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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

This is being sent to the R. N. M.

INFORMAL REPORT BY CAPTAIN J. J. MITCHELL R.N.M.

NAVAL ATTACHE BUENOS AIRES/MONTEVIDEO

1222

FALKLAND ISLANDS

BACKGROUND

(NOT TO BE QUOTED)

ENCL

14 APR 82.

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9370

Had we seen this?

1. The Sovereignty of the Falkland Islands has been under discussion between Great Britain and Argentina for a number of years and the situation when I took up my post in March 1981 was that these discussions were actively pursuing the possibilities, although there appeared little possibility of agreement given that Argentina was only interested in Sovereignty and Great Britain said the Falkland Islanders had to decide their own future.

① CIL-I
Have never
seen this?
Have you?
No

2. Discussions with Argentine Naval Officers indicated that there was a strong feeling that the Islands were properly Argentine, but that they were content to let the argument be settled through bilateral talks.

② R.N. to LHM.

3. During the year President Videla, was replaced by President Viola and the heads of all three services changed through normal completion of their due time in post.

③ PMA
④ ~~analysis~~
~~inquiry~~

4. The Defence Policy for the Islands was to defend the Islands with a detachment of 40 Royal Marines, which was a nominal defence gesture and left the Islands open to invasion when the Argentines so choose.

5. At the end of 1981, in the middle of December President Viola was displaced by General Galtieri, who assumed the position of President and Commander in Chief of the Army. Galtieri had previously shown himself to be a forceful character when in the Autumn he shut the frontier with Chile, as a result of the arrest of 4 people for spying.

6. Admiral Anaya is a quieter person but quickly demonstrated after taking office in September 1981 that he was a strong character who was committed to turning the Navy into a professional force.

7. Up to the end of 1981, I was shown every courtesy by the Argentine Navy and I do not believe there was any intention to invade the Islands, although clearly it was a subject that was frequently discussed. Indeed HMS Endurance visited Bahia Blanca in November and was shown every courtesy by the Argentine Navy.

8. 1982, therefore starts with a new Government in power, dedicated to stringent financial control and restoration of the Argentine economy. The genuineness of this intent was plainly visible in the forward planning of the Argentine Navy on purchasing and many other changes. However, the full affect was not fully apparent, January and February are holiday months, but by March it was becoming clear the Economic Minister had every intention of exercising firm financial control over the Services and the effect of this was felt most strongly by the Navy.

9. On the Naval front 1982 started with a visit by HMS Endurance to Ushuaia in Tierra de Fuego, although officially approved by the Argentine Navy, it was evident on arrival that the ship was not welcome by the local Commander and this was reported by HMS Endurance. This incident must be balanced against the warm welcome she later received in Mar del Plata and should be attributed to the local Base Commander, not wishing to have publicity, over a visit of a British Warship in such a sensitive area.

10. During this time I was shown every courtesy and as a result of HMS Endurance's visits to Bahai Blanca, Ushuaia and Mar del Plata had had every opportunity to visit all their naval bases. In doing this I saw no overt intention or preparations for an attack on the Falkland Islands.

11. Indeed with the Whitbread Round the World Yachts and HMS Endurance all in the same Basin with the Argentine Navy submarines in Mar del Plata it can be positively confirmed that up to the end of February there were no material preparations there.

12. At the end of February, I put in an application for HMS Endurance to visit Rosario after Easter and this was agreed and

subsequently reported to the United Nations as a sign of their goodwill to the Royal Navy!

13. At the end of February, talks postponed from December 1981, were held in New York and appear to have produced little advance on the discussions on Sovereignty and resulted in the Argentines issuing a statement to the effect that if positive progress was not made, they reserved the right to take appropriate action to settle the dispute. This produced counter statements from the FCO, that we could not negotiate under duress and I gather that as a result of this, private assurances were given by the Argentine FCO that force would not be employed.

14. The next escalation in the events was the landing by the Buen Suceso of a team on South Georgia to dismantle the whaling station, under the direction of a person called Davidoff. This in its self was not seen as important, since he had a legal contract for the work and had given advance warning of his intentions. He did not however report to the Base Commander at Gritvyken and as a result formal protests were made that he had landed illegally, which resulted in HMS Endurance being sent to South Georgia and, on the political side, a steadily escalating series of statements and counter statements, ending with the invasion of the Falkland Islands.

15. On the naval side events that took place were those reported in South Georgia, the sailing of the fleet ~~from~~^{from} Mar del Plata and Puerto Belgrano. The sailing of the Argentine submarines from Mar del Plata was reported but was not given special importance, as it was known that an exercise was planned with the Uruguayan Navy. However, that this was not so, soon become evident when two of the destroyers were reported as having been detached for South Georgia and reports from secret sources were received of one Submarine recognoitrng the beaches near Port Stanley.

16. Again the sailing of the fleet from Puerto Belgrano was reported without being able to give positive indication of its purpose.

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17. To understand the difficulty of knowing the intentions of the fleet, it must be appreciated that Puerto Belgrano, is 1,000 kilometres from Buenos Aires and is sited in a military area which covers a 10 mile stretch of the river, and is some 2 miles deep; a sight of the port area can therefore only be obtained by direct access.

18. My information from American sources is that the plan for invasion was started some 3 weeks before the invasion.

19. During these 3 weeks, I was received in their Navy Headquarters and was given every help in the World wide control of shipping exercise where we introduced an RNR Officer into the Argentine Navy organisation for 2 weeks and in the planning of a visit by International Military Services in early April.

20. In our end of year report, we ended with the statement that it was our assessment that the Falkland Islands could be captured whenever the Argentines wished and we would have no indication that this was so which in the event proved to be true.

21. On the Army and Air Force side there was no indication that any action was intended, until, in the early part of the week of the invasion, ~~when~~ we were advised that the C130 of the Argentine Air Force had left the base in Buenos Aires for an unstated destination.

22. In summary therefore, the situation developed against a background of a long standing threat to take action and followed an escalating path to the invasion.

23. Politically there was until the final moment a real belief that the problem would be settled politically and military force would not be used.

24. On the military side there was a developing situation in South Georgia that was fully reported and a belief that an invasion was under consideration, ^{which} became apparent once a secret

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source report was received of a submarine reconnoitring the beaches off Port Stanley.

25. Apart from this information, reported under the headings of ship sailings, there was no overt information available of the intention to invade and indeed I firmly believe that the Officers I met during the period were not aware of the intention.

Handwritten signature

Captain J J Mitchell, Royal Navy
Naval Attache
Buenos Aires

14 April 1982