

LOGISTICS IN THE FALKLANDS WAR

KENNETH L. PRIVRATSKY
FOREWORD BY MAJOR GENERAL JULIAN THOMPSON CB OBE

Logistics in the Falklands War

*For the thousands of British men and women who worked tirelessly behind the scenes and enabled victory
in the Falkland Islands War.*

**Logistics in the
Falklands War**

Behind the British Victory

Kenneth L. Privratsky



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Foreword

This is the first book devoted to addressing the logistics of the Falklands War of 1982. Perhaps we should not be surprised that it has taken thirty-two years for it to see the light of day. For as the American author Thorpe wrote, 'surely one of the strangest things in Military History is the almost complete silence upon the problems of supply.' Yet almost every general who knows his business recognises this. 'During the last war eighty per cent of our problems were of a logistical nature,' Montgomery is alleged to have said. Even Napoleon who dismissively pronounced, 'let no one speak to me of provisions,' usually got it right, although lack of attention to logistics in Russia and Spain contributed to his downfall.

Here, at last, is a comprehensive account of the logistics of the Falklands War, from the British point of view, written by a highly experienced American general officer. Ken Privratsky has studied the subject deeply, starting in the 1980s. Among his many perceptive observations two stand out for me, as a senior commander in the Falklands. First his recognition, based on personal reconnaissance, that the terrain in the Falklands shaped and impinged on the way the ground forces received, or in some cases did not receive, their supplies. Second, that the operation was conducted by the British over a very long distance from their home base – as the crow flies nearly 2,000 miles further from the UK than Japan – with one staging post approximately half way down the route.

'No one who has not visited the Falklands, be he Government Minister, Serviceman, Whitehall Official, MP or journalist, can ever speak or write convincingly about them with any sense of conviction or degree of credibility,' wrote Major General Edward Fursdon, the Defence Correspondent of the Daily Telegraph, after a visit a few months after the war. This belief is echoed by Ken Privratsky, who writes, 'I have had the opportunity to visit the Falkland Islands twice in recent years, including a stop in South Georgia. I am not sure that anyone can provide an adequate account of the Falklands War without spending some time on the islands.'

Those of us fighting in the Falklands in 1982, Navy, Marine, or Army, soon realised that the staff of the Task Force Commander (CTF), directing the war from a bunker in Northwood, just north of London, had absolutely no idea of the scale of the logistic challenge posed by operating in a land of rocky whale-backed hills and peat bog with no roads, or even the most rudimentary track. Major General Jeremy Moore originally provided the land force advice to the CTF. The day before we landed, Moore, accompanied by most of his staff, left the CTF's headquarters and travelling south in the liner Queen Elizabeth II, arrived ten days later to take command ashore. The commander and staff of Headquarters North-East District replaced him at Northwood. The majority of these people seemed unable to make the mental switch from driving about the north German plain in armoured personnel carriers accompanied by self-propelled artillery to picturing the realities of footslogging across a peat bog. Traversing the formidable terrain was of course only a minor part of the problem facing us. The logisticians had the far greater challenge of lifting forward every bean, bullet, gun, and gallon of fuel by a combination of landing craft and a lamentably small helicopter force. Before this there was the naval logistic problem of an offload of supplies and equipment under frequent air attack.

The author also alludes to the problems inherent in conducting operations at a long distance from the home base, and furthermore that this included that most difficult of war fighting pastimes, an amphibious operation. He makes it plain that this is very different from a sea-transported operation – the distinction, operationally and logistically, is sometimes lost on the present generation of British politicians, Officials, and the many senior serving officers lacking even rudimentary training in the art, or even a passing acquaintance gained by reading history, let alone actual experience of amphibious operations. With the exception of the insertion of the UK's Special Boat Service into Afghanistan in 2001 by helicopter, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the British experience of overseas expeditions since the Falklands has been of 'red carpet' operations, the classic example being the lead-up to the 1991 war in Kuwait, where a host nation, Saudi Arabia (and other Gulf states), provided all the facilities needed by the Coalition forces: including docks, slipways, airfields, roads, fuel, and even five star hotels for the RAF aircrew. The Falklands war involved a quintessential amphibious operation where you have to take everything you need with you, or capture it after arrival – for example a port, or an airfield – should these even exist. If, as in the case of the Falklands, the objective for the amphibious assault is beyond the range of land-based air, you need aircraft carriers to provide air cover and close air support; as well as carriers dedicated to bring support helicopters in far greater numbers than were made available to the amphibious and landing forces in the Falklands War.

Another aspect of an amphibious operation, which the author makes clear in this book, is that it is a *joint* operation in a way and to a degree that a sea-transported or straight land or maritime operation is not. In a sea-transported operation, as in the positioning of forces for Gulf War One in 1991, those being *transported* (the land force) are to all intents and purposes passengers and have a limited need to plan and interact with their *transporters*; the Royal and Merchant Navy. They do not have to think; the movement staff will tell them what to do on arrival. It is a movement operation. That is not to say that it does not require a great deal of logistic planning, but in essence it is little different from taking

passengers, vehicles, and containers across the North Sea or any other stretch of water in peacetime. Those being transported do not have to take account of the myriad factors that have to be weighed up by their transporters to the degree that the *landing* force (note change of name) has to in an amphibious operation. In this case, the amphibious and landing force commanders must work hand in glove, taking accounts of each other's requirements at every stage to produce a joint plan. This was a feature of the war in the Falklands that clearly had not been assimilated by the 5 Infantry Brigade, the follow-up brigade after the 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines had landed. This was not their fault. The role of the 5 Infantry Brigade was 'intervention,' the British term in the late 1970s/ early 1980s for what in effect was a 'red carpet' operation to rescue British Nationals from a foreign country in a time of crisis. This, it was assumed, because it was convenient to do so, would be by invitation on the part of the country concerned, or at worst, in the face of very light opposition: a few dissidents equipped with small arms. In short, operations against the sort of enemy that constituted the sole experience of all but a handful of British servicemen at that time. The brigade was pitchforked into the Falklands without the necessary training, most essentially in how to conduct joint operations. Other than some rudimentary exercises with RAF helicopters, neither the 5 Infantry Brigade, nor any other Army formation or unit, other than those in the 3 Commando Brigade, had the remotest notion of how to co-operate with the Royal Navy.

This ignorance persists. Senior serving British Army general officers have recently been heard saying that there is no need for elite troops, such as the Royal Marines, that there is 'nothing they do that cannot be done by a good infantry battalion,' citing the June 1944 landings in Normandy as an example. They forget if indeed they ever knew, that, for example, the British 3rd Infantry Division, the left hand assault division on Gold Beach in Normandy in June 1944, began their amphibious training in late 1942, *eighteen* months before they had to carry out the operation. Between summer 1943 and June 1944, in addition to numerous unit level amphibious training and courses, this Division took part in no less than ten formation level amphibious exercises - usually landing in the same craft that would land them in Normandy. In 1982, nobody was granted such a bonus. It was a 'come as you are' party and is likely to be next time.

Fortunately, in the case of the Falklands War of 1982 there was sufficient residual expertise among the staffs of 3 Commando Brigade and COMAW, and the units of 3 Commando Brigade, to overcome the lack of recent joint training thanks to financial cuts by Mr John Nott, the UK Secretary of State for Defence. The Royal Fleet Auxiliary had done even less joint training, and the Merchant Navy none. The point is that joint training by all parties likely to become involved in an amphibious operation is essential.

As made clear in Ken Privratsky's excellent book, the efforts of the logisticians in the Falklands were remarkable. The achievement is best summed up by an experienced rifle company commander in 3 Commando Brigade (at the very point of the spear and hence at the end of the logistic line of communication), who wrote later:

All comments and lessons from the logistics of this campaign should be leavened by the fact that this must be one of the few campaigns fought by a regular force since the internal combustion engine became generally available, where the widespread use of wheeled transport was not possible. This, combined with the speed with which it was necessary to put the whole act together, and the enemy's efforts to disrupt the act, makes it arguable that we were fortunate to have any logistics at all.

A well-researched account of logistics in the Falklands War in 1982 is long overdue; and this book will be welcomed by a wide readership, not just logisticians.

Julian Thompson

Preface

We have witnessed a half a dozen conflicts since the Falklands War, each different in various ways. Given the magnitude and duration of coalition efforts in the Middle East over the past twenty years, it is perhaps not surprising that some have faded into the background, the Falklands War being one of them, especially outside of the United Kingdom. In several ways, this war between Britain and Argentina in 1982 remains quite different from others recently. Not since the Second World War have nations battled at sea as they did in the South Atlantic. There have been no amphibious assaults to speak of since Inchon in the Korean War and Suez in 1956, both a generation earlier. It was a comparatively quick war as well. Only seventy-five days separated the invasion from surrender in the islands, notwithstanding sailing times of three weeks for ships to travel the 8,000 miles separating the United Kingdom and the Falklands. The battles on land were over in three weeks. The war had a clear beginning, a fairly decisive end, and afterwards the British military helped re-establish normalcy within a relatively short time as well. What makes the Falklands War unique in all of military history, however, is what happened in terms of logistics. Never has a nation assembled and deployed forces so quickly to fight a war so far away in an area where it had so little wherewithal. Britain was not ready for this fight in 1982 but still won. Understanding why that happened and how close the British came to losing could not be more relevant today, particularly for a generation of logisticians who have spent careers supporting wars in the Middle East.

At the time of Argentina's invasion of the Falklands, Britain, like many NATO countries, was poised to move forces quickly. Although states of readiness varied between members, quick deployment of designated units was essential to reinforce positions in Europe to defend against an attack by the Warsaw Pact. Those units were ready to deploy with some equipment, but the vast majority of the needs of allied ground forces were positioned already in Combat Equipment Groups on the continent. Thousands of tons of supplies were prepositioned in and around Germany to sustain the first weeks of fighting. Naval units were designated to protect seas as further deployments and large-scale resupply became necessary. In Britain as in the United States, military units were accustomed to participating in no-notice exercises to retrieve this prepositioned equipment and supplies and move to assembly areas. As a result, when units like 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines, which led the ground war, received alerts in 1982, they knew what to do, although not necessarily what to take or how to move it to an area like the Falklands.

Those high states of readiness to deploy started to decline in western militaries toward the end of the century. After the first Gulf War, countries like Kuwait became the new staging areas with billions of dollars of prepositioned equipment and supplies, much like Germany had been during the Cold War. This prepositioning proved invaluable for the buildup preceding the second war in Iraq in 2003. Since then, as coalition forces continued fighting in the region, focus shifted from the ability to deploy quickly to almost exclusive attention on rotating a sufficient number of trained units in and out of the region, often relying heavily on reserve forces. The net result is that over the past ten to fifteen years western militaries have no longer maintained the same readiness to deploy quickly to enforce political decisions as they did in the 1980s. Units previously accustomed to conducting emergency deployment readiness exercises as a matter of routine concentrated on preparing soldiers for continuing military operations in established theatres. For logisticians this has meant disembarking planes on secure runways, offloading large container ships at fixed ports with cranes, moving those containers down highways and issuing supplies from well-stocked warehouses. Although they certainly encounter many challenges in doing so, this experience remains quite different from trying to get supplies over a beach during an amphibious operation or moving them beyond there without roads, all the while being under threat of attack.

It is likely that forces in the future will again be expected to deploy quickly and operate over great distances in austere areas. When that happens, logisticians will need to provide support without reliance on fixed infrastructure, deep draft ports or airfields. The British experience in the Falklands highlights the difficulty of providing logistics over long distances into austere environments, particularly in situations of significant threat and especially for amphibious operations. Accordingly, it is not surprising that military schools are showing renewed interest in the Falklands War. There is much to learn from that experience, especially with the British government's recent release of many previously restricted official documents.

There have been many fine books written about this war over the past three decades but none thus far have focused on the remarkable logistics efforts that enabled victory. The Falkland War remains very much unique in the annals of military history because of that effort. It also provides a watershed for those interested in the logistics of waging war, particularly long-distance war.

We see the word 'logistics' around us today on a daily basis. Back in the 1980s, that term was not common except in the military. People not only did not discuss logistics outside of military circles; they seldom wrote about it for any audience, including military audiences. And so someone in the military like myself who was interested in reading about the subject had to be satisfied with titles like *Pure Logistics: The Science of War Preparation* (1917), *For the Want of a Nail: The Influence of Logistics in War* (1948), *Logistics in the National Defense* (1959), *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (1977), or perhaps *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army* (1978). There was not much else,

besides a two-volume exhaustive history of logistics in the Second World War. Logistics was a military thing up until 1991, when Desert Shield and Desert Storm added the term to the lexicons of many after news programmes revealed the multitude of challenges posed by deploying the equivalent of a large city to the Gulf. Unbeknownst to most, though, that deployment took six months to complete because of readiness shortfalls and distance challenges. Today we see the word 'logistics' everywhere. It has become, quite understandably, the mantra of many businesses.

The British military was well schooled in the subject of logistics back in the early 1980s. As an island nation, Britain had to take logistics seriously whenever its forces went some place. In fact, at the time of the Falklands War, the British were several years ahead of us Americans in tailoring logistics units to improve support capabilities on battlefields, even integrating different military services into tactical logistics units. The wisdom of such initiatives proved very apparent in the South Atlantic.

When the Falklands War captured the world's attention in 1982, I was a young US Army major serving in Panama. Like most others at the time, I had never heard of the Falkland Islands when the sabre-rattling started. I read newspapers to learn what was happening. A few years after the war, then a student at Staff College, I faced a requirement to write something on the art of war. I chose to research the Falklands War with a focus on logistics, which by then had become my military speciality. As I started research, I soon became fascinated by what the British had accomplished, with few exceptions all on their own. The war had ended just a few years before, and there was little information available about the logistics behind the victory. Thankfully, British military leaders at the time and years later graciously answered my letters seeking information and availed themselves for interviews. In the early 1990s when I was on fellowship to the Hoover Institution of War, Revolution and Peace, I began a book-length study of the war, but soon thereafter I became sidetracked by military and eventually industry requirements. When I retired for the last time in 2010, I dusted off my project. Over those years, I often worried that someone would tell this story before I did. As I look back now over a quarter of a century, I am pleasantly surprised that no one did, except in small pieces, since the logistics challenges behind the victory were so immense. The difficulties of supporting war over such a long distance with no forward presence would have been intimidating for any country. To wage war in a place like the Falklands made it even more so.

I have had the opportunity to visit the Falkland Islands twice in recent years, including a stop in South Georgia. I am not sure that anyone can provide an adequate account of the Falklands War without spending some time on the islands. Visitors cannot miss the minefields that are still awaiting clearance; the treeless, boggy terrain with no cover; the stone runs that stretch for hundreds of yards; or the strong winds that occasionally make it difficult to stand without moving. Sailing the rough waters of the South Atlantic, seeing the rugged coastlines, walking up the jagged slopes of hills where men fought at night against defences prepared over several weeks— all of this and more deepens one's perspective on the war. During my brief time in the Falklands, I kept reminding myself that the vast majority of those who fought there were like me. They had never been to this part of the world before. Most knew nothing about it. Unlike me, however, they did not have a return flight, and they were a very long way from home. They were heading into a fight at the end of an 8,000-mile logistics tether against an enemy that was passionate about retaining its new hold on the islands. Although the war ended favourably, many things did not go as planned. The British could very well have lost had some events turned out differently.

It is not my intent in this book to focus on lessons learned from this war, logistical or otherwise. Rather, I want to tell the story as it happened with as little military speak as possible so that readers can appreciate the extent of the efforts behind the victory. I try my best to discuss logistics activities in the context of military requirements and tactical needs. Combat at sea, on land and in the air provides the context, but logistics becomes the focus of the story. At the end, I offer some brief observations about the British experience from a logistician's standpoint, but those are only a starting point. I encourage others in the military to spend more time with this war. Wars nowadays produce few new lessons. They often reveal mistakes from lessons unlearned. It can be very costly to relearn lessons when waging war over long distances like the British did in the Falklands.

Regarding logistics, it is best that I provide some clarity for general readers about what that means without leading to definitions. Military logistics comprises those activities to project military power where it is needed and to sustain forces while there. On the surface it might seem simple. It requires a network of capabilities on the home front including ships, ports, trucks, trains, and planes as well as depots full of supplies. For military units, it traditionally includes such activities as transportation, supply, maintenance and repair of materiel, as well as administrative services like postal and pay. It can include medical services. It often includes burial and repatriation responsibilities. It encompasses pertinent activities for prisoners of war as well. The US Army has referred to this assortment of activities for years as combat service support. There are three levels of logistics, just as there are three levels of war: strategic, operational and tactical. Strategic logistics involves the readiness of industrial bases, equipping and deploying forces, and the follow-on support of those forces. Operational logistics involves the integration of logistics generally beyond the homeland, across services and in support of military units seeking multiple objectives. Tactical logistics becomes the domain of battlefields, where soldiers fight and sometimes die in the execution of battle plans. Executing logistics is a complex undertaking at all levels. And because things never turn out as planned, it becomes a continual process of re-evaluating and making adjustments as combat changes and losses occur both of forces and logistics wherewithal. It is never easy.

Kenneth L. Privratsky
Major General, US Army (Retired)

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There are many whom I need to thank for their assistance in making this book possible. The first person kind enough to answer the letters of a curious US Army major in 1986 was Ivar Hellberg, British Army and Commander of Commando Logistic Regiment, 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines during the war. He not only corresponded with me; he also graciously hosted my family and me at his quarters near Plymouth in 1988 and pulled together a group of officers who shared information with me. They included Rick Jolly, Royal Navy surgeon, who commanded the field hospital during the war known as the 'Red and Green Life Machine'; Gerry Wells-Cole, Royal Marines, who was the senior logistics staff officer for 3 Commando Brigade; and Peter Lamb, also Royal Marines and a key logistics planner for the two-brigade Land Force. All of these gentlemen spent hours educating me. Ivar has continued to answer my questions this past year. Gerry was particularly helpful in recent months reading and suggesting changes to all chapters in draft. I met Anthony Welch of the British Army at a US Army logistics school in 1988. He commanded Ordnance Squadron in Commando Logistic Regiment during the war and later retired as a brigadier. We spent many hours together talking about the war, often over beer. He provided me with dozens of photographs capturing logistics operations in the war. Major General Ian Baxter was kind enough to let me interview him in the early 1990s. During the war, he was Deputy Chief of Staff of the Land Force, a Royal Corps of Transport officer who guided much of the deployment and eventually became the senior logistics staff officer for the ground war. More recently, Nick van der Bijl, an Intelligence Corps staff sergeant who served with 3 Commando Brigade during the war, kindly previewed and advised on chapters dealing with 5 Infantry Brigade, answered numerous queries on a variety of topics, and offered the use of photographs. Roderick Macdonald, British Army, who commanded 59 Independent Commando Squadron with 3 Commando Brigade and later retired as a brigadier, allowed me to use photographs from his personal collection now in the public domain, many of which were taken by men in his command. Tym Marsh, the senior logistics staff officer for 5 Infantry Brigade, reviewed my chapters on that brigade and provided inputs. Robin Smith, also British Army, who commanded 91 Ordnance Company with 5 Brigade during the war, provided valuable information on deployment and support and many photographs for me to use as well. Patrick Watts, a resident of Stanley and the radio broadcaster who bravely gave out updates during the invasion until Argentines stuck a gun in his side, recently escorted me around some of the mountains surrounding Stanley where the final battles occurred. His knowledge of those locations and his experience during the occupation proved invaluable.

I owe great thanks to Michael Clapp, the Royal Navy commodore who commanded the Amphibious Task Force during the war and corresponded with me extensively during the early 1990s. His courtesy and his professionalism in typing dozens of pages (on a typewriter no less) to answer hordes of questions at that time still impress me. Over the past year, after we renewed communication, he has given tirelessly of his time to advise me on matters related to the war, to include reading my drafts and sharing materials. I owe the same great thanks to Julian Thompson, who was the brigadier commanding 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines during the war. A distinguished author of several military history books, he was kind enough to let me interview him at length in his home in the early 1990s, shortly after his retirement as a major general. At the time, I was a lieutenant colonel still trying to get the story straight. He too has given patiently of his time reading drafts, providing additional information, and also writing a foreword. Both Thompson and Clapp become centrepieces in several chapters of my book simply because they were that important to the war as a whole. Both are remarkable men, and I remain humbled by their assistance. This book would not have been possible without the two of them.

I have quoted directly from several of the above individuals, in some cases on multiple occasions. At other times, I have used extensively information they provided in conversations, correspondence, and emails. Without the totality of their contributions, this book would have turned out quite differently and been less accurate for sure.

I extend my appreciation to the staff of the Staff College, Camberley, many of whom are probably retired today as well. They opened their library stacks to me to help my research in the early 1990s. And I wish to thank the staff at the British Army Historical Branch at the Ministry of Defence in London, even though it no longer exists. In the 1990s, they provided many documents that proved very helpful to me. Perhaps some of those who worked there will read this and learn of my appreciation. A host of other organizations have been helpful in providing advice and assistance, including the Defence Imagery Team, Fleet Air Arm Museum, Imperial War Museum, National Army Museum, Royal Air Force Museum, and Royal Marines Museum.

I also would like to acknowledge the gracious permission by publishers and authors who have allowed me to quote from their publications. These include Anova Books, Aurum Publishing Group, Harper Collins, Naval Institute Press, Maritime Books, Methuen, Pen & Sword Books, Sterling Lord Literistic, Taylor & Francis Books and Whittles Publishing, as well as personal permissions from Sir Lawrence Freedman, Rick Jolly, and Nick van der Bijl. Extracts from *The Battle of the Falklands* are reprinted by permission of Peters, Fraser & Dunlop on behalf of Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins.

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assistance of my editor, George Chamier. To both of them, I offer my sincere thanks for the opportunity to share this story with those who made it happen.

Finally, I would like to thank my daughters, Erika and Kylie, and my wife, Kathy, for their support. Erika used her skills to develop some very nice maps for this book. Kathy pressed me often over the past twenty years to get on with my project. She helped me endlessly along the way and tolerated research materials spread around our house for a very long time. This book is as much hers as mine now.

Few if any books are free of errors and I expect mine will be no exception. Any mistakes of fact or interpretation in this book are mine alone

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

A Echelon	Logistics element behind fighting units
B Echelon	Logistics element in rear support area
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
Bde	Brigade
Bergen	Rucksack
BFSU	British Forces Support Unit
Blowpipe	Wire-guided, surface-to-air missile fired from shoulder.
Blues and Royals	Cavalry with armoured vehicles
BMA	Brigade Maintenance Area
BV202 (Snocat)	Tracked cross country, over-snow vehicle
Canberra	British-made (Argentine) light bomber
Casevac	Casualty Evacuation
C-130 Hercules	US-made cargo plane
CAG	Commander Amphibious Group
CATF	Commander Amphibious Task Force
Cdo	Commando
CH47 Chinook	US-made, twin-rotor heavy-lift cargo helicopter
CLFFI	Commander Land Force Falkland Islands
CTF	Commander Task Force
CLF	Commander Land Force
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINCFLEET	Commander-in-Chief Fleet
COMAW	Commodore Amphibious Warfare
Coy	Company
DCSR	Daily Combat Supply Rate
DOMS	Defence Operational Movements Staff
DP	Distribution Point
Dracone	Towed flexible fuel container
EFHE	Emergency Fuel Handling Equipment
EPW/POW	Enemy Prisoner of War/Prisoner of War
FBMA	Forward Brigade Maintenance Area
FMA	Force Maintenance Area
HMS	Her Majesty's Service
Harrier	British vertical take-off jet fighter
LADE	Lineas Aéreas del Estado
LCU	Landing Craft Utility
LCVP	Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel
LFFI	Land Force Falkland Islands
LLA	Logistics Loitering Area
LPD	Landing Platform Dock
LSL	Landing Ship Logistic
M&AW	Mountain & Arctic Warfare
MEZ	Maritime Exclusion Zone
MILAN	British wire-guided missile operated by two men
Mirage	French-made (Argentine) jet fighter
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MV	Merchant Vessel
NAAFI	Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes
NASA	National Aeronautical and Space Agency
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

O Group

Para

Pucara

QE2

RAF

Rapier

RCT

RFA

RM

RN

SAS

SBS

Scimitar

Scorpion

Sea King

Sidewinder

Skyhawk

SST

STUFT

Super Etendard

TEZ

TRALA

UHF

UKLF

Victor

Vulcan

Wasp

Wessex

Orders Group

Parachute battalion

Argentine dual-prop fighter

Queen Elizabeth II

Royal Air Force

Ground-to-air missile launcher, radar-guided

Royal Corps of Transport

Royal Fleet Auxiliary

Royal Marines

Royal Navy

Special Air Service

Special Boat Squadron

Small light tank

Small light tank

Royal Navy helicopter

US air-to-air guided missile

US-made (Argentine) jet fighter

Surgical Support Team

Ship Taken Up From Trade

French-built jet

Total Exclusion Zone

Tug, Repair, and Logistics Area

Ultra High Frequency

United Kingdom Land Force

Royal Air Force tanker plane

Royal Air Force bomber

Royal Navy light helicopter

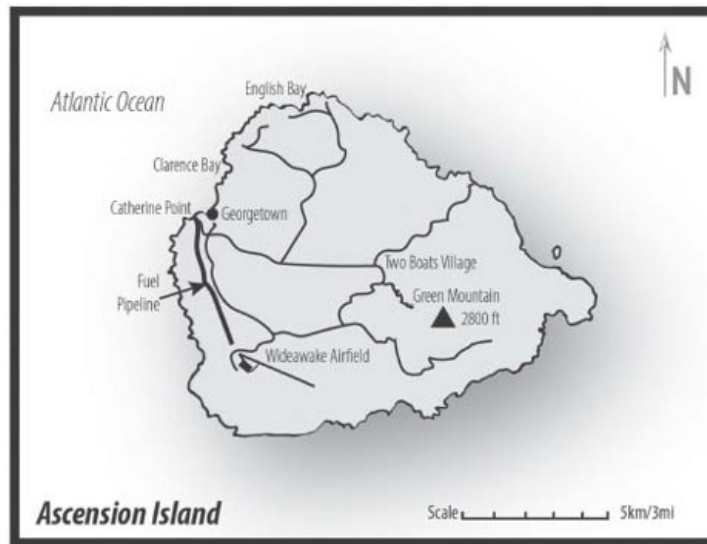
Royal Navy medium-lift helicopter

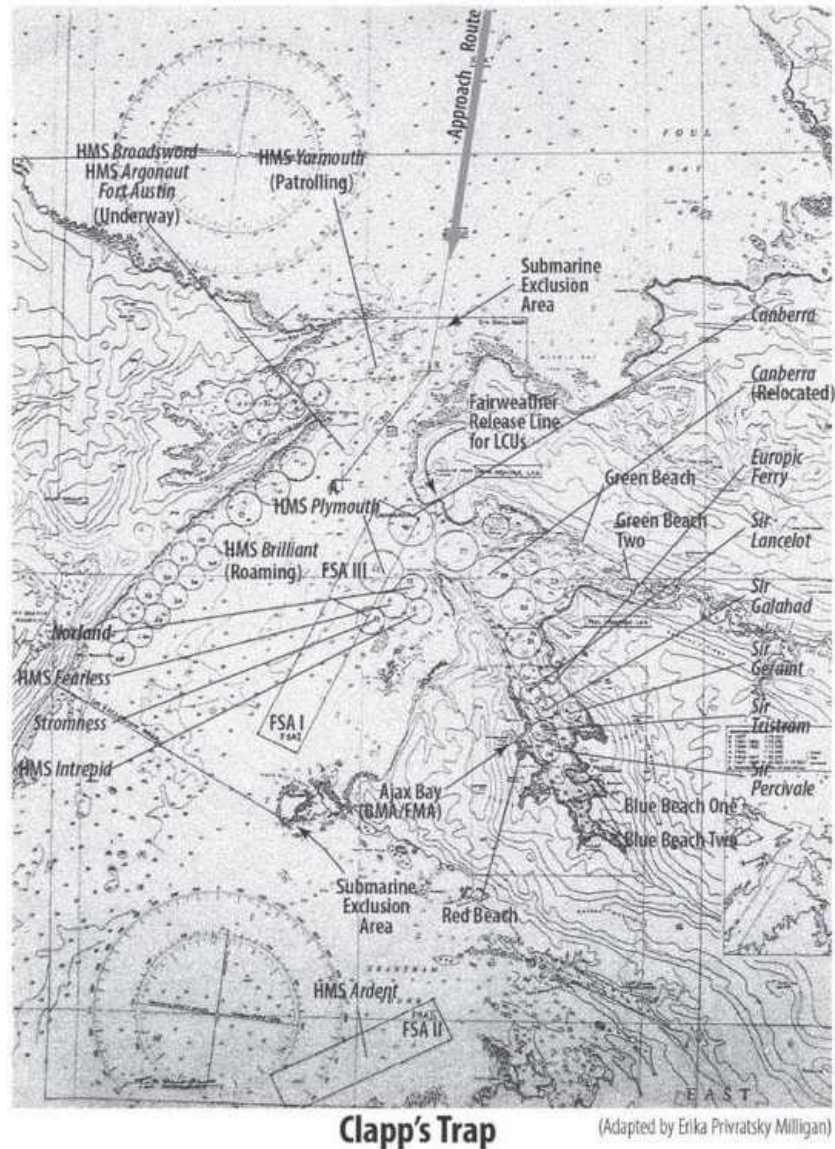
Maps

Designed by Erika Privratsky Milligan

[The Challenge for Logisticians](#)
[Ascension Island and South Georgia Island](#)
[Clapp's Trap](#)
[The Logistics Battlefield](#)
[2 Para's Fight for Goose Green \(28 May 1982\)](#)
[Battle for Mountains Surrounding Stanley](#)







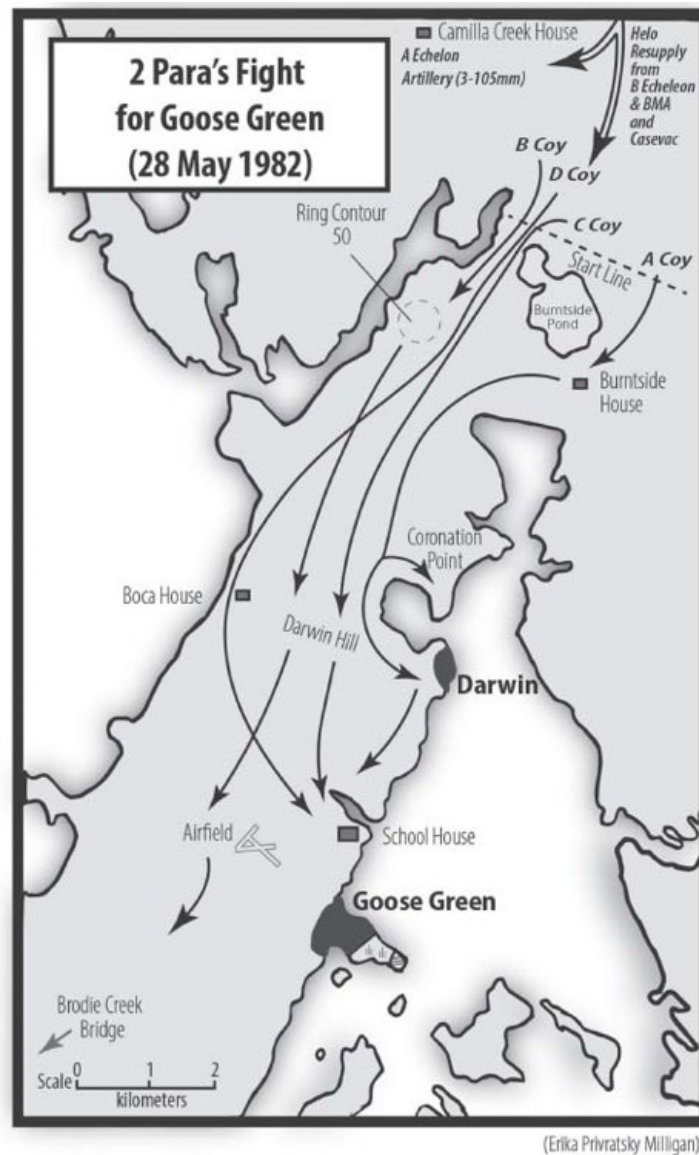
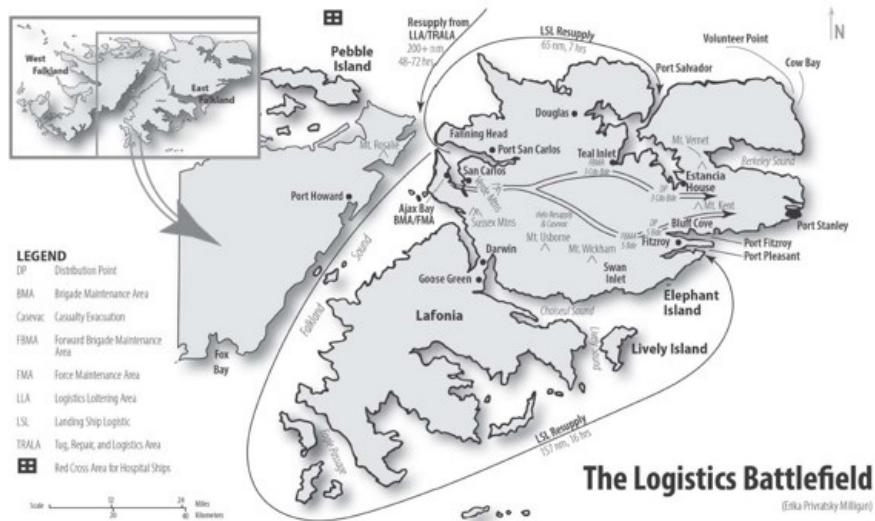
The map at the left is a copy of the one used on D Day in the Falkland Islands War by Commodore Michael Clapp, Commander Amphibious Task Force. It shows the approach of the Task Force into the Amphibious Operations Area and ship locations during the initial landing phase. Captions have been added to highlight ships and locations. Clapp describes the operation that day:

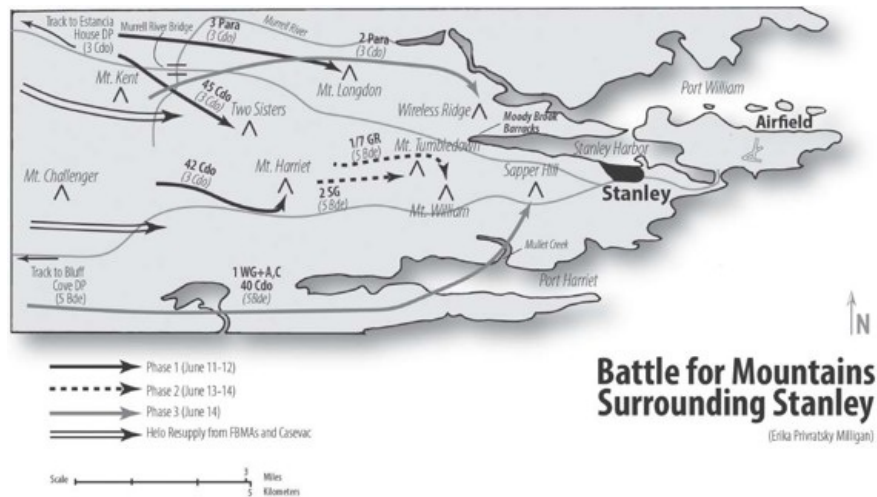
"The San Carlos area offered calm seas, no swells, a land-locked bay with deep-water anchorage, and beaches for landing. Argentines never expected us to land so far away from Stanley. We chose the first landing to be 0230 hrs on 21 May to take advantage of darkness both for passage into Falkland Sound and the assault. Ships approached from sea in four groups that night. Upon arrival, *Antrim* moved into Fire Support Area (FSA) I and *Ardent* moved into FSA II to provide naval gunfire support for landings. Enemy aircraft sank *Ardent* later that day, causing considerable loss of life and many wounded, but she had accomplished her mission.

Fearless led the first group of amphibious ships. Brigadier Thompson and I with our staffs were on board to control operations. *Intrepid* and *Yarmouth* followed. When the assault ships *Fearless* and *Intrepid* reached point Alpha, they went to designated anchorages, docked down, and released their landing craft in preparation for arrival of the merchant ships carrying troops. The next group included *Canberra* and *Norland* escorted by *Brilliant* and *Plymouth*. *Canberra* subsequently moved closer when we verified waters were free of mines. *Brilliant* with her Sea Wolf Surface-to-Air Missiles roamed while *Plymouth* went to FSA III. *Norland*, *Stromness* and *Fort Austin* all anchored initially. The final group was made up mainly of the smaller Landing Ships Logistic escorted by *Broadsword* and *Argonaut*. Landings were delayed a little but went well. The Weather Line of Departure was where landing craft started their assault to beaches. Troops secured objectives quickly with little opposition, and we started moving supporting arms and logistics ashore.

Vacant circles on the map denote anchorages that we were ready to use. The ones near West Falkland were planned in case we encountered mines. We never needed to use them. As air attacks developed, we moved anchorages closer to shore where possible and stopped using those anchorages in Falkland Sound that were exposed. Escorts ringed LSLs and merchant ships to provide protection the best they could. As a result, they bore the brunt of air attacks. Men demonstrated extraordinary courage during air attacks and when defusing unexploded bombs. Sadly the operation led to the loss of several ships, many lives, and

Air attacks on D Day and then on D+2 required us to change plans in order to safeguard ships since we did not control the skies. The buildup of supplies ashore nevertheless was successful. We operated in San Carlos water for the duration of the war, entering the Sound at night for protection. We totally surprised the Argentines on D Day and then defeated them decisively three weeks later.'





The more I have seen of war, the more I realize how it all depends on administration and transportation (what our American allies call logistics). It takes little skill or imagination to see *where* you would like your army to be and *when*; it takes much knowledge and hard work to know where you can place your forces and whether you can maintain them there. A real knowledge of supply and movement factors must be the basis of every leader's plan; only then can he know how and when to take risks with those factors; and battles and wars are won only by taking risks.

Field Marshal Archibald Wavell 'Advice to a Soldier',
in the *Sunday Times*, 13 August 1944

Chapter 1

Prelude to War

On 28 March 1982, an Argentine naval task force left its base at Puerto Belgrano, about 300 miles south of Buenos Aires, allegedly to take part in a joint exercise with Uruguay. Few Argentines noticed. Most were more concerned about the sad state of affairs in their country: high unemployment, annual inflation exceeding 100 per cent and a repressive new military Junta led by General now President Leopoldo Galtieri, the latest in a series of military dictators who had suppressed and often brutalized the population. These successive regimes had imprisoned, tortured, or murdered an estimated 30,000 journalists, union workers, students, academics, and others who voiced contrary opinions, including some foreigners. There had been demonstrations recently on streets of Buenos Aires. If the general public had noticed the task force heading toward the Atlantic, they might have sensed something of importance, particularly if they considered that the ships were supposed to be joining a naval exercise focused on anti-submarine warfare procedures (as the exercise had been billed). For the composition of the task force leaving Puerto Belgrano that day hardly fitted the role of training for such procedures. Rather, it consisted of an aircraft carrier, two destroyers, three frigates, an icebreaker, a tanker, and an amphibious landing ship. On board was a marine battalion augmented by platoons of infantry. Inside the tank landing ship were sixteen amphibious, tracked landing craft. An Argentine submarine waited for them below the surface further out at sea. Together they comprised Task Force 40. Those on board were not thinking of a joint exercise with Uruguay but set on executing Operation *Azul* ('blue') to retake the Falkland Islands. In its planning stages, the operation had taken the name Operation *Rosario* ('rosary'). Now that execution was underway, the name had changed to *Azul* to signify the blue robe of the Virgin Mary, in what one historian believes was an effort to compare the impending invasion to a semi-religious crusade.¹ The people of Argentina could have been as passionate about their country's sovereign rights to the Malvinas, their name for the Falklands, as they were about their religion.

By 1 April the Argentine naval task force had arrived off the coast of the main islands. Had they seen the ships that evening, British inhabitants on East Falkland might have regarded their presence as some type of April Fools Day joke. They did not, however, and the task force was anything but a hoax. Falklanders went to bed that night as free people loyal to Britain. Much to their dismay, to that of countrymen and relatives in Britain and also to the rest of the world, they awoke the next morning to find themselves captives of Argentina. The following day, Argentine forces overpowered another small group of Royal Marines on the island of South Georgia further out in the Atlantic. The streets of Buenos Aires filled again with citizens, this time not protesting about dire economic conditions but cheering that their country's flag finally was waving over their Malvinas.

When word of the invasion hit news channels around the world, it is doubtful that many outside the immediate area even knew of the archipelago in the South Atlantic called the Falklands. It consists of hundreds of small islands starting 350 miles off the present coastline of Argentina and extending nearly three times further out into the Atlantic with the islands of South Georgia and South Sandwich. The primary islands of East and West Falkland provide the name for the whole archipelago, as well as homes and livelihood for the vast majority of residents. In 1982, the total population was about 1,850, with 1,200 concentrated around the capital of Stanley on East Falkland. The few hundred others lived in settlements scattered about the islands, where life went on largely out of touch with the rest of the world. There was no road network over the treeless, boggy terrain. Communication was limited to short-wave radio transmissions. Residents sometimes lived their whole lives in isolated settlements. It was a tough environment inhabited by penguins, sea lions, about a half a million sheep, and the world's largest population of black-browed albatrosses.

Life in the Falklands would not appeal to many. There was no private industry after whaling stations on outer islands closed earlier in the twentieth century. Most residents had become employees of British companies exploiting resources on the islands over the years, had taken employment with the British government or now just raised sheep in the settlements. Inhabitants owed both their way of life and much of their livelihood to continued British sovereignty. They often withstood brutal conditions in the winter months as gale force winds buffeted coastlines. Those winters normally started in June.

Falklanders, however, were proud of their surroundings and content with their lifestyle. They were not pleased in the least when Argentines hoisted their flag over Stanley that morning. And although the invasion might have surprised them and countless others around the world, it remained the result of decades of frustration brought to a head by both desperation and missed or confused signals. Britain never anticipated that those frustrations had deepened so much that Argentina would invade. It did not realize that its decreasing interest in the Falklands and planned cuts in military capability would actually be another cause of the invasion, even as intelligence started revealing such a possibility. And Argentina never believed that the British would develop sufficient resolve to respond. It doubted British capability to wage war that far from their homeland given the immense logistics difficulties of doing so. Even senior government officials in Britain doubted their country's ability to project power into the southern

hemisphere and then sustain it logistically over such vast distances. Both countries would learn they were wrong.

Britain and Argentina had been on a collision course over this group of islands for about 150 years. British sea captain John Davis discovered the islands on 14 August 1592, but the first recorded landing was not until 1690, also by the British. They named the channel between the two principal islands Falkland Sound in honour of the Treasurer of the Navy, Viscount Falkland. The bordering islands would later take on the names of East and West Falkland. Over the years following the first landing, the islands would see Spanish, French and Dutch occupants as well as British, and they would assume various names, including Las Malvinas for the Spanish. The Spaniards forced out the British in 1769, but the British returned in 1833, expelled some of the settlers and then proceeded to maintain a continuous presence. At the time, the area had become an important foothold for protection of British shipping interests. Cape Horn, at the tip of South America, cornered the busiest trading routes in the world. Hundreds if not thousands of ships transited these treacherous waters between Europe, the Far East and both sides of North America each year as they moved everything from food and spices to furs and gold. The Falklands offered one of the few places where ships could receive some service, supply and medical care. Over a century later, with the rise in Argentina of Colonel Juan Peron, a fascist dictator who took power after a coup, ownership of the islands came into dispute. Britain proposed at one point that the International Court of Justice at The Hague hear claims from the two countries. Argentina refused.

In more recent years, the two countries had cooperated in limited ways to improve services for East Falkland. They reached agreement in the early 1970s for Argentina to operate a weekly air service to Stanley as a convenience to both countries and to install fuel tanks on the island to sustain the service and also supply residents. The British had agreed to assist in building an airstrip on the outskirts of Stanley and to establish a sea service from the Argentine mainland. Neither happened. Eventually, Britain coordinated a plan for the United States to provide steel matting for an airfield, and Argentina constructed the airfield using this material without further British assistance. The British even permitted Argentina to institute procedures for white travel cards to circumvent the need for passports for Falkland Islanders and Argentines flying between Argentina and the islands. Some Argentines had become residents of Stanley; a few were teaching Spanish to students. And yet talks remained at a standstill regarding transfer of sovereignty. It is not difficult to understand why Argentine angst was increasing in the second half of the twentieth century. Discussions had occurred between the two countries about a possible leaseback arrangement of the islands to Argentina, but the Islanders remained entrenched in their desire to maintain ties with Britain, even though they were not granted British citizenship. Argentina was getting tired of what it perceived to be half-baked answers over sovereignty.

Argentina was not misinterpreting the appearance of diminishing British interest in the Falklands. That decline was a fact, part of an overall decision to reduce overseas commitments. With the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, the strategic importance of the islands had declined as shipping lanes shifted toward Central America. In the mid 1970s, Lord Edward Shackleton, son of the famed British explorer of Antarctica, developed an extensive report for Parliament, which recommended bolstering British investment to exploit Falkland resources ranging from seaweed and fisheries to oil. His report fell on deaf ears. Meanwhile, economic pressures were mounting in Britain to reduce military budgets and commitments around the world. The Falklands seemed to some to be a very expensive obligation and thus a likely opportunity for savings. A platoon of Royal Marines was stationed at Stanley, as well as a small Royal Navy vessel, the HMS *Endurance*. Their presence posed little threat to any credible military force. Consequently, midway through 1981, British Secretary of Defence John Nott signed the order to retire the *Endurance* by the end of 1982 without replacement. That order was not a secret. Nor was the fact that retirement of *Endurance* would terminate British naval presence in the area. The closest British military base to the Falklands was 5,000 miles away in Belize; it was simply a training area, hardly capable of projecting any meaningful response if something happened in the Falklands. The British mainland was a whopping 8,000 miles away, three weeks sailing time in the best of weather. Proximity clearly worked in favour of Argentina. Secretary Nott himself believed the time had come to rethink British commitment to the Falklands. He had recently joined with other key Cabinet members to support a proposal to negotiate a long-term lease of the Falkland Islands to Argentina, but the 'proposal had been sabotaged by a cross-party alliance in the House of Commons'.²

Such was the situation when Galtieri assumed leadership of the new military Junta in Buenos Aires in late 1981. Frustrated with lack of British resolve to take sovereignty negotiations seriously, and seeing signs of a diminishing overall commitment to the islands, the Junta declared that 1983 would be 'the year of the Malvinas', 150 years since the British had established their presence on East Falkland. The Junta probably was bolstered to some extent by the successful occupation by Argentine scientists of Thule in the British South Sandwich Islands in 1976, which had provoked concerns in Britain but no actual response. Now, on 15 December, Admiral Jorge Anaya, Commander-in-Chief of the Argentine Navy and ardent proponent of Argentine rights to the Falklands, attended a change of command ceremony at Puerto Belgrano for Vice Admiral Juan Lombardo, the new Chief of Naval Operations. As head of the Navy, Anaya had spearheaded large procurements of ships, planes, helicopters and other military equipment in the late 1970s, significantly enhancing Argentine military prowess and probably contributing significantly to the economic problems now plaguing his country. After the ceremony, Anaya met with Lombardo privately and instructed him to prepare a plan to take control of the Falklands. Anaya stressed that this was contingency planning only and that Lombardo should work secretly with his flag-level counterparts in other military services. He advised Lombardo that the Junta was looking to select an option and execute if

necessary before the end of 1982. By then the British vessel *Endurance* would be gone, and the Argentine military would be in receipt of additional French Super Etendard aircraft and Exocet missiles, significantly bolstering its air combat and overall defence capabilities.³

The next month, the Junta formalized their intention in National Strategy Directive 1/82, declaring:

The Military Committee, faced with the evident and repeated lack of progress in the negotiations with Great Britain to obtain recognition of our sovereignty over the Malvinas, Georgias and South Sandwich Islands; convinced that the prolongation of the situation affects national honor, the full exercise of sovereignty and the exploration of resources, *has resolved*, to analyse the possibility of the use of military power to obtain the political objective. This resolution must be kept in strict secrecy and should be circulated only to the heads of the respective military departments.⁴

On 24 January, an Argentine journalist writing in *La Prensa* stated, 'a military attempt to resolve the dispute cannot be ruled out when sovereignty is at stake.'⁵ A month later, Argentine marines were already practising amphibious landings in Patagonia.

Galtieri and his Junta were confident that Britain would not have the political will or the overall ability to respond to the invasion. There were no indications of strong British resolve to demonstrate otherwise. They were well aware that Britain had been taking steps to downsize its force projection capability. The logistics challenges of getting a credible force 8,000 miles south simply seemed insurmountable, particularly since the notoriously rough South Atlantic winter would arrive by June. The last time Britain had tried to project its power was during the Suez crisis in the 1950s; and that deployment had proven disastrous for the proud Brits. The Falklands were much further away than the eastern Mediterranean. Mounting and sailing a large force such a vast distance with winter only a few months away, overcoming Argentine defences, simply executing an amphibious assault against a larger, established defensive force, and sustaining forces both at sea and on land for weeks and most likely months – all of it just seemed like a bridge too far. Moreover, if Argentines controlled the sea and air sufficiently to attack ships and interdict supply lines around the Falklands, they could make the position untenable for the British. Argentina was bargaining on the belief that the British would be intimidated by the many challenges of regaining the Falklands and that an Argentine invasion would compel earnest negotiations between the two countries, eventually producing a change in sovereignty of the islands. With a quick surprise invasion, it also hoped to avoid casualties to the Royal Marine garrison and civilians, perhaps garnering greater support in the United Nations.

In Britain, information started circulating about Argentina's emerging bellicosity. It did not gain much attention from the government, though, until early March when Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher received information about articles circulating in the Argentine press. On 3 March, she told her advisers, 'we must make contingency plans',⁶ although she was not expecting any plan to include a full-scale British invasion to regain the islands. By then Argentine planning was well underway. The Junta received the first draft of its invasion plan a week later on 9 March and advised military service chiefs to continue their focus for execution toward the end of the year.⁷

The catalyst hardening resolve of both the Argentines and British occurred over the next two weeks on the island of South Georgia, 900 miles out in the Atlantic from East Falkland and a dependency of the Falklands. It was a rugged place, uninhabited except for its famous three-foot tall King Penguins and some British scientists surveying Antarctica on a seasonal basis. Responsibility for affairs there rested with the Governor of the Falklands, who resided in the capital, Stanley, on East Falkland. Visitors to South Georgia were supposed to report in at Grytviken to the manager of the British Antarctic Survey Party team, which served as a representative of the Governor and controlled access to the island.

Many years before, South Georgia had been a home of sorts for whalers. Several dilapidated whaling stations from decades past remained. In the late 1970s, British owners of these stations had granted a contract to an Argentine metal merchant named Constantino Davidoff to dismantle them. That contract prohibited Davidoff from taking any weapons ashore or harming wildlife. Travelling to South Georgia to conduct dismantling work also required prior coordination with and approval by the British Embassy in Buenos Aires. Davidoff had visited scrap sites on South Georgia to assess the situation in December 1981 without proper documentation or even checking in with the manager at Grytviken, thereby creating a minor diplomatic storm. He was now planning to send a party of workers to start dismantling the stations. Davidoff visited the British Embassy in Buenos Aires to get paperwork for travelling to work sites on South Georgia. He even hoped to secure passage for his workforce on the British vessel *Endurance* stationed at Stanley. The Embassy was not immediately responsive, however, indicating they needed to coordinate further with the Governor of the Falklands, Rex Hunt. The impatient Davidoff proceeded to make his own arrangements regardless of whether he had approval to go to South Georgia. He chartered the Argentine naval support vessel *Bahia Buen Suceso* and set off anyway without proper authorization, in what some believe was deliberate collaboration with Argentina's military to put some forces on South Georgia as a follow-up test of British resolve after the occupation of Thule Island six years before. If that was the case, the results were not the same. On 19 March, British Antarctic survey scientists in the area reported that Davidoff's party had landed at Leith. The incursion might have faded into memory with little more than another diplomatic rebuke. Unfortunately, upon arrival the Davidoff party decided to raise an Argentine flag atop an old generator station at Leith and then proceeded to shoot local reindeer for their meals. These actions changed everything.

Word of the workers and their flag rocketed to Stanley and London. The next day, Governor Hunt dispatched *Endurance* with twenty Royal Marines to South Georgia. That seemed to get some attention. Argentina apologized and conveyed that the party would leave. On 22 March, however, British scientists

reconfirmed that although the *Bahia Buen Suceso* had departed, a dozen of the scrap metal workers remained. On 23 March, Britain issued a direct communiqué to Argentina that if the workers did not vacate South Georgia immediately, Royal Marines would remove them forcibly. It also formally recanted its previous decision that *Endurance* would be leaving the South Atlantic at the end of the year. The same day, Argentina responded by diverting another naval vessel, *Bahia Paraíso*, from an exercise in the area to Leith with a small military party of its own; that party arrived on the 25th, shortly after the British marines were landing twenty miles away at Grytviken with orders to hold in place and assess the situation. British marines were soon spotting Argentine marines coming ashore at Leith. It appeared that Argentina could be using the actions of the scrap metal workers to test British resolve. Whatever the basis for those actions on South Georgia in March 1982, the situation hardened the resolve of Argentina's military Junta to reclaim the Falklands. The Junta asked their military planning group how quickly they could finalize the invasion plan. Planners responded that they could be ready to sail from Argentina on 28 March.⁸ The Junta decided to move up the date of the invasion from the end of the year. It would take place just days away, on April Fools Day.

Back in England, as the Argentine task force was leaving Puerto Belgrano for the Falklands, Prime Minister Thatcher was becoming increasingly worried about the situation. She had been monitoring intelligence coming out of Argentina and the recent developments on South Georgia. It appeared that an invasion was imminent. Her closest advisers, however, had not come to that conclusion even though, at a minimum, there were clear causes for concern. Few were even in London. Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington was heading to Brussels and then to Tel Aviv. Chief of Defence Staff Admiral Terence Lewin was in New Zealand. Chief of the General Staff General Edwin Bramall was in Ireland. Secretary Nott had just returned from NATO meetings in the United States and was now travelling elsewhere in Britain. None of Thatcher's closest advisers seemed alarmed by the evolving situation. On 29 March, just before she left for meetings in Brussels and the day after the Argentine naval task force sailed toward the Falklands, she concluded that the developing situation in the South Atlantic required action. She decided therefore to dispatch three nuclear-powered submarines as a show of force, even though it would take the first submarine two weeks to arrive. The following day, word of the submarine deployments leaked out through the British press and then rippled down news wires to Argentina, only confirming to the Junta that they had made the right decision to advance the timeline for invasion.

Having suggested to her staff several weeks earlier that they needed to contemplate options for the Falklands, Thatcher now mulled over the assessment of her experts. Defence Secretary John Nott had submitted to her what was called a 'Defence Minute' outlining scenarios, challenges and options. The official view of the Chiefs of Staff had not changed since the latest military review of the area in the mid-1970s, which was essentially that 'defence against an Argentine invasion was impossible'.⁹ Now, at the start of the 1980s, British military strength was much less, largely because of changes in strategy and budget reductions. Britain's military presence overseas had changed significantly in the 1970s as forces withdrew from former colonial possessions in the Far East, Middle East and Mediterranean, leading to sizeable force reductions. Secretary Nott was not popular in military circles because he had spearheaded further changes. The Royal Navy had seen its active fighting force of carriers and warships reduced by thirty per cent in the last few years. As a result of cuts announced in the 1981 Defence Review, both the remaining aircraft carriers in the Royal Navy were earmarked for sale, HMS *Hermes* to India and HMS *Invincible* to Australia. As part of a new strategy, the Royal Navy's focus would shift to anti-submarine warfare in the North Atlantic. The Royal Air Force's only long-range bomber, the Vulcan, was also in the process of being phased out. The Royal Air Force's strategic transport fleet had shrunk from five squadrons in 1975 to a single squadron at the start of 1982.¹⁰ Only twenty-three Victor fuel tankers remained in the inventory now. And whereas amphibious forces and ships had survived the cuts, the effectiveness of any future amphibious operation would surely be reduced if there was no air cover from carriers. Causing more concern, the Royal Navy had no airborne early warning aircraft left to provide advance warning against air attack.¹¹ Despite such reductions in structure and hardware, however, the British military men remained as good as any anywhere. They were proud, professional, confident, and highly trained. Such traits could make all the difference. They would, however, have to bring everything they needed with them in order to regain control of the islands. A decision to go to war would become for them and Britain a 'come as you are, bring what you can' affair.

The story of Argentina's military over recent years provided a marked contrast to these reductions. Procurements had been sizeable. And although Argentine ships were mostly Second World War vintage, they remained quite capable. In fact, the long-range guns of the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano*, a former American ship that had survived the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, could strike targets further away than could any of the Royal Navy's ships. Argentina had over 200 fighter planes of various types, including five of its procurement order of fourteen Super Etendard strike fighters from France. The British could not hope to get a quarter that many planes to the South Atlantic. Several types of plane could take off from the Argentine aircraft carrier *Veinticinco de Mayo*. Others could strike from air bases in Argentina. The British had no such option. Their planes would be restricted to aircraft carriers until forces were ashore, at which time the British might be able to establish refuelling and armament locations on land if conditions permitted. They held out no hope, however, of constructing any runway suitable for conventional transport or fighter aircraft. The Argentines had also been purchasing Exocet missiles from France, which they could fire either from air or land. Argentine ground forces were sizeable, numbering 130,000, and even though seventy per cent of these were conscripts serving one-year hitches, their soldiers and marines constituted a significant fighting force, especially considering Argentina's capability

to get men easily from its mainland to the Falklands.

Such a seeming imbalance between military forces (even if Argentina had some aged assets) and the enemy's proximity to the Falklands were only part of the problem facing British decision-makers. One historian says that Secretary Nott believed it would take five months just to mount a sufficient force to respond to an invasion of the Falklands.¹² Another indicates Nott found no certainty that any large British task force ever could retake the islands after an Argentine invasion. It was clear he was deeply concerned about 'the logistical problems of operating at this distance'.¹³ Nott himself admitted as much in a paper submitted to a symposium focused on the twentieth anniversary of the war in 2002: 'My own initial reaction was that this was just not a viable logistic operation.'¹⁴ This hardly seemed an unreasonable concern even given the best of conditions. Projecting forces and sustaining them in battle is never easy. Both become exponentially more difficult if time is of the essence, assets are few, and no plans exist. Such was the situation that lay before Nott and his Ministry of Defence (MoD).

As an important member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Great Britain had made commitments and developed detailed plans for parts of the northern hemisphere. Its military had participated in many NATO and United States exercises over the years. British military units were earmarked for specific commitments in support of various contingencies. Within the NATO area, plans were in place with much detail. Additionally, supplies had been prepositioned not only in the United Kingdom, but also at key locations in continental northern Europe to assist potential deployment, onward movement of military units, and engagement. Allied support and assistance were available to shore up shortages if they occurred. Like other nations, Britain had devoted a substantial amount of its military budget and training toward NATO-type scenarios, specifically to counter an invasion of Western Europe by the Warsaw Pact. Its military was quite well prepared to fulfil Britain's commitment in the northern hemisphere.

This was not the case, however, outside the NATO area, in the southern hemisphere and elsewhere, where Britain had reduced commitments drastically. When it came to the Falklands in 1982, the British faced a situation that was at the other end of the spectrum from NATO preparedness. They had no contingency plan developed if Argentina invaded. There was no militarily useful infrastructure in the Falklands, not even unpaved roads outside of Stanley. Aside from the several dozen Royal Marines stationed in or near Stanley the British lacked what military leaders term 'forward presence' near the Falkland Islands. They had no prepositioned materiel anywhere in the area, meaning quite simply that, if they decided to counter an invasion, the British would have to bring everything they needed with them. They had no bases or airfields in the area on which they could rely, either their own or those of other countries. Furthermore, Britain would likely receive no assistance from allies if it sent military units south. Most countries in the southern hemisphere seemed likely to align with the Argentines and perhaps become openly hostile toward the British. Even major allies like the United States might be standoffish, since the Reagan administration was actively trying to nourish relations with Argentina at the time. In essence there were no supplies and no supporting services available anywhere between the United Kingdom and the Falklands. The nearest possible support base available was Ascension Island, a small British protectorate in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, almost exactly midway between England and the Falklands. It had an airfield that was being leased to Americans.

Making matters still worse, Britain had precious little time left in which to think about the consequences of an Argentine invasion. Even though the strength of its marines at Stanley doubled at the end of March as platoons rotated in and out for annual tours, such a small force would hardly even constitute a speed bump for a sizeable enemy invasion. Military action would require commitment of a substantial sea-air-ground force, rapid deployment of both forces and equipment, establishment of a supply chain spanning the Atlantic, and months of supplies. This surely weighed heavily on Nott and any others having to formulate recommendations for Thatcher, particularly those mindful of all of the logistics implications. It is not hard to imagine both their concerns and trepidation about putting such a daunting mission before their military.

The evening of Wednesday, 31 March, Nott finally requested an urgent meeting with Thatcher and others. There was no question that some unusual activity was underway. There had been reports of overflights of the islands. An Argentine C-130 had even made an 'emergency' landing on the Stanley airfield recently. Intelligence had confirmed for him now that an Argentine naval task force was heading toward the Falklands, apparently with the purpose of invading within two days.¹⁵ He was in the process of discussing the gloomy scenario and the bleak options with Thatcher and others in her room at the House of Commons, when a knock on the door interrupted them. Admiral Henry Leach, Chief of the Naval Staff with the title of First Sea Lord of the Royal Navy, stood in the doorway in his naval uniform and asked permission to attend the remainder of the session. Leach had just returned from a day trip to the Admiralty Surface Weapons Establishment and read the latest intelligence reports. He was not impressed with Nott's assessment and was very much opposed to his weak position on the situation. He and the Secretary had not had a cosy relationship. Leach, in fact, had infuriated Nott by lobbying against cuts to the Navy with the opposition Labour Party.¹⁶

Like some others in the military, Leach had been keeping close tabs on what was developing. He had heard about the meeting in the House of Commons and, although he was not invited, decided to go anyway. At the time, a sizeable part of British naval forces were exercising in the Mediterranean under the watchful eye of his subordinate Admiral John Fieldhouse, a former submariner and now Commander-in-Chief Fleet. Leach had already contacted Fieldhouse on the side the week before and told him to start thinking about moving ships to the South Atlantic. Now he was gatecrashing the Prime Minister's meeting

to offer exactly that solution. Eventually, Thatcher asked Leach for his opinion on the situation, and he told her without equivocation that Britain's role in international affairs would matter little in the future if it did nothing. After some discussion, Leach claimed with confidence: 'I can put together a task force of destroyers, frigates, landing support vessels. It will be led by the aircraft carriers HMS *Hermes* and HMS *Invincible*. It can be ready to leave in forty-eight hours.'¹⁷ His confident assertion must have reminded some present of George C. Scott's rendition of the famous American general in the movie *Patton* when Scott, portraying Patton, told Bradley that he could move his armoured forces 150 miles north in three days to reinforce soldiers surrounded by Germans at Bastogne. Patton had the advantage at least of some mobility, if only in the shape of his marching troops. But units cannot march across water, and at the time Britain had no troop transports to move its military and few cargo-compatible ships to support them, not even a hospital ship. Leach's claim might have seemed even bolder to those in the meeting since he further stated with the same confidence that the British task force could retake the islands if required, telling Thatcher all he needed was her approval. She and perhaps others apparently still had not grasped the challenge that lay ahead. When Thatcher asked Leach how long it would take for such a force to reach the Falklands, he replied about three weeks. Clearly not grasping the distance and perhaps even the challenges the United Kingdom would face, Thatcher questioned, 'Three weeks, you mean three days?', but Leach emphasized, 'No, I mean three weeks. The distance is 8,000 nautical miles.'¹⁸

Leach left the meeting with Thatcher's approval to proceed with planning, although the Prime Minister withheld approval to execute until she had discussed matters further with her Cabinet. She reserved for them the decision if and when the task force would sail. Leach had not convinced his direct boss, though. Nott remained with Thatcher after the admiral's departure, expressed his reluctance and told the Prime Minister he had many doubts about Britain's ability to respond effectively, and specifically 'about the logistics of fighting a war 8,000 miles away without air cover from land-based aircraft'.¹⁹ He certainly had reasons for concern. In the history of war, one would have to search far to find comparably bold ventures in force projection. Nott had received counsel earlier from Permanent Secretary of Defence Frank Cooper, when Cooper praised British military prowess in going to war: 'John, what you must realize is that war is really about getting men and equipment from A to B and they can be brilliant at it.'²⁰ Nott was about to learn that Cooper was right.

Thatcher, however, had heard enough to give her hope that Britain could respond effectively. Leach had become the 'man of the hour' both for the Prime Minister that evening and for the British in posterity. Without his intrusion into the meeting and his optimistic assertion that he could muster a task force that would win if called upon to do so, it is certain that the Argentine flag would have waved much longer over the Falklands. Although he had received no firm decision, Leach had received approval for the Ministry of Defence to start planning the deployment of a multi-service task force.

The following evening, Thatcher was assessing the situation again with advisers at 10 Downing Street. She summoned Admiral Leach, who then was hosting a dinner party at his own residence, to join her for continued discussion of the situation. Thatcher pressed Leach with a variety of questions. The meeting lasted until the early hours of 2 April, after which Leach returned to the MoD and advised the Acting Chief of Defence Staff, 'Signal C-in-C Fleet to prepare and sail the Task Force.'²¹ He then picked up the phone and called Fieldhouse. Dispatches soon arrived at naval units exercising in the Mediterranean ordering them to start consolidating into a battle group and prepare to go south covertly.

Meanwhile, thousands of miles away in the southern hemisphere, the Argentine invasion plan had been set back a day because of a storm at sea in the South Atlantic. The weather was so bad on 31 March that navy ships had to resort to radios to signal each other. The British intercepted a signal for the submarine *Santa Fe* to conduct surface reconnaissance of landing beaches near Stanley.²² They now knew for sure that an invasion of the Falklands was imminent. The few dozen Royal Marines at Stanley had little chance of stopping the Argentines unless something catastrophic impeded the planned assault. They parked vehicles on the airfield and spread barbed wire on nearby beaches, anticipating the assault to come east of Stanley. On the evening of 1 April, Governor Hunt went to the radio station in Stanley and cautioned residents, 'It looks as though the silly buggers mean it.'²³ Back in England, the headline in the 2 April early edition of the *Daily Mirror* led with a brief article on the front page: '2am: Falkland invasion "imminent".' The headline was accurate.

The invasion was over quickly on the morning of 2 April, brief firefights and a few explosions notwithstanding. Instead of coming in from the east as anticipated, a hundred of Rear Admiral Carlos Busser's marine commandos landed by inflatable rubber boats about two miles south of Stanley in the vicinity of Mullet Creek. They split into two groups, one heading toward the Royal Marine barracks at Moody Brook, which then were vacant because the men had taken up defensive positions closer to Stanley, and the other heading toward Government House, the residence of Governor Rex Hunt. Other Argentine marines landed on the beach of York Bay about a mile north-west of the Stanley airport. They too were soon en route on the road from the airport to the town centre with their armed amphibious vehicles. Less than three hours from first landings, the Argentine forces had secured Government House, received Governor Hunt's surrender and incarcerated the British garrison. Argentines cleared the runway quickly. Their first C-130 transports started landing at the Stanley airfield even before Governor Hunt's official surrender, unloading up to a thousand soldiers from the Army's 25th Infantry Regiment. That afternoon, another Argentine force arrived at South Georgia and overpowered the handful of Royal Marines there, who although outnumbered managed to shoot down a Puma helicopter and damage a frigate. By the day's end, Royal Marines previously stationed in the Falklands and Governor Hunt were on planes heading back towards Britain.

Amphibious operations were well planned and executed, just as the Argentine military had been practising in secret for the past couple of months. Soon over 10,000 Argentine marines and soldiers, mostly conscripts serving one-year terms, would find themselves on the islands to defend Argentina's claim to sovereignty. As news of the successful invasion spread to cities throughout Argentina, Galtieri became the hero he had hoped to be. Millions of Argentines stopped thinking about the economy and the abuses of the Junta and revelled in the glory of finally adding the Malvinas to their country. Only days earlier, Galtieri's military forces had been fring at some of these rioting citizens in the Plaza de Mayo in downtown Buenos Aires. Now that square was packed with citizens weeping in joy. As jubilation was erupting in the cities of Argentina, humiliating pictures of armed Argentine commandos standing atop Royal Marines prostrate on the streets of Stanley started circulating throughout the world, eventually infaming the British government and public. Argentina had just set in motion the possibility of the first war outside its land borders in over a hundred years. The Junta was confident that Britain would balk at the daunting challenges of dispatching a military force to the South Atlantic. They expected serious dialogue to start soon about sovereignty of the islands.

A series of communiqués on the day of the invasion started changing the way of life for residents of Stanley, including which side of the road they should drive. The Junta wasted no time putting an Argentine stamp on their new claim. Major General Osvaldo Jorge Garcia, the overall commander for the invasion and now acting governor of the islands, began to change the names of streets and other public places. Residents learned their town now would be called Puerto Rivero after a gaucho named Antonio Rivero, who had killed some of the British in 1833.²⁴ Several days later, dignitaries arrived from Buenos Aires for a ceremony swearing in Brigadier General Mario Menendez as the official Governor of the Malvinas. His military responsibilities included defence of the islands, even though no one at the time anticipated that such would become necessary. Thousands more troops arrived, and the construction of defences started, while the new government started rationing fuel, water, and utilities for residents, as well as controlling radio broadcasts. Nearly half the residents of Stanley fled to outlying settlements. Those who stayed started identifying and reinforcing safe areas for personal protection in case of a British response. It was not long, however, before Argentines discovered the Falklands could be a harsh place. Residents started seeing dozens of dead soldiers stacked like cord wood on tracks outside the town; they were the first of many victims of exposure to the cold and wet Falklands climate.²⁵ It also did not take long for the Junta to learn that its military action had created little euphoria outside of Argentina. The day after the invasion, the United Nations passed a resolution demanding the immediate withdrawal of Argentine forces and cessation of hostilities, and urging a political solution.

Nonetheless, the surrender of the Falklands rocked Britain like a massive earthquake. The British would not understand the real situation on the ground for some time. The local radio station in Stanley succeeded in transmitting some news as the invasion was underway. They then lost communication once Argentine marines landed, stopped transmissions and cut telephone lines. Thatcher and her fellow leaders would know few specifics until the Royal Marines arrived back in Britain a few days later. It was clear, though, that the British now were staring at a potential catastrophe. The bright sunny morning in London on Friday, 2 April belied the gloom that was settling in government offices. Service chiefs advising Thatcher's cabinet the day of the invasion offered frank assessments of 'logistics problems posed by the dispatch of a South Atlantic task force'.²⁶ Requirements would be staggering. Before the end of that evening, though, all but one Cabinet member voted in favour of sending a force south.

By then the Ministry of Defence had already designated its commanders to lead the task force south and was well on its way toward mustering forces and determining support requirements. The first to receive the official word was Rear Admiral Sandy Woodward, commander of the Royal Navy's First Flotilla, then participating in Exercise Springtrain in the Mediterranean. His immediate boss, Admiral Fieldhouse, had visited him just days before, given him a heads-up about the situation developing and told him to start thinking about heading a naval task force. At 0300 hrs on 2 April, Woodward received the communications signal formally ordering the establishment of Operation Corporate to recapture the Falklands.²⁷ He would become Commander of the Carrier Battle Group. Brigadier Julian Thompson, the commander of the elite 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines, was asleep at his home near the Royal Marine barracks at Plymouth, when his phone rang at 0315 hrs, just minutes after the signal reached Woodward's Flotilla Headquarters. On the other end of the line was Thompson's boss, Major General Jeremy Moore, the Commander of Commando Forces Royal Marines. Moore's message was succinct: 'You know those people down south: they're about to be invaded. Your Brigade is to come to seventy-two hours' notice to move with effect from now.'²⁸ Thompson would become the Commander Land Force. Commodore Michael Clapp also woke to a phone call at 0500 hrs that morning alerting him to developments in the Falklands.²⁹ He had just returned from Denmark, where he and others had been planning a future amphibious exercise, and his whereabouts took time to discover. Later that day he would be designated Commander Amphibious Task Force. Never before had he been involved in an amphibious operation. It would be Woodward's job to establish control of the sea and skies in the South Atlantic in order to protect and support the task force; it would be Clapp's to get land forces and supplies ashore at the right place and time during an anticipated amphibious assault; and it would be Thompson's to secure beaches and then take the fight onward to defeat the Argentines and re-establish British control of the Falkland Islands.

Each of the three commanders had very much to do. Lots of things needed to come together very quickly for them to get units assembled, supplied, moving south, and eventually sustained thousands of miles away for an undetermined length of time. The British had not taken on such challenges by themselves before. The clock also was ticking downward from the forty-eight hours Leach had promised

Thatcher. Fortunately, well before early morning phone calls on 2 April to the newly designated task force commanders, wheels had started spinning at high levels to overcome some of the immense deployment challenges and to emplace a logistics backbone that would sustain forces at sea, in the air, and on land in the South Atlantic.

Chapter 2

Mobilization and Deployment

Unlike Thatcher's government, which seemed paralyzed in their slow appreciation of the situation and decision-making during March, the British military had been leaning forward. Getting logistics pieces in place would be key to sustaining any task force. Admiral Leach might have been waiting for a green light to mobilize troops, but he and some of his colleagues had not waited to make the first moves in what would become an important logistics backbone for the war. Discussions had already started about what to do. Then, when the invasion happened and Parliament backed Thatcher's decision to launch a task force, a series of simultaneous activities commenced immediately that remains without parallel in modern force projection. Britain's response was swift, decisive and, although surely confusing at times, very effective. It was also noticeable immediately in cities and towns. People no sooner had read newspaper headlines on the morning of 2 April about an imminent invasion than they started witnessing hubs of activity in many places. That mobilization remains one of the greatest strategic achievements of the war because it enabled everything that followed. It all started rather discretely and involved many organizations working quickly and together.

At the time, Britain's lone ship in the South Atlantic, *Endurance*, only had provisions to last another three weeks. On 27 March, the RFA tanker *Appleleaf*, then bound from Curaçao to the United Kingdom with a full load of fuel, received orders to divert to Gibraltar, to embark general stores and then to head south. Two days later, the RFA stores ship *Fort Austin* received similar orders. Both ships sailed packed with supplies not just for *Endurance* but also as contingency for other ships that might follow and need support. *Appleleaf* and *Fort Austin* became the first pieces in a logistics backbone at sea between the United Kingdom and the Falklands that would strengthen in the weeks ahead. In subsequent weeks, dozens more support ships would follow in the wake of these two support vessels.

The next pieces for that logistics backbone took to the air. A dozen C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft took off from Royal Air Force bases in the United Kingdom in the early hours of 3 April, refuelling in places like Gibraltar and Dakar before landing on the remote island of Ascension in the middle of the Atlantic, ideally located midway between the United Kingdom and the Falklands. Aboard the first plane was a handful of Navy personnel with the mission to set up a forward operating base on Ascension Island for British forces heading south. That base became the salvation for British logistics and operational sustainment to forces in the South Atlantic. The C-130s would start landing on Ascension later that day and commence offloading dozens of pallets of military equipment as the advance party rushed to figure out where to put the cargo. Hundreds more cargo planes would follow in their trails throughout the month. Few inside or outside of the military noticed these initial moves, as well as actions behind the scenes to start projecting forces.

As the first ships and cargo planes were heading south, the British government and military at a high level were streamlining or ramping up their activities to focus on the Falklands. In the government at periods of crisis, advice normally flowed upward to the Prime Minister through the Cabinet and a Transition to War Committee, chaired by the Secretary of the Cabinet and attended by permanent secretaries of Government departments, specifically to advise Ministers, implement war measures and coordinate actions. Their military advice emanated within the Ministry of Defence from the Chiefs of Staff Committee, attended by the senior officer of each military service. They in turn received recommendations from the Defence Operations Executive Committee, attended by second-ranking members of the three military services and specifically charged with responsibility for implementing contingency or other theatre-specific plans and for advising the Transition to War Committee. This structure in 1982, however, was geared more toward NATO transition to war measures and deliberate planning. The situation in the Falklands eliminated the luxury of deliberate discussion. To confront such a situation requiring immediate attention, Prime Minister Thatcher formed an inner cabinet known as the Overseas and Defence (South Atlantic) Committee, including the Secretary of Defence and the Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Lewin, to provide military advice. Recommendations to this Committee, soon labelled Thatcher's War Cabinet, now would come directly from the Chiefs of Staff Committee.

The Defence Operations Executive Committee had assembled just prior to the Argentine invasion. They met twice on 1 April, though focused mostly on the suitability of Port Stanley airfield. Not until that evening did they conceive plans for deployment of a task force to retake the islands. At the same time, military organizations ramped up for round-the-clock operations. The Defence Situation Centre within the MoD became the focal point for actions to mount the military force out of Britain. It was the home of Central Defence Staffs, its operations area located conveniently adjacent to rooms housing staffs of the three services. The Centre's normal tasks were to monitor relevant world events affecting British defence interests, to coordinate positions and provide advice to senior military leaders, and then to issue orders to the task force implementing their decisions. With other supporting staffs, it then tracked the multitude of actions that normally followed. A key part of the Defence Situation Centre was the Defence Operational Movements Staff or DOMS, an organization only activated for wartime or emergency purposes, led by two

brigadiers and consisting of joint movement, air and sea resource support staffs to operate 24/7. Its main task was to plan operational movement of units and supplies based on priorities within the framework of the Defence Operations Executive requirements and then to allocate, coordinate and task available military service and civil movement resources.¹ Another key organization was Transport and Movements Branch of Headquarters, United Kingdom Land Force (UKLF). Its responsibilities included securing transportation resources, providing loading assistance at ports and coordinating requirements between units, depots, docks and airfields.² All of these offices and others were still in the process of ramping up when phones started ringing with a rush of requirements to deploy units and supplies.

The same was happening at Fleet Headquarters in the Northwood suburb of London. The staff there had been monitoring events more closely than most. Several days before the invasion, Admiral Leach had instructed Admiral Fieldhouse, the Commander-in-Chief Fleet, to alert Woodward's flotilla participating in Exercise Springtrain in the Mediterranean to prepare to head south. Fieldhouse would soon be designated the Commander-in-Chief of the emerging sea-air-ground task force. As such, he would respond directly to Admiral Lewin, Chief of the Defence Staff and member of the War Cabinet. It was a responsibility for which neither Fieldhouse nor his staff had trained. Their regular role was monitoring Soviet submarine activity approaching northern Europe and preparing to protect the flow of logistics ships between the United Kingdom and the European continent. They were expected to deal with ships coming into service and out of refit or maintenance, and to liaise for tasks such as training, exercises, fishery protection, and drug smuggling. If NATO transitioned to a reinforced alert status, Fieldhouse's ships would be 'chopped' to the staff of NATO, which was conveniently located nearby in Northwood. His staff, as a consequence, was small and solely concerned with peacetime operations. They lacked joint experience and assistance by Royal Marines or British Army staff. They had no amphibious experience and thus no real understanding of what now lay ahead.

Quite understandably, given the distance from the United Kingdom to the Falklands, the initial focus for many of these offices during the first weeks was on obtaining sufficient transportation to move forces and supplies south. Britain was hardly in a good posture in 1982 to project forces, although it could have been worse by far. The timing of the Argentine invasion actually worked to British advantage in some ways. The MoD's recent review of military needs had produced some bitter pills for the Navy to swallow. Some of the arguments had centred on whether the Navy should retain its only Landing Platform Docks, HMS *Fearless* and HMS *Intrepid*, which served vital roles in transporting landing craft and orchestrating command and control for amphibious operations. *Intrepid*, at this time, was being prepared for a reserve role and possible disposal. Fortunately, those and other amphibious transportation assets were still very much available. Britain's last two aircraft carriers were slated for sale, but in April 1982 both remained in the inventory and were largely ready. The aircraft carrier HMS *Hermes* was in the second week of a six-week maintenance schedule at the time. Some of her major systems had been dismantled as part of this schedule, but the Royal Navy could reverse that in a hurry. The other aircraft carrier, HMS *Invincible*, was alongside *Hermes* at Portsmouth, even though her crew was on leave.

The situation in British dockyards in April 1982, however, had become near catastrophic for working on ships and launching forces. The Defence Review had scheduled the dockyards at Portsmouth, Chatham, and Gibraltar for closure. All three were key for refitting surface ships. Morale at these crucial deployment locations had hit rock bottom. Such bitterness existed over closure decisions that when Secretary Nott visited Portsmouth in 1981 he was greeted with a 'hail of metal bolts and other dangerous missiles' as he tried to address workers.³ Quite clearly, had the Argentine invasion occurred toward the end of 1982 as originally planned, the readiness of dockyards would have been much less than in the spring. As it was, Portsmouth, Chatham, and Gibraltar became hubs of activity following decisions to deploy the task force. That is because the biggest challenge facing the British in 1982 involved the lack of shipping to accommodate the deployment of both forces and the thousands of tons of supplies and fuel needed to sustain a task force sailing 8,000 miles south to fight for an unknown period of time. Something had to be done to add ships to the inventory of the Royal Navy. Again, action started immediately and effectively.

A Naval Staff Advisory Group convened on the day of the invasion to assess sealift capabilities, to advise on options, and ultimately to solve the ship shortage problem. The Group was concerned overall about the size and readiness of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA), a civilian-operated agency in the MoD with responsibility for twenty-seven support ships. More than half were tankers. One was a helicopter support vessel. Others performed various supply roles. The most important vessels within the RFA at this time without doubt were six speciality ships named after the Knights of the Round Table. Known as Landing Ships Logistic or LSLs, each could carry over 300 troops, sixteen main battle tanks, thirty-four assorted vehicles, and 150 tons of fuel and ammunition. They were designed to unload their cargo on to beaches from ramps at either the bow or the stern. Helicopters could operate from their decks. Up to twenty helicopters could be stowed on board each ship in place of tanks and vehicles. Of the six, four were available almost immediately and could sail within a matter of days. *Sir Geraint* was at Devonport preparing for refit. *Sir Lancelot* and *Sir Percivale* were due in home waters on 3 April. *Sir Galahad* was scheduled back on 4 April from a Royal Marines exercise in Norway. Two others were further away and would have to sail later: *Sir Tristram* was in Belize, and *Sir Bedivere* was returning from Vancouver. These six logistics ships and the Landing Platform Docks *Fearless* and *Intrepid* were irreplaceable for any amphibious landing. They also had the capability of carrying fat-topped, self-propelled barges called mexefotes strapped to their sides. These shallow-draft platforms, roughly sixty feet long by twenty-four feet wide, provided transport of supplies to shore and around beaches. Not surprisingly, though,

mexefotes hanging from sides of LSLs in rough seas caused concern to captains because of potential damage to the LSL and their effect on stability. Captains were prepared to ditch them if necessary.

The LSLs and the rest of the RFA, however, were insufficient to meet the needs of a large task force operating 8,000 miles away. The immediate problem for planners centred on the lack of shipping to move several thousand troops and the mountains of supplies that soon would be flowing from depots into ports of departure. The military had no passenger and few cargo ships. Services now needed them in a hurry to transport thousands of men with their equipment and supplies. They also required support ships to supplement the RFA in order to sustain a large naval task force at sea. And so on 2 April, the Naval Staff Advisory Group started its first meetings to discuss requirements and find solutions. The meetings normally occurred multiple times a day for the first weeks, and continued into the next month, often including commercial ship owners or their representatives. They unarguably produced some of the most important discussions, cooperation and decisions of the entire war. Their purpose was to acquire commercial shipping and to coordinate modifications to the ships as required for the military's force projection requirements.

The British Board of Trade had been keeping meticulous records of British-flag shipping for years. Plans had been in place for some time to use roll-on roll-off ships to reinforce the northern flank of NATO in Norway if hostilities erupted. Matters at hand, however, required more than a few ships. Container ships operating in their traditional fashion would not be helpful since there were no fixed port facilities en route or in the Falklands, quite unlike the situation in northern Europe. The military now needed a wide range of ships quickly to help project and sustain the force.

The prerogative of the British government to requisition ships from trade had been established under English Common Law for centuries, dating back to the kingdom's participation in the Crusades. It had used this prerogative already in the twentieth century, during both world wars and in the Suez Campaign in 1956, but had not exercised such authority since then. Again, the British wasted no time in taking action in response to the Argentine invasion on 2 April. That same day, telephone calls were being made behind the scenes to shipping companies to verify discreetly the capabilities of certain ships. The Secretary of State received the proposal to requisition ships from trade on 3 April. The Queen signed the order on 4 April, and the Department of Trade originated the first order for a ship that very same day. Those ships soon became known as STUFT for 'Ships Taken up from Trade'. In the next couple months, a total of fifty-four such ships would be requisitioned for military use from thirty-three different civilian companies.

There were two options for acquiring commercial sealift capability: by charter or by requisition. Since most merchant ships already would be conducting business under contracts at this time, the prospect of chartering commercial ships at short notice was not hopeful. Cruise liners and ferries, for example, were already booked for summer season voyages. Some were in the midst of voyages, full of guests who had paid handsome prices for their suites. There was no time to wait for those cruises to end. Nor was there time for cargo ships to complete their deliveries throughout northern Europe. That left the primary option of requisitioning ships from trade. Ship owners were ready to cooperate. They, in fact, preferred the requisitioning option since it provided them with a legitimate reason to cancel contracts or bookings already signed with customers.

Requisitioning ships was the simple part of the process. Getting those ships unloaded and moved to British ports for reconfiguration, determining what needed to change on each of them to meet military requirements, getting materials to ports to enable reconfiguration – all of this became a complex, real-time communication process that had to happen quickly to facilitate the fast deployment timeline. Each STUFT would require modification, sometimes quite extensive. Initial expectations were for the movement of a two-commando force. Those numbers more than tripled before deployment, significantly increasing the need for merchant shipping. The Directorate of Naval Operations, supported closely by DOMS, worked with military departments, representatives of the Department of Trade and ship owners to address needs and challenges. The Directorate focused on ships to support the Royal Navy fleet. DOMS focused on ships to support the deployment of the task force with its supplies and equipment. Discussion at meetings pivoted on planned operational roles for ships, modification requirements to meet military needs established by planners in the MoD, eventual crew composition, loads to be carried, and much more. Attendees decided detailed timings and procedures for what needed to be refitted, where the work would take place, and which units or equipment would be loaded and when. At the conclusion of each meeting, confirmation of decisions was recorded and disseminated. Then DOMS developed detailed assessments of bids for cargo movement and loading requirements, eventually passing instructions to ship loading authorities at ports who in turn conducted pre-stow exercises to keep cargo shut-outs to a minimum.⁴ In later discussions, the subject of insurance became a serious concern. Those discussions were not as simple as deciding on fees for use. What would happen, for example, if a ship was damaged or destroyed? Ships are not manufactured overnight. How would companies replace their ability to generate revenue if they no longer had a ship after the war was over? Many questions resulted. None delayed the commitment of companies to support the deployment effort.

The primary criterion when assessing ships from trade, of course, was the specific military requirement, be it for passengers, cargo, fuel, repair capability or something else. But there were several other considerations of critical importance, including range, endurance, practicality, seaworthiness and survivability. The latter consideration dramatically separated military from commercial ships. Warships can normally stay afloat in conditions of moderate wind and waves with three to four compartments flooded between traverse bulkheads; commercial ships are far less capable.⁵ Decisions were made early not to

arm any ships taken up from trade. There simply were not enough 20mm or 40mm weapons systems available.⁶ But each STUFT ship needed some minimum naval communications capability via Ultra High Frequency and military signallers. All merchant ships had to be converted so they could be refuelled at sea, a capability not necessary in the conduct of their commercial businesses. Most had not operated satellite navigation systems, especially if their focus was limited to transiting the English Channel. The need for extended range now meant that merchant ships' ballast tanks, normally used to maintain stability by being filled with salt water, would have to be filled with fuel to provide range. These ships would no longer be able to ballast down with salt water as fuel was used, leaving them particularly unstable in rough seas. Many would leave with repositioned draft markings to account for their additional fuel loads. Some also would sail from England with two or three times more lifeboats and exemptions from normal certification rules restricting the number of personnel on board. No effort was made to repaint or camouflage the ships, aside from painting over company logos on funnels. Government policy dictated that only British-flag vessels could be used and that only British nationals could serve as crew. Those crews entering the South Atlantic would receive a 150 per cent pay bonus.⁷

Once ships were selected for requisition, the Navy's Ship Department at Bath assumed responsibility for detailing the specific design for retrofit. The Department owned one of the world's most advanced design systems at the time. Survey teams from the Ship Department visited ships in ports as far away as the Indian Ocean to assess further modification requirements and to develop designs that would maintain stability in South Atlantic winter seas. There was little time for detailed designs, though. Survey teams had responsibility to make best judgments on site and telephone them back to the Ship Department, where decisions were made on the spot. In the case of the passenger ship *Canberra*, the first vessel to be taken up in order to add troop-lift capability quickly for 3 Commando Brigade, surveyors essentially redesigned the deck on the back of an envelope, telephoning results back to England so that the Naval Overseer could arrange for Vosper Thornycroft to fabricate two five-ton structures before the ship even arrived in England for retrofit.⁸ At the time, *Canberra* was in the Mediterranean near Gibraltar with a full complement of passengers at the end of a world cruise. Representatives from the services and the government boarded the ship discreetly at Gibraltar. *Canberra* steamed toward Southampton, arriving on 6 April, disembarking passengers and then starting extensive modifications, just four days after the Argentine invasion.

The British lacked a capable hospital ship at the time. The only vessel in the Royal Navy earmarked as a potential hospital ship was the Queen's Royal Yacht *Britannia*. But because she required special furnace fuel oil to operate and had only a 200-bed capacity, planners deemed her unsuitable to support the task force. There were no friendly places to provide medical support in the vicinity of the Falklands closer than Montevideo, Uruguay, 1,000 miles to the north-west. The inability to care for potential casualties therefore led to the requisitioning of the cruise ship *Uganda*. At the time, *Uganda* also was in the Mediterranean, at Alexandria in Egypt, on an educational cruise carrying a thousand school children. After her owners received requisition instructions on 10 April, *Uganda* proceeded to Naples to unload those children, and a Bath survey team, engineers from the owners P&O, and a consultant surgeon went aboard. *Uganda* then headed to Gibraltar for modifications to accommodate a major surgical facility, clinics and laboratories to treat patients, as well as helicopter decks to receive casualties. Fresh water would be essential, but *Uganda* lacked the ability to produce it either for drinking or washing. Therefore adding such capability took high priority. Conversion of *Uganda* at Gibraltar, complete with Red Cross markings to adhere to the Geneva Convention, occurred at a pace comparable to that of *Canberra*, in a mere sixty-five hours. While such modifications were nearing completion, a 135-person medical team boarded *Uganda* to help store 90 tons of medical supplies for the new 250-bed floating hospital.

Concurrently, dozens of other ships steamed toward shipyards as decisions and dock berths became known. For every four vessels inspected for use, only one was actually taken. Half were chartered and half requisitioned. A week following the Queen's approval to requisition ships, the Department of Trade had already requisitioned a dozen. By the end of the month, it would requisition another thirty. Eventually these commercial ships outnumbered warships in the task force. They included ships retrofitted to carry ammunition, to be minesweepers, to serve as repair ships and aircraft ferries, and more. Seventeen merchant tankers served roles as convoy escort oilers, auxiliary support and storage. One merchant tanker was chartered from Canadian Pacific to haul water.

Most STUFT spent less than a week in shipyards before sailing in their new configuration. The average conversion time per ship was seventy-two hours for ninety-five per cent of the work.⁹ *Norland* was a typical large ship conversion. She was transformed in less than four days, complete with two helicopter pads as well as facilities to accommodate an 800-man parachute regiment. Surely the most famous requisition was of *Queen Elizabeth II* or *QE2*. She was taken up from trade on 4 May, just nineteen hours before she was set to sail to the Mediterranean with a full complement of cruise passengers. The container ship *Atlantic Conveyor*, owned by Cunard Steam Ship Company, would become the most infamous. She was taken up from trade on 14 April at Liverpool to be an aircraft ferry and cargo ship. A team started redesign work aboard her as she sailed to Plymouth for full retrofit. Directions followed for the manufacture of steel panels weighing fifteen tons apiece.¹⁰ Upon arrival at Devonport, workers cleared obstructions around her hatches, and installed panels for landing complete with lighting. She sailed eleven days later on 25 April. Upon departure, *Atlantic Conveyor*'s holds were packed with critical supplies. Aircraft lined her top deck. Containers stacked four high on each side of the upper deck provided ad hoc protection for those aircraft. She was fully capable of carrying and flying off Harrier jets and large Chinook helicopters. Her conversion provided an impressive display of what dockworkers and

steelworkers could do in short order. But unfortunately, *Atlantic Conveyor* would not return to the shores of England.

The complicated process of taking these ships up from trade to serve military purposes ranks as one of the most impressive strategic successes of the war. Executives from industry worked with the British government to make ships available and authorize modifications. The speed with which ship requisitions occurred and the extent of both requisitions and modifications were vital to the successful deployment effort. Without industry and government pulling together to solve ship shortages, Britain could never have gone to war over the Falklands as it did.

Getting requisitioned ships ready was complicated, but it was not the only piece of the deployment puzzle. These ships, like all others, had to marry up with units, equipment and supplies at precise times for loading. If they were cruise ships, they also had to replace inventories already loaded for cruise passengers. Troops who boarded such ships would not be dining on steaks and caviar. Pursers had to order bulk quantities of food, not necessarily knowing how many troops they would be carrying or how long ships would be at sea. They would not be able to supplement food shortages at the next port of call. There would be no separate supply chain of goods for them in the South Atlantic. The acquisition of ships, determination of where they should proceed for modification and procurement of new stocks all started simultaneously, as military units rushed to assemble and to move supplies from depots all over the United Kingdom.

Determining which port to use was not as obvious as some would have thought. Marchwood Military Port, for example, provided unique opportunities, including excellent security to enable covert deployments and large holding areas for staging equipment and ammunition. It was the home of the Royal Corps of Transport's 17 Port Regiment and the base for the six LSLs. Since they were under military control, Marchwood Military Port and the Royal Navy Dockyards were not legally bound by normal restrictions on explosive limits. They handled whatever cargo they needed.¹¹ Marchwood would have been a good location for some of the added deployment requirements, particularly since it was also serviced by rail. Unfortunately, the facility was nearly a half a century old and offered but a single jetty, capable of accepting only two ships.¹² Ships being taken up from trade had drafts too deep for Marchwood anyway. They had to go elsewhere.

It was first thought that commercial dockyards could be used, but after consideration of facilities, available labour and other resources, Royal Navy dockyards became the focal points for conversions. The vast majority of STUFT headed to Portsmouth and Devonport, with others going to Gibraltar and Rosyth. Ironically, on the day of the invasion, workers at Portsmouth had received their lay-off notices as a result of the previous decisions to downsize.¹³ Portsmouth nonetheless led the way with at least one STUFT on hand from 8 April to 21 May. The dockyard converted a combined total of twenty-five freighters, tankers, tugs, and short-sea ferries. Devonport converted fewer but they were better known: *Atlantic Conveyor*, *Atlantic Causeway*, *Contender Bezant* and *Astronomer*. Rosyth converted trawlers to minesweepers and refitted other STUFT into support and dispatch vessels. Chatham Dockyard workshops sent metalwork for conversions at Portsmouth and Devonport.¹⁴ These dockyards were soon crammed with trucks filed with supplies, as even more loads backed up outside gates. Given the rush to get supplies on ships in the first days, 3 Commando Brigade would become its own loading authority. Afterwards, UKLF assumed those important responsibilities, especially for the loading of ships taken up from trade. DOMS, in conjunction with the Department of Trade, would conduct a rough pre-stow for each ship. The designated loading authority would fine-tune the plan during a pre-stow exercise to reduce cargo shutouts, and Department of Trade representatives then would work with units and ship masters to ensure cargo and loads were within safety parameters.¹⁵

When Brigadier Julian Thompson, Commander of 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines, was woken by phone in the early hours of 2 April and told to prepare his forces for deployment, he was largely unaware of the extent of such high-level actions to put transportation solutions in place to move his men. His brigade had received some alerts without specifics to get ready over the past few days. Now he had little time to worry about logistics challenges at the national level to enable his men to deploy. His marines were accustomed to being alerted for contingencies. They normally operated on lead times of seven days for deployment. Now they had about half that. He and his commanders had much to do on their own as the strategic planning machinery above them churned to put pieces in place to deploy forces and enable them to win on the battlefield if the situation in the Falklands eventually led to war. They were at a significant disadvantage, though, as they started to pull together units and plan what to do. Ground force action in the Falklands presupposed that the British would conduct an amphibious landing somewhere on the islands, certainly one of the most difficult military operations to conduct even under the best of circumstances. Thompson's forces were well practised in such operations. Normally, however, they would expect to have some description of the basics for deployment, including their anticipated mission, the availability of shipping to transport them to the area of operations, some details about the enemy situation, possible landing sites, and more. They had none of this information. The only planning directive they had was the order to Thompson to bring his forces to be ready to deploy in seventy-two hours.

Brigadier Thompson, a keen student of military history, was highly respected by his rank and file marines, who were among the best fighters anywhere in the world. Royal Marine commandos had trained for years in Norway, both in winter and summer. The Brigade was Britain's designated landing force contribution to amphibious forces of the NATO alliance. His men were seasoned and exceptionally well trained for fighting in all kinds of weather. Operating in the Falklands, however, would bring new challenges for them, and particularly for those involved in tactical logistical support. Thompson's 3

Commando Brigade was part of a two-star command called Commando Forces Royal Marines, led by Major General Jeremy Moore, a very different personality to his subordinate Thompson but also highly respected. He had commanded 3 Commando Brigade just a few years before and was now about to retire. Moore would become Admiral Fieldhouse's deputy for planning during the deployment. His deputy chief of staff, who directed administration and logistics for Commando Forces, was Colonel Ian Baxter, Royal Corps of Transport. Baxter would become the driving force within Commando Forces Royal Marines to ensure 3 Commando Brigade had what it needed to deploy on time, both in terms of supplies and support.

In peacetime, use of the full military supply system is a rarity, not just in the United Kingdom but elsewhere. Time and costs are simply too great. As a result, units often conduct Field Training Exercises with notional stocks, which seldom create a feel for the magnitude of logistics challenges. The Royal Marines were no exception. But Baxter appreciated the thousands of tons that had to be moved, and he had worked to educate commando units. Just the summer before, he had arranged for three days of supplies for 42 Commando to be dumped in its square at the Royal Marines' Bickleigh Barracks at Plymouth. It was an eye-opening experience for men of the Brigade. After others saw the stacks of pallets in the barracks yard of 42 Commando, word travelled fast among the marines. Also during the year preceding the invasion, Baxter had led visits to depots holding commando war reserves and coordinated the rotation of stocks to ensure none were outdated. These initiatives proved invaluable in improving preparedness for what was now unfolding. The 42 Commando stores that showed up in the square that day represented a fraction of the 9,000 tons of war reserves earmarked for 3 Commando Brigade for deployment, all of which now had to move quickly out of depots around the United Kingdom.

War reserves for the Royal Marines were maintained at the time both on sea and land. Those at sea were aboard the LSL *Sir Geraint*, which had just berthed at Crombie twenty-four hours earlier for the first time in four years for routine stock turnover and transfer to another LSL. *Geraint* was now nearly empty. Fortunately, resources to reload supplies were close at hand, and the LSL was soon reloaded and ready to deploy. The vast majority of other war reserves were spread among depots around the United Kingdom run by the Royal Army Ordnance Corps and Royal Navy. Thirty days of war reserve supplies were pre-packed by commodity on to one-ton pallets, segregated in the depots and on the one LSL. Whereas stocks on the LSL were always ready except during turnover, depot stocks were normally held at seven days notice for issue. The war reserve was further divided into assault packs for the commandos and then subdivided to provide supplies for two, eight and twenty days for ammunition; five and twenty-five days for rations; and ten and twenty days for most other supplies.¹⁶ This provided flexibility for issue. It also enabled the supplies to move in multiple directions. The first-line supplies headed to the unit areas on unit transport and the second-line supplies on Brigade transport. Theatre-level and commercial transport routinely moved stocks direct to ships for loading.

Baxter made his first call to the UKLF G3 Transport and Movement Branch at 0900 hrs on 2 April, asking for immediate assistance to move the assault packs for 3 Commando Brigade from depots at Kineton, Bicester and Donnington to shipping anticipated near Plymouth and Rosyth.¹⁷ Within twenty-five minutes, the first vehicles were on the road to assist. For hours after that, trucks of various types were moving back and forth from depots to start the positioning of tens of thousands of tons of supplies, all without planners knowing which ships would eventually be available for the deployment or where. By 1700 hrs that day, nearly 150 trucks were supplementing 3 Commando Brigade's limited transportation resources. In the days ahead, help came from more military and commercial truckers around England. Commercial haulage became particularly essential since the railways had insufficient time to reposition assets to assist movements for the first week. Mileage travelled during these first days by trucks from the Commando Logistic Regiment alone equated to driving to the Falkland Islands and back seven times. UKLF eventually utilized 1,500 trucks of various sizes to meet the demands for movement, including over 100 vehicles hired from commercial carriers. Containers played no role in the movement of supplies. All cargo moved either on pallets or loose in packs, what is commonly referred to as break-bulk; and a lot of smaller packages moved hand-over-hand up ramps, down corridors and into storage areas. Supply depots dispatched a million operational ration packs and twelve million normal meals; nearly 10,000 tons of ammunition; 1,260 tons of POL; and 3,880 tons of ordnance stores. A large part of all of it was loaded within seventy-two hours. Before the full deployment was over, a whopping 38,000 tons would move from depots throughout the United Kingdom to ships for loading.¹⁸

When the call came to deploy, and supplies started heading their way, 3 Commando Brigade was truly in the position of starting cold. Assembling personnel was not easy: 42 Commando was dispersed on leave throughout the country after recently returning from an exercise in Norway, and twenty-five of its commandos were out of country; 40 Commando had just finished annual weapons training near Liverpool; 45 Commando was in Scotland about to go on leave, and one of its companies was in Hong Kong en route home from Brunei. The Commando Logistic Regiment was in the Plymouth area, just back from weeks of training in Norway and scheduled to go on block leave the following day. Most of the 3 Commando Brigade staff was on reconnaissance in Denmark for a future exercise. They started heading back immediately toward Plymouth, where Stonehouse Barracks was the home of 3 Commando Brigade and nearby Hamoaze House was the home of Commando Forces Royal Marines. Hamoaze House soon became the hub of activity for senior Marine commanders and staff working to make sense of what they faced. They did not have much to go by. As marines started heading toward Plymouth, the situation down south became clearer though. They learned at 1030 hrs on 2 April that the Argentines in fact had invaded the Falklands.¹⁹

That evening, 3 Commando Brigade staff arrived back from Denmark. Commodore Michael Clapp, the

commander of the Amphibious Task Force that would include the ships transporting Thompson's Land Force, joined the Marines at Hamoaze House, the Headquarters of Commando Forces Royal Marines. Colleagues described Clapp as a quiet leader 'with a devastatingly calm manner under all conditions'.²⁰ He would get plenty of time to demonstrate that in the next three months. Planning by staffs from both Commando Forces and 3 Commando Brigade continued non-stop at Hamoaze House for the next three days; 3 Commando Brigade started moving its war reserves from depots throughout the United Kingdom without knowing what ships eventually would be available or which port should receive the supplies. That information became steadily more available in hours and days ahead. The machinery of making it happen, however, could not wait on all the details. Planners had no appreciation yet of how large the operation would become to retake the Falklands. They had little intelligence about the enemy. They had to gaze into crystal balls to a great extent to decide what to take, knowing full well it would be difficult making up shortages later when they were 8,000 miles further south. Initial plans called for ten days of supply of war reserves. That changed to thirty, then forty-five, and eventually settled at sixty. Some critical supplies were simply not available, though. When Baxter asked someone to post a map of the Falklands on the wall of Hamoaze House, the staff could not find a single gridded map. The next day he called the Royal Marine Mapping Centre to get thousands of maps made as quickly as possible. Those maps eventually would be parachuted to the task force while at sea.

Fortunately for everyone, the Royal Marines had a major in their ranks whose knowledge of the Falklands was comprehensive, if not even photographic. Major Ewen Southby-Tailyour had commanded the platoon of Marines in the Falklands in the past. He was a landing craft specialist and yachtsman who had charted the coastlines of the main islands in the archipelago while posted there. According to associates, he looked at beaches with landing craft approaches in the back of his mind. Southby-Tailyour was not part of 3 Commando Brigade at the time of the invasion. It is not surprising, however, that Thompson called him early on 2 April, asked him to round up his maps and prepare to start educating marines at Hamoaze House. He also agreed, at the major's insistence, to take him along. Thompson commented after the war, 'If I was to name one man whose knowledge and expertise was irreplaceable in the planning and conduct in the amphibious operations I would, without hesitation, name Ewen Southby-Tailyour.'²¹

Southby-Tailyour rushed to Hamoaze House with his arms full of material and had soon set up maps and displays of the Falklands. He then started the first of many briefings for the Task Force and others over coming weeks. It is hard to overstate just how little most of those assembled knew about the islands then. As one young marine admitted about the invasion, 'Everyone was looking up at Scotland, and wondering how the Argentinians had got up there. Honestly, everyone was saying, "Are the Falklands in Scotland?"'²² There were men much senior to him, now sitting down in Hamoaze House to listen to Southby-Tailyour, who were comparably uninformed, although they might not have mistaken the Falklands for the Shetlands. And so Southby-Tailyour started saturating them with information about coastlines, temperatures, winds, terrain, infrastructure, inhabitants, communication, and much more. The salient points for planning what to take at this time had to be somewhat intimidating. In the Falklands there were no roads to speak of. The country consisted mostly of peat bogs, making vehicle travel all but impossible, while massive runs of rock made overland travel by foot slow, probably noisy, and treacherous in places. There was little overhead cover anywhere on the island, few trees outside of Stanley, very little potable water, and winds which blew constantly at the rate of fifteen to twenty knots. Communication with the outside world was limited mostly to ham radios. Year-round temperatures on the island were roughly comparable to Norway, and although the commandos had trained in Norway often, they did not do so for months on end. Fighting in the Falklands meant that, once ashore, men would carry most of what they needed on their backs over exposed, open terrain. And whatever they took they could not replace easily, since they would be fighting at the end of an 8,000-mile logistical tether.

Based on such initial knowledge of the Falkland Islands, planners decided that it was not worthwhile to deploy many of the vehicles in the Brigade, only those wheeled vehicles that carried essential equipment like radios or defence systems. Wheeled vehicles simply would not be able to travel across the anticipated boggy terrain of the Falklands. They would have to compete for space on landing craft to be landed and relocated. Although 3 Commando Brigade would normally deploy with over a thousand vehicles, the Brigade agreed on taking only fifty-four prime movers and nine motorcycles. Eventually, after insistence by Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg, Baxter agreed to add ten fuel-podded four-ton vehicles and nine Eager Beaver forklifts.²³ To make up for wheeled vehicles, the Brigade decided to deploy seventy-five Volvo BV202 tracked vehicles, anticipating that they would be able to traverse bogs easily. These over-snow vehicles produced ground pressure of only twenty-four ounces per square inch, roughly the same as a man on skis. The addition of fuel trucks, forklifts and tracked vehicles proved to be a smart decision. British Rail moved the BV202s from Scotland to the south coast ports of England for deployment. This constituted the only rail movement for the initial deployment. The Brigade decided that whatever vehicles it took would embark with full fuel tanks and carry two jerrycans filled with more fuel, something routinely prohibited on shipping during peacetime.²⁴ Many supplies were added as contingency, including one hundred sets of skis, because marines were not sure of the weather they would encounter.

Activity started all over the United Kingdom to meet requirements. First-line transportation from commandos began moving supplies from depots to unit areas. Commando Logistic Regiment transporters backed them up and also moved general war reserves with the help of theatre-level military and commercial transportation. As some staff huddled in Hamoaze House concentrated on getting supplies from depots to the Brigade and to ports, others focused on determining what would go on which ships as

the availability and location of shipping became known. Soon the British would find themselves in the business of stuffing ships full whenever they became available, not knowing if more ships would follow. It was truly a case of hot planning from depots to dockyards.

On 3 April Brigadier Thompson learned that his force would expand. Joining the land force would be the 3rd Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, known as 3 Para, and also two troops of the Blues and Royals, each equipped with two Scimitar and two Scorpion light tanks. Both of these Army units were highly trained and tough, good complements to the commandos. Thompson knew some of the commanders from past training experiences. These units would be joining the Brigade with only their first line scales of rations, ammunition and equipment though. Consequently, Brigade planners needed to add back-up war reserves to compensate. No additional numbers were added to the Brigade's Commando Logistic Regiment, however, even though ground forces had increased by twenty-five per cent with the addition of 3 Para. The Logistic Regiment would be deploying with far less than its normal strength, eventually 346 of 602, few from its Transport Squadron due to the lack of roads in the Falklands and no one from its Petroleum Troop, which was a reserve unit and could not be activated in time. Also joining the Brigade would be a battery of twelve Rapier surface-to-air missile launchers designed to bolster air defence. Although these were a welcome addition, few were familiar with the Rapier systems at the time since they were so new. No one anticipated the large amount of support they required. The extensive Rapier support equipment would later play significantly into placement and relocation decisions of those systems in the Falklands. Rapier support tails exacerbated space constraints for shipping Brigade cargo. Also, no one understood at this time how thirsty for fuel Rapiers would be when performing air defence watch. That too would complicate fuel distribution later for the Logistic Regiment.

Finally, given the addition of these forces and considering the possibility of casualties, two more additions resulted for the troop list. One was the Band of Commando Forces Royal Marines, not to serve as band members but to train as medics and stretcher-bearers for use as needed.²⁵ Another was an Army surgical team. When asked by Baxter whether women surgeons would be acceptable, Major General Moore responded without hesitation, much to the chagrin of the British Army, 'Certainly not!' Moore's concern might have been more for training than because of gender.

On Sunday, 4 April, Thompson called all of his commanders to Hamoaze House to brief them on what they faced. This was the first time some would learn about the Falklands and what lay ahead. It would be the start of a learning process that would last for several weeks. Concurrently, key staff attended mounting briefs to receive details of which ships they would be loading. Later that day, Moore, Clapp, Thompson and Southby-Tailyour met in London to update senior military leaders on the deployment planning for 3 Commando Brigade. Admiral Fieldhouse offered his apologies to Thompson for the lack of resources to move the force south: 'This is going to be a sad and bloody business. I only wish that I could give you more ships.'²⁶ The following morning, Thompson and Southby-Tailyour helicoptered to another meeting, this time with Governor Rex Hunt and the Royal Marines who had just returned to London via Montevideo, and tried to glean as much information as possible on the conditions in the Falklands when they departed.

Few people probably knew of the challenges that the lack of shipping would pose for the Task Force overall at this time, as units still were trying to determine the situation in the Falklands and what to take. From planners at the MoD and DOMS to surveyors at the Navy Ship Department at Bath, remarkable results were becoming evident in getting ships from trade and readying them for deployment. But with ships coming on line piecemeal, and without a clear picture of what ships would follow and when, those planning at Brigade level had little choice but to pack ships as best they could with the assistance of transporters at ports assisting the deployment. Loading went on simultaneously with refitting of commercial vessels to meet military requirements. When it came time for ships to depart, loading authorities dispatched sailing reports to DOMS detailing what was actually on board.²⁷ Seldom, however, would the Brigade know what was stowed by location on any ship. Moreover, cargo for specific units would often become split between multiple ships. There would be much to do to sort this out later.

The rush to load ships with necessary military supplies was not limited to Thompson's Landing Force. The Royal Navy and Royal Air Force had been hurrying to ready their units as well. Sea Harrier squadrons had started to arrive for *Hermes* and *Invincible* at Portsmouth on 2 April. A total of twenty-six Harriers were assembled from active, reserve and test units and split between the two carriers. Two squadrons of nine Sea King helicopters each, designed for anti-submarine warfare, started embarking the carriers the next day.²⁸ The task force would rely heavily on all of them as they got closer to the Falklands. Maintaining air and sea superiority over the Argentines would become essential in the minds of most.

Military and civilians worked through the nights to ready the feet and load supplies. On the evening of Sunday, 4 April, the first surface ship departed the United Kingdom. The sea-going tug *Typhoon* headed south without any fanfare. The next day, just three days after Thatcher's decision to send British forces south, and exactly as Admiral Leach had promised her, the first ships of the task force left the shores of England bound for the South Atlantic. Frigates HMS *Alacrity* and HMS *Antelope* led the way from Devonport to link up with four of the six LSLs that were ready to sail and which carried about 400 troops apiece, including all but a handful of Commando Logistic Regiment. Two of the LSLs had loaded and sailed from Marchwood, and the other two from Devonport. In days ahead, the remaining two LSLs would join the force south, one from Belize and the other from Gibraltar. Sailing down the Portsmouth channel shortly before 1000 hrs the following day came the carriers *Hermes* and *Invincible*, producing a particularly inspiring piece of theatre for the deployment, sailors lining the decks and saluting, chase boats below buzzing around the big carriers. It was a beautiful sunny day. Lining the banks of channels

leading to open waters were thousands of apprehensive yet inspired British citizens waving the Union Jack. It was indeed a day to be proud.

Most would not see the real rush that was occurring still behind the scenes to get these and other ships underway, even though they might have noticed Wessex helicopters shuttling supplies aboard the two carriers as they headed down the channels to sea. On the deck of *Hermes* were eleven Sea Harrier jets and eighteen Sea King helicopters, an impressive display for citizens on the banks. The on-deck display of aircraft was not simply to impress the populace. The aircraft carrier's hangar had become so jam packed with cargo, including 200 tons of ammunition for marines, that there was no room left inside the hangar for aircraft.²⁹

The remainder of the Land Force, in what would become the first wave of the troop deployment, left British shores in the next forty-eight hours. *Fearless*, which would be the home of Commodore Michael Clapp for the duration, sailed from Portsmouth on 6 April; *Stromness*, carrying rations for 7,500 men and 350 more marines, sailed just after dark on 7 April from Portsmouth.³⁰ Brigadier Julian Thompson and his staff helicoptered to *Fearless* on 6 April as she passed Portland. *Canberra*, the first ship taken up from trade, would follow from Southampton with more marines and all of 3 Para, a total of 2,500 troops, on 9 April, which was Good Friday and less than sixty hours since she had disembarked 1,500 cruise passengers at Southampton. The ship, soon to be nicknamed the Great White Whale, was overloaded by a whopping 10,000 tons. At Southampton dock before departure, she was sitting in the water thirteen inches below her maximum legal load limit. The owners, P&O, contacted Department of Trade inspectors, who promptly came down to the dock, painted new lines on the sides of the ship, and issued a new loading certificate.³¹ Accompanying *Canberra* was MV *Elk*, another STUFT, packed with thousands of tons of ammunition, much of it loaded regardless of compatibility guidelines. There was no automated listing of the cargo that had just sailed. Loading authorities had forwarded cargo manifests to DOMS before departure. Now an ordnance officer on 3 Commando Brigade staff carried the single copy of the consolidated cargo manifest. That list would become indispensable in weeks to follow.

It had been a fast-moving few days for Thatcher's government, the MoD, the services and British industry. As Major General Nick Vaux, then the Lieutenant Colonel commanding 42 Commando, so aptly stated years after the war, 'It was the beginning of a bold, unorthodox deployment, urgently driven with decisive political direction and sustained by constant adaptation to the changing circumstances.'³² Never in a century full of wars and conflicts had a country pulled together so fast to protect its interests, with no prior planning and under such unclear circumstances. The rest of the world, and certainly Argentina, marvelled at Britain's resolve. No country in the world, not even the United States, expected the British to dispatch a force so quickly. No one knew that Thompson's commanders were still waiting for gridded maps of the Falkland Islands.³³ Few outside high circles in the military realized that before the last ship in the first wave departed, one of the most important of them was already breaking down at sea. The carrier *Invincible* had sailed from Portsmouth with only one of her propellers turning. She now needed a new starboard main gearbox and had stopped in the Atlantic away from sight of land. Such a repair would normally take place in a dockyard. There was no time or desire to limp back to England after such a glorious departure. Repairs took place at sea after necessary equipment arrived by helicopter from the dockyard.³⁴ Many more challenges would follow, but the British had produced an incredibly impressive show of force in short order. They now had to decide what to do with it.

Chapter 3

Initial Planning and Preparation at Sea

Most preparation during the initial days of April was strategic in nature. It focused on outloading 3 Commando Brigade for possible battle and increasing Britain's industrial capability to project and sustain forces. It was three weeks' sailing to the South Atlantic. That would provide sufficient time for combat and support units to figure out options and plan for battle, if battle became essential – at least, that is what some surely thought. Certainly, few on planning staffs or in deploying units believed the Task Force would sail all the way to the Falklands. Most thought diplomatic efforts would produce some compromise. The US Secretary of State Alexander Haig was shuttling back and forth between Washington DC and Buenos Aires at the time, trying to find a peaceful resolution to tension and in the process balance Reagan administration desires to improve relations with Argentina. British planners and deployed units, however, could not count on those efforts being successful. They needed to plan for the worst case, which meant some type of amphibious assault as a first step toward reclaiming the Falklands.

Sailing around Woodward at this time was substantial sea power. Ships included guided missile destroyers *Glamorgan*, *Sheffield*, *Coventry*, *Glasgow*, and *Antrim*, and frigates *Brilliant*, *Plymouth*, and *Arrow*. Clapp was bringing down the aircraft carriers *Hermes* and *Invincible* and would join later. On 7 April, Woodward received orders for *Antrim* and *Plymouth* to detach from his group, proceed to Ascension at full speed and prepare for operations further south at South Georgia. That same day, he also received a message that Britain was announcing a Maritime Exclusion Zone around the Falklands effective 12 April. This announcement meant that any vessel entering waters within 200 miles of the Falkland Islands became a potential target for military action. That was not necessarily good news for the Royal Navy. The 200-mile boundary left the possibility that a carrier like *Veinticinco de Mayo* could loiter outside without threat and improve the striking range of fighter aircraft, since air bases on the Argentine mainland were another 150–200 miles further west. The Royal Navy would have preferred an even more extensive exclusion zone, and two weeks later Britain would modify the Maritime Exclusion Zone to a Total Exclusion Zone of 200 miles including any ships or planes that appeared threatening.

It took several days for commanders at sea to receive some clarity of intention for their planning purposes. A formal 'Appreciation of the Situation' arrived from Admiral Fieldhouse on 11 April, Easter Sunday, probably at the behest of Major General Jeremy Moore, who by then had joined Fieldhouse's staff as his deputy. Moore had substantial experience in operational planning. To their disappointment, however, Task Force commanders discovered that the Appreciation provided few specifics. The MoD was still finalizing a more substantive planning directive. The signal from Fieldhouse stated that the future plan would likely have four requirements: (1) Enforce the Falkland Island Exclusion Zone. (2) Establish sea and air superiority in the Exclusion Zone as soon as possible. (3) Repossess South Georgia. (4) Repossess the Falkland Islands. There was no timeline provided. Commanders did learn that initial priority would be establishing sea and air superiority, which would remain an expectation for weeks ahead. This was no small task. The British knew quite well that the Argentines posed a considerable threat to the Task Force well before ships carrying the ground force even neared the Falklands.

Although the British had far greater sea power heading south to take on the Argentine Navy, the same was not true of their ability to counter air threats. The Argentines had six times more planes than the Task Force. If the British lost any of their twenty-eight Sea Harriers or ten GR.3 Harriers capable of ground attack, there would be no replacements, since these constituted their total inventory of the jump jets at the time. What they lacked more seriously beyond air combat power was an Early Warning System to detect incoming fighters and missiles. This meant there was considerable risk both to ships at sea and then to ground forces when it came time to execute amphibious operations in the Falklands – assuming the Royal Navy and its Fleet Air Arm had not reduced Argentine air combat power sufficiently by then. An additional concern was Argentina's possession of French-made Exocet missiles, variants of which were common in NATO and the Soviet Union. They were formidable weapons, capable of being launched from air or ground. The British thought Argentina possessed both capabilities. The Exocet was a fire-and-forget missile, meaning that after release its homing device searched for targets, locked in and then guided a 350lb warhead forward at 750mph, normally producing catastrophic results. Given targets, it was near certain that after release an Exocet would find one of them, most often the largest, and create considerable damage. The British had no defence against these missiles, short of shooting chaff to deflect their flight paths.¹

By now, the Task Force was known officially as Task Force 317, under Admiral Fieldhouse, Commander South Atlantic Task Force. Vice Admiral Peter Herbert, whose three submarines were heading south well ahead of the surface ships, was the Flag Officer Submarines. Others now officially designated were Rear Admiral Woodward as Commander Carrier Battle Group, Brigadier Thompson as Commander Landing Force, Commodore Clapp as Commander Amphibious Task Force and Royal Navy Captain Brian Young, the captain of HMS *Antrim*, as Commander for Operation Paraquet. The Paraquet Group's purpose was to

retake South Georgia. Surprisingly, all commanders including Young reported directly with equal access to Fieldhouse. Rear Admiral Woodward, whose carriers were vital to success and needed top priority for protection, assumed authority to coordinate assets 'when necessary'.² There would be several occasions over the next two months when Fieldhouse simply could not communicate with his commanders. In fact, deployed commanders would sometimes have difficulty communicating with each other around the Falklands. With no one senior to Woodward, Clapp and Thompson in the South Atlantic to arbitrate competing requirements and at times make tough decisions, frustrations became inevitable, including for logisticians.

In addition to being Commander Amphibious Task Force, Commodore Clapp held the second title of Commander Amphibious Group. This brought with it pure Navy responsibilities for command and control of the ships designated for an amphibious operation. As these ships neared Ascension Island, aircraft carriers and frigates would transfer to Woodward's command and control to form the Carrier Battle Group. With his primary title of Commander Amphibious Task Force, Clapp was directly responsible for the amphibious assault until Thompson's forces were both ashore and sufficiently established logistically to break out from beach areas and seek objectives. Thompson had received an allocation of special forces to provide intelligence on enemy forces and, based on Clapp's recommendations, on beaches for such landings. Although he was responsible for loading ships to suit the amphibious assault and for getting supplies and services ashore, Clapp was hampered by the separation of Commando Logistic Regiment leaders on other ships and therefore had to rely heavily on their judgment.

Planning started in earnest aboard the ships heading south. Woodward's team was no different to the others, in that their minds had not been on the South Atlantic before the invasion. As they started toward Ascension, Woodward met with his team to begin developing an understanding of the situation. Freshly away from Exercise Springtrain, they had been planning for other scenarios for many days and they knew little about the Falkland Islands or the Argentine military. As was his manner, Woodward posed lots of questions to his staff. How should the Carrier Battle Group approach the Falklands? What were the possible landing sites on the islands? Where were the Argentines likely to establish defences? Where should the British concentrate their reconnaissance? Was it likely that the Argentine Navy would employ its submarines? How many mines could the Task Force expect to encounter? Would Argentina deploy them, and if so, where? How would they commit their aircraft? What did all this mean for the Carrier Battle Group? Such questions and many more consumed Woodward and his staff as they sailed south. They had few resources to help them. Their sources for Navy matters were largely limited to *Jane's Fighting Ships*, a standard public reference book not only for the Royal Navy at the time but for other navies as well.³

Woodward anticipated at the start the need for an amphibious operation. As he later wrote, 'We studied the maps exhaustively, weighing up the pros and cons of a wide range of local sites, where we could land the troops and establish a beach-head, from which we might eventually break out to attack the Argentinian main defensive positions. That beach-head would have to include the possibility of scraping an airstrip out of the unfriendly terrain if the carriers were not to remain at permanent high risk, dangerously close to the Argentine mainland.'⁴ Although his concern for maintaining the safety of ships was understandable, his counterparts, who were then starting planning processes of their own, would not agree with some of his recommendations for making the safety of ships top priority. All, including Woodward, would agree that gaining air superiority around the Falkland Islands was essential before any ground war could begin.

The staffs of Clapp and Thompson brought aboard varying experiences and backgrounds. Clapp's had not worked together before. In peacetime, his staff consisted of a half dozen Officers. They were part of the staff at the higher headquarters of Flag Officer 3 Flotilla, where Clapp was Chief of Staff (Amphibious Warfare), but whose main focus was on anti-submarine warfare. He was responsible for standards in carriers, amphibious ships and Royal Fleet Auxiliaries; his staff was expected only to execute a two-commando group amphibious operation. This landing force was growing daily much larger and necessitated a major increase in staff, including the addition of some specialists. His staff now on *Fearless* had assembled at the last minute to bolster amphibious planning and command-and-control capabilities. Several had not met each other before. But they brought with them experience from various exercises in landing craft, support helicopters, surface, mines, load planning, air warfare and amphibious warfare. Thompson's staff was not new. They were capable, well acquainted with each other, and most had worked together for some time in various positions. The two staffs, however, had not worked with each other before. Neither was familiar with the Falklands. Both had been brought up on exercises in Northern Norway and the Baltic that focused on land operations rather than amphibious landings and in the process used roll-on roll-off terminals with reception parties, along with ground transportation and fixed supply storage to meet logistics needs, as well as NATO air defence for protection. The rush to deploy meant that these staffs had been unable to develop loads and load plans the way they had been taught. It had become for them a real 'come as you are' deployment.

Organizationally, the combat unit structure of 3 Commando Brigade was not much different from the structure of military units found in other countries. It was essentially a three-part organization, echeloned downward in threes, the core of which were three commandos, the rough equivalent of a British Army battalion, each consisting of three rifle companies of about 120 men; a support company with six 81mm mortars and fourteen MILAN wire-guided, anti-tank missiles; and a headquarters company. Their standard weapon was the 7.62mm self-loading rifle. Companies consisted of three troops or platoons apiece, the foundation of which were three sections or squads. Those sections each carried anti-tank weapons as well

and 7.62mm general purpose machine guns. These groups received support from an artillery regiment with three batteries of 105mm howitzers, a combat engineer squadron, an air squadron of Gazelle and Scout helicopters, and other elements including an air defence troop with shoulder-fired Blowpipe surface-to-air missiles and special operations forces. When organized for battle, each commando group normally included a gun battery, a troop of Royal Engineers and other elements from the Brigade.

What was truly unique to the Brigade was its Commando Logistic Regiment, formed in 1971/2 to provide dedicated logistics support. It was patterned after the Parachute Logistic Regiment, which supported the Parachute Brigade and disbanded a few years later. There was no comparable military support unit in any other country at the time, including in the United States. It was a joint organization long before joint organizations became common in the militaries of other countries, its existence due in no small part to the fact that the Royal Marines had no supply and maintenance units of their own. The Logistic Regiment's normal strength was just over 600. Plans called for augmentation by 350 more upon mobilization. Core units included medical, transportation, workshop, and ordnance squadrons, organized for the most part into a three-troop structure as well to provide focused support to each of the three commando groups. The Headquarters Squadron provided command and control. The Medical Squadron provided three field dressing stations, each consisting of collection, treatment and evacuation sections and capable of pushing regimental aid posts forward should combat situations warrant. The Transport Squadron provided second-line transport in support of manoeuvre units and was capable of organizing three forward troops, each possessing trucks, fuel tankers and rough terrain forklifts. The Workshop Squadron provided direct support maintenance to commandos and was capable of furnishing three self-contained assault workshop detachments. The Ordnance Squadron was designed to provide supplies to units either from land or from ships; it too was capable of furnishing three assault ordnance detachments to support the commandos. The capability of each squadron to furnish forward troops or detachments enabled the Commando Logistic Regiment to establish and maintain multiple support areas, adding flexibility overall and enabling manoeuvre regiments to operate independently, for short periods, without continual reliance on lines of communication to the Brigade Maintenance Area or BMA, the commando term for their main logistics base. Every member of the Logistic Regiment had passed the Royal Marine Commando Course and sported the coveted green beret. A high percentage of them had experience in commando groups. All were capable of fighting as rifemen if needed. Composition of the Regiment included Royal Marines, British Army and Royal Navy. The command rotated every two years between the Army and the Royal Marines. The commander at this time was Lieutenant Colonel Ivar Hellberg, an Officer not intimidated by challenges. An avid outdoorsman and mountain climber, he had been a member of a team that successfully climbed Mount Everest in 1976. Hellberg, like many logisticians, served two bosses. His direct boss was Brigadier Thompson, since his responsibility was supporting 3 Commando Brigade units as he worked closely with Thompson's staff. He often received logistics guidance, though, from Colonel Baxter.

Neither Commodore Clapp nor Brigadier Thompson had any illusions about the challenges they faced. As Clapp put it, 'We had sailed with little idea of what lay ahead and even for what we should plan. We had, too, sailed in a rather unmilitary posture for reasons which, although well understood, gave both Julian and me misgivings.'⁵ Complicating matters for planning, their staffs on *Fearless* were separated from Lieutenant Colonel Ivar Hellberg and his logisticians aboard the LSL *Sir Lancelot*. Clapp imposed High Frequency (HF) radio transmitting silence on the Amphibious Group to maintain secrecy. Commanders and staff therefore needed to communicate by visiting each other or delivering messages by helicopter.

On 7 April, Clapp issued orders to ships to commence training in the days ahead. Thompson had already issued instructions to his units before departing. Now units started concentrating on fitness, nuclear/chemical/ biological defence training, weapons handling and calling for and adjusting artillery and mortar fire. He wanted every marine and soldier to be able to do the latter at a pinch. Clapp told his aviation components to practise flying in at-sea conditions and advised others to focus on intelligence gathering. He, Thompson and their staffs would concentrate concurrently on developing a greater appreciation of the Falkland Islands and options for attack should one become necessary. For many days to follow, Thompson joined Clapp for all meals in Clapp's dining room. Together they would hash out developments for the day, not always agreeing on what was important or should have priority.⁶ The two leaders developed a strong professional bond over the weeks, the value of which cannot be overstated. The command relationship in effect at the time was not doctrinal for amphibious operations, although it had improved since the Task Force's departure, with Clapp and Thompson both reporting to Woodward. Fieldhouse corrected this subordination when he issued a new organization for Task Force 317 with all three commanders reporting directly to him. According to amphibious doctrine, however, the Commander Land Force is subordinated to the Commander Amphibious Task Force until forces land, the beachhead becomes secure and sufficient logistics capabilities exist afloat and ashore that ground combat units can break out. Subordination has nothing to do with rank. It has everything to do with the complexity of controlling and defending ships, landing craft and helicopters; getting combat units ashore quickly and in the right places; and then establishing logistics wherewithal so that units can advance. Amphibious landings may well be the most difficult of all military operations. The bond that developed between Clapp and Thompson enabled the eventual success of the British landing, notwithstanding very poor communication and Argentine air attacks.

Early in the assessment process, Clapp's and Thompson's staffs ruled out landing locations other than on East Falkland. Reports indicated the Argentine forces were concentrated on East Falkland, mostly

around Stanley. It was quite unlikely they would move now to another far less populated island. A landing anywhere other than on East Falkland would mean simply that the British would have to conduct two landings, since they eventually needed to be on East Falkland to take on the Argentines, whose main body was guarding Stanley. They did not want to lose the advantage of surprise by landing somewhere that was irrelevant, only to have to land later on East Falkland to pursue the final objective.

They assessed nineteen possible beaches on East Falkland in close detail. For an amphibious landing they needed a beach with gradients suitable for landing craft and mexefote barges to land men and materials. The terrain in proximity to the beach had to provide some exits for the few tracked vehicles they had. The area needed to be suitable for defence from ground, air, and sea attacks. And they did not want the landing site and anchorages to be vulnerable to fire from Argentine artillery anticipated to be around Stanley, or from Exocets. Eventually, the staffs selected and Clapp and Thompson approved five areas for closer examination. By the time they had completed all their assessments they would settle on three locations: Cow Bay/Volunteer Bay, Berkeley Sound, and San Carlos.⁷

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg and his Commando Logistic Regiment leaders aboard *Lancelot* were developing support scenarios for an amphibious landing, at first not knowing, due to the requirement to maintain HF radio transmitting silence, the detailed planning that was underway on *Fearless*. Sustainment procedures practised by his regiment in peacetime emphasized forward support to the three commandos. That process routinely started with the topping off of the commandos with three days of supply. The Regiment held up to thirty days of supply afloat under control of Ordnance Squadron in LSLs. After the amphibious assault and the establishment of a secure beach area, Commando Logistic Regiment moved essential supplies and services ashore, preferably as dispersed as possible and normally including two storage areas, each with three to five days of supply. Then, as commandos moved toward their objectives, the Regiment established forward support areas manned by detachments from its squadrons and commanded by troop commanders from Transport Squadron. From those forward support areas, and following daily coordination meetings, the detachments pushed forward critical supplies, ammunition and rations to distribution points at night, for retrieval by the support echelons of each commando. The Regiment had developed procedures for mobile, water-borne distribution points and practised pushing supplies to isolated beaches at prearranged sites when commandos were temporarily in inaccessible locations. These procedures were designed to enable quick and continuous forward supply while relieving commandos of unnecessary administrative and transport burdens.

As Hellberg and members of his regiment sailed south on LSLs and started assessing the situation, not knowing where they would eventually land in the Falklands, they became firmly convinced that the most effective method would be to support the Land Force direct from the ships by helicopter, providing that they had control of both the air and sea.⁸ Hellberg concluded that two LSLs should be loaded with two days of consumable stocks (an estimated average consumption rate of ammunition, rations and supplies, commonly referred to as the DCSR or Daily Combat Supply Rate) dedicated for the logistic support of the land force. *Canberra* could provide immediate medical support, although not as a designated hospital ship under the Geneva Convention and therefore subject to enemy attack. This concept would enable two options while dividing LSL assets in case an LSL was damaged.

Option One would be for a landing in a single area by the full Brigade supported by two LSLs, one LSL held close inshore to support the land battle and the other in reserve outside the Total Exclusion Zone. Each LSL would carry two DCSR with separate command and control teams. The two LSLs would exchange places as supplies diminished and gain resupply from the stores ship RFA *Stromness* and ammunition ship MV *Elk*. The BMA ashore to sustain the Land Force would be small, consisting of a command and control element, a field dressing station, a rifle company for defence, workshop and ordnance detachments, an amphibious beach unit and a landing zone marshalling team for helicopters. The dressing station would be used for emergency casualties only. The main evacuation of casualties would be direct to *Canberra*. Option Two was designed to support two separate operations in different areas. In this case, one LSL would be allocated to support each operation carrying two DCSR of stocks. Each LSL would provide command and control and carry a dressing station, workshop detachment and ordnance detachment. Hellberg shared his plans with staff of the Amphibious Task Force, who visited him on *Lancelot* on 10 April. That same day, he shared it with 3 Commando Brigade staff and later helicoptered to *Fearless* to present his logistics concept of operations in person to 3 Commando Brigade Headquarters, which accepted it.⁹ Everyone was acutely aware that there might not be a second chance if plans went wrong. The vast distances back to Ascension and the United Kingdom would make it difficult to correct mistakes.

The 3 Commando Brigade staff eventually developed a forty-six-page discussion of the situation with eleven annexes outlining amphibious options and support plans. Planning for all scenarios assumed that the landing would take place under the protection of local air superiority, thereby allowing the presence of an afloat supply system; that STUFT and RFA loaded in the United Kingdom would be available with their known cargo when required for offloading; and that the offload of any follow-on forces would not be under amphibious conditions but under administrative conditions for units earmarked for reserve or garrison duties. Some of these assumptions would prove to be false.

Prior to leaving Britain, Commodore Clapp's boss had warned him, 'that the Royal Marines would want to carry out a major re-stow "as they always do" ... and to be very cautious of wasting effort indulging them.' Fortunately, Clapp did not take him too seriously. Storage problems on the ships were obvious even without considering any landing plan. And so, as staff planning was underway elsewhere, logisticians from Commando Logistic Regiment's Ordnance Squadron started to come to grips with the supplies that had

been hurried on to the ships. Although they generally knew from manifests what supplies were on each ship, they did not know where they were stowed. It was clear that some supplies were stacked atop others that would be more important. Even the corridors of the command ship *Fearless* were lined with packaged food ranging from baked beans to cereal, forcing those aboard to squeeze through stacks of supplies as they made their way about the ship. To gain better control of inventories, noncommissioned Officers on each ship carrying supplies verified locations as the Amphibious Group headed south. They sent what they discovered to Headquarters, 3 Commando Brigade, where the Brigade Ordnance Officer on staff consolidated information. Efforts were not entirely successful, but the men started sorting out tons of supplies stored in a rush to maximize limited space. Supplies were packed so tightly together that only the top layer of some stacks could be identified at times. Some ships' captains, understandably, proved unwilling to allow anyone in cargo areas while they were sailing. They had responsibility for safety on their vessels. The weather did not always cooperate. It turned sour for several days, bouncing the LSL *Sir Percivale* around so much that mexefote pontoons strapped to her sides were loosened and nearly required ditching.¹⁰

Meanwhile, as staff planning and logistics activities were proceeding, the military units were coming to grips with their own needs. During the first few days after departure, troops sorted out their own kit. Their rush to deploy was not unlike the hurry to get pallets of general supplies loaded. The bulk of the forces were on *Canberra*, her sun decks now packed with ammunition boxes, her elegant lounges converted to canteens. *Canberra's* purser no longer had his staff of foreign helpers. Royal Navy and Royal Marine cooks had replaced them and now concentrated on feeding 3,000 ravenous troops multiple times daily. Plenty of beer had been loaded aboard. Troops enjoyed a ration of two cans per day. On *Canberra* alone, those rations evaporated at the daily rate of 7,000 cans.¹¹

Units aboard ships focused first on organizing personal gear. Soon they and crews started implementing Thompson's and Clapp's orders for training as well as following focused guidance from their commanders and ships' captains. Physical training emphasizing endurance and strength became an early priority for 3 Commando Brigade, with units being allocated deck space some time during the day. Promenade decks on ships like *Canberra* became jogging tracks. Runs started first with physical training gear and combat boots; soon thereafter, troops were pounding the decks in full combat attire.¹² A number of troops on *Canberra* even took part in a marathon race around the quarter-mile promenade deck, with the winner posting a time of three hours and thirty minutes. Needless to say, the cruise ship's decks had never experienced such a pounding, let alone by runners sporting combat boots. With 3,000 men on board trying to get into better shape, physical training went on almost all day as units used their windows of time for physical fitness training. Not long after the departure, Officers on *Canberra* started getting concerned about the ability of the ship's decks to withstand this constant battering.¹³

It was not all about physical training, though. Men of the Task Force also learned about the Falklands during the passage south. They rotated to the stern of the vessel at times to zero weapons, as others tossed rubbish bags and empty drink cans overboard into the wake of the ship as targets.¹⁴ Medics taught classes on basic first aid, how to administer saline drips and also how to inject morphine to deal with severe injuries. This training would later prove invaluable to some, as men tended to wounded comrades during freights later in the Falklands. Units knew even less about the Falklands than the planners aboard *Fearless*, but they knew enough to understand they were entering a harsh environment and could be isolated from support for days. Orders would follow for each marine and soldier to receive a morphine capsule before landing, so that they could ease their pain if they needed to wait for medical evacuation from the battlefield. The Medical Squadron of Commando Logistic Regiment on *Canberra* also spearheaded a blood drive in the first two weeks, promoting friendly rivalry between units. It had received an initial supply of 800 units of whole blood upon deployment but collected an additional 1,000 half-litre bags from men on ships.¹⁵ As this training was underway on *Canberra*, similar medical training programmes were taking place on other ships, especially on merchant vessels and the RFA.

Also at this time, Southby-Tailyour, who was sailing with staffs on *Fearless*, expanded his classes on the Falklands and started sharing them with other ships in the Task Force. He spent hours in the first days at sea continuing to discuss the features and challenges of the Falkland Islands with their 10,000 miles of deeply indented coastline. Gathering such information on their own probably would have taken the staff months of research, even if they had had resources at their command. Few understood how isolated the settlements were on the island or the extent to which some residents of settlements were unfamiliar with their own island. As an example, one Officer later recounted that he met a Falkland Islander who had lived at Greenpatch settlement outside of Stanley for forty years and had never left the area in all of that time. She apparently was not unique, which meant that reliance on Falklanders for knowledge about their island could be risky. Southby-Tailyour shared information on the Falklands at evening briefings on *Fearless* and then headed to a closed-circuit television studio on board, taped his briefings and passed them to other ships in the Amphibious Group. Staffs and units learned as a result that there were only a limited number of harbours and few beaches in the Falklands suitable for landing craft. Most beaches lacked sand or shingle and were exposed to surf. Giant kelp, sometimes as thick as a man's thigh, impeded the travel of small craft in some areas. On land, the water table was right below the surface. Consequently, if troops dug foxholes or trenches they would most likely become waterlogged. Most water on East Falkland was unsafe to drink, much of it contaminated by the hundreds of thousands of sheep on the island, many of which carried fukes. This would have significant implications for the use of dehydrated rations that required water, and also for hygiene. It was fifty or more miles across the island over boggy terrain impassable by vehicles. There was no cover and, as a result, little concealment from enemy

aircraft or artillery. An abundance of huge boulders littered the landscape in places and restricted movement. Groups of such boulders, called 'stone runs', often stretched over hundreds of yards, making travel difficult, especially at night for troops lugging combat gear. Running water, showers or other facilities would not be awaiting the British when they arrived. This would be a place unlike those they had seen before on NATO exercises. In case men found themselves isolated somewhere on the islands, Southby-Tailyour developed a seven-page survival guide for them that detailed things they could eat, use or should avoid. Thompson had a copy provided to all men in the Land Force as well as aircrews.¹⁶

None of the education and training included what Julian Thompson believed was essential, a full proper rehearsal of the Brigade's landing plan under cover of darkness. He had already been informed that this would not be possible when they reached Ascension Island. As a result, he and Clapp preferred after leaving Ascension to take the entire brigade to South Georgia before any assault on the Falklands. That way they could conduct a much-needed rehearsal of the amphibious landing without sacrificing surprise for the attack at their chosen site in the Falklands, a standard protocol for such military preparations, at least under most circumstances. Their concern was valid. Clapp, in fact, initially understood that units would disembark transports into smaller ships in the South Atlantic, perhaps at South Georgia, before an amphibious landing. He did not expect large transports to be used as assault ships. Other shipping would not materialize for this transfer, though. The British had not carried out an amphibious landing at brigade strength in nearly twenty years. Now, they would not get to stop at South Georgia to rehearse either, but Thompson and Clapp would institute day and night drills training men laden with combat gear to cross from the large troopship *Canberra* into the tiny LCUs bouncing alongside. Such cross-decking was hardly a preferred scenario for an amphibious operation, but it would become an absolute necessity for the one they would eventually conduct.

A week into the passage south, commanders and staffs had all gained a much greater appreciation of matters at hand. They soon would have time to huddle with Admiral Fieldhouse, because he was calling a meeting of Task Force commanders at Ascension Island on 17 April. Clapp ordered *Fearless* to speed up to make the Ascension meeting, leaving the rest of the Group to catch up. That order caused *Fearless* to miss her resupply rendezvous with the tanker *Olmeda*, something which did not seem too important at the time but which would take on much greater significance when *Fearless* arrived at Ascension high in the water.

On 16 April, as the two groups of ships neared each other in the vicinity of Ascension, Woodward flew to *Fearless* to share information and thoughts about what lay ahead. Staffs had been examining the islands and developing proposals in isolation from each other for the past week. The resulting meeting would start tensions between the three commanders and their staffs that would persist for the duration of the campaign. Woodward had become keenly focused on the timing of operations, which would become very important for overall planning. He was particularly concerned about the onset of winter in the South Atlantic and how long his Carrier Battle Group could stay in the area before ship repairs became essential. Based on such concerns, he had started backward planning from late June, thinking that at that time both the weather and the needs of his ships could start things 'falling apart'.¹⁷ He thought it would take the Land Force about three weeks to land on East Falkland and retake Stanley. He knew that he needed to provide gunfire and naval air support for ground operations. He also awaited the arrival of the LPD *Intrepid*, the sister ship to *Fearless*, in the South Atlantic so that the Task Force could exercise effective command and control. At the time, *Intrepid* was in the process of being restored to service after previous decisions to decommission her. *Intrepid* now needed to get fixed and proceed south. Woodward did not think she would arrive before 16 May. He concluded therefore that the window for an amphibious assault on the Falklands, regardless of location, would be sometime in the period 16–25 May. This meant his carriers and other ships needed to get to the South Atlantic well before that and to gain control of the seas and air. He would emphasize all of the above during the meeting with Fieldhouse the next day.

Woodward, Thompson and Clapp had been involved actively with their staffs in assessing options for retaking the Falklands. After he listened to the options being proposed by the other two staffs, Woodward suggested that they should plan either to establish a bridgehead on West Falkland or on the fat plain of Lafonia, a large peninsula of East Falkland connected to the rest of the island by a small isthmus. He proposed that such an area would be defensible until an airstrip could be built to receive C-130s and fighter aircraft.¹⁸ By the time the huddle was over, Woodward had left the other commanders and staffs befuddled. Clapp, Thompson and their staffs collectively had ruled out such options en route to Ascension and instead had concentrated planning towards landings on East Falkland proper, where virtually all the invaders were located, the bulk massing around the capital of Stanley. They saw serious problems in what Woodward was proposing. Any amphibious landing on West Falkland or Lafonia would necessitate a second amphibious landing on East Falkland before the ground war could be prosecuted. Landing elsewhere before landing on East Falkland would cause British forces to lose the advantage of surprise and in all likelihood prolong the conflict into the harsh winter months of the South Atlantic, exacerbating Woodward's concerns about the serviceability of ships starting in late June.

Woodward left the meeting thinking it had been a productive exchange of ideas. The same was not true for those on *Fearless*. Woodward's proposals seemed like nonsense to them. As skilled a naval Officer as Woodward might have been, he seemed to lack a joint perspective, specifically an understanding of amphibious and ground warfare. His brusque and dismissive manner left a lasting impression on all present, not the least of whom was Southby-Tailyour. When the major introduced himself, the admiral curtly questioned, 'And what do you know about the Falklands, boy?'¹⁹ Staffs on *Fearless* nevertheless started working to assess Woodward's recommendations, but they anticipated that some of their heartburn would disappear the next day, when Fieldhouse and others landed on Ascension and everyone

had a chance to discuss their analyses and recommendations. They hoped that the meeting would produce decisions enabling them to finalize their planning.

Britain had achieved a lot in the two and a half weeks following the invasion. The bulk of its forces now were nearly half way to the South Atlantic. British submarines would soon be in Falkland area waters watching the movement of the Argentine Navy. Back in Britain, the services, government and industry continued collaborating to requisition and convert more ships, including minesweepers, to meet the needs of the Task Force. Discussion had started in the MoD about adding more combat units to the ground force. Tensions in the South Atlantic, however, had not abated. Fortunately, 3 Commando Brigade finally had received the gridded maps Colonel Ian Baxter ordered in the hours before first ships left the shores of England. Two tons of gridded maps arrived by parachute while the Task Force was en route to Ascension. Troops now had what they needed to share grid coordinates, plan advances and call for artillery fire, if war became necessary.

Chapter 4

Support Operations at Ascension Island

If the world understood little about the Falkland Islands before the Argentine invasion, it knew even less about the remote island in the Atlantic towards which the British Task Force was now heading. Ascension Island had not figured prominently in history since its Portuguese discovery in 1501. Perhaps its biggest claim to fame was that Royal Marines had garrisoned the island in 1815 as precaution against French occupation after Britain and her coalition allies exiled Napoleon to the nearby island of St Helena. In years that followed, Ascension became little more than a temporary way station for passing slave traders and merchant ships, until the 1940s, when the United States began leasing it from Britain. Americans constructed an airfield there at the time to serve as a staging base and to interdict German ships in the Atlantic during the Second World War. In the 1970s, their focus evolved to deep-space tracking, but the island remained largely unchanged, sparsely populated and with few resources. Until April 1982, the only occasional visitors to Ascension were naturalists looking for its green turtles, wild donkeys and sooty terns. In coming weeks, though, it would contribute so significantly to overall British planning and war efforts that some would claim, 'If Ascension Island had not existed we would have had to create it.'¹ There can be little doubt that the British would have created it differently had they had the power to do so. But although far from ideal, this little island made the Falkland Islands War possible.

Located just below the Equator, midway between South America and Africa as well as between Britain and the Falklands, Ascension is a small volcanic outcrop of about thirty-eight square miles, a place of dramatic contrasts. Its highest point, the 2,800ft Green Mountain, presents a tropical appearance from far away, with a small bamboo rain forest on its upper slopes. But lush vegetation atop the mountain belies both the barrenness of lower slopes and the dryness of the entire island. Green Mountain, as its name implies, claims the only greenery on Ascension Island. It is the single place high enough to capture rainfall sufficient for vegetation to grow. The trade winds, which slap the coastline at about eighteen knots every day and help maintain temperatures of 18° to 24° Centigrade year round, deposit a mere six inches of annual drizzle elsewhere on the island. Little fresh water accumulates routinely on Ascension, forcing inhabitants to rely mostly upon distilled seawater. Although one can spot occasional sandy beaches along the rugged coastline, getting to them is quite another matter because of large swells, themselves teeming with sharks and other voracious sea life, that unpredictably pound the shores. Those swells prevent conventional landing craft from coming ashore anywhere but at a place called English Bay on the north-west coast, and even there the beach is sufficient for only a single landing craft. In 1982, there were no fixed ports on the island to offload vessels, just a single stone jetty at the capital, Georgetown. Severe sea swells forced ships carrying supplies to anchor nearly half a mile off the coast and then shuttle goods ashore by lighter to the jetty. The island may have offered a great geographical location, but up close it looked like a barren landscape of volcanic ash, jagged rock and clinker, all surrounded by an unforgiving sea.

At the time of the Falklands invasion, a thousand people inhabited Ascension, all of whom were employed by or were contractors for British and American companies on the island. Over half of these, dubbed 'Saints', were from the island of St Helena, 700 miles to the south-east. Employers included Cable & Wireless, the British Broadcasting Corporation, Pan American Airlines, South Africa Cable and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). There remained no indigenous population. All residents lived in housing built and furnished by their employers in one of three settlements: Georgetown on the west coast, Two Boats in the centre and an American camp near the airfield called Wideawake, operated by Pan American. There were no hotels, buses, taxis, or rental car firms. Visitors were not allowed on the island without permission from the British Administrator. Children reaching eighteen years and unemployed, as well as pensioners, were required to return home. Food and other goods came from either American or British commissaries or from a couple of shops supplied by steamer twice a month. Sea passage remained the primary link to the outside world for many, particularly those with homes on St Helena since no airfield existed there. Life on Ascension was isolated. Although there was a golf course, it was reputed to be one of the worst in the world due to its lack of greenery. Consequently, residents expected to see few visitors.

Life for those on Ascension that spring changed dramatically. Inhabitants enthusiastically supported British efforts to transform their curiously remote island into a vibrant launch pad for British forces and supplies. Despite the eagerness of its inhabitants to assist, though, the island simply could not sustain large numbers of support personnel. There was little extra accommodation and insufficient fresh water for large numbers of new residents, however temporary their presence might be, since the island relied upon desalinated water. Limited plant output meant that fresh water production alone would necessarily restrict military presence on the island. The British had lots of men and supplies heading toward this island now, but there was only so much the islanders and their island could do. The rest would take careful planning and improvement in the weeks ahead.

Whatever challenges Ascension posed, the British welcomed its ideal location and availability with open

arms. They had no alternatives for providing operational sustainment to the Task Force heading toward the South Atlantic. Countries in South America were not about to offer their ports and airfields as platforms for launching a war against neighbouring Argentina, whether or not they agreed with what Argentina had done. Even countries in Africa were unwilling to face the political uproar that might ensue. Fortunately, the continuing lease to America now left the island open for British use. In an Exchange of Notes in 1962, the two nations had agreed that the United States would grant such 'logistic, administration or operating facilities at the Airfield ... considered by the Government of the United Kingdom to be necessary in connection with its use by United Kingdom military aircraft'.² Britain invoked its prerogative to utilize the airfield according to these agreements immediately following Argentina's invasion of East Falkland. They knew the Americans had improved and extended the airfield to 10,000 feet in 1966 as US Air Force needs arose in the Eastern Test Range, making it capable of accepting the world's largest aircraft. Despite having a first-class runway, though, Wideawake offered only a small hardstand area for parking and no parallel taxiways. Thick layers of volcanic dust prevented helicopters from using adjacent areas for landing without ingesting dust into their engines. Fuel storage capacity and aircraft maintenance facilities remained limited. Wideawake simply was not designed for heavy air traffic or for an influx of lots of supplies, but it would become the salvation for a task force that had departed so quickly.

The United States government started helping the British the same weekend that Argentina invaded the Falklands. The bottom line directive to the US Air Force's single military representative at Ascension, a lieutenant colonel controlling operations at Wideawake as part of the Air Force's Eastern Test Range, was reportedly to provide all the help the British needed 'but not to get caught doing it'.³ He and numerous other United States government employees there provided considerable help during the hectic months to follow. Other agencies of the United States government would assist as well by secretly pushing thousands of tons of supplies and millions of gallons of fuel to the island to help the British, while Secretary of State Haig continued his shuttle diplomacy between London and Buenos Aires.

The first British personnel departed the United Kingdom for Ascension on 3 April aboard a C-130 Hercules routed through Gibraltar and Dakar. Their task was to establish an airhead at Wideawake and prepare to offload about a dozen other C-130s that would start arriving later that day with supplies. The initial organization was small: two officers from the Royal Air Force's 38 Air Support Group, an officer and six airmen from the United Kingdom Mobile Air Movements Squadron, an officer and six sailors to form a forward logistics unit for the Royal Navy and an officer and eight sailors to support naval helicopters.⁴ Known as the British Forces Support Unit or BFSU, this organization expanded considerably in weeks to follow. Since initial members of the unit and the bulk of the Task Force were from the Royal Navy, it was not surprising that the commanding officer came from the Navy too. When Captain Robert McQueen arrived to take command, he brought authority to the small organization. His chain of command went directly through the Vice Chief of Defence Staff for Personnel and Logistics to the Chief himself. McQueen later recounted some of the specific guidelines he received at the MoD before departing: 'The first was that tri-service numbers on the island would not be more than about two hundred and the second that I should have the power of veto on anyone sent there.'⁵

The responsibilities of the BFSU were to get a forward sustainment base started and then to keep logistics operations going. They had to initiate logistics operations within hours of arrival and then start coordinating operations for days ahead, not knowing necessarily what would be arriving, since much of that was still being determined back in the United Kingdom. They had to decide what improvements were needed to administer logistics operations and to prepare to supervise the implementation of those improvements when resources arrived. They also needed to start planning a defence of the island in case that became necessary. There was not much time. What resulted from their efforts was a forward sustainment base that provided five distinct military benefits. Firstly, Ascension provided an anchorage for the fleet as it headed south, a place where ships could take on additional supplies that might have been consumed in getting that far south or left behind for any number of reasons upon departure. Secondly, it provided the airfield needed by the Royal Air Force to cut flight distances to the Falklands. Wideawake would become indispensable to sustaining long-range reconnaissance missions within days of the invasion, and for Vulcan bombing missions in a matter of weeks. For pure logistics reasons, it became essential for maintaining an air bridge to the Task Force. No matter how good logistics planning might become, ships and ground units would eventually need quick replacement of critical stores and perhaps people. The fastest way to achieve this would be by airdrop from planes launched out of Ascension. Thirdly, the island would provide a place for the Task Force to get supplies left behind and to sort out the mess that was then crowding the galleys of ships. The waters off Ascension, in spite of irritating and unpredictable swells, were far more welcoming than the barren ocean extending from there southward. Fourthly, Ascension Island provided a place where soldiers and marines of all specialities could hone skills required later if political efforts to resolve tensions failed. Not much space ashore was available, but it would have to suffice. And finally, it became a location where senior leaders of the Task Force could rendezvous to discuss developments and finalize plans before it proceeded further, while politicians continued to try to avoid war. There would be no other place to huddle before the Falklands.

Members of the BFSU scarcely had time to drop their bags in the small room of a hangar that would be their headquarters, before the airflow started. They would eventually opt for a tent a little further away to avoid some of the noise and bustle of activity at Wideawake. Three Lynx helicopters arrived that same day by C-130 from Lyneham, complete with air and ground crews and supporting supplies. Modified to carry Sea Skua air-to-surface missiles, the Lynxes flew on board RFA *Fort Austin* as she passed Ascension heading south to support *Endurance*. They would provide some much needed protection for this unarmed

stores ship heading alone toward the possible war zone. Three naval Wessex 5 transport helicopters arrived on April 4 aboard a civilian Short Belfast cargo plane. The BFSU made them operational by the time two more arrived on 6 April. Nimrods of 42 Squadron from St Mawgan and Kinloss followed the Belfast to provide communications links to nuclear submarines and to assist in any search-and-rescue missions that resulted from other aircraft flying to and from the island.⁶ The Nimrods were just the first of a steady stream of planes landing at Wideawake and occupying the limited tarmac.

The BFSU did not arrive with much organic capability to conduct extensive airhead operations. Instead, they were dependent on assistance from people and equipment from the United States who were already there, to include two Pan American air traffic controllers accustomed to seeing only a couple of hundred aircraft landings annually. Soon, however, they would see as many as 250 in a single day of April, reportedly making Wideawake busier than Chicago's O'Hare at the time.⁷

As ships of the Task Force arrived, the overcrowding would seem even worse as everyone scurried to juggle both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters in and out of the airfield as replenishment operations got underway. The work started with the arrival of *Fort Austin*, which also took on added supplies and dozens of Royal Marines who would participate in the plan to recapture South Georgia. *Fort Austin* then continued south on 9 April. The following day, the destroyer *Antrim* with the frigate *Plymouth* and RFA tanker *Tidespring* arrived to embark stores as well.

Fort Austin was the first Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel to take supplies to the South Atlantic with the help of the BFSU. It is worth taking a moment to trace her path on that first resupply mission, because *Fort Austin*'s typical missions after departing Ascension accentuate aspects of the war often overlooked: the seemingly endless work performed by auxiliary vessels to sustain fighting ships in the Task Force and the corresponding work that the BFSU performed to keep a single auxiliary vessel supplied. During the three-day passage south, the crew of *Fort Austin* started preparing their first loads for delivery both by jackstay and helicopter. After linking up with *Endurance*, whose supplies were down to two days of food, they delivered 200 loads before receiving passengers and stores for backhaul to Ascension. The crew then worked most of the night preparing loads for the *Antrim* group heading south from Ascension. *Fort Austin* linked up with the ships the next morning and worked nonstop until about midnight, delivering over 300 more loads to them. On the afternoon of the following day, 14 April, she received directions to rendezvous with *Sheffield*, *Brilliant*, *Glasgow*, *Coventry* and *Arrow*. *Fort Austin*'s crew scrambled to prepare another 380 loads for issue as demands kept coming in. After conducting two jackstay transfers for each ship, one for general stores and one for ammo, she received another 200 loads of backhaul material ranging from training ammunition to excess paint. Then it was back to Ascension, just at the time Royal Marines were arriving, to get as much as possible from the BFSU in forty-eight hours before heading south again. Helicopters and lighters shuttled 450 loads of supplies to the ship and took 120 backhaul loads to the island during those two days. *Fort Austin* then returned south. In these first two trips, she discharged over a thousand loads to keep other ships going. She embarked another thousand in return, most of which the BFSU would see at Ascension.⁸ There are countless other stories just like that of *Fort Austin* - resupply ships who were able to keep others supplied because of the base at Ascension and which, at the same time, became only part of an immense workload developing ashore.

In less than a week, the small BFSU had started fulfilling the first of its logistics functions. Dozens more ships arrived at Ascension to take on supplies and then continue southward. A challenge for British logisticians now became keeping these ships resupplied without complete reliance on much slower sea lines of communication. The Royal Air Force's C-130 Hercules, the primary British aircraft for delivering supplies by air, became the solution to that challenge.

People back in the United Kingdom had been working on modifications to the C-130 at this time, to increase its ability to 'keep up with' the Task Force. The C-130 had a range of about 2,000 miles depending on payload. This meant, unfortunately, it could get only a quarter of the way to the Falklands from Ascension before having to turn around. Ascension Island had halved the distance between the United Kingdom and the Falklands, making it possible to continue airdrops of critical supplies to ships. But now something had to be done soon to increase the operating range of aircraft so that air dispatchers could get supplies further south. The Royal Air Force had in the past thought of having its C-130s fitted for air-to-air refuelling, but the value of this did not justify the cost, given the comparatively short range within NATO areas. Now the situation was different. Three modifications to the C-130 commenced to enable it to cover more distance.

Starting on 16 April, the Engineering Wing at Lyneham began devising auxiliary tanks for installation in forward cabins of C-130s to add more internal fuel capacity. Some cylindrical tanks with a capacity of 825 Imperial gallons happened to be on hand. Within five days, the Wing fitted a pair into a C-130 and found they could increase its range by three to four hours. They later determined that installing four tanks increased the range further but limited payload to about twenty-five per cent of the aircraft's original maximum. Modifications proceeded to create both two- and four-tank models. The modified aircraft were nicknamed LR 2 (for Long Range) or LR 4, depending on the number of tanks installed. The insides of these C-130s started to take on the appearance of airborne fuel depots. Cargo was stored on ramp doors only since no room remained in cargo bays.

The second modification was aimed to give the C-130 air-to-air refuelling capability. Marshall of Cambridge (Engineering) Ltd, which had been designated the technical support centre for the Royal Air Force's C-130 fleet in 1966, had no previous direct experience in the installation of flight refuelling probes when it received the go-ahead to get involved. Probes for refuelling were then standard items in the Royal Air Force, but none were designed for C-130s. Therefore the British decided to use probes from

Vulcan bombers, and the call went out accordingly all over the United Kingdom: 'If you have a Vulcan please remove the refuelling probe.'⁹ Probes were in such short supply that a maintenance crew took a Concorde shuttle to the United States, changed planes in New York for San Diego and, with permission from the Pentagon, removed the probe from a Vulcan mounted on display there. By 28 April, the first probes had been fitted on some LR 4 models, as day and night training of crews commenced. The third modification was to provide some C-130s with air-refuelling capability themselves. Marshall completed this modification to an LR 4 model as well by 8 June, but this capability was not needed before the end of the war a week later.¹⁰ By then, the other modifications had already enabled the British to maintain continuous air resupply to the Task Force from the sustainment base at Ascension.

Ascension became irreplaceable for maintaining aerial resupply of critical items to Task Force ships moving south to the Falklands. Members of the Royal Corps of Transport's 47 Air Dispatch Squadron had departed England for Ascension on 5 April aboard *Fearless*. Their mission was to airdrop small loads to special forces if required. On 19 April, they were joined at Ascension by others from their squadron, and the next day they made their first air drop of high priority supplies to *Invincible* and *Alacrity*. The first LR 2 Hercules reached Wideawake on 12 May. On 16 May, in a flight lasting more than 24 hours and covering a total of 6,300 nautical miles, the modified C-130 dropped 1,000lb of supplies to *Antelope*.¹¹ By 1 June, 47 Air Dispatch had flown on 47 similar sorties, dropping 163 tons of supplies to the Task Force. The ability of the British to airdrop supplies into the war zone permitted them to reduce order-receipt time for high priority items from about two weeks to less than two days. By the war's end, high priority cargo out of Ascension, ranging from critical electronic components to missiles, was being dropped off East Falkland within forty hours of request.¹² Flights were exceeding twenty-eight hours by then. Each Hercules, with two crews aboard, needed two refuellings for such trips. Because Victor tankers also required refuelling on these flights, it took five Victors to get one C-130 near the Falklands to airdrop supplies. Together, pilots of these aircraft helped establish a new world endurance record for the C-130 Hercules.¹³

Needless to say, these logistical feats were not achieved without considerable bravery on the part of pilots and dispatchers. The C-130 Hercules became the first prop-driven airplane to refuel from Britain's Victor tankers. Differences in air speeds of these two aircraft made it impossible to refuel at level flight. The technique eventually perfected was for the Victor tanker to approach the Hercules from above and behind at a height of 23,000 feet. When the Victor was about a mile behind, the Hercules would start descending at a rate of about 500 feet per minute. The Victor then would overtake the descending Hercules and release a drogue to enable the fuel transfer. Refuelling lasted about fifteen minutes as both aircraft flew at 230-240 knots, the minimum speed for the Victor tanker. The Hercules, however, had to be at full throttle in its descent to maintain this speed. Temperatures rose dramatically at times, leading to burnout of several C-130 engines over the course of the war. The refuelling process usually ended at about 8,000 feet above the sea, but slow delivery on occasion meant that drogues were not withdrawn until 2,000 feet above the sea! There were other instances where C-130s, even after successful refuelling, consumed more fuel than expected due to strong headwinds or requirements to loiter near drop zones for tactical reasons; but their pilots calmly landed them back at Ascension with little fuel remaining.

Aerial resupply operations would produce friction between 47 Air Dispatch Squadron and the BFSU Commander that eventually had to be resolved at the MoD. Because of the Commander's insistence that space was limited at Ascension, the MoD was enforcing a policy that all airdrop loads had to be rigged in the United Kingdom rather than at Ascension, against the air dispatcher objections. Such a policy simply failed to recognize that requirements for supplies and priorities often change. Faced with the already long flight times to get supplies to Ascension, the British could ill afford to spend additional time at the last minute disassembling and reassembling loads for airdrop. Admiral Fieldhouse therefore changed the policy on 6 May, permitting loads to be rigged at Ascension.¹⁴ Disagreements about this BFSU-influenced policy were only one of the frustrations then developing at the forward sustainment base.

Complicating matters on a daily basis for BFSU after its arrival was a steady flow of passengers and cargo from the United Kingdom, much of which appeared to be uncontrolled. Units and depots started dispatching supplies to the island at the same time as ships were starting their two-week journeys there. Military personnel who did not sail with the Task Force began arriving individually or in units, carrying with them whatever equipment commanders deemed necessary. There were even reports of men arriving at the Royal Air Force base at Lyneham, signing up for open passenger lists to Ascension, getting themselves aboard airplanes and heading south without proper orders.¹⁵ Although instances of personnel arriving at Ascension without authorization were probably rare, there undoubtedly remained a lack of appreciation by some in the United Kingdom of actual limitations on the island. The flow of personnel and equipment into the island in those first weeks proved steady, and soon space was getting tight. The build-up of support personnel on the island had ballooned to nearly a thousand during this time as well. Roughly eighty per cent of these were members of the Royal Air Force.

The BFSU commander, knowing constraints on the island and trying to keep his operation going in accordance with MoD guidance, implemented procedures that to some seemed draconian. Until portable cabins arrived and were erected, accommodation and subsistence existed for only 200 people at Ascension, all provided by Pan American. Fresh water supplies remained critically short. As a result, Captain McQueen instituted a strict 'one in, one out' policy as the maximum number of personnel who could be accommodated was reached. One unfortunate military chaplain, after enduring the exhausting flight to get to Ascension, arrived unannounced only to discover himself heading back to the United Kingdom on the next returning aircraft. Brigadier Thompson had arranged for a Royal Army Ordnance team to come to Ascension and help with supply operations. McQueen sent them back as well.¹⁶ Others

who showed up and found accommodation discovered themselves pressed into service to meet workload needs. Captain McQueen occasionally commandeered vehicles and other equipment upon arrival to shift supplies around the limited area of hard standing.¹⁷ His unit learned to make do with whatever they could muster.

To some on the ground, running Wideawake at that time was like 'operating a large aircraft carrier'.¹⁸ As flight missions were tasked from the United Kingdom, the senior Royal Air Force representative on the ground at Wideawake juggled resources, shifting aircraft already on the ground or even flying them out if necessary, to make maximum use of the limited hardstand parking. At any one time, Wideawake could house up to thirty aircraft depending on size. There were times, though, when some planes were returned to the United Kingdom or sent to Gibraltar for short periods of time to create space at the airfield for higher priority aircraft.¹⁹ Planes departing the United Kingdom generally flew routes through West Africa, stopping at Gibraltar en route depending on prevailing winds. Movement planners in the United Kingdom specifically coordinated refuelling in Dakar, Senegal or Banjul, Gambia to help ease aircraft demands on fuel stocks at Ascension. Aircraft would then top off at Ascension with lesser amounts before departing on return legs.

There was only so much that the BFSU and planners elsewhere could do to make operations efficient in receiving the personnel, supplies, and equipment that were arriving. Before operations got too far out of control, major installation improvements had to occur on the remote island. These requirements, ranging from establishing messing facilities for support personnel to installing a pipeline system to pump millions of gallons fuel to Wideawake, would also compete for transportation, space, and manpower.

Solving the fuel shortage problem took high priority. A request for a million gallons of aviation fuel soon arrived at the Pentagon in Washington DC. Caspar Weinberger, then the US Secretary of Defense and not a supporter of Secretary of State Alexander Haig's shuttle diplomacy, helped immediately. The British could have obtained the fuel on the open market then, but it would have taken more time. Getting large quantities of fuel to Ascension now became relatively easy. The Pentagon just replaced tankers dispatched to Ascension as soon as they were empty. The main problem became getting the fuel to where it was needed. The pipeline then connecting Catherine's Point, where tankers discharged fuel through a floating pipeline into an American receiving point, and the airfield had common discharge and reception piping. This meant that when fuel was discharged from tankers it could not be pumped to the airfield three and a half miles away. Initially, the British transported fuel to the airfield using tankers, but the steep, rough road proved inadequate to handle the traffic.²⁰

The MoD knew something had to be done to improve fuel supply and storage capabilities on the island because of the anticipated airflow. Sailing toward Ascension in lead vessels of the Task Force at that time were sufficient pumps, pipes, and tanks with the Tactical Supply Wing, Royal Air Force to create a small forward airfield installation to receive fuel.²¹ Soldiers from 1 Troop, 51 Squadron, Royal Engineers arrived to complete a temporary pipeline connecting the fuel farm near the bay to storage tanks by the airfield. It took the engineers only ten days to make their assessment, develop plans and lay the three-mile pipeline. By the time it was completed, soldiers from 12 Petroleum Operations Section, Royal Army Ordnance Corps were arriving to take control of the US shore installation. The Section took over the two boost pumps at the installation and another half way up the line to the airfield. Then, with the arrival of piping and 30,000-gallon collapsible pillow tanks, the Section helped enlarge the fuel farm at the airfield before taking over its operation as well. Within weeks, British soldiers and airmen had installed a fuelling system for Wideawake that included 180,000 gallons of storage capacity and a pipeline to maintain a constant flow of fuel. With the help of their American allies, they now had a steady flow of aviation fuel from tankers anchored off Georgetown. Demand from the new system was so great that, in subsequent weeks, some of the 30,000-gallon tanks would start splitting and leaking from constant emptying and filling under the tropical sun.

After completing the pipeline, engineers shifted their attention to other needs to accommodate the island's increased population of workers. Again with the help of American suppliers, they installed a new desalination plant at English Bay, which would eventually become the site of the main transient tent camp. They renewed the sewage system there; renovated derelict buildings loaned by Cable & Wireless, making use of whatever was available; and put into operation enough portable power sources to take care of a small village. Engineers also improved the road to a remote valley so that the BFSU could move the massive build-up of ammunition further away from the airfield.²² The United States Air Force flew in fourteen paneloads of portable living accommodation, consisting of thirty-one twelve-man living modules. Each expanded into air-conditioned living quarters with bunks, showers, and lavatories. Originally intended for use by the United States Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force, these modules were just what the British needed to house support and transit personnel. British and Americans erected them in five days.²³ When it was all over, the British had created another small village on Ascension and nicknamed it 'Concertina City'.

Lots of other changes were occurring elsewhere on the island. A detachment from 30 Signal Regiment arrived the weekend of the invasion. Using Cable & Wireless circuits, they established communications direct to telephone circuits in the United Kingdom, through which people at Ascension could get quick access to worldwide outlets. During the next four months, these circuits would handle about six hundred calls per day. Then 2 Postal Regiment arrived to provide mail and courier service to those in the Task Force, to include free newspapers and magazines. By the first part of May, about two and a half tons of classified mail alone were arriving weekly. By June, the Regiment handled 20,000 mailbags through Ascension.²⁴ A four-man detachment from 9 Ordnance Battalion arrived to establish a laundry service for

those on the island; they planned to use a 1939 mobile laundry trailer being flown out from the United Kingdom. Before the trailer arrived, though, the detachment discovered an unused laundry in Two Boats Village and restored it to working condition instead. A detachment from Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes (NAAFI) had come and set up small facilities in Georgetown, in Two Boats Village and at English Bay. And a tri-service mess team worked nonstop, preparing a thousand meals a day from three field kitchen sites.²⁵

Despite these and countless other heroic efforts, the fledgling sustainment base was starting to crumble in the face of the massive workload just as 3 Commando Brigade arrived. The original six-man movement control detachment had become so overworked that two more teams eventually deployed to assist them. Furthermore, it was slowly becoming apparent that store handlers were having difficulties identifying and sorting military supplies that had started arriving since the weekend of the invasion.

The first vessel from the Task Force to arrive was the flagship for Admiral Woodward, the aircraft carrier *Hermes*, on 16 April. The following day, the amphibious force started arriving aboard *Fearless*, *Stromness* and the five LSLs. *Canberra* and *Elk* followed on 20 April after refuelling in Freetown. For days thereafter, dozens of ships of various sizes, shapes and colours would pass near or anchor in Ascension waters. It was a curious looking armada indeed. Many ships were stopping for quick replenishment of stores before continuing their passage south toward the Falklands. Routine naval procedure called for vertical replenishment by helicopters to ships in such instances. But what was then bobbing in Atlantic swells off the rocky coast of Ascension was not part of a typical Royal Navy exercise. The assembly formed a complex mixture of units from several services aboard a variety of ships, about which little was known by logisticians who had been working so frantically in and around Wideawake Airfield ever since the first planes landed on 3 April. About 500 tons of assorted supplies were waiting for these ships when they started arriving.

The Royal Navy had controlled receipt and issue of supplies on Ascension with considerable help from civilians ever since the first day. Pallets were taken from aircraft as they landed and placed in areas adjacent to the apron. Then they were sorted and moved by materiel-handling equipment to waiting or storage areas before helicopters flew them to ships. Navy teams ashore, however, were not very familiar with the Army supply system or with 3 Commando Brigade units. Adding to the confusion was the two weeks' worth of supplies rushed helter-skelter from the United Kingdom and stacked wherever space allowed. Some of it had been destined originally for ships at ports in the UK. This cargo was relatively simple to identify and transship. Knowing what went to whom once it arrived on ships, however, was another case entirely. Most ships were transporting multiple units. Consequently, packages consigned to ships rather than units presented problems. Pallets arrived off planes without paperwork, some unmarked and others with only bar code labels on boxes. Incompletely labelled ammunition pallets made it difficult if not impossible to distinguish War Maintenance Reserve ammunition from training ammunition or, in some cases, ammunition for Royal Marines from ammunition for the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force. It was not unusual to find addressees like 'Royal Marines Ascension' or '3 Commando Brigade South Atlantic' scribbled on pallets. As a result of all this, supplies at the airhead had become quite a mess.

Some of that might have been prevented, perhaps, if logisticians in the United Kingdom had anticipated the difficulty of conducting logistics operations under the conditions prevailing at Ascension. The rush to get things to the Task Force as quickly as possible, all too often in complete disregard of the disciplined supply system that had characterized British forces in the past, certainly created part of the problem. Sloppy supply control over the first weeks at Ascension made matters worse. There was little accounting for what arrived. Supplies were not logged in or out, and therefore it was not possible to tell where a particular item was unless someone was actually looking at it on the ground. That is to say, if a box was not in the holding area, you did not know whether it had arrived, been delivered, misplaced or even stolen. Regrettably, the latter case became reality at times. Since there was no security at the airfield holding area, supplies were subject to pilfering.

Resolving the supply problem would not be achieved without adding to the friction between logisticians afloat and those ashore. Soldiers from Ordnance Squadron, Commando Logistic Regiment came ashore eventually to take over supply operations around the airhead under the supervision of Captain McQueen. A composite supply team from Kineton and Donnington depots in the United Kingdom later reinforced the commandos. Together, these men, using materiel-handling equipment drawn from various units, sorted through the maze of pallets and boxes. Some remained on Ascension for the duration of the war to receive, sort, hold, repack, and repalletize supplies as necessary. If items were to be taken further by helicopter, as was often the case, then rigging teams at the airfield prepared the supplies in appropriate nets. In a relatively quick time, the detachment restored order to the supply situation on Ascension. A major headache for them soon became not what was on hand but priorities for issue. Virtually everything arriving from the United Kingdom had been labelled with the highest priority, whether it was ammunition or ironing boards.

Sometimes units' actions exacerbated the situation. An episode related a decade later by retired Major General Ian Baxter, then the colonel directing administration and logistics for Major General Moore, regards the Rapier air defence missile system being deployed for the commandos. Baxter indicated that, in 1982, Royal Marines, including himself and Brigadier Thompson, knew little about the Rapier system. They were dumbfounded to discover the assortment of equipment that accompanied the system to keep it operating. When senior leaders saw the extent of these support necessities, they scarcely believed their eyes and doubted all was needed. And so they directed much of it right back to England, at the time not understanding the importance of it all. Eventually, the Rapier equipment had to find a way back to

Ascension and on to ships. It intentionally became stowed in bottom cargo holds to prevent damage by salt water, which meant it would take more time to offload later.

A major task facing Commodore Clapp at this time was re-stowing the thousands of tons of supplies that had so hurriedly been stashed aboard ships in the United Kingdom. During the two weeks at sea, logisticians recorded most storage locations. At Ascension, they commenced the complex process of shifting items between ships and relocating them within ships so that, if war became a reality, what was needed would be ready. By this time, Wideawake Airfield had been averaging eight cargo planes per day packed with supplies and equipment. About 1500 tons of supplies had arrived, a third of which were waiting for 3 Commando Brigade upon its arrival. Logisticians afloat worked with those ashore to shuttle supplies to ships. Priorities were to issue two days of ammunition and rations to units, to configure LSLs with another two days of supplies for backup, to make sure artillery ammunition was loaded with guns and to consolidate demolitions and other engineer stores with 59 Independent Commando Squadron, Royal Engineers.

Complicating matters at first was the inability of LPD *Fearless* to dock herself down to release her LCUs. Since she arrived so low on fuel after foregoing bunkering, she was now too high in the water to release the landing craft. Consequently, re-stow started without the benefit of the only LCUs in the Task Force at the time. Helicopters ferried stores from island holding areas to ships and between ships. Soon, floating parking lots of mexeflotes were bobbing up and down in the Atlantic swell among the strange array of ships off Ascension. Mexeflotes moved to and from ships and became floating staging areas, as men removed layers of supplies to get at what was needed. Logisticians worked as fast as they could. They redistributed War Maintenance Reserves between ships while trying to preserve some flexibility to support eventual tactical plans. Their focus remained on configuring two of the LSLs – *Sir Galahad* and *Sir Percivale* – with two days of supplies for the brigade, consisting mainly of ammunition, packed fuel and rations, a total of 200 tons. Another four days of supply would be on *Stromness*, with sixteen additional days on *Elk*. These two ships would keep backup supplies available at the edge of the Total Exclusion Zone for re-stocking LSLs as required.

Another aim of the re-stow was to issue first-line supplies to units. Up to this time, many units had been separated from supplies they would require when landing in the Falklands. Units now needed their initial issues of ammunition, food and other selected items on the same ships that would carry them south. That way, they would have what they needed for the amphibious assault.

Re-stowage took a full eleven days. The BFSU's helicopter support element ashore prepared hundreds of loads during this time. In all there were six helicopters supporting the re-stow: two Wessexes, three Sea Kings and one heavy-lift CH47 Chinook. In one day pilots flew 138 Wessex, 40 Chinook, and 40 Sea King sorties with supplies from the airfield to ships. Helicopter pilots routinely refuelled hot at the airfield with engines running amidst fixed wing aircraft, all without mishap. A shortage of lifting gear and cargo nets slowed operations at times. If loads were prepared and requirements changed, then the loads had to be dismantled and repackaged. It was, as one member recalled, 'damned hard work'.²⁶

The work was no easier on ships anchored off shore. The only way of lifting items on or off most ships was by air. Considerable work had to precede the arrival of helicopters. Because items had been stuffed every which way in vessels, it was routinely the case that supplies on upper decks had to be repositioned to create space before cranes could lift supplies up from lower decks for the helicopters to move. The passage south had not been kind to the haphazardly loaded supplies either. As men moved cranes to retrieve ammunition from MV *Elk*, they discovered 'rough seas had dislodged some of the load, so instead of neat pallets, everything was stuck in the middle. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack.'²⁷

Nor was it easy for soldiers on mexeflote platforms bobbing up and down in swells to ferry stocks. One crew had just retired for the night aboard *Sir Lancelot* after finishing a long day of moving cargo throughout the anchorage. The Officer of the Watch roused them out of their bunks after a few hours and informed them that the LSL had to move to sea because hostile ships were in the area. To save time, *Lancelot* was to sail without mexeflotes and crews. So the crew was cast afloat on its mexeflote to fend for themselves. Conveniently for them, they found a mooring buoy in the dark, close to the beach, and secured themselves to it. The only protection for them on the floating raft was a few cargo nets and ammunition boxes, which they quickly formed into a shelter.²⁸

The threat never materialized, but the British took few chances. They had no viable defence in place at Ascension at the time, and they knew Argentina was capable of ranging large aircraft to the island or discharging special forces from ships. Its merchant vessel *Rio de la Plata* passed within four miles of Ascension on 25 April. Two days later, another Argentine merchant ship showed up in the area. Then, on 2 May, a Soviet spy trawler appeared in the distance. Such developments combined to create concern for the security of the Task Force. The British already were planning to deploy more Harriers to Ascension to link up with Task Force shipping. Eventually, some would be used to provide protection for ships operating in the area. As an interim precaution, ships received instructions to weigh anchor and steam out to sea at the end of each day; unfortunately, this slowed the re-stow process even further by preventing shuttling of supplies at night. Eight Harrier GR3s arrived for the Task Force on 5 May, and three remained at Ascension until Phantom interceptors eventually replaced them. That same day, the British installed a radar system on top of Green Mountain, using a Chinook helicopter disembarked from *Atlantic Conveyor*. They then announced a 200-mile 'terminal control area' around Ascension and required prior notification of all flights into the area.²⁹

The majority of Task Force marines and soldiers not involved in the re-stow engaged in training both afloat and ashore. Troops needed to zero weapons and armoured vehicles. The BFSU, with assistance

from the manager of Pan American, set up several training areas for use, to include a live-fire range for armoured vehicles. Commanders made the most of the time available. Troops were ferried ashore to English Bay by helicopter or landing craft and practised assaults. They conditioned themselves by marching the six miles to ranges to zero their weapons and then back to English Bay. Training ashore provided a premonition of likely ammunition expenditure rates. For example, 45 Commando fired a nine-year allocation of MILAN anti-tank training ammunition at Ascension in a single day.

Rehearsing procedures for disembarking transport ships into amphibious landing craft was also an important unit training priority. STUFT vessels posed particular concern. These ships lacked the internal communication systems found on amphibious ships to facilitate such operations. Units therefore needed to practise getting off the ships into landing craft quickly and safely. If they did not, then any amphibious assault could degenerate into a disorganized struggle to get ashore and would almost certainly jeopardize the success of the operation. Some Royal Marines had trained in similar procedures, but disembarking from STUFT would be new for all of them. Amphibious operations would be a completely different experience for paratroopers, though, since their skill was in jumping out of airplanes on to battlefields. They did not train to disembark ships to assault beaches. Consequently, everyone needed some degree of training, and so they practised disembarking into landing craft when ships were stationary and also when they were moving. Landing craft and helicopter availability constrained the time available since these movement assets were stretched already in the re-stow operation. Logistics requirements retained priority. Thompson allocated each battalion/commando one day and one night for landing craft rehearsals.

As logisticians were just starting to shuffle around supplies, Admiral Fieldhouse and Major General Moore arrived at Wideawake for a series of briefings as planned on 17 April aboard *Hermes*. Over a hundred commanders and staff crowded into a small briefing room on the carrier, where briefers shared assessments of the situation. Fieldhouse listened carefully to Woodward's concerns about timing and the eventual maintenance needs of ships. They assumed the two carriers would stay operational until mid-June and agreed on the need to liberate Stanley before then. They decided that the amphibious assault must take place by the third week in May and that special forces would land in the Falklands by 1 May to allow sufficient time to gather intelligence. The group concluded that the Carrier Battle Group should proceed south immediately to enforce the TEZ blockade and insert those special forces. Fieldhouse ruled out an amphibious landing at any place other than East Falkland. The exact location of the landing on East Falkland, however, remained unspecified. All agreed that Clapp and Thompson would continue evaluating options for landing areas and that special forces would provide intelligence regarding locations under consideration. By the end of the meeting, Fieldhouse stated categorically, for the first time, that Woodward's Carrier Battle Group would win the air and sea battles before any amphibious landing took place. Few, however, believed that would be possible. The Amphibious Task Force would remain at Ascension for the time being to carry out its re-stow of supplies and equipment.

The meeting produced several important decisions with implications for Task Force logistics. Fieldhouse agreed that 3 Commando Brigade needed reinforcement by another parachute battalion, an additional battery of 105mm light artillery guns, more engineers, medics, Blowpipes for air defence and light helicopters. Most of these reinforcements were, in fact, already being mobilized. This would bring the strength of the Land Force to about 5,500 men spread over five battalion-sized units with twenty-four 105mm light guns, eight tracked armoured reconnaissance vehicles, a battery of Rapier surface-to-air missiles and fifteen light helicopters.³⁰ Moreover, the assembly concluded that another brigade was required to increase overall ground combat strength, since 3 Commando Brigade, even when reinforced with a second parachute regiment, remained only half the size of the 10,000-strong Argentine force anticipated in the Falklands. The British Army's 5 Infantry Brigade would become that additional force. Previously known as 8th Field Force until it was renamed in January 1982, it was quite different from 3 Commando Brigade. Until its redesignation, the brigade had been a mixture of Regular Army and Territorial Army units, with a primary focus on homeland defence and secondary focus on out-of-area contingencies. It was a new formation that had not trained together before. Two of its famous units, the parachute battalions, were now deploying as attachments to the more prestigious 3 Commando Brigade.

Aboard *Hermes*, Thompson specifically requested more load-carrying transportation to support his brigade. There being no other aircraft carriers remaining, the MoD agreed shortly thereafter to requisition the container ship *Atlantic Conveyor* and convert her into a platform for heavy-lift helicopters and other aircraft. *Atlantic Conveyor* would be modified and sail loaded from England eight days after the meeting aboard *Hermes*. *Intrepid*, the second Landing Platform Dock, would join the Amphibious Task Force as well. Hellberg and Baxter huddled separately with Major General Moore at Ascension to work on logistics issues. They agreed that the current thirty days' supply of ammunition at Limited War Rates was insufficient. Estimates indicated that, at intense rates of fire, artillery and mortar ammunition supplies would not last a week. As a result, Baxter arranged for another thirty days of this ammunition, including 30mm armour-piercing rounds for the Scimitar light tanks and variable time fuses for artillery shells. Variable time fuses were not included in the artillery regiment's first line issue of ammunition. These fuses, whose settings enabled artillery shells to explode above ground level, would be much more effective in the open, peat-covered terrain common throughout much of the Falklands. So Baxter got more fuses from the British Army of the Rhine in Germany.³¹

The meeting aboard *Hermes* cut to the quick of some important issues, but it nevertheless left Brigadier Thompson and Commodore Clapp a little frustrated. Thompson had hoped for more specifics about what was expected. Although it was agreed that the earliest possible landing date would be 14/15 May, his mission remained vague. Where he was to land and with what objectives in mind would dramatically

influence logistics requirements and the time needed to get a sustainment base ashore on East Falkland. They had to continue configuring supplies for battle largely by guesswork.

On 18 April, the day after the meeting with Fieldhouse, the Carrier Battle Group headed south. Ten days later, Task Force commanders finally received a little more guidance. It reflected the objective that Chief of Defence Staff Lewin had proposed to the War Cabinet weeks before, to avoid war by 'bringing about the withdrawal of Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands and dependencies, and the re-establishment of British administration there, as quickly as possible'.³² Included in the guidance were requirements for Woodward to cut off supplies to the Argentines, discredit their claim to sovereignty, provoke their naval and air forces into action, and to control the sea and air for a main landing; and for Clapp to establish a beachhead close enough to exert military and psychological pressure on the main Argentine force in the Port Stanley area. The guidance expressed the hope that such actions 'may be enough to convince the Argentines that their own position is militarily untenable and that they can honourably agree to withdraw....'³³ The new information probably produced more confusion than clarity. It certainly did little to help Thompson, Clapp and their logisticians assess how to configure forces and supplies for an amphibious assault. It remained clear that Thatcher and her War Cabinet were still hoping to avoid war. Until circumstances changed that perspective, guidance for planning a ground war would remain vague.

By the end of April, the re-stow operation and other tasks were nearing completion. Clapp had arranged for some experts to assess the underwater signatures of ships to reduce the risk of magnetic mines, and for others to train ship crews on damage control and repair. Royal Navy engineers had installed 40mm anti-aircraft guns on the LSLs to provide some protection against air attack and repaired the reverse-osmosis fresh water generators installed in *Uganda* at Gibraltar. Moore flew back to Ascension Island on 29 April to update Thompson and Clapp on decisions in London. All but three of the nineteen beaches considered for amphibious landings had been eliminated. Those remaining were the ones Clapp and Thompson had been studying: Cow Bay/Volunteer Bay, Berkeley Sound, and San Carlos Bay. When Moore returned to London, he took with him an outline of operations orders for each of the three options. On 30 April, Thompson gathered his commanders together and, in strictest confidence, shared with them details of planning up until then. Many decisions still would be forthcoming, but one thing seemed sure. It started to look for the first time as if they really were going to war. The next day, Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg and the bulk of his Commando Logistic Regiment weighed anchors and headed south in their slower LSLs. The rest of the Amphibious Task Force would catch up with them before reaching the Falklands.

The other manoeuvre battalion, the 2nd Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, proudly known as 2 Para, arrived aboard the ferry *Norland* on the morning of 7 May. Thompson urgently requested a little more time so that 2 Para also could practise disembarking into landing craft from *Norland*. He was granted just a few more hours before the War Cabinet in London ordered the Amphibious Task Force south. The Group sailed at 2200 hrs that evening. Somewhere out in the South Atlantic, hundreds of miles ahead, the five slower LSLs were already steaming. Few members of the Task Force now doubted they would see some action. Too much had happened since they arrived at Ascension three weeks before. Still more was to happen in the days ahead that would make war even more likely.

Chapter 5

Final Preparation for the Amphibious Assault

Few aboard ships, in London or in Washington DC ever imagined that Argentina would prefer going to war rather than negotiate a settlement. By 1 May, however, those beliefs were starting to change. Despite almost complete support for the British in the United Nations, diplomatic efforts to find a peaceful solution were not finding traction in either the United Kingdom or Argentina. The Carrier Battle Group had arrived in the South Atlantic, and Argentina continued moving troops and supplies into the islands, while those already there worked on defences. Then, as British forces were completing their stay on Ascension, both countries took action which made war over the Falkland Islands a near certainty.

Five weeks after Argentine scrap metal workers hoisted their country's flag at Leith, the Paraquet Group reclaimed South Georgia with hardly a fight. On 25 April, the Argentine submarine *Santa Fe* made the mistake of surfacing in proximity to ships carrying Royal Marines ready to retake the island with force. With some naval gunfire, several well-aimed rockets from helicopters and a couple of depth charges, the British disabled the submarine, which then limped back into Grytviken. At the time, the marines aboard *Tidespring* were still 200 miles away. It would not be necessary for them to execute their plan. The frigates *Antrim* and *Broadsword* started bombarding the area around Grytviken to intimidate the Argentines. As the bombardment approached the settlement, the captain of the *Santa Fe* and the 137 Argentine military on land soon surrendered. It was an embarrassingly quick reversal of fortune for Argentina.

The quick victory at South Georgia, however, was not without misfortune for the British. In what remains a controversial decision, the commander of Paraquet Group directed special forces to land by helicopter on Fortuna Glacier and conduct reconnaissance, against the objections of the Group's Land Force commander, who had experience operating in such hazardous Antarctic conditions. Not long after insertion, the special forces had discovered travel on the glacier to be precarious because of whiteout conditions and crevasses. During evacuation, two of three Wessex helicopters crashed. Although all the men on board survived, the loss of those helicopters would prove very costly later.

The retaking of South Georgia removed any doubts about Britain's resolve to take back the Falklands by force if necessary. The island also provided them with their first foothold in the South Atlantic. About 900 miles from the Falklands, it might have seemed a convenient location to augment Ascension as a forward sustainment base. Unfortunately, South Georgia was virtually inaccessible except in small areas around the old whaling station at Grytviken or the abandoned settlements at Leith and Stromness. No docks or piers existed for berthing cargo ships. Although putting supplies and equipment on land was possible by landing craft, little could be done ashore after that. There was no infrastructure or landing areas for planes. It was an environment far more inhospitable than the main islands of East and West Falkland, bitterly cold and routinely buffeted by gale force winds, a place where only vast colonies of penguins and seals thrived. South Georgia nonetheless afforded the British a sheltered anchorage, well away from East Falkland and the reach of Argentine planes, to take care of other Task Force requirements as they developed. The Royal Navy by this time had earmarked several areas in the Atlantic to service vessels in the Task Force. Midway between Ascension and the Falklands, it established a Replenishment and Consolidation Area for fleet auxiliary vessels to receive and issue supplies. On the north-east edge of the Total Exclusion Zone, a Tug, Repair, and Logistics Area (TRALA) provided a location where ships could receive supplies from support vessels; where supplies could be held until taken to ships throughout the area; and where maintenance and battle damage repair to the fleet could take place. Also on the eastern side of the Total Exclusion Zone, a Logistics Loitering Area (LLA) was planned for those ships that would maintain supplies generally for the Amphibious Task Force and then shuttle them to East Falkland. South Georgia could supplement the TRALA in coming weeks by offering the fleet another, more protected area, where ships could rendezvous if necessary to conduct similar activities. Moreover, it would provide a convenient location for ships to anchor away from hazards of the war zone and to transfer troops and equipment to other ships for movement to East Falkland. This would be particularly advantageous when the politically sensitive ocean liner *QE2* arrived in the South Atlantic.

On 1 May, the British conducted the first of seven long-range Vulcan bomber strikes, attempting to crater the runway at Stanley and thereby impede Argentina's ability to reinforce the island or conduct airstrikes from there on British ships. Codenamed Black Buck, these bombing missions demonstrated that although its nearest airfield was thousands of miles away at Ascension, the Royal Air Force nonetheless could strike the Falklands. Each of the Black Buck missions required eighty air crewmen and eighteen sorties flown by fifteen Victor Tankers, a Nimrod surveillance plane and two Vulcan bombers, in total necessitating seventeen fuel transfers and consuming 2,000,000lb of fuel.¹ At the time, these flights were the longest bombing runs in history. The first mission dropped twenty-one bombs. Just one landed towards the edge of the airfield. It was the only time that the Vulcans managed to hit near the actual runway, and although the bomb left a large crater, the damage had no effect on landings of Argentine cargo planes. The result was nevertheless quite significant, aside from demonstrating British resolve and striking

power. Menendez had estimated that his troops required seventeen tons of food and over nine tons of fuel each day. During the first bombing run, two civilian freighters were anchored off of Stanley. Both pulled anchors and fled quickly, taking with them large quantities of supplies and equipment that would have been helpful to troops and defences. Neither ship returned to the Falklands.² The same day that Royal Air Force Vulcans cratered the airfield at Stanley, British Harriers from the Carrier Battle Group bombed the tiny airstrip at Goose Green, destroying several Pucara ground-attack aircraft. These successful air attacks by the British did not create a point of no return between Britain and Argentina. But what happened in the next three days surely meant that both countries had crossed the Rubicon, and focused world attention on the area.

By this time, British submarines had been lurking in waters around the Falklands and tracking movements of Argentina's Navy. They had discovered and reported two formations of ships just on the edge of the TEZ. To the north-west of the Falklands was Argentina's aircraft carrier *Veinticinco de Mayo* with other warships. To the south-west was the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano* with two accompanying destroyers. Both formations had the capability of firing Exocet missiles at the Carrier Battle Group if they gained range to do so. Planes from the *Veinticinco de Mayo* had a wider radius of action than the Sea Harriers and now were coming within range. Fearing a potential pincer movement by these two groups and the striking power of Exocet missiles, Woodward requested permission to torpedo the *General Belgrano*. Approval supposedly came from Thatcher herself. On 2 May, the British submarine *Conqueror* torpedoed *Belgrano* near the edge of the TEZ. The cruiser sank within an hour, killing an estimated 350 Argentine sailors and causing outrage in countries sympathetic to Argentina.

As controversial as this sinking and loss of life might have been, it produced a host of benefits for the British, far beyond their expectations. Thatcher had asked Admiral Leach during her last meeting with him on the evening of 1 April how the commander of the Argentine Navy would react to the British Navy. When he responded that the commander would return his fleet to harbour, she pressed him for a reason why, to which he said, 'Because I should appreciate that although I could take out some of the British ships, they would sink my entire Navy. It would take years to recover, if indeed it were practicable to do so.'³ Whether or not that was the thinking at the time, the Argentine Navy acted precisely as Leach predicted. After the sinking of the *Belgrano*, the carrier *Veinticinco de Mayo* and the rest of the Argentine Navy at sea headed back to port. They then stayed there for the remainder of the war, seriously stripping the Argentine Air Force of any flexibility in its bombing runs. No longer could its planes cut distances to targets by flying off the deck of an aircraft carrier. Now they had to fly from land bases 350 or more miles away from the Falklands, leaving pilots only seconds to make bombing decisions before returning for fuel. But the effect of the sinking of the *Belgrano* was not limited to its subsequent effects on Argentine air power. Lacking naval protection, merchant vessels had no desire to enter waters around the Falklands again. This forced Argentina to use cargo planes to provide the large tonnage of supplies needed daily by its occupation force. Strategically, the sinking of the *Belgrano* became one of the most important actions of the entire war.

On 4 May, though, Argentina achieved something to boast about as well. Two of its Super Etendards, each carrying a French-made Exocet missile, ranged the Carrier Battle Group about twelve miles away and launched their missiles. One Exocet apparently was deflected by British air defence measures. The other, however, struck the starboard side of the British destroyer HMS *Sheffield*, penetrated and burst into flames fed by the ship's fuel, killing twenty British sailors and wounding two dozen more. *Sheffield* had been launched less than five years before amidst much publicity. She sank as other ships were attempting to pull her back to Ascension and became the first British ship lost to enemy action since the Second World War. News of the loss of *Sheffield* was sobering for the British, underscoring the vulnerability of their ships at sea. Woodward's reaction to the attack was to direct his Battle Group to positions further to the east, making them even more difficult for Argentine pilots to range from mainland bases. Frustrating the British further, the Argentines shot down a Harrier on a bombing run over East Falkland the same day they struck *Sheffield*. Two days later, a pair of Harriers collided in the fog killing both pilots. The first week of May suddenly had become very costly for both countries.

The British knew at this point that Argentina had used two of its original five Exocets received from France and that it was trying hard to procure more. Although France had agreed secretly to delay completion of Argentina's original procurement order for ten of these missiles, Exocets remained available from other sources, particularly from countries like Iraq, which had a couple of dozen, and Peru, which was in the process of trying to procure some. Britain worried about Argentina getting its hands on any more of them. Secretary of Defence Nott therefore authorized secret agents to take covert initiatives to stop or inhibit more purchases. Some agents posed as buyers in international markets for the missiles and outbid the Argentines; others located Exocets in storage for sale and rendered them inoperable.⁴ Such actions proved to be remarkably successful in preventing further procurements. After the sinking of the *Sheffield*, though, Argentina still retained three of its five Exocets. Although it would receive no more, these remaining three continued to worry the British until the end of the war.

The ease with which the British took back South Georgia, coupled with the sinking of the *General Belgrano*, might have created second thoughts for the Junta about the wisdom of invading the Falklands. If that was the case, the sinking of the *Sheffield* reinforced its intent to fight back. Hopes for a peaceful solution and the likelihood of an Argentine withdrawal now seemed remote. Staffs with Fieldhouse and the Task Force assessed the remaining three options for landing sites on East Falkland. Some still wanted a site in proximity to Stanley, thereby permitting a short approach to the concentration of Argentine forces there. Others preferred a location further away that allowed better protection. Ultimately, however,

Fieldhouse left the decision to his commanders who would have to execute the amphibious operation. Clapp contacted Fieldhouse's headquarters at Northwood on 8 May, as *Fearless* was leading the Amphibious Task Force away from Ascension, to determine if it was possible to 'go firm' on San Carlos. Northwood concurred, which enabled the two leaders to complete details for an amphibious assault.

San Carlos was a good choice for several reasons. Since it was on the other side of the island from the concentration of Argentine forces at Stanley, landing there would come as a surprise to Brigadier General Menendez. If Argentina launched air attacks against the Task Force as operations were underway, pilots would not find it easy to zero in on British ships. The area was protected by reasonably high ground. Pilots would not want to enter the area from high altitudes because they would become vulnerable to the very effective Sea Dart missiles on British ships. Low approaches would obscure ship locations and mean added risks of flying into land. High ground around San Carlos made it even tougher for pilots to locate and fire on ships before becoming exposed. The area was outside the range of any known Argentine artillery. Falkland Sound leading to San Carlos also afforded much calmer waters for ships, landing craft, and mexeflotes than open seas elsewhere, and its waters, far away from Stanley, were much less likely to be mined. All of this was important because the British would be most vulnerable as landings and build-up on beaches were underway. Speed would be essential, and the protected waters allowed for twenty-four-hour landing craft and mexeflote operations. It was also easy to guard against counter-attack, even though ships remained vulnerable to Argentina's small submarines.

By this time, the LSLs were sailing an entire week ahead of the rest of the Amphibious Task Force, even though bow doors and side-loaded mexeflotes had been slowing them in rough seas. It was just as clear to men on board these logistics ships that a ground war was becoming imminent, but the location of the landings remained unclear to them. The two-week stay at Ascension had enabled them to sort out much of the mess in cargo holds of ships before heading south, but their preparation for supporting the Land Force was far from over. Neither the Commodore nor Commando Logistic Regiment had provided full-scale logistics support for 3 Commando Brigade in previous exercises, let alone to a combat force nearly twice as large after the addition of two parachute battalions.

The two amphibious exercises planned each year routinely had been prearranged by other NATO staffs over several months. Thus the operational staffs had had no opportunity to sit together and plan a landing or rehash plans as a result of enemy action, weather and other factors. On a recent exercise in Norwegian waters in January 1982, Brigadier Thompson and his staff were prevented from joining Commodore Clapp because of costs, despite never having exercised together. The exercise being planned for later that year would unfold like most others: supplies would arrive by rail; Commando Logistic Regiment would benefit from host nation support to augment its own slimmed down capabilities to support units; no logistics ships were scheduled to participate, let alone to move supplies on to beaches. Now, however, units were headed toward an operation of far greater magnitude than any previous exercise. The approach to the Falklands therefore allowed some valuable time for teaching the two staffs to work together and reach essential compromises.

Responsibility for configuring supplies based on directions from Brigade logistics staff and for training troops to issue them quickly fell to Major Anthony Welch, Commander of Ordnance Squadron. Supplies for 3 Commando Brigade remained packed around LSLs heading south. His men had secured them the best they could in anticipation of rougher seas in the South Atlantic. The Squadron now faced the challenge of unloading large quantities of supplies when the LSLs arrived in the Falklands. Hoists on the logistics ships provided only limited assistance because they could not reach many of the places where supplies were stowed. Welch therefore initiated further training after leaving Ascension so that his men could practise moving supplies from bottom storage areas to the top decks of the LSLs, where helicopters could then lift them to shore. The Squadron formed human chains to pass supplies hand-to-hand around LSLs. It eventually succeeded in moving a ton of ammunition from the bottom of an LSL to the top deck in eleven minutes. The Squadron also refined procedures for issuing supplies and for maintaining inventories, so that during the rush to get supplies ashore they did not duplicate the confusion they had experienced weeks before at Ascension.

On 12 May, the official order finally arrived for the leaders aboard *Fearless*. This instructed the forces in theatre to repossess the Falklands as quickly as possible. It outlined a six-phase operation beginning with the establishment of a Total Exclusion Zone and reconnaissance, both of which had started, and continuing with the amphibious landing, initial land operations, the arrival of 5 Infantry Brigade and finally the repossession of the islands. It specified that the amphibious landing would not be initiated until Woodward had achieved sea and air superiority.

On this day, Major General Moore was designated officially as the Commander, Land Force Falkland Islands, or CLFFI. This was much to the surprise and concern of Thompson and Clapp as it theoretically meant the Commander Amphibious Task Force, which comprised both ships and land forces, would have to negotiate with Moore and not Thompson. It also helped confirm their belief that no one above them in London really understood how an amphibious operation should be planned or commanded. They therefore decided to continue planning the amphibious operation together as if there had been no change in command structure, but to keep Moore informed of progress. The full Land Force would consist of 3 Commando Brigade and 5 Brigade. Moore would be sailing south with 5 Brigade on the luxury liner *QE2*, which just had been requisitioned as another troop ship. Thompson received directives from Moore later the same day, although they did not provide details regarding expectations beyond beaches. Clapp was not a recipient, even though he would be in command of the operation. Moore told Thompson:

You are to secure a bridgehead on East Falkland, into which reinforcements can be landed, in which an airstrip can be

established and from which operations to repossess the Falkland Islands can be achieved.

You are to push forward from the bridgehead area so far as the maintenance of its security allows, to gain information, to establish moral and physical domination over the enemy, and to forward the ultimate objective of repossession. You will retain operational control of all forces landed in the Falklands until I establish my Headquarters in the area. It is my intention to do this, aboard *Fearless*, as early as practicable after the landing. Expect this to be approximately on D+7. It is then my intention to land 5 Infantry Brigade into the beachhead and to develop operations for the complete repossession of the Falkland Islands.⁵

The amphibious landings and the subsequent build-up ashore would become known as Operation Sutton. The earliest date for the landings would be 18 May, depending on the situation. Complicating matters, though, were warnings by Woodward at this time that achieving air superiority might not be possible. That was something Clapp suspected; it created understandable concern for Thompson. Lack of air superiority posed serious potential ramifications for the Amphibious Task Force. A brief review of what occurs during an amphibious assault will reveal why.

Amphibious operations generally take place in three very distinct phases, preceded by intelligence gathering, beach selection and careful planning. The first is the actual assault conducted by ground combat forces to seize footholds on land; the second is the strengthening of the land force with combat support units like artillery and air defence; and the third is the building up of logistics capabilities. All phases require precise sequencing of landing craft to maintain momentum. If helicopters are available to transport men or supplies ashore in any phase, then they too are carefully allocated and controlled. Everything destined for land becomes part of an intricate movement plan broken down into assault waves based on available craft and priority of objectives. Anything that impedes the first phase can prevent combat forces from seizing objectives and securing what is known as the beachhead. Anything inhibiting the second jeopardizes the ability of those combat forces to hold on to the beachhead. And anything preventing the third threatens the ability of the land force to move beyond beaches with sufficient logistics support to secure objectives elsewhere. Delays therefore create opportunities for the enemy to regain the initiative and prevent forces from ever breaking out of the beachhead. Planning therefore seeks to accomplish all phases as quickly as possible, to put only what is necessary ashore and to keep pressure on the enemy in the meantime. Clapp's and Thompson's staffs were doing just that. They estimated it would take two days to get what was needed into the San Carlos beachhead before any breakout could occur. During this time, and particularly as they were establishing initial defences, the operation would be most vulnerable to counter-attack. Now that the Carrier Battle Group might not gain control of the skies, however, a distinct possibility existed that the Argentines could disrupt British plans without using ground forces. The amphibious operation would be considered complete only when Thompson judged units were organized ashore with sufficient supplies available for them to go it alone and then advised Clapp as such.

An additional cause for concern was the vague directive from Moore to Thompson on 12 May. Although it gave Thompson the prerogative to do whatever he felt was necessary to maintain security of the beachhead and establish dominance over the Argentines until Moore landed with 5 Brigade a week thereafter, the directive did not provide him objectives beyond the beachhead or even the latitude to commence a ground offensive to retake control of the island. Moreover, it implied that Moore expected Thompson's land force and perhaps Clapp's amphibious force to remain near the beachhead at San Carlos until Moore arrived with 5 Brigade a week later. That presented a potential problem, too, especially if Argentina retained credible air power.

The day after Brigadier Thompson received his directives from Moore, he called his subordinate commanders aboard *Fearless* to brief them on the mission at hand. Commodore Clapp and his key staff attended as well to ensure teams were synchronized, since he would control the operation until the Land Force was established ashore and ready to take over. At the meeting, Clapp's staff would detail plans for naval gunfire and the use of landing craft. Everyone had received copies of the operations order beforehand so that they could absorb details and identify questions. One commander not present for the meeting was Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg, who was then with his Commando Logistic Regiment moving on LSLs ahead of other ships in the Amphibious Task Force. His second in command, Major Terry Knott, was present; Thompson would later link up with Hellberg as the main group of ships joined up with the LSLs to brief him personally as well. Surgeon Commander Rick Jolly describes the succinct seriousness of Thompson's remarks to his men that day:

The Brigadier stands up, looks for a moment at the Commanding Officers sitting in the chintz-covered front-row chairs, dons his spectacles and in a quiet but clear voice gives his orders: 'Mission, gentlemen. To land in Port San Carlos, San Carlos Settlement, and Ajax Bay, and establish a beachhead for mounting offensive operations leading to the capture of the Falkland Islands.'

There is absolute silence. He repeats the sentence, then carries on: 'Design for battle. A *silent* night attack by landing craft, with the object of securing a high ground by first light ...'

The crisp instructions follow, one by one, until every angle and problem is covered.⁶

Four days later, intelligence arrived that the Argentines had positioned a strategic reserve in the area of Darwin, on the isthmus south of San Carlos; so Thompson adjusted his order to confront that possible threat first. The final plan called for four of the five combat units to go ashore under cover of darkness starting at 0230 hrs.⁷ The initial wave would consist of 2 Para and 40 Commando in twelve landing craft to secure high ground around the anchorage. The frigate *Plymouth* would provide fire support as required. The paratroopers would land first near San Carlos Settlement at a location designated Blue Beach. From there, they would climb the 700-900ft ridges of Sussex Mountain, establish defensive positions on the reverse slope and maintain observation to the south toward Darwin and Goose Green in anticipation of a counter-attack. The commandos would land nearby minutes later, fan out and establish a

similar defence facing east from the smaller Verde Mountains. Landing craft then would return for 45 Commando and 3 Para for the second wave. The former would head for a landing site designated Red Beach on the west side of the anchorage in Ajax Bay; 3 Para would land at an area called Green Beach near Port San Carlos. Together, the second wave of combat forces would broaden the beachhead. Initially, 42 Commando would remain afloat as reserve; it then would follow 3 Para into the area of Green Beach later in the day. At daylight, helicopters and landing craft would commence a carefully programmed movement of men, equipment and supplies to areas throughout the anchorage. It would start with the 105mm artillery and Rapiers and then proceed to logistics necessities. Movements were sequenced for the first forty hours to get requirements ashore. Commodore Clapp's staff had developed a detailed plan for positioning warships to counter Argentine airstrikes during landings and the build-up. The British now expected some attack planes to arrive from the west over West Falkland, if Argentines received reports from any remaining observation posts on Mount Rosalie about landings. The plan therefore called for an echeloned phalanx of ships to be located in Falkland Sound. To get beyond the Sound in order to attack ships in the San Carlos anchorage, Argentine pilots would have to get past this defence.

The last speaker at the 'O Group' was Major Gerry Wells-Cole, the Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General for 3 Commando Brigade. Wells-Cole, the chief logistics staff officer in the Brigade, had assumed his position a week before the Argentine invasion. He was now responsible for planning logistics support of the Brigade, which had been detailed in a fifteen-page logistics annex to the order.⁸ Wells-Cole highlighted salient points for support. Although specifics for logistics had been evolving over the past few weeks, the general concept remained relatively unchanged from plans developed en route to Ascension. The support elements of the combat units, called B Echelons, and all of Commando Logistic Regiment, would remain afloat initially. Combat units would land with basic loads of rations, ammunition and other supplies. Every vehicle would top off with fuel and take two full jerrycans as reserve. Some troops would carry extra rounds of mortar ammunition to leave on the beach for quick resupply during the first phase of the assault. About two days of supplies would remain on ships. Units needing anything further would coordinate with their B Echelons, which would receive transportation support through Commando Logistic Regiment as required. After combat units secured the beachhead, some of the Brigade logistics capability would come ashore. Unit B Echelons would move to designated areas with their units as a tailored portion of Commando Logistic Regiment formed a small BMA in the vicinity of Ajax Bay near Red Beach. Hellberg and Wells-Cole would decide the exact location later. As the situation stabilized, engineers then would establish a fuelling system on land so that helicopters and Harriers would not have to return to ships to refuel. Engineers also would establish water points at designated locations, since little potable water would be available anywhere on the island. The BMA eventually would stock about three days of supply for the land force. LSLs would deliver these supplies straight to the beach if possible. When other supplies were needed, Commando Logistic Regiment working with Thompson's and Clapp's staffs would coordinate replenishment from supply vessels holding greater quantities of stocks in the LLA further out in the TEZ. If all went as anticipated, 3 Commando Brigade expected to have five days of supply spread between beaches and logistics ships in the anchorage, with nearly two months' more at sea. It would request other ships to bring more supplies to the anchorage as needed.

The process set forth in the 3 Commando Brigade operations order was, in military terms, a 'pull system' of resupply. If a company in 42 Commando needed something, for instance, it notified its B Echelon, which either fulfilled the request or obtained support from Commando Logistic Regiment. Requests for support flowed from bottom to top. This differed from a 'push system', in which higher levels provided supplies or services to lower levels based on estimates of consumption and without requiring them to ask. Wells-Cole and Hellberg, as 3 Commando Brigade's primary planner and operator respectively for logistical support, would co-chair a daily conference ashore with unit quartermaster representatives to determine requirements. During that meeting, logisticians would work out details for the next twenty-four hours. Unit quartermasters would receive mail and other items turned in for repair to take back to their units. The detachment from Commando Logistic Regiment in the BMA then would issue supplies to the requesting B Echelons; or Commando Logistic Regiment afloat would arrange for delivery to the BMA for subsequent issue to units. If supplies were not on ships in the anchorage, Clapp's staff would request that Woodward make them available from other ships at sea. In situations where supplies were not available anywhere in the South Atlantic, the Brigade would pass requirements using satellite communications on *Fearless* direct to relevant logistics headquarters in the United Kingdom, which in turn would direct depots to release supplies. The long line of communication required Task Force commands to specify, at the time of request, the appropriate priority for delivery. Priority One delivery was by airdrop as near as possible to the Falklands; Priority Two was air delivery to Ascension and from there by sea; and Priority Three was delivery entirely by sea, which would take at least three weeks. All this meant, in theory at least, that 3 Commando Brigade units could expect to get high priority items within forty-eight to seventy-two hours by airdrop. When signalling requisitions to the United Kingdom, Brigade logisticians would also include strength figures, fuel consumption data, and information on controlled items, so that logisticians there could stay abreast of the overall logistical status of the Task Force.

The logistics annex contained detailed instructions in a variety of other areas. The intention throughout was to keep the bulk of services afloat initially. There would be no equipment repair capability ashore. Commando Logistic Regiment's Workshop Squadron would remain afloat. When requirements developed, workmen would go ashore to conduct repairs or to evacuate items to LSLs for repair. As much as possible

would be done aboard logistics ships, where men and equipment were readily available. That way, 3 Commando Brigade would not move people and equipment needlessly into the San Carlos area, consuming lots of transportation assets to get them there.

The initial plan for medical support was echeloned in depth. Self-aid and buddy-aid training provided en route would help individuals to keep themselves and others alive. Before landing, each man would receive a morphine injector to wear on his dog tags for use in easing the pain of wounds. Troops would render buddy-aid to each other at the point of injury. Company aid men and regimental aid post would be integrated into assault waves of units to help keep casualties alive for evacuation. Second-line care would be afloat initially, with No. 1 Medical Troop aboard *Galahad* and 2 Para's Parachute Clearing Troop aboard *Norland*. Casualties would evacuate there or to *Canberra*, which could provide both second- and third-line medical care. Since she was also acting as a troop ship, however, *Canberra* would not have protection under the Geneva Convention. She carried Commando Logistic Regiment's Medical Squadron, No.3 Medical Troop and No.2 Surgical Support Team, in addition to nursing, holding and advanced surgical capabilities. Casualties would be evacuated by air to *Sir Galahad*, *Norland* or *Canberra* as soon as possible, using a dedicated Wessex helicopter. The Commando Forces Band would be divided between those vessels to provide litter-bearer assistance. As the beachhead became secure, No. 1 Medical Troop and Parachute Clearing Troop then would move ashore to establish a small field dressing station. When that happened, casualties could receive immediate care in their unit areas, subsequent care in the BMA and surgical treatment on *Canberra*, which would remain anchored in San Carlos Bay. *Uganda*, the designated hospital ship, would provide the highest level of care in theatre. She would be located in a Red Cross box at sea about twenty miles north of Pebble Island, along with Argentina's hospital ship, *Bahia Paraiso*. Both countries had agreed that any casualties evacuated there should not participate further in the war.⁹ Three fast dispatch vessels – *Hydra*, *Hecla*, and *Hecate* – would transport casualties requiring additional or long-term care from *Uganda* to Montevideo, Uruguay. From there, British medical evacuation planes would airlift casualties to the United Kingdom via Ascension. Should there be fatalities, the plan directed units to conduct emergency burial on land until the BMA could be established. Thereafter, Commando Logistic Regiment would arrange for burial at a location in the vicinity of the BMA. Those dying aboard hospital ships at sea would either be buried ashore in a temporary cemetery, or at sea.

The logistics annex also contained instructions if prisoners of war were taken. Units would escort prisoners taken during landings back to the beach, where others would take custody and arrange for further transportation to a designated ship in the anchorage. Units would deliver weapons, ammunition and other equipment taken from prisoners to Commando Logistic Regiment for holding. Once the BMA was established ashore, the Regiment would prepare an appropriate prisoner of war cage and provide security. Adherence to the Geneva Convention was paramount.

Commando Logistic Regiment had been anticipating up until this time that most resupply from the ships to shore would be by LSL. These supply vessels would lower their bow ramps on to the beach at the BMA, enabling Ordnance Squadron to move supplies right into storage areas without any transshipment. This would help expedite offload. Since the shallow-bottomed LSLs were designed to do that in support of amphibious operations, it was natural that the Regiment would plan accordingly. Unfortunately, Commodore Clapp was not on that same sheet of music, and for good reason. He knew that the captains of LSLs had not practised beaching recently and that their vessels were designed more for roll-on roll-off operations in European settings. Peacetime exercises had afforded them few opportunities to practise beaching, largely because of regulatory requirements and fiscal constraints. Each time an LSL beached itself, regulations required inspection for possible bottom damage, which added to the cost of exercises. Now, if a captain beached improperly, he could damage or even strand the ship. Consequently, logisticians learned, as the LSLs were travelling south of Ascension, that the risks were too great for captains to attempt to beach. Instead of moving supplies directly on to beaches, they now needed to discharge from stern doors on to mexeflotes and landing craft, which then would transport supplies to beaches.¹⁰ This seemingly simple and understandable change produced significant alterations to 3 Commando Brigade's plans to move supplies ashore. At Ascension, the Regiment had stowed LSLs as much as possible for bow discharge straight on to beaches, based on best guesses of what would be needed. Much of what was supposed to come off first was therefore located toward the front of LSLs. Because of this decision, some supplies positioned in bows now needed to move to sterns, and vice versa. It also meant that offload would take longer because of double handling of stocks. Instead of supplies being taken by forklift or human chain directly from ramps of LSLs to storage areas ashore, landing craft or helicopters now would transship supplies from ship to shore. To prepare for stern discharge, Ordnance Squadron proceeded to shift stocks as best they could while LSLs sailed further south.

Back in London by this time, the MoD had started to get concerned about the disposition of the Land Force on ships, specifically about the ramifications if something happened to *Canberra*. In her role as a troop ship, *Canberra* was transporting the bulk of the combat force: 40 Commando, 42 Commando, a company from 45 Commando and 3 Para. Planning thus far called for these units to disembark *Canberra* into landing craft for the amphibious assault. Staffs had developed an intricate movement plan for getting units ashore. Commando Logistic Regiment had shuffled supplies at Ascension to get basic loads and first issues of supplies on the same vessels as units. Combat units aboard *Canberra* had rehearsed procedures for disembarking the large troop ship. Any exchange of troop units between ships therefore produced a wide-ranging impact on movement tables, supply stowage plans and training. If something happened to *Canberra* with three thousand men aboard, however, results could be catastrophic. The 'Great White

Whale' was such a massive target that some had determined that if she sank in the San Carlos anchorage her upper decks would remain above water.¹¹

Thompson and Clapp shared the same concerns, but faced with the long voyage south of Ascension and shipping limitations, they had few options in placing units on troop ships. They had planned a final cross-decking by helicopter before landings, to marry up supporting and supported units in accordance with the final task organization. But they had not intended to relocate the bulk of units now on *Canberra*. Those in London were monitoring the movement of the Task Force closely; they too were concerned about the concentration of troops on some ships. Clapp signalled that one possibility would be to divert ships to South Georgia so that troops could cross-deck to other ships before the final run to San Carlos; but that would present a staggeringly long distance for troops to travel in open landing craft, when they needed to be fresh for assaulting beaches. Another option was to shift units within available shipping while at sea but before the final approach to San Carlos. The weather had not been good for the past several days. Seas had been so rough, in fact, that LPDs could not dock down safely to release landing craft, nor would landing craft have been able to pull aside another ship and embark troops. On 18 May, while updating Fieldhouse on progress, the admiral advised Clapp that Thatcher herself was concerned about *Canberra*. They agreed that the ship should not approach the coast of the Falklands before transferring two of its three major units to other vessels. Clapp alerted units to prepare to transfer the following day, weather permitting.

Staffs quickly assembled to plan for the cross-decking of troops and to salvage the extensive landing plans already developed. They agreed that 40 Commando and 3 Para would transfer to *Fearless* and *Intrepid* respectively. A company from 45 Commando would move from *Canberra* to *Intrepid* to provide efficiencies in the use of landing craft. That company would be in the second wave ashore along with other units of 45 Commando located on *Stromness*. The worst-case plan called for the LPDs *Fearless* and *Intrepid* to steam on each side of *Canberra* and for the men of 40 Commando and 3 Para to transfer, one man at a time, on a light jackstay from the ship to an LPD. This operation would have taken an entire day and posed great risks to the men, each of whom would be laden with combat gear and supplies. The weather, fortunately, made matters much easier. For the first time in days, the South Atlantic calmed, permitting LPDs to dock down safely and release their landing craft from dock wells. The LCUs then went alongside *Canberra* and shuttled 40 Commando and 3 Para into the dock wells of the LPDs, from where the men climbed up ramps to crowded spaces for the final transit. Troops carefully followed each other down narrow passageways before exiting *Canberra* through her large side doors on to LCUs bobbing in the swells. During the transfer, one man from 40 Commando fell into the sea between the troop ship and a landing craft; others pulled him out shaken but without injury.¹² After the cross-decking, these units were now separated from their B Echelons aboard *Canberra*, and the LPDs *Fearless* and *Intrepid* were carrying two to three times the technical capacity for troops, leaving little room for comfort.

As these major unit relocations were taking place, more cross-decking operations started to shift smaller elements to ships providing final passage to San Carlos waters. It was during this part of the troop adjustments that tragedy struck. Shortly after sunset on 19 May, Sea Kings from 846 Naval Air Squadron were transferring troops of 22 Special Air Service from *Hermes* to *Intrepid* when one of the helicopters crashed into the Atlantic, killing twenty-two men. Early accounts claimed the helicopter struck an albatross. Years later, participants acknowledged it was significantly overloaded. Several of these men had already survived crashes in the operation to retake South Georgia or participated in a highly successful raid on Pebble Island on 14 May to destroy Argentine airplanes.

The Amphibious Task Force was now poised on the edge of the TEZ with radio transmitting silence strictly enforced so that they could land with as much surprise as possible. While many were working to shift units on 19 May, Task Force commanders received permission to execute Operation Sutton at their discretion. In the few hours remaining, units completed last-minute preparations the best ways they could. The weather continued to favour the British as the Amphibious Task Force eased its way toward the Falklands. A mist now shrouded movement, almost to the shorelines of East Falkland, preventing detection by Argentine air patrols. British special forces on the island had been reporting lookouts at Fanning Head on East Falkland. If the mist continued, it would hide the colourful mixture of ships passing in waters below as they entered Falkland Sound and the bay off of San Carlos for the amphibious assault.



Admiral Henry Leach convinced Prime Minister Thatcher that response was necessary and that Britain could overcome challenges to win. (*Leach's Endure No Makeshifts*, published by Leo Cooper in 1993)



Admiral John Fieldhouse, Commander-in-Chief Fleet, became the commander of the British Task Force. (*Crown Copyright*)



Rear Admiral Sandy Woodward, shown here with some of his staff, was Commander Carrier Battle Group. He was responsible for controlling sea and air. (*Crown Copyright*)



Commodore Michael Clapp was Commander Amphibious Task Force. He is shown here standing at right in the tank deck of *Fearless* talking to marines on 20 May as they approached San Carlos. (Courtesy Michael Clapp)



Moore consults with his two brigade commanders shortly after arriving at San Carlos. Left to Right: Brigadier Thompson, Major Smith (Rapier Air Defence Battery), Brigadier Wilson, Major General Moore. (Crown Copyright)



Lieutenant Colonel Ivar Hellberg commanded Commando Logistic Regiment of 3 Commando Brigade, a multifunctional logistics regiment that was very unique in 1982. (Courtesy Maritime Books)



Brigadier Julian Thompson, Commander 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines and initial Commander Land Force, with officers at Plymouth after the war. From Left: John Chester, Gerry Wells-Cole, Ewen Southby-Tailyour, Thompson, Viv Rowe, Roderick Macdonald. (Crown Copyright)



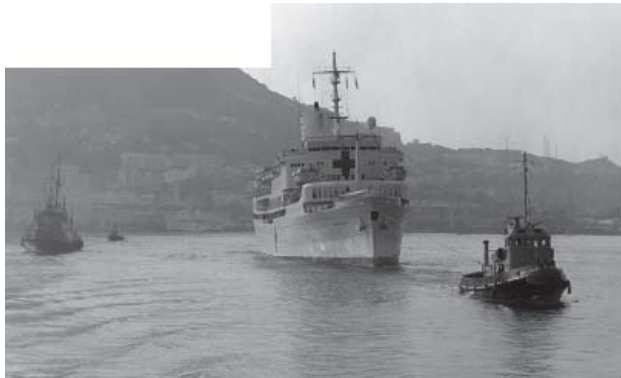
The cruise ship *Canberra* was the first ship taken up from trade. Here passengers disembark at Southampton as trucks full of supplies wait. (Courtesy P&O Heritage Collection)



Workers install a flight deck atop the swimming pool of *Canberra*. The ship with many modifications sailed loaded with troops three days after arriving in Southampton. (Courtesy P&O Heritage Collection)



Nicknamed The Great White Whale, Canberra departs the pier on 9 April 1982 with 2,500 troops of 3 Commando Brigade aboard. (Courtesy P&O Heritage Collection)



Workers converted *Uganda* to be a hospital ship in 65 hours. Here she prepares to sail from Gibraltar fully staffed and ready to care for wounded. (Courtesy P&O Heritage Collection)



A view of Wideawake Airfield on Ascension Island. The airfield was vital in getting supplies to the Task Force and at times was the busiest airport in the world. (Crown Copyright)



A CH47 Chinook cargo helicopter returns to Wideawake Airfield, probably after shuttling supplies to ships off the coast. Note the stacks of supplies in the background with Harriers in the foreground. (Crown Copyright)



Before the war, British C-130s were not configured for air-to-air refueling and pilots were untrained. Within weeks, the British configured planes and trained pilots. Pilots safely executed dozens of missions during and after the war, each requiring many refuelings like the one shown in the photograph. *(Crown Copyright)*



Airdrops at sea by C-130s from Ascension were key for quick replenishment to the Task Force in the South Atlantic. Dozens of drops were made like the one shown in the photograph. *(Crown Copyright)*



Supplies were rushed on to ships without regard for compatibility or stability. After leaving England, logisticians worked to secure loads and verify what was loaded. *(Courtesy Anthony Welch)*



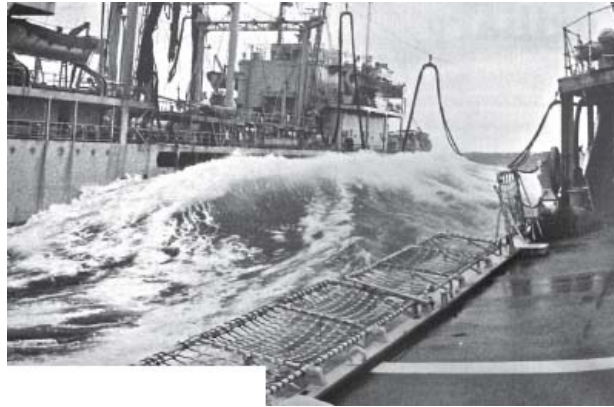
In the rush to depart, supplies were loaded in all available spaces. Here boxes line a corridor on HMS *Fearless*. (Courtesy Anthony Welch)



Marines at San Carlos form a human chain to offload supplies from a LCU. (Crown Copyright)



South Atlantic seas are notoriously rough. Here's a glimpse over the stern of an LSL with helicopter cabled to deck. (Courtesy Angus MacMillan)



Here an RFA tanker provides fuel to another ship in rough seas. *(Crown Copyright)*



The *Atlantic Conveyor* was taken up from trade and converted to transport aircraft and supplies. Containers were stacked at sides to protect the aircraft. She was hit by an Exocet missile on 25 May and later sank. Harriers had departed by that time. Nine helicopters were lost. The single CH47 Chinook that survived was on a test flight. *(Crown Copyright)*



On 21 May, *QE2* with most of 5 Brigade aboard passed Ascension Island. Major General Moore had flown to Ascension. He landed with staff on the modified stern deck of the cruise ship aboard a Chinook helicopter, probably the first and last time a CH47 landed on *QE2*. *(Courtesy Robin Smith)*



The Landing Platform Dock *Intrepid* is sailing with three of the six Landing Ships Logistics. Shown here are *Sir Galahad*, *Sir Percivale* and *Sir Lancelot*, all fully loaded and with mexeflotes on sides, nearing the Falklands. (Courtesy Ivar Hellberg)



LSL *Sir Percivale* sailing towards the Falklands fully loaded and with a mexeflote bolted to her sides. Marines are on the stern deck exercising. (Crown Copyright)



LSL *Sir Galahad* anchored near Ajax Bay with stern door down to discharge cargo. Onboard cranes are starting to offload cargo into landing craft. (Courtesy Anthony Welch)



After air attacks on D-Day, plans changed to push as many supplies to shore as possible. Here a landing craft and mexeflote arrive with supplies from ships. (Courtesy Anthony Welch)



The Brigade Maintenance Area at Ajax Bay had a few buildings but little hardstand, storage areas, and only a single ramp. This became the home for much of Commando Logistic Regiment. It later became the Force Maintenance Area. *(Crown Copyright)*



On 27 May Argentine planes attacked the BMA, destroying artillery ammunition loaded for 2 Para for its attack on Goose Green and other supplies. Unexploded bombs lodged in the field hospital. *(Courtesy Gus McMillan)*



On 27 May 1982, QE2 linked up with HMS Antrim in the vicinity of South Georgia. Major General Moore, Brigadier Wilson and others transferred to Antrim for travel to San Carlos. *(Courtesy Robin Smith)*



Logisticians of 81 and 91 Ordnance Companies cross deck ammo from *QE2* to *Canberra* at South Georgia. *(Courtesy Robin Smith)*



Getting supplies out of *QE2* was particularly difficult. Here logisticians labor to get supplies from the bottom of the cruise ship. *QE2* eventually headed back to the United Kingdom with most combat supplies for 5 Brigade still aboard. *(Courtesy Robin Smith)*



On 8 June, Argentine planes attacked the LSLs *Sir Tristram* and *Sir Galahad* near Fitzroy, killing 50 and wounding over 100. Smoke billows from *Galahad*. *(Crown Copyright)*



Lifeboats carrying survivors from attacks on the LSLs arrive at Fitzroy, as *Sir Galahad* burns in the background. (Crown Copyright)



It was a monumental job keeping jerrycans filled and then distributing them. Daily requirements approached a thousand cans per day just for 3 Commando Brigade. (Courtesy Robin Smith)



The dracone was invaluable for keeping a supply of fuel near shore. All but this one were lost on the *Atlantic Conveyor*. (Courtesy Robin Smith)



Forward air refuelling sites were set up at several locations. Here a hot refuel is taking place for a Wessex helicopter, meaning pilots are keeping the engine running. *(Courtesy Robin Smith)*



Civilians tried their best to help troops, but they had difficulty too. Here a civilian tractor gets stuck. *(Courtesy Roderick Macdonald Collection)*



A typical stone run complicating travel by foot. These runs often extend for hundreds of metres. *(Author Photograph)*



Stanley is visible only a few kilometres away from Wireless Ridge, the location of the last fight. *(Author Photograph)*



During the first phase of the battle for the mountains, the bridge over the Murrell River collapsed, closing the only overland track for supplies. Engineers installed a temporary replacement. *(Courtesy Roddy Macdonald Collection)*



The Red and Green Life Machine, the field hospital in the BMA at Ajax Bay, became famous for the many lives it saved. Surgeons continued operating notwithstanding unexploded bombs nearby. Here Surgeon Commander Rick Jolly takes a brief break. *(Courtesy Rick Jolly)*



Sailors aboard the carrier HMS *Hermes* rush a survivor from HMS *Sheffield* to a medical station. *(Crown Copyright)*



During the fight for Mount Longdon, the forward regimental aid post of 3 Para was at the very base of the rocks. The cross commemorates the location today. Several medics died trying to save lives of others. *(Author Photograph)*



British medics care for wounded near Mount Longdon. These casualties were Argentines. *(Crown Copyright)*



The British discovered warehouses and containers full of food in Stanley. Argentine leaders failed to get food to their soldiers in the field. *(Courtesy Robin Smith)*



Argentine vehicles packed the streets of Stanley at the time of surrender. British logisticians used them to help move supplies that arrived on LSLs from Ajax Bay. *(Courtesy Robin Smith)*



After collecting ammunition from prisoners and around battlefields, logisticians and others faced the task of sorting and disposal. *(Courtesy Robin Smith)*



Although bombs and shells never succeeded in stopping Argentine cargo planes from landing at Stanley, they had created damage needing repair before British C-130s from Ascension Island would land. Here engineers start repairing the airfield. The first

British C-130 landed ten days after the surrender. *(Courtesy Roderick Macdonald Collection)*



Many Argentines fought valiantly. Most were conscripts with little training. The faces of these prisoners reflect their disappointment after the surrender. *(Crown Copyright)*



Prisoners in Stanley turning in their weapons after the surrender. *(Courtesy Roderick Macdonald Collection)*



An immediate priority was repatriating prisoners to lessen potential for trouble and strains on logistics. Here Argentines are marching to board ships that will take them home. *(Courtesy Kenneth Ian Griffiths)*



Moore's first priority after receiving the surrender was to meet with residents of Stanley who had suffered under Argentine control for over two months. *(Crown Copyright)*



A Sea King helicopter moves slingloads of jerrycans to a forward area. A reminder of the difficulties logisticians faced in the Falklands. *(Crown Copyright)*



Major General Jeremy Moore holds the surrender document that was signed the evening of 14 June 1982. (*Crown Copyright*)

Chapter 6

D-Day and the Struggle to Build up Logistics

The Amphibious Task Group marshalled with the Carrier Battle Group north of the Falklands on 18 May, a few days before landings were scheduled. Tensions ran high, but there was good cause for optimism despite the setbacks and frustrations of past weeks. Intelligence indicated that Argentina had not reinforced areas near the landing sites. Less than a company of Argentine soldiers were in the area of San Carlos at the time to maintain observation of the stretch of water known as Falkland Sound, which separated East and West Falkland. Although several hundred Argentines were south-east of San Carlos in the settlement at Goose Green, most still remained in positions around Stanley, the capital. The Argentines believed that the British would land closer to the capital, either to the north around Berkeley Sound or south in the area of Port Harriet. The British wanted to keep it that way, so they planned diversions early the next morning at both locations to keep Brigadier General Menendez looking in those directions while 3 Commando Brigade seized objectives around San Carlos. They also planned a diversion at Darwin, halfway down the isthmus towards Goose Green. They intended to have the beachhead secure by first light so that the build-up ashore could commence without pause. Then it only became a question of how quickly and effectively Argentina would react.

Ever since the 17 April meeting at Ascension with Admiral Fieldhouse, the Amphibious Task Force had been planning on British air superiority. It had become clear in recent days, however, that the Carrier Battle Group had not achieved control of the skies around the islands as some had anticipated. Now, intelligence warned that air attacks were likely following the landings, but that it would probably take Argentina half a day to sort out the confusion caused by diversions and to counter with fighters from the mainland. Because of this possibility, though, the British had taken steps to reduce the number of high-value targets in the area of the landings. Consequently, they were holding merchant vessels like *Elk*, which carried thousands of tons of ammunition for the Task Force, in the LLA at the eastern edge of the TEZ for safety. No one doubted that Argentine pilots could complicate matters. But few of the British, whether in the Task Force making final preparations to land or in the United Kingdom anxiously awaiting first reports, expected what happened in the next few days. Moreover, the Amphibious Task Force had not agreed upon steps to be taken should air strikes disrupt the logistics plan. This would produce dramatic consequences in the days ahead.

Ships supporting the landings split away from the Carrier Battle Group in the early afternoon of 20 May and headed south toward Falkland Sound in three phases, each timed to prevent unnecessary congestion in Falkland Sound and the San Carlos anchorage. The destroyer *Antrim* and frigate *Ardent* led the first group, consisting of the LPD *Fearless* with 40 Commando, the LPD *Intrepid* with 3 Para and the frigate *Yarmouth*. As *Ardent* positioned herself in the Sound to provide gunfire support to the Special Air Service diversionary raid near Darwin, Wessex helicopters from *Antrim* would insert marines from the Special Boat Squadron and naval gunfire observers to help eliminate an Argentine observation post at Fanning Head on East Falkland. Shortly thereafter, the LPDs escorted by *Yarmouth* would sail through the darkness of the Sound, presumably unnoticed by Argentines at Fanning Head or observation posts on places like Mount Rosalie on West Falkland, anchor near the entrance to San Carlos at Chanco Point and release landing craft to shuttle assault waves ashore. As this was happening, the second group consisting of *Norland* with 2 Para, *Stromness* with the bulk of 45 Commando and *Canberra* with 42 Commando, escorted by the frigates *Brilliant* and *Plymouth* and the auxiliary *Fort Austin*, would be entering the Sound; they would arrive near the LPDs just as the landing craft were ready. The last to enter Falkland Sound, about four hours after the second wave reached the beaches, would be those ships bringing in artillery, Rapier air defences and Commando Logistic Regiment with the first days of supply for the Brigade: the frigates *Argonaut* and *Broadsword* escorting five LSLs and *Europic Ferry*, a roll-on roll-off ship taken up from trade.

Sequencing of the three groups was carefully planned to ensure that, when daylight came, the beachhead would be secure. That being achieved, movement of fire support and supplies could commence without delay as the LSLs arrived. The overall plan hinged on ships arriving and men disembarking on time. Men from 40 Commando aboard *Fearless* would load straight into that LPD's landing craft; the two lead craft would also carry either a Scorpion or Scimitar armoured vehicle in the bow to provide firepower if needed. Landing craft would depart *Intrepid* empty and go to *Norland*, where they would embark 2 Para from *Norland*'s side doors. Major Ewen Southby-Tailyour, who had completed his detailed guide to the coasts and inlets of the Falklands during a tour with the garrison force years earlier, would guide this first wave to designated beach assault sites. Then the landing craft would return to *Intrepid* and *Stromness* to pick up 3 Para and 45 Commando respectively for the second wave, while 42 Commando waited in reserve on *Canberra*. H-hour would be 0230 hrs, 21 May.

Everything started out as planned. As naval gunfire and diversionary attacks fixed Argentine attention on Stanley and Darwin, marines of the Special Boat Squadron were landing to eliminate any soldiers at the Fanning Head observation post who had survived a barrage of naval gunfire. While this was

happening, though, the mist that obscured the Amphibious Task Force from observation posts on Fanning Head created directional problems for some captains navigating ships through the Sound. *Norland*, which was carrying 2 Para for the first wave, had even more difficulties. Her crew forgot to place marking lights on her bow and stern to guide landing craft next to the troopship. In their brief stop at Ascension, 2 Para had practised disembarking, but only during daytime. Now, in the early morning darkness of San Carlos, the lack of training was revealed. One paratrooper, for instance, fell between *Norland* and a landing craft while disembarking; he survived but suffered a crushed hip.¹ The end result was that the disembarkation of 2 Para delayed the first wave getting to the beach. Brigadier Thompson considered altering the landing sequence at this time because of delays with 2 Para, but opted against it, fearing that disseminating changes at this stage would lead to loss of radio transmitting silence and alert the Argentines. The first wave did not land until 0430 hrs, about two hours later than scheduled. Subsequent waves were correspondingly late as a result.

Despite these delays, the amphibious landings were brilliantly successful, and by daylight the entire beachhead was secure. Commandos and paratroopers encountered only pockets of resistance, primarily from small groups of Argentines trying to break contact and withdraw. Landing craft carrying 2 Para dropped ramps on gradients short of dry land, and paratroopers waded ashore. Their boots would not dry out until a week later.² Combat units seized objectives as planned and sustained no casualties, but Argentines succeeded in shooting down two Gazelle helicopters that were spotting locations for Rapiers, killing three of the four pilots. Ships carrying Commando Logistic Regiment and Brigade supplies started arriving in the anchorage off San Carlos on schedule at daybreak. Waters in the anchorage were calm, just right for starting the laborious task of transporting support units and supplies to beaches. It had become a beautifully clear day. The Amphibious Task Force, however, would have preferred the earlier morning fog and cloud cover.

By 0900 hrs, the LSLs *Sir Geraint*, *Sir Tristram*, *Sir Lancelot*, *Sir Galahad*, and *Sir Percivale* were anchored in a dispersed row on the west side of the anchorage off Ajax Bay, where the Commando Logistic Regiment detachment intended to go ashore at Red Beach, in an area selected by Hellberg and Wells-Cole, to establish a small BMA. Ewen Southby-Tailyour had provided them with valuable information about possible locations. Opposite these ships, on the east side of the inlet off Blue Beach and San Carlos Settlement, *Europic Ferry*, *Norland*, *Stromness* and the command-and-control LPD *Fearless* were anchored. The LPD *Intrepid* was in the north part of the anchorage near Port San Carlos and Green Beach. *Canberra* waited just inside the anchorage near Chanco Point. It was an impressive collection of British ships – the bright red civilian ship *Europic Ferry* with ‘Townsend Thoresen’ emblazoned on her side and the huge white luxury liner *Canberra* sharply contrasting in the morning sun with the smaller, grey amphibious ships. The shuttling of 105mm artillery guns and Rapiers commenced as planned. Soon thereafter, Clapp started moving reserve stocks on to beaches according to plan. It was anticipated by 3 Commando Brigade that it would take about two days to get what was needed immediately ashore. To move all supplies and equipment ashore to enable a breakout from beaches might take ten days or more.

The only warship inside the anchorage at this time was *Plymouth*. That, however, was part of a deliberate plan to defend amphibious forces as they completed their build-up on to the beachhead. Although several ships were clustered in the San Carlos anchorage, surrounding hills made it difficult for enemy aircraft to approach the area undetected. The warships *Antrim*, *Ardent*, *Argonaut*, *Brilliant*, *Broadsword* and *Yarmouth* were all positioned west of the anchorage in Falkland Sound. Commodore Clapp had planned deliberately a defence to take advantage of the protected anchorage and the high ground, considering that the most likely avenue of approach for Argentine aircraft, particularly those coming from the mainland, would be from the west over West Falkland. Therefore, he had formed a picket line of ships in the Sound to force Argentine pilots to fly close to warships to get at the amphibious ships. That, coupled with aggressive Harrier combat air patrols from the Carrier Battle Group, would hopefully stop penetration. As one ship’s captain explained, ‘The idea was to put a cork in the bottle and bottle up the entrance to San Carlos Water so that attacking aircraft would have to fly over us and through our anti-aircraft barrage before they could get to the bulk of the amphibious ships in San Carlos Water.’³ Additionally, Thompson’s units would provide another band of air defence with their new Rapier air defence weapons just as soon as helicopters airlifted them from ships to the high ground surrounding the anchorage. Units, including Commando Logistic Regiment, were equipped with the shoulder-fire d anti-aircraft missiles called Blowpipes. All elements of the Task Force, including Harriers from the two aircraft carriers, would then combine to thwart Argentine efforts to disrupt the build-up.

The British plan had taken Menendez by surprise. In fact, his forces near Goose Green, distracted by the diversionary raid and naval gunfire, reported that they were being attacked by at least a battalion.⁴ Argentines had not anticipated the British would land so far away and then try to move units, supplies, and equipment across the rugged terrain of East Falkland to get at Stanley; and they thought that if the British tried it they would get bogged down and become vulnerable. The Argentine ability to quickly counter a distant landing with ground forces was limited now because British Harrier attacks in previous days had successfully destroyed some helicopters essential for moving troops. They nevertheless responded far quicker to the landings than the Task Force expected.

The first Argentine planes, armed Aeromacchi trainers from Stanley and Pucarás from Goose Green, arrived shortly after daybreak. British warships turned them back without incident. Then what seemed like an endless series of Argentine fighters arrived, following two-hour flights from the mainland, to attack ships in the Sound. Clapp’s warships and Harriers from the Carrier Battle Group teamed up to thwart most attacks, and by the morning’s end only one Argentine pilot had scored a serious hit. That was a

1,000lb bomb that struck the flight deck of *Antrim* but failed to detonate. Following a brief lull, Skyhawks and Daggers returned shortly after noon. Some briefly entered the anchorage area, but luckily did not attack any of the logistics ships there. It would have been difficult for them not to notice the monstrous, white-hulled *Canberra* exposed and vulnerable near Chanco Point. Instead, Argentine pilots continued to focus on the warships in Falkland Sound. One successfully evaded air defences and struck *Argonaut*. That bomb likewise failed to explode. Skyhawk pilots eventually succeeded in striking *Ardent* with three 500lb bombs, and this time one of them exploded.

By the day's end, the skies around San Carlos had been wracked with fire from ships and planes, much to the distraction of ground forces trying to consolidate on the beachhead and logisticians on ships trying to get supplies ashore. Argentine pilots had flown over fifty sorties against warships in the Sound; and although Harrier patrols and ship defences stopped one out of five planes, the British simply could not down them all. When the air attacks were over, damage to the fleet was serious. *Plymouth* and *Yarmouth* were the only warships to make it through the day unscathed. *Brilliant* and *Broadsword* had sustained minor damage; *Antrim* and *Argonaut* would be out of action until unexploded bombs lodged in their structures could be disarmed and removed; and *Ardent* was sinking.

Clapp emphasized after the war, 'It was not luck that the Argentine pilots attacked the warships and not the landing ships. We had lots of time to think about it and the whole approach to the landings had been a threat reduction exercise.'⁵ There can be no doubt that the situation would have been considerably worse had fighters tried to breach the picket line of warships in Falkland Sound and pursue logistics vessels and troop ships in the San Carlos anchorage. As it was, the British still had to rely on a lot of luck to make it through the day. Five bombs had struck warships and failed to detonate. Demolition experts worked frantically to defuse unexploded bombs. Argentine pilots, facing intense gunfire and anti-aircraft missiles from the British warship cordon, were opting for low, fast approaches when making bombing runs. They were forced to make split-second decisions due to their need to refuel after long flights from mainland Argentina. As they released bombs, they were not allowing sufficient time for them to arm.⁶ That undoubtedly would change once Argentina figured out what was happening. The Task Force did not want to rely on that much luck again.

Attacks on D-Day proved costly for both sides. The British lost twenty-five men, one ship, and two Gazelle helicopters. Over forty men were wounded and three other ships damaged significantly. But Clapp's defence had worked overall. Ships and Harriers had downed nine Mirages, five Skyhawks, and three Pucarás. Events had produced a variety of frustrations and anxieties. Brigadier Thompson, trapped aboard *Fearless* and trying to exercise command and control over his units ashore, struggled to maintain communications and learn what was going on as his men started securing objectives. He would not get ashore himself until late in the day, since all movement assets were kept busy. Then he landed without his headquarters, as his staff continued to struggle to get themselves and their equipment ashore. Pressure had mounted on him all day to get Rapiers on land to help counter Argentine air attacks. Unloading Rapiers proved to be an excruciatingly slow process, though, because they were stored in the bottoms of ships' holds, which meant that other equipment had to be shifted to get them out. Everyone discovered, when finally getting Rapiers off the ships, that rushing them to positions on land brought problems of a different nature. Areas had to be secure before men could get the systems in place. Complicating matters further, if men sited a Rapier wrongly, they then had to get another helicopter to relocate it. It did not matter whether the Rapier needed to be moved a few feet or a mile. Men could not move the heavy air defence systems by hand, and Rapiers routinely went on to hilltops inaccessible by vehicles. To become operable they also needed fuel to run generators. As a result, efforts to speed up the unloading of some equipment started to backfire and create more work.

Argentine air attacks now triggered efforts to reduce risks in the Amphibious Operations Area encompassing Falkland Sound and the San Carlos anchorage, and this propelled 3 Commando Brigade into an even greater rush to get equipment ashore. That afternoon, Admiral Fieldhouse expressed continuing concerns about the vulnerability of large ships like *Canberra*. Clapp directed *Canberra*, *Norland* and *Stromness* to depart the area that same evening and proceed toward the edge of the TEZ. LSLs could remain in the anchorage, but they were to unload as much as possible as quickly as possible.

The change came as a surprise to 3 Commando Brigade, which had been hoping to keep supplies moving ashore. The build-up had barely begun. More supplies than expected remained aboard ships in the anchorage. Now, the Brigade witnessed the unravelling of its plans for building up the beachhead and sustaining the eventual breakout. Their plans had hinged on LSLs and other ships anchored offshore to form a floating sustainment base within easy reach of the beachhead. Much of Commando Logistic Regiment, according to the established plan, was to remain afloat in the LSLs. Only a small tailored detachment was destined to go ashore. This new directive allowed LSLs to remain in the anchorage to continue the offload, but the same was not true for *Canberra*, *Norland* and *Stromness*, which unfortunately contained not only a wide mix of units but also tons of supplies for units going ashore.

During the remainder of D-Day and into the night, as flames from *Ardent* in Falkland Sound served as a sombre reminder of earlier events, the Amphibious Task Force focused on getting as much to shore as possible. In the late afternoon, 42 Commando, the Brigade's reserve force, left their rucksacks aboard *Canberra* and boarded landing craft for Blue Beach, where they took up defensive positions east of 3 Para at Port San Carlos. Additional landing craft and helicopters pushed supplies into the BMA at Ajax and other landing sites surrounding the anchorage. Inhabitants of San Carlos Settlement and Port San Carlos, who had welcomed combat units earlier that day, now assisted the British in getting established. Some offered the use of their few settlement buildings as headquarters operations and for quartering and caring

for men; others brewed and served hot beverages; and still more helped to offload and transport supplies to storage areas with family tractors and trailers. The process, however, was excruciatingly slow.

Complicating matters considerably from a logistics standpoint was the fact that vessels directed to depart were holding units, supplies, and equipment urgently needed ashore. *Canberra*, for instance, was still carrying unit supplies and equipment for 40 Commando, 42 Commando, and 3 Para. Support echelons and first-line supplies for these units had not been transferred from *Canberra* to other vessels when combat units cross-decked at sea shortly before D-Day. Assault waves had taken only enough supplies to last for forty-eight hours. Moreover, as they normally would when making an assault landing, the commandos and paratroopers had left rucksacks, parkas, sleeping gear, cooking items and extra clothes aboard troop transports. Some units, like 2 Para which disembarked from *Norland*, had not had the time to get personal gear to the beaches yet. If rucksacks and personal items did not get ashore, men would find their first nights on land more uncomfortable than expected.

Making the situation worse for Commando Logistic Regiment, *Canberra* was intended to be a floating hospital in the anchorage. If she sailed further out to sea, the Brigade would forfeit its planned offshore hospital capability. That would leave only *Uganda* in the Red Cross box north of Pebble Island; and anyone evacuated there could not return to the fighting because of previous agreements between the United Kingdom and Argentina. Furthermore, if the Regiment did not hurry and get medical personnel ashore, it would lose the skills of dozens of medical specialists and doctors then aboard *Canberra*.

Surgeon Commander Rick Jolly of Commando Logistic Regiment's Medical Squadron and other medical specialists in ships throughout the entire area had been working frantically to evacuate and save men injured throughout the San Carlos area during air attacks. The day had not gone well. Frustrated after receiving casualty locations encrypted incorrectly, Jolly had burst in upon staff officers aboard *Fearless* that day, demanding to be given locations in the clear.⁷ After it became apparent that *Canberra* and *Norland* would leave, he recognized that the original medical plan would have to change and that life-saving surgical capability in particular had to get ashore quickly to augment the small medical detachment. Jolly succeeded in getting approval to disembark more medical capability; however, the problem then became getting those capabilities to the beachhead. Insufficient time remained for everything to get off before the ships were to sail. Medical Squadron hurriedly assembled whatever surgical items they could, but without cranes or hoists aboard *Canberra*, and with few movement assets, they could not hope to get all they needed to the beach at Ajax. Landing craft were still working into the early morning of the next day, taking off whatever possible before the troop ship sailed to sea in the waning hours of darkness. No. 1 Medical Troop from *Lancelot* and Parachute Clearing Troop from *Norland* had made it ashore to Red Beach. *Canberra* weighed anchor, though, with a complete surgical team aboard, much to the frustration of Jolly and others. Moreover, she and *Norland* departed early the next morning with 90,000 rations, as well as unit supplies and some rucksacks belonging to two of the three commandos and both parachute battalions.

The challenge now confronting the Amphibious Task Force was immense, and the options to improve the situation were few. It had to get as much as possible ashore quickly. Although configuration of cargo in ships had improved at Ascension, it was still far from ideal. The need for speed would dictate that some supplies not needed ashore would find their way to beaches anyway. Those on ships did not have time to move lower priority supplies out of the way and segregate them from higher priority cargo. It was quicker at times to push all accessible supplies to shore. Commando Logistic Regiment also had to prepare to issue supplies to manoeuvre units since ships had sailed with the first-line supplies of most units. They had seen reconnaissance photographs of Ajax Bay and knew it offered few benefits as a large logistics base. As they reached Red Beach that day, members of the Regiment were taken aback by the actual limitations they now saw at first hand.

The portion of Ajax Bay that became the BMA violated all logistics textbook requirements. The area was uninhabited, which was good, but useable ground comprised only a few hundred metres, about a third of what the Regiment normally preferred just to disperse stocks. Outward from that, large stone outcroppings on the uneven ground prevented vehicle movements or supply storage. An abandoned mutton refrigeration and packing plant offered some shelter. It soon would become the field dressing station supporting the Land Force. There was no other overhead cover. A single cement ramp provided access to the anchorage for vehicles and forklifts unloading landing craft. The only other hard standing surrounded the old refrigeration plant. Making matters still worse, the water table was a mere three inches below the surface, which meant vehicles would quickly churn the surrounding area to mud. Foxholes would fill with water before troops could finish digging them. But Commando Logistic Regiment had no time to worry about conditions because there was no better alternative.

When daylight arrived the next day, bringing with it initially more clear skies and calm weather, fears were rekindled about Argentine pilots returning to attack units in the San Carlos area. Weather elsewhere was preventing planes from returning from the mainland, though. With some of the highly vulnerable and visible targets now safely at sea, Clapp's ships continued their cordon defence of the anchorage as Harrier pilots flew combat air patrols. Units maintained surveillance from surrounding hills as men worked to get Rapier air defence systems in place. In the BMA at Ajax, members of Commando Logistic Regiment's Ordnance Squadron worked to offload landing craft shuttling supplies ashore from the LSLs in the anchorage. Members of the Medical Squadron supplemented by medical teams from other services hurried to convert the filthy meat packing building into a small hospital. As leaders determined how to divide the plant into areas to accommodate the triage and care of casualties, others stacked boxes and hung blankets to create partitions dividing treatment areas. Outside, men prepared survival positions in

case of continued air attacks and cut blocks of peat from the rocky soil to reinforce the walls of the building. A sign soon hung over its door proudly proclaiming that it was 'The Red and Green Life Machine', named for the colours of paratrooper and commando berets worn by many of its occupants and capturing the proud inter-service spirit developing. Surrounded by thousands of tons of supplies, the refrigeration plant would present a good target for Argentine pilots. It would make an even better target if highlighted by the red crosses required for protection as a medical facility under the Geneva Convention. The Regiment therefore decided not to identify the refrigeration plant as a medical facility. They had no reason to believe the Argentines would honour the Geneva Convention anyway, despite mutual agreement to establish a Red Cross box for *Uganda* and *Bahia Paraíso*, since Argentina was not a signatory of the Geneva Convention.

By the afternoon of 22 May, Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg aboard *Sir Galahad* still had not managed to get ashore. Movement assets remained heavily taxed. Adding to his frustrations, Hellberg now discovered that he would not control any movement assets transporting personnel, supplies and equipment from ships to shore, not a single landing craft, mexeflote or helicopter. Having dedicated movement capability was at the core of the Regiment's operating procedures. Commodore Clapp required units needing transportation assistance to submit requests for movement to his headquarters on *Fearless* for approval and allocation of assets, which was in keeping with amphibious doctrine. The Regiment had been accustomed to relying on its own four-ton trucks during exercises in the past to distribute supplies. This was quite different now. Watercraft and helicopters were the only means of getting supplies to where they needed to go. Consequently, the centralized control of transportation, understandable though it was, added to friction that had been building in previous weeks. Land and naval forces did not have a common understanding of amphibious operations. This was becoming particularly true when it came to matters of logistics around San Carlos. Frustrations would grow in the days ahead.

As unloading continued in the anchorage on 23 May, Argentine fighters arrived again in numbers. Pilots penetrated Clapp's defences and shifted focus to the highly vulnerable, mostly unarmed, logistics ships. Skyhawks first entered the anchorage area from the south-east at about 0930 hrs, dropping bombs on several of the logistics ships. Daggers followed, and then more Skyhawks. Pilots succeeded in scoring direct hits on the LSLs *Sir Lancelot* and *Sir Galahad* and on the newly arrived *Sir Bedivere*. Miraculously, none of the bombs striking the three LSLs detonated, even though others, missing and falling harmlessly into the water between the ships, did explode. In fact, one of the two bombs hitting *Sir Lancelot* skipped off the water first, entered and passed through the LSL's superstructure, re-entered the water on the other side and still did not detonate.⁸ Considerable damage nevertheless resulted as 500lb or 1000lb bombs passed through or lodged in logistics ships. When it was all over, *Galahad* was beached and on fire, and *Lancelot* was still anchored but likewise on fire. Both had been hit twice by bombs that caused significant damage even though they failed to detonate. The British refloated *Galahad* the same day. Demolition experts worked frantically and ingeniously to defuse and remove bombs. In the case of *Galahad*, for instance, they eventually craned an unexploded bomb over the side of the LSL into an infatigable craft filled with cornflake packets for cushioning, before dumping it in deeper water.⁹ Once bombs were removed, repairs could start. Damage to *Bedivere* was minor, but *Galahad* would be out of action for a week and *Lancelot* for nearly three weeks. It was a serious setback for the logistics build-up ashore. As *Lancelot* underwent repairs she would revert primarily to being a helicopter-refuelling platform, until engineers established refuel capability on land.¹⁰

Logistics ships were not the only ones to suffer severe damage that day. Skyhawks struck *Antelope* with two 1,000lb bombs, and once again the bombs failed to detonate. Casualties were evacuated to the Red and Green Life Machine in the BMA. As some evacuated crewmen huddled on banks at Ajax Bay, explosions broke the night silence as defusing efforts failed, killing a demolition expert and others and splitting *Antelope* in half. By morning, her bow was protruding skyward out of the water.

Ashore at Ajax, Commando Logistic Regiment was coming to grips with the after-effects of the day's catastrophic events. Casualties were arriving for medical care. Dozens of other crewmen from damaged vessels were coming ashore, while demolition experts worked to remove unexploded bombs on ships, adding more congestion to the already cramped support area. Making matters still worse, the Regiment had lost contact with much of Ordnance Squadron. Over a hundred members of the Regiment aboard *Galahad* had been evacuated to another vessel after air attacks. Commanders were having difficulty finding out where they went because they had little capability to communicate with ships.

Commodore Clapp was intent on preventing such attacks from happening again. On D-Day the Argentines had made the original plan for a floating supply base near the beachhead untenable. These latest attacks demonstrated it would continue to be difficult to keep ships safe and get supplies ashore without control of the skies, especially with observation posts on West Falkland at both entrances to Falkland Sound able to observe ship movements. To reach San Carlos Water, supply ships entered the Sound from the north-east under the noses of Argentines on Mount Rosalie. As troublesome as that was, it remained better than travelling longer distances and entering the Sound from the south-west, passing small islands with multiple observation posts, at least one known to have a contingent of special forces, and then a small Argentine garrison at Fox Bay. The day after the second round of air attacks, on May 24, *Fort Austin* reported tapping on her hull, which suggested that divers might be attaching limpet mines. Since it would take time to send trained divers to investigate, the quickest measure was for *Fort Austin* and other ships in the area to slip anchors and head to sea, hoping to wash off any limpet mines or enemy divers. That defensive action might have created the impression that new directives were now restricting ship arrivals in the anchorage to the hours of darkness. Logisticians in 3 Commando Brigade believed that

was the case. These new departures deprived them of more time to unload supplies. They already had lost most of the previous day when planes hit LSLs, and logistics ground to a halt as units scrambled to control the situation.

Getting supplies to Ajax Bay from the open sea was not easy by any means. Supply ships were held in either the TRALA or LLA, both of which were in areas about 200 miles from San Carlos guarded by surface escorts and Harriers. It took an LSL travelling at twelve knots in reasonable sea states about twenty hours to cover that distance, whether it was leaving from or headed to the BMA. Rough seas made travel even slower, since captains did not want to risk damage to bow doors or the flooding of tank decks. Once Woodward received notice of what Commando Logistic Regiment needed, it could take over a day to check availability and transfer cargo between ships, often a very difficult operation in the heavy South Atlantic seas. The transit and load times therefore meant that daily resupply was out of the question, even under the best of circumstances and with clear communication of requirements. As it was, ships' captains always preferred to travel the 150 miles separating Falkland Sound from surrounding seas under cover of darkness because of the threat from submarines and Exocets (both air and land based) for the duration of the war. Rather than restricting offloads to hours of darkness, Clapp's focus remained on getting ships through this most dangerous stretch of water under the cover of darkness so that Commando Logistic Regiment then could work with watercraft operators and ships to offload either by day or night. Offloading during the day, of course, was much easier and preferable. There were no spare crews for landing craft or helicopters, which added to the problems. Clapp decided to land as much as he could in the shortest time possible, because this would at least ensure most of the Land Force stocks were safely ashore and not sunk. He was conscious that this might cause problems ashore but saw it as the safest option. The resupply process simply took more time than expected. It also meant that the entire Brigade had to be thoughtful about requirements both for continuing the build-up and for forecasting future resupply. If items were not on hand in the BMA, it took at least two days, and likely longer, to get them from ships to the beachhead before men could offload supplies and distribute them to units. Delays in getting supplies sooner chafed at Brigade logisticians.

On the way south, Thompson's and Clapp's staffs had developed an extensive listing of what supplies ships carried. Now Brigade representatives would visit Clapp on *Fearless* each night and provide him a list of ships needed in the anchorage the following night.¹¹ It sounded good. Unfortunately, the Brigade learned that inventory lists were less accurate than they thought and that the Royal Navy had requirements of its own that affected availability of ships. Whereas members of Ordnance Squadron had sailed with supply vessels en route to Ascension and compiled inventories, much had changed since then. There were no Ordnance Squadron representatives aboard some supply ships in the TEZ now. The Squadron traditionally employed assault supply teams to control stocks on LSLs, but it did not have the manpower to put them on all civilian ships, now laden with critical Brigade stocks, and also operate storage areas on land. There were simply too many ships and too few people. As a result of not having such stock control elements aboard ships, logisticians lost sight of the quantity and condition of some stocks. Many supplies had been consumed since the stay at Ascension, some had been irreparably damaged because of improper stowage or cargo handling and still others had been pilfered. Not surprisingly, the Task Force did not have an automated accountability system that credited receipts, debited issues and determined on-hand balances of the large inventory now scattered throughout the South Atlantic in a variety of vessels. And supplies on ships were not only for the Land Force.

Reasons for these conflicting supply interests and the resulting frustrations were built into the composition of the task force when it deployed from the United Kingdom. Given the scarcity of shipping overall and the speed of loading, the British hardly had the option of segregating each service's supplies aboard ships. Stocks from individual services therefore became intermingled from the beginning. Now the Carrier Battle Group had requirements for supplies aboard some of the same ships that were transporting Land Force stocks. It was not unusual, as a result, for Rear Admiral Woodward to dispatch supply ships to support the fleet when necessary, particularly if he was unaware of the urgency of Land Force requirements for specific items on the same ships. And this is exactly what happened to frustrate Brigade logisticians even more in days that followed. The auxiliary ship *Resource*, for example, which carried 3 Commando Brigade's War Maintenance Reserves as well as items for the Royal Navy, would not be available to the Brigade until after Argentina's surrender, because the fleet routinely needed her elsewhere. Each service had its own requirements, and there was no one senior to Clapp, Thompson, and Woodward in the South Atlantic to monitor events and redefine priorities. Woodward knew of some frustrations ashore, but he had ships covering a massive area with requirements as well. After the war he stated in correspondence:

The battle in the logistics world when your supply lines are wide open to attack is always about the balance between celerity and security of delivery. It's a bit over-stated but often the faster you go, the less likely you are to get there, strangely enough. Convoys are the classic example - not confined to sea warfare ... Yes, the land forces may have been frustrated at the short notice with which tactical deployment changes of ships were made - but they'd have been a damn sight more annoyed if the ships had all been sunk before they unloaded.

For several days following the landings, Commando Logistic Regiment found itself scrambling to get supplies to units as it struggled to unload ships as they returned to the anchorage. Lacking internal capability to move supplies to units only made matters more difficult. One category of supplies that highlights the challenges it faced was fuel. Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg had succeeded in getting nine trucks with fuel pods added to manifests upon deployment and had a total of twenty-four 400-gallon collapsible rubber fuel tanks for use. The struggle came in distributing fuel from those tanks to units. The

generator-powered Rapier air defence systems were consuming gasoline in large quantities. Each was located now in an outlying area to protect the beachhead and was accessible only by helicopter. This meant that a Sea King had to be dedicated exclusively to fuel resupply and routine maintenance for Rapiers on a daily basis.¹²

That was only part of the distribution challenge, though. Other items requiring gasoline on a recurring basis included Rigid Raider boats, BV202 Bandwagons and cooking equipment. The Bandwagons, which served as command vehicles, drank fuel at especially high rates because operators often kept engines running to charge radios and keep warm. As a result, units were relying on twenty-litre jerrycans to distribute fuel from the collapsible storage containers to this type of equipment. There was plenty of fuel on ships. The challenge became getting that fuel from ships to shore and then storing it there. Rounds fired by Argentine fighters had pierced the Brigade's only 10,000-litre collapsible pillow tank as it moved to shore on a mexeflote.¹³ Trucks with fuel pods attached could transport fuel between ships and shore aboard landing craft or mexeflotes, but once fuel pods were on land, someone had to dispense fuel into cans and then distribute it to locations where it was needed. Although that sounded simple enough, keeping a steady supply of fuel ready in jerrycans was far from easy. Royal Marines had tried to load 250 tons of packed gasoline on *Atlantic Causeway* in the United Kingdom, but shipping regulations and inspectors prevented them from getting more than a few dozen tons on board that and other vessels. Now 3 Commando Brigade had hundreds of jerrycans to fill and keep filled on a daily basis. Then they had to distribute the cans where needed. Brigade estimates of jerrycans on hand on D-Day totalled 1880: 1,000 empty, 600 filled and 280 more filled and carried on unit vehicles at the rate of two per vehicle. Daily consumption, however, was staggering for a brigade that had slimmed down equipment for deployment. Daily gasoline requirements consisted of 698 jerrycans: 160 for Rapiers, 378 for Volvo BV202 over-snow vehicles, 106 for Land Rovers and 54 for cooking.¹⁴ This meant that the Brigade had to keep empties flowing back to the fuel supply point in the BMA; and it needed far more cans if it ever wanted to maintain filled cans so that units did not have to waste time waiting for empties to be filled. Consequently, the Brigade was anxiously anticipating several thousand more jerrycans scheduled to arrive with the fuel handlers of 5 Infantry Brigade. In the meantime, the Regiment would have to keep gasoline flowing the best way it could, which was by a hand pump, since it had no other way to fill jerrycans.

Air attacks had delayed efforts to establish an emergency fuel handling system to provide aviation fuel ashore. When *Stromness* returned to the anchorage on 23 May, she brought the equipment needed for such a system. It included a banana-shaped floating fuel tank called a 'dracone', that could be pulled to ships, filled with fuel and then moored offshore. Piping and pumps would connect the dracone to collapsible tanks on land. Eventually, piping would be installed to move fuel to even larger collapsible pillow tanks. Once in operation, such fuel points would mean that naval vessels no longer had to remain near the coastline just to refuel helicopters supporting ground operations, thereby reducing threats to some types of shipping. Completing a landing strip would also eliminate the need for Harriers to travel over 200 miles from Woodward's Carrier Battle Group to fly combat air patrols around San Carlos or strike ground targets.¹⁵ Tactical air power would be more responsive once Harriers were able to refuel on land. Some matting for the strip was on *Stromness*. The rest would be coming aboard *Atlantic Conveyor*.

Although with time engineers could develop these fuel points, operating them would present a completely different challenge. Since Commando Logistic Regiment's Petroleum Troop consisted of reservists who had not been mobilized for the war, the Regiment had no one certified to dispense the volatile aviation fuel or, as importantly, to maintain quality control. Unless someone could be trained, 3 Commando Brigade would have to wait until specialists arrived with 5 Brigade in about a week. This would be the first time Royal Marines had used an emergency fuel handling system like this to provide aviation fuel.

The overriding concern for 3 Commando Brigade, though, was the sheer difficulty of getting what it needed in the right quantities to the proper locations. Several things were contributing to the frustrations. First of all was the shortage of movement assets. There were a total of eleven Sea King and five Wessex helicopters available at the time. Of these, only four Sea Kings were equipped with passive night vision goggles and therefore had to be dedicated to night missions in support of special forces.¹⁶ Factoring out another Sea King for dedicated support to Rapiers left only six Sea Kings and the Wessexes for ship-to-shore movements, until *Atlantic Conveyor* arrived with more helicopters, most notably the heavy-lift CH47 Chinooks she was carrying. Time for offloading was becoming more limited as winter approached in the South Atlantic. There were only about eight hours of daylight in each day now.

That these helicopters were performing well was not in dispute. On D-Day alone, helicopters had transported 288 loads, totalling 220 tons and 520 men, from 11 ships to 21 different sites.¹⁷ But Argentine air attacks had deprived the Brigade of many hours of valuable unloading time. For some in 3 Commando Brigade, centralized control of all movement assets was becoming a further hindrance, since the Brigade could rarely influence actions at short notice. Decisions directing ships out of the anchorage, however necessary they were, had separated several units from supplies and personal gear they needed and substantially complicated the build-up and resupply. During the first few days the Brigade was on the beachhead, almost no resupply reached commando units. Ordnance Squadron entered a desperate race against time to keep up with requirements.

The problem was not just with helicopters. Ship-to-shore movement by watercraft was not going smoothly, either. Initial difficulties began on D-Day when cargo handlers and transporters tried offloading some of the civilian ships. These ships had been designed to pull next to piers and either open side doors and let cargo roll off or use pier-side cranes to lift containers on to docks. Now, break-bulk cargo had

replaced containers, and there were no piers. Vehicle decks of roll-on roll-off vessels were still so packed with supplies that cargo handlers had difficulty getting materiel-handling equipment next to what was to be moved. Additionally, logisticians found that vessels like *Norland* could not lower stern doors sufficiently to reach mexeflote lighters being used to transport supplies to shore.¹⁸ The British would ultimately improvise ways to get supplies off by positioning mexeflote lighters between ramps of vessels to create causeways for moving supplies by forklift. Removing break-bulk loads from ships, one pallet at a time, was nevertheless very time consuming. Try as they might to improvise solutions, they quickly learned that requisitioned ships were no substitute for amphibious vessels designed for getting supplies ashore quickly in such situations. The offload rate for civilian vessels averaged only twenty tons per hour, compared to ninety tons per hour for LSLs.¹⁹ Complicating matters further, mexeflotes could not get to landing sites to offload supplies at low tide.

Controlling ship-to-shore operations had become a challenge on land as well. Part of this stemmed from the inability of all participants to communicate with each other. Thompson and Clapp shared a single secure voice Very High Fire quency (VHF) channel. There was no central administration/logistics communications net for controlling or monitoring the situation. Thompson's staff at San Carlos Settlement barely could talk to Clapp's on *Fearless*. Hellberg's subordinates could talk to Thompson's but not to Clapp's. And although Hellberg had representatives on some ships, he rarely could talk to them either. Beach support units ashore could generally speak to ships, but not to the Regiment or Brigade. There were many times, as a result, when elements involved in ship-to-shore operations, both ashore and afloat, simply did not know what was going on because they had no mechanism to stay abreast of developments. Consequently, as air attacks occurred or as other changes developed, offloading became very confusing.²⁰ It did not help that 3 Commando Brigade had not designated a liaison officer to stay aboard *Fearless* and collaborate with Clapp's staff to work through requirements, stay abreast of situations that affected shipping or keep naval staff in the picture with regard to troop movement ashore. If anything could have helped alleviate confusion and frustrations exacerbated by poor communication, it would have been a senior Land Force officer working with Clapp's staff and listening for changes affecting support to ground forces.

After the second round of air attacks on the anchorage, pressure had started developing for Brigadier Thompson to do something, now that he had secured a foothold on East Falkland, despite the fact that Major General Moore, who was then still en route to the Falklands aboard *QE2*, had not given him objectives beyond the beachhead and remained out of communication for further discussion. British ships had been taking a pounding since arriving in the South Atlantic throughout the area of operations. Thompson went to *Fearless* by a Rigid Raider boat each evening following the landings, until satellite communications could be installed ashore at Ajax, to provide updates direct to Admiral Fieldhouse at Northwood. Frustrations were also developing back in the United Kingdom. Although Thompson had not received clear guidance, he nonetheless had his planners working on options. On 23 May, he issued a warning order to 2 Para to conduct a raid on Darwin and Goose Green. Bad weather two days later prevented helicopters from moving forward artillery, so he decided the raid was too risky. It was even more risky to move units from San Carlos toward Stanley, which was fifty miles away. Such a move would require helicopters to keep units supplied as they moved forward. More helicopters were scheduled to arrive in a couple of days aboard the converted container ship *Atlantic Conveyor*. Departing prematurely before then could jeopardize the build-up and forward resupply to units, if not the units themselves.

Officials back in the United Kingdom were not the only ones becoming anxious for 3 Commando Brigade to move out from the San Carlos area. Some of Thompson's subordinate commanders were becoming equally concerned and did not appreciate fully the requirement to build up the beachhead so deliberately. Thompson called an 'O Group' meeting for his commanders and staff on 24 May to update them on the situation. As local children played among camouflage netting covering commando equipment in San Carlos Settlement, he asked his leaders to curb their impatience and explained that offloading must continue in order for them to get vital stores ashore.²¹ There was ample reason for all to be worried. Well over fifty Argentine planes had attacked ships in and around San Carlos by this time, seriously complicating the supply build-up and overall ship-to-shore operations. Fortunately for the British, few bombs had exploded when hitting ships.

Argentine planes were causing serious concerns for everyone, but matters could have been far worse. Had pilots concentrated on targetting ships key to command and control, troop transport or supplies, difficulties would have been magnified considerably. Instead, most first strikes were against warships, and Clapp's defence gave pilots little time to choose targets. Attacks on the command ship *Fearless*, the large transports *Canberra* and *Norland* or ships like *Elk* packed with ammunition could have produced crippling effects on the British.

Following attacks in the San Carlos anchorage, the British were expecting even more to happen. 'Veinticinco de Mayo' (25 May) was Argentina's National Day. Inflicting a great loss on the Task Force that day could bolster the morale of Argentines both at home and in the Falklands. Past days had brought considerable frustrations to senior military officials in Buenos Aires. Although pilots had flown dozens of sorties, many had not returned, and reports indicated that damage inflicted on British ships was far less than expected. A British reporter in the Falklands inadvertently provided an explanation when he released information regarding the high proportion of Argentine bombs not exploding to the British Broadcasting Corporation, which released it on the news, much to the dismay of British forces. Some believe that, as a result, Argentina started using bombs fitted with direct-action fuses, which armed upon release and activated when striking anything substantial.²²

It was a third Exocet missile, however, which brought the next serious blow to the Task Force and its logistics. Early on 25 May, an Argentine Lear Jet flying at high altitude took aerial photographs of British forces in the vicinity of the San Carlos area.²³ As he was closing in on the Falklands, *Atlantic Conveyor*'s civilian captain Ian North commented, 'Well boys, it's May 25. Something spectacular should happen today.'²⁴ Captain North did not know how correct he was. His *Atlantic Conveyor* was due to come into the San Carlos anchorage that evening.

The first air attacks that day came shortly after daybreak and concentrated again on the warships. The destroyer *Coventry* and the frigate *Broadsword* bore the brunt of attacks. By mid-afternoon, *Coventry* was in flames. Helicopter pilots struggled to retrieve survivors. By the day's end, the destroyer had capsized, and pilots had flown 263 of the survivors to San Carlos for boarding *Fort Austin*, sixteen minor casualties to *Ajax* for treatment, and four serious burn cases to *Uganda*. Nineteen men lost their lives.²⁵ At about 1800 hrs, as rescue operations from *Coventry* were concluding, Brigadier Thompson was chairing his usual evening conference with staff officers. They had been going over final details of plans for ground combat outside the beachhead, when another officer stuck his head in the tent and announced there just had been another strike further out at sea: an Exocet missile had slammed into *Atlantic Conveyor*. Two Argentine Super Etendard pilots had not been looking for *Atlantic Conveyor* that afternoon. In fact, their real hope was of finding the British aircraft carriers *Hermes* and *Invincible*. The pilots registered targets, however, and released their Exocets about twenty miles from the nearest ship. Royal Navy ships detected the planes, readied defences and fired chaff. The chaff deflected the missiles, but one then locked on to *Atlantic Conveyor*, which lacked any defensive capability of its own. The Exocet struck the container ship on her side, starting fires that eventually spread to the ammunition hold, which then exploded. The crew had been working throughout the day to prepare for offloading in the San Carlos anchorage that night. One of the four heavy-lift CH47 Chinook helicopters she was carrying, and which were needed ashore so badly, was on an aerial test flight when the Exocet struck. Harriers being transported had flown away to *Hermes* as well. But everything else on the converted container ship was lost. Within ninety minutes, Captain North directed his 150-man crew to evacuate. Twelve perished. *Atlantic Conveyor* later sank as salvage efforts were still underway, taking with her Captain North and thousands of tons of valuable supplies and equipment.

The loss of *Atlantic Conveyor* was nearly unimaginable to the Land Force, which was anxiously awaiting her arrival. The ship was carrying a host of critical items: tents for 10,000 men, matting for the Harrier runway planned for Port San Carlos, small support boats, materiel-handling vehicles, emergency fuel-handling equipment including all remaining floating dracones for fuel storage, desalination supplies, light sets and generators. Most importantly, though, she was carrying helicopters that the Brigade so badly needed to get units and supplies across East Falkland. *Atlantic Conveyor* sank to the bottom of the South Atlantic with three CH47 and six Wessex helicopters aboard. A single CH47 survived aboard *Hermes* but could not get to San Carlos before 29 May. When that helicopter arrived, it would not have any spare parts or tools; they too had perished with *Atlantic Conveyor*.²⁶ Those in the BMA at Ajax Bay that night could scarcely believe their ears when hearing of this latest catastrophe.

What had started out as a brilliant operation in the early morning darkness of the D-Day landings had turned into a nightmare. It took the British less than four hours to secure their objectives in the San Carlos beachhead on 21 May. They now had been on land for five days. It had taken them that long to consolidate and establish a small sustainment base because of attacks by Argentine pilots daring Clapp's cordon defence in the Sound. During that time, rifts between services had deepened. The Royal Navy had continued to sustain loss and damage worse than anyone imagined. Argentine pilots had struck fourteen British ships since the first days of May, sinking five. Fortunately for the British, bombs hitting seven of those ships, some multiple times, did not explode. Even though matters could have been much worse, the war had become far more costly than anyone expected.

Leaders in London, including Thatcher, were becoming very concerned. Few if any understood the situation on the ground on East Falkland and why it was taking so long for troops to get off the beachhead. Brigadier Thompson and Commodore Clapp had been planning a breakout when sufficient supplies had reached shore. Time was no longer on their side, though. Nightly conversations with superiors back in London were becoming more strained. Thompson would soon receive an ultimatum to get units away from the beachhead and do something. The ground war was about to begin.

Chapter 7

The Breakout and Fight for Goose Green

Following the successful amphibious landings on 21 May, 3 Commando Brigade faced the difficulty of implementing the vague directives issued by Major General Moore on 12 May. On the one hand, Moore had asked Thompson to look for opportunities to push forward from the beachhead; on the other, Moore advised that upon his arrival with 5 Brigade he then would lead a two-brigade attack against the Argentines. Brigadier Thompson and his staff had been assessing options for implementing this directive even before arriving in San Carlos, but they did not want to shift their focus unnecessarily from the concentration of Argentine forces at Stanley. By the time the British landed, Argentina had amassed nearly 13,000 men in the Falklands, around 11,000 of whom were positioned near the capital. That is where the British Land Force would have to win the war after it had built up sufficient logistics capabilities ashore. Now 3 Commando Brigade was working to complete that build-up at Ajax as they anxiously awaited the arrival of *Atlantic Conveyor* with additional helicopter support. The Brigade was planning to insert reconnaissance elements on Mount Kent, just 15km west of Stanley. Once those special forces had determined Argentine locations, Thompson intended to use Chinook helicopters off *Atlantic Conveyor* to move an entire commando to secure that dominant terrain feature. The Brigade was also planning to airlift another commando and a parachute battalion from the beachhead eastward to the areas of Douglas Settlement and Teal Inlet, distances of 35km and 50km respectively. After securing those areas and then repositioning critical supplies forward, British ground forces would be postured to attack from the west toward Stanley.

The Brigade never viewed the small Argentine contingent at Goose Green as an impediment to reaching Stanley. Much of this force supposedly consisted of members of the Argentine Air Force supporting air operations from the settlement's tiny airstrip. Given good weather, British Harriers could neutralize that threat if needed. Thompson had positioned 2 Para on Sussex Mountain to block any advance up the isthmus toward the beachhead. Staff had come to view the settlement, though, as a target of convenience for a small-scale ground operation, thus satisfying Moore's directive while not draining resources or diverting focus from Stanley. Special forces had conducted a successful diversionary raid in that area on D-Day. A second raid now would strengthen perceptions by the Argentines that the British intended to attack Stanley from that direction. Thompson therefore met with Lieutenant Colonel H. Jones, the commander of 2 Para, shortly after units came ashore, to discuss this possibility. Jones' paratroopers had been digging in since the landings, watching helplessly as Argentine planes attacked ships in Falkland Sound. The popular battalion commander welcomed an opportunity to lead his men into action. On 23 May, Thompson issued Jones a warning order tasking him to develop a plan for a limited raid on Goose Green, and later discussed his intent with Fieldhouse during a nightly update. At the time, Fieldhouse conveyed no sense of urgency for the raid.

Complicating the situation, however, were events since the landings. Air attacks on ships around San Carlos had slowed the build-up considerably. Helicopter support was now crucial for starting moves toward Stanley. The Brigade succeeded in getting reconnaissance elements forward to Mount Kent and Teal Inlet on 24 May. Then bad weather set in, restricting helicopters from flying and making it impossible to reposition artillery to support 2 Para's advance down the isthmus toward Goose Green. Thompson and his planners were in a huddle assessing alternative courses of action in the evening meeting of 25 May, when they learned of the loss of *Atlantic Conveyor*. One member of his staff responded after hearing about the loss of helicopters, 'We'll have to bloody well walk.'¹ Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Whitehead, the commanding officer of 45 Commando, one of the two units designated to move to the Douglas Settlement/Teal Inlet area, later told his men that if their forebears had been able to march from Normandy to Berlin in the Second World War, then walking across East Falkland should not be a problem.²

Marching a combat unit the distance from San Carlos to Stanley would be quite challenging, however, given the cold, wet winter weather. It had been calculated by 3 Commando Brigade that men carrying most of their individual equipment would take about an hour to march a single kilometre at night.³ As slow as that was, moving support units, equipment and supplies to sustain a ground fight would be an entirely different matter. It would now take more time and careful control of the few transportation assets remaining. Planners had calculated that it would take eighty-five Sea King sorties to airlift a single six-gun, 105mm light gun battery with a basic load of 500 rounds of ammunition per gun.⁴ With four gun batteries to be moved, much remained to be done before Thompson's ground forces could get forward with enough equipment to start the push on Stanley. The lone surviving Chinook helicopter from *Atlantic Conveyor* was not anticipated at San Carlos to help before 29 May. Thus anything shifting assets from requirements in the north would now just make it that much longer before the British could launch the decisive battle.

By the time the weather cleared around San Carlos, Thompson had decided that supporting operations toward Stanley and Goose Green would spread capabilities far too thin. He therefore cancelled the raid,

much to the consternation of 2 Para, intending instead to wait on the arrival of 5 Brigade with some additional helicopters. He did not believe it was important to send one of his combat units to neutralize the few hundred Argentines at this out-of-the way settlement, given recent developments. Thompson's decision, however, would not stand because Admiral Fieldhouse had changed his mind about the importance of Goose Green.

Ever since landing on East Falkland, Thompson had been operating under increasing pressure to 'get on with it' away from the San Carlos beachhead. It had become clear during his nightly updates that political and military leaders in the United Kingdom were becoming increasingly concerned about losses inflicted on the Royal Navy as the Land Force continued its build-up. And it was no secret that frustrations were developing within the Carrier Battle Group for the same reason. Thompson was at a clear disadvantage. He and Major General Moore had worked together often in the past, and Moore had complete confidence in his brigadier. But those in London directing the war effort knew little of him, neither Admiral Lewin in the War Cabinet advising Thatcher, nor Admirals Leach and Fieldhouse. Thompson and Woodward had not worked together either prior to the deployment, and since departing they had developed a cool relationship at best. All the admirals knew each other, but none of them had experience in amphibious operations or understood the associated risks of breaking away from beachheads prematurely. Now they were questioning the need to delay ground operations any longer. But concerns were not limited to the Royal Navy. Lieutenant General Richard Trant of the British Army, who replaced Moore as Fieldhouse's deputy, had signalled concerns to Moore on 24 May about the lack of movement out of the beachhead.⁵ Senior leaders in the British Army had expressed reservations about the viability of such a long distance war before forces even deployed. Now the politicians were starting to get concerned that if something did not change course soon, Britain could be forced into a ceasefire leading to negotiations from a position of weakness. Such strategic concerns were quite valid. The only problem was that no one shared them with Thompson. A signal from Moore had reached Thompson on 24 May reassuring him that Moore was not 'in sympathy with pressure to rush you'.⁶ Moore had been having communication problems aboard *QE2* ever since sailing from England with 5 Brigade. He was now without communications capability again.

Officials in London were looking for some action on land to regain the initiative, provide a British victory to counter recent losses to Argentine air attacks and buy time psychologically and politically until Moore and 5 Brigade arrived within the next week. Thompson therefore bore the brunt of these frustrations during his nightly phone calls. At one point, Fieldhouse supposedly contacted Woodward and 'told him to go ashore and shout at Thompson until he moved out of the beachhead'.⁷ Woodward declined. Shortly before noon on 26 May, Brigadier Thompson was summoned to speak to Fieldhouse via the satellite phone newly linked to London from Ajax Bay. During the call, Fieldhouse ordered him to attack Goose Green or be replaced.

Thompson therefore resurrected the plan for 2 Para to raid the settlement. His original intent had been for the parachute battalion to get in quickly, cause as much damage as possible and then withdraw. That now changed to a mission for 2 Para to capture Goose Green. Thompson did not give up on his plan to get other forces across the island in preparation for an attack on Stanley. Given the loss of heavy-lift helicopters, he intended to direct 45 Commando and 3 Para to cross East Falkland on foot. Then, as weather permitted, he would airlift 42 Commando forward to secure the high ground of Mount Kent with all the medium-lift helicopters he could muster. The least desirable mission for a combat unit would be assumed by 40 Commando; it would remain in the San Carlos anchorage to protect the BMA and other areas.

The British still expected to encounter only a few hundred Argentines at Goose Green. The Brigade had received conflicting intelligence reports since D-Day about enemy strength there. One report indicated that over three infantry companies were deployed around Darwin and Goose Green, supported by two 105mm artillery pieces and a dozen anti-aircraft guns. Just before leaving Sussex Mountain, though, Lieutenant Colonel Jones met with special forces who had conducted the D-Day raid on Darwin; they suggested to him that only a single company of Argentines was on the whole isthmus.⁸ The challenge before 2 Para remained daunting either way. The Argentines held good terrain and if properly deployed could create a tough defence against the paratroopers. Approaches to the settlement included large areas offering little cover to advancing ground forces. In one place, the isthmus narrowed to about a mile. After getting through that choke point, attackers would have to negotiate a ridge of land known as Darwin Hill that straddled the terrain between the Darwin and Goose Green Settlements. Should the defenders realize the British were coming, they could prepare an even better defence there to bog down a ground assault. The strength of 2 Para for the attack was slightly more than 600, about half of whom were concentrated in the three rifle companies. If there was only a company of Argentines spread out on the isthmus, as special forces advised Jones, then 2 Para would retain a three-to-one numerical advantage, not bad odds for an attacking force. If there were more, it could be at a potential disadvantage.

Resources to support 2 Para's attack were thin, due to requirements to support logistics operations and the two other units advancing from the beachhead toward Douglas Settlement and Teal Inlet. On the evening of 26 May, 2 Para would move out from Sussex Mountain, carrying most things with them. Jones' intent was to use the cover of darkness to get his paratroopers to the area around Camilla Creek House, about 12km from their positions on the mountain. They would remain in hiding there during the day and then attack in darkness early the next morning to seize Goose Green another 12km down the isthmus. Each soldier would carry ammunition estimated to be sufficient for two days, individual ration packs to eat whenever time permitted, two canteens of water, and medical supplies issued before landing. Many would carry extra rounds for the general-purpose machine guns for additional firepower. A request was

submitted to Brigade headquarters for BV202 over-snow vehicles to help move mortars and ammunition forward. To the battalion's frustration, Brigade turned down the request because of limited availability of the tracked vehicles, difficulties of distributing fuel forward in jerrycans and the belief that the vehicles would bog down in the terrain on the isthmus.⁹ Consequently, Lieutenant Colonel Jones opted to take only two of his eight authorized 81mm mortars and a total of 300 rounds of mortar ammunition, which would be man-packed by mortar sections, assault engineers and anyone else available. He had two Blowpipe detachments allocated to his battalion with man-portable surface-to-air missiles. Other fire support would come from three 105mm light guns, which the Brigade would lift by helicopter to Camilla Creek House the night of 27 May. This might not seem sufficient supporting firepower for a battalion attack, but as they left Camilla Creek the next morning, 2 Para also would receive naval gunfire support from the frigate *Arrow* and close air support from Harriers off the carriers. Nonetheless, 2 Para was far from pleased by the lack of support they appeared to be getting. Jones planned to keep his quartermaster officer with the battalion's B echelon at San Carlos to coordinate anticipated needs for resupply.

Also on 27 May, 45 Commando and 3 Para would begin their long treks on foot over the undulating East Falkland peat bogs toward Douglas Settlement and Teal Inlet respectively. Two days later, helicopters would transport 42 Commando from its positions around San Carlos to Mount Kent, from which the commandos could maintain observation of all approaches to Stanley. Then, using LSLs, the Brigade would form a sea line of communication from the BMA at Ajax, north-eastward around East Falkland and into Teal Inlet, in order to establish a tailored Forward Brigade Maintenance Area or FBMA there to sustain the attack toward Stanley. If all went as planned, 3 Commando Brigade would be postured in forward positions when Major General Moore arrived with 5 Brigade around 1 June. Coming days looked to be tiring for the entire Brigade.

Brigade units started walking toward their objectives under cover of darkness on the evening of 26 May. Meanwhile, 45 Commando boarded LCUs to take them across the anchorage to Port San Carlos, where they would begin their 35km march north to Douglas Settlement. Fearing that helicopters might not get their rucksacks forward once his commandos reached Douglas Settlement, Lieutenant Colonel Whitehead directed that his men take ammunition and rations for two days, as well as sleeping gear and extra clothing. Individual rucksacks grew to a staggering 120lb or more. The same applied to 3 Para, led by Lieutenant Colonel Hugh Pike, as they started their 50km march to Teal Inlet. Although 3 Para was to follow 45 Commando in the trek, Pike had received information from a local resident about a better route to Teal Inlet. He subsequently received approval to parallel the commandos further to the east. A troop of Scorpion and Scimitar light-armoured vehicles were originally supposed to accompany the paratroopers on their march. Fuel shortages prevented them from leaving the same day, though, when the LSL *Sir Lancelot* was forced to ditch fuel because an unexploded bomb remained on board. The troop leader eventually hijacked some fuel and followed 3 Para the next day, picking up stragglers en route.¹⁰ Before they marched off the slopes of Sussex Mountain toward Camilla Creek House that night, 2 Para hijacked two over-snow vehicles with Royal Corps of Transport drivers to resupply ammunition during their attack.¹¹ The paratroopers left their rucksacks in place on Sussex Mountain for support personnel to airlift forward when the tactical situation permitted.

Aside from the loss of helicopters and supplies aboard *Atlantic Conveyor*, the logistics posture of 3 Commando Brigade had improved slowly since the 24 May attacks on LSLs in the anchorage. Each night, members of Ordnance Squadron would await the arrival of ships carrying specific supplies. On some occasions, vessels requested would not show up; on others, members of Ordnance Squadron would board vessels only to find that original loads had been cross-decked to other vessels in the TEZ on the orders of Woodward's staff, but without coordination with 3 Commando Brigade.¹² When they succeeded in locating supplies needed, Ordnance Squadron inevitably found itself racing against time to get supplies offloaded, not knowing exactly which ships or supplies would show up in the anchorage. These conditions notwithstanding, it still had managed to amass about thirty days of supply at Ajax by the time 2 Para, 3 Para and 45 Commando departed on 27 May. Brigade logisticians were then starting to plan details of their major logistical move in a few days, when they would establish the FBMA at Teal Inlet.

The same day that combat units departed the San Carlos area for their objectives, Major Gerry Wells-Cole, Thompson's logistics planner, was in the BMA for the regular daily meeting with unit quartermasters to work out logistics requirements. Ordnance Squadron had just finished preparing sling loads of ammunition for 2 Para, which helicopters would lift to Camilla Creek House that night to support the paratroopers' attack the next morning on Goose Green. It was shortly after noon. Cooks were cleaning up after serving a meal to several hundred men from Commando Logistic Regiment and 45 Commando in the mess hall established in one section of the refrigeration plant. A few dozen feet away, in another section of the plant, surgeons in the small hospital area were in the middle of two operations. Suddenly, whistles sounded, a signal that enemy aircraft had been spotted in the area. Men scrambled for the foxholes and fighting positions they had been working on since D-Day. It looked like some Skyhawks had just made a bombing run near San Carlos Settlement. This would be the first time that Argentine pilots had penetrated air defences and attacked Brigade units on land. Wells-Cole recounted the chaos that followed:

Hellberg and I were moving up the side of the refrigeration plant, near the entrance to the Red and Green Life Machine. We were about 50 metres from the entrance. I was heading to the helicopter pad. That was when we saw fighters attacking San Carlos. They were hitting 40 Commando hard. Then, seconds later, Skyhawks were on top of us. I hit the ground. Dirt started flying all around. Then, I ran for the nearest slit trench for cover. Ammunition started blowing up all over the place.

Skyhawk pilots succeeded in dropping twelve bombs into the congested BMA. Fortunately, only four

exploded. Some of those that did explode, though, struck in the middle of the ammunition storage area, igniting stacks of 105mm artillery shells, mortar rounds and MILAN missiles. There was little Commando Logistic Regiment could do to contain the raging fires that erupted, since it had no fire-fighting equipment. Efforts to hose down fires with seawater helped little. Members of the Regiment rushed to move supplies safely away from fires but with little success. The lack of space had meant that supplies were intermingled and stacked in close proximity to each other. Explosions wracked the BMA throughout the night as winds fanned flames into surrounding stocks. Eventually, Commando Logistic Regiment had to let the fire burn itself out.

Four bombs also hit the old refrigeration plant, which housed the Red and Green Life Machine and the mess hall. One passed all the way through the plant without exploding, but another detonated on impact in the mess hall portion of the building. Had the attack occurred just an hour earlier, that bomb would have found many more commandos in the mess area. As it was, the attack was still costly. Four men from 45 Commando and one from Commando Logistic Regiment were killed at Ajax. Twenty-seven were wounded. Another man was killed and several others wounded by the air attack on 40 Commando that day. Making the situation even more treacherous, two 500lb bombs lodged in the refrigeration plant near the surgical wards. They would remain there for the duration of the war, defused and sandbagged, just a few feet away from surgeons and other medical personnel working to save lives. Memories of the destruction that afternoon would remain etched forever in the minds of those who were present. As Medical Squadron Commander Rick Jolly related years later, 'I still cannot pass a football field and hear the referee's whistle without feeling a tightening in my gut.'¹³

Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg knew that casualties could have been significantly higher had his men not been highly trained in survival skills. His Regiment stood apart from other logistics units elsewhere in the world because of the rigours of its combat skills training. All men were required to pass the Royal Marines Commando Course to serve in the Regiment. Many had already served in combat arms positions in one of 3 Commando Brigade's commandos; and all the men, as a result of this commando training, had become skilled in individual weapons and preparation of defences. Referring to his subordinates and the air attack that afternoon, Hellberg commented, 'Not only can they fight as part of a rifle section/ troop should the need arise, they also know how to dig in effectively with a good two feet of overhead cover - without this our casualty toll would probably have been three times higher.'¹⁴ In spite of this, the attack on the BMA reinforced beliefs throughout the Regiment that additional weaponry and combat training were necessary in British logistics units in the future, in order to save lives and protect supplies.

Damage to the Brigade sustainment base that day was considerable. Bombs and fires destroyed several hundred rounds of 81mm mortar and 105mm artillery ammunition, including those that had been segregated and netted into loads that same day for airlift to support 2 Para. Additionally, 45 Commando lost all of its MILAN missiles. The commandos had intended to use these as bunker-busters during the attack on Stanley. The attack simply could not have happened at a worse time. Explosions continued throughout the evening in the BMA, as 2 Para prepared to start its advance and as 45 Commando and 3 Para began to move across East Falkland. The Land Force found itself in the precarious position of having four of its five combat units moving away from the beachhead while units in the anchorage were still reeling from a devastating air attack. Logisticians scrambled to find additional cargo nets and fill them with artillery ammunition. Helicopter pilots managed to lift the half battery of 105mm guns and ammunition to Camilla Creek House for 2 Para. It required eighteen helicopter sorties: one for the gunners, three for the guns and fourteen for the artillery ammunition loose-loaded into cargo nets to save the weight of boxes and pallets.¹⁵ As cold weather settled in upon paratroopers near Camilla Creek House that night, they tried to get a few hours of rest before the attack. They had to make the best of it without the waterproof clothing and sleeping bags left behind on the mountains.

Adding to everyone's frustrations that evening, the battalion became aware that someone had leaked information to the BBC regarding the breakout from the beachhead. They suspected the leak came from one of the reporters accompanying units on East Falkland, but that was not the case. The consensus later was that some official in the British government actually caused the leak. Whatever the source, the damage was done. That afternoon, the BBC reported to the world that 3 Commando Brigade units were moving away from San Carlos and, more specifically, that 2 Para was then heading south to attack Argentines in the vicinity of Darwin and Goose Green. Any advantage from surprise was now lost. The next day, 2 Para would discover tougher defences and more firepower than they had anticipated from intelligence reports.

Lieutenant Colonel Jones had developed a detailed six-phase plan for the attack down the isthmus by his four companies. Patrols from C Company first would clear the start line located at the narrow throat of the isthmus 5km from Camilla Creek House. Then A Company and B Company would clear areas about 1km south of the start line on the east and west sides of the isthmus respectively, with D Company following in reserve initially between the two. A Company's focus was the area around Burntside House and B Company's on areas overlooking Camilla Creek. Once those were secure, A Company would clear Coronation Point on the east side near Darwin, and D Company would move forward to clear areas further south above Camilla Creek. Then B Company would pass through D Company to an area near Boca House, as C Company advanced to secure the airstrip west of Darwin. D Company would be prepared to reinforce B Company if needed. After this phase, the companies would be roughly in line across the isthmus west to east near Darwin. A Company then would clear Darwin as B and D Companies attacked together to clear Goose Green. In the final phase, C Company would advance south of Goose Green, seize Brodie Creek Bridge and take up positions to prevent enemy reinforcements. The plan was complex. It also did not

anticipate that the Argentine main defence might be on the highest ground outside Darwin called Darwin Hill.

Although spotted by Argentines, 2 Para scouts provided Jones good information about the location of defences. He intended to overrun defences straddling ridgelines near Darwin during the hours of darkness, then capture Darwin and Goose Green in daylight. The attack would start quietly, with units crossing the start line at 0230 hrs on 28 May, and then become noisy as units made contact with Argentines, at which time they would receive supplementary fire support from the 4.5 inch guns of the frigate *Arrow* in Grantham Sound, from the three 105mm light guns each with 320 rounds near Camilla Creek House and, at daybreak and weather permitting, from close air support by Harriers. By their nature, noisy attacks meant higher rates of ammunition expenditure. This was particularly important for the 105mm artillery and mortar crews. If the attack took longer than expected, gunners would probably require resupply of rounds to maintain continuous fire support.

Companies started their attacks on both sides of the isthmus with good success initially. Rain had started pouring down on the paratroopers. Within twenty minutes of crossing the start line, A Company made first contact with the enemy on the east side of the isthmus. The Argentines soon withdrew under protection of artillery fire. To the west, B Company came in contact with Argentines as well, an hour after crossing the start line; it overwhelmed them with the assistance of naval gunfire from *Arrow*. In their initial move, B Company paratroopers had bypassed some Argentines in the dark, however, and the advance of D Company, which was following, slowed significantly because of these pockets of resistance. By then, the guns on *Arrow* had gone silent because of mechanical problems, which took the sailors two hours to fix. As it worked to clear the resistance, D Company relied on mortars and artillery for support. Although other companies had achieved their first objectives by midnight, the fight by D Company was not over. The battalion's attack was starting to take longer than anticipated. By 0400 hrs, A Company had discovered to their surprise that there was no resistance on its second objective at Coronation Point. As a result, as D Company was still clearing its way south, A Company proceeded to set up a base for fire and position units for its assault on Darwin. The plan had been for them to wait before attacking Darwin until other companies had achieved their second objectives. B Company was still fighting through tough resistance as it approached its objective at Boca House. Now the proximity of forces began making mortar and artillery support difficult. The paratroopers had been fighting down the isthmus for two hours, and their overall advance was slowing. It was at this point that Jones ordered A Company to hold in place as he moved his tactical headquarters forward to join them and assess the situation. After doing so, he ordered A Company to continue its attack, but the Argentine defence dug into the ridge west of Darwin and, aided by artillery, blocked their path. By 0530 hrs, A Company's advance came to a halt as well. Its paratroopers had encountered Argentina's main defensive belt on Darwin Hill, which had received reinforcement by another infantry company earlier that morning.¹⁶ Now, as daylight broke, the attack by 2 Para stalled.

It was during this critical juncture in the fight that Jones started reassessing options with his units. He no longer had assistance from naval gunfire, since *Arrow* had been called off station because of the need to leave Grantham Sound for San Carlos Water for her own safety. Despite her guns being out of action for a while because of the mechanical problem, the frigate had fired hundreds of rounds to support 2 Para and remained two hours beyond her scheduled departure time. Jones opted for a ground attack rather than wait for added fire support. A group of fifteen men including the battalion adjutant for 2 Para, who was moving with Jones and his tactical command post, made an assault to silence a machine gun pinning down A Company. It was not successful. Three died, including the adjutant. Jones then led another attempt himself. As he charged forward, another machine gun from a trench they had not seen cut him down. Later, two scout helicopters shuttling ammunition forward tried to extract the battalion commander. A Pucara shot one of them down, killing the pilot and wounding his observer. Jones died before any helicopters could get him out.

Major Chris Keeble, Jones' second in command, inherited a situation at this point that was far from encouraging. He was at the main command post to the rear near Camilla Creek House, trying to orchestrate support for the fight. Ammunition was starting to run low. Casualty evacuation, in particular, was becoming a problem. Wounded paratroopers were scattered throughout the isthmus. Companies in the battalion were discovering that they had few litters to get casualties to locations where they could be treated. They had no ground transportation to move casualties to the battalion aid station; and enemy artillery fire was hindering helicopters from getting ammunition forward and then evacuating casualties to the hospital at Ajax. Paratroopers therefore were attempting to evacuate comrades with ponchos or anything else they could find. One account indicates, for instance, that when Lieutenant Colonel Jones was wounded, paratroopers worked frantically amidst enemy fire to improvise a stretcher from wood and tin off an adjacent Argentine trench. When that fell apart, they tried making a stretcher using rifles and personal equipment.¹⁷ Despite their efforts, Jones died long before a helicopter could have reached him amidst the fighting underway on the Darwin ridgeline. Making matters worse for 2 Para, the battalion had expended all of its mortar ammunition, and bad weather prevented Harriers from taking off. It was now daylight, and the paratroopers were spread out across the barren isthmus.

Keeble assumed command under these formidable circumstances. Fortunately, A Company succeeded in finding positions where they could fire anti-tank weapons at bunkers that had been obstructing their advance. B Company did the same and, with the assistance of a flanking movement from the west by D Company, caused Argentines around Boca House to surrender. As Keeble moved forward to take charge, he received updates from his company commanders. The seasoned major directed A Company to continue

to hold Darwin, took one of its companies to reinforce C Company, and ordered the reinforced C Company to head south to attack Goose Green. Keeble ordered D Company to seize the airfield at Goose Green and B Company to set up a blocking position on the high ground south of the settlement to prevent reinforcement. Paratroopers fought through Argentine defences as they advanced on objectives, withstanding artillery fire and several air attacks that included Pucarás trying in vain to hit them with napalm canisters. In the last hours of daylight, as the first Harriers were arriving to provide close air support, 2 Para finally surrounded Goose Green. It was about 1530 hrs. The paratroopers had been fighting for over twelve hours. The Harriers now brought intimidating firepower to bear on Argentines around Goose Green as they released cluster bombs, each bursting forth into four dozen smaller bombs. The air attacks demoralized the Argentines, who soon abandoned their artillery and air defence weapons. Keeble reported the developments to Thompson back at San Carlos. It was starting to snow around Goose Green. Personal gear and sleeping bags for his men remained on Sussex Mountain. He now needed to figure out his next step to force an Argentine surrender.

Despite their eventual success, it had not been a good day for 2 Para. Goose Green, their primary objective, was still in Argentine hands. It was clear that the battalion had encountered tougher defences than anticipated. Already paratroopers had killed over two hundred Argentines in heavy fighting, but 2 Para had lost sixteen men throughout the day. Another three dozen were wounded, and some of those still had not been evacuated. Casualties were staying on the battlefield far longer than anticipated. The detailed medical training Brigade units received while sailing south helped some men keep themselves alive until they could receive medical care. Field expedients remained the rule for getting individual casualties to locations where they could be evacuated eventually. Additionally, most units were in dire need of resupply. They had expended four to five times daily allocations of most ammunition. Mortar sections had used up all their rounds. They now needed to move forward before any further attack because their mortars were at range limits. Company A was out of ammunition, and Company B critically short.¹⁸ According to one account, some battalion soldiers had been crawling down the narrow isthmus throughout the day 'among dead and wounded, relieving them of spare ammunition'.¹⁹ Forward observers had submitted fire missions during the day, only to receive the reply, 'We just haven't got the rounds.'²⁰ By the end of the day, 2 Para was beginning to feel victorious, but the condition they were in chafed at some paratroopers. They believed the battalion warranted higher priority support and were frustrated by lack of resupply and slow evacuation of casualties.²¹ It did not matter to them that weather conditions had prevented Harriers from flying for most of the day. They had succeeded regardless of these circumstances because they were determined, tough men and had bold leaders. They had proved themselves far better soldiers than the Argentines.

Years after the war, Thompson faulted himself for not providing 2 Para with more resources for its fight that day and for not making it more of a Brigade affair.²² Although that is understandable after what happened, he could hardly have foreseen the confusion resulting from inaccurate intelligence, air strikes on the BMA, malfunctioning guns on *Arrow* or bad weather delaying close air support by Harriers. As the Land Force commander, he also had concerns for two units marching across East Falkland, special forces atop Mount Kent, another commando waiting to fly there and a beachhead now with thin defences and a vulnerable BMA.

The Brigade had tried hard to support the paratroopers during their attack. Air attacks on the BMA at Ajax the previous afternoon understandably had split the focus of Commando Logistic Regiment, as well as that of others in the anchorage area. Complicating matters further for those trying to get supplies forward to 2 Para was the lack of helicopters. Commodore Clapp retained operational control of all helicopters and had allocated some to the tactical control of 3 Commando Brigade, but 2 Para clearly perceived that it was not receiving timely helicopter support. At one point in the fighting, the battalion had tried in vain to get helicopters through its higher headquarters to come forward and evacuate two serious casualties. Finally, an off-duty Army Air Corps officer overheard the urgent request and responded on his own.²³ The overall procedure for providing helicopter support was no less frustrating for those in Commando Logistic Regiment or at the Brigade headquarters. On 29 May, Surgeon Commander Jolly, who continually faced the challenge of coordinating casualty evacuation needs for the Brigade, submitted a request to Clapp's staff, only to receive a message in return: 'Request better assessment helicopter needs for future casevac to avoid unnecessary tasking scarce assets. Difficulty of assessment understood but must improve. Give 24 Hours notice of future casevac requirements.'²⁴ There just seemed to be a lack of awareness by some in the approval channel of the realities of unpredictable requirements during combat. As *Fearless* departed the area of East Falkland that day to rendezvous with *Antrim*, the destroyer bringing Major General Moore and Brigadier Tony Wilson, the commander of 5 Brigade, Clapp handed over operational control of helicopters to the captain of the LPD *Intrepid*.

On the evening of 28 May, Keeble transmitted new requirements to Thompson, as his units consolidated around Goose Green in the falling snow, so that he could continue the attack the next day and defeat the Argentines. These included three more 105mm guns with 2,000 rounds of ammunition and the mortars with ammunition the battalion had left behind. Thompson agreed, and in addition decided to dispatch a company from 42 Commando to cover the southern approach to Goose Green; he also contacted Fieldhouse's headquarters at Northwood for assistance in getting the hospital ship *Uganda* to move closer to San Carlos so that Commando Logistic Regiment could evacuate casualties from its small field hospital at Ajax.²⁵ That field hospital was establishing a remarkable record of saving lives once casualties arrived, but given recent air attacks on the beachhead and 2 Para's fight, it simply was running out of space for casualties. The airlift of additional guns, mortars and ammunition began at first light the next day. Despite

a relatively short round trip of 38km from the beachhead to 2 Para locations, it took helicopters seven hours to fly the additional guns and ammunition forward.²⁶ By then, something remarkable had happened to make additional firepower unnecessary.

By nightfall, the paratroopers had clearly gained the upper hand, having hemmed the Argentines into the small settlement. Victory seemed certain, unless Brigadier General Menendez could somehow reinforce his forces. Neither side had an accurate assessment of the force they were facing, though. Major Keeble confirmed, after his soldiers interrogated some prisoners that evening, that the Argentines had been holding over a hundred civilians captive in the Goose Green community house since the beginning of the month. That complicated matters if he wanted to use all of his additional supporting fire to bring the defenders to their knees. He finally decided to offer the Argentines the option of surrendering rather than suffering what, in all certainty, would be a painful siege. The next morning, with Thompson's approval, he sent two Argentine prisoners forward under a white flag with two options: surrender, or suffer the consequences. He reminded the defenders that they were responsible for the welfare of civilians still in the settlement and that the British would hold them accountable after the fight, in accordance with the Geneva Convention, for any injuries to civilians. Then he waited for a reply. The response came a few hours later: the Argentines had agreed to surrender. Their commander requested that his men be permitted to march away from their defences and lay down their arms with honour. When they eventually marched out from their shelters, the Argentines discovered to their amazement that only a few hundred paratroopers surrounded them. The weary men of 2 Para were no less surprised when they counted a thousand Argentine prisoners filing past. It was a stunning victory for the British. The paratroopers also took possession of the spoils of war in and around the Goose Green settlement, including four 105mm howitzers, two 35mm air defence guns, six 20mm air defense guns, six 120mm mortars and two Pucara aircraft.²⁷

The achievement of 2 Para at Goose Green was tremendous to say the least. The victory stood as startling evidence, for any who might have doubted British resolve at that point, that the United Kingdom was not just committed to but capable of regaining the Falklands. The engagement was clearly a moment of reckoning for Argentine ground forces. Although some put up a good fight, they proved to be no match for the highly trained and determined paratroopers. That so few had captured so many made the Argentine surrender that much more embarrassing.

But if 2 Para's success was a boost to British morale and a catalyst for future planning, it also proved to be a bane for logisticians in 3 Commando Brigade. The stunning capture of a thousand Argentines provided good publicity. At the time of capture, though, these enemy prisoners of war represented nearly twenty per cent of the entire British Land Force. The impact on Commando Logistic Regiment and future logistical planning became staggering. The Regiment knew before landing that it would have responsibility for guarding prisoners. In fact, Hellberg had received direct support from a commando rifle company to handle that possibility. The problem presented by this mass surrender, however, was not just one of guarding and controlling prisoners in a congested BMA. As he put it later, Commando Logistic Regiment simply 'did not have the tentage, wire, pickets, cooks and canteens' to establish and run a prisoner of war camp. Now, transportation, always at a premium whether on sea or land, had to be diverted to transferring prisoners from Goose Green to Ajax. The Argentines were in need of food due to lack of adequate provisioning at Goose Green. Several hundred of them required treatment of wounds, and British blood supplies already were critically low.²⁸ Dozens more had to be buried, and the Regiment still had not managed to locate the body bags it shipped south for its own casualties, let alone for enemy dead. The Regiment would eventually bury the dead Argentines in a mass grave near Darwin.

Deciding what to do with such a large number of prisoners simply was not easy. The British considered putting them on ships at first, but since all ships apart from *Uganda* were potential targets, putting prisoners aboard them would run counter to the Geneva Convention. As they sorted out alternatives over the next few days, they kept the Argentines under guard in sheep-shearing sheds at Goose Green. Then they marched them to Ajax, where Commando Logistic Regiment took control, fed them British rations and provided medical care. There was simply no good place to put them at Ajax. Although the Brigade had been expecting tentage for thousands to arrive, those supplies had been lost days before on *Atlantic Conveyor*. The Regiment therefore kept the prisoners outside and under guard during daylight. At night they herded them into one end of the refrigeration plant for greater control and security. Within days, the Task Force boarded the Argentine prisoners on to a ship and sailed them to Montevideo, Uruguay for repatriation to Argentina, thereby reducing the potential drain on logistics resources meant for British units. In the end, the British learned the importance of having a unit designated beforehand to handle prisoners of war and of making sure that back-up supplies and services were available for their care.

The logistical posture of the Brigade had deteriorated significantly in the past forty-eight hours as a result of the attack on the BMA and 2 Para's fight. Requirements to provision prisoners only made matters that much worse. Several thousand tons of supplies were on hand now, but inventories of specific items were desperately low for some types of supply. Logisticians briefed at an evening conference on 28 May that in the BMA at the time there remained only eighty-three rounds of ammunition for the 105mm light guns, thirty MILAN missiles for the entire Brigade, no one-man ration packs, only two days' supply of ten-man ration packs (which were unsuitable for the troops to carry as they moved forward), no cooking fuel for heating rations, no spare clothing and only three days' supply of assorted medical stocks.²⁹ It was now even more critical than before to get ships into the anchorage with the right supplies. The Brigade had to replenish its stocks at Ajax; it likewise had to start getting other supplies forward to Teal Inlet, because 3 Para and 45 Commando would be there within hours and would need resupply. The Brigade's frustrations

and sense of urgency were evident in a message Major Wells-Cole sent to Clapp's staff that evening:

After last-minute plea *Galahad* departure tonight has been delayed as she is not yet unloaded for future ops. Further she continues to hold some stocks that are essential to the force that must be offloaded.

Also understand *Percival* not coming in until 29 May. Plan was to load her with stocks for future ops as well as *Galahad*. However as *Elk* can not come in for another 24 hours we do not hold necessary stocks to fill *Percival* nor support the Brigade much longer without resupply--if position not improved we will grind to a halt.³⁰

Meanwhile, the movement of 3 Para and 45 Commando had proceeded to the north toward Douglas Settlement and Teal Inlet largely without incident. Relatively few men dropped out of the trek under their staggering loads of equipment, supplies and ammunition. The commandos coined the term 'yomping' to describe their march across the island, meaning Your Own Marching Pace; the paratroopers called theirs 'tabbing' for Tactical Approach to Battle. The weather was not bad for the first day, but the men still had difficulty keeping their footing under the weight of their heavy rucksacks because of the boggy, uneven terrain. Unfortunately, the night after leaving the beachhead it rained, soaking men as well as sleeping bags and making the next day's march even less bearable. In the early afternoon of 28 May, lead elements of 45 Commando reached Douglas Settlement. They had been moving in combat formation the last dozen kilometres of their approach, so that they were ready in case they encountered resistance. Argentines who had been in the area, however, had fled. Locals were glad to see the commandos and helped move their gear with tractors and trailers over the last leg of the march. 3 Para arrived at its objective of Teal Inlet with armoured vehicles from the Blues and Royals later that evening.

Unbeknownst to most in 45 Commando and 3 Para, special forces performing reconnaissance had preceded them into the area several days before. *Fearless* had sailed around the north end of the island from San Carlos on 25 May and dropped off a team from Special Boat Squadron in small Rigid Raider watercraft. Their mission was to survey the narrow waters that led to Teal Inlet for suitable beach areas that LSLs could use to bring supplies forward.³¹ With information about beaches available and 3 Para and 45 Commando at their objectives, 3 Commando Brigade would soon be in position to start moving support echelons and supplies to the area for the eventual attack on Stanley.

On 29 May, 3 Commando Brigade issued orders to 45 Commando and 3 Para to prepare to continue their advance the next day to Estancia House, another 20km to the east. Once those areas were cleared, the Land Force then would be able to dominate high ground starting in the north with Mounts Estancia and Vernet and extending south-east to Mounts Kent and Challenger, once the other two commandos were able to relocate from San Carlos. At that point, the stage would be set for the final attack on Stanley after helicopters repositioned artillery and logisticians moved sufficient ammunition and supplies forward. In the meantime, 45 Commando and 3 Para would remain less than 20km from Stanley and within range of Argentine heavy artillery.

Efforts to get 42 Commando atop Mount Kent had been less successful. Bad weather had repeatedly prevented helicopters from reaching the mountain in recent days. On 30 May, though, the weather cleared for a while, just after the lone surviving Chinook helicopter from *Atlantic Conveyor* arrived at San Carlos. That helicopter would earn a reputation throughout the entire Task Force as a real workhorse from then to the end of the campaign. Its maiden flight was to Mount Kent that day, carrying 42 Commando and some of its supporting arms. On the return leg, the pilot encountered a severe winter snow storm, temporarily lost his vision and skidded the huge helicopter on to a creek near Port Salvador for about a hundred metres before he could pull it up again. The near catastrophe prevented further flights that evening until potential damage to the undercarriage could be checked.³²

By the following day, 3 Commando Brigade had succeeded in getting the three units to the desired locations. Both 3 Para and 45 Commando had reached areas around Estancia House; and most of 42 Commando was weathering blizzard-like wintry conditions on the slopes of Mount Kent. All three units were sorely in need of resupply, though. They had only what they carried with them. Logisticians had been working nonstop on the beachhead in the meantime, receiving and sorting supplies to move forward. Relocation of stocks began with a combined effort by helicopters and BV202 over-snow vehicles. LSLs would lift massive tonnages to Teal Inlet in the days ahead.

Now 3 Commando Brigade had its ground combat forces postured for the final offensive on Stanley. Nevertheless, it would take quite some time before the Brigade could shift artillery and supplies for the attack. Up to 70km separated 42 Commando, 45 Commando and 3 Para from their support echelons and other Brigade units near San Carlos; and 2 Para was still in the area of Goose Green, looking for an opportunity to move closer to Stanley. Providing what units needed would take time. Meanwhile, reinforcements were about to arrive in the anchorage. British forces on East Falkland soon would approach 10,000, twice as many as originally deployed as part of 3 Commando Brigade. That would demand a lot more work for logisticians even under ideal circumstances.

Chapter 8

More Forces and Challenges

When senior Task Force leaders met aboard *Hermes* at Ascension on 17 April, they agreed additional ground combat power was needed to supplement 3 Commando Brigade. Intelligence indicated that Argentine defenders on East Falkland already outnumbered Brigadier Thompson's force by more than two to one. There certainly was no reason to believe the situation would have changed by the time the Brigade landed. There remained a good possibility, in fact, that ratios could change to disadvantage the British even more. Even assuming 3 Commando Brigade would be able to surprise the Argentines with their initial assault and establish a sufficient beachhead, taking the battle to Stanley would be quite a different matter. The British clearly needed more ground forces, if for no other reason than to keep several thousand of Brigadier General Menendez's soldiers occupied as Thompson's commandos punched through outlying areas to take Stanley. Accordingly, Admiral Fieldhouse returned to the United Kingdom from Ascension and set another brigade in motion toward the South Atlantic. That unit became 5 Infantry Brigade.

This was a very different organization from its counterpart 3 Commando Brigade. Formed only three months before with its primary mission as a reserve force for the defence of the United Kingdom, it had no commitment to NATO and claimed three combat units of battalion size. Two of these units were already moving toward the South Atlantic now but not as part of 5 Brigade: 2 Para and 3 Para, regarded as the Brigade's premier fighting units, had been attached to 3 Commando Brigade, a standard military procedure for task organizing for battle to meet mission requirements. The only remaining organic combat unit was a battalion of Gurkhas. With about 700 soldiers in the 1st/7th Duke of Edinburgh's Own Gurkha Rifles, this battalion was slightly larger than a parachute battalion and commando. These Nepalese soldiers were tough and proud. They claimed a reputation going back to the 1800s of striking fear in enemies with their curved *kukri* knives and battle cry '*Ayo Gurkhali!*' ('Here come the Gurkhas!'). Legend had it that they used those knives to behead their enemies and, as a result, enemy soldiers fled when they heard the Gurkhas were coming. British officials coordinated with the Nepalese government to get approval for the Gurkhas to deploy as part of the follow-on force.

That being granted, the MoD then attached two other battalions to 5 Brigade. The day-to-day duties of 1st Battalion Welsh Guards, the first unit to be attached, were as ceremonial guards at Windsor Castle. They had completed a training exercise in Kenya the previous winter, but their speciality was fighting from armoured personnel carriers. The Welsh Guards would now have to revert to being plain infantry for the Falklands War. The battalion had the benefit of being at full strength both in terms of men and equipment. For the first three months of 1982, it had served as the British 'Spearhead' battalion for contingencies before being replaced on rotation by 3 Para in April.¹ The day-to-day duties of the second unit, 2nd Battalion Scots Guards, were also ceremonial, but at Buckingham Palace. There is no reason to believe either of these units were poor choices, but neither had trained with the new brigade before. As dedicated and professional as both of these units were in their own ways, they were a far cry from Thompson's, most of whom constantly trained in tough conditions for roles in helping to defend NATO in northern Europe. To be sure, by the end of May, 2 Para had already demonstrated an ability to slug its way through Argentine trenches on the way to capturing Goose Green, and 3 Para had started trekking across East Falkland peat bogs under the weight of one hundred-pound packs.

The size of the brigade being assembled became a little more than 3,000 men, which included few supporting arms. Not having organic artillery for its homeland defence mission, 5 Brigade gained a single six-gun battery of 105mm artillery guns, compared to the normal allocation of three such batteries for a three-battalion brigade; 3 Commando Brigade had four batteries supporting its five battalions. In addition, 5 Brigade would receive support from nine light helicopters (six Gazelles and three Scouts), which was roughly half the number that deployed to support 3 Commando Brigade. It also gained a full engineer battalion.

Certainly, one of the striking differences between the two brigades involved logistics capabilities. Unlike 3 Commando Brigade, which received support from its organic Commando Logistic Regiment, 5 Brigade had no dedicated, active-duty logistics organization. Moreover, the Brigade lacked a separate subordinate headquarters to command logistics units and control logistics operations. Commando Logistic Regiment was a self-contained organization that provided lots of capability as well as organized command and control of logistics for 3 Commando Brigade. All members of Commando Logistic Regiment were commando trained, and they routinely practised performing their missions in harsh winter environments as in Norway. In contrast, reserve units were intended to be the backbone of logistics support for 5 Brigade. Since reserves were not activated for the war, though, the MoD had to identify a contingent of logistics units to train with and deploy with the Brigade. It turned to the Logistic Support Group of the United Kingdom Mobile Force, a large brigade with a role of defending Jutland and the Danish Islands and comprised of Regular Army, Territorial Army and Royal Air Force units. As senior planners identified an appropriate slice of support, they tried to keep units, personnel and vehicles to a minimum.

Units assembled to support 5 Brigade appeared adequate on paper. They included portions of two supply companies, a maintenance company and the remainder of a field hospital that already had deployed elements south. The capabilities of units remained thin, however: 81 Ordnance Company, which normally supported Britain's 1 Infantry Brigade, would provide routine second-line supply support to brigade units, but would have only one Land Rover and two four-ton vehicles to handle the tons of supplies that supported units would require. Supplementing 81 Ordnance would be elements from 91 Ordnance, a company normally associated with higher-level, third-line support providing petroleum and rations, often working closely with Royal Engineers and Royal Air Force fuel supply units; other elements included a laundry section, a bath unit and a field bakery. The capabilities of this second ordnance company were intended to benefit all ground forces upon reaching East Falkland. Its skills in the handling of petroleum, however, would prove especially valuable, since Commando Logistic Regiment had deployed without its reservist petroleum troop. The company claimed the only Regular Army petroleum platoon in the United Kingdom. These two ordnance companies would later fall under the command of single commander. Medical support for 5 Brigade came from 16 Field Ambulance, which had already deployed its Parachute Clearing Troop with 2 Para. It now lacked surgical capability. UKLF eventually assembled that capability for 16 Field Ambulance, but not until high-level intervention had occurred. Maintenance would be provided by 10 Field Workshop, a company that had just switched missions with another maintenance company on 1 April, as part of a bigger reorganization. That change had left 10 Field Workshop poorly prepared in manpower, vehicles and equipment to support anyone; it lacked both internal equipment and many repair parts.² Additionally, 5 Brigade had no organic transportation capability but received augmentation from 407 Troop of the Royal Corps of Transport to provide forklift capability. Rounding out support services were 160 Provost Company of the Royal Military Police and the 6th Field Cash Office of the Royal Army Pay Corps.

Taken together, the assembled units comprised a logistics organization more suited to supplement Commando Logistic Regiment or to furnish garrison-type support, than to provide direct support to units in battle. Logistics specialists throughout these units totalled about 300, about the same as those presently in support of 3 Commando Brigade. No separate command structure existed over the various units, though. The units had not worked together before. There could not have been a greater contrast to 3 Commando Brigade's Commando Logistic Regiment commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg. Not unexpectedly, it was anticipated at higher levels that when this collection of 5 Brigade support units arrived on East Falkland, they would become attached to Hellberg's Regiment. He then would gain responsibility for providing logistical support to both brigades. But this was not clear either to 5 Infantry Brigade or 3 Commando Brigade.

The commander of the reconfigured 5 Brigade was Brigadier Tony Wilson. A 46-year-old Light Infantry officer who had been awarded a Military Cross as a company commander in Northern Ireland, Wilson had established a reputation both for competence and innovation. He was probably frustrated by the peeling off of 2 and 3 Para, his two prize units, to the commandos. Since being reconfigured and renamed in January 1982, Wilson's brigade had benefited from only a single opportunity to train together prior to the Argentine invasion. That exercise had seen some tensions rise between the paratrooper battalions and Wilson, supposedly because of Wilson's style and ideas. That tension would be renewed in the Falklands.

Wilson and his units had one advantage in that they did not have to rush away from the United Kingdom as hurriedly as 3 Commando had. During the first days of April, as they had been thinking through various options and assessing unit augmentation, military planners contacted Wilson to discuss needs for 5 Brigade should deployment become necessary. The MoD arranged for Wilson to have the opportunity before deployment to organize his forces and to practise procedures together for the first time. Soldiers of the Brigade would participate in a two-week exercise called Welsh Falcon at the Sennybridge training area in the Brecon Beacons of Wales. It looked to be an ideal training site, since the terrain there seemed to resemble the Falklands. Training started in the middle of April with intensive live firing of weapons. It then progressed to simulated combat operations involving helicopter movements and even some practice in conducting amphibious assaults.³ During the first week, the weather was cold and rainy as anticipated. By the second week, it had turned unseasonably warm. Although beneficial in many respects, Welsh Falcon fell far short of the time needed to put in place the skills and procedures that staffs and units needed to operate as a team. Wilson opted, correctly it would seem, to concentrate efforts at the platoon and company level to hone the skills of small units and individual soldiers. As this training was underway, he did not demand simultaneously more intensive battle staff training at brigade and battalion levels.⁴ Soldiers certainly needed every minute available to work on their battlefield skills. Wilson's brigade staff had barely been together for three months, though, and had not worked together with at least two of the three battalion staffs.

Logistics units faced further challenges during the two-week training period before deployment. Similarly to battalions in the brigade, these company-sized units had not trained together before Exercise Welsh Falcon. Making matters even more difficult for them in Wales, they had to get themselves organized; receive and familiarize themselves with equipment to fill shortages; work out procedures with each other and with supported units; sustain the brigade during the entire training exercise; and, simultaneously, try to figure out the scales of supplies its supported units would need. While that was underway, they also had to start thinking about their own deployment requirements. Theirs was a full plate, something not entirely uncommon for logistics units preparing for deployment as they try to train themselves while supporting others. The big difference was that these units had not worked with each other before. And without a logistics headquarters to provide command and control of the assorted

activities, responsibility fell to Wilson's new and inexperienced brigade staff.

A second logistics issue that plagued 5 Brigade from the start was the lack of sufficient supplies and suitable equipment. Unlike 3 Commando Brigade units, Wilson's had no dedicated stores upon which to draw in time of war. Military plans previously had not allocated them War Maintenance Reserve as they had for the commandos. Without such reserves, units had no earmarked sources for the specialized equipment and clothing they would need, not to mention ammunition. Nor had they practised determining requirements for deployment. Instead, planners in Fieldhouse's headquarters and the MoD found themselves scurrying to put together supplies that 5 Brigade could use. While Welsh Falcon was underway, these high-level planners developed supply requirements for 5 Brigade consisting of thirty days of ammunition and other stocks based on a projection of limited war consumption rates. The rush to take care of Wilson's brigade conflicted at times with last minute requirements for Thompson's, which then was completing its stay at Ascension and preparing to sail south to the war zone. No one at Northwood or the MoD explained how 5 Brigade would be employed once it was in the Falklands. Fieldhouse's headquarters had not given it a specific mission. Leaders could have assumed this follow-on force was being put together to join the commandos and fight Argentines as part of a larger British ground force. The prevailing opinion being reported in the National Press was that these units were sailing south only to be a garrison force, and could arrive in the Falklands after the war was over.

Given such assumptions, it might have seemed logical that soldiers and units within the brigade did not require supplies and equipment comparable to that taken by commandos. When 5 Brigade requested some BV202 over-snow vehicles such as commandos had taken, it received only the notoriously unreliable older Snowcat versions. When it requested more capable radios, it received far fewer than requested. When it requested more ammunition for grenade launchers, it learned the ammunition was only available for special forces. And when it asked for additional clothing for soldiers, the Brigade seldom received the exact items or the quantities requested. Serious clothing deficiencies for soldiers were corrected only after the intervention of an officer's father in the House of Lords.⁵ Eventually, the MoD scoured civilian shops to obtain bergens for the soldiers, but supply still fell short by a thousand. A couple weeks were available for the MoD to assemble all the specialized supplies requested by 5 Brigade and to make good other deficiencies in organization, equipment and supplies, if only by borrowing from British units elsewhere. For whatever reasons, Wilson's units received provisions less than those allocated to Thompson's both in number and quality. It appeared that the MoD, at least on the surface, treated 5 Brigade with lower priority than 3 Commando Brigade. Whether that was in fact true is not clear, but the perception of this brigade being a mere stepchild of the other started taking hold within 5 Brigade even before it departed the United Kingdom. And it probably only underlined that perception that a Royal Marine was designated to command the two-brigade land force. Major General Moore, however, went to great lengths not to show preference, which included donning a camouflage forage cap instead of the green beret of Royal Marine commandos. Regardless, the perception would persist and strengthen down through the ranks of both brigades. One thing was certain at this time - Brigadier Wilson had his hands full through no fault of his own, and he had not even reached port yet. At the conclusion of Welsh Falcon, he received notice that 5 Brigade would embark for the South Atlantic on 12 May.

The Brigade's outload from the United Kingdom proceeded, in many ways, no better than that of 3 Commando Brigade thirty days before. One high-level after-action report detailing lessons learned indicates that 5 Brigade had concurred with stowage plans developed by Headquarters UKLF, the organization responsible for starting to load ships while the Brigade still was training in Wales.⁶ But Wilson had also received repeated assurances that his Brigade would have the benefit of stopping at Ascension Island en route, just as 3 Commando Brigade had done, to train, issue first-line supplies and restow other stocks as required. Outload of supplies for his units became hectic and confused, perhaps even worse, if that was possible, than that for commandos the previous month. Again, trucks and trains jammed the port of Southampton with thousands of tons of cargo. Movement personnel responsible for the actual loading found stocks arriving without notice and frequently with incomplete documentation. As in early April, loading did not proceed with a tactical orientation since there was no clear understanding of how 5 Brigade would be employed once it arrived in the South Atlantic. Having no indication about the order in which supplies and equipment would be needed further south, stevedores at Southampton proceeded once again to load ships with whatever arrived first. The overriding criterion for loading was simply to make supplies and equipment fit on designated ships so as not to delay departure. The prevailing assumption remained that 5 Brigade would have a chance to sort it all out before reaching the South Atlantic. Once again, although this was understandable for safety reasons, the Board of Trade refused to load filled jerrycans, which would have eased greatly refuelling challenges further south. Five thousand would remain dockside when 5 Brigade sailed.

Compounding problems for the Brigade, regardless of whether it bought some time at Ascension to restow important items, were the types of ships carrying units and supplies. All soldiers, stocks and equipment would move on ships taken up from trade: *QE2*, *Nordic Ferry*, *Baltic Ferry*, and *Atlantic Causeway*. For soldiers fresh out of training fields in Wales, vessels like the luxury liner *QE2* might have seemed a welcome berth. She routinely carried 1,500 guests, but now 3,000 soldiers would pack the ship. For logisticians, civilian ships like *QE2* became troublesome. They were designed for pier-side loading and discharge, be it of supplies, vehicles or passengers, and would be slower considerably to unload in the South Atlantic than LSLs. The Amphibious Task Force with 3 Commando Brigade was already discovering this further south. Lack of a tactical loading plan and first-come-first-served loading procedures made matters worse still. Cargo was stacked frequently in blocks, making some of it inaccessible, depending on

the order of loading. Stevedores stuffed the main deck of *Nordic Ferry*, for example, with stocks loaded from bow to stern in the following order with little space in between: fifteen rows of ammunition, three pallets high; six rows of rations, three pallets high; eight rows of miscellaneous unit supplies; refrigerated supplies in containers; and finally, vehicles.⁷ Since *Nordic Ferry*'s loading door was in the stern, logisticians could only reach ammunition in the bow by removing other cargo. The loading of *Baltic Ferry* was comparable. Loads on *QE2* were even more inaccessible. Unlike the roll-on roll-off ferries, this luxury liner had eight levels of conventional holds located forward. Loading was by dockside crane, starting with the lowest level. When this was full, crane operations shifted to the next highest level. Once the ship was loaded fully, it was only possible to gain access to lower levels through a series of corridors and staircases leading to small doors in each level. Having stocks concentrated on just a few ships, in spite of how the cargo might have been arranged, nevertheless offered some advantages for 5 Brigade. The Brigade at least would not have to scour the decks of a dozen or so ships similarly loaded in a haphazard way to find a particular item, a task which had plagued the Commodore's staff and logisticians of 3 Commando Brigade the previous month.

After finishing their training exercise in Wales, 5 Brigade units had to confront the confusion at ports. When 81 Ordnance Company arrived in Southampton to board *QE2*, for example, it found much of the Brigade's 81mm mortar and 105mm gun ammunition stowed in the bottom of the ship. Rations, small arms ammunition and unit supplies were spread throughout other levels. More ammunition was on the upper deck, with additional rations stacked atop and covered with tarpaulins. Needless to say, 81 Ordnance and others agreed they were not loaded for war. Elsewhere, units were separated from their supplies, gunners from guns and infantry from mortars. One unit's mortars were on *QE2*, but the base plates for the mortars were on the two ferries. Another unit discovered its radio batteries were on the ferries but its battery chargers were on *QE2*.⁸

The degree of confusion is perhaps best evidenced by one of the smaller logistics units, 10 Field Workshop. The original plan called for about half of the company's supplies to be split between *Nordic Ferry* and *Baltic Ferry*. The rest was to follow a week later in *Contender Bezant*. Company personnel would sail on several ships: twelve on *Nordic Ferry*, twenty-three on *Baltic Ferry*, twenty-four on *QE2* and a trail party of thirty-three on *St Edmund*. Upon arriving at the docks, though, the company found almost everything had changed. Several passengers manifested for the two ferries were turned away because of lack of room. Some went to the *QE2*. Eventually, fifteen members flew by air to Ascension and rejoined the company there as ships sailed past. Company stocks went on either *Nordic Ferry* or *Baltic Ferry* according to what arrived first.⁹ All of this translated into nightmares for unit commanders at a time when they needed to sort out last-minute shortages and get on with training their men.

Most soldiers in 5 Brigade sailed south from Southampton on *QE2* on the morning of 13 May. Ahead of them, with much of their supplies, were the two ferries. Making sense of the entire outload, getting the initial issues of supplies to units and training soldiers would be challenging in the days ahead. The task became more difficult for logisticians because accommodation restraints on the two ferries had restricted the presence of 81 Ordnance Company to two men per ship. That was clearly insufficient for rearranging anything. Consequently, 5 Brigade had no sooner departed Southampton docks than logisticians eagerly began awaiting their arrival at Ascension to reconfigure and issue supplies. En route, they started determining where supplies were located, just as their Commando Logistic Regiment counterparts had done the previous month. The Brigade was hardly stowed for war, with artillery gunners separated from their guns and infantrymen from their mortars. On *QE2*, ammunition packed the bottom levels. If she were to be torpedoed, she would likely sink quickly after a very loud explosion. It would be difficult shifting any of the large loads now within or between ships, except in a secure anchorage area.

Units started an aggressive training programme after leaving the United Kingdom, much like the one developed by 3 Commando Brigade earlier. Considerable emphasis was placed on physical conditioning and medical skills. Doctors and medics instructed soldiers on emergency treatment for various types of wound, how to clear air passages, how to administer drips and morphine and methods of carrying casualties on stretchers. Like the commandos and paratroopers who had preceded them, 5 Brigade soldiers would each carry additional supplies to help them survive on the battlefield. Troops rehearsed methods of embarking and disembarking ships with full loads, and from the few light helicopters that deployed with the Brigade. After each day of training with helicopters, soldiers would have to re-mark the improvised landing pad on the luxury liner because helicopter struts and rotor wash would strip away the painted markings.¹⁰

Within six days, *QE2* had reached its first stop at Freetown to take on fresh water and fuel. Then, on 21 May, the same day that 3 Commando Brigade was assaulting beaches at San Carlos, ships carrying 5 Brigade began arriving at Ascension. Since departing the United Kingdom, Wilson had not received guidance as to whether his brigade would be a full participant in the ground war or if it would become a garrison force performing other functions.

It soon came as a complete surprise to everyone on *QE2* that the cruise liner would not rendezvous with *Baltic Ferry*, *Nordic Ferry*, and *Atlantic Causeway* at Ascension, as 5 Brigade had been led to believe. Instead, the ship merely slowed down near the island, just long enough to replenish some stores, pick up mail and take aboard Major General Jeremy Moore, his staff and some others, all of whom had flown south by air to Ascension. It was probably the first and last time that a large CH47 Chinook helicopter landed on *QE2*. Moore, who had been serving as the land force deputy to Fieldhouse in Northwood, was now officially designated Commander Land Force Falkland Islands, the new designation of the two-brigade division. He disembarked the large helicopter as it landed on the new landing platform at the stern of the

ship.

Moore called an Orders Group meeting with Brigadier Wilson and staffs on 21 May, shortly after he arrived on board. He advised 5 Brigade:

3rd Commando Brigade is now landing to secure a bridgehead on East Falkland, into which I can reinforce, and from which I can develop operations to repossess the islands ... It is my intention to land 5 Brigade into the beachhead and then to develop operations, using both brigades to further dominate the enemy to such an extent that he cracks and gives up.¹¹

The Brigade now knew for the first time that it would have a role in the ground war. Moore reassured Wilson that his units would be full participants in the final battle for Stanley and not become a mere garrison force. He agreed that 2 Para would revert back to 5 Brigade upon arrival; that Wilson's enlarged four-battalion brigade would open up another axis of advance from Goose Green to Stanley, a distance of 85km to the north-east through Fitzroy and Bluff Cove; and that 5 Brigade would receive equal priority in allocation of supporting resources with 3 Commando Brigade, which at that time was in the process of preparing to attack Goose Green, insert forces on Mount Kent and march across East Falkland to prepare for an attack on Stanley.¹² Neither Moore nor Wilson had an appreciation at the time of the situation on East Falkland, let alone how spread out Thompson's forces were becoming. Nor did they realize the difficulty, because of the few helicopters available, of getting units and supplies on to the beachhead and then forward. Later, when he reached East Falkland and gained such appreciation, Moore would change his mind and, to the consternation of 5 Brigade, keep priority of support efforts with 3 Commando Brigade for several days.

After the momentary pause at Ascension, *QE2* continued her course south. Steaming a day ahead of her were the other ships carrying 5 Brigade's supplies and equipment. Men thought they would continue straight for San Carlos, but soon the destination of the troop ship changed to South Georgia. *QE2* would rendezvous there with other ships and transfer her soldiers and supplies. Concern in London for the safety of *QE2* led to direction to the captain that the cruise liner should go no further west than South Georgia. After unloading, she would head back immediately to England. No one in London wanted to risk the political consequences of losing this famous ship to another Argentine missile. Some rumours were circulating that Argentina was even attempting to strike large civilian ships by rolling bombs out of the back ends of C-130s. Soldiers on *QE2* therefore started taping black plastic to the ship's picture windows to cut down glare from the sun, thereby making the huge ship less noticeable from above by enemy planes.

Prospects of battle now closer, 5 Brigade was hard at work in other preparations. Rifle companies conducted trials to determine quantities of ammunition and rations the men could best carry. In the end, two days of supply per man became the target. Then 81 Ordnance Company started issuing from whatever stocks were on *QE2*. The process proved to be slow and tedious. Soldiers had to manhandle stocks, box by box, down narrow corridors on to elevators or up staircases to the few available rooms sufficient for support echelons to open them and issue supplies to soldiers.

The passage south of Ascension soon proved frustrating for Major General Moore as well. Although *QE2* had been equipped with an expensive satellite communications system to help him stay in touch with events on East Falkland, the equipment failed to operate properly right from the start.¹³ As a result, Moore was unable to exchange information with Brigadier Thompson or Commodore Clapp on a consistent basis. Whereas Moore knew that landings were underway, he now had no way of receiving first-hand updates or of providing direction. Nor was he able to provide the important command interface between Fieldhouse's headquarters at Northwood and Thompson's at San Carlos. This communications breakdown prevented the direct exchange of information between commanders and staffs that was critical at this point to identify the best way of landing and employing the follow-on force then travelling south.

Colonel Ian Baxter and his small staff were also working out logistics details for the Brigade. Baxter, as Moore's logistics deputy, would now have responsibility for the myriad of details affecting logistics for LFFI. The intent was for stocks of the two brigades to be treated as divisional assets. The support plan was comparable to the initial plans of Commando Logistic Regiment. Elements of 81 Ordnance Company and 91 Ordnance Company, now consolidated under a single company commander, would operate with some personnel ashore, in a Beach Support Area. The remainder would stay on board various supply ships to control stocks. The normal method of supply would be by helicopter and landing craft from ships to units ashore. Planners envisioned that 81/91 Ordnance and other 5 Brigade logistics units would work for Commando Logistic Regiment, which would become the organization responsible for sustaining both brigades. Creation of a 'division level' logistics organization to respond to Moore's directives, to allocate supplies and to enforce priorities was critical now that two brigades would be competing for limited resources and movements assets. Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg, Commander of Commando Logistic Regiment, had received a signal telling him which supplies were heading south with 5 Brigade, by ship and by location within ships.¹⁴ No one had been able to advise 3 Commando Brigade, though, that the plan was for Hellberg to assume command and control of 5 Brigade's logistics units and responsibility for sustaining all ground forces. Unbeknownst to Baxter and others, a lot had happened further south. They still were unaware how significantly Argentine pilots had delayed the build-up ashore and caused logistics plans to change. On 22 May, Baxter reviewed and approved the outline of the plan for resupplying a two-brigade force in the ground war. The day before, Argentine air attacks on D-Day had shredded the 3 Commando Brigade plan.

Also during the move south, 5 Brigade staff refined plans to provide for the administration of prisoners

of war that would prove invaluable in weeks ahead. The Land Force had the beginnings of a standard operating procedure for processing, caring for and repatriating prisoners. It anticipated having to deal with as many as 10,000 prisoners after defeating the Argentines. While en route, 5 Brigade drafted an order for the establishment of prisoner of war camps. It provided the framework for administration and discipline of prisoners in temporary camps at Ajax Bay, Goose Green and Fitzroy, and at the Falkland Islands Company and the airport in Stanley, as well as for the transport of prisoners on designated ships.¹⁵ By the time the Brigade arrived, others already would be grappling with the challenges posed by a large influx of prisoners. No provision had been made for manpower to guard prisoners of war. Those guards, when needed, would have to come from men performing other duties. Considerable attention was given to developing a petroleum supply plan as well, based on anticipated consumption of different fuels.

Any relaxed atmosphere on *QE2* had long since vanished by this time in the passage south. Temperatures had plunged from 28° to 5° Centigrade as she entered the freeze zone of the South Atlantic. The captain reduced the ship's speed from 25 to 10 knots as more than a hundred icebergs appeared on his radar screen. As *QE2* slipped through the mist, past one berg more than a mile long and 300 feet high, some soldiers peered out and recalled stories of the *Titanic*.¹⁶ Moore, Wilson and members of their staffs cross-decked by helicopter to the battle-streaked destroyer *Antrim* and headed toward San Carlos on 27 May to rendezvous with Commodore Clapp on *Fearless*. Included in the party to make contact with Commando Logistic Regiment was Major Geoff Thomas, who had become the commander of 81 Ordnance Company and 91 Ordnance Company to facilitate better command and control of assets.

Meanwhile, *QE2* continued through frigid South Atlantic conditions to rendezvous with ships at Cumberland Bay off Grytviken on South Georgia. *Canberra* and *Norland* were headed her way from the Falklands with crews keenly aware of the hazards of war. The Welsh Guards, Scots Guards, Gurkhas, 16 Field Ambulance and 5 Brigade Headquarters would transfer to *Canberra* and *Norland* with their equipment as quickly as possible and head to San Carlos. Most logistics units would trail later on *Stromness*. These ships started arriving just before *QE2* so that the cross-decking could commence without delay. It began on 27 May and continued throughout the night. The trawlers *Northella*, *Junella*, *Farnella*, *Cordella* and *Pict* ferried soldiers and 250 tons of supplies, carrying whatever they could between *QE2* and other vessels.¹⁷ The cruise ship's captain had never attempted to unload at anchor before. All tried their best. Trawlers had difficulty, however, even staying alongside the massive superstructure of *QE2* without knocking dents in her sides. Soldiers formed chain gangs down the luxury liner's corridors to pass boxes of supplies from forward storage decks through side doors to trawlers. The few helicopters that had deployed with the Brigade ferried freight as well between the top decks of the assembled ships.

Work continued nonstop the next day. At 2100 hrs on 28 May, *Canberra* and *Norland* weighed anchors and headed back toward San Carlos. By this time, other ships had arrived to transfer cargo, including *Stromness*, *Resource*, *Lycaon*, *Saxonia* and *Leeds Castle*, and the tankers *British Esk* and *British Tay*. Efforts continued to get supplies out of the narrow storage spaces of *QE2*, while sentries cautiously stood watch with automatic weapons pointed towards the sky. Then, amidst renewed reports that Argentina was attempting to strike civilian vessels, *QE2* abruptly headed north at dusk on 29 May for the United Kingdom. On board were survivors of *Ardent*, *Antelope*, and *Coventry*.¹⁸ The troop ship had been so difficult to unload that, when she sailed, 70 per cent of 5 Brigade's 81mm mortar and 105mm gun ammunition remained buried in lower decks. As *QE2* started the long voyage back to the United Kingdom, *Stromness* headed to San Carlos with the remaining logistics units and supplies. What was supposed to be a two-day sail to East Falkland increased to four because of appalling weather that prevented the continuation of training and made many soldiers seasick. To their credit during this difficult time, the Welsh Guards aboard *Canberra* continued providing forty machine-gun teams during daylight on the upper decks for air defence.¹⁹ As *Stromness* headed west away from South Georgia, the advance party led by Major General Moore was just arriving in the San Carlos anchorage.

Moore and others had transferred from *Antrim* to *Fearless* about fifty miles from the Falklands. Commodore Clapp had sailed *Fearless* to meet the new division commander. The brief passage together gave Clapp the opportunity to share the latest tactical situation reports, since faulty communications systems on *QE2* had prevented Moore from receiving updates during much of his journey. On the way, they also were able to link up with *Hermes* and share updates with Rear Admiral Woodward. Other than Clapp, no one was aware fully of the tactical or logistical situation since 3 Commando Brigade had hit the beaches on D-Day. Included in the advance party with Moore was Major Geoff Thomas, commander of the consolidated 81 and 91 Ordnance companies, to coordinate initial logistical arrangements for 5 Brigade when it arrived. He admitted in a briefing following the war that a map had served as his only source of information about the bridgehead until his arrival on East Falkland. He had been told that his unit would be put ashore at San Carlos Settlement, where it would establish a support area to supplement 3 Commando Brigade's BMA at Ajax Bay. That would be where his soldiers would offload and store supplies for 5 Brigade, since no room remained at Ajax for additional logistics units or supplies. Thomas had been told that there was a great beach at San Carlos Settlement. What he found when he went ashore to reconnoitre the area was a small jetty with a narrow entry for a single landing craft, unuseable except at high tide since the gradient was so steep. Holding supplies on the beach was not possible because it was covered at high tide. Behind the beach area, peat bogs started. Marines, still in the San Carlos Settlement, had been making the area suffice for over a week now. There simply was nothing else available, though. Logisticians in 5 Brigade would conclude, just as those in Commando Logistic Regiment had when arriving at Ajax on D-Day, that textbook procedures for establishing a support area simply could

not apply here. Eventually, 81 Ordnance soldiers would borrow a tractor and trailer to supplement their meagre assets and shift supplies wherever they could, after having moved the majority of stocks from landing craft to shore by hand.

No one was happier to see Major General Moore arrive that day than Brigadier Thompson. Moore would now provide a much-needed buffer between him and Admiral Fieldhouse's headquarters in London, thereby relieving the brigadier of cumbersome requirements to travel to Ajax Bay daily to use the satellite communications link to update Northwood. Thompson would be able to concentrate exclusively on fighting the war with 3 Commando Brigade. In anticipation of this, even as Moore was coming ashore, Thompson's staff was in the process of relocating 3 Commando Brigade Headquarters to Teal Inlet so that Thompson would be in close proximity to 3 Para, 42 Commando and 45 Commando. Movement of supplies to Teal Inlet to establish a Forward Brigade Maintenance Area or FBMA had already started, to sustain the final push to Stanley.

But if the new arrivals provided relief for Thompson, the same was not the case for his senior logistician, Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg. Commando Logistic Regiment had been struggling since arriving at Ajax to meet the logistics demands of 3 Commando Brigade. Changes to original plans and setbacks from air strikes had combined to create concerns in a variety of areas. Forward resupply to Teal Inlet was beginning, which eventually would split the Regiment. Hellberg currently had hundreds of enemy prisoners of war to handle with no additional resources. His men had assumed the sobering responsibility of burying British dead in a makeshift cemetery at Ajax. Ordnance Squadron had started an equally sobering 'dead man's kit section' for storing equipment taken from those killed in battle, as an expedient way of replacing small items needed by units. Providing personal comfort items ranging from cigarettes to toiletries had by this time become a real sore spot for many. There were no provisions for such items in 3 Commando Brigade's War Maintenance Reserve. The original plan had called for ground forces to draw such items from the Navy. That worked fine for some units while they sailed south, because the Navy maintained small canteens on ships run by NAAFI employees. Unfortunately, those tiny canteens lacked the capability to meet the demands of thousands of deployed troops. As a result, most men had run out of sundry items even before reaching the South Atlantic. Now, ground forces had been suffering ashore for nearly two weeks. The arrival of 5 Brigade provided no relief, in fact it made matters worse, because those soldiers were experiencing shortages too. Back in the United Kingdom, a shipment of 176 tons of canteen items had departed with a nine-man team to help issue them to units. The shipment would not arrive at Ajax, though, until 9 June.²⁰ By then, it was hoped that ground forces would be involved heavily in recapturing Stanley at the other end of East Falkland.

Upon learning from Colonel Baxter that Commando Logistic Regiment would become a 'divisional' asset, with himself no longer under the command of Thompson but of Moore, Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg went to Thompson in frustration. His BMA now would be known as the Force Maintenance Area or FMA, and he would be responsible for sustaining two brigades. As both leaders agreed, though, there was little alternative. It was essential to have a single organization controlling division logistics operations. Although consternation would continue when Commando Logistic Regiment discovered the state of 5 Brigade's supplies and its ad hoc logistics structure, all knew and respected Baxter, Moore's logistics deputy, himself commando-trained. Baxter now would be directing the Division's planning efforts for logistics.

One of the first decisions that Baxter made upon arriving was for the petroleum specialists from 91 Ordnance to assume the hectic fuel supply operations in the San Carlos area. Commando Logistic Regiment, having deployed without its own petroleum specialists, had been struggling since landing to keep jerrycans filled at the brigade's single fuel supply point at Ajax. One soldier, a Private Potter, had been handling the entire operation since the landings. Potter, in fact, had been the recipient of a lot of tongue-in-cheek ribbings since he filled his first jerrycan on D-Day. That had been the day when his term of enlistment had officially expired. The Ordnance Squadron Commander, Major Anthony Welch, had been joking with him since then, saying that he would now have to pay his own way back to the United Kingdom when the war ended! The young soldier had been working round the clock since arriving, and without complaint. Petroleum specialists from 91 Ordnance would not land until 3 June, but when they did they would relieve pressures at this fuel supply point and operate others. By this time, 3 Commando Brigade's 59 Independent Commando Squadron, Royal Engineers had completed the construction of an airstrip with emergency fuel handling equipment at Port San Carlos to service helicopters, but the Brigade had no personnel qualified to issue the more volatile aviation fuel needed by Harriers until specialists from 91 Ordnance arrived.

The main units and stocks of 5 Brigade arrived on the first two days of June aboard *Canberra*, *Norland*, *Baltic Ferry*, and *Nordic Ferry*. For those who had witnessed the devastation Argentine pilots had wrought in the anchorage in recent days, the return of the large troop ship dubbed the 'White Whale' must have been discomfiting, even though overcast skies made air attacks unlikely. To some, disembarkation by the Scots Guards and Welsh Guards from *Canberra* appeared all too leisurely, given experiences on D-Day.²¹ The Gurkhas, however, seemed to exit *Norland* with far more determination; and once ashore, they set off almost immediately to Goose Green with the mission of relieving 2 Para, which had remained there since capturing the settlement.²²

Once 81 Ordnance arrived aboard *Stromness* on 3 June, logisticians focused on making up first-line stocks for the three combat battalions. Since supplies for 5 Brigade had been loaded in bulk, rather than in preconfigured assault packages from War Maintenance Reserve as they had been for 3 Commando Brigade, logisticians now had to break out supplies by commodity and sort them by quantity and unit. The

non-tactical outload from the United Kingdom slowed matters further, as supply handlers had to remove walls of less important supplies in the confined decks of ships to get at stocks they needed. Complicating matters still further, pallets of boxes sometimes were not marked, which meant that soldiers had to pry them open to see what was inside. Logisticians had no trouble, however, locating additional jerrycans loaded on *Baltic Ferry*. Unfortunately, all were empty, the British Board of Trade again having continued to refuse to lift peacetime restrictions on transport of fuel in small containers aboard the civilian ferries. Although it would take considerable time to fill the empty cans, men from 91 Ordnance were present on East Falkland to relieve the strain of issuing fuel, which was particularly important now for units that were across the island preparing for the final push on Stanley. Distances across East Falkland and lack of suitable transportation assets would complicate distribution of fuel and all other supplies, the typical method of transport being helicopters with sling loads. One of the most alarming discoveries by 3 Commando Brigade logisticians was that 5 Brigade had deployed without any water purification tablets. With little potable water on East Falkland outside of Stanley, and military rations that required five to six pints for rehydration, this oversight presented a significant challenge.

The unloading of 5 Brigade supplies and equipment had been underway only a short time when concern developed again for the safety of ships. Consequently, shortly after arriving, 5 Brigade logisticians experienced the same irritation Commando Logistic Regiment had been experiencing since D-Day of having supply ships pulled away from them when they least expected. No sooner had 81 Ordnance succeeded in reaching ammunition crammed in the bow of *Baltic Ferry*, than the ship's captain received orders to leave the anchorage. Such instances, coupled with the sheer difficulty of getting supplies out of ships quickly, meant in the end that supplies for some units never saw the light of day. Most of 10 Field Workshop's equipment aboard *Baltic Ferry* and *Nordic Ferry* remained afloat for the entire war; members of that maintenance unit subsequently assumed roles as guards for enemy prisoners of war, while others borrowed equipment to form a rear command post for 5 Brigade.²³ Perhaps most importantly, the twenty Snowcat vehicles from 407 Transportation Troop that had accompanied 5 Brigade, however unreliable and frustrating these older versions of the Volvo BV202 might have been, remained afloat during the first days. Six eventually got ashore. All could have been helpful early on for distributing small quantities of supplies to units.

Several factors combined to slow and disrupt the offload of 5 Brigade equipment and supplies and subsequent distribution of supplies to units. The way stocks were stowed, coupled with the added difficulties of getting supplies out of civilian ships, certainly was a large factor. In instances where the Royal Navy directed a ship to leave before offloading was complete, matters were even worse. But what had the most lasting effect was 5 Brigade's overall inability to help itself. It arrived with thousands of tons of stocks but embarrassingly little capability to move supplies by land, sea or air to where they were needed. In the words of Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg, 'The addition of 5 Infantry Brigade simply spread the jam twice as thin and resupply took twice as long.'²⁴ What he and other logisticians now needed was time to get units and supplies to where they were needed. They could ill afford any actions that took attention away from relocation of units from San Carlos and the methodical build-up of supplies in forward areas.

The situation regarding availability of transportation assets in the San Carlos area had changed dramatically in the past few weeks, and not just because the Task Force had lost all but one of its Chinook helicopters on *Atlantic Conveyor*. Movement efforts had shifted, just before 5 Brigade arrived, from ship-to-shore activities to forward resupply. Following the victory at Goose Green, 3 Commando Brigade's priority for transportation of all types moved to resupplying its forward units and then building up sufficient stocks at Teal Inlet to permit the assault on Stanley. The push to get supplies to 3 Para and 45 Commando had started on 31 May, when *Intrepid* made an emergency run around the north coast of East Falkland and launched two of her LCUs with 250 tons of critical supplies for Teal Inlet.²⁵ The first snowfall of winter had started, making it difficult, yet even more important, to get sufficient supplies forward. Fortunately, also on 31 May, helicopters had managed to get through bad weather to deliver some supplies as well. The first large delivery took place on the evening of 1 June, when the LSL *Sir Percivale* completed her first of several trips between Ajax Bay and Teal Inlet. *Sir Percivale's* Captain Tony Pitt would later receive the Distinguished Service Cross for navigating his ship that night in the dark through eleven miles of the narrow, hazardous inlet to get supplies forward to marines and paratroopers.²⁶ He had no way of knowing whether the narrow inlet was mined or if the enemy was on shore ready to obstruct his passage, even though the Amphibious Task Force and special forces had tried their best to clear the area. A second LSL, *Sir Lancelot*, made another run the next day with more supplies.

It was not long, though, before 3 Commando Brigade became concerned about the pace of this forward build-up. It had relocated Brigade Headquarters to Teal Inlet to be close to three of its combat units. On 4 June, Thompson's staff started putting pressure on Moore's newly arrived staff to maintain focus on 3 Commando Brigade's supply needs:

1. Understand we only have one Sea King and one Wessex under opcon [operational control] tomorrow.
2. This allocation totally inadequate for current resupply tasks eg 2,100 rounds 105 ammo.
3. No shells, no attack!

Lift of Rapier this location incomplete although assurance given yesterday to the contrary. Rapier this location non operational and short vehicles and vital stores. All launchers dumped on one site.

Teal Inlet now plum target ... a successful strike could spoil our day and many more to come.²⁷

There was indeed some cause for concern. Frustrating Thompson and his staff at this time were reports broadcast on BBC World News that his forces had relocated to areas west of Stanley with a headquarters at Teal Inlet, and that they were preparing to attack Stanley.

There simply were not enough assets to provide the same priority to everyone. Unfortunately, by the end of the first week in June, matters had become significantly more complicated. Thompson's units were postured in the north and nearly ready for an attack on Stanley to end the war. Events on the other side of East Falkland, however, were about to take a turn for the worse. They would delay such an attack for over a week and produce the worst British losses in the war.

Chapter 9

Problems at Fitzroy

When he arrived in the San Carlos area on 30 May, Major General Moore was intent on bringing the war smartly to an end. All British land forces now were under his command and control. When the Scots Guards, Welsh Guards and Gurkhas arrived in the next few days, numbers on land would increase to around 10,000. It had been nine days since the successful amphibious landing. Losses had been significant on land as well as at sea since then. Although the stunning victory at Goose Green had bolstered morale in the Task Force and back in London, much remained to be done. Moore hoped to bring the war to an end in the next week. Much depended, however, on how quickly he could get remaining units and supplies in position for an attack on Argentine forces concentrated around Stanley. By this time, units were spread around East Falkland. Two units, 45 Commando and 3 Para, were completing their movements across East Falkland carrying heavy packs. On Mount Kent, 42 Commando was digging in under harsh weather. Exhausted from fighting down the isthmus, 2 Para remained around the settlement at Goose Green, where it was finally getting its first shelter since D-Day in community buildings and trying to dry out clothing. In reserve and still at San Carlos was 40 Commando. Support arms, including Commando Logistic Regiment, remained in the San Carlos, Port San Carlos and Ajax Bay areas. Helicopters needed to relocate artillery forward. LSLs also needed to continue the movement of hundreds of tons of supplies around the west side of East Falkland into Teal Inlet to strengthen the FBMA, from which Commando Logistic Regiment eventually would support the push toward Stanley. Although the build-up at Teal Inlet would take a few more days, pieces appeared to be moving into place to start an advance on Stanley soon. The main question to be answered was how. This was foremost in Moore's mind when he arrived. His first priority was to huddle with his two brigade commanders and decide the best path forward.

Marines within 3 Commando Brigade Headquarters and Signal Squadron hurriedly set up space in a cowshed provided by a farmer at San Carlos Settlement for Thompson's staff to brief Major General Moore. Brigadier Thompson urged the continuance of his current build-up around Teal Inlet and, from that general area, a concentrated attack on Stanley from the west. He did not see the need for a two-pronged advance, especially if that was just to get additional units into the fight. Instead, he envisioned phased combat operations to defeat Argentines, who had been establishing fighting positions over past weeks atop the half dozen mountains surrounding Stanley. Intelligence had reported that these forces had established formidable defences. Thompson knew that his units would bypass these mountains at their own peril. They had to defeat and demoralize the Argentines on the hilltops before their leaders in Stanley would ever surrender. His plan called for 45 Commando to take Two Sisters, 42 Commando to seize Mount Harriet, and 3 Para to defeat the Argentines on Mount Longdon. Once these objectives were under British control, 3 Para would seize Wireless Ridge and 45 Commando would assault Tumbledown Mountain and Mount William, with 42 Commando reverting to forward reserve. After that, he would designate a unit to seize Sapper Hill. Then units would break into the flat ground surrounding Stanley. In reserve would be 2 Para at Goose Green and 40 Commando at San Carlos, throughout fights for the mountains and for Stanley as conditions warranted. Thompson's Brigade was just a few days away from having sufficient supplies positioned forward that he could execute this battle plan.

Moore agreed to continue the build-up of the logistics base at Teal Inlet for 3 Commando Brigade, since it was already underway and units would become vulnerable without it. This decision to focus on building up logistics in that forward area would reduce the number of available helicopters, landing craft and mexeflotes to assist the offload of supplies in the anchorage and to move any supplies to 5 Brigade units. Once the build-up at Teal Inlet for 3 Commando Brigade was complete, however, Moore indicated that priority would shift to 5 Brigade to establish another FBMA in the vicinity of Fitzroy and Bluff Cove, 10–15km to the north of Fitzroy depending on the route. There were simply too few transportation resources to share equally between the two brigades after the loss of *Atlantic Conveyor*. With Moore now in the Falklands, officials back in London seemed to temper criticism of delayed activity on the ground. As one War Cabinet minister supposedly confessed, 'I think ministers were a bit ashamed of the way they behaved after San Carlos ... We were learning from experience: we wanted a quick victory, but this time we were more ready to defer to military advice.'¹ Moore gave Thompson and Wilson guidance for his anticipated two-pronged approach toward Stanley. He wanted to get 5 Brigade into the action. Thompson would continue on his northern axis and Wilson would establish a new axis from the south beyond Goose Green to Fitzroy and then onward to Stanley. When both forces were in position and ready, the battle for Stanley would begin. Moore also changed the organization. Not surprisingly, 2 Para reverted to command and control of 5 Brigade, just as Moore had indicated to Wilson during their passage south. Moore was keenly aware of the precarious position of British forces, with winter setting in and also because of the significant British losses to date. Concerns were starting to develop about the fitness and health of units who had now been operating in this harsh environment for nearly two weeks. There was no way of avoiding the reality that thousands of miles separated the Task Force from the forward operating base at

Ascension and that the Royal Navy remained very vulnerable at sea. He needed to get the war over as soon as possible but also in a methodical, sustainable fashion. That required the integration of logistics into planning and execution, just as Thompson had been working to achieve since landing. Moore's guidance called for completion of the logistics build-up at Teal Inlet and then at Fitzroy, before the assault toward Stanley.

After the meeting, Moore confronted the painful reality of recent fighting on East Falkland. Over past days, helicopters had been extracting to Ajax Bay the bodies of paratroopers killed in the fight for Goose Green. Engineers had prepared a mass grave site for their burial that day. He and dozens of others stood solemnly above as six paratroopers carried each body bag covered by the Union Flag, one by one, down into the grave. Seventeen men were buried that day, eleven of them officers and noncommissioned officers who had died leading their men.²

Also on 30 May, Wilson boarded a helicopter for Goose Green to meet with Major Keeble to discuss options about a southern advance toward Stanley. Just off their astounding victory at Goose Green, 2 Para was tired, but its leaders also were pumped for more action. They had ideas of how to advance, as did Wilson. His plan envisioned a cross-country march by 5 Brigade units from San Carlos areas and Goose Green to Port Pleasant near Fitzroy, with 2 Para reverting to support, essentially providing flank protection from the mountains to the west for the march of the other three combat battalions to Fitzroy. Keeble and staff were not happy with Wilson's ideas. The plan they preferred would continue the momentum gained at Goose Green by immediately advancing toward Swan Inlet, defeating whatever enemy force was there, and then moving onward in direct fashion to Fitzroy. Lively discussion ensued. The battlefield huddle ended, however, with no decision but some hard feelings on both sides. The get-together did not get off to a start that encouraged camaraderie, when paratroopers witnessed Wilson arriving at their location wearing a red beret, the cherished symbol of the Parachute Regiment, instead of his own light infantry beret, as well as wellington boots.³ The boots, indeed, were sensible footwear for the Falklands, but no one else had them, and the paratroopers' feet were still wet from their landing on D-Day. It was probably at this meeting that Wilson also advised Keeble that he was not remaining in command of 2 Para, higher authorities having determined that, despite Keeble's successful leadership during the fight for Goose Green, 2 Para still deserved a higher ranking commander. That man would be Lieutenant Colonel David Chaundler, who was then en route to the South Atlantic. Wilson returned to San Carlos from his meeting at Goose Green having issued no orders and having frustrated 2 Para.

On 1 June, ships started arriving in the anchorage to unload 5 Brigade and its stores. The first was *Atlantic Causeway* with twenty Wessex helicopters and eight Sea Kings. Both types would be vital in continuing the forward build-up of supplies and ammunition. The next day, *Canberra* and *Norland* arrived with 5 Brigade troop units. It took twenty-four hours to offload the Scots Guards, Welsh Guards and Gurkhas. Once off their ships, these battalions reorganized around anchorage areas. Due to limited communications during their passage south from the United Kingdom, they knew little more than the general situation on the ground. The two Guards battalions had not received guidance about how they would be employed beyond the beachhead. The Gurkhas quickly prepared to relocate by the lone Chinook helicopter to Goose Green to relieve 2 Para in place. At the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Chaundler, the newly designated commander of 2 Para, arrived in the San Carlos area, even less aware of the situation at hand than the three battalions offloading from ships. Although Keeble had performed exceptionally well as acting commander following the death of H. Jones, the MoD preferred a lieutenant colonel to lead 2 Para, and Chaundler was the designated officer to replace Jones as command tours changed. In fine paratrooper tradition, he had parachuted into the South Atlantic on 1 June near the Carrier Battle Group and arrived on *Fearless* in the early morning of 2 June, where he met Wilson before finding a bunk for a few hours. He awoke later that morning to learn that the Brigadier had left by helicopter for Goose Green to meet with Keeble without him. Chaundler hitched a ride on another helicopter to Darwin, walked to Goose Green and arrived later that day. By then, however, Wilson had already told Keeble to execute the 2 Para plan for taking Swan Inlet. Actions were well underway.⁴

The paratroopers had wasted no time. They softened up the area of Swan Inlet with fire from scout helicopters, then shuttled troops forward with other helicopters. Entering the settlement, they were surprised to discover no evidence of Argentines. Locating a working telephone, a paratrooper proceeded to dial a number at Fitzroy settlement and received an answer from the daughter of the settlement manager. He asked whether there were any Argentines in the Fitzroy area and learned to everyone's surprise that none were there. Scout helicopters returned paratroopers to Goose Green within the hour. They quickly contacted and briefed Wilson about their discovery, seeking his approval to move to Fitzroy immediately, confident they could secure the surrounding area without a struggle and further prepare the way for the assault on Stanley. It was a bold initiative and timely, since that same morning Argentines had destroyed much of the 150-foot timber bridge connecting Darwin to Stanley over the Fitzroy Inlet to slow any British advance.

Wilson's approval to proceed and 2 Para's rapid advance forward set in motion a series of actions that ultimately would produce shocking consequences and significantly delay Moore's plans for a rapid end to the war. At the time, the only Chinook helicopter operating in the Falklands was then in the process of relocating the Gurkhas and their supplies to Goose Green. Wilson hijacked without permission that Chinook to help springboard paratroopers forward to Fitzroy as quickly as possible. The single Chinook and 5 Brigade's scout helicopters started shuttling the parachute battalion from Goose Green to Fitzroy, refuelling between sorties from drums of Argentine fuel at the Goose Green airstrip. At one point, 2 Para pressured Chinook pilots to take as many as eighty paratroopers forward in a single lift, nearly doubling

the published troop-carrying capacity of the large transport helicopter. A British Mountain and Arctic Warfare Cadre observation post on a nearby mountain watched the insertions, thinking at first that Argentines were moving into Fitzroy, and notified 3 Commando Brigade Headquarters, which proceeded to prepare two batteries of artillery to fire on the suspected enemy troops. Fortunately, it checked with LFFI Headquarters, learned of 2 Para's move and cancelled the fire mission.⁵ Failure to keep adjacent units informed had nearly caused a friendly-fire incident. By nightfall on 2 June, most of 2 Para and its battalion headquarters were secure in areas surrounding Fitzroy. The move proved to be another coup by 2 Para. Unfortunately, it did not figure in LFFI strategy. Matters became complicated because of the difficulty of providing support to the paratroopers in their new location, support which they now needed and fully expected.

British ground forces at the time were in no position to do what logically would follow in a synchronized operation: to consolidate their foothold and prepare for future operations by moving supporting units and supplies into the Fitzroy area as well. Seizing Fitzroy was a bold undertaking to be sure, very much akin to the Paras' success at Goose Green, but this time 2 Para had put itself close to enemy-held territory, less than 30km from Argentine forces at Stanley and closer still to those who were on mountain tops. They were over 50km from their sustainment base on the beachhead at Ajax. Now they were huddling into Fitzroy as night closed in, with only the supplies they had carried forward on their backs. The paratroopers lacked protection from supporting artillery and air defence. They had advanced far beyond the ability of 5 Brigade or the FMA to sustain them. Making matters even worse, they had outrun their radio communication capabilities and could talk to neither Wilson's headquarters nor to any units on the beachhead. The unit had pushed itself to the very end of a weak tether and without any way of receiving supplies or reinforcement quickly.

The surprising advance by 2 Para into Fitzroy happened at a time when movement assets were straining to their limit. Ships carrying Welsh Guards, Scots Guards, Gurkhas and supplies for all of 5 Brigade were just arriving in the anchorage. Logisticians were preparing to offload those ships as quickly as possible as they worked to complete the build-up at Teal Inlet approved by Major General Moore upon his arrival. Logistics ships, landing craft and helicopters would be needed in the anchorage and between the anchorage and Teal Inlet for several days to transport supplies and equipment. With no large cargo helicopters other than the single Chinook, transportation capabilities remained scarce to move supplies by air to Fitzroy, despite added assets unloading from *Atlantic Causeway*. Transportation over land was not possible. The only alternative route to bolster 2 Para now was from the San Carlos area to Fitzroy by sea. That route extended from the anchorage in San Carlos Water all the way around Lafonia and up the east coast toward Fitzroy, a distance of 157 nautical miles, more than twice the distance from the anchorage to Teal Inlet. It would take a slow LSL sixteen hours to complete such a trip, making it impossible to complete the passage in the fourteen hours of darkness prevailing in the Falklands at the time. None of the coastline or surrounding sea over this long distance had been cleared of Argentine forces, ships or sea mines. Furthermore, it was important for ships to keep radio and radar silence so as not to give away their approach. This made it a very difficult route to navigate as there were reefs and low land that could not be seen at night. The water in Port Pleasant, the anchorage for Fitzroy, was too shallow for a frigate to escort and offer gunfire support. Unlike at Teal Inlet, where soldiers could unload a newly arrived LSL under the protection of remaining hours of darkness, those at Fitzroy would have to offload during daylight. Ships, landing craft and soldiers would be far more vulnerable. Making matters worse, the waters off Fitzroy were visible from Mount Harriet and Mount Challenger, where Argentine observation posts were located.

But 5 Brigade and others at Division Headquarters were to view 2 Para's surprise advance from quite different perspectives. Wilson had been waiting for such an opportunity to get his soldiers forward quickly ever since he had arrived, and now saw nothing but opportunities ahead. He excitedly announced his intentions later that night at San Carlos: 'I'm moving people forward as fast as I can with stocks of ammunition to launch what I suppose could be called the final offensive. I've grabbed fifty-five kilometres in this great jump forward and I want to consolidate it.'⁶ He commandeered a local coastal vessel named *Monsoon* at Goose Green which some soon dubbed 'Wilson's private navy'.⁷ Manned by watch-keeping officers from *Fearless*, the vessel soon would start moving his tactical headquarters, remaining troops and supplies. Wilson issued orders to the Welsh and Scots Guards to prepare to relocate. The Welsh Guards would take over from 2 Para north of Fitzroy at Bluff Cove, establishing positions even closer to Stanley. The Scots Guards would take over from 2 Para east of Bluff Cove, and 2 Para then would revert to Brigade reserve. Such positioning would set the stage for a brigade attack toward Stanley along a southern route. The problem, however, was not the concept but the timing and difficulty of relocating additional ground forces and the necessary support and supplies for his entire brigade, most of which still awaited offloading in the San Carlos anchorage. The newly arrived commander of 2 Para recommended, 'Since there was no immediate need for fighting troops, air defence and logistics should be moved before infantry battalions.'⁸ Others at Division Headquarters shared Chaundler's opinion. The focus nonetheless remained on teeth rather than tail.

The advance to Fitzroy had made a shambles of plans to integrate tactics and logistics. Even though Thompson's forces were pressuring Moore's headquarters for movement assets to get supplies across the island for the attack on Stanley, something now had to be done soon to get supplies and protection to Fitzroy. The possibility remained that Menendez would launch a counter-attack against 2 Para. If that happened, paratroopers would be in for a tough fight without possibility of reinforcement or added sustainment. Shifting transportation assets available to push units or supplies to Fitzroy would set back

the final push to Stanley by several days, even under the best of conditions. If anything else intervened, then the push to Stanley could be delayed even more.

When Moore's staff first learned of the hasty move of 2 Para to Fitzroy on 2 June, they were furious. They thought 5 Brigade's first priority upon arrival in the Falklands should have been to establish command and control of its units, particularly since the brigade was short of communications equipment.⁹ The three battalions that had sailed south with Wilson and Moore were just then in the process of landing and getting settled. Upon receiving news that 2 Para had advanced to Fitzroy, Moore himself shared his brigade commander's enthusiasm. He felt that having British forces at Fitzroy would keep General Menendez looking south, thereby enabling the commandos to continue their build-up and positioning east of Teal Inlet.¹⁰ But British generals and admirals from the Falklands to London soon learned that getting either men or supplies to Fitzroy would not be that easy. The long distance around Lafonia to Fitzroy meant landing craft and mexeflotes could not travel that distance on their own. The LPDs *Fearless* and/or *Intrepid* would have to sail away from San Carlos to move landing craft forward; they were fast enough to be able to get there and back in darkness. The LSLs could not, but they could move mexeflotes secured to their sides to assist the movement of supplies to shore. A combination of both now had to be diverted from current missions to meet movement needs to support 5 Brigade. No one relished putting vessels at further risk or reducing the numbers of landing craft back at San Carlos, where logisticians remained busy offloading ships.

As the reality of the situation began to sink in on staffs, the Welsh Guards started their 25km march from the beachhead area to Goose Green on 3 June, as directed by Wilson. They had obtained three tractors to assist them in the move. Within the first hour of the march that evening, as bad weather was settling in, tractors had become mired in peat bogs and guardsmen had withered under the weight of heavy rucksacks. The commander of the Welsh Guards, Lieutenant Colonel Johnny Rickett, ordered his men to turn around and head back to positions on Sussex Mountain.¹¹ Word of their failed attempt to march such a short distance chafed at commandos and paratroopers who had been on the island two weeks, exposed both to the harsh environment and dozens of Argentine air attacks. The paratroopers had spent nearly two days on the isthmus leading to Goose Green, moving into position and then fighting their way to victory in both rain and snow. As a result of the aborted march, doubts started developing whether the two public duty battalions could withstand a cross-country trek from Goose Green to Fitzroy, let alone a fight from there to Stanley. The distance from Goose Green to Stanley was three times that from the anchorage to Goose Green, and it was apparent that a lot of Argentines would be dug in and waiting to intervene from hills and bunkers around the capital.

Moore's staff aboard *Fearless* worked frantically to organize movement assets to transport units, equipment and supplies to Fitzroy. It had been their plan all along to establish another support area around Fitzroy to sustain 5 Brigade's eventual advance from the south, but they had wanted to complete the build-up at Teal Inlet first and then proceed in a more methodical manner to strengthen Fitzroy. The Fitzroy settlement was actually much more suitable in some ways than Ajax, with a beach sufficient for landing craft, large wool sheds for shelter, surrounding areas for stock storage, running water and electricity. Logisticians at division level had debated whether to move most of the original BMA at Ajax to Fitzroy for the final battle. The present predicament, however, changed the situation and offered them few alternatives. Recurring bad weather and competing requirements for helicopters meant that an airlift of three battalions and requisite supplies simply was not possible.

Planning focused therefore on using a combination of LPDs and LSLs as they became available to move units and supplies. Rear Admiral Woodward, rightfully sensitive to losses and damage sustained thus far by the Royal Navy and much aware that Argentines retained land-based Exocet capability, urged that troops march to Fitzroy to provide for the southern advance and that they receive sustainment from supplies and services being positioned at Teal Inlet.¹² Admiral Fieldhouse suggested that Moore abandon altogether the focus on Fitzroy and Bluff Cove and instead move the two Guards battalions around to Teal Inlet to participate in a northern attack on a single axis.¹³ In hindsight, his suggestion might have been the best alternative, considering all factors: if the British could have continued to keep the Argentines focused on a southern advance so they did not reinforce defences in anticipation of an attack from the west. It might have appealed to Thompson, but it did not satisfy Moore's preference to have both brigades share in retaking Stanley.

Major General Moore and Commodore Clapp signalled Northwood on 4 June with what they believed to be the best solution.¹⁴ Their plan was to use the LPD *Intrepid* with its LCUs to move the Welsh Guards and Scots Guards in two waves to Fitzroy and then have them advance the 10km to 15km further north on foot to take up positions around Bluff Cove. Fieldhouse remained concerned about having LPDs so far forward. He therefore directed that these ships, so important for command and control, not sail outside of San Carlos Water during daylight.¹⁵ That left Moore and Clapp with the alternative of using LPDs only under cover of darkness to move units and LCUs as far forward as possible and of sailing one or more LSLs to move everything else. Conducting unit movements over two nights would reduce further the exposure of and risk to the LPDs.

The plan evolved for *Intrepid* to sail on two successive evenings, releasing its LCUs short of Fitzroy for transporting Scots Guards to Bluff Cove on the first evening and Welsh Guards to Fitzroy on the second.¹⁶ As these moves were underway, LSLs *Tristram* and *Galahad* would commence successive uploads of support units and supplies from San Carlos. Clapp was very much against sending two LSLs given the risks and other needs, but eventually relented after appeals by Colonel Baxter, who remained concerned about getting sufficient logistics forward as quickly as possible. *Tristram* would depart first, with a

mexeflote side-loaded to assist cargo offload, and arrive after the Scots Guards were ashore. It would carry Rapier air defence systems and 16 Field Ambulance, both vital in protecting forces forward and treating them if necessary. Extra food, fuel and ammunition were also included. *Galahad* would follow with the rest of supplies needed for the FMBA for 5 Brigade, arriving after Welsh Guards were ashore and the offload of *Tristram* was complete, so that the two LSLs would not be forward at the same time competing for limited watercraft for unloading. A naval Mine Counter Measures Team, some Royal Engineers and a Special Boat Service party had already been to Fitzroy and Bluff Cove checking out beaches and exits for mines, obstacles and enemy outposts. Brigadier Wilson issued orders for his units to get ready. Nothing, unfortunately, went according to original intentions except for the embarkation of Scots Guards at San Carlos on the evening of 5 June. Execution plans unravelled over and over again and eventually led to the most devastating British losses of the war.

Intrepid and her escorts, *Penelope* and *Avenger*, left San Carlos under cover of darkness on the evening of 5 June with Scots Guards aboard and proceeded around Lafonia toward Elephant Island, where it would release its LCUs to transport the guardsmen forward to Bluff Cove. Planners estimated it would take four hours for LCUs to make the movement in open water from Elephant Island to Bluff Cove. It would be a tough passage for the Scots Guards in the open LCUs. The actual release point for the LCUs, however, was left to the judgment of the commander of *Intrepid*, Captain Peter Dingemans. After releasing her LCUs with the Scots Guards, *Intrepid* then would return to San Carlos to embark the Welsh Guards and again move around Lafonia under cover of darkness and rendezvous with LCUs returning from Bluff Cove, which would take the Welshmen to Fitzroy. The LCUs then would be in position at Fitzroy to shuttle supplies from the LSL *Sir Tristram* when she arrived that night with units and supplies to start forming the forward support base.

Captain Dingemans concluded en route that it was not safe to proceed all the way to Elephant Island. Instead, he decided to release *Intrepid's* four LCUs at Lively Island, about 20km short of Elephant Island, which meant they would reach Bluff Cove in daylight and potentially in view of Argentine observation posts. The LCUs with Scots Guards aboard floated out of the dock well of *Intrepid* at 0230 hrs on 6 June, with Major Ewen Southby-Tailyour guiding the passage north to Bluff Cove. Southby-Tailyour had charted the Falkland waters in previous years and had guided landing craft to beaches on D-Day. The Scots Guards could not have a more experienced person navigating them to Bluff Cove. Unfortunately, he had been rushed into the operation so quickly at the last minute that he did not have his navigation charts with him, and the LCUs had only steering compasses with at least a 30° error possibility.¹⁷

This first shuttle of 5 Brigade units almost led to disaster. British warships operating in the area were unaware of the troop movement by LCU, even though Clapp had discussed plans with Woodward.¹⁸ Radars on HMS *Cardiff* and HMS *Yarmouth* picked up the LCUs moving toward Bluff Cove. The ships fired illumination rounds over the LCUs and determined fortunately that the Guardsmen in LCUs were not Argentines. It was a harrowing night for the Scots Guards travelling in unknown waters at night in the open landing craft, not knowing if Argentines could detect them from land or sea. By the time the LCUs reached Bluff Cove at 0800 hrs, the guardsmen were soaked and freezing from their long voyage in the open landing craft. The transit had taken them nearly twice as long as anticipated because of the drop-off at Lively Island. Although they had escaped a friendly fire disaster, a Gazelle carrying 5 Brigade's Signal Officer and another passenger was not so fortunate. Pilots were flying high en route to the Fitzroy area to establish a retransmission site to improve communications and had turned off the helicopter's Identification Friend or Foe signal because it was interfering with communications. Woodward had established a no-fly zone in the area without the knowledge of 5 Brigade or others. *Cardiff* picked up the Gazelle on its radar and shot it down, killing both passengers and the two pilots.¹⁹

The arrival of the Scots Guards came as quite a surprise to 2 Para, which by then had pressed forward to the Bluff Cove area. Like crews on British warships in the area, the parachute battalion had not received notice that the Scots Guards were arriving to relieve them. They wasted no time in vacating Bluff Cove for the guardsmen, though. To their great credit, the Scots Guards quickly recovered from the rigors of their passage, took over 2 Para positions and started patrolling. The damage to Fitzroy Bridge now necessitated a long cross-country march to get from Bluff Cove to Fitzroy. One of 2 Para's officers waved his pistol at coxswains, hijacked three of the four newly arrived LCUs and forced their crews to transport them over water to Fitzroy. By this time, Brigadier Wilson had relocated his tactical headquarters by air to Fitzroy as well. Southby-Tailyour had caught a helicopter ride back to San Carlos to update leaders on the advance. Upon his return to Bluff Cove later that day, he would learn to his dismay that only a single LCU remained at that location. The hijacking of the other three became the major factor in preventing movement of the Welsh Guards into the area later that night.

Throughout this first day, the LSL *Sir Tristram* had been loading men and equipment in San Carlos. That had not gone according to plan either. Bad weather had prevented helicopters from moving Rapiers from locations on land to the ship. 16 Field Ambulance had not been able to get ready throughout the day. Late into the evening, she sailed without Rapier systems and medics, arriving at Fitzroy on the morning of 7 June to start unloading.

Meanwhile, on her return to San Carlos, *Intrepid* had developed engine troubles.²⁰ The mission for moving Welsh Guards forward during the night of 6/7 June therefore fell to her sister LPD *Fearless*, whose Captain Jeremy Larkin appeared less reluctant about taking his LPD beyond Lively Island to Elephant Island.²¹ The next phase of the shuttle plan called for *Fearless*, carrying two of its own LCUs preloaded with guardsmen's supplies, to link up with the four LCUs from *Intrepid* that were in the forward area already. Two of *Intrepid's* LCUs and the two from *Fearless* would carry the Welsh Guards to Fitzroy. The

remaining two LCUs from *Intrepid* would load into *Fearless* for return to San Carlos to assist in other work there. Back in Fitzroy and Bluff Cove, however, harsh weather had set in, making an evening linkup with *Fearless* no longer possible, as Southby-Tailyour still scrambled to locate the three missing landing craft. He therefore decided against sending any LCUs to meet *Fearless* near Elephant Island, but since there were no communication links between Bluff Cove or Fitzroy and the San Carlos anchorage, he was unable to inform Captain Larkin of *Fearless*. Larkin, therefore, set sail from San Carlos on the evening of 6 June with Welsh Guards aboard and two LCUs, expecting to link up with the four LCUs from *Intrepid*, this time at Elephant Island not Lively Island. When LCUs failed to show early the next morning, and after using its onboard helicopter to search for them, the captain of *Fearless* signalled Clapp, who consulted with Moore and then released his two LCUs with as many of the Welsh Guards as possible. The mission for guiding these LCUs beyond the release point fell to Major Tony Todd, a Royal Corps of Transport officer with considerable amphibious and maritime experience, who was erroneously told to take the contingent of Welsh Guards to Bluff Cove instead of Fitzroy, their intended destination. Todd expertly guided the two LCUs safely to Bluff Cove. They arrived with half of the Welsh Guards at 0800 hrs as *Fearless* was well on her way back to San Carlos with the other half of the battalion. By this time, as one could imagine, frustrations were developing in the other Welsh Guards headed back to San Carlos. It was hard for them not to feel jerked around. Since arriving on East Falkland, they had moved toward Goose Green only to be pulled back after marching only a short way. Now they had travelled most of the night past Lively Island to Elephant Island, expecting to load LCUs and disembark at Fitzroy, only to discover they were separated from half their comrades and headed back to San Carlos.

Throughout 7 June, the LSL *Sir Galahad* had been loading at San Carlos for the second shuttle of supplies to Fitzroy. When the Welsh Guards returned aboard *Fearless* they were directed aboard *Galahad* for their return voyage to Fitzroy. However, by the time everything was aboard, including about 450 soldiers, Rapiers and 16 Field Ambulance, it was well into the night. Captain P. J. G. Roberts, commanding officer of *Sir Galahad*, signalled Commodore Clapp's staff aboard *Fearless* expressing his intent to stay at San Carlos until the following night. He received an order to set sail immediately for Port Pleasant at Fitzroy not Bluff Cove.²² It was not possible to get an LSL into Bluff Cove due to shallow water. While the frustrated remainder of the Welsh Guards went to sleep that night thinking they were being taken to Bluff Cove to meet their buddies, *Galahad* steamed around Lafonia toward Fitzroy. Normally captains advise embarked forces of sailing plans. For whatever reason, that did not happen this evening. Nor did anyone from the Welsh Guards check with the captain.

The focus of those at Fitzroy at this time was not on receiving more combat troops but on offloading and organizing supplies for the new support area. The 1/7 Gurkhas had just relocated most of its subordinate units by helicopter from Goose Green to the Fitzroy area. Soldiers nearly had completed offloading ammunition from *Sir Tristram* by the end of 7 June. The movement from ship to shore had gone excruciatingly slowly because of difficulty in getting at supplies and equipment on the LSL. Early the next morning, though, while *Galahad* was steaming toward Fitzroy, Southby-Tailyour received instructions to send vessels to Choisuel Sound near Goose Green to pick up equipment from 5 Brigade's headquarters and to dispatch *Intrepid's* LCUs to marry up with the LPD for return to San Carlos. He sent an LCU and the captured coaster *Monsoon* to complete the mission, with further instructions to return under cover of night.²³ That left him with only one other LCU and a single mexeflote for offloading remaining supplies from *Tristram*. Not surprisingly, he and others at Fitzroy were alarmed to see *Sir Galahad* round the bend just before 0700 hrs on 8 June and anchor near *Sir Tristram*. When the Welsh Guards awoke, they were dismayed to discover themselves at Fitzroy rather than Bluff Cove, where the rest of their battalion was. Those at Fitzroy, like Southby-Tailyour, who had experienced the fury of Argentine air attacks at San Carlos now were horrified at what they saw and hurried to *Galahad* with the only remaining LCU, itself partially filled with ammunition from *Tristram*, to encourage passengers to get ashore quickly and walk to Bluff Cove. By then, however, it was discovered that the ramp of the lone LCU could not be lowered sufficiently to marry up with the stern door of *Galahad*, thereby preventing soldiers from boarding the landing craft with their heavy weapons directly from the stern door. Instead, the Welsh Guards faced the prospect of climbing down the side of the LSL on rope ladders to board the landing craft. This frustrated even more the Welsh Guards, who were still perplexed as to why they were not at Bluff Cove. Arguments ensued between Welsh Guards leaders aboard *Galahad* and Southby-Tailyour intent on getting men off ships as quickly as possible. Four hours after arrival of *Galahad*, most of those who had sailed aboard the LSL were still below decks in a canteen watching a movie. A Sea King helicopter had succeeded in lifting a Rapier to shore, but it was still undergoing calibration tests. Harrier combat air patrols, which Division Headquarters had scheduled for that same morning, went off station at the arranged time since they had received no word to stay longer.²⁴ The movement to Fitzroy had become one surprise after another, surpassed only by horribly poor communication.

Few suspected that the stage was set for another devastating Argentine air strike. Brigadiers Wilson and Thompson were both aboard *Fearless* off San Carlos meeting with Moore at the time and assessing options for the final thrust toward Stanley. Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg, Major Anthony Welch from Ordnance Squadron and Major Peter Lamb, an officer on Colonel Ian Baxter's divisional logistics staff, had just arrived at Fitzroy to assess its potential as an even larger supply base. After the war, Commodore Clapp best summarized the series of events that set the stage for what would soon follow: 'Tragedy struck, perhaps, because we were all running a little fast ... Communications were always difficult and my staff and I were more used to dealing with Royal Marines, who are trained to get off a ship as quickly as possible, than with soldiers, inexperienced in amphibious operations.'²⁵ He was right. Not even the

weather was turning out to British advantage. The last couple of days had been overcast. *Galahad* arrived under clear sunny skies, though. Argentine soldiers atop a nearby mountain woke up to discover they had a clear view of the two LSLs anchored together at Port Pleasant. They radioed their headquarters at Stanley. An electronic warfare troop from 3 Commando Brigade on Mount Kent intercepted the report but did not have sufficient time to pass the intelligence to Division Headquarters.²⁶ By that time, there was nothing that Moore or others could do anyway.

Argentine pilots and bombs had wasted several opportunities to cause serious damage to the British in previous days. That was not to be the case, however, at Fitzroy. What had become frustrating delays in moving units and supplies became a disaster of near catastrophic proportions. The British detected on radar what appeared to be incoming Argentine aircraft late that morning and were alerting units when, shortly after noon, five Skyhawks found the LSLs sitting in open waters in the anchorage of Port Pleasant off Fitzroy without the protection of a single warship, since a bar prevented warships from getting closer. Argentine pilots scored direct hits, their bombs ripping deep into the bowels of the undefended LSLs. Two bombs struck *Sir Tristram* and three struck *Sir Galahad*, with one passing completely through the LSL without exploding, as had happened to the ship during attacks on 23 May in San Carlos.²⁷ Within seconds, both vessels were engulfed in flames. Many of the several hundred soldiers aboard *Galahad* immediately became trapped below decks as tons of ammunition and petroleum erupted into balls of fire rushing down corridors and up stairwells. Those on upper decks hurled life rafts over the side and scrambled to escape. As if matters could get no worse, Argentine pilots coming out of attack runs at Fitzroy noticed an LCU in open water, about half way to Goose Green, heading toward Fitzroy. It was the LCU that Southby-Tailyour had sent to Goose Green earlier in the morning with instructions to return that night under cover of darkness. Contrary to his instructions, the lone LCU was now in open water in broad daylight. Argentine fighters attacked again, killing six men and badly damaging the LCU and its cargo. Aboard were the six Land Rovers that comprised 5 Brigade's headquarters, filled with its command and control equipment.

The day ended in total disaster for 5 Brigade. Soldiers from 16 Field Ambulance aboard *Galahad* disregarded their own safety and worked frantically to save lives as explosions wracked the LSL. The lone Sea King helicopter at Fitzroy made repeated trips into dense smoke to remove wounded soldiers and rush them ashore for treatment by the small advance party of 16 Field Ambulance. Other helicopters from throughout East Falkland soon responded and established a steady shuttle throughout the afternoon and night covering the 50km between Fitzroy and the field hospital at Ajax Bay. One of the first helicopters to arrive at Ajax was a Gazelle, from which a runner rushed into the Red and Green Life Machine with a note for Commander Rick Jolly from John Roberts, the senior medical officer working frantically to save lives at Fitzroy. It was simple and urgent: 'GALAHAD HIT BEFORE SURGICAL TEAMS UNLOADED. MANY (NOT YET COUNTED) BURN CASUALTIES. NEED FLUIDS AND MORPHIA PLUS PLUS.'²⁸ Some medical personnel from Ajax grabbed supplies and flew back to Fitzroy in the Gazelle to help; others followed. So many casualties soon started arriving at the Red and Green Life Machine, though, that Jolly called *Fearless* and asked the headquarters to identify vessels that could take casualties. Eventually, Jolly's hospital had over a hundred casualties lying in and around the tiny refrigeration plant at Ajax. Landing craft took two dozen casualties each to *Fearless*, *Intrepid*, and *Atlantic Causeway* in the anchorage, as helicopters continued the shuttle from Fitzroy. Other helicopters took some casualties straight to *Uganda*. Medics and doctors at both locations worked tirelessly and, despite such a heavy influx of casualties, continued to maintain their miraculous record. Every British casualty who arrived alive at the small Ajax hospital remained alive. Regrettably, many others never had time to get off the burning LSLs.

Fires aboard *Tristram* subsided comparatively quickly, so that next day the British could remove some of her remaining stocks. Before that could be done, however, engineers had to get the stern door of the LSL open. They went aside the smoking LSL, cut the chains from her stern door and allowed the heavy door to fall into the water, thereby creating a gaping hole for others to enter *Tristram*. A forklift, with tyres smoking from the hot, plated floors of the LSL, shuttled supplies to the waiting LCU, as soldiers, continuing to disregard their own safety, laboured heroically to get whatever they could ashore. Nothing could be done, unfortunately, to save *Sir Galahad* or anything on board. Fires raged for days. Eventually, the Royal Navy pulled the smouldering LSL further out to sea and torpedoed her. *Sir Tristram* would be salvaged, but not until long after the war. The loss of these two valuable logistics ships meant two fewer LSLs to assist the forward build-up of units, equipment, and supplies before the final battle.

The lack of communication between 5 Brigade and Division Headquarters had created massive misunderstandings and dangerous assumptions. A combination of oversights, mistakes and coincidences followed, creating a window of opportunity for Argentine pilots that day. When it was all over, British ground forces had sustained their biggest setback of the war. In many ways, the British had been lucky in days past. Dozens of Argentine pilots had scored hits on vessels since the amphibious landings. When the Task Force was most vulnerable in waters off San Carlos, though, as it worked frantically in the hours following the landings to get supplies ashore, Argentine pilots had left logistics vessels alone. Even when pilots struck *Sir Lancelot* and *Sir Galahad* in those early days, their bombs failed to detonate. All that changed at Fitzroy. The British luck had run out. Forty-nine men lost their lives as a result of the air attacks and a hundred and fifteen were wounded, forty-five of them very seriously.²⁹ Most were from the Welsh Guards and 16 Field Ambulance. Countless tons of supplies also had been destroyed.

Much has been written about what happened that day at Fitzroy, although most accounts do not detail the cascade of decisions and events that led to the massive loss of life. It is difficult to imagine anything else that could have gone wrong at Fitzroy. In the rush to open up a southern approach, 2 Para took advantage of an opportunity, approved by its higher headquarters. However, 5 Brigade apparently did not

clear the large advance with Moore and his LFFI staff, which was orchestrating logistics at this point for all units. The war diary of 5 Infantry Brigade seems to indicate that 2 Para was on the fringe of being combat-ineffective at the time, in 'poor physical shape having been in the open since 2 June and still tired after Goose Green battle ... [with] a large number of cases of trench foot'.³⁰ Once paratroopers had advanced to Fitzroy late on 2 June, LFFI confronted the conundrum of trying, at the same time, to offload ships in San Carlos, continue to push supplies to Teal Inlet for 3 Commando Brigade and now shore up 2 Para at Fitzroy. The leap forward to that settlement became the catalyst for everything that followed. Events might have been different had Wilson told 2 Para to insert only its Patrols Company to secure the area, dig in and maintain reconnaissance until LFFI could plan the next steps to increase capability; but they would have been vulnerable as well, and without reinforcement. It also might have been different had Woodward committed ships to protect the operation more. Hindsight is always easy. The net result from Fitzroy was that it cost several dozen lives, left many more men seriously maimed and shortened the careers of some who otherwise might have been recognized as heroes.

Events at Fitzroy rocked many in the Task Force and senior leaders in London. Losses had been staggering. Medical facilities both on land and sea were overflowing. Forces now needed to be reconstituted. Logistics leaders who had flown to Fitzroy before the attack to decide how best to use the settlement witnessed the catastrophic loss of lives and supplies. They had seen first-hand that the settlement was too far forward to be used for anything other than a forward base. They now returned to San Carlos knowing that it would take a lot more work and time to get everything where it needed to go. There would not be another incident like this one. Major General Moore would insist that tactics and logistics be integrated fully before launching his brigades in the final thrust to trap the Argentines in the capital. He deliberately suppressed information about the extent of casualties so that it would not bolster Argentine impressions about the success of the air attacks. If there was any glimmer of light amidst the darkness that day, it came from the increased focus by Argentines on the southern approach to Stanley. They were more convinced than ever that the main thrust by the British would originate from the south. Three weeks before, they were anticipating an amphibious landing near Stanley too. Again, the British would surprise them.

Chapter 10

The Battle for Mountains Surrounding Stanley

Major General Moore had summoned his two brigade commanders to Division Headquarters aboard LPD *Fearless* early on 8 June to discuss options for the final attack on Stanley. Unlike his staff, Moore had not been so upset about Brigadier Wilson's surprise move to Fitzroy nearly a week earlier. Risky though it had been, 5 Brigade's leap forward fixed the enemy's attention all the more closely on the southern approach to Stanley. The Argentines had been thinking for some time that the British would launch their main assault from a route through Fitzroy, despite reports of British advances to the west of Stanley near Teal Inlet. And to be sure, they did not know that activity to the south had become a frantic struggle to reduce the vulnerability of 2 Para without supplies and supporting arms. Increased activity around Fitzroy further promoted the perception that it would become the springboard for the final attack. Fitzroy was not, however, part of a deception plan to mask a commando attack from the west. Quite the contrary, it was intended to play a significant role in the final attack. Just how prominent that role would be was one of the main issues at Moore's meeting with his commanders.

The contentious issue at his meeting that day was whether British ground forces would conduct their final assault through the mountains near Stanley on a broad or a narrow front. The broad front in question started with Mount Longdon to the north-west of Stanley and included high ground starting a few miles south of Longdon and extending eastwards to Stanley: Two Sisters, Mount Harriet, Tumbledown Mountain, Mount William and Sapper Hill. Should Mount Longdon be an objective, then another prominent feature known as Wireless Ridge stood between Mount Longdon and Stanley. In that case, the British would need to take Wireless as well. The narrow option excluded Mount Longdon and Wireless Ridge.

Brigadier Thompson objected to the narrow front option for reasons both tactical and logistical.¹ Since the Argentines were expecting a thrust from the south now more than ever, concentrating the attack into a narrower front from the west and south of Stanley would play into their suspicions. From a logistics standpoint, very importantly, the narrow front option with British forces bypassing Argentine forces on Mount Longdon posed significant risks. For days the Division had been concentrating on getting supplies into the FBMA at Teal Inlet. That area now served as the forward sustainment base for 3 Commando Brigade. Thompson's 3 Para and 45 Commando had moved east from there several days before and taken the high ground of Mount Estancia and Mount Vernet to the north-west of Longdon. The track from Teal Inlet through a small settlement called Estancia House near Mount Estancia now became the critical ground supply route for his units, regardless of where they were attacking.

Opposition astride this supply route, most notably from Argentine units at Mount Longdon, had to be neutralized in order to ensure continuity of support to 3 Commando Brigade units during the final battle. From a logistics perspective, Thompson's battle plan enabled interior rather than exterior lines of communication, thereby enabling 3 Commando Brigade to maintain the security of its only ground and helicopter resupply route from the FBMA at Teal Inlet through a distribution point at Estancia House and from there to combat units. The Brigade could not rely on the few available helicopters to move supplies forward from Teal Inlet. Combat units would carry considerable supplies with them, but approach marches would be long, and once fighting started the units would require reliable resupply. During the final battle, helicopters would focus on resupply if possible, but mainly on movement of artillery ammunition and medical evacuation. Mount Longdon, therefore, became a critical objective from Thompson's perspective, and 3 Commando Brigade had to control it to protect logistics sustainment for the battle for Stanley.

Some at division level clearly did not share all of Thompson's concerns. While Moore was chairing his meeting aboard *Fearless* that day, other members of the Division staff and Commando Logistic Regiment were forward at Fitzroy assessing the potential of that area as a sustainment base. Shifting supplies forward from Ajax Bay could shorten distances significantly between the bulk of stocks and combat units, even though there were risks in moving large quantities of supplies that near to Stanley; but getting supplies there was challenging. Distances by sea from the Ajax area were twice as long to Fitzroy as they were to Teal Inlet.

As Moore, Thompson, Wilson and others were discussing tactical and logistical options for the final battle, Argentine observers were, unfortunately, peering down from their observation posts to discover and eventually report the arrival of the LSLs *Sir Tristram* and *Sir Galahad* at Fitzroy. Word arrived about the Argentine air attacks as the meeting on *Fearless* was still in session. The session ended abruptly, and the leaders returned to their units as LFFI shifted its focus to saving lives and restoring order at Fitzroy. Moore had reached no decisions about the plan for a final attack before the hasty adjournment.

By 9 June, as the extent of losses at Fitzroy became fully known, the location's appeal as a large support area vanished. Planning shifted toward establishing only another FBMA at Fitzroy, this one for 5 Brigade. While staff and units were adjusting to the magnitude of losses, Moore shifted his attention to 3 Commando Brigade as the main effort for the upcoming final battle. When arriving on East Falkland ten

days earlier, he had anticipated that his brigades would be beginning the final battle by this time. Now, however, Moore still faced requirements to get artillery and ammunition forward for both brigades to support the attack. Additionally, something had to be done to reconstitute the combat strength of 5 Brigade, given the large number of casualties sustained by 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards and the stocks that had been lost. He would focus deliberately on building up logistics capabilities in forward areas before launching the final assault and on ensuring that logistics remained integrated fully with tactical plans through all phases of the battle plan until his forces captured Stanley.

That day, Moore flew forward to 3 Commando Brigade's headquarters at Teal Inlet to meet with Thompson and tell him that 3 Commando Brigade would be the Division main effort in an attack that would include Mount Longdon. The plan would contain three phases: during the first phase, 3 Commando Brigade would attack Mount Longdon, Two Sisters, and Mount Harriet; during the second, 3 Commando Brigade would continue its attack to take Wireless Ridge while 5 Brigade attacked Tumbledown Mountain and Mount William; Thompson's Brigade would then continue the attack in phase three to seize remaining high ground south of Stanley, beginning with Sapper Hill. The hope was that the Argentines would surrender before phase three became necessary.

Thompson's units had been planning towards this end for some time and hoping for such a decision. To add more punch to his main effort, Moore attached 2 Para back to 3 Commando Brigade. He also attached 5 Brigade's 1 Welsh Guards, which was augmented now by two companies from 40 Commando, because the approach route for the commando attack on Mount Harriet would cross into its sector. Helicopters would lift the paratroopers from their current location near Fitzroy to an assembly area aside Mount Kent, where they would be in reserve initially. Moore, however, did not let Thompson retain control of the remainder of 40 Commando, which had been providing security around the beachhead since D-Day because of continuing concerns about a possible attack on rear areas. Thompson's units were prepared and eager to get on with it. They had been forward now for well over a week, and although there had been some skirmishes with Argentines, most of their time had been spent patrolling to determine enemy dispositions and vulnerabilities.

Conditions in forward areas had taken a distinct turn for the worse since commandos had moved away from the San Carlos beachhead, particularly for those units in hills approaching Stanley. Lieutenant Colonel Nick Vaux's 42 Commando probably had been withstanding the worst of it. His men had been patrolling in and around Mount Kent since the end of May and at Mount Challenger since the first days of June. Some of his units had waited several days for their packs to get forward and still longer for resupply of food. Although there remained tons of food and supplies at both Ajax and Teal Inlet, bad weather had complicated efforts to get supplies forward by helicopter. When supplies did arrive, commandos then had to man-pack them further forward at night to unit positions. The dried Arctic rations being provided contained over 5,000 calories but required water and cooking fuel to reconstitute them. Units generally ran short of both; and as a result, men were starting to suffer from diarrhoea and dehydration.² Consequently, many relished finding captured enemy rations, because they came with fuel tablets called hexamine for cooking and sometimes with a small bottle of whisky and cigarettes.

As Vaux recalls, 'Each day brought blizzard, squall and downpour in relentless sequence.'³ His commandos would attempt to erect poncho shelters, only to have the fierce winds buffeting the mountains change direction and rip them apart. Only occasionally would the sun break through to provide them with temporary warmth and a chance to dry out clothes. They had come to despise the standard issue military boot that soaked up moisture like a sponge; these boots were now making cases of trench foot a real problem. When packs containing their extra clothing and personal items finally arrived on 7 June, Vaux's men could hardly contain their enthusiasm: 'For a brief, carefree spell the atmosphere was reminiscent of opening presents at Christmas, with weather-beaten marines gleefully extracting "dry sox and clean nix", caches of nutty (chocolate), even the odd battery-powered razor.'⁴

Making matters worse, though, 42 Commando had suffered several casualties when marines stumbled on to Argentine mines as they patrolled areas around Challenger. The difficulty of evacuating these casualties from points of injury to aid stations foreshadowed the difficulties all British units would face during the final battle. At the same time, however, it proved again the wisdom behind the detailed medical training marines and soldiers had received while sailing south from the United Kingdom. One illustrative case in point is that of Marine Mark Curtis of 42 Commando, who was on patrol when he stepped on a mine. Curtis described what happened:

It was at the bottom of a little slope that I stepped on a mine; "Cuth" and the other marine had walked over it. I seemed to be thrown up in the air and fell on my right side. I took the gun off my shoulder and pointed it forward, waiting for someone to fire at us; I still thought it was the ambush. My foot started to feel numb. I tried to feel down but my trousers were all torn round the bottom. The middle of my foot had been blown off; the toes were still there, connected to my shin by a fleshy bit of skin. It looked weird. Half an inch of my heel had been ripped back. That was all there was left - the toes and the back of the heel. "Cuth" shouted, asked what was going on - a bit of heavy language. I told him I'd had my foot blown off, but I didn't put it quite like that. Everything was quiet then. He crawled over on his hands and knees, looking for mines. He tried to bandage my leg and I gave myself some morphine. You keep it on your dog tag - like a little toothpaste tube with a needle. I couldn't get the plastic cover off and had to bite it off. I injected myself in the muscle of the thigh. It didn't seem to have any effect for half an hour; the pain had started after five minutes. "Cuth" picked me up and carried me out.⁵

Medical training and toughness helped Curtis stay alive until his comrades could get him to medical specialists. It took them seven hours to carry him back to the first aid station; from there, it took another eighteen hours to get him to the field hospital. He lost his foot but lived.⁶

Caring for wounded weighed heavily on the minds of many throughout the Land Force. No one doubted there would be casualties. What concerned everyone was the difficulty of getting casualties off the

battlefield. Whereas the men were well trained in keeping themselves and their comrades alive until help arrived, the rocky and hilly terrain would make it very difficult for units to extract casualties down the sides of mountains to level locations, from where they could be evacuated further to the rear by helicopter. Making matters worse, hilltop vantage points would enable Argentines to observe helicopters landing and possibly call for fire. Thompson had successfully resisted efforts by the senior doctor at Division to close down 3 Commando Brigade's small field dressing station at Teal Inlet and to consolidate it with the one being established at Fitzroy to support 5 Brigade, thereby forming one larger divisional field hospital.⁷ Although such a proposal seemed advantageous from a resource standpoint, it disregarded the conditions which made evacuation so difficult around the mountains, something which some commanders had come to experience at first hand in recent days. Foggy weather near the mountains surrounding Stanley frequently resulted in conditions that prevented helicopters from flying. Medical evacuation across or around the several mountains separating 3 Commando Brigade units from a Fitzroy field hospital, therefore, became totally contingent upon weather. Of even more immediate concern to combat units was the lack of lightweight but sturdy collapsible stretchers to assist men in carrying casualties from points of injury to locations for treatment or further evacuation. Rocky slopes would make it difficult enough for men to fight their way through Argentine positions, let alone carry stretchers up and men down the slopes under fire. To facilitate casualty evacuation, as well as for forward resupply of ammunition and other critical supplies, units organized ad hoc litter-bearer teams from personnel not directly involved in the fight. The teams would shuttle supplies forward on whatever stretchers they had and carry casualties back.

By this time, another potential problem needed to be solved. Commando Logistic Regiment and its Medical Squadron had been rushing from emergency to emergency since D-Day, as they worked to care for casualties. Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg had found himself under pressure on almost a daily basis from Northwood to release details of those who had been killed or wounded. To control the flow of such sensitive information, he established a Field Records and Reinforcement Holding Unit next to the Red and Green Life Machine, to stay abreast of developments, maintain accurate information about casualties and ensure that notifications to next of kin were completed before divulging any information to others. The Brigade had first implemented this centralized operation during an exercise the previous year. Before the amphibious landings at San Carlos, it had earmarked staffing for this unit for contingency purposes. Some clerks came from parachute battalions and commandos. After the war, 3 Commando Brigade recommended that organizations continue fulfilling these very important but easily overlooked requirements.

Thompson called his commanders together for their 'O Group' briefing on 10 June, the day after his meeting with Moore at Teal Inlet. The Commando Brigade plan pivoted on three sequential attacks on the evening of 11 June, beginning in the north with Mount Longdon: 3 Para received the mission to seize that key piece of terrain and prepare to exploit forward on to Wireless Ridge to the east; 45 Commando would attack to defeat enemy forces on Two Sisters directly to the south of Mount Longdon and prepare to exploit forward on to Tumbledown Mountain; and 42 Commando, further south still, would seize Mount Harriet and prepare to follow 45 Commando through Tumbledown to take Mount William. Once the battle started, all units would have to share the single bridge across the Murrell River to shuttle supplies forward. That bridge would remain critical as long as fighting continued, since it enabled the only ground line of communication between 3 Commando Brigade's distribution point at Estancia House on the west side of the Murrell River and combat units, whose objectives were on the east side. Brigade objectives were to be taken by first light the next day. Two of the attacks were to be silent in order to achieve surprise, meaning that there would be no artillery preparation. The attack on Mount Harriet would be 'noisy' to cover the move of 42 Commando around the flank to hit Argentines from the rear. When artillery fire began, Argentines occupying British objectives would feel the full weight of more than 11,000 rounds of 105mm artillery ammunition now positioned forward for this first phase of the battle. Additionally, some Task Force warships were dedicated to support the units: *Avenger* would provide naval gunfire for 3 Para; *Glamorgan* for 45 Commando; *Yarmouth* for 42 Commando; and *Arrow* for special forces that would be conducting some small operations closer to Stanley. Together, these four ships had 1400 rounds for their 4.5-inch guns to supplement the artillery on land.⁸

Thompson's commanders had had plenty of time to think about the missions before them and to develop plans during the final days of the supply build-up. Their units nevertheless faced daunting tasks as they attacked up hill, over generally unfamiliar and rocky terrain, and at night. Although some had experienced skirmishes with Argentines over the past week, this would be the first real fighting for most units since arriving on East Falkland. Meanwhile, 2 Para would remain the Brigade reserve.

As commanders finalized details of their respective portions of the plan, Commando Logistic Regiment at Ajax, in its new role supporting both brigades, and brigade support echelons at Teal Inlet and Fitzroy maintained a constant flow of supplies to forward positions, using the Division's helicopters in preparation for the final attack. There were about forty helicopters of all types available at the time, including four more Wessexes that arrived at San Carlos on 9 June aboard the RFA support ship *Engadine*. Hopes of providing scheduled maintenance services to them, as would have been strictly enforced in peacetime, had long since vanished. Now, pilots pushed their helicopters to the limits. The single CH47 Chinook, which had been pressed so hard following the loss of the other heavy-lift helicopters aboard *Atlantic Conveyor*, flew 109 hours without servicing.⁹ Since pilots flew virtually nonstop during the limited daylight hours, checks for leaks and structural cracks became limited to those times when pilots brought their helicopters in for a hot refuel, or at night. Checks at night, made with the aid of low-intensity red-

lensed flashlights, were not always capable of detecting serious faults. Nonetheless, the British succeeded in maintaining a near 100 per cent operational rate of their helicopters through to the end of the war. 'Band-Aid fixes' became more than a figurative expression for many helicopters, as masking tape was used to cover bullet holes. If something was not damaged severely enough to prevent take-off, pilots took the risk.

The British had taken to heart the sobering lessons of Goose Green. Moore was resolved not to start the attack before the required support was in place for his brigades. Expectations for combat units were no different than they had been on D-Day. Each man was to carry two days of supplies and ammunition. All vehicles were to be topped off with fuel. The major difference was the deliberate build-up of artillery ammunition to provide overlapping coverage of fire for battalions. Previously, 2 Para had gone into battle man-packing ammunition and only a portion of its organic mortars. Units would bring all their organic weapons to bear on objectives this time. Additionally, the British would press all of their 105mm artillery batteries into action. The intent was for each battalion to receive support from at least one battery of six guns and possibly from another battery (for a total of twelve guns) at any one time, depending on commitments.¹⁰ Moore directed that there be 500 rounds of ammunition at every gun position, backed up by 500 more rounds per gun in forward support areas at Teal Inlet and Fitzroy. Supplementing the artillery would be naval gunfire and Harrier groundattack aircraft. The Royal Engineers had completed landing platforms and jet refuelling capability at San Carlos on 5 June. Harrier pilots could now stay on station longer to provide support because they did not have to return to ships to refuel as before. The plan was for combat units in brigades to have two days of supply. Each FBMA would have an additional two days' on hand. Backing them up would be the support area at Ajax Bay, now the sustainment base ashore for all land forces. Commodore Clapp remained prepared to provide additional resupply from ships in Falkland Sound or at sea to the Force Maintenance Area as needed. His LSLs would be pushing supplies from Ajax to the FBMA at Teal Inlet and Fitzroy on alternating days to keep forward areas well stocked.

A considerable amount of ammunition had already been shifted forward to Teal Inlet and Fitzroy by the time the exact plan of attack became clear. Before the build-up was complete, Commando Logistic Regiment would move over 1,000 tons of ammunition to each location, almost exclusively by sea. A Sea King helicopter, after all, could carry only about sixty rounds of 105mm ammunition per lift. Helicopters became indispensable, however, in moving ammunition from the forward support areas to gun positions. It was a slow process. And it became slower still at times, when units on the ground tried to retain slings and nets for their own use after receiving ammunition and other supplies. The British had not deployed with as much sling-load equipment as they would have liked. The frustrations among logisticians of not getting sling-load items back would continue as attacks started and it became necessary to relocate both guns and ammunition.

By the time the build-up was complete, Teal Inlet and Fitzroy had both become hubs of activity. Forward arming and refuelling points had been established at each location to eliminate the need for helicopters to return to San Carlos. Local settlements pressed their equipment into service to help soldiers. Before long, tractors and Volvo tracked vehicles, which had become the most desirable means to move supplies, had churned the peat into seas of mud. By 11 June, the now famous Red and Green Life Machine, which had taken considerable pride in its inter-service medical teams, had largely disbanded to relocate medical troops and surgical teams to Teal Inlet and Fitzroy so that increased lifesaving care and surgical capabilities would be far forward to care for casualties. Only a single surgical team remained at Ajax. The hospital ship *Uganda* would come close to shore in the final days, as a precaution, to receive casualties if required.

Support plans for the two brigades were based on comparable principles. The bulk of 3 Commando Brigade stocks would remain at Teal Inlet under control of the Commander, Transport Squadron from Commando Logistic Regiment. From there, supplies would move, either by Rigid Raider boat or four-wheel drive/tracked vehicles further east to a distribution point at Estancia House, where approximately sixty tons of supplies were stashed and camouflaged before the attack commenced. Combat unit support echelons, split between the Teal Inlet support base and the Estancia distribution point, would provide supplies to their respective units from the distribution point. Together, they would transport supplies by whatever means they could overland from the distribution point, using the single-width muddy track. Helicopters would supplement unit efforts whenever possible, bringing casualties back from aid posts to field surgical teams on return flights. The bulk of stocks for 5 Brigade remained at Fitzroy under control of the Commander, 81 Ordnance, who had further assistance from a small command post from Commando Logistic Regiment. He and battalion quartermasters from 5 Brigade units would then coordinate movement of supplies to a distribution point at Bluff Cove, the initial location of the Scots Guards. From there, they would take supplies forward to unit locations. The intent was to move supplies between Fitzroy and Bluff Cove both by land and sea. The bridge crossing the inlet and connecting the settlement and distribution point, however, still was under repair from damage caused by Argentine explosives. Rough seas in coming days also would limit the use of landing craft to transport supplies to the distribution point. These situations necessitated greater reliance on helicopters to shift supplies forward from Fitzroy. Both 5 Brigade and 3 Commando Brigade units obtained supplies from the distribution point. Logisticians would attempt to orchestrate the throughput of supplies by helicopter, direct from the forward support base to units or gun positions, based on helicopter availability and weather.

Rapier air defences were in place and operational at both forward support base locations by this time, but the Argentines did not take action to disrupt the final build-up, either by air or on the ground. Argentine pilots attempted to attack 3 Commando Brigade's distribution point at Estancia House on a

couple of occasions, but they failed to find targets because of the camouflage commandos had erected. Although Argentine pilots had inflicted heavy losses on the British Task Force during the past month, serious threats to British ground forces, except that during 2 Para's fight at Goose Green, failed to materialize. Argentine leaders never employed forces on the ground to disrupt the initial British build-up in the San Carlos anchorage after the June 8 air attacks at Fitzroy, or now, as logisticians laboured to get supplies to forward areas.

Argentina's hopes of defeating the British, in fact, had vanished. Some simply had not realized it. They had started with more than a two-to-one numerical advantage in ground forces. Now both sides had about 9,000 soldiers getting ready to confront each other. Argentina's Junta had foregone many opportunities. Its ability to inflict further damage now was significantly less than it had been. Naval vessels remained berthed in mainland ports after the intimidating and costly loss of *General Belgrano* a month before. Since then, Argentina had lost nearly a hundred planes in attempts to break through British air defences. It was becoming clear that the prize they had snatched so effortlessly from a reinforced platoon of marines on 2 April was now in jeopardy. Menendez had sent his chief of staff to the mainland on 8 June, the same day that Argentine pilots set back the British at Fitzroy, to ask Galtieri to make some move at the British rear area still at San Carlos. When Galtieri refused, Menendez urged him to accept the terms of UN Resolution 502 demanding an immediate withdrawal of Argentine forces from the Falklands, but Galtieri again refused.¹¹ Now Menendez's troops, still largely facing south in and around Stanley, were about to feel the full strength of Moore's two combat brigades and the supporting arms of the entire British Task Force. The assault would start with ferocity when 3 Commando Brigade units attacked in rapid succession not from the south but from the west.

It had taken the British a little over two months to get to this point, at a cost of a half dozen ships lost and many more damaged, a dozen planes and helicopters downed, and a couple hundred lives. The efforts of every person in the Task Force had focused on setting the stage for the battle for Stanley, which the British had regarded from early on as the centre of gravity in winning the war. Those involved in logistics operations at Ascension Island or in the United Kingdom were probably unaware of that, or of what was about to transpire. Shipbuilders, stock handlers and lorry drivers back in England; frustrated cargo handlers sweltering in the heat of Ascension Island; pilots and ground crews who had kept tankers and resupply planes in the air; crews on a hundred ships both commercial and military; and countless logisticians working in and out of their specialties throughout the theatre - all had contributed to a line of communication that now stretched from distribution points at Estancia House and Bluff Cove 8,000 miles back to the United Kingdom to make the battle possible. It had not been easy getting this far, and their jobs were not yet done, but there was no doubt that they had contributed immeasurably to the British victory that was about to arrive.

From vantage points away from the Falklands, and decades after the war, the short-lived ground war provides the impression that the British victory was not only swift but also easy. This could not be further from the truth. The British would reach their planned objectives, but not without heroic fighting. Thus 3 Commando Brigade would not be ready to exploit their first successes uniformly across the front; nor would 5 Brigade be ready to begin its attack in the second phase of the Division's plan to take Tumbledown Mountain and Mount William. The attack by 3 Para on Mount Longdon provides an illustration of the difficulties that 3 Commando Brigade units faced the night of 11/12 June both in terms of tactics and logistics. The fight for control of Mount Longdon would become the costliest ground engagement of the war.

Lieutenant Colonel Hew Pike's plan for taking Mount Longdon was simple yet challenging, and it took into full account the terrain and anticipated enemy positions. Because there was a large minefield to the south of Mount Longdon, it would not be possible for his units to outflank the Argentines from that direction without taking considerable risks. The mountain's summit, on the west side, provided a commanding view of the surrounding open ground for several thousand metres, both to the west, from where the British would attack under cover of darkness, and to the east, where the British would have to clear Argentines from fighting positions extending eastward to Wireless Ridge. Because the terrain surrounding Longdon was open, paratroopers could become exposed once fighting started, particularly if the Argentines were able to illuminate the area. The British believed that the Argentines were holding the summit and the north ridge of Mount Longdon. Pike planned to dedicate a company to take each of these areas, to hold his third company in reserve to assist as needed and to be prepared to exploit successes. The support company would establish a base of fire from the west/north-west to support attacking infantry companies with mortars, machineguns and MILAN missiles. Pike's paratroopers would be going up against men from the enemy's 7th Regiment, which was known to be holding Wireless Ridge as well. The fight for Mount Longdon was anticipated to be a tough one. After action reports indicated that the paratroopers confronted strong defences manned by a company and reinforced by engineers, snipers and machine-gun crews. The fight for the summit proved to be the fiercest.

Logistics support for 3 Para's attack was organized with both a forward and rear element. The unit's regimental aid post was likewise split into forward and rear aid stations to provide for continuous care to casualties. The forward logistics element was to travel with the support company on foot as it moved to establish its fire support base. It consisted of stretcher-bearers, who carried ammunition forward atop stretchers, and the forward aid station under control of the Regimental Medical Officer. The rear logistics element, under control of the battalion's executive Officer, had the benefit of five tracked Volvo vehicles, three civilian tractors with trailers and four civilian Land Rovers. They would carry the bulk of additional ammunition and supplies as well as the rear aid station, which included an extra doctor as well as medical

specialists and supplies. The vehicles would not go forward until the fight was underway, so that 3 Para's approach march and attack could remain silent. Complicating matters for 3 Para's rear element as well as for others in 3 Commando Brigade, however, was the lone bridge over the Murrell River. The vehicles of 3 Para could not cross the bridge until 45 Commando, the unit to its immediate south that would attack Two Sisters just 2km from Mount Longdon, had crossed its start line as well. Thompson had prescribed precise times for his units to cross their start lines to sequence the Brigade attack properly: 3 Para, to be exact, was scheduled to cross its start line at 2001 hrs that evening, followed by 45 Commando at 2100 hrs.¹² Getting the rear element forward did not seem to be a problem. Men had to carry their heavy loads 5km or more over the rough East Falkland terrain in the dark just to get from assembly areas to start lines. From start lines, they had several more kilometres to go to find the enemy. Needless to say, a lot could happen to cause plans to unravel and to delay support from getting across the bridge.

The bulk of Pike's support was not only contingent upon 45 Commando crossing its start line. If 45 Commando's attack on Two Sisters did not go favourably, then that also could affect 3 Para's ability to get its rear logistics element forward, since Argentine defenders on Two Sisters would be close enough to observe it and call for fire. Likewise, if 3 Para's attack on Mount Longdon did not go as planned, Argentine defenders there would remain in overwatch positions to do the same to 45 Commando's rear element. The two units were clearly dependent upon each other for both timeliness and success. As so often happens on battlefields, friction disrupted plans and timetables, but it did not stop British success that evening.

Pike's paratroopers forded the Murrell River and crossed their start line only a few minutes behind schedule. As companies started toward their objectives in the dark, their paths inadvertently crossed, creating some confusion; and then, less than an hour after units crossed the start line, a platoon leader stepped on an anti-personnel mine. The explosion ended 3 Para's hopes of a silent approach and attack. Within minutes, as the support company and the forward logistics element were still en route to their positions, the fight was underway and 3 Para started taking casualties. Fighting would continue throughout the night as paratroopers fought up the craggy slopes of Mount Longdon, often exposed by illumination rounds fired by Argentine artillery. Meanwhile, 3 Para's rear logistics element was experiencing significant delays getting across the Murrell Bridge. One of the companies from Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Whitehead's 45 Commando did not reach its start line for the attack on Two Sisters until 2300 hrs, two hours later than scheduled, which eventually altered that commando's plan for attacking in the south. The delay now meant that 3 Para's rear logistics element could not get across the Murrell River until well after midnight. By then, 3 Para had been fighting for over three hours. When the rear portion of the regimental aid post managed to join its forward counterpart at the base of Mount Longdon after midnight, the battalion was in dire need of medical support and supplies. Two company medical assistants had already been killed on the mountain as they tried to help the wounded.

The battalion had designated a landing site just to the west of the Murrell Bridge for helicopters to pick up casualties in need of evacuation to 3 Commando Brigade's field dressing station at Teal Inlet. The forward aid post had been treating casualties for some time before the rear aid post arrived with the vehicles needed to get casualties to the helicopter-landing site. Before first light, approximately twenty casualties had been evacuated by vehicles from the regimental aid post at the base of Mount Longdon to the landing site, from where they were transported to Teal Inlet, initially in reconnaissance helicopters fitted with night vision devices for flying in the dark. Each brigade had been allocated Wessex helicopters specifically to assist in evacuation of casualties. They could call these helicopters forward now, using their own radio nets and without coordinating with a higher headquarters, a different procedure from that which had plagued 3 Commando Brigade during the Goose Green fight. Regrettably, the Wessex helicopters were not equipped for flying at night. By first light, when these and other helicopters without night-flight capabilities could be used, a backlog of casualties awaited evacuation at the landing site.

None of the helicopters providing evacuation from the battlefield to field dressing stations were configured with equipment or personnel to provide continuous medical treatment for casualties. The British had no pure medical evacuation helicopters with them. The light helicopters like Gazelles and Scouts flew patients in rear compartments from which seats had been removed. Space was so restricted that stretchers would not fit. As was the case when they hurriedly came to the aid of 5 Brigade following air attacks at Fitzroy, British helicopter pilots landed, took on casualties wherever they could and flew them as directly as possible to the nearest dressing station. Air crewmen did whatever possible to look after casualties en route. Not being trained medics, though, they could render little assistance. Fortunately, distances to field dressing stations at both Teal Inlet and Fitzroy were less than 20km, even from the most distant of objectives. (The bodies of those less fortunate who had been killed outright or who had died from wounds were isolated from the injured and, as time permitted, normally evacuated on vehicles heading overland to rear areas.) Evading artillery fire became a challenge in itself for helicopter pilots, as Argentine field artillery observers atop surrounding hills spotted them in the daylight and called for fire. Consequently, the sighting of British helicopters landing to evacuate casualties often prompted shelling from Argentine artillery able to range the Mount Longdon area from Stanley.

By late morning, having fought all night over the crags and through the rocky crevasses of Mount Longdon in, around and through positions that Argentines had been preparing for over a month, the paratroopers had won. But 3 Para now found itself the target of well-planned and discouragingly accurate artillery and mortar fire, making it difficult to exploit their hard-fought success toward Wireless Ridge. The battalion did not receive the order to continue the attack that day. Had they received it, it is likely that they would have advanced further only with difficulty and after some reconstitution. The fight to take

Mount Longdon had cost 3 Para seventeen lives and over forty wounded. Holding on to it for the next forty-eight hours would cost them another six lives, as paratroopers fell victim to continuing Argentine artillery attacks. Some of them, as commonly cited in reports following the war, were stretcher-bearers and other medical personnel trying to evacuate or treat the wounded. The after action report of 3 Para following the war reveals the difficulty units faced getting the wounded further to the rear: of the twenty-three paratroopers who died taking or consolidating their position on Mount Longdon, eighteen lost their lives before arriving at the regimental aid post.¹³ Given the remarkable medical training the unit received aboard ship when en route to the Falklands, which gave individuals the confidence and ability to take care of themselves and others on the battlefield, the experience of 3 Para on Mount Longdon accentuates the difficulty of extracting casualties from points of injury to locations for further treatment or evacuation, even when the distance to those locations is only a matter of several hundred metres. The battalion's forward medical station was located against the rocky base of Longdon, just a short walk from the summit on a normal day, perhaps. That evening, it probably seemed like miles away.

Fights on adjacent mountains had progressed to quicker conclusions than on Mount Longdon that evening, and losses were considerably less. Men in 45 Commando preparing to attack the adjacent Two Sisters witnessed the fierce Fighting underway to their north, as did the Argentines they were about to assault. Lieutenant Colonel Whitehead, the commander of 45 Commando, had planned the attack on Two Sisters so that one of his companies would attack first to seize the high ground on the western slope, thereby fixing the enemy's attention on that direction. Once on the high ground there, that company would provide a base of fire for the commando's main effort, consisting of two companies attacking from the north-west. The company that was to initiate the attack, however, was the same one that failed to reach its start line until three hours after the appointed time, thereby delaying logistical elements of 3 Para from crossing the Murrell River Bridge. The men in that company had been struggling under the weight of MILAN missile launchers and dozens of missiles to reach their start line at the appointed time. The unit had planned for a three-hour approach march. Instead it took them twice as long to traverse the rough Falklands terrain in the dark with their loads. When the company arrived around 2300 hrs, Whitehead opted to have his companies attack simultaneously. They did so to very good effect. Within a little over four hours, his men had fought their way up the western slope of Two Sisters and cleared Argentines from positions extending eastwards on Two Sisters toward Tumbledown. Artillery fire from both sides was heavy during the attack. The commandos confronted preplanned Argentine artillery fire, just like that which paratroopers on Mount Longdon were experiencing, once they overran enemy positions. Argentine indirect fire had a particularly devastating effect on the commandos, though. Four men died during the taking of Two Sisters, all felled by Argentine artillery or mortar bombardments. Ten others were wounded throughout the Fighting that night.

The success of Lieutenant Colonel Nick Vaux's 42 Commando on Mount Harriet, 2km to the south of Two Sisters, was no less impressive. After spending nearly two weeks patrolling and battling the elements, men from 42 Commando implemented a bold plan to outflank the Argentine defenders. His units planned to cross their start line at 2030 hrs. Vaux had received permission from Thompson to forego a silent attack by using preparatory artillery fire on enemy positions on the mountain to distract the Argentines from his real intentions. As that was being implemented, one of his companies was to create a diversion to the west of Mount Harriet as his other two, having skirted the mountain to the south on a long approach march, attacked from the east into the enemy rear. The distance from its assembly area near Mount Challenger to the start line east of Mount Harriet in the Welsh Guards sector was 7km. It would seem like twice that distance, though, because the route crossed several long stone runs, slowing movement considerably and making it difficult to keep quiet. To ensure men would have back-up supplies during the attack, the commando formed a 34-man 'portage troop' from its headquarters company to carry ammunition and critical equipment and to be prepared to backhaul any casualties. The ad hoc transport troop consisted of administrative specialists, cooks and whoever else was available and not otherwise directly involved in the Fighting. During 42 Commando's Fight for Mount Harriet, this human supply train trailed the two companies in the south by about an hour to get in position to support Vaux's main effort.¹⁴ During that approach march, commando companies would cross 5 Brigade's boundary before turning north to attack objectives on Mount Harriet. Accordingly, it was agreed beforehand that a reconnaissance platoon from the Welsh Guards would secure the start line for the marines and guide them initially on their final approach. The guardsmen were not at the appointed place for the link-up, though, which delayed the attack for over an hour. Nonetheless, Vaux's plan worked to perfection. The diversionary attack from the west fixed Argentine attention, while the other two companies surprised defences from the rear. By daylight, after eight hours of Fighting, 42 Commando had seized its objective at the loss of only a single commando and the wounding of twenty others. In attacking from the east, Vaux's men had cut off the escape route of the surprised defenders. As a direct result, they captured 300 prisoners from the defending Argentine 4th Infantry Regiment, including its commanding Officer.¹⁵

By daylight, 3 Commando Brigade had secured all of its objectives. Units had received sustained and exceptionally effective naval gunfire from Woodward's Battle Group. The destroyer *Glamorgan* and frigates *Yarmouth* and *Avenger* fired hundreds of high explosive rounds in support of the ground attacks. Unfortunately, the support was not given without significant cost. As some commandos were Fighting up the slopes of the mountains, they witnessed a land-based Exocet missile fired from the outskirts of Stanley slam into the side of *Glamorgan*. Although the ship survived, a dozen sailors did not and another dozen were wounded.¹⁶ She became the final ship casualty suffered by the Royal Navy. Woodward had been concerned for some time about his ships being vulnerable to land-based Exocets. His concerns proved to

be valid. An hour later, the Royal Air Force completed its seventh Black Buck bombing run. Although all twenty-one bombs missed their intended targets, there can be no doubt that the impacts rattled the nerves of Argentines in Stanley, particularly amidst the reports that Longdon, Two Sisters and Harriet had fallen to the British.

Thompson decided not to have his commanders exploit their hard fought successes by continuing the attack toward their secondary objectives, feeling that they would become unnecessarily exposed if attacking in daylight. The brigade also needed to re-stock gun lines with ammunition. He had relocated his reserve battalion, 2 Para, from its previous area near Mount Kent to Mount Longdon during the night. After a 15km march with equipment, paratroopers were soon digging in on the western side of Mount Longdon. It became clear soon after daylight, though, that Argentines, particularly those atop Tumbledown Mountain, had not only spotted the 3 Commando Brigade units but were able to bring effective mortar and artillery fire upon them. Accordingly, Thompson ordered his units to consolidate near their objectives and prepare for possible counter-attacks. Although there are some indications that the Argentine Army's central command post in Stanley ordered several counter-attacks for that day, none materialized. That provided units with the opportunity to evacuate their casualties from the three mountains and get their support echelons forward with needed resupply. Additionally, it permitted helicopter pilots to start the time-consuming process of relocating artillery batteries for the next phase of the battle and re-stocking gun lines with ammunition from back-up stocks at Teal Inlet.

Major General Moore had monitored the 3 Commando Brigade engagements closely from the small forward headquarters he had established at Fitzroy. He had hoped to continue attacks without interruption on to Tumbledown Mountain, Mount William and Wireless Ridge, thereby hastening a situation in which Argentines would be forced to surrender. Meanwhile, 5 Brigade had sought an extension so that they could complete plans for attack and the forward stocking of artillery ammunition, which Moore granted. For the next day, efforts refocused on shifting equipment and supplies for the next phase of the battle, and on taking care of immediate unit requirements. All available helicopters laboured to replenish ammunition for artillery batteries dispersed throughout the battle area. Limitations on cargo loads went by the wayside, as they had done so often over the past several weeks. As one pilot put it, 'We just kept pulling at the stick to see if the aircraft would come up. If not, we threw off a box and tried again.'¹⁷ Because brigade support bases at Teal Inlet and Fitzroy had established helicopter arming and refuelling locations by this time, pilots did not have to fly the hundred miles to Ajax and back for fuel, as they had so many times the week before during the initial forward build-up.

Supplies moved forward on the surface as well, particularly from 3 Commando Brigade's units in the north, since they had consumed considerable amounts of small arms ammunition and other supplies during their Fights. The Brigade's support base at Teal Inlet continued to move supplies forward to the distribution point at Estancia both by vehicle and Rigid Raider boat. From there, unit support echelons picked up supplies and transported them to forward locations along the single track crossing the Murrell Bridge. While resupply by ground was underway, the bridge over the Murrell River collapsed under the weight of an armoured recovery vehicle laden with ammunition, thereby closing 3 Commando Brigade's only land supply route. Royal Engineers had been labouring in previous days to repair the bridge across the inlet connecting 5 Brigade's supply base at Fitzroy with its distribution point at Bluff Cove. Now, they focused on this new problem in the north. The engineers built an air-portable bridge at Fitzroy to replace the one damaged across the Murrell River and flew it there by Chinook to reopen 3 Commando Brigade's supply route.

With the local populace continuing to provide tractors and manpower to shuttle supplies, units were again poised to resume the offensive. Argentine pilots made two last attempts during the final hours of preparation to disrupt British plans, but they were not successful. In the first attempt, during the day of 13 June, Skyhawks attacked the 3 Commando Brigade headquarters near Mount Kent and 2 Para at its new position near Mount Longdon; they damaged three helicopters but produced no additional British casualties. Then, later that night, Harriers intercepted Argentine planes attempting another raid, downing one of them.

The plan for the next phase would get 5 Brigade into the ground war for the first time. The 2 Scots Guards would start it off by attacking an estimated two companies from the 5th Marine Battalion, reputed to be the best Argentine unit in the Falklands, on Tumbledown Mountain. Assuming success by the Guards, the 1/7 Gurkhas would follow to attack Mount William. In the north, 2 Para, still operating under the command and control of 3 Commando Brigade, would assault Wireless Ridge. With these three objectives taken, the Division would then continue attacking Argentine forces into Stanley. If it became necessary, responsibility for taking the town would shift to Thompson. He intended another multi-phase attack. It would start with 3 Para securing areas around the old racecourse on the west side of Stanley. Then 45 Commando would seize Sapper Hill and pass through 42 Commando to secure areas immediately to the south of Stanley. The Welsh Guards would revert back to his control and secure areas to the south-east of the capital, cutting off access to the airport. The British would now have surrounded Stanley to force a surrender, hopefully without having to fight in the town itself and put civilians at risk.

Brigadier Wilson issued orders to his three battalions on the afternoon of 12 June. The timing and success of the fight for Tumbledown affected the other attacks. Argentine forces on that mountain would be able to influence action on the adjacent Mount William and on Wireless Ridge, just a few kilometres north. If the Scots Guards did not achieve their objectives by daylight, then 2 Para on Wireless Ridge would be exposed and vulnerable to Argentine marines remaining on Tumbledown. The Argentines had viewed Tumbledown from the start as a key to the defence of Stanley because it so dominated other

surrounding hills. Accordingly, they had prepared a stiff defensive network on the mountain and littered approach routes with mines. The British had little hope of avoiding the full force of Argentine defences. The north face of the mountain yielded sharp drop-offs, significantly limiting any approach from that side. Other Argentine defenders on Mount William to the east protected that flank and maintained observation over the more open terrain to the south of Tumbledown. All this enabled the Argentines to concentrate their defences in the west and south. Consequently, Lieutenant Colonel Mike Scott, commander of 2 Scots Guards, planned to attack Tumbledown directly from the west, with three of his companies passing through each other as the fight progressed to maintain momentum in reaching the top of Tumbledown. His reconnaissance platoon reinforced with a troop of two Scorpions and two Scimitars would create a diversionary attack to the south on the most likely approach route. He had not received much intelligence about Argentine battle positions, though. The diversion would start at 1900 hrs on 13 June, with the main attack commencing two hours later. British artillery, naval gunfire and Harriers pounded Tumbledown on the day of the attack.

When the diversion started, the platoon of slightly more than thirty guardsmen initially had difficulty locating the enemy. Once they did, they encountered fierce resistance from Argentines in dozens of bunkers designed to block any approach to Stanley from the south. Before the engagement was over, they were fighting for their lives as they struggled to withdraw, eventually finding themselves in a minefield, where Argentines then tried to target them with artillery fire. What was intended as a diversion had proven very costly. Two were killed; a dozen were wounded. One of the Scorpion armoured vehicles from the Blues and Royals hit an anti-tank mine and had to be abandoned. The next day, sappers would discover fifty-seven mines embedded in the ground near the Scorpion as they tried to recover the vehicle.¹⁸

As this platoon was trying desperately to extricate itself from the minefield, the main attack commenced from the west. The guardsmen reached their first objective without much contact. Then, as the second phase began and companies started passing forward, they encountered heavy defences sheltered by rocks and crags to the top of Tumbledown. The Scots Guards did not reach the summit until 0600 hrs, at which time they faced more Argentines fiercely resisting from other fighting positions. Finally, after ten hours of tough combat, much of it at close quarters, the Scots Guards gained control of Tumbledown. Lieutenant Colonel Scott had ordered his men not to wear their helmets during the attack, although they carried them on their packs for the expected artillery fire that would follow when they reached their objectives – his thought being that wearing the more distinctive berets would help morale and also aid in identification. At least one of his platoon commanders sustained serious head wounds during the fighting. It is perhaps surprising that many others did not. Although aid stations were echeloned, getting the wounded down the mountainside so that they could be treated and evacuated plagued the guardsmen just as it had the commandos two nights previous. They would lose two more to mortar fire as men tried to retrieve their wounded comrades after the Argentines had fled.¹⁹ Nine men lost their lives; another forty-three were wounded. Fully half of all those killed or wounded were Officers, warrant Officers or noncommissioned Officers, a clear testament to these having led from the front.²⁰ This fight had been a tough one, too.

Meanwhile, the men of 1/7 Gurkha Rifles had been freezing as they waited in an area west of Tumbledown throughout the night for word that the Scots Guards had taken their objectives. The plan had been for them to pass through the guardsmen after Tumbledown was secure. Although they had been without ration resupply for two days, the proud Gurkhas remained poised to start their advance toward Mount William. The duration of the Scots Guards' attack meant, however, that if they waited much longer they would be attacking Mount William in daylight. Therefore Wilson ordered them to move out on a different route. They were circling Tumbledown under cliffs to the north when they encountered a minefield. An Argentine forward observer detected the formation and called for fire support, which injured eight of the Gurkhas. As fighting waned on Tumbledown and daylight approached, they finally reached the east side of Tumbledown and prepared to assault William, only to discover most Argentines had already fled. After brief skirmishes resulting in no further casualties, they soon were atop Mount William. After the war, their commander showed his good humour by crediting his men with the collapse of the defences:

Our boys were not just 'disappointed' at not hitting the enemy, they were livid, but it is some consolation that we heard later from several sources (rarely admitted in the press) that it was our arrival on the battlefield from the north in the way that we did that caused the final collapse. I am not too confident that that is so, but we certainly contributed to the rout. The Argies were scared stupid of the Gurkhas and the former's rapid disappearance from the battlefield was probably the best, and certainly the most nicely timed decision of their war.²¹

By this time, 2 Para had overwhelmed the Argentines on Wireless Ridge. The paratroopers had learned many lessons from their fight at Goose Green, where, through no fault of their own, they did not have the benefit of much supporting fire. Lieutenant Colonel David Chaundler could now enjoy an extensive artillery preparation to precede his attacking soldiers. Unlike his predecessor H. Jones at Goose Green, he had two batteries of artillery with thousands of rounds to support his battalion for this fight. The attack by 2 Para would be 'noisy', with preparatory fire starting before men crossed their start lines. In addition to the artillery, the frigate *Ambuscade* with her 4.5-inch guns, all of the battalion's organic mortars, support platoons with bunker-busting MILAN missiles and machine guns, and armoured vehicles would support the attack, which was planned in four phases. Companies would start their attacks from positions north of Wireless and, after reaching first objectives, turn eastwards and continue attacking from the west over the ridge. Preparatory fire pounded Argentine positions as paratroopers started crossing start lines just

after 2100 hrs on 13 June. One account indicates that the artillery fired so much ammunition during the paratroopers' attack that helicopters fitted with night vision devices had to keep ammunition flowing between forward supply points and gun lines; and that, as the fight progressed to the top of the ridge, the tanks of the Blues and Royals had to go back to rear supply points themselves to replenish the large quantities of ammunition they had expended.²² The barrage of fire demoralized Argentine defenders. Soon they were abandoning positions in an attempt to survive, often leaving their equipment in place. Although companies faced some resistance, the combination of heavy supporting fire and an aggressive ground attack soon overcame Argentine defences. As paratroopers succeeded in closing ranks, the remaining defenders broke and ran. When the fighting ended, 2 Para had suffered three killed and eleven wounded. Estimates of Argentine casualties were 25 killed and 125 wounded, the vast majority by the effective supporting fire.

The last shots of the war would come on Sapper Hill. With Tumbledown and William now secure, Wilson ordered Lieutenant Colonel Johnny Rickett, the commander of 1 Welsh Guards, to attack and secure that piece of ground. Two companies from 40 Commando reinforced Rickett's battalion. Helicopters moved them to two different landing zones in the vicinity of Sapper Hill. Those landing at the first found themselves on a tract of land surrounded by minefields. Helicopters erroneously landed others too far to the east in full view of the few Argentine defenders still on the hill. Three Argentines were killed in a brief firefight. The rest quickly abandoned their positions and fled toward Stanley. The Welsh Guards and commandos had secured Sapper Hill despite the errant landings. The fighting was over.

By daylight, British units started to see Argentines retreating in disarray throughout the battlefields. Their attacks clearly had succeeded in overthrowing defences and creating near panic in Argentine ranks, despite the heroic resistance of some. Although some British artillery batteries were now down to just a few rounds, they would not need to hurry to re-stock gun lines. Those who could view the ground stretching from surrounding hilltops to Stanley realized that the fighting was over. Before long, hundreds of Argentine soldiers were dropping their weapons, discarding other equipment and fleeing towards the capital.

For the inhabitants of Stanley, it had been a terrifying four days. Most had fled for safety to makeshift bunkers in basements, crawl spaces, under porches or in other protected areas. Although they knew the battle for the mountains was underway, they had no idea how it was going. Argentine 155mm artillery rattled their houses as it fired large shells toward the mountains at the advancing British. The sounds of battle had become deafening. The mountains, quite visible from many places in Stanley on clear days, now were obscured by smoke and dust from the constant shelling by the opposing forces. Argentines had taken up positions in and around houses and buildings as well as on rooftops in Stanley. British Harriers had become a common sight for residents as pilots flew nearly nonstop trying to destroy or soften up Argentine positions. Naval gunfire had been pounding areas around the town to eliminate other key defences. Unfortunately, errant British shells also struck some houses in the town, killing three residents.

It had not been easy for either the military or the people of Stanley. For the British Task Force, the two months since they had departed the United Kingdom had been especially difficult. Hundreds on both sides had lost their lives or been wounded. Still more wounded waited on mountain slopes to be treated and evacuated. Now, as victors, the British were about to transition to one of the most difficult phases in war - when fighting men have to work to implement a disciplined peace in a community ravaged by war. They had the advantage of knowing that the citizens of Stanley would welcome their arrival; but those same citizens also needed their help, as did thousands of defeated and dejected Argentines. The transition and ultimate return to normalcy in Stanley would bring additional challenges and concerns for the war-weary British and, in particular, for the men of logistics and support units.

Chapter 11

After the Surrender

Although military units were adhering to a ceasefire by the late morning of 14 June, Argentina had not surrendered. Galtieri was pressuring Brigadier General Menendez to launch a counter-attack. British special forces, however, using the local hospital radio network, had made contact with Argentines in Stanley in the hope of encouraging a surrender while the battle for the mountains was raging. Communications eventually reached Menendez, who agreed to discuss matters. Special forces therefore arranged a secret session later that day to set the stage for a meeting between Menendez and Major General Moore. Earlier, perhaps in anticipation of such a breakthrough, Moore had instructed both of his brigadiers to halt their brigade movements toward Stanley after securing the high ground. He wanted to avoid a fight in the capital itself if at all possible. The same afternoon, Brigadier Thompson with several of his staff walked into Stanley from the west and noticed a British helicopter overhead. He recognized it as carrying Lieutenant Colonel Michael Rose, Commander 22 SAS Regiment, and suspected that negotiations were underway. Rose, in fact, was entering the town on a prearranged route to meet with Menendez and discuss conditions for surrender. The Argentine general understood the hopelessness of the situation, and at 1830 hrs Rose advised Moore that Menendez was willing to surrender. Meanwhile, Admiral Fieldhouse and others in London anxiously awaited the outcome.

After a break in the wintry squalls that evening, special forces spirited Moore into Stanley to accept the surrender on the second floor of the Secretariat Building, which had been serving as Argentine headquarters during the war. Menendez was waiting in neatly pressed uniform and shined shoes when a smallish man in dirty battle uniform walked up the stairs. It was Moore, looking more like the vanquished than the victor. The meeting between the two generals did not last long. Menendez objected to the use of the term 'unconditional surrender' and so penned his own correction before finally signing the document, which became effective at 2130 hrs that evening. According to the agreement, Argentine units would keep their flags, officers would retain their firearms, commanders would remain in charge of their troops, a mixed working group between the two forces would form to resolve personnel and logistics issues, and prisoners would be grouped near the airport until they could be transported back to Argentina. The British would soon learn that Argentine military leaders exercised no more discipline over their units than they had during the occupation. Most, in fact, would remove insignias to mask their ranks. Moore's transmission back to Admiral Fieldhouse following the signature that evening was brief:

IN PORT STANLEY AT 9 O'CLOCK PM FALKLAND ISLANDS TIME TONIGHT THE 14 JUNE 1982, MAJOR GENERAL MENENDES SURRENDERED TO ME ALL THE ARGENTINE FORCES IN EAST AND WEST FALKLAND, TOGETHER WITH THEIR IMPEDIMENTA. ARRANGEMENTS ARE IN HAND TO ASSEMBLE THE MEN FOR RETURN TO ARGENTINA, TO GATHER THEIR ARMS AND EQUIPMENT, AND TO MAKE SAFE THEIR MUNITIONS. THE FALKLAND ISLANDS ARE ONCE MORE UNDER THE GOVERNMENT DESIRED BY THE INHABITANTS. GOD SAVE THE QUEEN.

The succinctness of Moore's message to Fieldhouse belied the enormity of the tasks now facing him and his senior commanders.

Falklanders had no idea that the British Land Force commander was in their midst. Most remained secluded in their homes or shelters, still fearful for their lives. Having grown accustomed to the sound of explosions for several weeks, they suddenly sensed an eerie silence enveloping Stanley. None grasped what had just happened. After the signing, Moore turned to Patrick Watts, who had been in the Secretariat when the general arrived, and asked where he could meet some locals. Watts was the radio broadcaster who had provided updates during the invasion, until the Argentines shut down transmissions. He told Moore that over a hundred people had taken refuge in the Falkland Island Company's West Store in the town centre, then headed to the store to tell them the war was over and Moore was on his way. Watts had barely arrived, at about 2220 hrs, when Moore walked in and told everyone he was sorry it had taken him so long to get to Stanley. Soon locals in the store hoisted the smallish general atop their shoulders and gave him a drink.¹ News about the end of the war spread quickly around the small community.

After visiting the local hospital to meet more locals, Moore mentioned to Watts that he would appreciate a cup of tea. They went to the residence the broadcaster shared with his mother, where all relaxed with some tea and cakes. Before the general headed to Government House for the night, he declared it to be 'the best dammed cuppa I've had since I set out'. The civility of this gathering belied the chaos that was brewing outside on the streets of the capital.

By then, a handful of others had arrived in Stanley to join Moore, including Colonel Ian Baxter, his deputy chief of staff for logistics, who had the unique experience of drafting the terms of surrender that Moore presented to Menendez. He arrived via helicopter on the same prearranged route about twenty minutes after Moore. It would have been a surreal scene had anyone been there to observe the Brits disembark their helicopters in battle uniforms that evening and walk across the sports field on which they had landed. Some Argentine soldiers were milling around, still armed, as others continued to straggle on to the streets from the surrounding hills. And although they surely anticipated they would find damage, it

must have been particularly surreal and unnerving for the newly arrived Brits to see the carnage, filth and disorder then characterizing the capital.

Walking from the landing area across the muddy sports field that evening, Baxter could see dozens of shipping containers on side streets, their doors open and their insides stuffed with things like sides of beef and bacon, bottles of olive oil, cases of wine, clothing and other items clearly different from the supplies Argentine conscript soldiers in the field had been receiving. But some containers also were filled with crates of ration packs that had never made it to the front lines. Now Argentine soldiers were looting these containers, taking whatever they wanted. Vehicles packed streets that were ankle-deep in mud. Weapons, ammunition, dead men, occasional body parts and debris littered the town. Even more startling, perhaps, was the complete degradation of sanitation. Argentine leaders had not enforced basic sanitary measures in units during their occupation; forces had built no field latrines in the two and a half months since the invasion. Soldiers therefore had been defecating wherever and whenever they pleased – on the streets, in the town hall, in the hospital, the post office, on jetties, in virtually all public places as well as in houses where they were staying. Artillery, cannon fire and bombs, coupled with Argentine sabotage, had crippled local services, including plumbing. Permeating the air was the stench of garbage, carcasses rotting in freezers without power at the town's slaughterhouse, dead bodies and human excrement. If there was any moment of peace and quiet in the scene before the new arrivals, it was when they saw a white horse tethered near the Secretariat Building eating grass. The following day, they would discover that someone had shot the horse dead. Stanley had become a horrible place.

Shelling in past days had left several houses and buildings aflame. Now, as they learned of the surrender, some frustrated Argentines added to the chaos by setting fire to other houses, a store and the dockyard. The local fire brigade manned by residents sprang into action and tried its best to douse the flames. Reportedly, other frustrated Argentines set booby traps in houses and buildings. Although peace was at hand, order in the capital was still far away.

With government no longer existing in the Falklands, responsibility for controlling the situation and for restoring order now fell squarely on to Moore's shoulders. He would be in charge for the near term, not just of the needs of his land forces but also of the civilian population throughout the islands and over 8,000 Argentine prisoners crowding into a town with a normal population of barely a thousand. After the surrender that evening, Moore instructed Baxter to coordinate with Menendez for the handling of prisoners.

Meanwhile, 5 Infantry Brigade and 3 Commando Brigade had stopped their advance as they awaited news of the surrender. Some units were anxious to be the first to enter the beleaguered town. Moore, however, did not want the situation in Stanley to be exacerbated by an influx of several thousand British troops. He had instructed Wilson to prepare his units to return to the Fitzroy area. Thompson's men had reached the town limits on 14 June. His commanders then started seeking shelter for their men on the western edge of Stanley, and 2 Para and 3 Para took up positions in the grandstands of the racecourse and in huts and houses on the outskirts of town. Lieutenant Colonel Nick Vaux, the Commander 42 Commando, discovered a seaplane hangar as he looked for temporary quarters for his men and there made a gruesome discovery:

Entering the sea-plane hangar was like walking under a vegetable strainer. Everywhere narrow shafts of light speared the gloom through myriad punctures from a cluster bomb strike. Inside was the anticipated squalor. It became quickly apparent that this would be worse than usual as the two companies began to clean up. A useful-looking wheelbarrow under a tarpaulin turned out to contain a dismembered corpse. On a balcony upstairs was a pile of amputated limbs from which the blood dripped down onto the floor below. Outside more bodies were piled together in the mud. We gradually came to realize that this had been a macabre mortuary.²

The hangar eventually housed two of Vaux's companies, once they had cleaned up the mess. After weeks of operating in the open, often in harsh weather, British troops welcomed whatever shelter they could find. The day after the surrender, Moore selflessly dubbed Brigadier Thompson the 'Man of the Match' for his leadership throughout the campaign. He also instructed Thompson to assign one of his units to start disarming Argentines and to concentrate them near the airfield. The task fell to Vaux and his commandos.

Although the war on land was officially over now, much had to be done before some semblance of normalcy could return to the island. Argentines had abandoned much of their gear upon learning of the surrender. Helmets, rifles, ammunition and other equipment now littered mountainsides and trails. The people of Stanley lacked basic services. There was no running water. Residents were relying on the little water remaining in tanks at their homes; the town's water purification facility had been badly damaged by shellfire during the final assault. The sewage pipe to the sea had been severed. Two of the three generators in the town's power station were not working. In many places, power lines cut by shellfire were draped around buildings. Roads remained largely impassable because of mud and abandoned equipment. Surrounding the town were minefields and booby traps, complicating movement on land and also on beaches where the Argentines had anticipated an amphibious assault. And beyond the capital, miles away in settlements, the inhabitants faced similar challenges. Argentines had taken whatever they wanted from them too. Falklanders had been surviving for over two months on what they had on hand or were able to retain. Those in Stanley now eagerly opened their homes, took in as many of the British as they could, and looked after them. Local hospitality of this kind would continue for many months, until more permanent accommodation for the military became available. Ada Watts, for example, turned her entire house over to the British forces and returned several times a week to cook meals for those staying there.

Of primary importance to British commanders at this time, of course, was the welfare of their men, who

had been sacrificing so much for the past month in the islands and also for the previous two months to get there. Thousands of troops remained in field locations, many in the open with only personal gear. Most had not enjoyed a hot meal in days. Many had not showered in weeks or even changed their underwear recently. A common complaint after the war concerned the poor quality of the combat boots some had been wearing. It was not unusual for men to remove boots from dead Argentine soldiers to replace their own. Trench foot was a common ailment; so was the diarrhoea, known as 'Galtieri's revenge', due to the lack of fully sterilized water. These men had been struggling in tough field conditions, always under threat of possible attack and the stress of combat. They, too, needed reconstitution as well as a good break. Ordnance Squadron Commander Anthony Welch thought that Brigadier Thompson recognized this and purposely 'let his commandos go for a day or two to get it out of their system'. He was right. Thompson realized that his men needed some time to relish their hard-fought victory. Liquor allocations were established, and celebration commenced within British ranks, with the lone pub in Stanley quickly back in operation. But with all kinds of abandoned equipment lying around, and many exuberant men happy the war was over, it is not surprising that looting by British troops started as well. Concerned that troops might get their hands on drugs, Commander Rick Jolly of the Medical Squadron smashed hundreds of capsules of Argentine morphine hydrochloride.³ Thompson was aware of the potential for things to spin out of control after the victory. About forty-eight hours after the surrender, he called his commanders together and told them to re-establish discipline in their units and get their troops back in proper uniform. He declared a curfew for military units from last light to first light, declared the town's pub off limits, established guards over supply areas and instituted patrols to keep units inside designated areas. The celebrating soon came to an end, and the immense work of reversing the supply chain and restoring order in the Falklands began. Early decisions to hold many units in field locations outside Stanley certainly lessened congestion in the town as well as easing command and control issues. Shortly after the surrender, the Division relocated soldiers from 5 Brigade by helicopter from their last field locations at Sapper Hill, Tumbledown and Mount William directly back to Fitzroy and Goose Green, where they vastly outnumbered the tiny populations of those settlements. Most of Brigadier Wilson's men would never walk the streets of Stanley.

Without communications across the island or into all settlements, Moore asked Commodore Clapp to gain a better appreciation of the situation and needs in the settlements. Clapp kept the LPD *Intrepid* with its additional command and control capabilities near San Carlos to assist assessments in that area; he relocated *Fearless* to Port Stanley to help coordinate logistics requirements. At the time, there was much uncertainty about conditions, including the number of people in settlements outside of Stanley and of Argentine prisoners on the island. Helicopters went to every settlement in West Falkland and in East Falkland, including Lafonia, to visit each home and determine needs. It was clear that logisticians would have to provide supplies to other parts of the island, but actual needs would remain unclear for days. Concerns also persisted about the attitude of Argentina, given Galtieri's personal refusal to surrender. Consequently, Woodward kept ships at sea on alert, since the surrender Menendez had signed only applied to land forces. Clapp maintained procedures restricting coastal ship movements outside of San Carlos, Fitzroy and Teal Inlet by day, so that vessels remained protected by at least some Rapier air defence. The shifting of supplies from Ajax Bay started under cover of darkness.⁴

At the time of surrender, Stanley was well beyond the distribution points for land force logistics. The supply chain then spread backward from Teal Inlet to the west and Bluff Cove to the south across the island to Ajax Bay, where the bulk of Commando Logistic Regiment and supplies remained at the FMA. Logisticians now needed to reverse the Division's supply chain so that leaders could care for their own troops and provide essentials to the Argentine prisoners now concentrated in Stanley. Simultaneously, engineers needed to tackle a wide range of projects within the capital to re-establish basic services like water, electricity and sewage. The airfield required repairs so that aircraft could land safely after the long flight from Ascension. The British also needed to confront the horrific challenge of locating and defusing untold thousands of mines that Argentines had buried and scattered outside the city, around paths leading outward to the mountains and on beaches. Some of these challenges could be resolved in short order; others would be more complex. Winter weather had prevailed since mid-May. Freezing temperatures and strong winds would continue now for several months, making conditions for repair and reconstruction far from ideal.

The British focused fast on getting the many thousands of prisoners of war back to Argentina. By this time they had assumed responsibility for over 10,000 enemy prisoners of war on ships and around East Falkland. Without a fully useable airfield, and with no port facilities aside from jetties for small craft to help shift supplies, the continued presence of prisoners in such large numbers simply prolonged the discomfort for everyone, complicated logistics and created the possibility that the situation would worsen. Covered shelters were not available to protect all prisoners from the weather. Their tents having gone down with the *Atlantic Conveyor*, the British had no alternative but to resort to pickets and wire to confine and segregate most prisoners. This situation was far from ideal.

The Argentines were not only dejected because of their defeat. Some were angry at the way they had suffered on the surrounding mountains as they risked their lives. Conscripts straggled back from field positions into Stanley, many with trench foot and diarrhoea themselves, to see stacks of food and clothes which they had badly needed in the mountains. It was clear that severe inequities existed in the provisioning of units and ranks. Some platoons appeared well fed; others began scavenging for whatever they could find while they had the chance. Argentine leaders had failed to get supplies to many of their men. Returning from the field, soldiers probably found themselves with more rations than they had seen

in the previous month. But few supplies remained for the thousands of prisoners now crowded in Stanley. The British naval embargo and the full retreat of the Argentine Navy after the sinking of *Belgrano* had crippled Argentina's ability to keep its large fighting force armed and fed. Supplies arriving by C-130 cargo planes proved insufficient. Less than three days of food remained for Argentine units at the time of surrender. The British carefully inspected rations before issuing them to prisoners, withholding those designated for officers since they contained liquor supplements. They strip-searched prisoners, leaving them with enough clothing and bedding to care for themselves, then moved them into holding areas and a few buildings near the Stanley airfield. On the night of 16 June, however, a riot broke out, with prisoners setting fire to a building that, ironically, held their clothing stores.⁵

Three days after the surrender, the British marched Argentine prisoners from the airfield where they were being quarantined to board *Canberra* and *Norland* and sail to Puerto Madryn in southern Argentina. *Canberra* had on board over a thousand prisoners from the San Carlos area; she embarked several thousand more from Port Stanley before sailing for Argentina on 18 June. *Norland* and some smaller vessels followed with more. By 20 June, the British had repatriated most prisoners, but retained 600 Argentine officers and specialists, including Menendez, as a guarantee against Galtieri changing his mind about the surrender. With the departure of prisoners, one of the most difficult challenges in the restoration of order came to an end, removing the potential for insurrection and significantly reducing supply requirements.

To reverse the logistics chain, the British once again relied on sealift to move the bulk of units and supplies, as they attempted to keep as much as possible out of Stanley so as not to exacerbate congestion problems and inhibit the work that was needed to start restoring services to residents. It would take days, however, to relocate stocks from Ajax Bay to Stanley, given the long transits around the island. The solution became ship-to-shore operations as in the initial amphibious operation three weeks earlier, relying on landing craft and mexeflotes. A couple of days after the surrender, most of the logistics organization at Ajax Bay boarded MV *Elk*, leaving behind a small detachment to handle the several hundred prisoners of war remaining there and to provide a distribution point for 40 Commando, still the Land Force reserve at the time of surrender. Once arriving in Stanley, logisticians took control of functioning Argentine vehicles to assist in the distribution of supplies throughout the town. Not long after the surrender, waters surrounding the port of Stanley filled with ships rendering help. Some were used for military accommodation to relieve congestion in the town. As LSLs made it around to Stanley, the British started rotating military units to those vessels so that men could shower and clean up gear. For the vast majority, this would be the first time they had enjoyed a shower of any type since landing on the island nearly a month before. *Sir Tristram*, badly damaged during the air attacks at Fitzroy, was towed around and anchored both for repairs and to serve as accommodation along with *Sir Bedivere*. The *Baltic Ferry* became a floating workshop, source of supply and accommodation for 81 Ordnance Company, as she performed equipment recovery, salvage and maintenance operations. Other ships served similar purposes. As these ships arrived off Stanley, they soon constituted the main logistics base both for British units and the civilian population. With such a gathering of ships now outside Stanley, and the urgent need to shuttle supplies ashore on to restricted small jetties, it is understandable that someone now was required to control traffic both around the anchorage and in the limited port areas, so that the military task force could focus on other needs. A Royal Navy commander arrived from the United Kingdom to serve as harbourmaster about a week after the surrender.

For a while the forward supply bases at Teal Inlet and Fitzroy continued to supply units away from the capital, until remaining stocks could move to Stanley. Eventually, the Division left much equipment and supplies at forward support locations so that the future garrison force could clean up those areas in a more methodical manner in the months ahead.

It did not take the British long to restore basic services on the island, although the challenges were many and repairs remained short-term solutions. Work started quickly to repair damage to the water supply system in Stanley. It took Royal Engineers about one week. Using their water purification units, they first established water points on an interim basis. Then, with the help of flexible dracone bladders belonging to the Falkland Island Government, they established direct supply from Fleet bulk water tankers to supply the town. Power generation capacity for Stanley had been quite limited even before the invasion. It took engineers two weeks to repair the many overhead power lines in Stanley that had been damaged by shellfire and to complete other quick fixes to re-establish a power grid. That became sufficient for town residents, but power generation for Stanley remained as limited as it had been prior to the war. The British eventually installed a much greater capacity to generate electricity for the town and also a separate power station for the military. Engineers installed slipways at the eastern end of Stanley to enable soldiers to discharge supplies and equipment from mexeflotes and LCUs. They moored a dracone of fuel offshore and laid a pipeline to the town's fuel depot system. And they fixed countless potholes in the roads in and around Stanley.⁶

Some of the civilian population of the islands had run short of food and general supplies during the war. The British military, however, simply did not have sufficient supplies on ships to satisfy all of their needs or desires. It was more a matter of conducting minor repairs and coordinating distribution of supplies to small outlying settlements; providing for their needs generally went smoothly. The situation in Stanley was more challenging, though, due to its larger population, overall condition and lack of suitable facilities. The town offered few places for the breakdown and storage of bulk supplies once logisticians got them ashore, complicating distribution to both residents and military units. The limited amount of pre-war warehousing in Stanley for food and other supplies had become living accommodation for Argentine

soldiers. Those buildings now needed disinfecting. Consequently, any residents hoping for hot rations and a quick influx of food soon became disappointed. Eventually, the British were able to supplement rations with fresh fruit, vegetables and eggs. But it was August before British logisticians could offer even garrison troops fresh rations. This challenge, and the consequent overall inability of the British military to meet everyone's needs, was something that some civilians found hard to understand.

Others focused on expanding medical care for civilians after the surrender. The King Edward VII Memorial Hospital at Port Stanley was intact. It was small but offered a range of modern facilities. The Argentines had used part of the hospital for their needs. Before the war, two doctors and a dentist had been providing care for islanders. On 27 April, however, Argentines abducted one of the doctors and his wife and held them captive at Fox Bay until the surrender. That left one doctor at the hospital. She received help from another doctor who had had the misfortune of being on holiday in Stanley from the United Kingdom when Argentina invaded. Under normal circumstances, these doctors would have found themselves flying to outlying settlements at times to provide care to residents who were sick. That service stopped after the invasion. On occasion, their Argentine captors permitted the two doctors in Stanley to use a radio to provide medical advice to others in need. During the war, medical care to those in settlements scattered around East Falkland became limited to whatever treatment military medics could provide if they were in the vicinity. Teams from 16 Field Ambulance provided additional treatment for residents after the surrender. They occupied a wing in the hospital and started collecting and sorting the vast quantity of Argentine medical equipment and supplies they found. A week after the surrender, more medical elements arrived by ship. A military wing became operational on 29 June. By then *Uganda* had moved into Port William Harbour to provide back-up medical care and evacuation facilities. The ship's crew also donated fifty hospital beds and bedding to King Edward Hospital.⁷

Of critical importance following the arrival of the British in Stanley was the restoration of the airfield and jetties, the hubs for aerial and sea delivery of supplies. The air bridge from Ascension remained active. C-130 cargo planes air-dropped clothing, boots, sleeping bags and other supplies for the troops, as well as nearly a ton of mail daily for both the military and civilians. The British established a snatch procedure for outgoing mail while runway repair work was underway. The technique involved two twenty-foot vertical poles connected by a wire loop holding a bag with about ten pounds of mail. Pilots flew their C-130s near to the ground, snatched the mail from the loop with a hook attached to a hydraulic winch and then flew back to Ascension. About thirty of these snatches took place before the runway was finally fixed sufficiently that pilots could start landing their planes.⁸

By the end of the war, the airfield at Stanley had become a sea of mud. Drainage ditches were not capable of holding run-off. It was every bit as big a mess as the town itself. The Argentines had performed only crude repairs to the runway. Of primary concern, other than damage from shellfire, was a large crater on one side. Although this crater did not stop C-130s from landing and taking off, it provided an undesirable hazard and required capping before British air cargo operations could begin. The airfield itself was far from first-rate. Built in the late 1970s, it offered a mere 4,000 feet of tarmac over bedrock, making it suitable only for C-130s and smaller aircraft; any bigger planes would require either an extension of the existing runway or construction of a new one. Royal Engineers completed a cleanup and temporary repair of the existing runway shortly after the departure of Argentine prisoners, including installation of air defence radar, air traffic control and an instrument landing system. The British renamed the airport RAF Stanley, perhaps a signal that the Royal Air Force would have a significant role from then on in the future protection of the Falklands. The first British C-130 Hercules touched down on the refurbished runway on 24 June with air movement personnel and equipment for cargo operations, just eleven days after the last Argentine C-130 had taken off.⁹ That same day, a British submarine torpedoed the LSL *Sir Galahad* in deep water out at sea. The logistics ship had survived several bombing runs but was beyond repair after the attack at Fitzroy. She sank to the bottom of the South Atlantic.

Revamping the Port of Stanley became key to solving the long-term supply problem for residents of East Falkland as well as for the future garrison force. There never had been a port facility per se in the Falklands. A focus for logistics planners in the two years following the surrender would be finding a way to handle large volumes of cargo from the sea. In June 1982, however, few options were available. Initial resupply by sea remained restricted to mexeflotes shuttling supplies ashore from LSLs anchored off Port Stanley, after arriving with supplies from Ajax. Those supplies only provided temporary relief to Stanley, though. What was needed was a larger, more modern facility to accept ships capable of carrying thousands of tons of cargo. That would take years to achieve, as would the expansion of airfield capabilities. In the meantime, Royal Engineers had to fix the port sufficiently so that it could at least start receiving supplies by sea on a continuing basis.

Port Stanley harbour provided adequate anchorage for some vessels, but depths were shallow, on average about six metres with occasional areas ten metres deep. This was sufficient for small vessels but not for larger supply ships in the Task Force that had been taken up from trade or other supply vessels needed in years to come. The port consisted of wooden jetties in poor states of repair, incapable of supporting cranes or even heavy load-carrying equipment. Engineers soon built two slipways by bulldozing the coastal retaining wall and adding loads of rock. This enabled slow movement of loads from ship to shore, but limited roads and lack of storage continued to make offload and distribution of supplies a very challenging process. Initial supplies came off the ships in bulk. Logisticians then moved them off jetties and into town for breakdown and subsequent distribution. Lots of supplies shuttled into Stanley only to be reconfigured into smaller loads, returned to slipways and lightered eventually to settlements.

Shortly after the surrender, engineers also started the immense task of clearing minefields and

disposing of ordnance. Minefields would hamper movement for decades around the outskirts of Stanley, across the countryside and on beaches. The Argentines had purchased many mines from Italy, Israel and Spain; most were made of plastic, making them especially hard to detect. The Argentine defences were a witches' brew of undetectable and haphazardly laid mines, unmarked minefields and scattered booby traps and other improvised charges. Argentina was not a signatory of the Geneva Convention and paid no heed to Convention requirements for multi-strand fences with warning signs for minefields. Moreover, as British forces pushed toward Stanley, fleeing Argentine soldiers started, for pure nuisance value, according to some accounts, scattering mines on paths leading to town, on hillsides and among rocks.

Mine clearance became perhaps the most challenging post-war task faced by the British in their efforts to restore normalcy to the islands. In the weeks following the surrender, engineers received some assistance from thirty-five Argentine Army and Marine prisoners, who agreed to assist the clean-up effort in return for good meals, warm showers and separate accommodation.¹⁰ Some had records of the minefields. The British also established a kids' club for the children in Stanley. If children found something suspicious and reported it to engineers, they were dubbed 'deputy bomb disposaleers' and given a certificate and a pat on the head. In the end, 237 out of 280 children on the island enrolled in the programme. Gradually, other records of the minefields started showing up mysteriously in houses, probably hidden there by Argentine engineers who had been staying in homes before heading to the prisoner camp. A year after the surrender, clearance efforts had recovered 4,500 grenades, 20,000 mortar rounds, 4,000 rockets, 12,000 shells, mostly for aircraft, 2,000 unlaidd mines, 284 assorted missiles, 88 bombs and large amounts of sealed ammunition.¹¹ Many mines and thousands of rounds of unexpended ordnance were recovered around the airfield and the jetty at Stanley, both of which were vital to re-establishing the air and sea bridge to East Falkland. Unfortunately, more than thirty years after the war, minefields still restrict movement in some areas around Stanley. Visitors will see areas cordoned off with wire and signage marking the presence of mines. Clearing operations continue, and some beaches near Stanley remain closed.

Planning for the unpleasant task of exhuming those killed in action and buried in the field actually commenced before the surrender on 14 June. Coffins and embalming materials had been shipped south aboard MV *Strathewe* with a Graves Registration party from the Royal Pioneer Corps, the first such team the British had formed since the Second World War. They estimated their task would take six weeks; they completed it in two. In most instances exhumation was by hand, except at San Carlos where they were able to use a mechanical digger. Fourteen of the dead were reburied in the War Graves Commission Cemetery at San Carlos with full service honours, including 2 Para's Commander, Lieutenant Colonel H. Jones. The other sixty-four bodies were repatriated.¹² It was the first time in British military history that repatriation of the dead had taken place from foreign lands. The next of kin of the deceased were all given a choice: to have their loved ones buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery on the Falkland Islands, or to have their remains repatriated to the United Kingdom.

Much had been accomplished in the two weeks since the surrender. Water was running again. Power had been restored. The majority of Argentines had been returned to their homeland. The airfield was back in service, even if landings were constrained. Work had started to make the port more serviceable. Ships had anchored off shore to provide accommodation. Military units had achieved a lot in a very short period of time. But without question, many were weary, tired of struggling in the increasing cold of winter and eager to get home.

On 25 June, senior British commanders welcomed Governor Rex Hunt back to the Falklands. He established and chaired a Joint Rehabilitation Committee to guide restoration work essential in the months ahead.¹³ Included on the Committee were Major General Moore and Commodore Clapp. Both had moved into Stanley with their staffs. The same day that the Governor returned, the first echelons of British units started leaving the Falklands for the long voyage back to the United Kingdom. The first ships to depart were *Norland* and *Europic Ferry* with the two parachute battalions. On 26 June, Brigadier Thompson and much of his 3 Commando Brigade headed towards home on *Canberra*. Commando Logistic Regiment followed aboard the LSL *Sir Percivale* on 28 June.

That left logistics units from 5 Brigade, including 81 and 91 Ordnance Companies, 10 Field Workshop and a transport troop to build upon the progress already made and to provide the framework for a larger logistics organization. For the commander of 10 Field Workshop, this would be the first time he would get his unit together since departing the United Kingdom. Even at the time of surrender, his men and unit equipment remained split between San Carlos Settlement, Fitzroy and Stanley, with more still embarked on *Norland*, *Nordic Ferry*, *Baltic Ferry*, *Sir Geraint*, *Sir Percivale* and probably *St Edmond* and *Container Bezant*.¹⁴ It had been an unusual war for him and his men. Other units ranging from postal and pay to NAAFI and veterinary services joined the 5 Brigade logistics units, all formally established into the Falkland Islands Logistic Battalion on 28 June. On 14 July, Admiral Fieldhouse's CINCFLEET headquarters issued a logistics support plan for what was to be called the Falklands Island Garrison and included both remaining land forces and ships operating in the area. It detailed tasks to military services and formally reverted provisioning of the population to the civil government, except for rations, which the garrison would continue to provide until the end of September. Major General David Thorne arrived in July as Commander British Forces Falkland Islands, along with 1st Queen's Own Highlanders and a company of the Queen's Lancashire Regiment to provide some replacement for 5 Brigade units that were starting to depart. The last combat unit of 5 Brigade to leave was the Scots Guards the end of July.

The British Task Force had succeeded in re-establishing order and basic services in the Falklands. The work exceeded everyone's expectations. Lieutenant Colonel Hellberg perhaps best summarized the

feelings of many when he said during a presentation three years after the war:

We train for all phases of war but not the aftermath of a war – the men are on a high and psyched-up and the last thing they want to do is clean up. Believe me, it requires iron discipline to wind up an operation of this sort. There is a mass of work to do: all stocks and equipment made safe and brought in, graves dug and services arranged, prisoner of war clean up teams, essential services to the community, mine/booby trap clearance and massive regrouping. I believe my Regiment worked even harder during this clean-up than even during the campaign. It is therefore in my humble opinion that ‘aftermath’ should be studied at Staff College as a separate phase of war.¹⁵

After the surrender, the British faced a challenge common to all victorious military forces. They were not structured to assume the broad array of tasks required to restore order and re-establish normal services, particularly when it came to caring for and administering to the civilian population. As forces started to depart, however, they left behind many improvements and a garrison geared to continue the work for years to come.

A decade later, it would be difficult to recall what the area around Stanley and elsewhere on East Falkland looked like in the winter of 1982. Several months after the surrender, the British rented specially designed oil-rig support barges, moved them to the Falklands, moored them near the shore and constructed walk-on ramps to provide accommodation for several thousand men.¹⁶ By the end of 1983, they had constructed camps of portable cabins ashore to house a garrison force of 3,000. Ocean shipping in the future would require much more to sustain the residents and an enlarged garrison force. Up to this time, residents of Stanley had seen only break-bulk or palletized cargo arriving in their town on small vessels four or five times a year. Enabling the Port of Stanley to handle containers became essential, and this brought with it a requirement for cranes, material-handling equipment, container chassis, staging areas and more. A little over a year after the surrender, the British had provided a long-term solution. They contracted for construction of a new port structure consisting of six barge bases providing 1,000 feet of berthing, 60,000 square feet of cargo handling space, and prefabricated steel-clad warehousing providing 1.25 million cubic feet of covered storage. A seventh barge accommodated roll-on roll-off shipping as well. Work commenced in October 1983 and concluded three months later. The first ship to arrive at this new port facility offloaded 500 tons of general supplies and sixty containers in thirty hours. On the ship’s previous visit to the Falklands, offloading of such tonnage had taken a whopping twenty-one days.¹⁷ The Port of Stanley now was capable of handling trans-ocean supply for residents of the Falklands and the military garrison for years to come.

Without additional work to the runway, RAF capability beyond resupply by C-130 remain limited, though. What the British needed for the long term was an extended runway and parking areas to accommodate jet fighters and larger planes. Planners in Britain had anticipated this even before the start of the land war. They had purchased aluminum airfield matting from the United States to resurface the runway and extend it from 4,000 feet to 6,500 feet. Work was completed at the end of August, leaving the airfield with much more capability than it had before the war. For the next several years, RAF Stanley became a key base for both logistics and all-weather fighters.

An even bigger airfield was required, however, if Britain was ever to introduce long-range cargo and passenger planes into the South Atlantic and thereby escape the costly air-to-air refuelling missions needed to keep the Falklands supplied. Debate over those needs commenced shortly after the war. On 1 May 1986, an entirely new airport facility capable of taking large Boeing 747-type aircraft became operational thirty miles south-west of Stanley, between the capital and Darwin. Named RAF Mount Pleasant, this complex assured rapid reinforcement if ever needed to help counter future provocation.

Prime Minister Thatcher astonished residents of East Falkland in January 1983 by landing unexpectedly at the Stanley airfield. It came as a complete surprise to them as she walked off the C-130 Hercules with Admiral Fieldhouse to greet them. It was the first time that a British Prime Minister had visited their islands, and they were ecstatic to see her. She made it clear to residents that they should never again doubt the British commitment to the future security of the Falklands. She had already instructed her government to dust off the Shackleton Report of the 1970s and to start implementing its recommendations to improve conditions and help residents take advantage of promising resources in and around their islands.

Life for Falklanders was getting back to normal, but normalcy was far away for many others involved in the war. Britain had made immense sacrifices to preserve the right of self-determination for those living in the Falklands – 255 British servicemen killed, 777 wounded with about 10 per cent of these permanently disabled, 6 ships lost, many other ships damaged and 20 aircraft destroyed. The cost of the war had approached £1 billion. Construction projects over the next few years to enhance defence capabilities for the future would consume several billion more. The cost to Argentina was enormous, including an estimated 750 killed, 1100 wounded and vast amounts of equipment lost. Its military was in a shambles. Galtieri and his Junta had been removed, but a new democratic government was now confronting economic conditions far more calamitous than before the invasion.

This had been a war quite unlike any other in the history of either country. Logistics challenges before the war had been unimaginable to most. The Argentines had doubted that Britain would take such risks in the southern hemisphere. Many in the United Kingdom had doubted their own ability to deploy forces over such vast distances and then sustain them sufficiently to win. Thatcher, many in her government, the British Task Force and thousands of men and women providing support proved them wrong.

Chapter 12

A Reflection on the British Experience

It might seem a statement of the obvious that the strategic mobility of a nation's military begins with the ability to move a force to where it is needed. It may be less apparent that that mobility is determined by the comprehensive readiness of a nation's transportation network, depots and ports to respond to the crisis within the time frame necessary. As these capabilities decline, or some become weaker than others, then the ability of a nation to respond is reduced generally to the readiness of the weakest component. Generating military force results from the synchronization of several activities toward a common end. It is not easy.

An overriding reminder about the Falkland Islands War is that wars sometimes occur at times and in places least expected. Since the 1960s, financial constraints had replaced a comprehensive strategy with regard to the United Kingdom's overseas commitments. Such clearly was still the case in 1982. Not only did Britain underestimate Argentina's resolve to take the islands by force if necessary; it appeared to miscalculate the seriousness behind rumblings in the media and elsewhere leading up to the invasion. Fortunately, its armed forces were reasonably well prepared for deployment at the time, even though there were vast differences between the readiness of 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines and 5 Infantry Brigade. Had the invasion occurred later in the year, as was originally planned by the Argentine Junta, some of the Royal Navy ships which proved so valuable would have been out of the inventory. That spring, its two remaining aircraft carriers were still available and all of its amphibious ships, including logistics ships, were basically ready. Depots were filled with supplies, many configured on to pallets for specific units and periods of time. But Britain lacked troop transport capabilities, supply ships, a hospital ship and a wide variety of other support vessels to sustain a task force over long distances for several months. Movement assets became the weakest component in deploying a force quickly. The speed with which commercial shipping companies freed up vessels, the synchronization of activities and supply chains to convert dozens of ships to meet military needs, and the responsiveness of work forces throughout the United Kingdom to get jobs done almost belie belief over thirty years later. The British military could not have deployed a credible force, let alone won the Falklands War, without industry and thousands of people working behind the scenes. Fortunately, the government had procedures in place for such eventualities. The Queen approved the orders quickly, industry cooperated fully and the result was last-minute mobility. The success of these efforts underscores the power of national resolve, something that is often lacking when politicians commit countries to war.

Despite its eventual ability to deploy a task force, however, the British military had no plans in place to counter a full-scale invasion of the Falklands. As a result, and given the vast distances to the South Atlantic, it is not surprising that so many in the MoD and the government remained hesitant about taking on such a challenge. Fortunately, the Royal Navy recognized the need to bridge the gap to the South Atlantic early and dispatched a handful of men to Ascension Island to set up supply operations the day after the invasion, as some support ships were already heading in that direction. Early establishment of that forward support base between the United Kingdom and the Falklands remains one of the most crucial decisions behind the eventual victory. The small island and the support personnel who arrived early to start operations there were as vital to the victory as the brave men on ships or fighting up the mountains surrounding Stanley.

It would be quite an overstatement to say that operations at Ascension went smoothly. Like many other things in the Falklands War, arrangements and operations there were ad hoc. The support unit had no visibility over what was coming into the airfield on any given day, or even over what was showing up off the island's shores. Many times it was not clear where supplies were destined, other than for the South Atlantic generally. It just so happened that with further British ingenuity Ascension became much more than a supply base. It proved an essential training area for troops to practise landing from landing craft and helicopters, to zero their rifles and guns and for ships to prepare and sharpen damage control teams, while others degaussed Royal Fleet Auxiliaries and merchant ships to make them less susceptible to magnetic mines. It also became a launch pad for dozens of planes to extend the reach of the nation's supply lines and for Vulcan bombers to demonstrate their ability to strike deep into the southern hemisphere. The MoD had no hope of establishing and maintaining logistics to its task force without some such place en route. Just a week after Thatcher's decision to deploy forces, fully converted ships were leaving the shores of England as other ships were starting to arrive at Ascension to receive supplies. And although the Amphibious Task Force was still working at Ascension to reconfigure cargo on ships by 1 May, other parts of the Task Force by then were fully engaged in combat in the South Atlantic. Deployments continued from the United Kingdom as the first troops were hitting the beaches near San Carlos. Ships were still being requisitioned and converted in May. Supplies continued to funnel into Ascension and from there on to ships headed south. Cargo planes from Ascension completed their last airdrops of supplies to the Task Force at the end of June. Even after the surrender, the small island helped the British maintain logistics momentum.

As ships were being modified in the United Kingdom and support operations were commencing at Ascension, a host of other activities began to prepare weapons systems for long voyages south and eventual battle, as well as to obtain other equipment. The Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm and the Royal Air Force, for example, rushed to modify aircraft for added protection against potential corrosion during ocean travel in rough seas. The Fleet Air Arm adapted Harriers to use the latest model Sidewinder missiles received from the United States, and modified Sea King helicopters for the use of Passive Night Goggles; the Royal Air Force enabled its Vulcan bombers to handle laser-guided bombs. Procurement commenced immediately of air-to-air refuelling equipment so that Vulcans, Nimrods and C-130s could perform their missions at long distances south of Ascension. This included not only probes for the aircraft but new navigational systems, so that pilots could link up their planes with tankers to take on fuel. As some focused on such equipment issues, other staff initiated procurement of shipping containers that could withstand airdrops at sea or worked to solve a range of other challenges, like the fuel and water storage limitations at Ascension, which led eventually to the construction of a new fuel pipeline from the shore to Wideawake Airfield. All such efforts and many others behind the scenes helped to ensure the Task Force had what it needed to get to the South Atlantic with readiness to fight. When the call to arms went out, British men and women worked eighteen hour days or longer to ensure troops had what they needed. Things came together quickly and effectively, obviously the combined result of effective staff work, streamlined procedures and willing workers. The Second World War was the last time military action of any type had produced such overwhelming national unity.

The Falklands War clearly highlights the difficulty of executing an amphibious assault, still probably the most challenging of military operations. Some of the Royal Marines involved had spent most of their careers training in amphibious operations, but none of the Royal Navy or British Army had. To say that the Task Force was well prepared for such an operation would be quite an overstatement. Commodore Clapp's small amphibious staff was newly assembled; most had to learn their jobs as they went. Prior to their deployment, the Royal Navy, Royal Fleet Auxiliary and logistics units had never had the opportunity to participate in exercises requiring large-scale logistics support over beaches in peacetime, except through simulations. Budgets simply did not allow for such costly training. Consequently, much of their operational experience was limited to fixed facilities and robust infrastructures. Although they surely had thought about the challenges of 'going live', their previous training provided no substitute for hands-on experience in what are commonly termed logistics-over-the-shore operations. Air attacks shredded their plans and forced a bigger buildup ashore. For the first week on land, they found themselves reacting to conditions at hand and simultaneously moving and issuing supplies as they continued struggling to build up more supplies ashore so that combat forces eventually could break away from beach areas and pursue other objectives. The net result was that frustrations developed not only for those waiting for rucksacks near the beach but all the way back to London. The services often did not understand each other's needs. Except for those at San Carlos trying to execute the amphibious operation while withstanding withering attacks from the air, few if any in the British military grasped the complexity of those operations.

Often regarded as the unique speciality of marines, amphibious operations are inherently joint in nature and not exclusive to any service. The navy's role is undisputedly large, and the responsibilities of the Commander Amphibious Task Force in protecting forces and getting them and their supplies to the right places on time are complex to say the least. And yet before the Falklands War, there were few in the Royal Navy who had a full understanding of the array of challenges underlying such operations. British amphibious operations had been limited to peacetime 'administrative landings', with host nations providing protection and necessary facilities. Staffing and training had taken a back seat to other Navy priorities. Commodore Clapp himself had never practised such operations before taking over responsibility for the Amphibious Task Force. It is understandable why others outside San Carlos Water became anxious at times about developments. It is also quite remarkable that, with such limited training beforehand and persistent threats from the Argentine Air Force, the amphibious operation came off so successfully. Establishing logistics capability remains essential in amphibious operations before forces can pursue objectives beyond beaches. Although that capability can remain afloat, it must be responsive to the needs of the land force.

Some have concluded rightly from the Falklands War that the integration of logistics and combat operations is essential. Nations have lost wars in the past when they failed to integrate the two. Britain did not come close to that in the Falklands, thanks to some luck and to the fact that its commanders generally were focused on making sure logistics wherewithal was in place. Such was their focus both during amphibious operations and after the breakout. For example, 3 Commando Brigade units started their marches across East Falkland as logistics ships were preparing to move supplies around the west side of the island from Ajax Bay to Teal Inlet to join them. That build-up was underway by the time Major General Moore and 5 Infantry Brigade arrived at the end of May. Care was taken to get supplies and firepower in place before the battle for the mountains. Brigadier Thompson altered plans and halted forces after the first phase of attacks, to make sure that sufficient support moved forward to maintain momentum. The battle for the high ground surrounding Stanley remained effective because of both heroic fighting and well-executed plans to ensure units continued to receive the support they needed.

The costly effects of not fully integrating logistics and tactics became evident twice during the war. At Goose Green, 2 Para went into battle with less support than it needed. A few days after winning that fight, the same paratroopers seized an opportunity to advance quickly to Fitzroy and in the process discovered it would take nearly a week to get supplies and services to them. This situation was quite different to the delayed build-up after the amphibious landing and the movement of supplies by LSL to the other side of

East Falkland. On the isthmus leading to Goose Green, 3 Commando Brigade misjudged the situation and the support needed by 2 Para. When 2 Para then seized an opportunity to advance, 5 Brigade did not consider the eventual difficulty of sustaining a battalion of paratroopers once it arrived at Fitzroy. Both situations produced consequences, but neither jeopardized the outcome of the war. Had commanders like Clapp and Thompson not remained focused on integrating logistics and combat operations, however, the war might have turned out differently.

The long distance to the Falklands was another consideration for the British, especially when it came to supporting their forces. Given three weeks to get supplies by sea from the United Kingdom, and about half as long just from Ascension, they did not have the capability to make up for losses quickly by ocean shipping. Although C-130s could airdrop many things to the Task Force, these cargo planes were insufficient to replace large quantities. Consequently, Britain took steps early to protect its fragile supply chain to the South Atlantic, starting at Ascension with surveillance and continuing throughout the war as the Royal Navy moved its ships day and night around the Falklands to keep them as safe as possible. It wisely maintained many supply ships beyond the reach of Argentine pilots. Even though the British went to great lengths to protect their supply chain, they were not always successful. Although the Task Force suffered significant setbacks due to its inability to control the skies, those setbacks were not enough to cripple the force.

Some have proposed that the two aircraft carriers, HMSs *Hermes* and *Invincible*, constituted the centre of gravity of the Task Force. It is true that the British would have had a much more difficult time countering the persistent attacks by Argentine fighters without the majority of its Harriers. But such beliefs would have to consider the timing of any possible successful hit on a carrier. Once engineers and logisticians had established landing strips and refuelling ashore, the effects of the loss of a carrier would have been less. Admiral Henry Leach, the head of the Royal Navy at the time, admitted in his memoir after the war that he believed they would lose twice as many ships; yet he never wavered in his belief that the British would win.¹ One can make a more compelling argument that the logistics capabilities of the Task Force constituted the centre of gravity of the campaign, at least through 1 June when the Force had built up supplies on land and started moving them forward. Prior to that, severe damage to their supplies would have either stopped or significantly delayed the British capability to generate combat power ashore. Had bombs exploded on impact when they hit the LSLs *Galahad*, *Lancelot* and *Bedivere* just after the landings, the British could have lost half of the logistics vessels able to approach shallow waters, hampering not only the initial build-up but also the forward positioning of supplies by those ships later on. All of these ships were packed with supplies, equipment and, at times, men. If the Argentines had bombed the merchant ship *MV Elk*, they might have destroyed the majority of the Land Force's ammunition. If they had hit ships carrying fuel, they could have grounded helicopters and more. Hits on either of the converted transports *Norland* or *Canberra*, both massive targets that dwarfed the warships in Falkland Sound, could have been catastrophic on D-Day because of the troops and supplies on board. It is not hard to imagine the difficulties such losses would have created for the Task Force.

Commanders were justifiably concerned about their lack of air superiority and the ability of the Argentines to launch Exocet missiles. The Task Force remained vulnerable to the interdiction of its supply lines for almost the entire war. It so happened that, before the invasion, Argentine pilots had trained primarily on attacking ground targets rather than ships at sea. Making split second decisions, after flying hundreds of miles from Argentina and then avoiding British air defences when reaching the Falklands, challenged pilots even more. Years later, it now appears that these pilots often were not following the instructions of their superiors, who had told them to target transports, landing craft and logistics ships instead of warships.² There can be little doubt that the outcome of the war might have been quite different had Argentine pilots followed those orders and more of their bombs had exploded. Fighting over long distances with little forward support, as the British did, makes a force more susceptible to interdiction.

It might surprise some to discover that supply was never a serious problem during the war, though. The British returned having learned many lessons about the quality of some supplies and scales of allocation for others, such as ammunition. And although there were instances where troops suffered in the rough weather without supplies, the Task Force had the essentials it needed throughout the war. The Argentines never seriously crippled its logistics capabilities, despite causing huge losses at times. It is true that as the war was coming to an end, the Royal Navy was running out of some ammunition. At other times during the ground war, as during the battle for Goose Green, gunners stopped firing because they had no more ammunition. By the time the Argentines surrendered in Stanley, some artillery batteries were on their last rounds as well. But plenty of ammunition remained elsewhere, and it would have reached fighting positions after a pause.

The same is generally true for the Argentine military. Although soldiers in the field often suffered from lack of food and supply, a steady flow of supplies continued from the mainland to Stanley right up to the end of the war. Navy and merchant shipping stopped supplying the Falklands after the sinking of *Belgrano*, but the Argentine Air Force, Navy and civilian aircraft were landing multiple times daily from the invasion until the day before the surrender, often backhauling casualties. Flights were aborted on three days in May due to crosswinds. Otherwise, brave pilots guided their planes into Stanley, avoiding British radar while under constant threat of Harrier attack. They compiled an impressive record of flying 2,356 hours to the islands. British pilots tried repeatedly to stop the flow, but they only succeeded once, when on 1 June a Harrier pilot successfully downed a C-130 with a Sidewinder missile.³ Operational-level logistics remained effective for the Argentine military despite not having ocean shipping at its disposal.

Plenty of supplies were in Stanley at the time of surrender. The breakdown in the Argentine supply chain occurred outward from Stanley at the tactical level, as commanders simply failed to get supplies forward to units. The Argentine Army had been relying on helicopter resupply as well. After the British destroyed ten of their helicopters, forward distribution of supplies became more difficult, and commanders in Stanley failed to find other solutions to get supplies to their men in field locations, even though the surrounding mountains were only a matter of a dozen kilometres or less from the capital.

The challenge for British logisticians, day after day, was also to get supplies to where they were needed. Events largely outside their control, coupled with a lack of dedicated transportation, initially inhibited their ability to supply units. As casualties occurred, logisticians had to compete, quite understandably, with medical evacuation requirements. It just remained a slow process. In the end, it was the movement of supplies and equipment that dictated the pace of the ground war.

These issues were not limited to the battlefield. Problems started when ships were loaded in the United Kingdom in a rush to get south. Supply troops struggled to determine what cargo they had and where it was supposed to go. At Ascension, they tried their best over a couple of weeks to sort through stacks of supplies in the cargo holds of ships and re-stow them so that access would be easier and discharge quicker during the assault. Just getting cargo out of ships was a challenge at times. When *QE2* disembarked troops at South Georgia and headed back to England, for example, she sailed north with tons of supplies simply because of the difficulty of removing them from the bottom of the ship. South of Ascension, plans for the discharge of LSLs changed, preventing logisticians from offloading supplies from them on to beaches and therefore requiring double handling of stocks. At other times after D-Day, logisticians waited day and night for supply ships to arrive in the anchorage, only to learn those ships were needed elsewhere. All these things combined to affect the pace of operations.

Fuel, in particular, plagued logisticians after the landings because of the large amount of daily needs. Lack of fuel handlers and the large daily requirements for jerrycans were part of the problem. Another challenge was the need to keep aircraft flying. Eventually, the British established refuelling points ashore. The first was in operation at Port San Carlos for helicopters by the end of May and eventually included a 10,000 litre pillow tank. Another was completed at San Carlos shortly after 5 Brigade arrived. There was plenty of fuel aboard ships. Logisticians and engineers filled a floating tank called a dracone, pulled it near shore with small boats, then piped fuel from it to refuelling locations on land. Establishing these capabilities took time, though. Much fuel handling equipment had gone down with the *Atlantic Conveyor*. It did not help matters that Argentine pilots shot holes in a collapsible pillow tank for fuel as it was moving ashore atop a mexeflote. Until the completion of landing strips and refuelling sites and the arrival of qualified petroleum experts from 5 Brigade, Harrier pilots needed either to land on the cramped and often busy flight decks of *Fearless* or *Intrepid* or return to aircraft carriers sometimes as far as 200 miles away from East Falkland to rearm and refuel before providing additional air cover or ground support. Before the final battle, forward area rearming and refuelling sites had also been established at Teal Inlet and Fitzroy. Those sites were resupplied occasionally by LSLs, but primarily by helicopters with sling loads of jerrycans and portable fuel bladders, including eighteen captured from Argentines.

Helicopters remained vital to logistics operations during the war because of the rough, trackless terrain of East Falkland. Much has been written about the effects of the loss of three out of four CH47 cargo helicopters, six Wessex helicopters and other supplies aboard the *Atlantic Conveyor* on 26 May. That was clearly quite a setback for logisticians, especially the CH47s with their 20,000lb cargo capacities. There can be little doubt, however, that logisticians would have struggled to keep all of these helicopters flying had they arrived at San Carlos as planned at the end of May. A CH47, as an example, typically consumes more than 300 gallons of fuel per hour. With four flying daily, logisticians would have needed a lot of fuel on land. It would have been quite a distribution challenge. As it was, during the peak of operations during the battle for the mountains, helicopters and Harriers drank fuel from just the installation at Port San Carlos at the rate of 42,000 gallons per day.⁴ On one day the BMA/FMA at Ajax Bay was down to a single day of fuel remaining, as it struggled to meet requirements.

Command and control presented a host of challenges as well, starting with the lack of a joint operational headquarters in the South Atlantic. With greater appreciation of the situation as it was developing, a senior headquarters in theatre could have relieved some pressures on all task force commanders. Nightly calls from the battlefield back to the United Kingdom were hardly a substitute for real-time situational awareness, communication and decision-making. Such a senior headquarters might have set different priorities for supply ships too. Logisticians became frustrated when ships they requested failed to show up as anticipated because of needs elsewhere. Their frustrations were understandable, since no-shows delayed supplies for at least another day. But such frustrations were also inevitable, since many supplies for the entire task force were commingled as a result of the rushed outload. As it was, Rear Admiral Woodward directed ship movements based on his view of priorities and overall needs at the time for the entire Task Force. There is nothing to suggest those priorities were not the best; but during and after the war, others believed them not to be, which is not necessarily surprising.

Communications issues made the lack of such command presence even more pronounced. During the critical period of the amphibious landings and build-up, Brigadier Thompson was often out of touch with Commodore Clapp and his staff, and both remained out of touch with Major General Moore, who was then sailing south on *QE2*, which was experiencing prolonged communication problems. Signal traffic overwhelmed the system, and only high priority signals would reach their destination. Communications also plagued logisticians, but in different ways. STUFT ships did not have the same communication capabilities as military ships. Logisticians frequently had no communication with ships, landing craft,

mexeflotes or helicopters. Although they could communicate generally with unit support echelons, they lacked a separate radio net to relay logistics information higher. Consequently, face-to-face meetings had to become the norm so as not to clog up the operations net. As forces advanced inland, other communications challenges arose as well, most noticeably around Fitzroy, when many discovered they could not communicate with 2 Para once it advanced to the settlement, and when 5 Infantry Brigade became separated from its communication vehicles. In today's world of constant satellite communications, instant messaging and tweets, it can be difficult to appreciate the many difficulties the British faced in communicating in the Falklands. Senior commanders were often out of touch with each other. Logisticians commonly lacked the ability to communicate altogether. After the war, Land Force logisticians recognized that a significant oversight had been the lack of a senior logistics staff officer to work with Commodore Clapp's staff aboard *Fearless* following the amphibious landings.⁵ Such a liaison officer likely would have prevented many frustrations about decisions affecting the offload of supplies, and provided a clearer understanding of joint requirements. With the arrival of 5 Brigade, Headquarters LFFI designated an officer to serve in that capacity, establish priorities and coordinate requirements with naval staff. This did not eliminate all confusion and frustration, but his presence certainly reduced it from what it had been in May.

Matters might have been worse had it not been for the logistics organization and staffs that deployed initially. There was a dramatic difference between Commando Logistic Regiment, which was an integral part of 3 Commando Brigade, and the assorted logistics units assembled at the last minute to support 5 Infantry Brigade. Those small units for 5 Brigade certainly knew what they were doing, but without more capabilities and a command and control headquarters to guide support, they never were capable of providing support to a brigade force on the battlefield. One would think that those who formed the 5 Brigade team knew of these shortfalls and understood the challenges of providing logistics on the battlefield. Perhaps they anticipated that the assorted logistics units in 5 Brigade would become 'plugs' for Commando Logistic Regiment when they arrived, so that the Regiment would be more capable of providing support for a two-brigade division. If that were the case, no one apparently told 3 Commando Brigade.

It is remarkable that the Regiment was able to maintain the quality support it provided, given how often plans changed because of air attacks and damage to ships. And yet these logisticians and the staffs supporting them were able to bounce back from setbacks and refocus on getting supplies and services forward for the main attack on Stanley, while integrating newly arrived 5 Brigade units into their plans. These achievements are all the more impressive when one considers that most of their training prior to the war remained restricted to fixed infrastructures in NATO scenarios, which bore little relationship to an assault on a hostile coast.

Key to some of this performance at least was the organization itself, a multi-functional multi-service unit trained in both its logistic mission and survival skills, each member being commando-trained like others in 3 Commando Brigade. Commando Logistic Regiment was structured to enable continuous support on the battlefield. It could tailor multi-functional support teams to meet changing conditions. There was probably no other unit like this Regiment in 1982. Back then, logistics support for ground forces typically came from separate supply, maintenance, transportation and medical units, often stove-piped for command and control from lower to higher levels. Only several years after the Falklands War did other militaries start forming multi-functional logistics commands to provide support to combat units. And although this type of support organization is quite common today, branches of the military still have not migrated toward more joint organizations for providing logistics, except at installation level. Logistics in the US military, for example, remain very much service-centric, even though some integration has started at installation level. Commando Logistic Regiment continues to warrant closer examination by those interested in the range of possibilities of joint logistics, especially in expeditionary-type warfare.

Within the Commando Logistic Regiment there was no better example of successful support on the battlefield than the achievements of its Medical Squadron. Initial plans did not envisage the need for a hospital ashore. As Argentine planes threatened shipping, it became essential to establish those capabilities on land quickly. The choice became Ajax Bay, the area planned for the anticipated small build-up of supplies; it also provided shelter for a small hospital in the old sheep processing plant. In the rush to relocate ships, however, the Squadron was unable to disembark all of what it wanted. Nonetheless, the makeshift field hospital at Ajax soon proved vital in saving lives. By the time Argentina surrendered, the Red and Green Life Machine had treated over 1,000 casualties and performed over 300 major surgeries. Remarkably, only three British soldiers died after reaching this hospital, even though some arrived in such bad condition that they required five units of blood to stabilize them before surgery could take place.⁶ The astounding success of doctors in mending soldiers was due in part to practices used by surgeons as far back as Napoleon's army, but not that common elsewhere at the time. They removed dead tissue, cleaned wounds as best they could and applied loose wraps, but kept wounds open for days afterwards until time or conditions enabled more thorough examination.

The bravery and skill of doctors was only part of the reason for these medical successes, though. The British anticipated that East Falkland would present challenges greater than their recent experiences in Northern Ireland at that time, where evacuation from point of injury was easy and transportation plentiful. Medical training provided to units en route to the Falklands proved invaluable on the battlefield. It consisted of several blocks of instruction to enable men to deal with a variety of combat wounds, to administer drips and morphine, to apply first aid dressings and provide immediate resuscitation, and to help evacuate casualties. Medications and dressings issued before landings helped men to alleviate pain

and stop bleeding, so that they could care for themselves or assist comrades without immediately calling for medical assistance. Above the soldier level within companies, other leaders carried still more supplies, to include intravenous fluids and extra drugs and dressings. Such preparation proved invaluable at Darwin/Goose Green and in the mountains surrounding Stanley, where rocky crags slowed down ad hoc stretcher teams.

The Falklands War also demonstrated again the importance of evacuation helicopters and echeloned levels of treatment from point of injury to surgery. Although evacuation was rudimentary most of the time, it remained effective in saving lives because of treatment capabilities at multiple levels. It is worth noting that thirty per cent of all the casualties the British treated were Argentines. British doctors were overwhelmed at times by the need to tend to Argentine casualties and provide continuing care to prisoners. Surgeon Commander Rick Jolly became the only member of the Task Force to receive decorations from both the British and Argentine governments.

Many likely do not know, however, that the vast majority of casualties during the war occurred not on land but at sea, nearly seventy per cent if one counts the Sea King helicopter crash during cross-loading prior to D-Day. Casualties on ships were often quite severe because of exploding fuel and the difficulty of reaching injured sailors in burning passageways and compartments. There can be no doubt that battle drills and medical training for sailors and crews en route to the South Atlantic had an equally positive effect on saving lives at sea as well.

Perhaps the most lasting impression one gets from the Falklands War, though, is that the British were simply better than the Argentines they fought. From bottom to top ranks, there were vast differences between the militaries of the two nations. Britain's armed services were voluntary and professional, and had trained under difficult conditions in the past. Argentina's consisted mostly of conscripts, many with little training and without the camaraderie of units with heritages centuries old. Many had come from the warmer areas of northern Argentina. Dozens died not in battle but from exposure, because they were not adequately prepared or equipped. British senior leaders may not have held a common view of events on a daily basis, but they shared a vision of where they must win the war and what could cause them to lose it. The Argentine Junta misjudged British resolve, and its commanders failed to develop a coherent strategy to defeat the Task Force or to take advantage of opportunities on the battlefield. British leaders led from the front and took care of their men. Many of Argentina's never left Stanley as their men suffered in the field. Some leaders disciplined soldiers by withholding rations. Residents of Stanley witnessed one soldier having to strip to the waist and stand all day by the Town Hall in freezing rain because he had returned from the field on his own simply to get more rations for his men.⁷ When British leaders died, others took their place and executed plans because they understood what had to be done and were capable of assuming responsibility. Overall, British troops were better trained and tougher than most Argentines they faced, as was demonstrated on multiple occasions from Goose Green to Mount Longdon and beyond. When setbacks occurred, these units were able to bounce back.

Britain's commandos, paratroopers, soldiers, sailors and airmen all had their moments of glory under tough fighting conditions in the Falklands War. They were simply more professional than those they fought. All of them were backed up by thousands of men and women working behind the scenes, at times thousands of miles away, trying get them what they needed. Together they made the victory possible.

Notes

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16. Miller and Hutchings, p. 139
17. Ibid., pp. 145-6
18. Brown, p. 243-5
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26. Underwood, p. 80
27. Thompson, *3 Commando Brigade*, pp. 121, 124

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6. Bishop and Witherow, p. 111
7. Ibid., p. 117
8. Van der Bijl and Aldea, p. 87
9. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 273
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13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 96
15. Ibid., p. 97
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18. Clapp, p. 233
19. Middlebrook, *The Falklands War*, p. 300
20. Van der Bijl and Aldea, p. 112
21. Ibid., pp. 112–13
22. Middlebrook, *The Falklands War*, pp. 301–2
23. Hastings and Jenkins, p. 273
24. Bishop and Witherow, p. 114. Two other events that day restricted the possible response by Harriers even more. A Harrier had crashed on take-off from the newly established refuelling site on land at San Carlos, stopping further refuelling for a while. Also that day, Woodward had moved *Hermes* another 100 miles further east to clean her boilers, limiting the time on station of Harriers to less than fifteen minutes until the refuelling station could be cleared. Southby-Tailyour, p. 300
25. Underwood, p. 12
26. Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War*, p. 284
27. Bombs lodging in the LSLs did not explode inside their casings as normally happens. They deflagrated with casings bursting open and contents burning. Middlebrook, *The Falklands War*, p. 300
28. Jolly, p. 123
29. Freedman, *Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, Vol II, p. 613
30. Ibid., p. 606

Chapter 10: The Battle for Mountains Surrounding Stanley

1. Thompson, *3 Commando Brigade*, p. 139
2. Vaux, p. 131
3. Ibid., p. 130
4. Ibid., p. 151
5. Middlebrook, *The Falklands War*, p. 322
6. Ibid.
7. Thompson, *3 Commando Brigade*, p. 140. It is important to note that at one point in the final battle, the only dressing station in the entire division that was reachable by helicopter because of weather was 3 Commando Brigade's at Teal Inlet
8. Middlebrook, *The Falklands War*, p. 329
9. Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War*, p. 278
10. Fox, pp. 229–30
11. Middlebrook, *The Falklands War*, p. 314
12. Thompson, *3 Commando Brigade*, p. 148
13. 3 Para Post Operational Report, p. L-3
14. Thompson, *3 Commando Brigade*, p. 163
15. Ibid., p. 169
16. Brown, p. 318
17. Underwood, p. 35
18. Van der Bijl and Aldea, p. 191
19. Middlebrook, *The Falklands War*, pp. 357, 366
20. Van der Bijl and Aldea, p. 202

21. Letter dated 4 November 1982 from Lieutenant Colonel David Morgan to Patrick Bishop, co-author of *The Winter War*, offering some tongue-in-cheek corrections to the book
22. Middlebrook, *The Falklands War*, p. 369

Chapter 11: After the Surrender

1. Smith, p. 185
2. Vaux, p. 202
3. Jolly, *The Red and Green Life Machine*, p. 142
4. Clapp, pp. 268-9
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7. Smith, p. 107

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