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MAY05 – INFORME SOBRE EL SHEFFIELD (prem 19/624)

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DRAFT STATEMENT - 5th MAY

With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a further statement about the Argentine attack on HMS SHEFFIELD.

In the statement I made to the House late last night I provided an outline of the attack on HMS SHEFFIELD and of the loss of one of our Sea Harriers and its pilot. The pilot was Lieutenant Nicholas Taylor. His next-of-kin have been informed - and the whole House will I know wish to join me in expressing sorrow and deepest sympathy with his family.

It is entirely right that the House should now have as full an account of the attack on HMS SHEFFIELD as I am able to give today. The House will understand why it will be necessary for me to repeat some of the details I provided last night.

At about 3.30 London time yesterday afternoon HMS SHEFFIELD was attacked by Argentine Super Etendard aircraft which launched Exocet missiles. HMS SHEFFIELD was some 70 miles off the Falklands enforcing the Total Exclusion Zone, together with other elements of the Task Force. One missile missed the ship; the other hit her amidships. The resulting explosion caused a major fire. Although attempts were made to extinguish the fire for nearly four hours, with the assistance of fire-fighting teams from other ships in the area, it eventually spread out of control. At about 7 pm London time the order was

given to abandon ship. Ships of the Task Force in the area picked up survivors, and the latest information I have is that about 30 men are still missing. A further number sustained injuries, and they are being well cared for under medical supervision. We have no further details of casualties at the present time. The ships are still engaged on operations and I know that the Force Commander will provide further information just as soon as he is able to do so. All the next-of-kin of the ship's company are being informed. The thoughts of the whole House are with them at this sad time.