



# SOUTH GEORGIA



South Georgia  
"Are we really going to fight over that?"



In a second recon mission, Special Forces were landed in Stromness Bay by Gemini dinghy. One dinghy had engine failure and was swept out to sea. They were found the following morning by 'Humphrey' who once again came to the rescue.



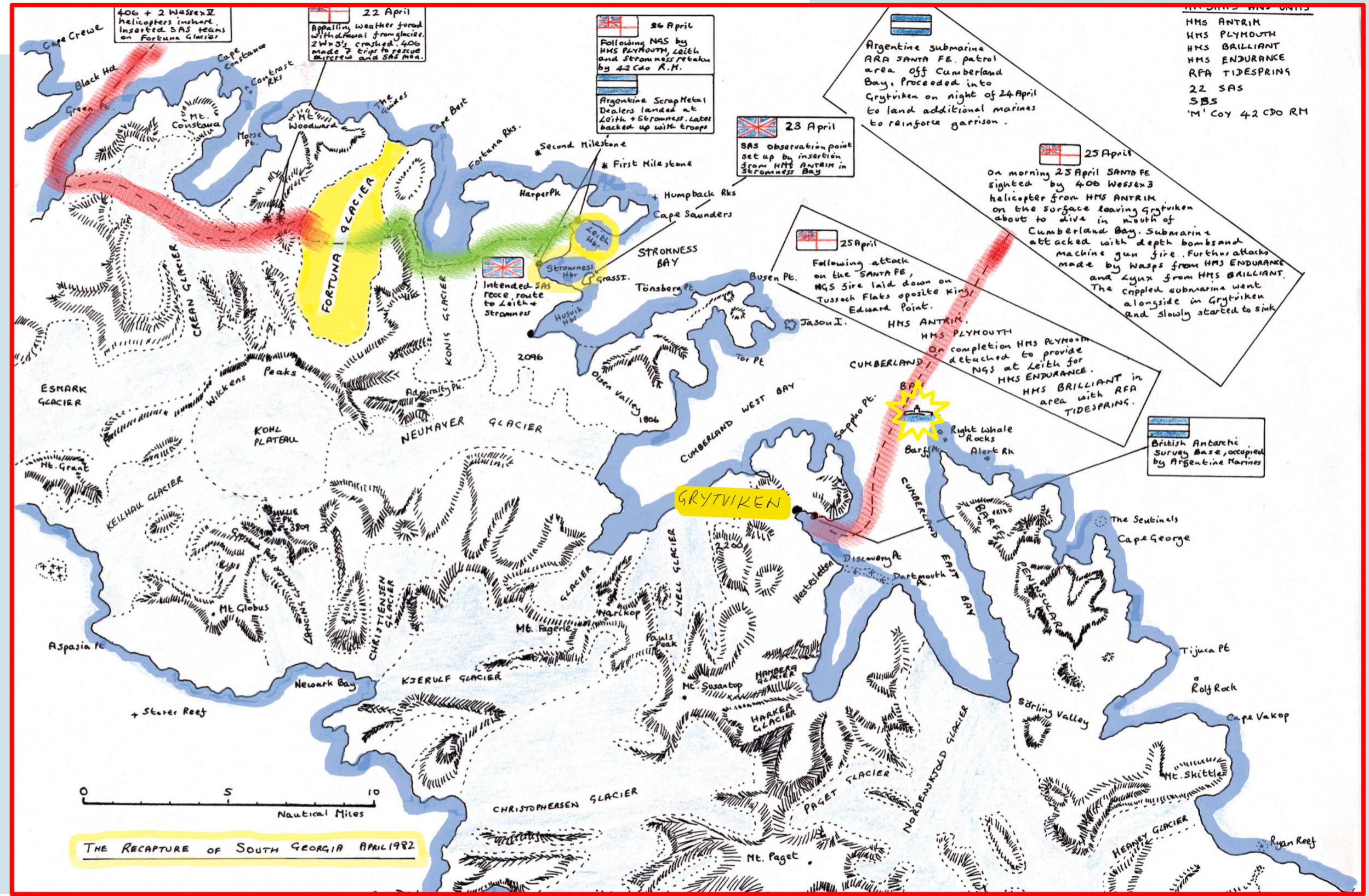
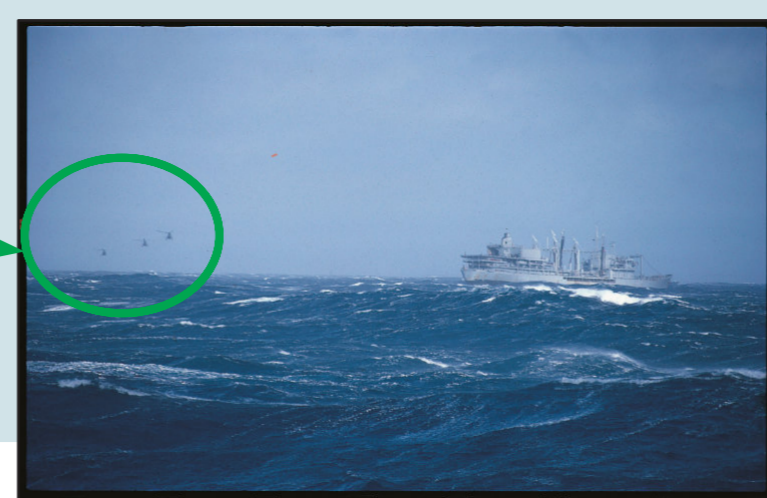
## Reconnaissance

Argentine positions in Grytviken and Leith had to be located. The first attempt on 21 April was an airborne insertion of an SAS Troop, using 'Humphrey' and two Wessex V helicopters from *Tidespring*, onto Fortuna glacier. The flight in was extremely difficult in cloud and buffeting wind and snowstorms. The weather that night was atrocious – Force 11 winds, snowstorms. The next day the ship received a faint radio signal saying that the Troop were suffering from severe exposure and would not survive another night. After an abortive attempt on the morning of 22 April, that afternoon the three helicopters returned through still atrocious weather, experiencing sudden downdraughts of wind, snow and cloud but the Observer conned all three helicopters to the right position. However, on taking off, one of the other helicopters lost control and crashed. The remaining two landed, embarked all the men from the crashed helicopter and took off again. Then the other Wessex V experienced a sudden 'white-out', and crashed. At this stage 'Humphrey' was airborne and already overloaded and returned to the ship. The weather intervened and it was not until 1635 that he could return to the glacier. Conditions were still atrocious, but they landed and picked all the men from the second crashed helicopter. In an extremely perilous and overloaded state, straining the engine beyond its limits to lift the load, with men lying across the laps of others, *Humphrey* returned safely. No man was injured apart from bruises. For that exemplary example of airmanship, judgement, teamwork and courage, the pilot **Ian Stanley** was awarded the DSO and the aircrew were awarded a 'Mention in Despatches'.

See Panel 7 "The Team" for description of weather and barograph trace.



Over this period, we were under surveillance by Argentine air reconnaissance aircraft which may have been radioing our position back to base. We had clearance to shoot it down – if only it would come within range!

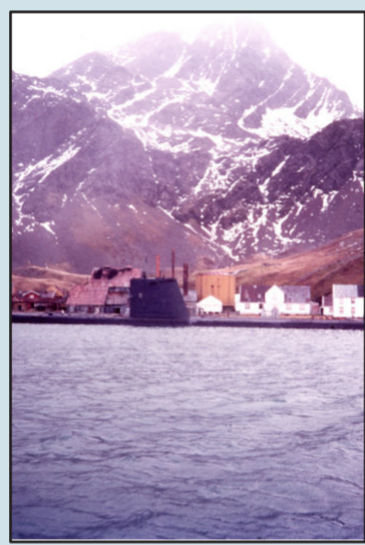


**Saturday 24 April**, the threat increased. Intelligence indicated that an enemy submarine, *ARA Santa Fe*, was on passage to South Georgia with twin missions: to land Special Forces officer **Lt Alfredo Astiz**; and to sink us. We moved 100 miles north to encourage him to enter Grytviken, assessing that the submarine would spend the night alongside then sail at first light.

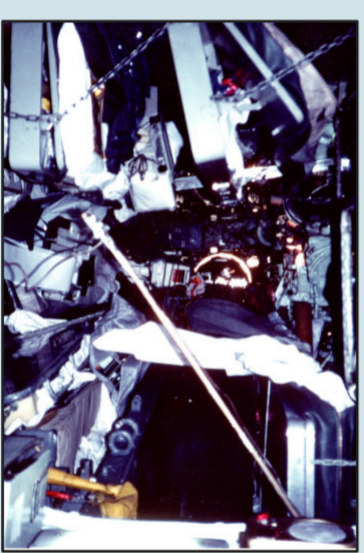
Overnight we closed the coast and 'Humphrey', with helicopters from *Endurance*, *Plymouth* and *Brilliant* in support, found *Santa Fe* at dawn leaving harbour on the surface.

'Humphrey' dropped two depth charges which exploded close alongside. The damaged submarine turned for Grytviken. The other helicopters added their firepower, dropping a homing torpedo in case the submarine tried to dive, and strafing the fin (conning tower) with missiles and machine gun fire.

'Humphrey' became the first British helicopter to disable a submarine, and possibly the first in the world. During this Sunday morning action, the Prime Minister called the ship via satellite phone and asked to speak to the Captain, but the radio operator replied 'he is a bit busy sinking a submarine at present'.



(Above) *ARA Santa Fe* lies disabled in Grytviken harbour.



(left & right) Onboard - secured for sea? NO!



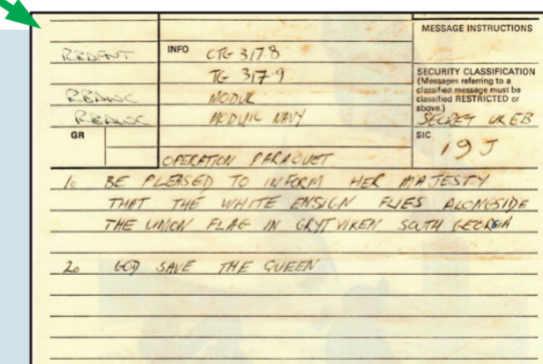
Back onboard *Antrim*, now closing the coast at speed with battle ensigns flying, we prepared to capitalise on the initiative. We mustered a scratch landing party of 79 men. The remaining 200 men of M Company RM, embarked in *Tidespring* for this specific purpose, were too far to the north to be involved.

*Antrim* and *Plymouth* bombarded with 189 rounds of 4.5" shells (see Panel 7) on the hills surrounding Grytviken to avoid unnecessary casualties or damage to infrastructure. This convinced the garrison that we could select targets at will.

The helicopters went in, the troops landed unknowingly close to enemy minefields, but the threat to the Argentines was clear. With almost indecent haste they signalled their surrender as *Antrim* and other ships entered Cumberland Bay. *Santa Fe* was alongside, listing and crippled.

Correct formalities were observed at 1720Z and the signal – which we had drafted on the way south from Ascension, so sure were we of success – was sent to London (see the manuscript original in the glass cabinet). It was this signal which the Prime Minister was filmed taking to Buckingham Palace and saying to newsmen, 'Just rejoice in our boys and the Marines, rejoice!'.

It was the first victory of the campaign and lifted morale among all who were friendly to Britain.



That night, the Argentine Garrison Commander and the CO of the *Santa Fe* dined onboard with our Captain and officers. What effect that had on their morale on seeing a gleaming table, silver arranged, candles burning, stewards attending, is hard to imagine. Perhaps something like 'Who are these guys? They have steamed 8000 miles, crippled our submarine, bombarded and landed, and now we are sitting down to dinner!' (The additional, unstated aim was to ensure we were not attacked by underwater saboteurs.)

## Aftermath

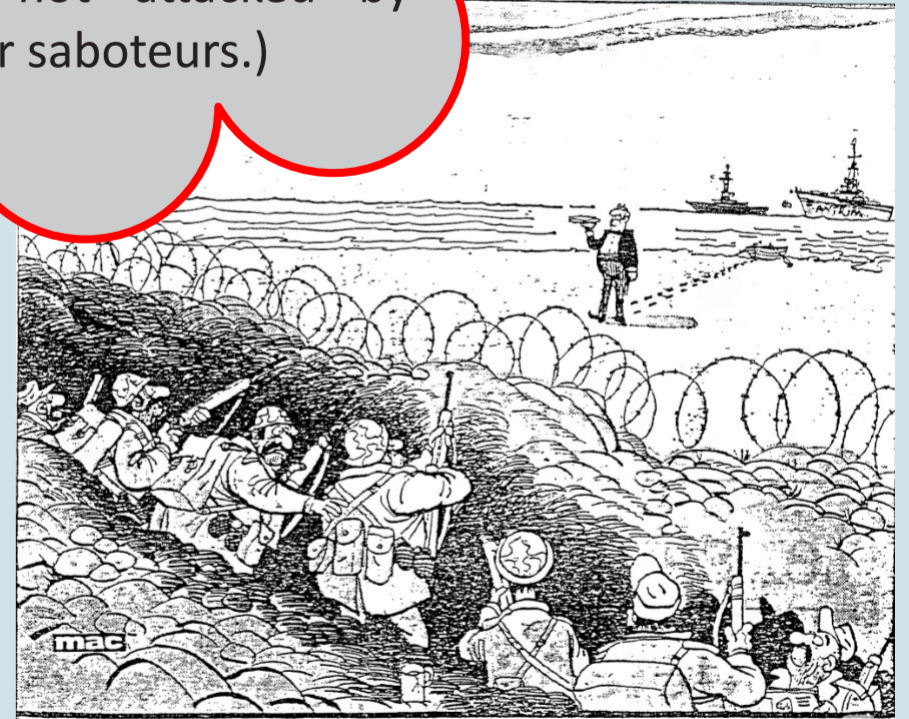
Our doctor treated an Argentine sailor who had lost his leg when a missile, fired by a helicopter, broke through the fin of the submarine. 'A nice clean cut' reported the doctor.

No deaths were caused on either side during the operation, but sadly Argentine **Chief Petty Officer Artuso** was killed by a Royal Marine whilst moving the submarine to another berth. The Marine had been briefed to shoot anyone who attempted to touch certain valves. Unfortunately, the submarine lurched, the CPO instinctively reached for a handle, and was shot dead. He was buried near Shackleton's grave in the Whalers' Cemetery with full military honours on 29 April.

**Felix Artuso** left a widow in Buenos Aires and three children, Christian (8), Karina (6) and Carolina (2). The children have been to South Georgia in subsequent years and laid pebbles on his grave, but it is not an easy place to visit. We all felt diminished by his death.

M Company RM were landed as a garrison force, and the 200 Argentine prisoners were embarked in *Tidespring* for passage to Ascension Island and repatriation.

We had some unexpected additions in *Antrim*; two women who had been filming on South Georgia, **Cindy Buxton** and **Annie Price** came north, bringing two ducks, who took up residence in the Captain's bath! They were donated to the Peter Scott sanctuary at Slimbridge.



The Burial of CPO Artuso



Argentine prisoners onboard RFA *Tidespring*



The Grave of Sir Ernest Shackleton. Buried here 100 years ago



Grytviken Church

## Back towards Ascension

As we steamed towards Ascension with *Tidespring*, we celebrated the announcement of our aircrew's decorations – **Stewart Cooper** (the second pilot, extreme left) and **Chris Parry** (the observer, extreme right), Aircrewman **David Fitzgerald** (not shown) all received Mention In Despatches; **Ian Stanley** (pilot, second from right) DSO, and also Captain **Brian Young**.

We thought we might be going home – not a chance!

