

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE INFORMATION REPORT

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1. COUNTRY: ARGENTINA (AR)

2. REPORT NUMBER:

(b)(3):10 USC 424

3. TITLE: (U) Military Affairs - Beagle Channel - Argentine Preparations for Confrontation with Chile

4. PROJECT NUMBER: N/A

5. DATE OF INFORMATION: 781126-781204

6. DATE OF REPORT: 781215

7. DATE & PLACE OF ACQUISITION: 781126-781204, Rio Gallegos, Rio Grande, Ushuaia, and Comodoro Rivadavia, Argentina

8. REFERENCES: (b)(3):10 USC 424 /Continues

9. ASSESSMENT: SOURCE (b)(3):10 USC 424

10. ORIGINATOR: (b)(3):10 USC 424

11. REQUEST EVALUATION No. OPO _____

12. PREPARING OFF _____

14. SOURCE: (b)(3):10 USC 424 (country)

15. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

~~NOFORN~~ (b)(3):10 USC 424

D YES
I
R
C NO

(b)(3):10 USC 424

16. SUMMARY: ~~(C/NOFORN)~~ This report forwards information obtained (b)(1):1.4 (c) (b)(1):(b)(3):10 USC 424;Sec. 1.4(c) while conducting a visit to the areas of Rio Gallegos, Rio Grande, Ushuaia, and Comodoro Rivadavia. (b)(1):1.4 (c) the written summary of (b)(3):10 USC 424 observations at Enclosure (1).

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

REC'D 28 DEC 78

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18. DISTRIBUTION BY ORIGINATOR: DIA (original)

USCINCSO

(b)(3):10 USC 424

19. DOWNGRADING AND DECLASSIFICATION DATA:

CLASSIFIED BY: DIAM 58-11, ENCL 3,
dtd 5 DEC 78
DECLASSIFY ON: 15 DEC 1998

20. ENCLOSURES:

1 Enclosure
1. Summary of Observations, 5 pages, 1 cy,
~~(C/NOFORN)~~

MICROFICED BY (b)(3):10 USC 424

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21. This IR contains 1 pages.

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RIO GALLEGOS Airport

1. 26 Nov

(a) 1 x UH-1D or H helicopter in olive drab camouflage parked on main apron.

(b) Earth revetments for dispersed aircraft sighted at Eastern end of runway.

(c) 4 pairs of reinforced-concrete hardened aircraft shelters in 2 groups, each of 2 shelters, on the North side of the runway, nearing completion.

2. 1 Dec

The following aircraft were sighted:

1 x B-58 in yellow and black paint scheme

1 x B-7 in olive drab

1 x B-47 in olive drab

1 x B-52

1 x Quarani

3. 4 Dec

(a) 1 x B-58 in yellow and black paint scheme and headed south.

(b) 2 x B-58s in olive drab and a number of B-7s flew in and out of runway 50 and 51.

(c) 1 x Quarani carried in practice approach and overshoots. Orange flares.

(d) 3 Army chaplains in civilian clothes boarded the evening LADE flight at Rio Gallegos bound for Rio Grande (which is Navy and Marines territory).

(e) At Eastern end of runway on southern side there is a large underground shelter with four separate entrances, and nearby several slit trenches for air raid protection.

RIO GRANDE - 26 Nov

4. (a) Earth revetments for aircraft dispersal sighted around the airfield. More under construction.

(b) All aircraft were parked inside the hangar, and it was difficult to distinguish what was there apart from 1 x P₂H, several B 326s, several F-26s and a Sabreliner.

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(c) ...

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(b)(3):10 USC 424

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- 4. (c) In the town it was noted that the hospital had a red cross painted on the roof.
- (d) New permanent housing is under construction in the Marine Barracks.
- (e) Few troops were to be seen and those in the street were unarmed.
- (f) At 2145 hrs an Aerolineas Argentina Boeing 707 took off from the airport. From the interest it generated in the town it appeared to be an unusual event.
- (g) Throughout Tierra del Fuego posters are to be seen announcing "Lenox (sic), Picton y Nueva son Argentinas".

5. 27 Nov

- (a) During the morning pairs of MB326s with under-wing stores appeared to be returning from patrol. Some steep diving attacks were made on the airfield (good for AA gunners, bad for pilots). At no time were more than two aircraft sighted at one time. The underwing stores appeared to be 2 MB pods and 6 rockets.
- (b) Local residents seemed very relaxed about the situation. There are a large number of Chilean workers in the town but, apart from drunkenness, there appeared to be no problem with them.

1 Dec

- 6. (a) I landed as aircraft were being brought out of the hangar. The following were sighted:

- 3 x T-28s (camouflage painted) with gun pods and
- 1 x P2H rocket pylons, but without rockets
- 7 x MB326 (5 in grey paintscheme, 2 in light green), with gun-pods and rockets
- 2 x T-34s in "peacetime" Armada livery.

- (b) There is an ammunition storage area on the East side of the airfield.

USHUAIA - 27 Nov

- 7. (a) The following vessels were sighted on my arrival in the evening:

- 2 x Minesweepers/Minehunters ("Tom" class?) painted grey. No pennant numbers or names visible
- 2 x Fast Attack Craft-Gun ("Combattante II" class) painted in green, brown and black camouflage scheme (except radome)

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7(a) The above were moored in pairs on the landward side of the main jetty.

- 2 x Motor Gun Boats ("Higgins" class?) painted in green, brown and black camouflage scheme
- 1 x large Patrol Craft (63 ft AVR?) apparently unarmed. Green, brown and black camouflage scheme
- 3 x small ramped landing craft (camouflage painted)

The above were moored against a small jetty between the main jetty and the YPF jetty.

(b) In addition there was an orange-painted vessel "Antartida" which appeared to be a service vessel for light buoys and a green-hulled schooner ("Hielo?") which appeared to be flying the stars and stripes.

8. 28 Nov

(a) 1 x Alouette III flew several sorties along the Beagle Channel. (This aircraft appeared to be based at Ushuaia and operated every day).

(b) To the West of the airfield there is a radio hut which has had recent earth protective walls built round it and the roof of which was camouflaged in a very light colour scheme.

(c) Part of the main naval aviation hangar roof had been camouflage painted in "jig-saw" scheme of brown, green and black. The paint appeared to be gloss and certainly did nothing to conceal the building. (This exercise seemed pointless as the airfield is easily identifiable, and just across the bay are a number of bright aluminium-painted YPF oil and gas storage tanks).

(d) Both Minesweepers/Minehunters sailed East on patrol at about 1100 hrs, returning at 2030 hrs.

9. 29 Nov

(a) There were considerable military aircraft movements, including Skyvan, C47, Electra, P27, HS 125, IA 35 (?). 2 x armed MB326s flew low over the harbour at 1930 hrs in a westerly direction. (The Territorial Government Hughes 500 helicopter flew regularly and the Learjet was a frequent visitor. Both orange painted.)

(b) The 2 x MGBs sailed Eastwards on patrol during the morning but returned by 1400 hrs.

(c) The town's first air-raid alert was practised at 2030 hrs with the sounding of sirens. Streets were cleared and it was understood that only authorized persons were allowed out until

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- 9(c) the end of the curfew at 0100 hrs. Armed marines arrived in the dock area and there were a number of small patrols. There appeared to be a general lack of enthusiasm on the part of the troops who tried to shelter from the wind and rain rather than keep lookout. All lights in the town were extinguished. (This did not cause much inconvenience until about 2300 hrs because of the long Antarctic day). Navigation lights remained on. Each block appeared to have one or more wardens (civilians) who had a distinguishing white armband on the left arm. Vehicles had all lights masked with a blue paint (and drove about twice as fast as normal).
- (d) 1 x Argentine Army "Unimog" was seen in town, but there was no indication of the unit to which it belonged.

10. 30 Nov

- (a) During the night 29/30 Nov an LSD arrived in the harbour. When first seen it was flooded down at the stern with ramps open and small landing craft manoeuvring around the ship, but not carrying marines. The LSD carried no permanent number but it clearly must have been the "Candido de Lasala". (YPF tanker "La Plata" also arrived).
- (b) During the day the LSD berthed on the seaward side of the main jetty and hoisted the red flag. Ammunition was offloaded and transported to the marine barracks. Also a large quantity of new metal bunkbeds (estimated 300-400) and foam mattresses.
- (c) At least 4 single-mount and 1 twin-mount 40mm Bofors AA guns were off-loaded.
- (d) The LSD then loaded a considerable number of orange-painted drums (appeared to be 40 gallon fuel drums). A dump of similar drums was seen behind the naval aviation hangar in the airfield.
- (e) Crew came ashore in the evening, some in combat dress and others in blues. One sailor was seen wearing a "Belgrano" cap ribbon.
- (f) 1 x MGB returned from patrol at 1300 hrs. The other had remained at the jetty.
- (g) 1 x Combattante II class Fast Attack Craft sailed East at 2030 hrs. (This was the only movement of these craft during my 3½ days in Ushuaia).
- (h) 1 x armed MB326 did several touch-and-go approaches in both directions and then landed. It took off at 2010 hrs.
- (i) During the time I was in Ushuaia there was a lot of activity moving earth from the SW corner of the airfield to some point out of sight. (Possible AA defences, with the guns landed by the LSD?)

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The situation seemed very relaxed. Local people said all the fuss was in Buenos Aires. A large number of Chileans whose papers were not in order had been sent back to Chile. As a result there was a severe shortage of labour. Not many troops were to be seen. Those in town were unarmed. Security in the docks was very lax (apart from during the air-raid practice) and persons were not stopped for identity check. There seemed to be no special security measures on the YPF tank farm. There are a number of 40mm and 20mm guns mounted on a bluff overlooking the harbour in the marine barracks, but these appeared to be for gun drill rather than defensive purposes as they were not dug-in. Movement was not allowed on the Channel or to Puerto Alate Brown - the latter ostensibly because the road was said to be under repair after damage during the winter, but more probably because of military activity there.

COMODORO RIVADAVIA - 4 Dec

12. 3 pairs of reinforced-concrete hardened aircraft shelters were sighted on the North side of the runway, under construction, but less advanced than those at Rio Gallegos (eg reinforcing mesh shaped but concrete not yet poured). Same design as those at Rio Gallegos. (Perhaps the 4th pair has not yet been started?). Concrete blast walls appeared completed, as well as taxiways.

CONCLUSIONS

13. (a) There is a lot of "infrastructure" activity in the South, viz aircraft shelters at Comodoro Rivadavia, Rio Gallegos and Rio Grande; air raid shelters at Rio Gallegos; increased AA defences at Ushuaia.
- (b) The Navy would appear to have beefed up their air capability in Tierra del Fuego viz armed MB326s and T-28s at Rio Grande. However, Ushuaia at present appears comparatively undefended against surprise surface or air attack.
- (c) There would appear to be preparations to accommodate more troops at Ushuaia, viz extra beds.
- (d) The dearth of troops in the towns and lack of activity on the roads suggests that a sizeable proportion of the normal garrison has been deployed elsewhere.

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