



Mrs Thatcher's War

The Falklands, 1982



A number of people have asked for a free copy of the rules to Mrs Thatcher's War, so they can decide whether or not to buy the game. Instead of giving away game components for free, I've decided to write this sketch of the rulebook as a way for potential players to evaluate the game and its mechanics.

While reading this description, you are encouraged to follow along with the detailed sequence of play that I have posted on Board Game Geek:

<https://boardgamegeek.com/image/3842861/mrs-thatchers-war-falklands-1982>

If you have played other games in the "Ben Madison's British Wars Trilogy" series (Don't Tread On Me, and N: The Napoleonic Wars, all from White Dog Games) the mechanics of Mrs Thatcher's War should be quite familiar to you.

– R. Ben Madison (designer)

[1/0] Introduction

'The Falklands thing was a fight between two bald men over a comb.'

– Jorge Luis Borges, Argentine novelist

Mrs Thatcher's War is a strategic **solitaire** (one player) game on the 1982 Falklands War between Britain and Argentina. The player plays the forces of Great Britain, against the Argentine forces of General Galtieri. It's not a detailed historical simulation, but was designed as a fun and challenging game that illustrates the general strategic course of the war and highlights important historical themes. All sections in the rulebook are preceded by snarky or informative quotations from people involved with the war, or observers of the war, like the one above. The rules are illustrated with pictures I took during my tour of the Falkland Islands in 2015.

[2/0] Game Equipment

This covers the standard set of booklets, loose sheets, maps and playing pieces included with the game:

- One 11 x 17" colour map of East Falkland (one sided)
- One 8½ x 11" colour Strategic Map of the South Atlantic (one sided)
- One 8½ x 11" colour Charts and Tables sheet (one sided)
- One 8½ x 11" black/white Player Aid Card (two sided)
- One sheet of 88 one-sided colour playing pieces ('units')
- One 16-page full colour rules booklet (*you're reading it*)
- One six-sided die (*you need three, or just roll the one three times*)

Units included with the game represent warships, small groups of aircraft, and a variety of ground combat units. A complete set of the counters in the game is visible on Board Game Geek:

<https://boardgamegeek.com/image/3834081/mrs-thatchers-war-falklands-1982>

Sequence of Play: The game consists of 19 Game Turns starting on Turn 1 (25-30 April 1982) and ending on Turn 19 (21-23 June 1982). Each Turn, you will perform the listed 'phases' in the precise order shown in the [Detailed Sequence of Play](#) linked above at Board Game Geek. Game functions marked with a triangle (▼) are ignored when the weather is bad; the triangle indicates that this is a "No Air" turn, when you are prevented from flying your aircraft. (As the British player, often you want this to happen because it's worse for the Argentines if there are no planes in the sky at all.)

[3/0] Set Up

This is your conventional, run-of-the-mill set of setup instructions. Most of the British units begin the game off-map or at Ascension Island awaiting the progress of your naval forces off the Falklands. Argentine air and naval units set up in Argentina, while Argentine ground units start in the Falklands. The big, powerful Argentine ground units start in Stanley (the occupied capital) but there are other Argentine forces that start, face down, elsewhere on the East Falkland map. You don't know what those forces are until your ground units make contact with them later in the game. They may be full-fledged military forces or mine fields or small armed patrols.

[4/0] Appreciate the Situation

Weather: During this part of the turn you roll for Weather. This may have no effect, or it may force you to skip the entire turn. It can have other effects as well.

SAS Raids: You have an "SAS" marker (Special Air Service) which, if it's available, you can use at this time to carry out one of several types of important mission. You can raid the Argentine air force (blow up its planes on the ground, like the Pebble Island raid), spoof or distract the Argentine air force, attempt to sabotage Argentina's stock of Exocet missiles, reconnoitre one of those face-down Argentine ground units (flip it face-up so you know what it is before attacking it), or you can place the SAS on the map in a ground combat role. When you've finished using the SAS this turn, you will roll a die to see if the SAS is forced to take time off to regroup or send for reinforcements, which may mean the SAS isn't available for you to use until a certain future turn.

STUFT: If your ground forces have landed at East Falkland, you can use the 'STUFT' unit ('Ships Taken Up From Trade') to land military supplies and equipment. This will give you access to the vital helicopter units that you'll need to advance across the island.

Diplomacy: You can also improve morale by negotiating with Argentina. Often this is just a useful bluff; sometimes it is a costly move that degrades your ground combat ability (global opinion is annoyed that you're fighting a war in the middle of negotiations).

[5/0] Grupos Phase

Grupos: Argentina's "Grupo" units represent ground-based air forces in Argentina which are capable of sending long-range flights across

the South Atlantic to attack the Falkland Islands. These Grupo units can randomly leave Argentina into the adjacent Sea Zones, where they present a threat to your forces.

(6/0) Task Force Phase

Now you can use your subs to sink Argentine surface ships (the cruiser *Belgrano* or the carrier *25 de Mayo*). You can also send a British Escort unit to “man the gun line off Stanley,” which allows you to bring naval gunfire to support ground operations in the ring of hills around Stanley during the final phase of your ground war. This operation is also liable to counterattack from Argentine Exocets.

During this Phase, you fight the Grupos using your naval units (two carriers, *Hermes* and *Invincible*, and two Escort forces that include a combination of frigates, destroyers and so forth); but to do so you risk losses to your naval units, including deadly Exocet missile attacks. Surviving Grupos will later send planes to fight in the skies over East Falkland. You can also use Escort units to move vital supplies to your ground forces, once those have landed on East Falkland.

(7/0) Argentine Air Assets Phase ▼

Here you determine which area of East Falkland is Argentina’s chief objective this turn (the “Target Sector”), and the surviving Grupos will send Argentine air force planes to that and the other Air Sectors. An optional rule will abort Argentina’s A4 “Skyhawk” planes back to Argentina if the weather is poor.

(8/0) British Air Assets Phase ▼

Launch Harriers! The British player will now take every available British Harrier air unit and place them on missions over East Falkland in the five Air Sector Boxes. (The unusual mechanic of both sides taking many of their units off the map at the end of each turn, and setting them up anew on the next turn, is reminiscent of the N: *The Napoleonic Wars* game.)

(9/0) Argentine Junta Plan Phase ▼

 This is where the game’s “Artificial Intelligence” kicks in, with a multi-tiered series of Argentine reaction moves based on what you’ve just done with the Royal Air Force. Based on Argentina’s perceived strategic interests this turn, various Argentine planes on the East Falkland map will change their position, trying to outfox you; and you’re stuck with their new deployments. How aggressive the Argentines are depends on which faction in the junta is calling the shots this turn (Army, Navy or Air Force).

(10/0) Air Battle Procedure ▼



This part of the rules is your standard air-to-air shoot-em-up with a conventional Combat Results Table and die rolling. In each Air Sector, hostile forces do battle with each other in the air (the battle can be affected by the presence of ground units as well, as both sides can fire at what’s going on in the skies above). The British want to control civilian settlements on the East Falkland map during air battles, because those secure positions add to the British ability to fire at enemy air forces overhead.

Also during air battles, both sides can bring in their ‘Ace’ pilots to take part in the battle.

During air battles, it’s not unusual for one side to retreat (to a different Air Sector), possibly with the winning side pursuing. This system allows air battles to continue all over the length of East Falkland. Lost planes can be lost for good, or can be repaired.

(11/0) Ground War Phase

If British ground units have not yet landed at San Carlos on the East Falkland map, you can skip this phase!

During the Ground War Phase, the British player sends supplies to his ground units through their foothold at San Carlos, on the western end of East Falkland. Like everything else in this game, this is a gamble: you have to use your precious Escorts to do it, which means they can’t be used elsewhere. And, those Escorts can be attacked on that mission, by active Argentine Grupos (that you wish you’d destroyed earlier in the turn).

The **Ground War** follows the three coloured paths between San Carlos and Stanley. Your ground units will move, box by box, from San Carlos to Stanley, subject to the presence of air units above, and the weather, and any Argentine forces they may encounter along the way. Each of the ground boxes is called a ‘Camp’, which is what Falkland Islanders themselves call these small territorial units on the island which mostly represent sheep farms.

Ground Combat: When British and Argentine ground units occupy the same Camp, Ground Combat occurs. Each side totals its units’ Strength Points, and adds the result of one die roll. **The side with the higher overall total wins the battle. If tied, the defender (the one already in the Camp) wins.**



The “ring of hills” around Stanley. Tumbledown, Two Sisters, and Mount Kent, as seen from the Airport Road.

These ground battles are also affected by a variety of factors including enemy artillery, Argentine ground attack aircraft, mountain terrain, naval gunfire support, the presence of helpful Falkland Islanders who can show you terrain features that aren’t on your maps, and strategic factors like weather, the global political situation, morale, political negotiations, and even the Pope (whose visits to Britain and Argentina came at a terrible time for countries trying to wage war on each other without embarrassing him).

(12/0) Logistics/Invasion Phase

Victory: If all three Camps adjacent to Stanley (Wireless Ridge, Tumbledown, and Mount William) are British-controlled at this point in the Turn, then **Argentine morale breaks** and you win the game in a blaze of Thatcherian triumphalism. **Rejoice – just rejoice!**

Last Turn Defeat: Or, if it is **Turn 19 (only)** and you have not won,

then the game ends and **you lose**. Between the failure to capture vital objectives, mounting casualty totals and global public opinion turning against you, there is no option but to petition the United Nations for a 'peaceful solution' which will end up letting the dictatorships of the Third World enforce Argentina's claims.

Assuming you are still in the game, and you haven't yet landed on East Falkland, you can now launch '**Operation Sutton: the Landing at San Carlos**'. This is when, once per game, you can land your ground forces on East Falkland at the San Carlos Landing Zone. This opens the ground portion of the war – the 'yomp' from San Carlos across East Falkland to Stanley. To do a successful landing, you have to have naval units in the area, the weather has to cooperate, and you need air superiority. *Note that the later you land, the less time you have to win the game.* It ends on Turn 19 whether you like it or not!

Repair: Both sides can repair their damaged aircraft at this time. This is affected by the weather. For Argentina, it's also affected by the sheer amount of damage taken during the turn – by inflicting greater damage on the Argentine Air Force, you (the British player) can overwhelm Argentina's ability to repair and replace damaged planes, which means some of those Argentine planes will never return to action during the game.

Political Factors and News Headlines: The turn ends by removing the Pope, the Diplomacy Marker, and the Chilean Radar unit (Chile's dictator Pinochet backed Britain during the war). You also roll on the News Headlines table, a set of random events which plunge you into the chaotic politics of 1983 and give you even further headaches. Finally, you reset your planes and Argentina's planes by sending them all back to base in preparation for the next turn.

End of Turn: When the Turn ends, advance the Game Turn marker to the next Turn and go back to Rule 4/0.



(13/0) Specific Headlines List

This part of the rulebook is a rather lengthy list of random events, which you only need to consult when the Headlines Table tells you to. Like all my other games, Events are a main component of **Mrs Thatcher's War**. In this game, these Events cover a great variety of military, diplomatic, and political factors that all had some bearing on the progress and the outcome of the Falklands War. These include:

- The Gurkhas
- Argentine saboteurs in Gibraltar (*this really happened!*)
- British Vulcan bomber air raids
- EEC/NATO 'Allies' (some good for you, some bad)
- Dissent within the British cabinet (the 'Wets')
- Public opinion, goaded by Fleet Street and the broadcast media
- Argentine war plans, including advances on East Falkland
- Reagan Administration factionalism on Falklands policy
- Argentine naval activity, including the submarine threat
- America's promise to send you an aircraft carrier if yours is lost
- Random collisions and accidents involving your precious Harriers
- Shady pro-Argentine arms dealers (Cuba, Israel, Libya, etc.)
- Chilean dictator Pinochet backing Britain
- Pope John Paul II visiting Britain and Argentina
- Argentine military morale problems, of which there were many
- US shipments of Sidewinder missiles for your Harrier forces
- United Nations diplomats trying to thwart your military progress
- British by-elections that test Mrs Thatcher's popularity
- The BBC leaking military secrets (but is Argentina listening?)
- 'Kelpers' – civilian Falkland Islanders resist Argentine occupation
- The politically motivated insertion of Scots and Welsh troops

(14/0) Designer's Notes

The game includes a lengthy essay by the designer on the history of the Falkland Islands dispute, as well as notes concerning the history of this game and its place in the otherwise unimpressive pantheon of Falklands War games.

The rulebook concludes with an extensive bibliography of recommended books (and games) on the Falklands War, as well as the standard thank-you lists and game credits, including for a number of Falkland Islanders who helped me to do the research during and after my 2015 visit to the Islands. There is a catalogue of unit identifications and various game abbreviations. It ends, much to everybody's amusement, with a list of popular songs found on the radio during April, May and June of 1982 so you can go on Spotify and map out your soundtrack for when you play **Mrs Thatcher's War** (to the strains of Joan Jett, Roxy Music, A Flock of Seagulls, and other bands you don't usually associate with 'war music').

