

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a Meeting held in Room 5301, Ministry  
of Defence, Main Building, Whitehall,  
on WEDNESDAY 28 APRIL 1982 at 2.00 pm

PRESENT

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Terence Lewin,  
Chief of the Defence Staff

Admiral Sir Henry Leach,  
Chief of the Naval Staff

General Sir Edwin Bramall,  
Chief of the General Staff

Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Beetham,  
Chief of the Air Staff

ALSO PRESENT

Air Chief Marshal Sir David Evans,  
Vice Chief of the Defence Staff  
(Personnel and Logistics)

Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse,  
Commander-in-Chief Fleet

Lieutenant General Sir James Glover,  
Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff  
(Intelligence)

Air Marshal Sir John Curtis,  
Air Officer Commanding 18 Group

Commodore R G Heaslip,  
Representing the Assistant Chief  
of the Defence Staff (Policy)

Major General J J Moore,  
Major General Royal Marines

Rear-Admiral D W Brown,  
Assistant Chief of the Defence  
Staff (Operations)

Mr J M Stewart,  
Representing the Permanent  
Under Secretary

SECRETARIAT

Brigadier J A C G Eyre  
Captain J E S Raymond RN  
Lieutenant Colonel J B R Peacock  
Commander M Bickley

RESTRICTED

COS 34th Meeting/82  
28 April 1982

C O N T E N T S

PART I - ITEMS DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING

1. (1) OPERATION CORPORATE

PART II - ITEMS DEALT WITH PRIOR TO THE MEETING

N11

Note:

1. Recorded as a Confidential Annex.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
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CONFIDENTIAL ANNEX  
TO  
COS 34TH MEETING/82 HELD ON  
WEDNESDAY 28 APRIL 1982 AT 2.00 pm

OPERATION CORPORATEITEM 1. FORCE LEVELS

1. SIR TERENCE LEWIN said they would have seen a signal (1) from the Task Force Commander asking that a further 3 battalions be allotted to Operation CORPORATE. They would wish to welcome the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, the Task Force Commander, to their meeting to discuss the complex issues raised by that request. They had already taken note (2) of the Commander-in-Chief Fleet's outline plan (3) for Operation SUTTON, which covered the establishment of an initial bridgehead, and they already had in hand studies on longer term issues such as the establishment of a garrison once the Falkland Islands had been regained. The area which they must now address was the operation to link those two phases, and whether additional forces would be needed for it.

2. ADMIRAL SIR JOHN FIELDHOUSE (Commander-in-Chief Fleet) said that, although he had not been set a task beyond Operation SUTTON, he had assumed that his mission would be to repossess the Falkland Islands, with the limitations that there should be minimum civilian casualties and, if possible, minimum damage to civilian property. Current intelligence indicated an Argentine land force level of some 7 - 8,000 men amounting to 6 or 7 full strength battalions, with the possibility of further reinforcements. Against that his own landing force numbered some 5,500 men organised into 5 battalions. He assessed that these 5 battalions were the minimum force required to establish a bridgehead in order to achieve his aim; it allowed no margin for any set-back due to enemy action, weather, movement problems or other factors. On present plans

## Notes:

1. CTF 317 AAA/A2C/I9F 271516Z APR 82.
2. COS 25th Meeting/82, Item 5.
3. Attachment to COS(Misc) 137/742/1 dated 19 April 1982.

any reserves would be 8,000 miles away with a transit time of 3 to 4 weeks. He considered he had to plan for a short, sharp decisive action because the Task Force was unlikely to win a campaign of attrition; the combined effects of enemy action, adverse weather and equipment unserviceability would erode the capability of his sea and air forces in a prolonged campaign to the point where their effectiveness would be called into question. He was concerned not only that his present force was numerically too weak to ensure rapid success beyond the limited aim of Operation SUTTON, but that even with the additional 3 battalions he had requested he would still only have marginal superiority. Although his knowledge of enemy dispositions was inadequate, if he was not allotted these extra troops at the outset, he could not be satisfied with his ability to carry out further operations, and in his view that risk was not justified. His major concern was that the Argentines might keep their sea and air forces in reserve until a landing had been made and then, when our forces ashore were at their most vulnerable, launch a major attack against them. The Argentines would in particular have the advantage of operating a greater number of aircraft from secure mainland bases, and possibly from their aircraft carrier as well. It was inevitable that our forces would suffer some losses as a result of this pressure, and it was therefore essential that a proper reserve was immediately available, either to reinforce the landing if that operation proved difficult, or to enable such a landing to be exploited rapidly. He could not afford a 3 week delay in reinforcement under those conditions.

3. SIR EDWIN BRAMALL said the Commander-in-Chief Fleet had presented a logical case militarily justifying the reinforcements he had requested. They, however, had to look at the issues in a broader context. He doubted whether the situation at present merited a military operation on the scale which was now being suggested. It was possible that the operation could be contained within the scope of the forces which had already been allotted to it. The proposed reinforcement was a high visibility measure involving considerable shipping not only for the men of the 3 battalions but also for their equipment, and the additional supply problems caused by increasing the force by this amount would require considerable and sustained logistic effort. The dates which had been postulated pre-supposed an early landing, which in turn was susceptible to political and diplomatic factors, weather, and the success of preparatory operations by Special Forces. They could not assume this date could

be met. He considered that they should clarify the options which were available, and study in detail the logistic implications of such a reinforcement, before putting any case to Ministers. He foresaw these options might include a blockade and harassing operations by air attack and Special Forces, to achieve an Argentine surrender without a landing; an operation such as Operation SUTTON in conjunction with harassing operations to induce a quick surrender; a full scale repossession operation against determined defence forces, which would require more troops; or the abandonment of the landing option because it ran too great a risk, and the consequent reliance on other measures to achieve an Argentine withdrawal.

4. SIR MICHAEL BEETHAM said he shared the Commander-in-Chief Fleet's concern but questioned whether the reinforcements requested would be sufficient. A firm planning assumption was that an effective sea and air blockade had been imposed, and it could therefore be assumed that the Argentine capability would gradually decline; if that, together with harassing operations, did not reduce the Argentine operational capability to a level within the scope of the force as presently constituted, he considered it would be questionable whether a landing operation should be attempted at all. He agreed that the landing force would be more vulnerable to air attack once ashore, and considered the sinking of the Argentine aircraft carrier a prerequisite to any landing. If any reinforcements were needed, he considered that extra aircraft would be a higher priority than extra troops.

5. SIR HENRY LEACH said it was essential that the Commander-in-Chief Fleet should have sufficient resources for the task he was set. He agreed that the whole operation should be short and sharp, and that the problem was how to exert further pressure on the Argentines after Operation SUTTON. If, however, further land operations were necessary, a major requirement would be to remove the constraints on minimum civilian casualties and damage; and aircraft and possibly naval resources would be of greater value than extra troops. He doubted whether the addition of one brigade would effectively increase that pressure. The question of the Argentine aircraft carrier could only be resolved by Ministerial approval of suitable Rules of Engagement. In summary they should be considering removing constraints on the Task Force Commander rather than reinforcing the landing force; if that was not possible then the landing operation might not be feasible.

6. In discussion the following points were made:

a. Once a landing had been made the options would be either to exploit it rapidly or to hold the bridgehead for a sustained period. Rapid exploitation would be done by the initial landing force if the landing met little opposition, but it was doubtful if Port Stanley could be taken by assault. The town was probably defended by up to 4 battalions, which should have well prepared defensive positions; this would be a difficult objective even for a reinforced landing force, and was unlikely to be achieved quickly unless attrition had successfully weakened the capability and resolve of the Argentines.

b. The neutralisation of Port Stanley airfield was crucial to the success of any landing operation, as was the destruction of Argentine helicopters to inhibit their troop mobility.

c. If a further brigade was added to the force, a 2-star headquarters would be needed to coordinate landing operations. This could take the form of a small headquarters in the LPD with a small tactical headquarters deployed ashore. It would not require a conventional divisional headquarters staff.

d. It would be essential to know in advance the concept of operations for which reinforcements were required, in order to ensure that they were properly equipped and organised for that task.

e. The provision of further Harriers, additional to those to be embarked in the Atlantic Conveyor, could need further consideration.

f. The addition of a brigade to the force would place a severe strain on the Lines of Communication. This would need careful study before the proposal could be implemented.

g. The timing of the sea lift and availability of shipping was a critical factor. Troops could most conveniently be carried in the Queen Elizabeth 2, which would be available to sail on 4 May if a decision was taken now, but otherwise not again until 19 May. There was also a shortage of merchant shipping sailing under the British flag for the logistic lift; the choice was in any event limited by the need for ships to be suitable for modification to

operate helicopters, and by the need for such shipping to have the lifting gear to unload vehicles and heavy equipment on to landing craft.

h. The only alternative to the use of merchant shipping would be to airlift the reinforcements and their equipment to Ascension Island for onward movement by ships of the Task Force. This would involve those ships in an unacceptably long round trip from the Falkland Islands, and an extremely difficult loading operation at Ascension Island.

7. Summing up, SIR TERENCE LEWIN said they would wish to instruct the Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff (Policy) to prepare for their consideration at their meeting the next day a paper setting out the position as brought out in their discussion, and in particular highlighting the timing factors. He would obtain the views of the Commander-in-Chief Fleet on the draft paper before that meeting.