

# 'Chess game' soon turned very real

Continued from pg. 1

The trip was very slow, as the British government was engaged in a political chess game, allowing the Argentine government the opportunity to pull out, and in doing so, save face.

But Argentina never took advantage of that ploy and the British navy continued on its way.

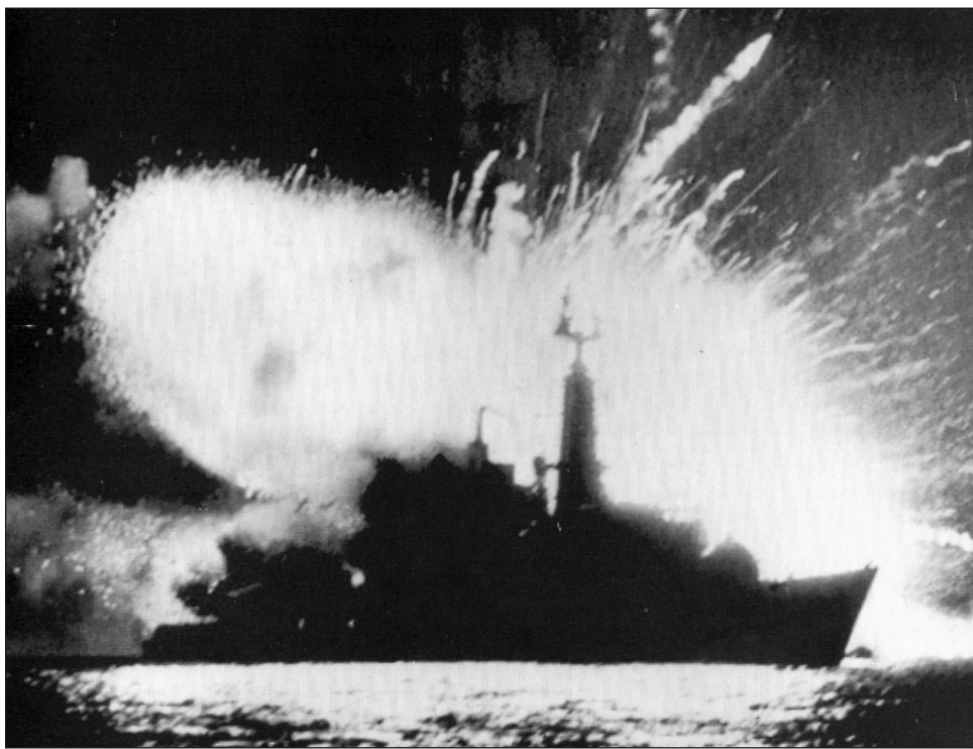
Two separate British naval task forces and the Argentine fleet were operating in the neighbourhood of the Falklands, and soon came into conflict. The first naval loss was the Argentine cruiser ARA General Belgrano, which was sunk May 2, 1982 by the British submarine HMS Conqueror, killing 323 members of Belgrano's crew. Losses from Belgrano totaled just over half of Argentine deaths in the Falklands conflict.

Two days after the sinking of Belgrano, the British lost the destroyer HMS Sheffield following an Exocet missile strike on May 4.

The chess game had now become very real.

On May 21, HMS Antelope moved into San Carlos Water (Bay), on the northwest corner of the East Falklands Island. It was where the British troops and assault vehicles were unloaded.

Ships in that area were the targets of numerous air attacks from the Argentine air force, with most of the attacks coming



When the ammunition magazine of the HMS Antelope exploded, the night sky was filled with a pyrotechnics display that could be seen for miles. Marshall was about a half mile away when it blew. Photo Courtesy Ship's Company- HMS Antelope

in at very low altitudes.

"We were there for essentially one day," said Marshall, "We relieved a sister ship that was 'goalkeeping' (aerial defense) to stop any Argentine aircraft from entering the area. Us, and other frigates— as many as four, were protecting that area."

The bay was bordered on each side by high mountains- a perfect natural defense for unloading troops and supplies, as the Argentine aircraft had to attack through the entrance, not over the mountains, and come in over the ships at a low angle approach.

"The day we were hit, (May 23) we

were in the bay around 6 a.m., and the attacks started at 8 a.m.," said Marshall, "The Argentine aircraft weren't very good at night flying, so most of their attacks were daytime attacks. We had relieved our sister ship, the HMS Ardent, (which had been sunk) two days before, and we sustained about eight or 10 bombing raids that day. We were very fortunate, the ship was only hit twice with 1,000 lb. bombs, and fortunately, the bombs didn't explode, as they were not properly armed— the Argentineans were using high altitude fuses, for low altitude bombing runs."

"The Argentinean air force pilots have my greatest respect," said Marshall, "They

were very brave and risked their lives, as they came in really, really low to attack— very dangerous. They will always have my respect."

Marshall is quick to add that day had its light moments too.

"There were some funny times too," added Marshall, "That day I was on the back of the ship— no aircraft in sight, and I was eating my lunch— no air raid eminent, but obviously someone made a mistake. A bomb hit the water no more than 15 metres from me. I was taking a wash-room break when it hit. My lunch and tea were knocked into the sea, and I leapt onto the flight deck to one of the machine guns mounted there, and started shooting at this aircraft, complete with expletives, you know, those normal things that come out of your mouth in the fog of war."

"I was firing at this aircraft, and it was disappearing off in the distance, there was no way I was ever going to hit it— it was my only way to react to the fact he'd bombed us."

"The most amusing thing— I had peed myself in the middle of this battle."

Around noon, two Argentinean Skyhawk fighters came over the ship from the north off the ship's starboard side. The first passed by, but the second was skimming the waves. The Antelope opened fire on the aircraft with 20 mm machine guns and hit it in the wing. The pilot pulled the aircraft up over the ship, but clipped the aerial on the ship at 400 mph. The plane disintegrated and tumbled into the water, but at the same time, the ship lurched as one of the bombs from that same aircraft entered its hull on the starboard side.

The unexploded bomb punched a one-metre hole through the side of the ship above the waterline, and sat in the air-conditioning unit near the ship's control centre.

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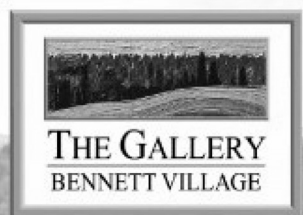
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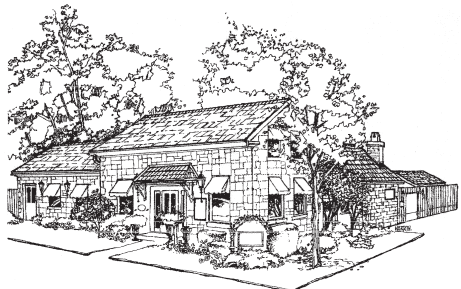
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