



# The Falklands

# Conflict



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# About this resource

**This resource documents the story of the 74 day conflict between Great Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands.**

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Exploring the historical events that led to the 1982 conflict, the resource reflects on Plymouth dockyard's response and the role of the Royal Marine Commandos in the subsequent battles to recapture the islands.





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# The Falklands Conflict

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**The Falklands conflict was a battle between Great Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands in 1982.**

## **Where are the Falkland Islands?**

The Falkland Islands are 480 kilometres from Argentina in the southern Atlantic Ocean. They are known in Argentina as the 'Islas Malvinas'.

There are two main islands called West Falkland and East Falkland, with over seven hundred smaller uninhabited islands scattered around them. In 1982, the population of 1,800 islanders were mainly involved in agriculture and sheep farming. A large majority of these people were descended from British settlers who'd arrived in the previous century.

Although eight thousand miles away from Britain, the Falkland Islands were and still are a British overseas territory – however in late April 1982 Argentina had occupied and stationed thousands of troops on the island.

## **When did the conflict start?**

The Falklands conflict started 40 years ago. The conflict claimed the lives of more than 900 people including dozens of Royal Navy sailors and Royal Marine soldiers from Plymouth.

## **How long did it last?**

The conflict lasted only 74 days, ending with Argentina returning the Falklands to British control on 14 June 1982.



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# A Short History

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**Argentina and the United Kingdom have argued over which country the Falklands Islands belongs to since the 1800s. In the 1700s, the British set up a town at Port Egmont on West Falkland, which nearly led to a war with Spain who had a town at Port Louis on East Falkland.**

Argentina declared independence from Spain in 1817 and made a colony on the islands in 1820. An American warship later destroyed this town, and the British took over the islands again in 1833.

The British kept the islands until 2 April 1982, when Argentinian forces commanded by General Mario Menendez invaded and occupied the Falkland Islands in an attempt to establish the sovereignty it had claimed over them.

The British government headed by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher strongly believed Falkland Islanders, who were predominantly descendants of 19th century British settlers, favoured British rule.

On 5 April, the British government dispatched a task force which included the frigates HMS Plymouth and HMS Brilliant to engage the Argentine Navy and Air Force before making an amphibious assault on the islands.



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# Call to Action

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**Argentinian forces invaded the British territory of the Falkland Islands on 2 April 1982. The British government had anticipated conflict with Argentina but were surprised by the invasion.**

Emergency plans for a naval task force were drawn up including warships, aircraft carriers and submarine support. Commercial and civilian ships were converted to carry weapons, supplies and troops.

Devonport Dockyard and Royal William Yard worked around the clock – the average conversion time was 8 days – equipping these ships with weapons, rations and equipment.

In Devonport the SS Atlantic Conveyor was converted for helicopter operations within 9 days whilst Portsmouth dockyard converted the ocean liner Queen Elizabeth 2 (QE2) to carry 3,000 troops. 30,000 tons of supplies and ammunition were shipped from Devonport and Portsmouth alone.

Anticipating the need for a highly trained landing force, 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines stationed in Stonehouse Barracks, Commando Royal Engineers at Crownhill Fort, the Citadel based Royal Artillery Regiment and even the Royal Marines Band, who were experienced medical assistants, were mobilised in and around Plymouth.

All commandos were trained in Arctic warfare and so well equipped for the mountainous and barren terrain of the Falkland Islands.







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# Sea and Air Combat

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**By early April the huge naval task force comprised of 127 ships; 43 Royal Navy vessels, 22 Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships, and 62 merchant ships had set sail for the South Atlantic Ocean.**

Following the arrival of the British naval and Royal Air forces at Ascension Island, the Argentinian government increased their troops to 13,000 and dispatched regular air raids from their bases in Argentina and the Falklands capital Stanley.

As the situation intensified, British and Argentinian forces started to engage in a combination of ship, submarine and air combat.

On 2 May the Argentinian cruiser General Belgrano was torpedoed by the Royal Navy submarine HMS Conqueror, resulting in the loss of over 300 Argentinian crew.

As a result the Argentinian navy withdrew naval support, weakening their force. However on 4 May the Argentinian's considerable air force attacked the HMS Sheffield, resulting in its eventual sinking with 20 crew lost.





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# Operation Sutton

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**With naval and air forces engaged in combat, the British forces considered the problem of how best to land and recapture the Falkland Islands. The Falkland's terrain was notoriously difficult and the most obvious landing area, Port Stanley, was heavily guarded by the Argentinian forces.**

On the night of 21 May, 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines landed on the opposite side of East Falkland Island around San Carlos Water. The landings, Codenamed Operation Sutton, included 40 and 42 Commando Royal Marines. Through a combination of ship, helicopter and amphibious craft an overall force of 4,000 soldiers landed safely.



Falkland Islands, 1982  
© Ivar Hellberg



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# Three Battles

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**Once landed, the British forces consisting of Special Air Service (SAS), Royal Marines, Parachute Regiments, Welsh and Scots Guards and Gurkha Rifles captured key settlements such as Darwin and Goose Green.**

Following the sinking of the SS Atlantic Conveyor, which carried vital Chinook helicopters, the British forces were forced to march 80 miles towards the capital under extreme weather and bombing campaigns by the Argentinian air force,

On the night of 11 June, units of 3 Commando Brigade including 42 Commando launched three simultaneous attacks on Mount Harriet, Two Sisters, and Mount Longdon capturing the ring of high ground around the capital Stanley.

Forty eight hours of sustained night battles led to the surrender and capture of the capital from the Argentinian forces.



Falkland Islands, 1982  
© Peter Holdgate





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# The End of Conflict

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## After the fall of Stanley, the Argentinian forces formally surrendered on 14 June.

Returning ships were escorted through Plymouth Sound with triumphal arches of water and crowds of families greeted the soldiers and sailors as returning heroes.

On 26 July a service of thanksgiving was held in St Paul's Cathedral, London attended by the Royal Family, the Prime Minister and several of the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Army servicemen who fought in the conflict.

The following year a memorial to the conflict, carved out of Dartmoor granite, was placed in the centre of Port Stanley.



Official Argentinian surrender aboard HMS Plymouth  
© Iain Henderson







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# Ideas for activities

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## Chronology of Conflict

Using this resource students can create a timeline mapping out the 74 days of conflict.

Researching primary historical sources such as first-hand accounts and photographs of the conflict, students will then decide in their opinion the key events that led to the outcome of the Falklands conflict.

Recording these chosen events in a written or online timeline to present and debate together in class.

## Causes and Consequence

Drawing on the 'A Short History' section in this resource divide your class into small groups.

Giving each group the theme of causes and consequence, the students will research and discuss the causes that led to both countries claiming sovereignty over the Falklands and discuss what the consequences were for both after the end of the conflict.

Groups can present their findings in a debate at the end of the session.

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## Battle Ready

Devonport Dockyard played an important role in the conversion of civilian ships into vessels ready for conflict.

The manufacture of landing platforms, aircraft hangers and extensive accommodation were all completed in an average of 8 days.

In a timed session ask your pupils to split into 'engineering' groups, researching, selecting and presenting an ideal commercial ship for conversion.

### Key objectives to consider:

- Ship reinforcement
  - Air craft landing and carriers
  - Amphibious vehicles and landing crafts
  - Storing weapons, rations and equipment
  - Providing accommodation for troops
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