

LOOSE MINUTE

TC. 2936/30/93/82

Sec/VCNS

Copy to: Sec/ACNS(O) (without enclosure).

FALKLANDS RECONSTRUCTION.

1. As requested at this morning's briefing, attached for VCNS is a copy of DNOT's Reconstruction of Events leading up to the Falkland Islands.
2. I should stress that it is a purely 'in house' document and copies so far are held only by ACNS(O), Head of DE 5 and DN Plans.

*Garnier*

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DIRECTOR OF NAVAL OPERATIONS AND TRADE.

24 September, 1982.

*Copy sent to Historical Branch  
30/11/82. JH.*

~~Ex-114~~  
(29/1)FALKLANDS RECONSTRUCTION

1. A JIC assessment (1) in July 1981, argued that if the Argentinians concluded there was no hope of a peaceful transfer of sovereignty, military action could not be ruled out. The JIC identified the following military options:
    - a. Harassment or arrest of British Shipping.
    - b. Military occupation of one or more of the uninhabited islands.
    - c. Arrest of the BAS team on South Georgia.
    - d. Small scale military operation against the islands.
    - e. Full scale military invasion of the islands.
  2. A paper was prepared by MOD (2) as an Annex to a FCO memorandum for OD, which the FCO were constructing in September 1981. It assessed that Argentina had the military capability to pursue any of the options listed above, and that the Argentinians were some of the most efficient armed forces in South America. It discussed possible responses to Argentinian military action and, inter alia, postulated that the despatch of a large balanced force to deter a full scale invasion "could well precipitate the very action it was intended to deter". It concluded that to deal with a full scale invasion would require naval and land forces with organic air support on a very substantial scale, and that the logistic problems of such an operation would be formidable.
  3. The Autumn of 1981 saw little other than routine naval activity. HMS ENDURANCE sailed from UK for her last planned South Atlantic deployment on 13 October and arrived at Bahia Blanca on 26 November. She started her first work period on 12 December at South Georgia.
  4. Possibly the first indication of a developing situation was on 8 January when ENDURANCE reported a conversation with the Officer Commanding the ARA Antarctic Squadron who announced his intention in favour of operations in the sensitive areas of South Georgia and South Sandwich (3).
  5. On 25 January ENDURANCE reported (4) a marked change in attitude by the Argentinian Navy during his visit to USHUAIA. The pilot who took ENDURANCE out was very pro-British and said that "something is very wrong with my Navy". ENDURANCE reported that the ARA had been ordered not to fraternize with the British.
- (1) JIC(81)(N)34 dated 9 July 1981.
  - (2) D/DS11/10/6 dated 11 September 1981.
  - (3) ENDURANCE UAJ 081540 8 January (paper 307 in 344/4)
  - (4) ENDURANCE UAJ 251955 2 January (paper 328 in 344/4)

6. ENDURANCE next reported (5), on 1 February after his visit to Punta Arenas, that the Chilean Navy had confirmed frequently the belligerent and arrogant attitude of Argentina towards sovereignty issues, both towards Beagle Channel and the Falklands. Notwithstanding these two reports, ENDURANCE called at Mar del Plata in Argentina for a two week self maintenance period from 4-22 February, and received the usual friendly reception, both from the local community and from Argentine Naval Officers.

7. During the next few weeks tensions increased between Britain and Argentina. Talks in New York were unsuccessful, on 2 March HMA WASHINGTON reported the hardening of the Argentine attitude but he did not believe that Argentina press reports of military action reflected the views of the Argentine government (6). On the same day HMA BUENOS AIRES reported an Argentine statement (7) in which Argentina reserved the right to terminate the working of diplomatic mechanisms and to 'choose freely the procedure which best accords with her interests'. Later on the second an Argentinian government spokesman, referring to the possibility of the use of force, preferred 'at the moment' to discount such suggestions. On 9 March S of S was given a factual draft (8) for him to send to the Prime Minister to indicate how quickly RN ships could be deployed to the Falklands.

8. On 10 March D14 advised DGI on the Falklands (9). The note indicated that no military option was under active consideration and concluded that "The (Argentine) Navy's present attitude is not considered to pose any immediate or increased threat .... beyond that outlined in the JIC assessment (1).

9. On 9 March the FCO called for the MOD position paper (2) to be dusted off in view of the lack of progress in the Anglo-Argentine talks. The paper was restaffed and cleared out of Committee by the Chiefs of Staff on 19 March. On that day MOD UK NAVY asked CINCFLEET to look at options for a 'mini-deployment' to the Falklands in January 1983 (10).

10. On 20 March, the Governor of the Falklands reported that the Argentinian naval auxiliary BAHIA BUEN SUCESO had landed a party of civilian and military personnel at LEITH in South Georgia late on 19 March. They had hoisted an Argentinian flag; changed English notices into Spanish; set up a radio and fired shots (later thought to be at reindeer) (11). He issued instructions to the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) Base Commander to tell the Argentinians to leave forthwith. He also recommended that if his instructions were not complied with, HMS ENDURANCE, in Port Stanley, should sail for South Georgia on 21 March with Royal Marines embarked. CINCFLEET accordingly ordered ENDURANCE to prepare to sail having embarked RM's of platoon strength (12).

- (5) ENDURANCE UAJ/ULJ 011245 Z February (paper in 344/4)
- (6) WASHINGTON TELNO 671 of 1 March.
- (7) BUENOS AIRES TELNO 58 of 2 March.
- (8) D/DS5/3/5/71 dated 9 March.
- (9) D14A/6618 dated 10 March.
- (10) MOD UK AAA/ACA/LDQ 191305 Z Mar (Paper 141 in 343/S)
- (11) HEGF1 201125 Z Mar.
- (12) CINCFLEET EAL/LDQ 202327 Z Mar.

11. Meanwhile diplomatic protests were registered, and the Argentinians attempted to play the matter down. HE BUENOS AIRES reported that the Argentine had told him the party and ship would be leaving on 21 March and that the party were in no way official, had no serving service personnel or military arms. (13)

12. ENDURANCE duly sailed from Port Stanley in the afternoon of 21 March, having embarked his helicopters and brought his RM detachment to platoon strength. He also asked MOD to make alternative arrangements for roulement of the Falklands detachment of RM's (NP 8901) whose reliefs were due at Montevideo on 24 March.

13. The BAHIA BUEN SUCESO left LEITH harbour late on the morning of 22 March. Later that day the BAS observation party reported that some Argentinians had been left behind, with equipment. The party were reported as scrap dealers who had in fact a perfectly good contract to take scrap from the disused whaling station, but had no documentation for landing and were thus there illegally.

14. ENDURANCE arrived at GRYPVIKEN on 24 March. Having signalled further information and observation on the 23, indicating his disquiet with the developing situation. He had received instructions not to enter, nor conduct any naval operations in the vicinity of LEITH harbour (14). On the same day the Foreign Secretary asked S of S to delay ENDURANCE's planned departure from the South Atlantic in view of the situation (15). At this stage also the Prime Minister was warned by the Foreign Secretary that the situation had developed to the point where we may "now face the prospect of an early confrontation with Argentina". (16). FCO officials however considered that the Argentinians would probably first act to cut off some or all of the essential services they provided the islands.

15. In the meantime, arrangements were agreed for the roulement of NP 8901 using RRS JOHN BISCOE. The relieving detachment were due to arrive at Port Stanley on 29 March. BNA BUENOS AIRES suggested that it might be desirable to retain both RM detachments until the situation had clarified (17). This was later agreed.

16. On 25 March another Argentinian ship, the BAHIA PARAISO an ice patrol ship, arrived at LEITH harbour and started to work cargo. ENDURANCE suspected that the Argentine Commander of the Antarctic Squadron was embarked (18). This was confirmed later in the day.

17. Diplomatic activity continued at a high level. On 25 March the Argentinian Foreign Minister, in deprecating our action of sending ENDURANCE to South Georgia (which had by now hit the UK press), told our Ambassador in BA that "there now seemed no way in which the Argentines could remove the men.... without appearing to have responded to threat" (19).

- (13) BUENOS AIRES TELNO 85 of 21 Mar.
- (14) MOD UK NAVY JDA/W4A/LDQ/A3A 231945 Z Mar.
- (15) FCS/82/55 dated 24 March 1982.
- (16) PM/82/23 dated 24 March 1982.
- (17) BNA BUENOS AIRES 251409 Z Mar.
- (18) ENDURANCE EAL/LDQ/A3A 251401 Z Mar.
- (19) BUENOS AIRES Telno 101 of 25 March.

18. By this stage CINCFLEET had earmarked certain ships then at Gibraltar in the event of a requirement to deploy forces to the South Atlantic. Additionally RFA FORT AUSTIN was being prepared to sail to replenish ENDURANCE. This was in response to a directive from S of S on 26 March. FORT AUSTIN was to be ready to sail on 29 March.

19. A more detailed report of the activities of BAHIA PARAISO was sent by ENDURANCE on the evening of the 25th (20). The Argentine ship worked cargo into 3 LCVP type craft and operated an Alouette helicopter. By this time ENDURANCE had set up observation posts, one of which was detected by the Alouette, and was promptly relocated. The BAHIA PARAISO sailed during the night of 25/26 March.

20. Earlier, on 20/21 March, an incident had occurred in the Falklands when person(s) unknown entered the Argentinian airline office and placed a Union Flag over the Argentinian flag, sprayed paint and daubed toothpaste on a desk. This was reported on 23 March (21) and seized upon by the Argentinians as a "parallel insult" to their action.

21. Diplomatic activity continued. On 26 March BUENOS AIRES reported that the Argentine President wished to discuss the matter with his fellow Commanders-in-Chief. Also on the 26th a report was received that all Argentinian submarines at Mar Del Plata had sailed. This event was assessed as 'not necessarily sinister' by our Ambassador (22). Late on the same day, ENDURANCE confirmed that 12 Argentines had been left ashore at Leith and were working heavy plant.

22. By 27 March it was becoming apparent that the Argentinians had no intention of complying with the British requests to remove the party ashore at Leith. The Argentine Foreign Minister announced that a firm decision had been taken to give the men on South Georgia all necessary protection (23) including the presence of the BAHIA PARAISO. Argentinian press reported the despatch of the corvettes DRUMMOND and GRANVILLE, and the tanker PUNTA MEDANOS in support; the sailing of a submarine from Mar Del Plata, and the presence of a detachment of marines in the BAHIA PARAISO. This was picked up the same day by Reuters.

23. On the following day ENDURANCE reported (24) that he had established Observation Posts (OPs) to watch the activity at Leith and that he intended to search the North Coast of South Georgia using both helicopters and ENDURANCE. This he duly did, under strict instructions not to be escalatory. The JOHN BISCOE was reported by the Argentinian press as being a 'RN warship' on her way to Port Stanley with Royal Marines onboard (relieving NP 8901).

- (20) ENDURANCE EAL/LDQ 252140 Z March.
- (21) HEGF1 TELNO 27 of 23 March.
- (22) BUENOS AIRES TELNO 107 of 26 March.
- (23) BUENOS AIRES TELNO 110 of 27 March.
- (24) ENDURANCE AAA/LDQ/JDA 281250 Z March.

24. Considerable thought was being given by this time as to how to reinforce our Naval presence in the South Atlantic. Apart from the FORT AUSTIN, plans were now set in train to despatch a nuclear submarine and on 29 March MOD UK NAVY instructed CINCFLEET to prepare HMS SPARTAN for immediate deployment (25). SPARTAN was at the time operating in the vicinity of Gibraltar providing services for exercise SPRINGTRAIN forces under the flag of Flag Officer First Flotilla (FOF1) (Rear Admiral Woodward). SPARTAN was duly withdrawn from SPRINGTRAIN and arrived in Gibraltar to store and load torpedoes from HMS ORACLE, who was also withdrawn from SPRINGTRAIN. SPARTAN was to sail on 31 March, arriving in the Falklands area on 11/12 April. Coincidentally another SSN, HMS SUPERB, had also been withdrawn from SPRINGTRAIN and had sailed from Gibraltar on 26 March for an entirely different operational task. This was seized upon by the press somewhat later thus giving the impression that we had an SSN in area earlier than was in fact the case.

25. On 28 March, the Argentines issued a message to our Ambassador in BUENOS AIRES which indicated clearly the Argentine insistence upon their sovereignty, and their refusal to remove the party in South Georgia (26). This led, late that evening, to the Foreign Secretary asking the US Secretary of State, Mr Haig, to assist in mediation. Our Foreign Secretary said in this message "if we do not find a solution soon, I fear the gravest consequences". (27)

26. On 29 March, a note was sent to S of S by the Naval Staff (28), setting out the possible options for Naval Reinforcement of the Falklands. These were assessed at the time as:

- a. FORT AUSTIN. Due to sail from Gibraltar on 29 March to resupply ENDURANCE. Could collect 150 RMs en route at ASCENSION ISLAND.
- b. Two Frigates Plus a Tanker. BROADSWORD and YARMOUTH, with RFA PLUMLEAF, at Gibraltar en route to the Indian Ocean, could deploy. This force level would not match Argentinian Naval forces believed to be in area.
- c. SSN. An SSN could be made available, and deployed covertly (Note: SPARTAN was by this time on her way to Gibraltar to prepare).
- d. A Larger Force of DD/FF. Up to 9 FF/DD plus afloat support could be diverted from SPRINGTRAIN; at short notice. (This option was not favoured as it would be seen to be provocative without being necessarily superior to Argentine forces in area.)

- (25) MOD UK NAVY AAA/LGQ/JDA 291514 Z March.
- (26) BUENOS AIRES TELNO 116 of 28 March.
- (27) FCO TELNO 588 of 28 March.
- (28) D/DS5/3/5/71 dated 29 March.

e. A Balanced Task Force Capable of Effective Action Against the Argentine Navy. This should include a CVS, an SSN and sufficient missile ships, escorts and RFA support. It would convey up to a Commando Group (800) Royal Marines. Were this to be a preferred option, an LPD would also be needed. Such a force would take at least 7 days to assemble. (Historical Note: In the event it took 3 days. This will be discussed later.)

Detailed examination of (c) to (e) above was still being carried out by CINCFLEET. The possibility of the longer term relief of ENDURANCE was being addressed separately.

27. Also on the same day, the decision to retain the outgoing Falklands garrison of Royal Marines (NP 8901) in the South Atlantic was taken, thus effectively doubling the strength of the garrison (29). Finally on the 29th ENDURANCE reported (30) that on his return to Grytviken he had been closed by the BAHIA PARAISO with whom he exchanged pleasantries. ENDURANCE has previously asked (31) if he could go aboard the Argentinian ship and discuss the situation with a view to defusing it at local level. This had been turned down by MOD UK NAVY (32).

28. The SSN HMS SPARTAN having loaded extra weapons from HMS ORACLE at Gibraltar, finally sailed on 1 April. RFA FORT AUSTIN left the Gibraltar areas for the South Atlantic on 29 March, to resupply ENDURANCE.

29. On 30 March, S of S authorised the preparation of a second SSN and HMS SPLENDID was accordingly withdrawn from a reactive operation in the North West approaches and returned to Faslane for topping up with stores and weapons (33). Meantime Ministers had indicated that HMG wished to take early measures to reinforce our military presence in the Falklands area, and CINCFLEET was instructed (34) to make contingency arrangements for deployment of:

(a) Up to 7 DD/FF from SPRINGTRAIN forces.

(b) A Task Group of sufficient size to achieve superiority over any Argentinian Naval Force likely to be in the area.

CINCFLEET responded by nominating FOF1 as CTG desig and nominating ships for the two options (35). The directive to CINCFLEET (34) also asked for a third SSN and HMS CONQUEROR was nominated late on 30 March.

- (29) MOD UK NAVY W4A/A3A/LDQ/EAL/QFX 290945 Z March.
- (30) ENDURANCE EAL/LDG/A3A 292035 Z March.
- (31) ENDURANCE EAL/LDQ/A3A 291930 Z March.
- (32) MOD UK NAVY EAL/LDQ/A3A 291930 Z March.
- (33) MOD UK NAVY AAA/ACA/LGQ/JDA 301112 Z March.
- (34) MOD UK NAVY AAA/LDQ/JDA 301632 Z March.
- (35) CINCFLEET AAA/LDQ/LDD/JDA 302028 Z March.

30. During the same day, 30 March, ENDURANCE reported the arrival of a Soviet tug STOYKY at Grytviken on 29 March. Later he confirmed that the tug intended to remain for 3 days. Little activity was observed by ENDURANCE who was going to resume reconnaissance to the North West at first light on 31 March.

31. Diplomatic activity continued but with little practical result. The Prime Minister was minuted (36) on the situation in South Georgia by the Foreign Secretary and M of S(AF) (although undated this was received in DNOT on 1 April). In this assessment there was a statement on the assebly of a Task Force. It said that "the preparations could not be concealed and it would prove highly provocative and hence escalatory, unless the Argentines were preparing to invade the Falklands. There is at present no sign of this". This statement was at variance with a signal sent by MOD UK NAVY to CINCFLEET (37) on 31 March which stated that "current intelligence indicates possibility that Argentinian units might be in a position to land troops near Port Stanley on or after 2 April". At this stage Ministers were considering what to do with ENDURANCE, some 800 miles away from Port Stanley watching the Scrap dealers.

32. On 31 March, after receipt of (37), CINCFLEET ordered ENDURANCE (38) to prepare to sail at short notice for Port Stanley. ENDURANCE was also instructed to prepare contingency plans for either re-embarking his shore party or leaving a minimum effective OP party behind. That evening CINCFLEET issued further instructions to FOF (39) stressing the need for covertness, ordering him to continue with SPRINGTRAIN and to confine his planning for the SOUTHLANT contingency to the ships previously nominated.

33. Finally, late on 31 March, ENDURANCE was ordered to disembark all Royal Marines to Grytviken with complete scales of weapons, ammunition, ratios and stores (40). On completion he was to proceed with all despatch to Port Stanley. He commented later (41) that "the logic of this move was not clear as the Falklands were to be invaded on 2 April, a fact which was widely known, and it takes ENDURANCE approximately 3 days passage to reach Port Stanley". However he also says wryly in the same report that perhaps he would not have been writing the report at all if the ship had been allowed to stay and fight it out at Grytviken!

34. Instructions were now issued by MOD UK NAVY (42) for the employment of the RMs on South Georgia. Their mission, in priority order, was to:

- (36) D/MIN/(AF)/PB/5/1/5 undated.
- (37) MOD UK NAVY LDQ 311625 Z March.
- (38) CINCFLEET ADA/LDQ 311825 Z March.
- (39) CINCFLEET AAA/LDQ/LDD 311841 Z March.
- (40) CINCFLEET LDQ 312111 Z March.
- (41) ENDURANCE Report of Proceedings dated 12 June 1982.
- (42) MOD UK NAVY AAA/LDQ 312223 Z March.

- (a) Maintain UK presence on South Georgia.
- (b) Protect BAS personnel at Grytviken.
- (c) Maintain surveillance of Argentines at Leith.

Rules of engagement had been issued on 23 March (43) and were unchanged. Command of the detachment was to be retained by ENDURANCE.

35. Early on 1 April ENDURANCE reported that he had sailed from Grytviken (44), that he had landed all his RMs with rations for 14 days, and that his own food stocks were down to 17 days.

36. By this time the diplomatic scene had hotted up. The Foreign Secretary, in Tel Aviv, had seen his overnight telegrams and had agreed not to approach the UN security council unless we could produce 'absolutely convincing evidence in public of a genuine and immediate invasion threat' (45). He had previously on 30 March stated HMG's concern that 'a dangerous situation was developing over the illegal presence on South Georgia of a party of Argentines' (46). He now sought reactions from Brazil, Montevideo, Washington, UKMIS New York, and Santiago, on the UK position set out in amplification of his statement in the House (46).

37. During the morning of 1 April, CGRM issued a warning order for the reinforcement of the Falklands Garrison (47). At this stage ENDURANCE was on her way to Port Stanley, due there during the forenoon of 3 April: NP 8901, 75 Royal Marines, were at Port Stanley with their prime task the defence of the capital; 2 SSNs were on their way as was RFA FORT AUSTIN; and FOF 2 was also preparing his forces (39). However, the scale of reinforcement considered was only a Company Group of 200 men, plus SBS in particular for the third SSN HMS CONQUEROR. FORT AUSTIN was ordered to increase to maximum prudent speed and was warned that she might have to divert to Ascension Island. Later that day Port Stanley reported that a Polish supply ship heading for Stanley was stopped by an Argentinian warship some 110 miles North of Port Stanley (48) and told not to proceed further to the Falkland Islands. At 1825 Z the FCO warned the Governor (49) that 'we have apparently reliable evidence that an Argentine Task Force will gather off Cape Pembroke early tomorrow morning 2 April'. The stage was set.

38. Also, during the day of 1 April, the Falklands crisis became an operation and was duly christened. CORPORATE, plucked from the codeword lists of the Central Staff, was to become a household word in defence circles over the forthcoming months.

- (43) MOD UK NAVY JDA/W4A/LDQ/A3A 232001 Z March.
- (44) ENDURANCE EAL/LDQ/A3A/A2M 010215 Z April.
- (45) TEL AVIV TELNO 130 of 1 April 1982.
- (46) FCO TELNO 46 of 1 April 1982.
- (47) CGRM AAA/LDQ/W4A 011045 Z April.
- (48) Port Stanley TELNO 6 of 1 April.
- (49) FCO TELNO 48 of 1 April.

39. The Navy now began to prepare for war. The Naval Staff Advisory Group (NSAG) was in almost permanent session. Options were discussed, discarded, adopted. Well established procedures were short-circuited. Signals marked 'FLASH' became routine in their appearance. Minimize was ordered. CINCFLEET alerted his whole command (50). The Governor in Port Stanley, by now under no illusions, disposed his meagre forces (51). Down in the South Atlantic, ENDURANCE asked to be kept up to date on diptels and any other background information. He also had assessed the invasion date - correctly - as 2 April. (52).

40. In the early hours of 2 April, the First Sea Lord arrived in the Naval Operations Room of the Ministry of Defence, having just left the Cabinet. His directive was terse and to the point. A Task Group was to be made ready and sailed. It was to comprise 2 carriers, 1 LPD, at least 4 destroyers/Frigates and appropriate support. It was to be tasked to transport all three RM commandoes and the Commando Brigade Headquarters to the South Atlantic. The Army were to provide 2 LSLs. Supporting ships and Auxiliaries for the SPRINGTRAIN group were to be earmarked and prepared (52).

41. Early in the morning of 2 April, radio contact with the Falklands was lost. ENDURANCE, was then ordered:

(a) to remain covert and not to close the Falkland Islands further by CINCFLEET (53) and, a little later;

(b) to attempt to make contact with Port Stanley (54) despite breaching of HF silence; ~~and~~

finally confirmed the news of the Argentinian invasion.

- (50) CINCFLEET AAA/LDQ/LDD 011600 Z April.
- (51) Port Stanley TELNO 64 of 1 April.
- (52) ENDURANCE AAA/ACA/LDQ/JDA 011240 Z April.
- (52) MOD UK NAVY 19F/LDQ/HGQ/OAC 020223 Z April.
- (53) CINCFLEET 19F/LDQ/EAK 021135 Z April.
- (54) MOD UK NAVY LDQ/SCA/19F 021155 Z April.

AD by 5 (ci-davant)

M1

3-6

1. These all cover ENDURANCE and points of detail. I have assisted DSS to produce most if not all of their queries. I will need to see ofr, in particular ③ page 3 last para.

new subject

2. I have completed the reconstruction, as documents available to me, up until the invasion on April 2. The information between then and the formal start of NHB daily summaries is fully documented and held by NHB, who have a 2/0 joining a 10 Sept additional, and is thus not DNOT's province. I have so informed ~~him~~ Head of NHB. I do not believe we have anything to add which is not already available to them. I may have his own input.

3. The reconstruction is with the registry in typing, classified SECRET UK EYES A. To the best of my knowledge no copies exist other than in the back of this file. It should go to Head of NHB with a covering note etc but not until cleared by D.

↑ Sept 82

Ms.

Phys. 10.

Please note B 10 which is Remond's final  
draft of the Falkland's Reconstruction. No one  
has seen it except ARWS(O).

9 Sept. 82.

by  
HOB.