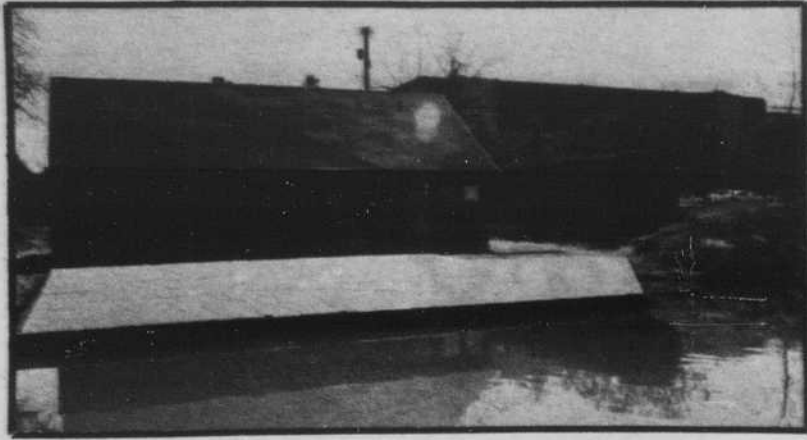


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British knock down two Argentine jets

FALKLAND ISLANDS (AP) — A British destroyer attacked by Argentine warplanes shot down two of the Skyhawk fighter-bombers Wednesday in a battle about 30 miles west of the Falkland Islands, the Defense Ministry announced in London.

There was no immediate comment from Argentina, but before the clash U.N. Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar expressed cautious hope about peace talks.

It was the first Argentine air attack on the British Fleet since May 4 and the Defense Ministry in London said the planes apparently flew from the Argentine mainland and attacked through thick cloud cover. The new fighting was the first reported since Tuesday morning when a British ship attacked an Argentine ship in the channel between the two main islands.

Spokesman Ian McDonald

said a third Argentine Skyhawk escaped anti-aircraft fire from the British destroyer. The destroyer apparently was on radar picket duty in advance of the main British fleet, which has ringed the islands seized by Argentina on April 2.

Well-informed sources said the Argentine planes, identified by the Defense Ministry as U.S.-built A-4s, were shot down by computer-controlled Sea Wolf missiles.

The Defense Ministry said the encounter was inside a 200-mile war zone Britain declared around the South Atlantic islands April 30.

McDonald said there was no damage to the warship, which was not identified, nor any British casualties. He said the Argentine fighter-bombers were U.S.-built A-4 Skyhawks and were shot down by fire from the warship. He did not say whether they were knocked down by anti-aircraft fire or missiles and would not confirm the report that Sea Wolf missiles were used.

If the report is true, it would be the first time the British-made weapon — primarily designed to shoot down missiles — had been used in combat.

McDonald identified the Skyhawks as A4-Ps, which are land-based.

Argentina's air force has 68 of the bomb-carrying planes, some stationed at Rio Gallegos, the nearest air base to the war zone. They have a range of about 460 miles, enough to reach radar picket ships of the British task force.

It was the first air attack on the fleet since May 4 when a missile from an Argentine fighter-bomber wrecked the destroyer Sheffield inside the war zone. The British said 20 sailors were killed in that strike. On Tuesday, Britain said one of its warships attacked an Argentine surface vessel in the Falkland Sound, the narrow channel separating the main Falkland Islands.

The requisitioned luxury liner Queen Elizabeth 2 left Southampton Wednesday with 3,000 British soldiers aboard and is scheduled to join with the armada surrounding the Falklands in several weeks.

But well-informed sources in London said British defense chiefs fear Argentina's three submarines are prowling the Falkland Islands war zone to sink British troop and supply ships, and that British warships and spyplanes have been deployed to hunt the Argentine subs.

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