

**'WATCH OUT! WATCH OUT! MISSILE, MISSILE...!'**  
Argentine Air Power over the Falklands



# WATCH OUT! WATCH MISSILE, MIS

During operations in the South Atlantic to re-take the Falkland Islands, the air assets of the Argentine Air Force and Navy acted with bravery and skill in confronting the third most powerful navy in the world. Thirty-five years on, Claudio Meunier pays tribute to the heroic men who tried to defend the 'Malvinas' and those who fought against them. >>







# OUT! MISSILE!



**LEFT:**  
Captain Marcos Cervwinski, a pilot of 8 Group, who participated in a Sea Harrier chase over the islands equipped with Matra missiles. The father of Cervwinski flew in the RAF as a Second World War fighter pilot serving with a Polish unit.



**MAIN IMAGE:**  
Skyhawk 3-A-305 piloted by CC Philippi on board the Carrier ARA Veinticinco de Mayo in the first days of May 1982. Skyhawk 3-A-305 dropped its bombs in the 21 May attack on the Frigate HMS Ardent and scored a direct hit, ultimately sinking the ship.



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**ABOVE:** CC Norberto Pereiro, Navy Aviator in the Falklands and the little hangar at the airport in the first days of April 1982. Pereiro commanded the unit EA52 which assigned three Fokker F 28 Fellowship aircraft which flew during the conflict between the continent and the islands, sometimes under enemy fire.

**RIGHT:** One of the Argentine Air Force Canberras during a training exercise before the war at Paraná.

**O**n 1 May, 1982, on arrival of the British Task Force, Argentine military air operations got underway when Air Forces Dagers and Mirage MIII were launched from the mainland. In what was the first encounter, two Dagers, (C-437) and (C-430), piloted by Capt Moreno, and his wingman, Lt Volponi, met the two Sea Harriers of Lt Cdr Robin Kent (ZA175) and his wingman, Lt Brian Haigh (XZ498). Initially, both sections sought to shoot each other down, but when Kent launched an AIM-9L Sidewinder missile at Moreno's Dagger, which was successfully avoided, both the Argentinians engaged afterburners and headed back to the mainland.

A serious setback for the Argentinians, that same day, was the loss of three Mirages after another air battle with Sea Harriers. Two were shot down; 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Carlos Perona ejected over Pebble Island, and Lt José Leónidas

Ardules was killed when his Mirage was struck by a Sidewinder missile. The pilot of the third Mirage, Capt Gustavo Argentino Garcia Cuerva, decided to make an emergency landing on the short runway at Stanley since his fuel state was insufficient to reach the mainland. Cuerva had been one of the officers in charge of the reception of the Mirages when they were delivered to the country in the 1970s, and was one of the Mirage's most experienced pilots. When Garcia Cuerva approached Port Stanley, the airport was in chaos as a consequence of the Avro Vulcan strike early that day, along with ensuing Sea Harrier attacks. The small Argentine Naval Aviation quarter, close to the control tower, had been hit. Fuel and oil stored there, together with parts of the two FIGAS Beaver seaplanes which had been removed to prevent use, were set on fire during one of these attacks. The runway had been struck, too, and one side rendered unusable by the impact of a 1,000lb bomb. Although Cuerva

was being assisted in his approach by Argentine Air Force radar, the sudden appearance of the jet triggered an immediate and automatic response from the anti-aircraft defences, highly sensitised and nervous following recent attacks. The Mirage was repeatedly hit and its pilot unfortunately killed.

In one of the air strikes that day, the "Segunda Escuadrilla de Sostén Logístico y Móvil" (EA52) (Second Squadron of Logistic Support), of the Argentine Naval Aviation force, suffered its only casualty when Petty Officer Hidalgo, trying to protect a young conscript, was wounded by bomb shrapnel in one of his legs which eventually had to be amputated.

## FLYING AT WAVE-TOP LEVEL

Meanwhile, at the Patagonian Trelew airport, three Argentine Air Force Canberras were being prepared for a strike on the British Task Force, each carrying two Mk 17, 1,000lb bombs and







**LEFT:** Operations at the San Julian base; A-4Cs ready to operate in San Carlos Bay, May 1982. Behind are ex Israeli Daggers used by the Argentine Air Force at the same base.

supplementary 650gallon fuel tanks. The Canberra of Lt Cooke had been hastily supplied with locally produced 'chaff' and flare dispensers. That afternoon, the three aircraft took off from Trelew led by Capt Nogueira and, en route to their target, entered the radar envelope of the Argentine naval task force ("Fuerza de Tareas 79") who were sailing in pursuit of the same target. The Canberras unexpected detection brought Argentine ships to 'Battle Stations' and two A-4Q Skyhawks, armed with Sidewinder AIM 9B missiles, piloted by Lt Cdr Alberto Philippi and Lt J G Felix Medici, were launched from the carrier *Veinticinco de Mayo* to face what appeared to be enemy aircraft. Once the Canberras were visually identified, the Skyhawks were ordered to return. After that, the bombers transitioned to wave-top flight and, after a few minutes, visually acquired the frigates HMS *Yarmouth* and HMS *Brilliant*, both holding station on the fleet's anti-aircraft screen. Almost at the same time, ➤



**LEFT:** The EA33 Argentine Navy Skyhawk Unit. This photo was taken at the Rio Grande base on 20 May. Over the next few days three pilots were lost, one was missing and the other two ejected from their Skyhawks.



**LEFT:** TN Julio Mateo Barraza, Super Etendard pilot, one of the pilots who fired the Exocet on 25 May which sunk the Atlantic Conveyor.

**OPPOSITE:** An Argentine Navy Skyhawk A-4C pictured at the time of the Falklands conflict. (KEY ARCHIVES)



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### RIGHT:

Pilots and ground crew members of 1st Attack Squadron, Navy Aviation, with the MC339 Aermacchi based at Port Stanley. The unit lost two pilots and TN Owen Crippa spotted the assault in San Carlos on 21 May. In his solitary flight he attacked HMS Argonaut with rockets.



the ships detected and launched their missiles at the incoming threat. Capt Nogueira pressed on, ordering 'chaff' and flares to be dispersed, but he could not avoid one of the weapons exploding close to his Canberra (B-108), blowing off a wing tip. Believing the missiles to be coming from Sea Harriers, Nogueira ordered his group to abort the attack and individually exit the area. Badly damaged, he assessed that trying to reach nearby Stanley had better odds than flying home but was urged to desist in view of what happened that morning with Cuerva's Mirage. Nogueira had no choice and headed to the continent, living to tell the tale.

Fifty minutes behind, the other three Canberras, each carrying four 1000lb retarded bombs, were flying at wave-top level towards the British fleet. Capt Garcia Puebla, one of the pilots, pressed his comrades to keep their heads down by making short radio

clicks each time one of them climbed slightly above him. However, Lts Alan Curtis and Mike Broadwater, flying a Sea Harrier Combat Air Patrol (CAP), spotted them from above. At first glance, they counted two Canberras but soon realised there were three!

Curtis fired one missile, but this was rapidly detected and dodged by Garcia Puebla, who at the same time warned the flight leader, Capt Baigorri, about the danger: "Misil, misil, ruptura !" ('Missile, missile, break!') and started to make sharp turns from one side to the other with the heavily laden Canberra, dropping 'chaff' and flares and taking care not to hit the sea. Meanwhile, to Puebla's awe, the Canberra of Lt Gonzalez continued flying straight and level, taking no evasive action whatsoever and with a missile on his tail, chasing him. Garcia Puebla yelled: "Guarda el dos, guarda el dos, misil, misil!" ("Two, watch out, two, watch



out, missile, missile!'), but it was in vain; the missile launched by Curtis finally reached its target. Both Canberra crew members ejected, but they were never recovered. On the way back, the two surviving Canberras were again close to being shot down when they got into the coverage of Argentine fleet radars. This time, they were rapidly identified and promptly answered authentication requests.

### NUCLEAR-POWERED SUBMARINE THREAT

Contacts between both naval task forces came to a climax on the night of 1 May when each found the exact location of the other. On the Argentinian side, the Grumman S-2E Trackers of the Escuadrilla Aeronaval Antisubmarina (EA2S) (Antisubmarine Naval Air Squadron) were the assets which discovered the British ships. That night, one of these piston-engined

### BELOW:

Top: An Argentine Skyhawk depicted in its Falkland War colours.

(BRITAIN AT WAR ARCHIVE)

Left: Argentine Navy Westland Sea Lynx (3-H-141), acquired in UK before the war. Two Argentine Sea Lynx (3-H-141 and 3-H-142) were lost in the conflict.

Right: An anti-submarine Grumman Tracker S-2E (2-AS-22) of the Argentine Aviation Navy Unit, EA2S, at Stanley Airport on 10 April 1982.







**LEFT:**  
Lockheed Neptune SP-2H (2-P-112) which detected HMS Sheffield on 4 May. This Neptune vectored two Super Etendard over the warship to launch AM39 Exocet missiles.

aircraft, having climbed a little from wave-top level to make a brief sweep with its radar, was detected in turn by the radars of the ships it was trying to find. The British answer didn't wait; a Sea Harrier, piloted by Capt Ian Mortimer, was sent after the intruder. The Tracker, knowing it was being illuminated by enemy radar, rapidly went down to the sea surface and ran away from the threat at full power, frequently and randomly changing course in order not to point out the position of the *Veinticinco de Mayo*. Ian Mortimer's persistence eventually yielded fruit, not in downing the Tracker but in discovering the Argentine fleet when he was illuminated by a 965 Radar of one of its Type 42 destroyers (exactly the same as the British ones). Confirming the location of the Argentine ships on the screen of his Blue Fox radar, he turned back with this invaluable information to

his carrier and letting go of his prey, the S-2E Tracker. Finally, that dark night, the Tracker landed safely on the deck of *Veinticinco de Mayo*.

Aboard that carrier, the countdown started for the "Tercera Escuadrilla de Caza y Ataque" (EA33) (Third Fighter Bomber Air Naval Squadron) after the landing of the S-2E Tracker. Six A-4Q Skyhawk were being prepared with four MK82 Snakeye bombs each to attack the British fleet at dawn on 2 May, when the squadron's commanding officer, Lt Cdr Rodolfo Castro Fox realised that the lack of wind, very unusual at those latitudes, posed a serious constraint for the launching of the heavily loaded Skyhawks. It was decided to switch to two bombs per aircraft, but a better assessment identified that this bomb load was insufficient to ensure an overall successful mission and the sortie was finally cancelled. The Argentine fleet, 200 nautical miles away from the British at that moment, then sailed toward shallow waters to counteract the nuclear-powered submarine threat and set course to Puerto Belgrano Naval Base where it remained for the rest of the war, effectively trapped there because of the submarine threat.

Indeed, Argentina was shocked that very same day with news of the sinking of the cruiser *General Belgrano* (formerly USS *Phoenix* and survivor of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor) torpedoed by the submarine HMS *Conqueror*. This episode buried any

hope of negotiations to find a peaceful solution of the conflict. Worse yet, it killed any will that might still be alive in both parties to reach any solution. As usually happens, governments find in wars a good motive to divert public attention away from domestic problems and quarrels.

The "Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Exploración" (Naval Air Search Squadron) were assigned the mission to search for the *Belgrano* survivors and, when doing so, they also searched for 965 Radar emissions of the British Type 42 destroyers, of the same class as the Argentinian ARA *Hercules* and ARA *Santisima Trinidad* destroyers, with whom they used to train in peacetime. It was during one such mission that Neptune 2-P-112, commanded by Lt Cdr Ernesto Proni Leston, detected the emissions of HMS *Sheffield* and determined roughly its position. This initiated unique mission, a combined operation involving an old surveillance aircraft, close to being decommissioned, and a pair of the modern, brand new, naval strike fighters, the Super Etendard. These were equipped with the sophisticated stand-off "fire and forget" AM-39 Exocet anti-ship missiles. Just before the war's outbreak, Argentina had received five of the fourteen Super Etendard purchased from France, and five of an undisclosed number of missiles. However, neither two had been completely tuned-in with the other when, in April, all French technical assistance was completely >>

**BELOW:**  
Super Etendard 3-A-202, one of the jets which participated in the HMS Sheffield attack.





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## ABOVE:

Captain Gustavo Argentino Garcia Cuerva, pilot of 8 Group. He was killed on 1 May by 'friendly fire' when he executed an emergency landing at Port Stanley. His Mirage III exploded in mid-air.

## TOP RIGHT:

One of the youngest and most energetic pilots in the war, Alferéz Jorge Nelson "Bam Bam" Barrionuevo, leaves the cockpit of his A-4B of 5 Group, Argentine Air Force. The other officer with Barrionuevo is Lt Mario Nivoli.

## RIGHT:

The bunker of the "Aermacchi boys" under the rocks near the principal runway at Port Stanley Airport. L to R: TN Owen Crippa, Operations 'boss' TN Horacio Talarico and TC Arturo Medici. The others are unit ground crew members.

cut off. It was thanks to the ingenuity and dedication of flight and technical crews that the system was ready to be used, albeit in small numbers, when the confrontation began.

On the morning of 4 May, two Super Etendard aircraft departed Rio Grande toward the HMS *Sheffield* position reported by the Neptune. Closer to the target, and flying in strict radio silence at 50 ft above the waves, they received a target position update from the Neptune. Minutes later, they confirmed the exact coordinates with one or two sweeps of their own AGAVE radars, launched the missiles and broke immediately away towards home. The attack was unexpected,

and caught the ship's crew by surprise - although one of the Super Etendard AGAVE emissions was previously intercepted. One of the missiles struck the ship and, although it did not explode, started a fire that could not be controlled and forced the crew to abandon ship a few hours later. The attack's consequences certainly amazed Argentine naval aviators, too, who only became aware of their success through the British media. In that way, they confirmed the 'tuning' of the Super Etendard-Exocet pairing was complete and successful, as were the tactics developed for operational use. With one major warship destroyed on each side, and a toll of many casualties

in no more than 72 hours, the war had escalated rapidly. It was already unstoppable.

## NOBODY ELSE WAS COMING HOME

The A-4B of the Argentine Air Force "Grupo 5 de caza" (Fighter Group 5) were in action since 1 May, but on 12 May the pace intensified for them when four Skyhawks attacked the Type 22 frigate HMS *Brilliant* and the Type 42 destroyer, HMS *Glasgow*. Each jet carried one (British) 1,000lb Mk 17 bomb from the very batch brought into the country along with Avro Lancasters and Lincolns in the 1950s. After those aircraft were







phased out, the bombs were passed to the Canberras, but by then their rectangular low-speed fins had been replaced by beveled ones to allow use by faster aircraft like Canberras and Skyhawks.

Flying at less than 50 ft, the Skyhawks split in two pairs and charged towards the vessels. Two Sea Wolf missiles were fired from the Royal Navy ships with deadly accuracy and two Skyhawks went down. The two remaining aircraft continued the attack, but the flight leader, Lt Bustos, was killed when he accidentally struck the sea before reaching the bomb release point. The fourth pilot, Sub Lt Alferéz Vazquez, was the only one who completed the attack run and escaped after he dropped his bomb, although it missed the target. When he landed, he ended up off the end of the runway due to the thick layer of sea salt on the windscreen of his aircraft that obstructed almost completely his forward sight. One of the senior pilots

accompanied the emotionally drained Vazquez to the sick bay, trying to cheer him up on the way: "Bien pibe, vamos, muy bien!" ("Ok boy, we're doing very well"), to which Vazquez replied: "Señor, los hicieron mierda a todos" ("Sir, they f\*\*\*\*d up all the others").

The senior pilot said it was impossible, that they were currently coming back. Vazquez, lying on a stretcher, insisted: "No puede ser si yo vi como a Nivoli lo destrozaron" ("It can't be, I saw how Nivoli was blown up"). After a short while it was evident that Vazquez was right. Nobody else was coming home.

Meanwhile, another flight of four Skyhawks, led by Capt Tony Zelaya, attacked the same ships, and Sub Lt Arraras, one of the wingmen, achieved a direct hit on HMS *Glasgow*. The bomb impacted the starboard side of the ship, right above the waterline, leaving a hole of 90 cm, traversed the whole ship's beam, pierced a fuel tank and smashing an oxygen tank on the way before finally going out

through the port side to explode in the sea. It proved what the Skyhawks were capable of when confronting the modern ships of the Royal Navy and armed with Second World War bombs! Had the bomb fuse worked as expected, the fate of HMS *Glasgow* would have been sealed. *Glasgow* was the first ship hit by Argentine Air Force in the war and was withdrawn from the battle area on 25 May. The four Skyhawks had better luck than their previous comrades, since all escaped safely from the attack. Unfortunately, and like Cuerva twelve days earlier, Lt Fausto Gavazzi was shot down and killed by Argentine fire as he overflew Goose Green on the way back. Certainly, 12 May was a sad and rough day for "Grupo 5 de Caza", losing half of the eight pilots and aircraft involved in the two missions. As for the surviving pilots, Vazquez and Arraras, both were shot down and killed by Sea Harriers when attacking British ships at Bluff Cove on 8 June. >>

**BELOW LEFT:**  
The mechanic of Captain Philippi's Skyhawk, Warrant Officer Ruben Limia, recovers the cockpit ladder after he knows that his aircraft and its pilot would not return on 21 May.

**BELOW RIGHT:**  
The bombs of a Sea Harrier exploding over the airport. In this attack, the little hangar of Argentine Navy Aviation (see earlier photograph) was destroyed, and soldiers of the Argentine Army based near the airport were killed.



**BOTTOM:**  
Last minute check-ups of Mirage III at the Rio Gallegos Base, home of 8 Group Mirages. During the campaign, the Mirages bombed during night over Task Force positions.





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**ABOVE:** One of the most famous group of pilots of the Argentine Air Force after the war, 5 Group, who lost 9 pilots in the conflict.

**TOP RIGHT:** One of the few survivors; A-4C at its base of BAM Plumerillo, Mendoza.

**BELOW:** "Charlie" 225, one of the Skyhawk survivors of the conflict. This veteran jet was used in attacks on HMS Broadsword on 25 May. The bomb dropped by '225' impacted the warship and then fell into the sea where it exploded.

## JUMPING OVER MASTS AND ANTENNAE

On 21 May, air activity over the island escalated with the British landings in San Carlos. Early in the morning that day, and due to the reports of important enemy activity in San Carlos strait, a single Aermacchi MB-339 of the Primera Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Ataque (Naval Air First Attack Squadron) was launched from Port Stanley in a low level armed reconnaissance mission to find out what was going on there. A few minutes later, its pilot, Lt Owen Crippa, spotted a frigate-type ship sailing south of Roca Blanca Bay. Crippa stuck to the shore and entered the strait, noticing almost immediately a helicopter hovering in front of him and clearly unaware of his presence. As a first impulse he intended to attack it, but suddenly became aware of numerous vessels deployed below and so he aborted the attack on the helicopter and pointed his Aermacchi toward the nearest ship, HMS *Argonaut*, at which he shot all eight of his five inch Zunni rockets and

fired several bursts of his Aden 30 mm guns, until he literally had to jump over the masts and antennae at the end of his attack run. Now, he found himself in the middle of what seemed to be the whole British task force, and flying at the same level as their decks. At full-power he started to turn abruptly to one side and then to the other so as to confuse the aiming of British gunners who certainly saved no rounds on him! With one hand on the stick, and the other grasping the ejection handle, he clearly saw a Seacat missile fired from HMS *Fearless* and watched a Blowpipe missile fired from RMS *Canberra*, both rapidly closing in on him - although somehow he managed to elude them. He then headed to Federal Point, watching constantly above and behind in case a CAP Sea Harrier was chasing him, then turned right towards Sussex Point where he made a sketch on his kneepad of the ship's deployment he had witnessed. He had barely escaped from the trap posed by the ships air defences and Harrier CAPs, but still had to face another challenge; flying







**LEFT:**  
An Argentine Super Etendard, equipped with an Exocet anti-shiping missile.



at low level over terrain covered by nervous Argentine gunners who were unaware of his flight. He tried to call Port Stanley Airport, but only a nearby Prefectura Naval Argentina (Argentine Coast Guard) ship heard him: "No sé donde mierda estoy, denme un rumbo" ("I don't know where the hell I am! Give me a heading!") he yelled again. Fortunately, this time the airport answered giving an approach course to Stanley where he was anxiously awaited by the squadron's Operations Officer, Lt Horacio Talarico, who was initially scheduled to accompany him as wingman but couldn't take off due to a flat tyre.

The information from Crippa was of extreme value to rapidly assemble attacks from the main Patagonian air bases; Air Force Daggars MV from San Julian and Rio Grande, Air Force A-4B Skyhawks from Rio Gallegos, and Naval Aviation A-4Q Skyhawk from Rio Grande. The first ship attacked by those waves was the same attacked a couple of hours before by Crippa, HMS *Argonaut*, this time by a pair of "Grupo 5" A-4B Skyhawks in a four-ship flight codenamed "Leo", piloted by 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Filippini and Lt Autiero. Filippini's bomb struck the ship close to the waterline, but did not explode. The Skyhawk was flying at such a low altitude that when overflying the ship it broke down one of her antennas with its drop tank, but with no consequences for the aircraft's integrity. Autiero's bomb, dropped a few seconds later, drilled into the ship's superstructure and lodged inside, also not exploding. The four "Leo" planes survived, and returned home.

The naval aviation A-4Q Skyhawks of the Tercera Escuadrilla Aeronaval de Ataque (Third Naval Air Attack Squadron) were given the order to

attack a radar picket ship near Ruiz Puente bay. This ship was HMS *Ardent* and had been previously attacked by two Air Force Daggars, the first one (C-418) commanded by Captain Horacio Mir Gonzalez, whose bomb fell short, bounced on the sea's surface, continued to the ship, pierced her and ended up lodged in the stern - again without detonating. The second Dagger (C-436), of Lt Juan Bernhardt, impacted the ship's hangar tearing it to pieces together with the ship's Sea Lynx (XZ251) helicopter and a Seacat missile launcher, starting a fire. After this attack, the ship sought shelter in a nearby cove and the smoke of that fire, and the ship's masts, attracted the first wave of three naval A-4Q Skyhawks. Its leader, Lt Cdr Alberto Philippi, attacked first in 3-A-307, launching in a rapid sequence his four MK82 Snakeye 500lb bombs and scored a direct hit, again in the ship's stern. Then came Lt Arca who also managed to strike the target with one bomb, and finally Lieutenant Marquez who, evading the explosions of his preceding colleague's bombs, saved his for the next mission and to tell his leader about the results of the attack. Two minutes later, two Sea Harriers, piloted by Lt Clive Morell and Flt Lt (RAF) John Leeming, circling above, chased the three naval Skyhawks on their way out. Marquez was hit first and his aircraft disappeared in a ball of flame, hit by Leeming's second 30 mm burst. Lt Cdr Philippi, one of the most experienced A-4Q pilots in the Argentine Navy, was the second to go - struck by a Sidewinder AIM-9L launched by Morell. Fortunately, he was able to eject. Morell then went after Arca who received several 30 mm shots which opened a one metre hole in his right wing through which he lost the landing strut and wheel, all >>

**CENTRE:**  
Four images taken from Argentine gun cameras:

**Top left:**  
An Argentine Dagger fires its cannons at HMS *Brilliant* on 21 May during the landings at San Carlos.

**Bottom Left:**  
A Dagger piloted by Captain Horacio Mir Gonzalez attacks the RFA *Sir Bedivere* in San Carlos Bay on 24 May.

**Top Right:**  
HMS *Plymouth* under attack by the Daggars of 'Dog' and 'Cat' Sections on 8 June.

**Bottom Right:**  
HMS *Plymouth*, under attack from cannons and bombs by 'Cat' section.



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**ABOVE:** ACM Sir Peter Squire, CO 1 Sqn during the war, made a 'goodwill' visit to Argentina in 2002. He was given personal items of pilot Lt Nick Taylor to return to his family. Taylor was killed on 4 May 1982.

**BELOW:** Dagger C-418, this jet executed 11 missions over the Falklands and survived. On 21 May, Capt Horacio Mir Gonzalez bombed HMS Ardent in C-418.

hydraulic fluid and half his remaining fuel. Arca had no choice. In such a condition he could only try to reach Port Stanley and eject there, which he finally achieved with only minor injuries.

While this drama was taking place, another wave of three A-4Q, led by Navy Lt Rotolo, approached the crippled HMS *Ardent*. The attack tactic was unique at the time, developed from a statistical math analysis undertaken by a team of academics led by Dr. Gerardo Sylvester of the "Universidad Nacional del Sur" (South National University) of Bahia Blanca city. It comprised a plan to attack a ship with two flights of three aircraft each. Each aircraft had to converge on the target from three different directions and drop a sequence of four bombs. The conclusions of the analysis was amazing in its accuracy: 50% of the attacking force would be shot

down, but the ship finally would be sunk. And that what was exactly what happened when the second Skyhawk wave scored new hits on the ship.

### RAF VETERANS FLYING AS ARGENTINE VOLUNTEERS

That epic day, another accurate attack carried out by Air Force Dagers damaged the frigate HMS *Brilliant* and wounded several of her crewmembers. In a separate air battle, three other Dagers fell prey to the Sea Harriers. For these operations, civilian Learjet aircraft, equipped with navigation systems and meteorological radars, were employed to guide the Air Force fighters (but not the Navy ones) to the mission areas. These aircraft, flown by civilian volunteers, were nicknamed "Fenix Squadron". Two of its pilots were Claudio Withington and James Harvey, both Argentinian citizens who voluntarily piloted RAF bombers during the Second World War. Now, more than 60 years old, and convinced of the Argentine rights to the disputed islands, they volunteered to fly again in the last modern naval air war.

The war lasted until 14 June when Argentine forces in the islands surrendered to the British. Both countries sustained heavy losses during the naval air confrontations, and from 21 May up to 25 May the British lost six ships sunk; HMS *Ardent*, HMS *Antelope*, HMS *Coventry* HMS *Sheffield* and the container ship SS

*Atlantic Conveyor* and the RFA *Sir Galahad*. Fifteen other ships were damaged, some severely, and many lives were lost although Argentine aviation casualties were immense in proportion to the assets committed; the Air Force lost 29 pilots, 12 aircrew members and 14 ground support personnel dead, 49 aircraft were shot down by enemy fire and 26 destroyed on the ground, in operational accidents or else were captured. Naval Aviation casualties were 4 pilots and 2 aircrewmen dead, 14 aircraft and helicopters lost, 4 shot down and others destroyed on the ground, in accidents or captured.

This modern naval air war demonstrated the professionalism of the Argentine pilots, aroused the admiration of their people as well as their opponents, and became a milestone in the history of military aviation which is remembered even today, especially by those very pilots, now veterans, who gather from time to time to share remembrances about their epic combats in the skies of the distant South Atlantic. Those who were on the receiving end of their attacks are united in their views about the bravery and dedication of the Argentine Air Force and Navy pilots who were pitched against them. Now, thirty five years on, a number of the fliers from both sides are friends – meeting occasionally at reunions, or at the homes of their erstwhile enemies. ☉

