



22nd May,

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE

This morning the Union Jack is once again flying on the Falkland Islands. And I hope that you have all seen this photograph - showing the evident pleasure of the Falkland Island children.

A major bridgehead has been established in the area of San Carlos on East Falkland. The major amphibious landing yesterday was a complete success. Tactical surprise was achieved and our troops landed safely with almost no interference from Argentine forces. We are now ashore on British Sovereign Territory in considerable force and have three Royal Marine Commandos and two Battalions of the Parachute Regiment firmly in place with their supporting arms including artillery and Rapier and other air defence weapons. From their secure base our forces will advance to place the occupying Argentine troops under increasing harassment, whilst the Royal Navy maintains and tightens its blockade around the islands.

To complement the landings there were raids yesterday in other parts of East and West Falklands. In one of these Royal Marines captured an Argentine position on Fanning Head overlooking Falkland Sound. In another the airfield at Goose Green and Argentine positions closeby were raided by our forces.



Carrier based RAF Harriers launched attacks in the course of the morning against Argentine installations at Port Stanley airfield and the helicopters on the ground nearby, as well as military installations at Fox Bay. During these operations we lost two Gazelle helicopters, and one RAF Harrier is missing.

The Argentine Navy has so far made no attempt to intervene. Its surface ships remain bottled up in coastal waters. The Argentine Airforce has as expected launched heavy raids on our ships. Air attacks started at about 10.30 local time and continued throughout daylight. A succession of attacks were made by Mirage, Sky Hawks and Pucarás. Combat air patrols by Sea Harriers from the Task Force were flown continuously and were successful in shooting down a large number of aircraft. We believe that total Argentine losses so far are 9 Mirage, 5 Sky Hawks, 2 Pucarás and 4 helicopters. These losses must represent a very significant blow to the Argentine Air Force.

Nevertheless Argentine aircraft penetrated our air defence screen and carried out attacks on our ships. Three warships sustained minor damage, but this is being repaired and the ships remain operational. One warship has been damaged in the engine room by an unexploded bomb but all her weapons remain effective. A Type 21 frigate, HMS ARDENT was also hit by bombs and rockets, and after valiant efforts to contain the damage sank in the course of the night. We do not yet have further detailed casualty figures to add to those already announced by the Ministry but first reports indicate that about 20 men are missing from HMS ARDENT, and about 30 are injured.



I should like to pay great tribute to the men of our Task Force whose actions yesterday were in the highest traditions of Her Majesty's Forces, and to men and women of the Merchant Navy. Over the next day or so our forces will undoubtedly see action again, and we must expect fresh attacks upon them. But they are fighting now from a secure base, and the hazardous hours of the initial amphibious landing are behind them. We are back on the Falkland Islands, and back in strength. We intend to ensure that aggression does not pay.