

## The Falkland Islands War (02/04/1982-14/06/1982)

On April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1982, Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, a remote British colony in the South Atlantic, starting a short and decisive war that made international headlines, created a significant political drama, and involved bravery and tragedy. Neither Britain nor Argentina declared a state of war at any time, meaning that the conflict was, officially, an 'undeclared war'. The conflict was fought between April 2<sup>nd</sup> and June 14<sup>th</sup> 1982, lasting for 74 days.

The UK, which had ruled the islands for nearly 150 years (though Argentina had long claimed sovereignty), quickly chose to fight and so the Royal Navy sailed to the south to retake the islands.

The Falkland Islands is a tiny archipelago in the South Atlantic Ocean consisting of two main islands (called West Falkland and East Falkland) and about 780 small islands. They are located about 300 miles from Argentina, and about 8,000 miles from the UK.



On April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1982, Argentina invaded and occupied the Falkland Islands and on the following day they invaded South Georgia (about 1,600 miles from Argentina).

From an Argentine point of view, the incident was a "reclamation of territory". The history of the Falklands is complicated. France was the first nation to establish a colony on East Falkland in 1764, and then the British claimed West Falkland in 1765. Five years after that, the Spanish army captured the fort of Port Egmont, on West Falkland.

Fifty years later, in 1815, a mercenary working for the "United Provinces of the River Plate" (later called "Argentina") claimed possession of the islands. In 1833, the British reasserted their sovereignty and requested that the Argentine administration leave. Britain retained possession of the islands from that time, but the issue of the islands' sovereignty remained controversial.

In the early 1980s, Argentina was ruled by a military dictatorship and there was much political unrest and many economic problems. Its leadership believed that taking the Falklands would appeal to nationalist sentiment and unite an increasingly divided public.

A Commando unit, SAS troops and members of the Special Boat Squadron retook South Georgia on April 25<sup>th</sup>. But it was the sinking of the Argentine ship, ARA General Belgrano, by British forces on May 2<sup>nd</sup> that has been remembered as the conflict's first major engagement – and it was one of the most controversial acts of the war.

Despite being outside of the "exclusion zone", the decision was made to torpedo the ship. 323 Argentinian lives were lost.





On June 12<sup>th</sup>, British forces reached high ground around the capital, Stanley, and surrounded its port. A series of short battles then followed, and Argentina surrendered on June 14<sup>th</sup>.

The Falklands War left 650 Argentinian and 253 British people dead. Hundreds more were injured on both sides. Britain also captured around 11,000 Argentine prisoners, all of whom were freed when the fighting finished.

The conflict received widespread support in Britain, possibly because the previous years had seen economic recession and a decline in industry. The victory became a defining moment for British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. She said "We have ceased to be a nation in retreat ... we rejoice that Britain has rekindled that spirit which has fired her for generations past and which today has begun to burn as brightly as before". It was a victory that was to translate into personal success for Thatcher. In the general election of the next year, her Conservative government won by the most decisive landslide since 1945.

Although the two nations re-established relations in 1989, Argentina still maintains its claim to the Falklands islands, even adding it to its constitution in 1994.

In a 2013 referendum, the islanders voted to remain a UK overseas territory – a result dismissed by the Argentine government as a "publicity stunt".

If Argentina had not attacked in 1982, a declining population would eventually have left the Falklands unviable as a British colony. Instead, the victory led to a firmer British commitment, and the population of the islands is now increasing, year after year, and the islands are more prosperous and secure than ever before.

**Source:**

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/falklands-war-history-facts-what-happened/>