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NAVAL PARTY 8901
and
THE ARGENTINE INVASION

Es el relato de los hechos de la "OPERACIÓN ROSARIO" durante el 02 de Abril vistos desde la óptica británica.

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Naval Party 8901

And the Argentine Invasion

On Wednesday March the 31st 1982 British intelligence indicated that the Argentine fleet would be moving into position for a seaborne assault on the Falkland Islands within the next 48 hours. The Argentine force had sailed under the overall command of Vice Admiral Juan Lombardo. Most of the ships sailed on Friday 26th March from the port of Puerto Belgrano. Rex Hunt the Governor of the Falklands, was informed by London of the Argentineans possible intentions. Governor Hunt immediately summoned the two senior Royal Marine officers on the island to Government House to discuss the defence of the Falklands. Saying " Sounds like the buggers mean it.



At the time of the Argentine invasion the islands were defended by Naval Party 8901 (NP 8901) that consisted of a Royal Marine garrison of about troop strength. It just so happened that NP 8901 was in the process of its annual rotation, with one troop arriving and one troop returning to the UK (a fact that the Argentine intelligence did not know). Major Norman's troop of Marines were being relieved by a troop commanded by Major Noott. This gave Rex Hunt a total of 67 Royal Marines to defend the Falklands. Major Norman, being the senior of the two Majors, was placed in over all command and

Noott was made military adviser to the Governor. 12 of Major Noott's troop had already sailed to South Georgia aboard H.M.S. Endurance under the command of Lt. Keith Mills. They had been sent to keep an eye on some Argentineans at Leith.

Rex Hunt also sent calls out to the 120 members of the Falklands Islands Volunteer Defence Force, made up of local men. These men had never fired a shot in anger and had only been called into action once before in 1966, when 30 Argentinean nationalists, hijacked an Argentinean plane and landed it at Stanley race course to free the oppressed islands from the British. The Argentines were shocked to find they were not welcome. They were quickly surrounded and sent back to Argentina on a British ship. The response to Governor Hunts "Call to arms " was very disappointing. Because of the distance, some of the members of the defence force had to travel, only 23 managed to reach Port Stanley to help in the town's defence. Two officers and nine men from H.M.S. Endurance were also in Stanley at the time. As Major Norman was taking stock of his limited forces Jim Airfield, an ex-Royal Marine Corporal, who had moved to the Falklands, arrived at the Marine barracks at Moody Brook and demanded to be given a weapon saying, "There's no such thing as an ex-Marine ". He was given a rifle and fought alongside the Marines. Also a Canadian, Bill Curtis, who was a former air traffic controller, was sent by Norman to Stanley Airport to deactivate the airports directional beacon.



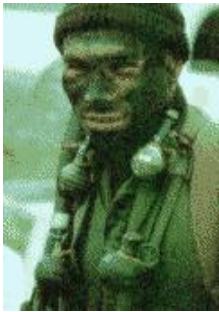
On the morning of the 1st of April, at 11am, Major Norman briefed his forces, telling them " Tomorrow you're all going to start earning your pay. " The Marines took it well, but some of the members of H.M.S. Endurance became very wide eyed. Norman then deployed his troops ([see Map](#)). His basic plan was to disrupt any Argentine landing at the airport or harbour. No 5 Section, commanded by Cpl. Duff, and was placed south of Stanley Airfield, with a GPMG, covering the beach on that side of the town, after they had first placed various construction vehicles on the runway to prevent any Argentine troop transports landing. Marines Milne and Wilcox of No. 5 section were sent with a GPMG to cover

the Yorke Bay beaches just north of the airport. They both had motorcycles to ensure a quick get away. At Hookers Point, No 1 section commanded by Cpl. Armor was placed with No 2 section commanded by Cpl. Brown, just behind them on the old airstrip. To the west of these two sections was Lieutenant Bill Trollope with eight men. Lt. Trollope placed his men on the edge of the old airstrip. These men were armed with a 84mm Carl Gustav and 66mm rockets. These weapons were just about the only heavy support weapons the Marines had. Earlier Major Norman was disgusted to find out the NP 8901's only 81 mm mortar, had a cracked tube and could not be fired. No 3 section was placed 1 km north of these positions.



No. 6 section, commanded by Cpl. York was deployed near Stanley harbour. They placed their Gemini assault boat in a hidden cove, with orders to resist any Argentine ships trying to enter the harbour, whether they were landing craft or aircraft Carriers. Finally Marine Mike Berry was sent on a motorcycle to the top of Sapper Hill. From this height, with his radio, he would be able to report to Major Norman any Argentine

attempts to land. The motor coaster Forrest, skippered by Jack Sollis, was placed in Port William to act as a seaborne early warning radar. At Cape Pembroke lighthouse, Basil Biggs, the lighthouse keeper, turned off the lamp and stood look out for enemy shipping from his high vantage point. Chief Secretary Baker, Police Constable Lamb and a detachment of Royal Navy personnel under the command of Colour Sgt. Noone, rounded up all Argentine citizens in Port Stanley. About 30 Argentines were rounded up, mostly employees of the Argentina State Oil Company. No mention can be found to say if the islanders were ever informed as to the possibility of an Argentine invasion. The Marines and the other defenders settled down and waited for the Argentine invaders to arrive.



At 9pm on the evening of Thursday the 1st of April the Argentines commenced Operation 'Rosario', the Argentinean code name for the "Liberation of the Malvinas" ([see Map](#)). The destroyer Santísima Trinidad (an ex British type 42 destroyer) moved to 500 meters off Mullet Creek, south of Port Stanley, and lowered 21 Gemini assault boats into the water containing 92 men of the Argentine Amphibious Commando, under the command of Lieutenant Commander Guillermo Sanchez-Sabarots. Lieutenant Schweitzer's small advance party went ashore first to secure a beachhead at Mullet Creek. They then waited to guide the main party in. The main party soon pushed off from Santísima Trinidad, but found the going hard. The current had changed and started to push the boats to the north, driving them into a field of sea kelp. The kelp wound itself around the propellers of the Gemini's causing many of the outboard motors to splutter to a halt. It took a long time and a lot of swearing before the commandos managed to extract themselves from the kelp and it was 11pm by the time they landed near Lake Point and finally joined up with Lieutenant Schweitzer's advance party. On Sapper Hill, Marine Berry had heard the sound

of the Argentine commandos trying to extract themselves from the kelp and radioed Norman to say he could hear the sound of engines revving out to sea, but Norman judged them to be helicopter engines.

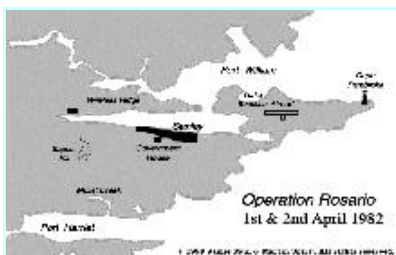
At 1.30 am the Argentine commandos split into two groups and moved off to their objectives. Sanchez-Sabarots took his group to attack the Royal Marine barracks at Moody Brook while [Lieutenant Commander Pedro Giachino](#) took the other group around Sapper Hill to attack Government House and capture Governor Hunt. Giachino, who was normally 2IC of the 1st Marine Infantry Battalion, had in fact volunteered to accompany the commandos on Operation 'Rosario'. By the end of the day's fighting his name was known in every Argentine household.

At 11pm, the Argentine submarine Santa Fe gently surfaced off Kidney Island. Unfortunately for her, she was spotted straight away by Forrest's radar and Jack Sollis reported the submarine's presence to Government House. Ten tactical divers left the submarine aboard three Zodiacs and headed to a beach just east of Yorke Point, code named " Red Beach " where they placed navigation beacons.

It took Sanchez-Sabarots and his group five hours to cover the six miles to Moody Brook Barracks. During the march Lieutenant Bardi, who was acting as lead scout, fell and broke his ankle. He had to be left behind. At 5.45 am the Argentine commandos reached the Marine barracks and proceeded to attack the buildings with heavy automatic fire and deadly phosphorous grenades. This appears to have been very violent tactics for troops who later claimed that they used blank ammunition in order to save lives. This assault soon stopped when it was realized that the barracks were in fact empty. Major Norman had decided the day before that there was no point in trying to defend the barracks and had moved his HQ to Government house. The Argentine commandos, now feeling very confident after the easy capture of their first objective, now moved to join Giachino's group for their second objective, Government House. The picture on the right shows the destruction caused to the Royal Marine barracks some time after the war.



The noise of the assault on Moody Brook barracks had alerted Norman that the Argentines had landed. At the time he was at Out Look Rocks near Government House. He immediately drove back to Government house and radioed all his sections to return to Government House. Realizing that he was being attacked from various directions, he had decided to centralize his defence around Government House.



Giachino's group, having arrived on a small hillock near Government House, using night vision aids, observed the Royal Marines preparing for an attack. Giachino's plan was to enter Government House from the rear and "Invite Governor Hunt to surrender". Earlier in the year, Rex Hunt had unwisely given a copy of the plans of Government House to a visiting Argentine, who claimed to be an architect. However, Giachino did not seem to be aware of these plans as he and his 16 men advanced on Government House thinking they were entering the back door, when in fact they were entering the servants annex. At 6.15am, Giachino leading four of his men, kicked down the door to the annex. Three Royal Marines had been placed by Norman to cover the annex, Cpls.

Sellen and Fleet and Marine Dorey. As Giachino and his men burst through the door they came under a hail of fire from the Royal Marines. The Battle for Stanley had started.

Giachino was hit almost at once trying to throw a grenade. Another Argentine officer was also hit in the leg, while the others ran and hid in the maids' quarters. Governor Hunt and Chief Secretary Barker took cover under the Governor's desk while the defenders of Government House and the Argentine commandos exchanged fire. A stalemate now developed, with Giachino lying badly wounded in the annex, the grenade, with its pin removed, still in his hand. An Argentine medic tried to reach him but was also wounded by a grenade. The British tried to get Giachino to throw away the grenade so he could be helped, but Giachino refused to do so, thinking, possibly, that it grenade might bounce back at him. There was also a language problem, as none of the British spoke Spanish and none of the Argentines spoke English, so the three wounded men were left where they fell. Later after the surrender of Government house, Argentine medics tried desperately to save Giachino, but he had lost too much blood and died shortly afterwards. He was to be the first Argentine to be killed in the conflict. Most Argentine soldiers through out the conflict carried a eulogy written for Giachino. It reads thus.

The Malvinas Are Argentine

Many hued skies, majestic above the sea,
A rapid flight of white seagulls
Fleeing from the infernal thunder of guns,
Eternal witness, the Southern Cross,

Imposing white and blue standard,
May you bless it, may all-powerful God,
There is the silence of death round about us,
The blood of brothers lives in grief.

Struggle of people, fervour, lamentations,
Voices of the Anthem, flag on the balcony!
A song of the brotherhood, glory and unction.

Impassioned verses of Pedroni
Have anchored at your port, SOLEDAD....
" Come home to the Fatherland, to eternity!

Nidia AG Otbea de Fontanini

Around about the time Lieutenant Commander Giachino was kicking in the door to his own mortality, Sollis on Forrest and Lighthouse keeper Basil Biggs both reported seeing Cabo San Antonio, a former United States tank landing ship, enter Port William, about a mile North-East of Yorke Bay. She was being escorted by the destroyer Hercules and the corvette Drummond. At 6.20 Cabo San Antonio's bow doors were opened and the leading wave of LVTP-7s (Landing Vehicle Tracked Personnel) LVTPs of E company 2nd Marine Infantry Battalion (Infantry de Marina) slid into the water and headed for the Yorke Beaches guided by the navigation lights placed earlier by the tactical divers. This first wave was commanded by Lieutenant Commander Santillans. At 6.30 am the LVTPs hauled themselves ashore onto the beach. Santillans reported that the beach was clear allowing the 14 remaining LVTPs of E Company to approach the beach. On board two of these LVTPs were Commander Alfredo Weinstabl, commander of the 2nd Marine Infantry Battalion and Rear Admiral Carlos Busser. Second Lieutenant Rey's section advanced to capture Cape Pembroke lighthouse. D company also landed soon afterwards and joined Santillan's LVTPs as they started to advance down the road to Stanley.



As the LVTP column passed the old airfield, they came in range of Lt. Bill Trollope's section; he gave the order to open fire. The LVTPs were each armed with a 12.7mm machine gun that made these amphibious troop carriers a formidable threat to Lt. Trollope and his small section of Marines. Marine Gibbs, armed with a 66mm anti-tank rocket launcher took aim at the lead Argentine APC and opened fire, but missed. An 84mm Carl Gustav round fired by Marine Brown found its mark and stopped the lead LVTP dead. The Argentine marines inside the LVTP were unhurt and quickly evacuated the vehicle. The other Argentine LVTPs now spread out and opened up with their 12.7mm machine guns on Trollope's section positions. Lt. Trollope ordered a withdrawal back to Government house, happy that at least one of the Argentines APC would not give the Marines any problems in the near future.

While this action was taking place, the defenders at Government House were still exchanging shots with the few Argentine

commandos that surrounded the building. During this time Major Norman received a report from Cpl. York's No. 6 section, which was still covering the harbour in a Gemini assault boat. Cpl. York came over the net (radio) saying he had three possible targets to engage and wanted Major Norman to tell him what his target priorities were. "What are the targets?" Norman asked York over the net. York replied, "Target number 1 is an aircraft carrier, target number 2 is a cruiser..." At that moment the radio went dead.

After his radio died on him, Cpl. York, decided it was time to pull out. His men first booby-trapped their Carl Gustav using grenades. York then tried to send a final message to Norman, saying "I'm going fishing" a cryptic reference to a comment he had made earlier the day before to Norman when asked what he intended to do if the Argentines did invade. York's section paddled their Gemini out over the kelp before starting the engine and headed north across Port William. Not long after starting the engine, York was horrified to find an Argentine destroyer chasing his small boat. He quickly made for the shadows of a Polish fishing factory ship that was anchored near the shore, then headed into shore and pulled up on a small beach. The section hid the Gemini and melted into the hills, with only their fighting order. For three days York and his Marines traveled slowly northwest, knowing that the rest of NP 8901 had been captured by now. They went undetected by Argentine helicopters. On the 4th of April York and his men reached a small shepherd's hut near Estancia owned by Mrs. Watson. York had no radio or supplies and was now concerned for Mrs. Watson's safety if the Argentines found them and a firefight started. Reluctantly he decided to surrender to the Argentines. Using a kelper's radio he advised the Argentines where his section was, then ordered his men to destroy and bury their weapons. A Major Dowling (of Irish decent with a hatred for all things British) accompanied by men of the 181 Military Police Company flew to the shepherd's cottage by helicopter. After landing the Argentines roughly searched York and his men, then tied them up with wire. The Marines were then placed aboard the helicopter and flown to Stanley where Major Dowling had them thrown into cells at Stanley Police Station, where they remained until they were repatriated back to the UK. Major Dowling overstepped his authority on several other occasions and was eventually sent back to Argentina in disgrace.



Rear Admiral Busser was starting to get a little concerned by the fact that the British had managed to hold up his advance on Government House and he had not yet linked up with the Commandos. He now ordered the 1st Marine Battalion to be flown in by helicopters from Almirante Irizar along with a section of 105 mm rocket launchers. Marine Berry on Sapper Hill reported seeing these helicopters heading for Stanley. Meanwhile at Government House, the three survivors of Giachino's section were still hiding in the maids' quarters, their presence unknown to the British, until they decided to try and break out and reach the attacking forces around Government House. As they were preparing to move they were heard by Major Noott, who opened fire into the maids' room ceiling. The three Argentines came tumbling down the stairs and surrendered to the British. They became the first Argentine POWs of the war.



At 8.30 am, Governor Rex Hunt and Major Norman faced up to the fact that the Argentines had landed in force and the defence of Government House could not last much longer so they discussed what to do next. One suggestion was that the Marines should now disperse into the island's interior and carry on the fight in guerrilla style warfare. After a little thought this idea was thrown out because it would be impossible for the Marines to survive on the island without heavy support that would be a long time coming. While this discussion was taking place, the battle for Government House was intensifying and Rex Hunt was starting to get very worried about civilian casualties if the fighting continued into Stanley itself. He now invoked the 1939 emergency powers that named him Commander in Chief of all Her Majesties Forces in the Falkland Islands and ordered the now vastly outnumbered Marines to surrender to the Argentineans, saying he was doing this to save lives.



Hunt then sent for one of the local Argentineans, an ex-Argentine Air Force officer called Hector Gilobert who worked for the Argentinean State Air Line LADE (Linea Aerea Del Estado). Chief Secretary Barker had been unable to find him when rounding up other Argentines the day before. It was generally thought by most islanders that Gilobert was in fact an Argentinean intelligence officer and he had supplied the invasion planners with information about NP 8901. Gilobert was soon found and sent to Government House where Hunt asked him to negotiate a cease-



fire so that the civilians in Stanley would not be harmed. Gilobert left Government House, passed through the Argentine lines and delivered Hunt's message by radio to Major General Garcia aboard Santisima Trinidad, who was in overall command of the Malvinas Theatre of Operations.



General Garica passed on the proposal to Admiral Busser in Stanley, who agreed to the cease-fire. Busser relayed that he would meet the British outside St. Mary's Church. The Argentines had thought to bring a white flag for the use of such meetings, but it could not be found, so they used white plastic bin bags instead. Busser and his aides were taken to Government House where they were met by Hunt, Noott, and Norman. Hunt refused to shake Busser's hand saying, "This is British property. You are not invited."



Busser was visibly upset when the former Governor refused to shake his hand. Negotiations proceeded at a very civil level, apart from the interruptions by the anti-British Major Dowling, who later mistreated Cpl. York's section. After talking to Busser, Hunt consulted Norman and



Noott and agreed to surrender. At 9.30 am, 149 years of British Colonial rule came to an end, the Falkland Islands were now in Argentinean hands. The Argentine flag was raised over Government House to cheers from the Argentine troops. Hunt was allowed to change into his official ceremonial regalia and was driven to the airport in his official car. (a London taxi) At the airport he was placed aboard an Argentine C130 Hercules and flown to Montevideo and from there he was flown back to London.



No such niceties for the members of NP 8901. The Royal Marines were stripped of their weapons and webbing and forced to lie face down on the ground in front of Government House with their hands behind their heads. They were not physically mistreated by the Argentines, but the humiliation they all felt was terrible. The Argentine press took many photos of the Royal Marines lying face down on the ground with Argentine marines guarding them. The Argentines did not realize it at the time but by taking these photos of the defeated Royal Marines they had just

added smoke to the fire that was now burning in the heart of the British public back in Britain. When these photos were later published in newspapers in Britain there was an outcry of support for the British Government to take back the Falkland Islands.



The Royal Marines of NP 8901 and the members of the Island's Defence Force were moved to the playing fields where more pictures were taken. On the picture on the right at least one member of the Defence Force can be seen as well as several Royal Navy personnel. Also, at least three of the sitting

men are making rude gestures towards the photographer. The Royal Marines were later marched to the airport and placed on a C130 Hercules heading for Montevideo. As one of the Royal Marines was being marched onto the aircraft he turned to his Argentine guard and said " Don't make yourself too comfy mate, we'll be back ". He wasn't wrong. After returning to the UK and giving much valuable intelligence to the Task Force commanders, Major Norman and his men returned to their Moody Brook barracks 76 days later as part of 42 Cdo RM.



Cpl York and his section of five Marines who were isolated on the western side of the narrows saw from their position that the Argentines were laying an ambush for them. As they had a Gemini hidden on the opposite side of the headland, they decided it was time to make a tactical withdrawal. Loading their kit into the the Gemini, and in order to avoid detection paddled their way to make good their escape. Suddenly round the headland came an Argentine Destroyer at full speed. It quickly spotted them, and in the words of Marine 'Butch' Urand 'I think we did 100 mile per hour!'. And to its everlasting credit the Johnson outboard motor sprang into life, and they made good their escape, first hiding behind a Polish Fishing vessel and then running their Gemini into the shallows out of reach of the Argentines. They lived in caves on diddle-do-berries for three days before their final capture. When taken, the Argentines were a little confused as to what rank three badge Marine Urand was (three Badges being long service stripes) because his chums had nicknamed him 'The General'. Being older than the rest, The Argentineans decided that discretion was the better part of valour and introduced him to 'The General' to the local naval commander, an Argentine Admiral.

Marine Jeffery Urand and the rest of NP8901 were flown to Argentina, Marine Urand and his little party were kept separately from the remainder and intensively interrogated. Although no physical violence was used, the technique was aggressive and at times threatening. Their heads were shaved and they were kept in solitary confinement, before eventually being sent home. Now back again with the task force, Now suddenly he heard the unforgettable voice of his interrogator again. A officious Argentine captain was addressing a company of forlorn conscripts before dispersal on to the airfield. Marine Urand strolled up behind and tapped the Argentine captain on the shoulder: ' Allo My Darlin', Fancy us meeting like this again,' The military police officer paled, Gulpd and quickly disappeared into the ever changing throng of POWs



A NP8901 reunion is held each year on the first Saturday of April in Plymouth for all ex-NP8901 members.

The reunions are organized by Rod Wilcox who is trying to track down other members of NP8901

If you were a member of NP8901
please contact Rod at rodwilcox@hotmail.com

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