

FOX TWO!

THE FIRST DOGFIGHT OF THE FALKLANDS WAR, MAY 1, 1982

On May 1, 1982, British and Argentinian air assets met in combat, a month after Argentina's invasion of the South Atlantic archipelago. Using first-hand accounts from both sides, **MARIANO SCIARONI** traces the events of the late afternoon, when Royal Navy Sea Harriers and Argentinian Air Force Mirages met face-to-face for the first — and last — time

"DARDO, CLEARED FOR take-off. Good hunting". *Capitán* Gustavo "Paco" García Cuerva accelerated *Fuerza Aérea Argentina* (FAéA — Argentinian Air Force) Dassault Mirage IIIIEA serial I-015 down the runway, even though it was struggling to gain speed. The groundcrew had put his aircraft in *Hotel* configuration — two 1,700lit external tanks, two DEFA 552 30mm cannon and two Matra R550 Magic 1 heat-seeking air-to-air missiles (AAMs) — and the aircraft felt heavy and slow. Alongside him, *Teniente Primero* Carlos "Daga" Perona took off in Mirage I-019, armed in the same way.

OPENING HOSTILITIES

It was 1542hr (local time) on May 1, 1982, at Río Gallegos military airbase in southern mainland Argentina. García Cuerva, an experienced Mirage pilot of *Grupo de Caza 8* (No 8 Fighter Group), was to lead *Dardo* (Dart) section, with Perona as his wingman. It was one of several anti-air sorties that the FAéA had scheduled for that day when air combat operations against the UK over possession of the Falklands/Malvinas began, as well as the second sortie of the day for Perona and García Cuerva. Both pilots had flown a sortie in the morning in which, although

The late afternoon of May 1, 1982, over the northern coast of the Falkland Islands — Flt Lt Paul Barton, an RAF Harrier pilot on exchange with the Royal Navy's No 801 NAS, fires his port AIM-9L Sidewinder air-to-air missile from Sea Harrier XZ453/"009" at Dassault Mirage IIIIEA serial I-019 of the Fuerza Aérea Argentina (Argentinian Air Force), flown by Teniente Primero Carlos "Daga" Perona. Meanwhile, Barton's wingman Lt Steve Thomas RN pursues Mirage I-015 flown by Capitán Gustavo "Paco" García Cuerva. Artwork by GARETH HECTOR © 2024, commissioned for the cover of the Osprey Duel-series book *Sea Harrier FRS.1 vs Mirage IIIDagger* by Douglas C. Dildy and Pablo Calcaterra (www.ospreypublishing.com).

