

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 5
Issue 2 *The Journal of Mine Action*

Article 49

August 2001

Falklands, Malvinas

Country Profile
CISR

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Recommended Citation

Profile, Country (2001) "Falklands, Malvinas," *Journal of Mine Action* : Vol. 5 : Iss. 2 , Article 49.
Available at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol5/iss2/49>

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Landmines in Latin America

Issue 5.2 | August 2001

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History

The Falklands/Malvinas contain thousands of AP and AT mines as a result of a 1982 conflict over possession of the islands between the United Kingdom and Argentina. This conflict dates back to the 19th century when Argentina claimed Spain's right to the islands after gaining independence. The United Kingdom countered Argentina's advance, reasserted its rule and established the Falklands/Malvinas as a British colony in 1892. The dispute over control of the territory continued until 1982 when the United Kingdom presided over Argentina. Today, the Falklands/Malvinas are governed by the United Kingdom, although Argentina still stakes its claim to the land.



Landmine / UXO Overview

In November 1999 the United Kingdom estimated that Argentine armed forces laid 127 mine fields during its conflict with the United Kingdom in 1982, leaving 16,600 mines in the ground. Following the conflict, British forces removed 1,400 mines and pinpointed the locations of 101 remaining mine fields. According to the Landmine Monitor Report 2000, these mine-infested areas are clearly marked and fenced off. Areas reported to contain the highest concentration of landmines include Port Howard, Port Fitzroy, Fox Bay, Darwin, Goose Green, Port Stanley and Yorke Bay.

Casualties

Immediately following the 1982 conflict in the Falklands/Malvinas, the UK Ministry of Defense stopped clearance efforts after several British deminers sustained injuries. The U.S. Department of State "Hidden Killers" report of 1998 attributes 14 casualties to landmines in the Falklands/Malvinas.

Demining

In the past, efforts to initiate demining in mine-ridden fields in the Falklands/Malvinas have been unsuccessful. In July 1999 the UK military declined demining initiatives from U.S. and European private clearance companies, claiming the desire to administer clearance operations within its government. Earlier offers from Argentina to assist and fund clearance operations also failed when the Argentines stipulated that demining not be carried out by the UK military. However, recent reports indicate agreements to jointly conduct demining are intact. Following a visit by UK Secretary

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of State for Defense Geoff Hoon to Buenos Aires in March 2000, newspapers reported the possibility of joint mine clearance operations by both governments.

Mine Awareness

Mine awareness is clearly acknowledged and promoted in the Falklands/Malvinas. The Landmine Monitor Report 2000 reads, "minefields are surrounded with a three strand fence and there are signs, marked 'Danger Mines' at regular intervals around the perimeter, in addition to the NATO standard mine warning triangles." In addition, local schools conduct briefings for children on mines and UXO until they reach the age of 16. Passengers entering the Falklands/Malvinas by aircraft or cruise ship are also forewarned of the dangers of landmines.

Reality Check

Even though mined areas are very clearly fenced off, access is denied to very important areas. Peat cutting areas are blocked off, while peat is used as the main fuel for cooking and heating. Not only are the thousands of "hidden killers" directly hurting victims, they are indirectly hurting the entire population.

Profiles have been compiled from The Landmine Monitor Report, regional MACs, and wire and media reports.
