

## Chapter III

### THE LESSONS OF THE FALKLANDS

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#### The significance of the war

Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands on 2 April 1982 sparked off the most important naval operation since the Korean conflict thirty years earlier, providing experts with a host of lessons about naval tactics and equipment. The two sides employed a range of modern weaponry which until then had never been used in operational conditions, although it had been tested, and whose ability to perform in combat therefore remained largely a matter of conjecture.

#### The impact of submarines

The first shot ever fired in anger by a nuclear submarine was off the Falklands, when H.M.S. *Conqueror* sank the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano* despite the fact that the latter was screened by two destroyers. Thereafter, the Argentine fleet was effectively bottled up in harbour. Although Argentina possessed an aircraft-carrier and some modern ASW vessels, including two British-built type-42 destroyers, the dangers posed by the presence of British nuclear attack submarines were considered too great to allow them to sail.

Argentine submarines are also known to have been a source of serious concern and discomfort to the commanders of the British task force especially until all the land forces were put ashore: the *Santa Fe* was caught on the surface during the British attack on South Georgia, but another Argentinian submarine continued to pose a threat. A report of the U.S. Department of the Navy indicates that an Argentinian German-built type-209 diesel-electric submarine "was at sea, at times in the area of the British force, for an estimated thirty-six days . . . (and) survived all British ASW efforts" in spite of "a large number of ASW weapons being expended."<sup>1</sup>

#### The impact of missiles

Missiles, shipborne and air-launched, were awesomely effective. Of the seventy-two Argentine aircraft hit in action against the task force and its ground

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<sup>1</sup> *Lessons of the Falklands: Summary Report*, Department of the Navy, Washington, D.C., February 1983, Section 3.C. (The 209's main torpedo fire control was not operational and the back-up panel improperly wired, causing all torpedoes to be fired on incorrect bearings, according to Section 3.Q. of the same report.)