

The Untold Story of the Falklands War

TV Documentary Series 2 x 60'



Nearly 40 years ago, **Britain went to war with Argentina**. And mounted a major land invasion, 8,000 miles away.

But before troops could put boots on the ground of the Falkland Islands, an entirely different battle had to be won. The battle for its skies.

And Britain nearly lost it.

On the **40th anniversary of the conflict** and with exclusive rights to best-selling author Rowland White's new book ***Harrier 809*** we'll tell the definitive story of the Falklands War but also reveal **the untold side of the conflict** : the critically important ***air war***.

Through **exclusive access to the British top guns** that faced the might of the Argentinian airforce, we'll see the war through their unique perspective : one that was fought at the speed of sound. **Many will be talking for the first time.**

And with **newly declassified information**, we'll follow the MI6 agents and British special forces who waged the **covert war** to keep the fleet afloat and stop Argentina's deadly **Exocet** missiles, as ship after ship went down.

Finally, we'll tell *the political and diplomatic story of the war* that turned Margaret Thatcher into an international superstar, cemented the UK's relationship with the US and paved the way for democratic elections in Argentina.

Background

April 2nd, 1982 : Argentina invades the Falkland Islands, British sovereign territory deep in the South Atlantic. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's political survival depends on a decisive response. **That response is war.**

April 5th : A Task Force of 11,000 troops, over 200 ships and 42 aircraft sets off a third of the way around the globe, to **take the islands back by force.**

The world looks on aghast, convinced **it's a suicide mission.**

And for good reason, because unless the Task Force can control the skies over the Falklands, **it will be crushed.** Argentina has 122 world-class supersonic fighter jets. **Britain has 28.** And any hope that Britain might yet pull it off is dashed by one word : **Exocet.** Argentina's supersonic ship-killing missiles are impossible to detect until seconds before impact.

Alongside the Task Force, Britain waged a desperate and determined **secret war.** We'll go into the **covert campaign** to stop Argentina getting more Exocets, send **secret surveillance radar teams** to Chile, and the **SAS** on a suicide mission **to blow up** missiles and planes **deep behind enemy lines.**

We'll show how the untested **Sea Harrier** jump jet held the line as, in the heat of the fight, British pilots coaxed lethal performance from its revolutionary technology. After losing 7 aircraft in one day, Argentina's extraordinarily brave and able fighter pilots dubbed it '*La Muerte Negra*' - **The Black Death.**

The Untold Story of the Falklands War will be the definitive **landmark history** of the whole conflict as it played out in the remote wilds of the South Atlantic.

In the words of the people who were there, some speaking for the first time, we'll chart the **diplomatic and political** manoeuvres, the high-stakes **black**

ops and high-tech **intelligence** war, the deadly duels on the sea, the dogfights in the air and the hand-to-hand fighting in the trenches.

And we'll bring an entirely new perspective, unseen until now. **The make-or-break battle for the skies.**

Rowland White

Through extensive research, White has built up a network of contacts who remain close and willing to participate in the project on an exclusive basis. His books have sold over half a million and his detailed research and authoritative writing have earned him the high regard of senior naval, military and air force figures.

INTRO [PRETITLE/TRAIL] :

VISION	AUDIO
Archive : Exocet being loaded on to a jet	GEDGE (pilot) : The Exocet is a flying torpedo - its sole purpose is to sink ships. They're undetectable - they skim the surface of the sea at 785kph.
Archive : Exocet	BRAITHWAITE (pilot) : 145 kilogrammes of RDX and TNT - enough bang to demolish a towerblock.
Archive : Exocet	COVINGTON (pilot) : If either the <i>Hermes</i> or the <i>Invincible</i> had been hit, it would have been game over.
HARRIER JUMP JETS - waving British crowds	COMM : The Navy's first line of defence is the thin grey line of Harrier jump jets. But they're untested in battle and there are only 20....
Archive : early trials, Harrier prototype looking shaky	GEDGE (pilot) : It had once been derided as a machine incapable of carrying a matchbox across a playing field.....
Archive of HMS Sheffield	John Humphrys, BBC News, May 4th (actual) : <i>"Britain has suffered its first major losses in the Falklands conflict..the destroyer Sheffield came under an Argentine missile attack. It later sank."</i>
Archive : Harrier flying over West Falkland at low level	DAVE MORGAN (pilot - Actual archive interview) : <i>I was going as fast and as low as I'd ever flown in my life - 550 mph at about 50 feet. The whole of the airfield was covered in a big hemisphere of explosions. Anti aircraft fire, tracer, missiles, bombs going off. Just this huge maelstrom of metal, and I was flying and I was flying 10 feet above the sand dunes.</i>
BBC REPORTER Archive	<i>I'm not allowed to say how many planes joined the raid, but I counted them all out and I counted them all back.</i>
Archive : Tristram and Galaghad hit Archive : Harrier dogfight	MORGAN : <i>I saw these thick columns of black smoke and it was the Tristram and Galaghad that had been hit...locked my missile and the missile went straight up his jet pipe, minimum range of 300 yards. Instant explosion and virtually nothing came out of the fireball.</i>

THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE FALKLANDS WAR

STORY BEATS TREATMENT

FILM 1 : PART 1

Friday, 19th March, 1982. On **South Georgia**, a remote, barren island in the South Atlantic that's British territory, an Argentinian scrap metal ship arrives to dismantle a derelict whaling station. But among the workers are Argentine special forces, disguised as scientists. Their plan : **to covertly set up a base to assist the invasion of the nearby Falkland Islands, British sovereign territory and home to 2,000 British subjects.** They are quickly discovered.

The Argentinians have been campaigning for a return of islands for decades. In Whitehall there is mild irritation at what looks like a stunt, but little more.

Margaret Thatcher's government has other things on its mind. The Prime Minister is getting the worst poll ratings ever. With an election the following year, it's looking like she'll be **annihilated by the Liberal party.**

Another beleaguered leader, **General Galtieri** of Argentina, has to worry about a country that is on its financial knees, with inflation in three figures and protests in the streets. He needs a crowd pleaser. ***This is a golden opportunity to finally invade and seize the Malvinas.***

Friday, 2nd of April. Argentina invades the Falkland Islands. TV Pictures show captured British soldiers and, in Buenos Aires jubilant crowds. The world is stunned, the mood in Britain sombre and then **outraged.**

FILM 1 : PART 2

After a crisis meeting with the top Naval, Military and RAF brass, Thatcher decides to **fight back** and a Royal Navy **Task Force** prepares and puts to

sea **in three days**. It will carry 11,000 troops a third of the way around the world **to take the islands back, by force if necessary**.

The world looks on fascinated and aghast. The plan looks mad, and the flotilla doomed - sitting ducks, waiting to be picked off, not least by Argentina's deadly **Exocets missiles**. If they get anywhere near landing, troops will have to deal **with sortie after sortie of air attacks** from a very large, well-equipped and well-trained air force.

The **balance of power** is closely scrutinised by military strategists around the world - Britain has a superior navy, and better technology, but no airborne early warnings systems. Its air power is puny, but its infantry comprising **Gurkhas, Marines and Paratroops** world-class compared to Argentina's conscripts.

But **President Reagan** is desperate to avoid a regional conflict. He needs the loyalty of Argentina, a bulwark against **communism** in Latin America. Military strategists also think that a protracted war in the South Atlantic could **draw in the Soviet Union** and escalate to a much more dangerous conflict.

A frenetic round **of shuttle diplomacy** led by **US Secretary of State Al Haig**, tries to find a solution....but in Britain, Thatcher's resolute position is winning admirers, and *poll ratings*.

In the **Pentagon**, US Defence Secretary Caspar Weinberger faces a sombre lecture from his top brass : *the Task Force will fail*. Weinberger tells his people: *Give Maggie whatever she wants*. Everything from sat phones to anti-aircraft missiles are freighted to the UK. Most precious of all, American air-to-air **Sidewinder missiles**.

The only hope for any success depends on British **control of the air**. And that is down to **just twenty small, untried jump jets - Sea Harriers** - on the carriers *HMS Invincible* and *HMS Hermes*.

A jet that doesn't need a runway has been a holy grail for aerospace engineers since WW2 and, in 1960, a British company cracks it with a **Jump Jet**, that can direct the thrust of its engines, *both back and down*. **There's nothing else like it in the world**. But its detractors dismiss The Sea Harrier as an airshow novelty.

But in an era of **massive defence cuts**, they're **cheap**. An alternative to the **vast aircraft carrier system of HMS Ark Royal** with its huge force of heavy duty supersonic fighter jets - **Phantoms** and **Buccaneers**.

The Falklands is just the kind of war **Ark Royal** was built for....the trouble is : ***it was scrapped 3 years ago***.

The Admiralty expects half the Sea Harriers will be wiped out **in the first week**. Reinforcements will be critical but there's nothing. So **veteran top gun, Tim Gedge** is ordered to form **an entirely new squadron. From scratch in 21 days**. The only pilots available are **newbies, retreads and veterans**. It is the **Dirty Dozen** - *the only thing missing is a pilot sprung from jail*.

FILM 1 : PART 3

As well as airpower, Britain needs intelligence. Latin America specialist and flying ace Sidney Edwards is sent to work with Britain's only ally in the region : Argentina's deadly rival and neighbour **Chile**. It will be **a top secret mission that will change the war**.

Now **Gedge needs Harriers** - he has **one** and there are 8 to find. Some are pulled out of reserve and commandeered from test squadrons, the British Aerospace production line works round the clock. It will be called the **809 Squadron**.

Now it needs something to fly from. The Navy has nothing to offer, so an old merchant container ship, the **SS Atlantic Conveyor** is adapted as a

makeshift aircraft carrier from which 809 Squadron can operate. **Not a rivet in the entire vessel is designed for warfare.** In a marathon of improvised engineering, it's converted **in 7 days.**

But there is one thing for which no-one can prepare. **The Exocet missile.** It is a French-made supersonic **ship-killer** 6 metres long that skims a metre above sea level, making it **undetected by radar.** Once spotted, a ship's crew has only a few minutes before **a massive explosion rips into the ship.** It is the weapon to stop the Task Force. **And Argentina has five of them.**

And, they want a whole lot more. So they scramble to get as many as they can from the world market. But waiting for them is an elaborate **global sting operation** masterminded by **MI6.** Agents from Paris to Tripoli pose as every variety of shady arms dealer who all promise Exocets..... that never appear.

Meanwhile, at **Chilean Air Force Intelligence HQ,** Sidney Edwards is given access to **24/7 radar coverage.** Radar operators track the time, height, direction, speed and numbers of every Argentine aircraft operating out of the country's southern airfields. **It's an intelligence gold mine.**

FILM 1 : PART 4

While the Task Force takes up position around the Islands, super long-range Vulcan bombers **fly 4000 miles** to bomb the runway at the Falklands capital, **Port Stanley. It is a major blow.** The Argentine airforce must now operate from the mainland, 400 miles away. **And now the air war begins.....**

When the Harriers come face to face with the enemy's supersonic **Mirages,** it's their **first live test.** When the jump jet technology kicks in, mid air, it gives the smaller jets astonishing **maneuverability.** The heat seeking **Sidewinder** missile makes for a lethal double act. Two Mirages **go down in flames.**

On May 2nd, Sidney Edwards intercepts an order for an **all out naval attack** on Task Force. The Argentine cruiser **ARA General Belgrano** is heading **away** from the Task Force, when the hunter-killer nuclear submarine, **HMS**

Conqueror unleashes three torpedoes, carrying nearly a ton of explosive. ***The Belgrano*** sinks, taking 323 lives with it. It is hugely controversial, and it won't be long before the Argentinians exact their revenge.

Two *Super Etendard* fighter jets drop an **Exocet** each and hit the **HMS Sheffield**. The ship bursts in to flames and is abandoned. **20 lives are lost.**

As long as Argentina has **Exocets** and *Super Etendards* to launch them, it can pick off British ships whenever it wants to. And it just needs to hit **one** of two aircraft carriers *HMS Invincible* or *HMS Hermes* to **win the war.**

And there is absolutely nothing that Britain can do about it.

To make things worse : British intelligence learns of **rumours of French Exocet technicians** working in Argentina. Without hard evidence and unwilling to rock the boat with a crucial ally, London has to live with the possibility that **France is secretly assisting Argentina.**

And then the **SAS** comes up with a daring plan. If it works, **the Exocet threat will be eliminated for good.**

FILM 2 : PART 1

The SAS conceives a daring plan to destroy the **Exocets** once and for all. 55 SAS soldiers in two C-130 Hercules aircraft **will land directly on the runway at Argentina's main military base.** The ground force will then destroy any *Super Etendard* jets and Exocets they can find.

It is codenamed : **Operation Mikado.** To succeed, it needs a **recce operation** and an SAS team sets off from *Invincible* on an adapted Sea King helicopter. When it gets lost in fog and is forced to land in Chile, the Argentinians find out and **Mikado is abandoned.**

HMS Glamorgan, 10 miles off the coast of **Port Stanley** starts shelling the runway, while, in the dead of night, 5,000 troops from Britain's elite **3 Commando Brigade** step ashore of **Port San Carlos**, 50 miles to the west of the capital.

The Argentinians have left it **completely undefended** and are completely surprised. They think the San Carlos landings are a **diversion**, but it is **the full scale amphibious attack from the Task Force**.

The British Army has walked in through the back door.

FILM 2: PART 2

But Argentina will not give up the Islands without a fight. And a **massive air attack** is launched against the ships and men at San Carlos. It is so severe, the fjord is dubbed "**Bomb Alley**".

Throughout the day, Argentinian **Daggers** and **Skyhawks** bomb British ships in **seventeen sorties** - *HMS Antrim, HMS Argonaut, HMS Broadsword, HMS Brilliant, HMS Ardent* all take hits. *Ardent* will eventually sink. **Now the Harriers have to support the land war** and the world looks on amazed.

In the dead of night, 900 elite soldiers from the British 2nd Parachute Regiment descend on an Argentinian base at the tiny settlements of **Darwin** and **Goose Green**. As the machine guns open up from the entrenched enemy positions, **Harriers** dive in to support, strafing Argentinian trenches. In an extraordinary act of bravery, the commander of 2 Para, **Lt Col Herbert 'H' Jones** charges a machine gun nest solo and is killed. He's awarded a Victoria Cross. With the base neutralised, the British army breaks out of the beachhead at San Carlos, **streaming east across the island**. The SAS **attacks** Argentinian positions on the freezing mountains of **Kent** and **Wireless Ridge**.



Undertrained, their flying and combat skills rusty, the pilots of Gedge's scratch squadron **shoot down seven Argentine aircraft in the first day**. The Harriers are dubbed '*La Muerte Negra*' - **The Black Death**. Undeterred, the Argentinian Air Force **now doubles down with ferocious determination**.

Four **Skyhawks** descend on **HMS Antelope** and deliver **two massive 1000lb bombs**, which tear into the ship and then do nothing. A **bomb disposal team** tries to defuse its deadly cargo, lodged deep in the wrecked innards of the ship. All are killed in a massive explosion that sinks the ship.

Two waves of Skyhawks slam three 250lb bombs into the side of **HMS Coventry**, killing 20 crew and injuring 30. Coventry **completely capsizes**. As its crew wait to be rescued, 150 miles away, two **SuperEtendard** jets are skimming just above sea level. Their targets : ***HMS Invincible and HMS Hermes***. If an Exocet hits just one, the Task Force will be **mortally wounded**.

But using radar-jamming metallic chaff, the two ships confuse, then **side-step** the missiles which stream on, searching **for a new target**. They lock onto the hapless hulk of the **Atlantic Conveyor**, laden with fuel and ammunition. Then, 300kg of high explosive detonates. ***The merchant ship doesn't stand a chance***. 12 men are killed and a huge quantity of supplies vital to the Task Force lost.

FILM 2: PART 3

The **global Exocet procurement war** now gears up to extreme levels with both sides resorting to every and any means possible to control the supply.

Prime Minister Thatcher now takes a call from **French President Mitterand** - reporting heavy pressure from the **government of Peru** to honour a delivery of Exocets. But British intelligence has evidence that Peru will pass them to Argentina. Mitterand relents. Meanwhile, the Attorney General, Michael Havers, comes up with a plan to **steal Exocets** from the world market using bogus arms dealers.

The Argentinian's **have one last precious air-launched Exocet**. Two **SuperÉtendards**, escorted by four **Skyhawks** with two 500lb bombs set off, **this time they must not fail**. Their target : **Invincible**.

But Edwards' radar team have tipped the ships off and the Exocet streams harmlessly into the horizon, while two of the attacking Skyhawks are shot down by **HMS Exeter**, cruising nearby. A unit of Argentinian special forces now moves **two ship-launched Exocets** ashore, to an improvised launching platform.

FILM 2 : PART 4

Troop ships *RFA Galahad* and *RFA Tristram* start landing units of the **Welsh and Scots guards**. They are immediately spotted by Argentinian commandos who call in air strikes from bases in Argentina. Expecting trouble from the Harriers, a **decoy mission** of **Mirage** jets sets off in advance while **Daggers** and **Skyhawks** home in on the troopships and the men landing from them.

The **airstrikes kill 51 men**, with hundreds of severe burn injuries but the Harriers vow revenge. Pilot **Dave Morgan** sees the smoke pouring from *Tristram* and *Galahad* and turns towards the retreating Skyhawks with deadly determination. He and his wingman Dave Smith down three of them, with

Sidewinders. They are **the last Harrier kills of the war.** Argentina is out of air-launched Exocets, but it has **one last ace.**

HMS Glamorgan is summoned to shallow waters, to shell Argentinian positions and support the Marines descending on Stanley. Tracking her on land is a radar truck parked next to the crudely rigged **Exocet** launching platform.... and just after 6 am, **the last Exocets** of the war are launched.

Two missiles fail to launch, but one speeds at over 1000 kph and the Glamorgan is 40 km away. **Launch to impact is 2 minutes,** the Glamorgan can do nothing but turn at high speed to present its stern to the Exocet to minimise damage.

The missile glances the deck, skids then detonates, blasting down into the ship. **14 men are killed instantly.**



With 5,000 newly landed troops behind it, **3 Commando Brigade** moves on the heavily defended mountains surrounding **Port Stanley.** Battles take place at Mountains **Harriet, Two Sisters** and **Longdon.**

At the battle of Mount **Tumbledown,** fighting is so intense that British soldiers charge with **bayonets fixed** killing the enemy in **hand-to-hand fighting.** **The British Army has not fought like that since the 2nd World War.**

The Argentinians throw everything they have against the advancing British troops : **rifle, mortar, machine gun, artillery fire and sniper fire**. The British clear trenches with **hand grenades**. Both sides are accused of **atrocities** and **killing prisoners of war**.



With the last natural defences of Stanley breached, the Argentinian perimeter falters and on 14th of June, the garrison surrenders. **Over 900 lives have been lost in a war of 74 days.**

In the election of 1983, Margaret Thatcher wins **the most decisive victory since the 1945 Labour landslide** and a Conservative majority of 144 seats. She will remain Prime Minister for another seven years.

And the massive defence cuts planned just before the Falklands War broke up are scrapped.

