

UNATTRIBUTABLE BRIEFING FOR DEFENCE CORRESPONDENTS - COL DONKIN
22 MAY 1982 - HR 24

- Q. You said that you have moved the assault ships and landing craft out, what is there left for them to attack?
- A. I cannot say precisely but obviously you cannot put a force ashore and leave nothing there to support them at all. Obviously the major ships had to be got out as quickly as possible.
- Q. Are you saying there are some smaller ships still there?
- A. There are some units there but not major ships.
- Q. Are the ships that are still there RN or RFA?
- A. There are RN and RFA ships but all the merchant ships which we were concerned about have been withdrawn.
- Q. Are the Harriers ashore?
- A. I cannot answer that directly. They are operating ashore but they are not actually ashore.
- Q. You are not prepared to tell us if they are touching down ashore?
- A. I do not wish to tell you where they are going to be based.
- Q. Can I ask you about the figure you gave of more than 25,000 troops involved?
- A. The total number of men afloat in the whole of the Task Force which includes Royal Navy, Marines, Army, RFA, civilians and RAF, the whole lot exceeds 25,000 men.
- Q. Can you tell how much of that is actually the Task Force?
- A. All I can tell you is that the whole lot are under the command of the Commander of the Fleet.
- Q. How many fighting personnel are among this 25,000?
- A. Something like 10,000
- Q. Have you got Rapier at all?
- A. I think Secretary of State mentioned it himself.

- Q. Does this 25,000 include Ascension?
- A. My words were "afloat".
- Q. If you have got Rapier you are going to have to set up no go areas for Harriers.
- A. That applies to BAOR or anywhere where operations take place.
- Q. What are the signs of the Argentines mounting a counter attack?
- A. As I said downstairs in the Hall, we are very encouraged by their lack of resolve. Morale does appear to be very low. All indications are that the fighting will is not very great.
- Q. Haven't you been dealing so far with very small detachments of Argentines and the bigger ones to come at Port Stanley might have a different resolve?
- A. I would agree with you. Quite how hard they will fight we are not sure. We very much doubt they have the ability to mount a counter attack from within the Falkland Islands because their aircraft have been attacked by our own forces that their helicopter threat is now limited.
- Q. How many Pucaras have they left?
- A. I wish we knew.
- Q. How do we establish when an aircraft is shot down? Is it on film or a one to one basis or are one or two of them seen smoking and heading in the direction of Argentina?
- A. Last night many officers were involved in sorting out various reports. The figure of 9 Mirage and 5 Sky Hawks is actually on the pessimistic side. How one identifies these kills is difficult. In several instances aircraft smashed around the ships in the Sound. On other occasions the Sea Harriers were following retreating aircraft having made their strikes. Two were taken out by a following pair of Sea Harriers who destroyed them in the air so both pilots were able to corroborate each other's stories.
- Q. Presumably one or two aircraft may have been damaged and have a long flight across water so there may have been one or two others who did not make it back.
- A. Absolutely.
- Q. I heard on the radio this afternoon that people have been streaming out of Port Stanley, 4,500 of them, marching towards the bridgehead. Have you any confirmation of this?
- A. They have got 50 miles between us and them of difficult terrain, no roads, no helicopters. Its a long way and by the time they reach us they possible won't have the resolve to fight.

Q. Have we any indication they are in fact on their way?

A. There is no indication as yet.

Q. Would you prefer it if they came out or stayed where they are?

A. We would prefer if they came out because Stanley is the heart of the whole thing. If we entice them out we will have a better chance of destroying them quickly and effectively without any danger to Stanley.

Q. Are there some regiments elsewhere on the Island?

A. I cannot answer that.

Q. Would it be reasonable to assume we have half our fighting men ashore and half in reserve?

A. CDS has already told you which units are ashore and presumably you can work it out from there.

Q. Was there an Argentine radar installation on top of Fanning Head?

A. No. We were rather worried about Fanning Head because we had observed them going in there, we had no idea why they were going in and at one stage we were frightened that they had actually locked on to our landing area which we had planned several weeks ago. We were concerned when the parties arrived but chose to leave them there untouched because the Argentinians would have put two and two together. I didn't mention mining in the briefing. Fortunately there was no mining in the Falkland Sound or San Carlos Water.

Q. What about land mines?

A. Landings took place unopposed except in Port San Carlos. All landings were safe and so far we have come across no mines. To be honest I don't really think they thought we were going to land there at all.

Q. Describe what you think their biggest problems were in order of priority.

A. I personally believe that morale is their number one factor or biggest problem. Second is logistic re-supply. It is very difficult to quantify their fighting ability but one must take into account that most of them are very young conscripts so their will to fight is perhaps the third factor.

- Q. Do you know what units they come from, are they marines?
- A. We have positive identification there are marines there and their marines are the elite but basically the vast majority are infantry soldiers. They have a combination of supporting arms, engineers, gunners but I cannot quantify details but we have built up a good picture in the last few weeks.
- Q. Do we think there are 10,000 or fewer?
- A. I think we estimate there are approximately 10,000 men on the Island.
- Q. The loss of the two Gazelles, did they use Blowpipe?
- A. I fear very much that they were using Blowpipe but we don't know. It must have been a hand held weapon - it wouldn't have been a rifle or machine gun. The Argentinians have Blowpipe and the enemy force that was withdrawing engaged two of our helicopters and we estimate that the weapon used was probably Blowpipe.
- Q. What brought down the 14 aircraft?
- A. The aircraft were brought down by a combination of Sea Harriers in the air-to-air defence role, ship weapons and ground fire. You can make your own deductions about what has not yet been used.
- Q. Can you clarify about the withdrawal of the ships. Are we talking about landing assault craft or about frigates ?
- A. We have withdrawn as mentioned before all big ships from the area to the edge of the TEZ.
- Q. You thought there was about 10,000 Argentinians there. Would you regard that as over-reinforcement by the Argentinians?
- A. It seems they are all bunched up in Stanley. It is difficult to understand what their concept of operations are. They have a massive amount of troops stuck in Stanley and we are not going to achieve our aim if we destroy Stanley. We do not understand why they have such great numbers there.
- Q. Is it going to be awfully difficult to win?
- A. We will win alright, no question of that. The question is how we can isolate them from Stanley.
- Q. Are they in the houses?
- A. Yes.

Q. Is that where they are living?

A. Yes.

Q. Have you any idea of what sort of vehicles they have got?

A. We haven't identified them. They have got some tracked vehicles.

Q. Were the Gazelle helicopter crews killed in those attacks?

A. I do not believe we have gone into details about casualties at this time.

Q. Have you any news of Prince Andrew's involvement?

A. As you know, he is in the Task Force.

Q. Is he in ASW helicopters or troop carriers?

A. ASW role.