfanis; Mayor Francisco Mensi; Cabo Principal Juan D. Perón and Cabo Principal Juan Tello; Suboficial Auxiliar Hugo H. González and Suboficial Auxiliar Vicente L. Reynoso; Suboficial Principal Andrés W. Manyszyn; and Cabo Primero Eduardo Barrionuevo. Take-off: Comodoro Rivadavia, 0850. Landing: Santa Cruz, 1050.

Fénix Squadron

Seven sorties were carried out on diversionary, reconnaissance, exploration and thermal imaging air survey missions.

Frag-O no. 1096 (FAS). Aircraft: Learjet 35 A, registration mark T-24, call sign: PÚA. Mission: reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Mayor Roberto F. Cardoso, Teniente Eduardo Casado, Cabo Primero Jorge F. Bazán and Primer Teniente Raúl H. Calleja. Take-off: Comodoro Rivadavia, 1115. Landing: 1355.

Frag-O no. 2521/1 (FAS). Aircraft: MU-2/60, registration mark LV-ODZ, call sign: BRAVO. Mission: close-range reconnaissance and exploration in the “Pacú” focal area. Crew: Alférez Eduardo N. Meyer and Alférez Carlos A. Quiroga. Take-off: Comodoro Rivadavia, 1130. Landing: 1330.

Frag-O w/o. no. (CAE). Aircraft: C-500, registration mark LV-MZG, call sign: CASERO 2. Mission: close-range reconnaissance and exploration in the “Alpha” Zone, covering the maritime coast of Buenos Aires. Crew: Alférez Vicente Collerone and Alférez Adrián J. González. Take-off: Comandante Espora, 1439. Landing: 1715.

Frag-O no. 2521/2 (FAS). Aircraft: MU-2/60, registration mark LV-ODZ, call sign: BRAVO. Mission: close-range reconnaissance and exploration in the “Pacú” focal area. Crew: Alférez Carlos A. Quiroga y Alférez Eduardo N. Meyer. Take-off: Comodoro Rivadavia, 1500. Landing: 1620.

Frag-O w/o. no. (FAS). Aircraft: Learjet 35 A, registration mark T-24, call sign: ROLO 1. Mission: reconnaissance and exploration. Crew: Mayor Roberto F. Cardoso, Teniente Eduardo E. Casado, Cabo Primero Jorge F. Bazán and Teniente Oscar N. Domínguez (officer photographer). Take-off: Comodoro Rivadavia, 1520. It reached the southeast of Malvinas Islands and returned at 1830.

On the return flight, Cardoso heard the communication of the BMK-62 RUTA 2, piloted by Capitán Eduardo Rodino, who reported he had been attacked by Task Force aircraft near Malvinas; he was disoriented and needed information to return to his base. Urgently, Cardoso acted as liaison and communicated with the Comodoro Rivadavia radar, which suggested they head towards Puerto Deseado. The information was relayed to the Canberra that had landed there, refueled and returned to Trelew²¹³.

Frag-O w/o. no. (FAS). Aircraft: Learjet 35 A, registration mark T-22, call sign: ROLO 2. Mission: reconnaissance, exploration and diversionary. Crew: Primer Teniente Eduardo E. Bianco and Teniente Luis A. Herrera. Take-off: Río Grande, 1530. It overflew Malvinas and returned at 1705.

Frag-O w/o. no. (FAS). Aircraft: Learjet 35 A, registration mark LV-OFV, call sign: CARDO. Mission: reconnaissance, exploration and diversionary. Crew: Capitán Antonio Buirra and Capitán Carlos Pane, Cabo Primero Dardo Rocha. Take-off: Río Grande, 1535. It overflew Malvinas and returned at 1700.

²¹³ BAM Trelew Report, Mayor Roberto Cardoso, 1982, DEH-FAA Archives.

Malvinas Air Defense Sector

The actions of the Malvinas Air Defense Sector (SDA) on 1 May are understood within the joint doctrine framework, by which the long-range or area Air Defense in a Theater of Operations is assigned to the Air Force. The latter is primarily responsible for air traffic control, surveillance and guidance of fighter interceptors and long-range missiles, while the short-range or local anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) is specific to each branch of service. The authority that leads and coordinates the long-range air defense and spreads the alarms to local AAA is the Information and Control Center (CIC).

On the Malvinas Islands, the SDA was completely isolated within an area of the theater of operations that had neither air nor naval surveillance, while, at the same time, it did not have either interceptors or long-range AAA available on the island. Consequently, the FAA's defensive effort was confined to implementing a local surveillance system with the two assigned long-range radars and supplemented by short-range radars and an Air Observers Network. The only means of warfare it counted on were the short-range anti-aircraft artillery which included assets of the three Armed Forces that were grouped together under a joint command over which it only exercised coordination authority.

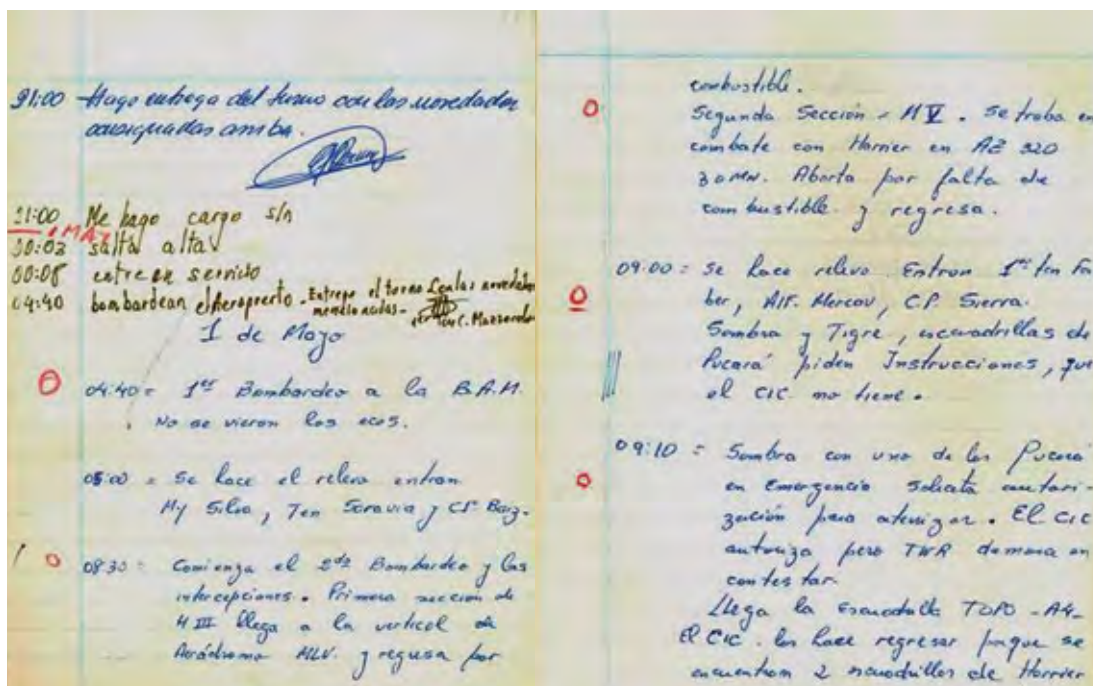
On the morning of 1 May, at 0800, after the night bombardment, the fleet's admiral sent a message demanding surrender. At 0820, the demand was rejected. In response to that, at 0830, nine Sea Harriers attacked BAM Malvinas and three attacked BAM Cóndor. There was neither the surprise nor the doubt that had existed at the time of the first attack. The red alert was issued, and the artillery repelled the attack. Regrettably, due to the early morning attack on Cóndor base, the order was given to evacuate the Pucará at dawn; thus, in the middle of the task, it endured an attack that caused significant human and material losses.

The first contact between Argentine and British fighters was made at 0900. For the first time in history, Argentine pilots realized that they were not facing a simulated target, but rather one manned by a NATO pilot who simply wanted to shoot them down with an AIM-9L air-to-air missile. From then on, a battle of intentions, feints and ploys began between Argentine and British aircraft. The British, who had given the first punch, after modifying their aircraft to be used as interceptors, showed their respect for the M-III EA configured with Matra 530 interception missiles, and were supported by a sophisticated and efficient air control system, patrolled around the Islands and waited for the Argentine counterattack.

In any case, there was an atmosphere of confidence at the CIC. After the morning attacks, the controllers' team was better prepared. At the Air Traffic Information Desk (MITA), Suboficial Auxiliar Pedro Faletto and Cabo Primero Ángel Catalano received and plotted FAS aircraft movements, and copied Argentine flight plans. Suboficial Auxiliar Héctor Corrado and Cabo Roberto Garrido, among others, took turns at the General Information Desk (MIG), where they were in charge of plotting and marking the positions of the detected echoes using craft paper triangles with different colors to identify them as friendly, enemy or unknown.

Meanwhile, the FAS, whose main goal was to prevent a traditional landing and achieve air superiority, and based on a prior verbal coordination made with the CIC Malvinas, had the task to converge on the Islands combined formation flights from different mainland bases. These flights combined interceptor and fighter bomber aircraft equipped with obsolete iron bombs designed to shoot at ground targets. The climax came after 1400 when three British vessels approached from the south of the Malvinas airport to bombard Argentine defenses two hours later. At that time, the weather station issued the QAM report²¹⁴: a dense layer of stratocumulus at 300 meters covered the sky with some clearings and good visibility.

²¹⁴ QAM: a numerical code report that details the prevailing weather conditions at an airport.



First hours of 1 May as recorded in the Malvinas radar War Diary

Mayor Gilberto Oliva was responsible for the communications with the anti-aircraft artillery, and Suboficial Mayor Alfredo Ocampo was in charge of the liaison with the ROA's filter center. Vicecomodoro Oscar Aranda, with the assistance of Mayor Alberto Kajihara and Mayor Héctor Pergolini, was in charge of the general coordination. At the same time, Vicecomodoro Alberto Alegría ordered attack sorties against naval and ground targets, while Mayor Gilberto Oliva and Mayor Alberto Catalá transmitted the orders and communicated the alerts to BAM Cóndor and BAM Malvinas.

As they were not given an outline of the possible fragmentary orders (time, aircraft type, call sign and task) beforehand, those responsible for controlling the Argentine aircraft faced the difficulty of having to specify the location of Argentine aircraft's targets, which were urgently transmitted by radars and observers and, thus, saturated the channels and created confusion.

While Suboficial Faletto was copying the report, Cabo Funes warned that the FIERRO flight unit was approaching. After the warning, Cabo Funes placed a blue craft paper cutout on the General Information Desk map, at the western end of the Islands. Immediately afterwards, the Argentine flight unit was confronted by a British patrol coming from the north. At their flying speed, the distance between them was only eight minutes. Funes placed another triangle on the chart. "Another CAP is approaching, at zero four zero, 60 km away, towards the FIERROS as well," he warned, as he added a second red triangle.

Shortly after 1600, while the air combats were being followed on the General Information Desk, the windows rattled and two explosions were heard afterwards. The three vessels led by a destroyer began bombarding Argentine positions. An Army helicopter sighted the vessels 18 km south of BAM Malvinas. The ROA M-1 lookout, stationed on top of a hill, 5 km north of the airport, reported that the vessels were bombarding the runway.

The naval bombardment increased the need to establish contact with the attack flight units. There was growing agitation at the CIC. It was necessary to constantly know the aircraft's locations. Thirty centimeters of map, fifty kilometers of atmosphere, three minutes to fight the duels. Approach speeds added up to more than 2000 km/h. The battle for superiority became entangled; an order was given here, the name of a flight unit was corrected there.

An attack was directed towards a combat air patrol, and simultaneously orders were given to a threatened Argentine aircraft to escape. As there was such a large number of aircraft, it was impossible to coordinate an optimal encounter. All radio communications were being transmitted simultaneously. Time became erratic.

There were periods of time that seemed to go by as if the clock had stopped; other times, fifteen minutes would pass by without anyone noticing it. Every three antenna turns, the radar updated the aircrafts' position. The assistants moved the little cutouts and the triangles jumped incoherently. The twelve craft paper cutouts took up the table, and others had to be added in a hurry. The plotters could not keep up. It was unclear who was who. Vicecomodoro Alegría had been trying for long to transmit by VHF radio the aircraft carrier's position (that was inferred from the analysis of the Sea Harriers' trajectories) to the flight units that were coming in, while Catalá was communicating it by HF Grinnel to the FAS. The circle's center formed by the points where they had been detected while climbing, or where they were lost while descending to land, should correspond to the aircraft carrier's position. But it was impossible to communicate by VHF radio with the aircraft.

The eagerness to achieve air superiority was beginning to fade. In a desperate attempt, Vicecomodoro Alegría opened a window, took the bags off a window, and, putting his radio and half his body out, shouted. His words resounded in the cold afternoon: only static and the deafening roar of cannon fire answered.

At that moment, the Mirage III DARDO section moved to a favorable position to confront a Sea Harrier patrol and protect the Argentine attack aircraft that were approaching at a low altitude. It was Vicecomodoro Aranda's moment: he ordered the radar controller to guide them so as to shoot them down. "Bandits at one o'clock...: let's hit them, Two," the voice filled with courage of Capitán García Cuerva, Mirage section leader, was heard over the radio. The CIC was plunged into a sudden silence. They were mesmerized as they observed the triangles being moved by Funes. "One down, c'mon!" As they celebrated the first shoot down, a "no" filled with anguish was heard. The plotter repeated the "no" and landed a punch on the table. After Perona's shoot down, García Cuerva, whose aircraft was short of fuel, requested landing clearance on the Malvinas runway.

Apart from the craters caused in the morning, the base was being attacked by British vessels. Minutes later, nearby, García Cuerva reported he intended to land. He was given the order to eject in the north of the Island. The instruction was repeated three times, but the pilot was determined to save his aircraft. Simultaneously, the ground forces liaison officer alerted to an air attack on positions to the west of the city. As they were convinced it was a mistake, and after exchanging glances with Mayor Oliva, Vicecomodoro Aranda decided that the ceasefire should be called for. The order was relayed to the Antiaircraft Artillery Command Post (PCAAa) and, from there, it should be relayed in all directions; but cannons and cries were heard due to the confusion. The aircraft was shot down by friendly fire.

In the meantime, the M-5 RUBIO section had arrived. Vicecomodoro Aranda gave the radar controller the order to confront it with a plotted Sea Harrier which, minutes later, was shown on the screen as two aircraft. The RUBIO section, however, turned out to be a single aircraft piloted by Primer Teniente José L. Ardiles, who would be shot down.

On 1 May, the CIC Malvinas' TPS-43 radar operated for 21 hours and 15 minutes and was turned off for 2 hours and 45 minutes due to a naval bombardment red alert.

Analysis of the operations

The actions of the British forces

Admiral John Woodward, Task Force commander, began hostilities by performing a show of force through air bombing and made a simulated landing that would enable him to anticipate the most efficient deterrent actions to prepare for the actual landing. Besides, the

distraction of 1 May facilitated the insertion of special forces patrols by helicopters or boats from submarine HMS *Onyx*²¹⁵.

The following results are drawn from the comparison between planned and achieved British goals:

- The RAF Vulcan attack only affected the Malvinas airport: the airport's building, the Navy's hangar and the runway's southern edge which was left with a crater of an MK-17 15-meter diameter bomb, but was still operational. The goal was not achieved but it proved to be less dangerous than for the Sea Harrier pilots on a visual daytime attack mission and flying at a low altitude.
- The carrier based aircraft temporarily neutralized the airfields and destroyed the aircraft that were on the ground. In air combat, three aircraft were shot down and the lethality of the AIM-9L Sidewinder missiles was proven, though at least one or two aircraft were lost to the Argentine anti-aircraft artillery. The superiority of the AIM-9Ls led them to require the complete replacement of the previous version of missiles, the 9Gs. Due to the Argentine anti-aircraft artillery's response, they decided not to repeat the direct VFR attacks of Sea Harriers (operating in visual flight conditions) the following days.
- Besides the damage to the airport, BAM Malvinas only suffered the partial destruction of the Islander, owned by the former British governor (a cluster munition cut off the aircraft's tail), and minor damages caused by cannon fire on the Argentine Coast Guard PA-54 Skyvan's empennage, which was later recovered.
- As regards the attack on BAM C ndor, they achieved effectiveness by exploiting the element of surprise, which coincided with the "ceasefire" ordered to the anti-aircraft defenses to allow the Pucará aircraft to take off. In spite of materiel losses and the heavy cost in lives, they could not paralyze the activity of the airport, which continued operating during the following days.
- They did not achieve air dominance, only local superiority.
- There were no preparations for a large-scale landing, but rather for bombarding Argentine defenses. It was also observed that helicopter assault forces infiltrated commando groups with the Islanders' complicity.

Although British sources do not acknowledge it, on 1 May 1982, the Task Force had to repair the damage the frigates *Arrow* and *Alacrity* and the destroyer *Glamorgan* had suffered, which had been caused by the M-5 Dagger attack. Likewise, they might have lost one or two Sea Harriers which were shot down by the Puerto Argentino anti-aircraft artillery, in addition to the damage to another aircraft.

Looking back on the war's events, Admiral John Woodward admitted he had underestimated the enemy:

What happened was that I did not know the potential of the Argentine Air Force; in other words, I never thought Argentine pilots would do what they did. It was not my mistake; anyone would have done what I did! Could anyone imagine that our fleet would be so unprotected? We always had air coverage for our vessels, but nothing could be done against the persistence of the Argentine pilots. It was something really extraordinary, they appeared everywhere and we learned to respect them...²¹⁶

²¹⁵ LAWRENCE FREEDMAN, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, London, Consortium White House Publishing, 2005, page 287.

²¹⁶ *The Economist*, London, March 16, 1984.

Conclusions drawn from the first day of combat

Although the aircraft operated pushing the limit of their flight range and under poor weather conditions at their mainland bases, the following conclusions and lessons were drawn from the baptism of fire:

- All fighter aircraft departed and returned without accidents and operated way below the weather minimums required at the time for most fighter-bombers, that is, approximately 300 meters ceiling and 3 km visibility.
- The gathering of strategic intelligence was deficient; thus it was impossible to anticipate the Vulcan attack and to activate the anti-aircraft defense in a timely manner.
- The Argentine Air Force prevented the enemy from achieving air dominance.
- A real naval air tactical interdiction was carried out by the FAA in Malvinas Islands against a powerful naval fleet with NATO's military technology.
- Important factors of strength and weakness of the action of the fleet, its early warning system and defensive weapons were identified, which would enable the combat crews to find the best way to attack naval targets using conventional weapons and demonstrating reasonable effectiveness, before state-of-the-art anti-aircraft systems.
- On the other hand, the loss of aircraft on the first day showed the advantage that the Sea Harrier - AIM-9L Sidewinder duo gave the enemy to compete for air combat superiority. Moreover, the short combat time allowed by the fuel in all M-III EA and Dagger configurations had to be considered.
- At the same time, as regards offensive operations, the FAS would devote almost completely to interdiction missions against naval targets, as long as the targets were near the Islands and in known positions. Twenty days later, the Battle of San Carlos would be, in any case, the maximum expression of the massive use of the Air Force offensive means.
- Likewise, the effort of the operations would also be devoted to sustaining the airlift to the Islands, and to the exploration, reconnaissance and diversionary missions which would be maintained throughout the conflict. Assigning attack tasks against targets of circumstance under orders of the Malvinas CIC, without having an appropriate request or relying on tactical intelligence of the combat zone, besides the inefficient communications system that transmitted fragmentary orders orally, prevented the good reception of the actions' purposes and decreased the efficiency of the echelon responsible for executing the immediate planning and the operations real-time leadership. This situation complicated the Malvinas radar controllers in particular, as they did not know their combat role and the targets to aim at, as the flight units appeared.

Between 1620 and 1750, twenty-eight Argentine aircraft flew over Malvinas, in groups of twelve sections or flight units. Radar operators had to guide six of them against the vessels and had to lead the rest of the flight units towards the Sea Harriers to prevent them from intercepting the sections carrying bombs and, thus, not wasting the effort of having arrived to attack. While all of this was happening, no one knew who was who, the CIC had not assigned targets nor had it ordered each section what to do²¹⁷.

Consequently, from 1700, the CIC gave all aircraft asking for instructions the order to return to the mainland. It is also important to bear in mind that, due to the tactical situation and materiel failures, the required minimum combat unit (a section of two aircraft) was not observed. On two occasions, only one aircraft was given the order to conduct a sortie: Frag-O no. 1101 FIERRO, Capitán Raúl Ángel Díaz, and Frag-O no. 1113 RUBIO, Primer Teniente José Leónidas Ardiles (killed in combat).

²¹⁷ MIGUEL ÁNGEL SILVA, *op. cit.*, 2007, page 225.

Frequencies were not diversified or assigned for the different sorties. For example, one frequency for attack missions against ground targets, another frequency for fighter interceptor, umbrella formations, escort aircraft, diversionary missions, and other frequencies, if needed. The radar had the capability to diversify frequencies by task, but this could not be done because the fragmentary orders were not transmitted. The radar operator would actually learn of the mission when the flight unit or section established the first radio link.

In spite of the ceasefire imposed on the airport's anti-aircraft defenses, it was not possible to prevent the units deployed outside the defensive perimeter from opening fire on Capitán García Cuerva, which resulted in the pilot's aircraft being shot down and his death.

At the strategic level, it is important to highlight the following:

The British bombardment which took place in the early morning of 1 May showed the Argentine government's serious error of having considered that it would not be attacked. At the same time, the strong defense of the Argentine anti-aircraft artillery, besides the surprise and accurate attack of the TORNO flight unit against a destroyer and two frigates, warned the United Kingdom that Operation Corporate would not be a military outing.

At the higher tactical level, the British high command showed the vulnerability of Argentine targets on the mainland considering the Vulcans' range. Thus, the CAE gave the order to maintain an M-III squadron in the Comodoro Rivadavia 9th Air Brigade so as to defend the logistics base for the shipment of supplies to Malvinas and the headquarters of the FAS. The British also made Argentine leaders believe that they were facing a landing while, at the same time, they infiltrated helicopters with RAF special troops into the Islands.

On the other hand, the British failed in their attempt to put the Puerto Argentino airfield out of service, but they were able to maintain combat air patrols throughout that day. Besides the advantages offered by the proximity of the floating air bases (*Hermes* and *Invincible* aircraft carriers) and the maneuverable Sea Harriers with their AIM-9L Sidewinder missiles with all-aspect capabilities, they also counted on a ground air control integrated by terminals in each frigate and in each destroyer, connected by a modern digital data transmission system.

Nevertheless, if the Argentine high command had been able to attend the war cabinet meetings in London, it would have been convinced that the 1 May battle had been a great Argentine victory. The withdrawal of the British task group offshore was due to the real need to put them out of range of the FAS aircraft and to reorganize them while they waited for reinforcements or repairs. The Argentines' reaction would make them require another Vulcan bombing and the reinforcement of aircraft, weapons, soldiers and supplies. However, such a result also meant a real insult to the United Kingdom and its closest ally, the United States. Margaret Thatcher's conservative government²¹⁸ and its political survival were at stake in the South Atlantic conflict, as it would not survive a military failure. Thus, it could not afford anything other than a total victory at any price²¹⁹.

* * *

Operational sorties of 1 May

The Air Force carried out 76 sorties:

- 63 sorties were flown from the mainland, 52 of them were combat sorties.
- 13 sorties were flown from Malvinas Bases, 11 of them were combat sorties.

²¹⁸ "On 2 May, Mrs. Thatcher and her war cabinet steeled themselves to demonstrate decisively and bloodily to Argentina that the seizure of the Falklands would be met by whatever level of force proved necessary to repossess them," in MAX HASTINGS AND SIMON JENKIS, op. cit., page 149.

²¹⁹ RUBÉN OSCAR MORO, *Historia del Conflicto...*, ESGA, 1985, op. cit., page 196.



Fiero 3 in action - Painting by Cap. VGM (reservist) Exequiel Martínez

Argentine Air Force Losses

AIRCRAFT AND CREW:

M-III EA (I-015) of BAM Río Gallegos Squadron. Pilot: Capitán Gustavo Argentino García Cuerva, dead.

M-III EA (I-019) of BAM Río Gallegos Squadron. Pilot: Primer Teniente Carlos Perona, ejected and rescued.

M-5 Dagger (C-433) of 1st Squadron based in Río Grande. Pilot: Primer Teniente José Leónidas Ardiles, dead.

BMK-62 Canberra (B-110) of Canberra Squadron based in BAN Trelew. Pilot: Teniente Eduardo Jorge Raúl de Ibáñez, dead. Navigator: Primer Teniente Mario Hipólito González, dead.

IA-58 Pucará (A-527) of BAM Cóndor Pucará Squadron. Pilot: Teniente Daniel Antonio Jukic, dead.

IA-58 Pucará (A-506) of BAM Cóndor Pucará Squadron, operational accident. Pilot: Capitán Ricardo Grünert, uninjured.

IA-58 Pucará (A-517) of BAM Cóndor Pucará Squadron, operational accident. Pilot: Teniente Miguel Giménez, uninjured.

TECHNICAL AND TROOP PERSONNEL:

Suboficial Auxiliar Mario Duarte, Pucará Squadron armorer (BAM Cóndor), dead.

Cabo Primero José Peralta, Pucará Squadron armorer (BAM Cóndor), dead.

Cabo Primero Andrés Brashich, Pucará Squadron armorer (BAM Cóndor), dead.

Cabo Primero José Maldonado, Pucará Squadron mechanic (BAM Cóndor), dead.

Cabo Primero Agustín Montaña, Pucará Squadron mechanic (BAM Cóndor), dead.

Cabo Primero Miguel Carrizo, Pucará Squadron electrician mechanic (BAM Cóndor), dead.

Cabo Juan Rodríguez, Pucará Squadron instrument mechanic (BAM Cóndor), dead.

Soldier class of 1963 Guillermo García (BAM Malvinas), dead.

Soldier class of 1963 Héctor Bordón (BAM Malvinas), dead.

Reported British Casualties

County-class destroyer HMS *Glamorgan* and Type 21 frigates HMS *Arrow* and HMS *Alacrity* suffered minor damage.

A Sea Harrier was damaged by the antiaircraft artillery.



Glossary of terms and acronyms

Spanish	English	Acronym
Análisis y Evaluación de las Operaciones	Operations Analysis and Assessment	SOAEO
Armada de la República Argentina	Argentine Navy	ARA
Artillería Antiaérea	Antiaircraft Artillery	AAa
Bahía Fox	Fox Bay	
Base Aérea Militar	Military Air Base	BAM
Base Aeronaval	Naval Air Base	BAN
Batallón de Aviación 601	601 st Aviation Battalion	
Batallón de Infantería de Marina	Marine Battalion	
Batallón de Infantería de Marina 5	5 th Marine Battalion	BIM 5
Brigada Aérea	Air Brigade	
Central de Operaciones Antiaéreas Conjunta	Joint Central Antiaircraft Operations Center	COAaCj
Centro de Ensayo en Vuelo	Flight Test Center	CEV
Centro de Información y Control	Information and Control Center	CIC
Centro de Información y Control Baires	Buenos Aires Information and Control Center	CIC Baires
Centro de Operaciones Conjuntas	Joint Operations Center	CEOPECON
Círculo de Aeronáutica	Aeronautical Association	
Comandante de Operaciones Aéreas	Commander of Air Operations	COA
Comandante de Operaciones Navales	Naval Operations Commander	
Comandante del Teatro de Operaciones Atlántico Sur	South Atlantic Theater Commander	COATLANSUR
Comando Aéreo de Defensa	Argentine Air Defense Command	CAD
Comando Aéreo de Transporte	Argentine Air Transport Command	CAT
Comando Aéreo Estratégico	Argentine Strategic Air Command	CAE
Comando de Aviación Naval	Naval Aviation Command	
Comando de Defensa Aérea Sur	Southern Air Defense Command	CODASUR
Comando de Defensa Aérea Zona Centro	Central Zone Air Defense Command	Central CODAZ
Comando de Defensa Aérea Zona Sur	Southern Zone Air Defense Command	Southern CODAZ
Comando de Operaciones Aéreas	Air Operations Command	COA
Comando de Operaciones Navales	Naval Operations Command	CON
Comando Naval de Tránsito Marítimo	Naval Command for Sea Traffic	
Comisión Batalla Aérea por Nuestras Islas Malvinas	Air Warfare Commission for Our Malvinas Islands	BANIM
Comité Militar	Military Committee	COMIL
Compañía de Defensa y Servicios	Defense and Services Company	
Compañía de Ingenieros de Combate 9	9 th Combat Engineers Company	
Compañía de Servicio Aéreo del Gobierno de las Islas Malvinas	Falkland Islands Government Aviation Service	FIGAS
Compañía de Soldados del Escuadrón de Tropas de la IX Brigada Aérea	Company of Soldiers of the 9 th Air Brigade Battalion	
compañías de infantería	infantry companies	

The Argentine Air Force during the Malvinas War

Componente Aéreo del Teatro de Operaciones Sur	Air Component of the Southern Theater of Operations	CATOS
Componente Aéreo Malvinas	Malvinas Air Component	CAM
Componente de Transporte Aéreo	Air Transport Component	CTA
Departamento Movilización y Reserva	Mobilization and Reserve Department	
Depósito Mayor de Abastecimientos	Grand Supply Depot	
Dirección de Estudios Históricos	Directorate for Historical Studies	DEH
Dirección de Infraestructura	Infrastructure Directorate	
Dirección General de Antártida y Malvinas de la Cancillería	Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs Antarctica and Malvinas General Directorate	
Dirección General de Sanidad	Medical Headquarter	DGS
Directiva de Estrategia Militar	Military Strategic Directive	DEMIL
Directiva de Estrategia Nacional	National Strategic Directive	DENAC
Director General de Antártida y Malvinas	General Director of Antarctica and Malvinas	
Ejército Argentino	Argentine Army	EA
Elemento Control de Transporte Aéreo	Air Transport Control Element	ECTA
elementos esenciales de información	essential elements of information	EEI
Empresa Líneas Marítimas Argentinas	Argentine Sea Shipping Company	ELMA
Empresa Nacional de Correos y Telégrafos	Argentine Mail Company	ENCOTEL
Equipamiento de inteligencia de comunicaciones	Communications intelligence equipment	COMINT
Equipamiento de inteligencia electrónica	Electronic intelligence equipment	ELINT
Equipo de Control Aéreo	Air Control Equipment	ECA
Equipo de Control de Combate	Combat Control Team	ECCO
Escuadrón de Exploración de Caballería	Cavalry Exploration Squadron	
Escuadrón Vigilancia y Control Aéreo	Airspace Surveillance and Control Squadron	VyCA
Escuela de Aviación Militar	Military Aviation School	EAM
Escuela de Radar	Radar School	
Escuela de Suboficiales de la Fuerza Aérea	Argentine Air Force Non-Commissioned Officer School	ESFA
Estación aeronaval	Naval air station	EAN
Estado Mayor Conjunto	Joint Staff of the Argentine Armed Forces	EMC
Exploración y Reconocimiento Lejano	Long-Range Exploration and Reconnaissance	ERL
Exposición Rural	Argentine Rural Exhibition	
Fábrica Militar de Aviones	Argentine Military Aircraft Factory	
Fuerza Aérea Argentina	Argentine Air Force	FAA
Fuerza Aérea Oeste	Argentine Air Force Western Command	FAO
Fuerza Aérea Sur	Argentine Air Force Southern Command	FAS
Fuerza de Defensa de las Islas Falkland	Falkland Islands Defense Force	FIDF
Gas del Estado	Argentina's state-owned gas company	
Gendarmería Nacional	National Border Patrol	GN

Grupo 1 de Comunicaciones Escuela	1 st Communications Group Institute	G1CE
Grupo 1 de Transporte Aéreo	1 st Air Transport Group	
Grupo 2 Vigilancia y Control Aéreo	2 nd Airspace Surveillance and Control Group	2 nd VyCA Group
Grupo 4 de Caza	4 th Fighter Group	
Grupo 5 de Caza	5 th Fighter Group	
Grupo 6 de Caza de Tandil	Tandil's 6 th Fighter Group	
Grupo Alfa de Infantería de Marina	Alfa Marine Group	
Grupo Artillería de Defensa Antiaérea	Antiaircraft Defense Artillery Group	GADA
Grupo de Artillería 4	4 th Artillery Group	
grupo de artillería orgánico	organic artillery group	
Grupo de Exploración y Reconocimiento Aéreo	Air Reconnaissance and Exploration Group	GERA
Grupo de Operaciones Especiales	Special Operations Group	GOE
Grupo I de Construcciones	1 st Constructions Group	
Grupo I de Vigilancia y Control Aéreo - Escuela	1 st Air Surveillance and Control Group - Institute	GIVA-E
Grupo I Mantenimiento	1 st Maintenance Group	
Guarnición Aérea Córdoba	Córdoba Air Garrison	
Guarnición Militar Malvinas	Malvinas Military Garrison	
Hospital Aeronáutico Central	Central Aeronautical Hospital	HAC
Hospital Militar Reubicable	Field Military Hospital	HMR
Instituto Nacional de Aviación Civil	Civil Aviation National Institute	INAC
Instituto Universitario Córdoba	Córdoba Air University Institute	
IX Brigada de Infantería	9 th Infantry Brigade	
Jefatura II - Inteligencia	2 nd Intelligence Division	
Jefatura III Planificación	3 rd Planning Division	
Líneas Aéreas del Estado	Argentine state-owned airline	LADE
Mesa de Información de Tránsito Aéreo	Air Traffic Information Desk	MITA
Mesa de Información General (MIG)	General Information Desk	MIG
Nivel Estratégico Operacional	Operational Strategic Level	NEO
Nivel Táctico Superior	Higher Tactical Level	NTS
Oficial de Control Aéreo Adelantado	Forward Air Control Officer	OCAA
Oficial de Control Aéreo Táctico	Tactical Air Control Officer	OCAT
Oficiales de Enlace de la Fuerza Aérea	Argentine Air Force Liaison Officers	OEFA
Oficina Meteorológica de Aeródromo	Airfield Weather Office	OMA
Órdenes de Transporte Aéreo	Air Transport Orders	OTA
Organización de los Estados Americanos	Organization of American States	OAS
Patrulla Aérea de Combate	Combat Air Patrol	CAP
Poder Ejecutivo Nacional	National Executive Power	PEN
Prefectura Naval Argentina	Argentine Coast Guard	PNA
Puesto de Comando de Artillería Antiaérea	Antiaircraft Artillery Command Post	PCAAa
Puesto de Observación Aérea	Air Observation Post	POA

Puesto de Operaciones de Transporte Aéreo	Air Transport Operations Post	POTA
Puesto de Socorro	Aid Station	PUSO
Red de Observadores del Aire	Air Observers Network	ROA
Regimiento de Infantería	Infantry Regiment	RI
Reglas de Empeñamiento	Rules of Engagement	ROE
Reserva Estratégica del Ejército	Army Strategic Reserve	REE
Reserva Estratégica Militar	Military Strategic Reserve	REM
Reserva Estratégica Operacional	Operational Strategic Reserve	REO
Sección de Búsqueda y Salvamento	Search and Rescue Section	S&R
Sección Exploración y Reconocimiento	Reconnaissance and Exploration Section	R&E
Sección Operativa de Apoyo Aéreo	Air Support Operational Section	SOAA
Sección Operativa de Búsqueda y Salvamento	Search and Rescue (Operational Section)	SOBYS
Sección Operativa de Defensa Aérea	Air Defense Operational Section	SODA
Sección Operativa de Exploración y Reconocimiento	Reconnaissance and Exploration Operational Section	SOER
Sección Operativa de Operaciones Especiales	Special Ops Operational Section	SOOE
Sección Operativa de Seguridad y Servicios	Security and Services (Operational Section)	SOSS
Sección Operativa de Transporte Aéreo	Air Transport Operational Section	SOTA
Sección Operativa de Vigilancia y Control Aéreo	Air Surveillance and Control (Operational Section)	SOVYCA
Sección Operativa Superioridad Aérea e Interdicción	Interdiction and Air Superiority Operational Section	SOSAI
Secretaría de Correos y Telecomunicaciones	Mail and Telecommunications Office	
Secretaría de Inteligencia del Estado	Secretariat of State Intelligence	SIDE
Sector de Defensa Aérea (SDA) Malvinas	Malvinas Air Defense Sector	SDA
Servicio Meteorológico Nacional	Argentine National Weather Service	SMN
Sistema de Control Aerotáctico	Air and Tactical Control System	SCAT
Sistema de Control Aerotáctico	Tactical Air Control System	
Sociedad Científica Argentina	Argentine Scientific Association	
Subprefecto	Prefecture Deputy Official	
Teatro de Operaciones Aéreas Sur	Southern Theater of Air Operations	
Teatro de Operaciones Atlántico Sur	South Atlantic Theater of Operations	TOAS
Teatro de Operaciones Malvinas	Malvinas Theater of Operations	TOM
Teatro de Operaciones Sur	Southern Theater of Operations	TOS
Terminal Aérea de Carga	Air Cargo Terminal	TAC
Terminal Aérea de Cargas Malvinas	Malvinas Air Cargo Terminal	TAC MLV
Tratado Interamericano de Asistencia Recíproca	Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance	TIAR
Veterano de Guerra de Malvinas	Malvinas War Veteran	VGM
Vialidad Nacional	National Highway Administration	
X Brigada de Infantería Mecanizada	10 th Mechanized Infantry Brigade	

Comparison of military ranks

Argentine Air Force (FAA)	Royal Air Force (RAF)	US Air Force (USAF)
Brigadier General	Air Chief Marshal	General (Gen/O-10)
Brigadier Mayor	Air Marshal	Lieutenant General (Lt Ge/O-9)
Brigadier	Air Vice Marshal	Major General (Maj Gen/O-8)
Comodoro Mayor	Air Commodore	Brigadier General (Brig Gen/O-7)
Comodoro	Group Captain	Colonel (Col/O-6)
Vicecomodoro	Wing Commander	Lieutenant Colonel (Lt Col/O-5)
Mayor	Squadron Leader	Major (Maj/O-4)
Capitán	Flight Lieutenant	Captain (Capt/O-3)
1er Teniente	Flying Officer	First Lieutenant (1st Lt/O-2)
Teniente (Alférez and Teniente are included here since both last about 6 six years as the Second Lieutenant rank))	Pilot Officer	Second Lieutenant (2d LT/O-1)
	Warrant Officer	
Suboficial Mayor	N/A	Chief Master Sergeant (E-9)
Suboficial Principal	Flight Sergeant	Senior Master Sergeant (SMSgt/E-8)
Suboficial Ayudante	Sergeant	Master Sergeant (E-7)
Suboficial Auxiliar	Corporal	Technical Sergeant (E-6)
Cabo Principal	Senior Aircraftman	Staff Sergeant (E-5)
Cabo Primero	Aircraftman	Senior Airman (E-4)
Cabo	Aircraftman	Airman 1st Class (E-3)
Voluntario Segundo		Airman (E-2)
Voluntario Primero		Airman Basic (E-1)

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