

# Troops gain Falklands bridgehead

## Junta says fight just beginning

From Christopher Thomas, Buenos Aires, May 21

Argentina claimed tonight it had sunk a Type 42 destroyer and a Type 22 frigate and seriously damaged three other warships. The military authorities also claimed to have destroyed two landing craft, each with an estimated 25 men on board and to have shot down six Harriers.

Argentina said that by 4pm today (8pm British time) it had lost three aircraft and three helicopters had been damaged. Operations were continuing. Captain Enrique de León, the Argentine military spokesman, said the main body of British troops on the island was being surrounded. Argentine troops were moving towards them with light tanks and artillery. He admitted that the troops had landed unopposed because they were in an area where there were no Argentine forces. The advancing Argentines were encountering arctic conditions. He added that the British were being attacked from the air and from ground artillery.

"They are ashore but they have not got a solid bridgehead", Captain de León continued. "It is going to be difficult for them because we are now only just beginning to move our defensive forces against them. Their ships are in retreat because of heavy air attacks".

Earlier Argentina had claimed to have attacked five British frigates, one of which was said to be ablaze and sinking, and to have launched an air raid on 10 landing craft containing 250 men.

Noticias Argentinas said that British Marine commandos were attempting to establish a bridgehead in East Falkland and had carried out the first big amphibious disembarkation of the conflict. The troops were being attacked by Argentine Dagger aircraft which were succeeding in preventing the landing.

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### Casualty information

The Ministry of Defence issued the following numbers for relatives to call:  
 Rosyth: 0383 412191; Faslane: 0436 71125; Plymouth: 0752 666666; Portland: 0305 821547; Portsmouth: 0705 755212; Chatham: 0634 812771; Royal Marines: Plymouth 0752 667777.  
 Inquiries about Army personnel should be made on 01-409 7647.

Argentina said it was bombarding the British forces with two mobile field guns which had been moved into range. One was 105 mm gun with a range of five miles and other was a 155 mm with a range of eight miles. The Argentines said not all the men in the landing parties had made it ashore.

According to a flurry of junta communiques and military statements, the main action was in the Falklands Sound, which separates the two main islands. The junta claimed that a Sea Harrier had been shot down in the region and the pilot captured, and that two Sea King helicopters had been destroyed in Port Darwin nearby.

It also claimed 14 rockets had been fired at one frigate in the area, and later tonight Telam, the official news agency, said the rockets were fired from an Italian-built Aeromacchi aircraft.

The first communique reporting serious fighting came at 11.11am local time (3.11 British time), saying that at 8.45am three British ships were detected in the Bay of Port San Carlos in the Falklands Sound.

● A bridgehead was established by more than 1,000 British troops on the Falkland Islands yesterday, seven weeks after Argentina's invasion. The announcement last night by Mr John Nott, the Defence Secretary, said that there were casualties on both sides and five Royal Navy ships had been damaged, two seriously.

● The amphibious landings were staged at Port San Carlos, 50

miles west of Port Stanley. They were quickly followed up by landing ships carrying Scorpion light tanks and anti-aircraft missiles.

● Seventeen Argentine aircraft and two helicopters were destroyed in the battle and a Mirage damaged. British losses were a Harrier and two small helicopters. Mr Nott said Argentine prisoners had been taken and a secure land base was being consolidated.

## Five British ships hit in air attack

By Henry Stanhope, Defence Correspondent

British forces were firmly established back on the Falkland Islands last night after the most intense fighting since the Argentine invasion seven weeks ago.

But the bridgehead at Port San Carlos, 50 miles to the west of Port Stanley, was established only at a cost, which could turn out to be heavy.

Five warships were damaged by Argentine bombers which flew over the task force in waves from their mainland bases. According to the Argentine authorities early today, two of the ships were sunk and three others seriously damaged. A Harrier jet supporting land forces on the Falklands was also missing. There were no details of casualties.

Earlier in the day it had also been announced that 21 men were feared dead after a Royal Navy Sea King helicopter plunged into the icy waters while ferrying soldiers from one ship to another.

The Argentine Air Force lost 17 aircraft in the fighting according to the Defence Ministry — nine Mirage jets, five Skyhawks and three light Pucara ground-attack aircraft. Another Mirage was damaged.

After a day of mounting speculation the full drama of the day's events was unfolded only when Mr John Nott the Defence Secretary appeared before a crowded press conference at the Defence Ministry, and delivered a short statement.

"Royal Marine commandos and the Parachute Regiment are now ashore in substantial numbers, with artillery, air defence weapons and other heavy equipment already disembarked from our ships. These landings were unopposed. A secure land base is being consolidated."

Argentine casualties and prisoners were taken to the liner Canberra, which has a hospital on board. The wounded, who appeared to be

mainly teenagers, were reassured in the doctors' rudimentary Spanish. Throughout the daylight hours Canberra itself had been the target of continual attacks by Argentine aircraft.

The news came less than 24 hours after it had become clear that Britain was turning from the diplomatic to the military option and that the Government had ordered Rear Admiral John Woodward to accelerate the pace of operations in the South Atlantic.

"Attrition is the name of the game" sources said — and attrition seemed to be the objective as the raiding parties — totalling an estimated 1,000 men — started landing by sea and by helicopter

Meanwhile task force warships bombarded military targets around Port Stanley with their rapid-firing 4.5-inch guns while Harrier jets bombed and strafed positions around Fox Bay where 1,500 Argentine troops are said to be based.

Reports that some of the troops who landed were establishing themselves more permanently on East Falkland began to filter around London later in the day. But it was not until Mr Nott's statement that the extent of the landing became known.

The Argentine Air Force's counter-offensive seems to have begun soon after 10 am, when the Mirage interceptors and Skyhawk bombers swooped over West Falkland towards British frigates and destroyers in the Sound.

It was in the straits that at least two of the British ships were hit, according to the Buenos Aires military, whose communique for once matched the figures, if not the details, put out in London.

The Blues and Royals are equipped with the Scorpion family of light tanks and other tracked reconnaissance

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Royal Marine Commandos raising the Union Jack over the Falklands yesterday.

## War Cabinet is likely to assess battle today

By our Political Staff

Mrs Margaret Thatcher and her "war Cabinet" are likely to meet this morning to be given an assessment by the Service chiefs of the new military situation in the wake of yesterday's operation by British forces to establish a bridgehead on the Falkland Islands.

The Prime Minister changed her plans last night to spend the weekend at Chequers; she returned unexpectedly to Downing Street after spending most of the day fulfilling engagements in her constituency in Finchley, north London

With the intensification of

military action, and news coming in all the time from the South Atlantic, she decided to stay in London to be available for consultation with her senior colleagues.

She told a correspondent on her return to No 10: "These are nervous days, but we have marvellous fighting forces; everyone is behaving them. We are fighting a just cause and we wish them Godspeed."

"These are the most marvellous fighting forces in the world. They are courageous; they are dedicated. They are fighting a just cause. Everyone is behind them. Indeed, I think, not only in this

country but in so many countries elsewhere."

Earlier, Mrs Thatcher was loudly applauded when she spoke just before opening a warehouse in Finchley.

She told her audience: "I know you will understand that my first thoughts, I think all our first thoughts, indeed all our waking thoughts, are really 8,000 miles away with our men in the task force who went to restore freedom and justice to the people of the Falkland Islands"

"Their purpose is a great ideal and their courage and their skill has brought a new pride to our country and

made us realize once again that we are all really one family. For us, geographically distant though we may be, they are but a heartbeat away."

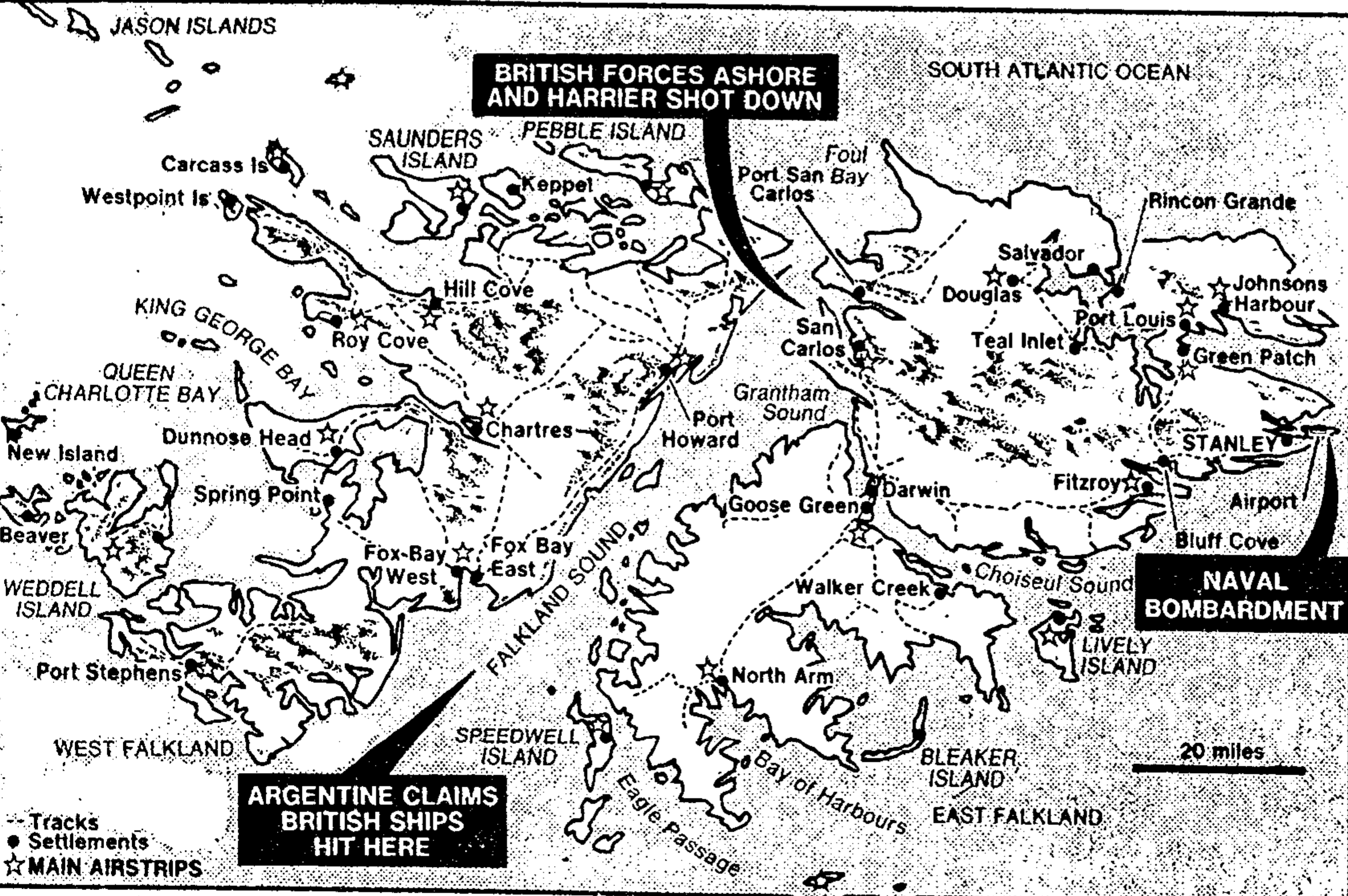
Before her Finchley engagements Mrs Thatcher had chaired a meeting of the inner Cabinet which was brought up to date on the latest military action on the Falklands. The latest Peruvian initiative was considered, but regarded as offering little of substance [report, page 3].

Opposition parties moved swiftly to support the intensification of military action as details were announced.

Mr John Silkin, Labour's chief defence spokesman, said that the whole country knew it was going to happen. The Labour Party was not prepared to hand over the Falklands to a regime that denied human and civil rights.

Asked on BBC radio's *The World at One* programme whether the message was that the official Opposition, the bulk of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and the Government were united over the action in the South Atlantic, Mr Silkin said: "Absolutely right, provided at the same time we never

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## 'Someone must shout stop'

From Zoriana Pysariwsky, New York, May 21

Ireland tonight called for an immediate ceasefire in the South Atlantic and the renewal of the Secretary-General's efforts for a negotiated settlement as the United Nations Security Council reopened debate on the Falklands conflict.

Claiming that the council could not accept the inevitable and "like a chorus in a Greek play, lament the unfolding tragedy", Mr Noel Dorr, the Irish representative, said that "someone must shout stop before the present conflict becomes uncontrollable".

During the debate the representatives of Britain and Argentina sought to blame the other's government for the breakdown of negotiations.

Earlier the council held private consultations only hours after Britain had begun its escalation of military action in the South Atlantic. It did so at the request of Ireland, Argentina and Panama.

But Britain said it would oppose any move to bring about an unconditional ceasefire which would simply enable "Argentina to consolidate what she has acquired by force", and leave the British Government with its hands tied.

Sir Anthony Parsons, the British representative, made the remarks as he went into the consultations of the council, but in keeping with tradition he declined to say whether Britain would indeed exercise its power of veto against any resolution which might seek to limit its military option. However, this was thought likely,

Last night Señor Pérez de Cuellar, the Secretary General, admitted defeat in his efforts to secure a peaceful settlement. He said the British and Argentine Governments were simply not prepared to accept his "ideas" and that the matter now rested in the hands of the Security Council.

Sir Anthony told the

Security Council that Britain's delay in mounting a military operation should not be seen as a sign of weakness. (Reuter reports).

"The British people are neither militaristic nor belligerent", he said.

"Over the centuries, many nations have made the mistake of interpreting our slowness to be aroused as weakness. This has always proved a profound mistake. "We are not carried away by slogans or rhetoric, but we are implacably stubborn in defence of principles and the rights of peoples."

Señor Pérez de Cuellar told the council he was still personally committed to help in every way towards a lasting solution.

"The prospect which faces us is one of destruction, continuing conflict and, above all, the loss of many, many young lives", he said. "Efforts must continue to find the means of avoiding this and restoring peace. There is no other course."

## Armada of Marines storms beaches

From John Witherow, in a pooled dispatch, with the task force.

The predawn skies over the Falklands are lit up by flashes of shell bursts as the assault force storms the beach-head. Marines are being sent in by helicopter and are swarming off landing craft on the northern shores of East Falkland.

A naval bombardment with four and a half inch guns and air strikes against the estimated 7,000 to 10,000 Argentine troops entrenched on the islands had preceded the landings. The site chosen for the assault was San Carlos Bay at the mouth of the Falkland Sound near the northern tip of East Falkland.

For the Royal Marines it was a matter of restoring honour lost in the humiliation seven weeks ago to the day when a vastly superior Argentine force overwhelmed the tiny garrison.

Twenty-four hours of mist and fog had cleared to give the invasion forces clear starlit skies as they left an armada of more than 70 ships for the beaches.

There are no immediate signs of the Argentine Navy joining the battle. Its ships, including the aircraft carrier, 25th of May, are still inshore along the Argentine coast.

One of the most important actions since the Second World War began when the assault ships, headed by HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid, huge ships with their own docks at the stern, disgorged their landing craft full of heavily armed Marines towards the beaches.

Close on the heels of the landing forces were tanks and armoured carriers, heavy guns, and missile batteries which will be set up once the beachhead is secured.

The invasion forces are bracing themselves for Gen-

eral Galtieri to throw the full might of his superior air force at us with the coming of daylight.

● Brian Hanrahan, of the BBC, writes from HMS Hermes about the day the bridgehead was secured: The attack started an hour after dawn and continued right through the day. First came the small Pucara bombers in a ground attack, low and surprising.

One of them got right into the bay to drop its bombs, but without success. For a few moments the air was full of missiles as the defending ships fired back.

I saw one Pucara making off over the hill with a missile chasing it. The captain saw a flash in the sky and debris tumbling down.

That set the pattern for the rest of the day: wave after wave of air attacks came against the fleet.

First they had to fight or outwit the Harriers which were between them and the islands. Then they had to go through the task force frigates and destroyers which were deployed to put up a missile screen.

But some got through to where we were anchored. This morning, for example, two Mirages came sweeping down across the bay.

We did not see them at first. We saw the red wake of the anti aircraft missiles rushing out to meet them, then there was the roar of their engine, the explosion of bombs, missiles, guns, everybody firing together.

One stray missile went off in the air about a hundred yards away. Two bombs exploded harmlessly on the hilltops as the aircraft curved away, diving back where they had come from.

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Stanhope, Henry. "Troops gain Falklands bridgehead." Times, 22 May 1982, pp. 1+. The Times Digital Archive, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS17140406/TTDA?u=nlibscot&sid=bookmark-TTDA](http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS17140406/TTDA?u=nlibscot&sid=bookmark-TTDA). Accessed 19 May 2025.