

**224. Memorandum From the Deputy Director for Operations,
National Military Command Center (Hekman) to the
Director of Operations, Joint Staff (Gast)¹**

Washington, May 5, 1982, 0930 EDT

SUBJECT

Sinking of British Destroyer—SHEFFIELD

REFERENCE

Memorandum for J-30, 050109 EDT May 1982²

1. (U) This memorandum contains updated information not contained in the original memorandum.

2. (U) At 041020 EDT May 1982, the British destroyer HMS SHEFFIELD received a direct hit by an Exocet missile, was set ablaze and subsequently sunk. Reports indicate that two AM-39 air launched Exocet Missiles were fired with one direct hit in the control room area, on the SHEFFIELD. As many as 30 British sailors of the 270 man crew were reportedly killed. The remainder of the crew were picked up by other UK ships in the area after they abandoned ship. The attack on the SHEFFIELD occurred in an area to the southeast of the Falkland Islands, at about 52415/5741 W.

3. (U) The Exocet missile that hit the SHEFFIELD was apparently launched from an Argentine French-built Super Etendard fighter-bomber from a point outside 20 miles. The Super Etendard is designed as a carrier based aircraft with an estimated operating range of 400 NM. The aircraft has in-flight refueling capability and can be refueled from a tanker-configured A-4 as well as the KC-135. Fourteen of these aircraft were ordered by Argentina from France in late 1979.

4. (S) Some analysts believe the Etendard may have been operating from the Argentine aircraft carrier 25 DE MAYO when it engaged the SHEFFIELD. This would have required in-flight refueling. Another possibility is the aircraft originated from NAS Rio Grande, on the Island of Tierro Del Fuego. SHEFFIELD was within the extreme unrefueled range of the aircraft if originating from NAS Rio Grande.

¹ Source: Washington National Records Center, OSD Files, FRC 330-84-0003, Argentina (Jan-15 May) 1982. Secret. Carlucci initialed at the top of the memorandum; a stamped notation indicates that he saw it on May 5.

² The referenced memorandum provides a less detailed report of the sinking of HMS *Sheffield*, based upon earlier information, and is *ibid*.

5. (S) The Exocet Missile is a 1450 pound weapon with a high-explosive war head. It is a sea-skimmer which is designed to fly about 10 feet above the surface of the ocean. It is believed to have a maximum operating range of about 42 miles. The missile uses a radar altimeter and a radar guidance device for homing in on its target in final stages of flight. It must be guided by the launch aircraft in all but the terminal phase.

6. (S) SHEFFIELD's position indicates she was probably in a forward air defense picket station ahead of the British Task Force. SHEFFIELD carried the SEA DART anti-air missile system with a range of 20 miles (15 miles effective range). She carried radar equipment capable of detecting the attacking aircraft well outside of her own self-defense radius but was not capable of reaching the aircraft with on board weapons systems if the aircraft remained outside 20 NM. SHEFFIELD sensors could also have theoretically detected the incoming missile, however, considering the weather and sea state conditions existing at the time, such detection is doubtful. SHEFFIELD's missile guidance Radar jamming capabilities are not known at this writing but are being researched.

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