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British launch assault on Stanley

EAST FALKLAND ISLAND (AP) — British and Argentine troops opened the battle for the Falklands capital of Stanley on Monday, clashing on the slopes of nearby Mount Kent while British Harrier jets attacked the encircled town's airfield, the British Defense Ministry

reported. Britain's domestic news agency, Press Association, said about 4,000 British troops closing a pincers movement on heavily defended Stanley were reinforced by 3,500 soldiers brought to the South Atlantic aboard the luxury liner Queen

Elizabeth 2. The ministry did not confirm that account. The ministry said the British were locked in combat with Argentine forces on 1,500-foot Mount Kent, 12 miles west of Stanley and considered an anchor of the Argentine defense line. It gave no further details.

Press Association said there also was fighting at Two Sisters ridge, about three miles west of Stanley and overlooking the capital. It said the 3,500 soldiers brought here by the QE2 — three battalions of the Scots and Welsh Guards and Nepalese Gurkhas — were ferried ashore from the liner and joined paratroopers forming the northern force of the two-pronged assault.

The Defense Ministry report on the air raids on the airfield 2½ miles east of Stanley said "a number" of Argentine light planes on the asphalt runway were "believed to have been damaged."

Press Association said warships from the 100-vessel British task force shelled Argentine positions around Stanley from two miles out.

There was no immediate announcement from Argentina on the fighting for Stanley.

Argentina's privately owned DYN news agency quoted military sources in Buenos Aires as

saying the Argentine commander on the Falklands, Brig. Gen. Mario Benjamin Menendez, had fortified the ridges approaching Stanley from the west with strong gun emplacements. If the British seize the heights, they can train their 105mm artillery on the Argentine defenses.

The paratroopers had left the British beachhead at San Carlos Thursday and crossed about 40 miles of boggy terrain and rocky ridges to attack Mount Kent. The southern attack force of paratroopers and marines also moved out of San Carlos and in a major land battle Friday seized the settlements of Goose Green and Darwin, 40 miles west of Stanley, taking 1,400 Argentine prisoners according to the official British account.

The Defense Ministry said 17 British troops were killed in the attack, but gave no figures for Argentine casualties. Military sources, however, have said 100 Argentines died and 120 were wounded in fierce fighting.

Argentine newspapers predicted the battle for Stanley would be the decisive encounter in the undeclared war that developed after Argentina seized the British-held South Atlantic islands April 2.

Stanley's neat rows of brightly painted frame homes and harbor can easily be seen from the rocky outcroppings of the 500-foot Two Sisters ridge between Mount Kent and the town.

Britain confirmed, meanwhile, that the 14,694-ton container ship Atlantic Conveyor had sunk. The requisitioned Cunard Line vessel had been a floating hulk since it was blasted Tuesday by an Exocet missile fired by an Argentine Super Etendard fighter-bomber.

The British stood by their denial of an Argentine claim that the aircraft carrier Invincible had been hit and put out of action by an Exocet missile and bombs during an attack by Argentine Etendards and Skyhawks on the war fleet Sunday.

Britain said eight members of the Atlantic Conveyor's civilian crew perished when it was struck and set ablaze and seven others, including the captain, were missing. It was the fourth ship London has reported lost. The others were two frigates and two destroyers.

Argentina's naval losses included the navy's only cruiser, the General Belgrano, torpedoed by a British submarine May 2; a patrol boat; a freighter; a fishing factory ship; and a submarine scuttled at South Georgia Island.

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