

Commodore Barry Bryant, Falklands submarine hunter who ran the Royal Navy's principal charity.

He helped retake the remote island of South Georgia from Argentina in a daring anti-submarine effort fought and won largely in helicopters

Telegraph Obituaries

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Byrant at his desk as director of naval service conditions, his final naval position after a long career

Commodore Barry Bryant, who has died aged 76, helped force the surrender of the Argentine submarine Sata Fe during the opening action of the 1982 Falklands campaign, and later spent 17 years running the Royal Navy's principal charity.

In 1982 Bryant was flight commander and senior observer (i.e. navigator/tactical co-ordinator) in the frigate HMS Brilliant, part of the task group sent to retake the remote island of South Georgia, the first objective of the Falklands campaign. There, in an anti-submarine action fought and won largely by helicopters, he took part in the first engagement of its kind since the Second World War.

Airborne in a Lynx on the morning of April 25, Bryant was searching the sea north of the island when he heard the cry "Wolf!", the codeword for a submarine caught on the surface, go out from HMS Antrim's Wessex helicopter, and listened on

the radio as it was attacked, and depth charged. The submarine, Santa Fe, commanded by Capitan de Corbeta Horacio Bicaín, was damaged but remained operational. Closing in, Bryant dropped a homing torpedo, set shallow, less in expectation of a hit, he later explained, than to discourage Bicaín from diving, knowing what was lurking beneath him.



Bryant was airborne on a Lynx helicopter when he heard the codeword for a submarine caught on the surface

Circling back, Bryant's crew opened fire on the submarine's conning tower with a general-purpose machine gun, cobbled together earlier using an office swivel chair, in an attempt to disable the periscopes. As one of Santa Fe's crew returned fire, Wasp helicopters from other ships pressed home attacks with air-to-surface missiles, and the submarine limped into Grytviken harbour, where the Argentine garrison surrendered later that day.

Bryant recalled with some relish that Brilliant, the only Type 22 frigate fitted with two Lynx, had been fortunate to be on hand and had, as he put it, "a handsome young team eager for glory. We were quite surprised that Galtieri didn't give up at once". When his pilot, Nick Butler, brought the helicopter down to land at King Edward Point, an Argentine officer steered them away from a minefield; that officer turned out to be Bicaín.

Submarine crippled

By **DESMOND WETTERN** *Naval Correspondent*

ARGININE forces on South Georgia surrendered yesterday, two hours after a helicopter landing by Royal Marines. Mr Nott, Defence Secretary, announced last night that the landing met limited resistance and no British casualties had been reported so far.

The marines went in after helicopters had knocked out the Argentine submarine Santa Fe, 1,870 tons.

Mr Nott said: "British troops landed on South Georgia this afternoon. They have now successfully taken control of Grytviken."

"At 6 p.m., the white flag was hoisted in Grytviken beside the Argentine flag. Shortly after, the Argentine forces surrendered to the British forces.

"The Argentine forces offered only limited resistance.

"Our forces were landed by helicopter and were supported by a number of warships, together with a Royal Fleet

SUBMARINE RAN FOR HARBOUR

By **A. J. McILROY**
aboard the *Invincible*

AFTER being attacked by British helicopters the Argentine submarine Santa Fe made a run for Grytviken on the north coast of South Georgia.

It reached Cumberland Bay but was hit.

The Telegraph's report on the submarine attack from April 26 1982

The following night, in poor visibility and with the rotors perilously close to the cliffs, Bryant and his crew winched an SAS patrol, stranded and without supplies, to safety from the beach at Stromness.

A quieter moment followed when Bryant and Butler went aboard the captured submarine and liberated two bottles of Argentine brandy in the wardroom – a fair exchange, Bryant reckoned, given his later enthusiasm for Argentine wine.

Brilliant went on to serve through the main Falklands campaign: on May 12 her Sea Wolf missiles claimed three Argentine Skyhawks in a single engagement; on May 16 an attempt to destroy the Argentine supply ship Bahia Buen Suceso at Fox Bay, using a beer keg packed with explosives, was abandoned under heavy fire; and on May 25 Brilliant picked survivors of the Atlantic Conveyor from the freezing sea after she was struck by Exocet missiles.

Bryant and Butler were mentioned in despatches for their part

in the campaign.

Barry Bryant was born on November 25, 1949, in Dorchester, where his father was a tax inspector, and was educated at Wymondham College, Norfolk, before entering Dartmouth in 1968.

He was awarded his Observer's Wings while still a midshipman and joined 824 Naval Air Squadron, embarked in the fleet carrier Ark Royal. He was onboard on the evening of November 9, 1970, when the ship's company was ordered to stand by for a collision. Moments later came a heavy crunch as a Soviet destroyer scaped down Ark Royal's port side. Within minutes Bryant was airborne on a search-and-rescue sortie, though no one was found in the water.



The presentation of Bryant's Observer Wings at RNAS Portland in 1969

Over the next ten years Bryant succeeded in increasingly responsible observer appointments: in the guided-missile destroyer Fife, 1971-73; in the cruiser Tiger 1973-75, where he gained his watchkeeping and ocean navigation certificates and transferred from the short-service list to the general list as a full career officer; in 737 Naval Air Squadron instructing new observers 1975-77; and service in Kent, RFA Tidepool, during a Cod War in 1976, and in Norfolk in 1977.

A shore appointment to the stone frigate HMS Dryad, the Navy's centre for coordinated sea warfare, threw him back in the general-service mainstream. "I sometimes felt like a demigod and sometimes a fish out of water," he wrote later. "I knew a lot about ASW and helicopters, as far as the latter were concerned, a lot more than the Dryad staff, but not a lot

about guns, missiles, diving and many other disciplines.”

Further sea time followed in the frigates Diomedes and Achilles on a group deployment to the Far East, when he arrested the ship’s chief writer after it was discovered he had diverted monies paid to “S O Achilles” (and intended for the supply officer of HMS Achilles) to a new account which he had set up on the false name of “Stanley Oliver Achilles.”

In early 1982, Bryant’s flight was on detachment from Avenger to Brilliant for a NATO exercise off Gibraltar when the Argentines invaded the Falklands.

After the Falklands, Bryant re-joined Avenger. There, on May 4, 1983, in the Gulf, he was airborne when the tail rotor control failed and the Lynx struck the sea heavily. Bryant escaped through the port window. Upon surfacing, there was no sign of the other aircrew or his passenger, the ship’s captain (and future vice-admiral) Peter Woodhead, until, to his relief, they popped up beside him. Bryant had cracked lumbar vertebrae and was told afterwards how narrowly he had survived. The hero of the crash was the aircrewman, Gary Stewart, who had re-entered the sinking aircraft to free Woodhead from entanglement inside the cabin before following him to safety.

Later Bryant commanded the frigates Hermione and Jupiter 1986-88, served as commander sea training 1990-92, and commanded the ice patrol ship Endurance 1995-97, making the first visit by the White Ensign to Buenos Aires since the conflict thirteen years earlier. Ashore he was naval assistant to the first sea lord 1992-93, as a commodore, director of naval service conditions 1997-2001.



Bryant presenting the chief of the Argentine Navy with gifts in 1995, during the first visit of a Royal Navy ship to Buenos Aires since the end of the Falklands War

On leaving the Navy he became director general of King George's Fund for Sailors, remaining in the post for 17 years. Though fund raising mattered, his own energies went chiefly into hosting the charity's major events – including dinners at the Guildhall and various livery halls, and concerts by the Royal Marines Band – overseeing its finances and managing its legal affairs. His particular satisfaction lay in ensuring that some £3 million per year in grants were used to best effect, working with the Merchant Navy, trade unions, shipowners and shipbrokers, and Trinity House to secure coordinated support across the sector. He also changed the charity's name to Seafarers UK and was appointed Commander of the Royal Victoria Order.

After retiring in 2019 he remained busy as president of Chatham Naval Officers' Association, of Tunbridge Wells Sea Cadets, and of HMS Jupiter Association, and as Lord High Admiral of the United Kingdom's representative governor of the Hospital of Sir John Hawkins in Chatham (an appointment and title created in Tudor times).

Throughout, Bryant's wit and warmth always shone warmly, and he was a source of friendship, laughter, and unwavering support.

In 1971 he married Veronica Ball, but the marriage was dissolved in 1992. In 1999 he married Commander Tracy Smith, who survives him together with twin daughters from his first marriage and a son and daughter from his second.

Commodore Barry Bryant, born November 25, 1949, and died August 8, 2026.