



All Guns Blazing!

Newsletter of the Naval Wargames Society

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Editorial

As I write this I am sitting in the home of the Royal Navy. I've been spending the week working on HMS CARDIFF, one of the Type 42 destroyers that took part in the Falklands campaign and one of the few RN escorts that wasn't actually damaged during the battles off the islands. Walking around the ship in her dark, decommissioned state has made this month's battle report even more poignant from my perspective, as it covers the Falklands refight stated on board HMS BELFAST over the Christmas break. This is the third of three articles covering that event – part 3, next month, features the rules that were used in the Falklands game.

The 2008/09 subscription period for Battlefleet has just opened, and we have introduced a new E-Subscription. Members choosing this option will receive their Battlefleets via PDF (actually by downloading them from a secure site) but otherwise receive the same benefits as normal members. To date the take-up using this method has been quite encouraging, and it seems to be popular with members outside the UK for obvious reasons! Take a look at the "Join NWS" or "Subscribe" links on the NWS website for more details.

Yours aye,

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NWS Game at Salute 2008 *(April 19th, 2008, ExCel Centre, London)*

The Naval Wargames Society will be attending Salute 2008 this year, running a 1/350th scale participation game based on the x-craft midget sub attack on Tirpitz in the Norwegian fjords.

The game is being organised by Simon Stokes. At present Simon has a few spare places in our allotted 8 free entries for anyone that wants to come along and help out with the game. Simon will allocate them on a first come first served basis (but remember, to get a free pass you do actually have to help out with the game as well as enjoying the rest of the show ☺).

If you would like to help out and get a free "in" to this prestigious event please contact Simon direct at:

simonjohnstokes@aol.com

NWS Display on board HMS Belfast

Falklands Part 1 (the game)

By Simon Stokes

Introduction

The second participation game we ran in the afternoon of both days was suggested by Rob Morgan to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Falklands Conflict. The game recreated in miniature the crucial seaborne landings of the British 3rd Commando Brigade at San Carlos on the Eastern Falklands and the Argentine air force's efforts to disrupt those landings.

Background



The Falklands War (*Spanish: Guerra de las Malvinas/Guerra del Atlántico Sur*), also called the Falklands Conflict/Crisis, was fought in 1982 between Argentina and the United Kingdom over the disputed Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. The Falkland Islands consist of two large and many small islands in the South Atlantic Ocean east of Argentina, and their name and ownership have long been disputed.

The war was triggered by the occupation of South Georgia by Argentina on 19 March 1982 followed by the occupation of the Falklands, and ended when Argentina surrendered on 14 June 1982. War was not actually declared by either side. The initial invasion was considered by Argentina as the re-occupation of its own territory, and by Britain as an invasion of a British overseas territory, and the most recent invasion of British territory by a foreign power.

In the period leading up to the war, Argentina was in the midst of a devastating economic crisis and large-scale civil unrest against the repressive military junta that had been governing the country since 1976. The Argentine military government, headed by General Leopoldo Galtieri, sought to maintain power by diverting public attention playing off long-standing feelings of the Argentines towards the islands, although they never thought that the United Kingdom would respond militarily. The ongoing tension between the two countries over the islands increased on 19 March when a group of hired Argentinian scrap metal merchants raised their flag at South Georgia, an act that would later be seen as the first offensive action in the war. The Argentine Military Junta, suspecting that the UK would reinforce its South Atlantic Forces, ordered the invasion of the Falkland Islands to be brought forward to 2 April.

Britain was taken by surprise by the Argentine attack, but dispatched a naval task force initially as a political move to put pressure on Argentina to reach a negotiated settlement but ultimately its job was to retake the islands by amphibious assault. After combat resulting in 258 British and 649 Argentine deaths, the British eventually prevailed and the islands remain under British control. However, Argentina shows no sign of relinquishing its claim, indeed the claim remains in the Argentine constitution after its reformation in 1994.

Our game re-created the amphibious landing by the British Task force at San Carlos Water on 21st May 1982 and the Argentine Air force's attempts to disrupt those landings.

Under cover of dark during the early morning on May 21, the British Amphibious Task Group under the command of Commodore Michael Clapp, landed on beaches around San Carlos Water, which is on the north western coast of East Falkland facing onto Falkland Sound. The bay, known as Bomb Alley by British forces, was the scene of repeated air attacks by low-flying Argentine jets.

The 4,000 men of 3rd Commando Brigade were put ashore by waves of 8 LCUs and 8 LCVPs that were led by Major Ewen Southby-Tailyour who had commanded the Falklands detachment only a year previously. By dawn the next day they had established a secure beachhead from which to conduct offensive operations.

The British picked the landing site at San Carlos Bay on the northwest side of East Falkland Island opposite Port Stanley, which lies on the east side of the island. San Carlos Bay was chosen as the landing point because the bluffs and high hills surrounding the bay would mask the landing ships from Exocet missile radars.



The British lost a Harrier and two Royal Marine Gazelle helicopters to ground fire during aggressive air strikes on Argentine airfields and installations in the Falklands on the morning of 21st May. Once alerted to the British landing, the Argentinians sent virtually the whole FAS air strength (about 75 aircraft) to attack the British ships during the day. Staged in flights of four, the Argentine Skyhawks and Daggars dropped to an altitude of 100 feet for the last 100 NM to San Carlos Bay. The high hills not only screened the British ships from Exocets, but also screened the Argentine aircraft from detection until the last moment. The Argentine Daggars and Skyhawks popped up over the hills and bored straight into the British ships. The British had dozens of air defense missiles as well as numerous anti-aircraft guns to defend the ships. However, coming in at low level

and popping up over the hills, the Argentinians gave the British no more than 20–30 seconds to acquire, track, lock on, and shoot before they released their bombs and headed for home.

It was a frightful day of combat. The frigate *Ardent* was damaged in an early attack and sunk by a second Argentine attack late in the day. Argentine bombs—some of which mercifully did not explode—damaged four other ships. *Antrim* suffered heavy damage while *Brilliant*, *Argonaut*, and *Broadsword* sustained moderate damage. The Argentinians paid a fearful price for their moderate success. The British downed nine FAS aircraft, including five Daggars and four Skyhawks. They also shot down two Pucarás and two helicopters from Argentine air units based in the Falklands.

Preparations

The Falklands conflict and modern period naval and air combat are not subjects I was initially overly familiar with, though I am old enough to remember the conflict when it happened and the coverage it received in the news. I started therefore by getting my facts straight and picked up a second hand copy of “The Battle for the Falklands” by Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins. A thoroughly good read by the way and well worth the £1 that I paid for it. From this the landings at San Carlos and the air battles over “bomb alley” seemed an obvious choice for the game.

Next came the procurement of the ship and aircraft models I needed to run the game. I had first to identify the ship classes of the various British frigates and destroyers listed as being in Falkland Sound and so dug out a book I’d bought 27 years ago – “The Armed Forces of the United Kingdom” by Chris Chant, published by David & Charles (this was published in 1980, 18 months or so before the Falklands conflict!). The first set-back was that no-one had any models to lend us in anything approaching the scale needed for the playing space we had on board HMS *Belfast*. This gave me a significant ship building programme on a very tight timescale (a mere 4 weeks). The aircraft were easily procured from Tumbling Dice who produce specific Falklands packs, though their “Flames above the Falklands” rules proved somewhat of a disappointment, but more on that later. The ship models were a little more difficult but the Airfix Falklands warships boxed set and HMS *Fearless* kits proved sufficient to give me what I needed. Historically we needed the following:

Falkland Sound

- Antrim D18 (County class destroyer)
- Ardent F184 (Type 21 class frigate)
- Argonaut F56 (Leander class frigate)
- Brilliant F90 (Type 22 class frigate)
- Broadsword F88 (Type 22 class frigate)
- Yarmouth F101 (Rothesay class frigate)

San Carlos Water

- Fearless L10 (Assault Ship)
- Plymouth F126 (Rothesay class frigate)
- Canberra
- Various fleet auxiliary ships

This gave me two main problems. Firstly the Airfix Falklands Warships boxed sets only provided County, Leander and Type 21 models. Secondly I only had two of the kit sets to play with and in one of these the Leander kit was missing half of the hull! The upshot of this was that I omitted *Brilliant*, *Plymouth*, *Canberra* and the fleet auxiliaries from the game and converted one of the Leander kits to represent *Yarmouth* and one of the Type 21 kits to represent *Broadsword*. You can see the results below, though the experts among you will recognise that neither conversion is 100% accurate - model making is not a skill that comes easily to me I’m afraid.



Broadsword conversion

The next problem was the rules. The "Flames Above The Falklands" set concentrates on air-to-air combat and for our purposes it over simplified the air to ground and ground to air fire by resolving this in a single dice roll with no specific target ship. David Manley came to my rescue here though and provided me with a simple set of modern air combat rules that he'd used for a parti game at Salute a few years ago and which did have rules for air to ground and ground to air missile and anti aircraft fire with individual ships. I modified David's rules to suite our specific game, the resulting rule set being part 2 of this write up.

The final piece in the jigsaw was the land to represent Fanning head and the bluffs around San Carlos Water. Time and talent limited this to some tough expanded polystyrene flooring cut to shape and flocked.

The Games

Participants took command of a flight of 3 or 4 Argentine aircraft or a pair of Sea Harriers flying CAP over San Carlos. The game starting positions were as they were at dawn on the 21st with the bulk of the Landing ships, represented by HMS *Fearless*, already in San Carlos water and in the process of disembarking the troops and their supplies - they arrived during the early hours of the morning having evaded detection. In order to get at the landing ships in San Carlos Water the Argentine air force needed first to defeat the RN warships in Falkland Sound guarding the entrance to San Carlos Water. San Carlos Water was too narrow and the surrounding bluffs too high for any other approach.

The games on both days were very popular with visitors and their numbers determined the strength and frequency of the Argentine attacks.

On day one the first attack was by a flight of four Daggars that came in fast and low over west Falkland. They ignored the RN warships in Falkland Sound and headed straight for HMS *Fearless*, only slackening their speed as they made their bombing run. They paid a heavy price for this direct approach however. HMS *Ardent* was the first to engage them, as her AA guns and 4.5" bought down one of their number. She also launched two Sea Cat missiles at them but these proved less than effective at the crossing targets which were also dropping copious amounts of chaff to confuse the missiles guidance systems. Next to engage was HMS *Broadsword* which launched two Sea Wolf missiles again at the crossing targets. These had more success than did *Ardent's* Sea Cat and splashed one of the Daggars into Falkland Sound. Simultaneously to this the Sea Harrier CAP also engaged the Daggars with Sidewinders, which quickly closed the distance and splashed one more Dagger.



Just the one Dagger survived the combined attentions of Broadsword's Sea Wolf and Sea Harrier Sidewinders.

This left just a single Dagger to make it's run in on *Fearless*, which attempted to defend herself with 40mm AA fire and her own Sea Cats. Yet again the Sea Cat missiles missed their target, though the 40mm AA fire caused some damage to the Dagger, but not enough to prevent her strafing and dropping her two 500lb bombs. The strafing caused some minor damage to *Fearless*, but the bombs missed their target. The Dagger limped away over East Falkland trailing smoke in her wake.



The lone surviving Dagger makes it's escape over East Falkland after it's failed bombing run on HMS Fearless.

This was an early wake up call for the next wave of Argentine pilots who were then choosing their aircraft. The next attack was by two flights of Skyhawks and was concentrated on one of the outlying RN frigates, HMS *Yarmouth*. Of all the frigates in Falkland Sound, the *Yarmouth* was the oldest and least well equipped for AA defence. The direction of approach of the Skyhawks meant that *Yarmouth* could not rely on any support from any of her consorts, and only the Sea Harrier CAP was able to come to her aid in time. Despite this handicap and the number of Skyhawks homing in on her, *Yarmouth* put up an effective defence, damaging one of the Skyhawks and forcing it to turn for home with a combination of AA fire and the first effective use of Sea Cat in the game. Sea Harrier side winders were as deadly as usual and splashed two further Skyhawks. Five Skyhawks remained however and these pressed home their attacks, this time dropping their clutches of three 500lb bombs at 1000 feet. Only one bomb hit it's target however causing significant but not critical damage to *Yarmouth*. This proved to be the last attack on day one.

On day two the damage counters were re-set and we ran the game again from start to finish. This was no mere re-run of the day one game however. A sudden rush of visitors including quite a few "lad and dad" combinations ensured that pretty much every flight of Argentine bombers available appeared on the playing area in a very short space of time. The Harrier CAP was also noticeable by it's absence – strangely no-one wanted to take up the opportunity of this "target rich environment", even the Brazilian visitor who was less than enthusiastic about playing on the Argentine side. This mass onslaught completely overwhelmed the RN warships defences.

First to succumb was HMS *Argonaut* posted at the northern end of Falkland Sound. Attacked by a brace of four Argentine navy skyhawks, she attempted to defend herself with both 20mm and 40mm AA fire and Sea Cat missiles. The Sea Cat managed to find a target this time but did insufficient damage to it to splash the skyhawk. AA fire damaged another, but again not enough to splash it. Consequently all four skyhawks got through to drop their clutches of four specially retarded 500lb bombs at very low level. *Argonaut* was hit by a total of three bombs which caused catastrophic damage and started a fire. She was out of the fight and left drifting in a sinking condition.

Next to come under attack was *Yarmouth*, as she attracted the attentions of a flight of four Daggars and a flight of four Pucarars. Again *Yarmouth's* station precluded assistance from any of the other RN frigates and without the Harrier CAP her Sea Cat and AA fire defences were overwhelmed. She did however manage to down one of the Pucara's and damage another – another success for Sea Cat. This left four Daggars and three Pucarars which pressed on in their bomb runs and were rewarded by three 500lb bomb hits on *Yarmouth*. Again damage was catastrophic and left another RN frigate disabled, adrift and in a sinking condition.

Simultaneously to the attack on *Yarmouth* a flight of four Skyhawks and two flights of three Aeromacchi MB339s mounted a concerted attack on HMS *Ardent*. Again *Ardent's* outlying position meant that she was denuded of support from all but *Broadsword's* Sea Wolf and *Antrim's* long range Sea Slug. Combined with two of her own Sea Cat missiles, AA fire and 4.5" gun, she managed to splash two of the skyhawks, two of the MB339s and damage another. Three MB339s and two skyhawks got through though however and of the twenty four 500lb bombs dropped five hit *Ardent* with predictable results.

This left only *Antrim* and *Broadsword* afloat and operational in Falkland Sound to fend off the final attack of the game which was mounted by a flight of four skyhawks and another of four Daggars. The retiring Pucarars kept *Antrim* busy by strafing her on their way back to Goose Green, doing only light damage to *Antrim* but managing to avoid the Sea Cat that was launched at them. *Broadsword* was a tougher nut to crack however and she managed to splash two skyhawks with Sea Wolf and damage a skyhawk and a Dagger with AA fire. The two remaining skyhawks dropped a total of six 500lb bombs aimed at *Broadsword*, but missed with all six. The skyhawks and Daggars, which were saving their bombs for *Fearless*, did do some light damage to *Broadsword* with strafing cannon fire as they overflew her, but pressed on to San Carlos Water to attack *Fearless*. *Fearless* defended herself with AA fire and Sea Cat. The Commandos also launched Blowpipe missiles in her defence. Little success was had by either side however and the Daggars escaped any serious damage but missed with all eight 500lb bombs, doing only superficial damage with strafing cannon fire.

At this point, about 3:45pm, I thought that we were finished for the day and could wrap up and clear down the game at our leisure, but a late rush of new and returning players meant that we set up the game for a third and final encore. This time it was the northern end of the RN frigates that bore the brunt of the Argentine attacks. None were sunk but *Broadsword* and *Argonaut* were crippled and *Ardent* severely damaged, for the loss of two navy skyhawks and four Aeromacchi MB339s. *Fearless* remained undamaged however.

Conclusions

The game played out well and proved popular with those that had a go and also generated quite a bit of interest from passing visitors who asked plenty of questions and took away the flyers and NWS membership forms we handed out.

From my own perspective I certainly learned a great deal that I'd not previously appreciated about the conflict and in particular the action over San Carlos water. In general though the consensus amongst the NWS crew (Rob Hutton, Dave Sharp, Jeff Crane and Robert Kirk) was that the game was less rewarding from a naval wargamer's perspective than was the River plate game, even though it attracted by far and away more participants.

Thanks go to the NWS crew for their help on the day, to David Manley for his help with the rules (which form the second part of this write up) and to Nick Hewitt and the IWM staff who looked after us on the day and did the printing and laminating for us as I'd not been organised enough to do this before I got there.

Simon Stokes
7th Jan 2008

NWS Events and Regional Contacts, 2008

NWS Northern Fleet – Falkirk East Central Scotland

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Falkirk Wargames Club meets each Monday night at 7pm with a variety of games running each evening. Naval games are popular with 2 or 3 run each month. Campaign games sometimes feature in our monthly weekend sessions. Games tend to be organised week to week making a 3-month forecast here a waste of time. Please get in touch if you'd like to come along.

- Popular periods – Modern (Shipwreck), WW1 and 2 (GQ), WW2 Coastal (Action Stations), and Pre-dreadnought (P Dunn's rules)

NWS North Hants [Every 3rd Sunday]

Jeff Crane 31 Park Gardens, Black Dam, Basingstoke, Hants, 01256 427906
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NWS Wessex [Bi-Monthly Meetings]

The Wessex Group has gone into (hopefully) temporary abeyance for the moment. If anyone living in the Bath / Bristol / Gloucester area (or further afield) would like to take on managing the group please contact myself or any of the other NWS officials.