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**NAVAL  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**THE FALKLANDS WAR: UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF  
CONTEXT IN SHAPING ARGENTINE STRATEGIC DECISIONS**

by

Scott Nietzel

September 2007

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Jeanne Giraldo  
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**THE FALKLANDS WAR: UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF CONTEXT IN  
SHAPING ARGENTINE STRATEGIC DECISIONS**

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Lieutenant, United States Navy  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis uses a historical case study approach to examine the impact of context on shaping decision making during the conduct of war. The case analyzed is the war between Argentina and Great Britain for control of the Falkland Islands in 1982. This thesis examines the relative strength of the belligerents' positions using the concepts of force, time and space from current operational warfare doctrine and shows that British victory in the conflict was by no means a foregone conclusion. Next, an exploration of Argentine conduct of the war highlights and discusses in detail mistakes and errors in judgment that had direct impacts on battlefield results. These decisions are then traced to the context in which they were made. It is this context, specifically the power of limited war culture and to a lesser extent the strength of the military polity as a constituency, that explains the Argentine defeat in the Falklands.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

What, but a bleak and gloomy solitude, an island thrown aside from human use, stormy in winter, and barren in summer; an island which not even southern savages have dignified with habitation; where a garrison must be kept in a state that contemplates with envy the exiles of Siberia; of which the expence will be perpetual, and the use only occasional; and which, if fortune smiles upon our labours, may become a nest of smugglers in peace, and in war the refuge of future Buccaniers.

**Samuel Johnson** (British author 1709-1784, writing about the Falklands)<sup>1</sup>

In 1982, Argentina and the United Kingdom fought a short and decisive war in the South Atlantic over possession of the islands known as *las Islas Malvinas*, or the Falkland Islands. Politicians, military planners and warriors on both sides made decisions that were good and poor, analyses that were correct and wrong and assumptions that were true and false. In the end, however, it was the United Kingdom that achieved an unqualified victory on the battlefield. Immediately, military professionals and scholars began to analyze the factors that had led to the war's outcome. The most frequent explanation to emerge from this debate is that British military superiority, reflected most prominently in their ground forces, simply overwhelmed the capabilities of the Argentine forces. This thesis will show that this was not the case and that, instead, poor Argentine conduct of the war was the primary reason for their defeat on the battlefield. While other analysts have pointed to the poor conduct of combat operations as the reason for defeat, they most often attribute this to inter-service rivalry.<sup>2</sup> However, the reality is that poor coordination between the services only played a minor part in shaping the outcome. Instead, the most important factor in the Argentine military's

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign: The Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign: The 1982 Falklands War and It's Aftermath*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005). Nora Kinzer Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos: Unit Cohesion in the Falklands*, (Washington D.C.: Brassey's (US), 1991). Martin Middlebrook, *The Argentine Fight for the Falklands*, (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2003). Duncan Anderson, *The Falklands War 1982*, (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 15-16.



defeat was the context in which critical decisions about the conduct of the war were made. This context involves a 'limited war culture', the effect of which was magnified by the importance of the senior military leadership as a constituency to which the junta was beholden.

A detailed analysis of the forces engaged, the geography of the battle space, and the conduct of operations reveals that the British held a definitive advantage in the quality of their ground forces. However, in the realm of air and naval forces the Argentines achieved parity with the British in many aspects and advantages in others. The geography of the battle space gave the Argentines a superior position relative to the British. The islands were much closer to Argentina and the nature of the islands forced the British to operate far from any bases or support facilities. Additionally, the operational factor of time aided the Argentine cause much more than the British. The impending arrival of winter in the South Atlantic was a pivotal factor in all aspects of military operations in the theater. The British edge in the quality of their ground forces was not sufficient to explain the outcome of the war. The Argentine conduct of the war and decisions regarding their employment of available forces played a much more decisive role in determining the result. Understanding the factors that drove these decisions is the key to explaining the Argentine military defeat. Specifically, it is necessary to examine the political motivations of the Junta and rivalries between the three services as a driving factor in poor decisions. Each of these three explanations, British ground force superiority, Argentine conduct of the war, and motivations and fractures within the military leadership will be examined in detail. This examination will illustrate that these explanations for the outcome of the war are insufficient to explain the outcome of the war.

The Argentines exhibited a limited war culture that was representative of a larger Latin American trend regarding military forces and their employment. This culture dominated ideas in Argentina about the conduct of military operations. Specifically, their war-fighting culture encompassed decisions about when to go to war, the employment of offensive or defensive strategies, acceptable casualty levels and the national "theory of

victory.”<sup>3</sup> The decisions of the Junta forced the military into conducting combat operations with severe restrictions that crippled their effectiveness. Equally important, the Argentine junta was obligated to a constituency which did not have military victory in the Falklands as its highest priority. In the end, although material advantage could not be claimed by either side, while the positional advantage was decidedly in the favor of Argentina, the atmosphere in which pivotal Argentine decisions were made had such a deleterious effect on the quality of those decisions that the British won the war with apparent ease.

## A. BACKGROUND

### 1. The Falkland Islands

The Falkland Islands are composed of approximately eight hundred islands lying in the South Atlantic Ocean.<sup>4</sup> The two largest are East and West Falkland and they represent the bulk of the approximately 4,700 square miles of land in the islands, an area that is roughly the size of the state of Connecticut.<sup>5</sup> The islands are located about 250 miles from the coast of Argentina.<sup>6</sup> Lying about 800 miles south of the Falklands is South Georgia and a further 500 miles are the South Sandwich Islands, both of which would also play a role in war.<sup>7</sup> The largest city and capital of the islands is Port Stanley, which lies just under 7,800 miles from the United Kingdom and 1,140 miles from Buenos Aires.<sup>8</sup> Lying at 51 degrees south latitude, the islands are exposed to the harsh weather of the southern Atlantic and the winter brings ample evidence that the Antarctic is not far

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Twomey, "Chinese Doctrines as Strategic Culture: Assessing Their Effects," *Strategic Insights* IV, no. 10 (2005).

<sup>4</sup> The British refer to the islands as the Falkland Islands and the Argentines as *las Islas Malvinas*. For simplicity and consistency this paper will refer to them as the Falkland Islands. This is not intended to reflect any normative judgment on the sovereignty dispute.

<sup>5</sup> "CIA World Factbook," in Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>, [Last Accessed September 2007].

<sup>6</sup> Freedman, *The Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War : the Falklands Conflict of 1982*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1991), xxiii.

away. The log of a ship returning to Spain in 1540 described the islands as “bare with not a bit of wood, very windy and very cold, because eight months in the year it snows and prevailing winds are south-west.”<sup>9</sup> Due largely to its location and the realities of geography, there is no arable land on the islands and the primary economic activity at the time of the conflict was sheep farming.<sup>10</sup> In 1982, there were approximately 1,800 people living on the Falklands.<sup>11</sup> The overwhelming majority of these were British citizens known as ‘kelpers’, but there were a handful of Argentines, Chileans and Americans living in the 589 residential buildings on the islands.<sup>12</sup> In 1982, these people would find themselves at the center of the world’s attention.

## 2. Origins of the Dispute

The British connection to the Falkland Islands dates to 1690. While sailing to Chile, poor weather forced Captain John Strong into the vicinity of the islands, which he explored and named for the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Falkland.<sup>13</sup> The earliest settlements on the islands were established in the 1760s. First, the French under the leadership of Antoine de Bougainville established Port Louis in 1764.<sup>14</sup> Two years later, in January of 1766, the commander of the British ship HMS *Jason*, John McBride founded a settlement at Saunders Island near the coast of West Falkland.<sup>15</sup> There is evidence that these two settlements existed in ignorance of each other.<sup>16</sup> However, an agreement between France and Spain signed on October 4, 1766 transferred the islands to Spanish control.<sup>17</sup> It was this agreement that led to the first militarized dispute over ownership of the islands.

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<sup>9</sup> Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 1st American ed., (New York: Norton, 1983), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *CIA World Factbook*.

<sup>11</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Freedman, *Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Freedman, *Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 3. Freedman, *The Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 4.



Figure 1. Satellite Image of the Falklands<sup>18</sup>

Furious that the British refused to leave the islands, the Spanish dispatched nearly 1,500 soldiers and five warships that ejected the British settlers in June of 1770.<sup>19</sup> As the two sides prepared for war, Spain acquiesced to British demands and allowed for the settlement at Saunders Island to be reestablished. Then, in 1774, the British voluntarily withdrew from the islands, however, as the settlers departed a plaque was left behind with the following inscription:

Be it known to all nations that the Falkland Islands, with this fort, the storehouses, wharfs, harbours, bays and creeks thereunto belonging are the sole right and property of His Most Sacred Majesty George the Third, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, etc. In

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<sup>18</sup> Image from NASA (In the public domain).

<sup>19</sup> Freedman, *Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, 5.

witness whereof this plaque is set up, and His Britannic Majesty's colours left flying as a mark of possession. By S.W.Clayton, Commanding Officer at Falkland Islands, AD 1774.<sup>20</sup>

For the next four decades the islands existed as a colony of Spain and free from international attention. On July 9, 1816, the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata, later to become Argentina, declared their independence from Spain and claimed all the territorial rights of Spain. A small Argentine outpost operated on the islands with little notice until June of 1829. The appointment of Louis Vernet as governor of the islands in 1829 renewed British interest.<sup>21</sup> A formal protest was issued by the British on November 19, 1829 arguing that the Argentine Republic had "assumed authority incompatible with His Britannick [sic] Majesty's rights of sovereignty over the Falkland Islands."<sup>22</sup> However, it was another matter that precipitated the British return to the islands. Governor Vernet began to enforce fishing regulations in the islands and seized three American vessels.<sup>23</sup> In response, the American warship USS *Lexington*, under the command of Silas Duncan, sailed to the islands "landed, destroyed all military installations, razed the buildings, seized sealskins, put most inhabitants under arrest and then left, declaring the Islands free of all government."<sup>24</sup> Seizing upon the confused situation, the British dispatched HMS *Tyne* and HMS *Clio* to the region and *Clio's* commander, Captain Onslow, raised the British flag over the islands on January 3, 1833.<sup>25</sup> Thus began a long-standing dispute between the United Kingdom and Argentina over who was the rightful owner of the Falkland Islands. The British flag would fly over the Falklands until April 2, 1982, when Argentine forces lowered it; the change was brief and by June 14<sup>th</sup>, the Union Jack once again flew over the Falklands.

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<sup>20</sup> Freedman, *The Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Freedman, *The Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, xxxi.

<sup>24</sup> Freedman, *Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, xxxii.

### 3. The Dispute Leading Up to the War

The dispute over the Falkland Islands simmered in Argentina from 1833 on, becoming an integral part of the national image. The issue reemerged on an international scale in 1964 when the United Nations Committee on Decolonization added the islands to its list of “territories that ought to be decolonized.”<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the committee agreed to the Argentine demand that ‘Malvinas’ be added to the official description of the islands.<sup>27</sup> The long-standing dispute over the islands received official recognition with the passing of Resolution 2065 in the United Nations’ General Assembly, by a vote of 45 to zero, with 14 abstentions, on December 16, 1965.<sup>28</sup> The resolution invited

the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to proceed without delay with the negotiations recommended by the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples with a view to finding a peaceful solution to the problem, bearing in the mind the provisions and objectives of the Charter of the United Nations and of General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and the interests of the population of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).<sup>29</sup>

This resolution became the foundation for 17 years of negotiations that proved to be largely fruitless.

The sticking point for the British was the issue of self-determination. From their perspective it was the ‘wishes’ of the islanders that had to be considered first and foremost. For the most part, the population of the islands “although small, was content” and “had no desire to see a change in status.”<sup>30</sup> The Argentines took a more literal view of Resolution 2065 and insisted that it was the ‘interests’ of the islanders and not their ‘wishes’ which should dominate the discussion. Some progress was made including an

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<sup>26</sup> Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, , 7.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>28</sup> Freedman, *Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> "General Assembly Resolution 2065," United Nations, <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/3892395.html>, [Last Accessed September 2007].

<sup>30</sup> Freedman, *Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, 21.

agreement in 1971 that established regular air service between the islands and Argentina.<sup>31</sup> However, definitive progress on the issue of sovereignty did not develop. The lack of movement in negotiations between the countries led to another United Nations' resolution, 3160, adopted by a vote of 99 for and zero against with 14 abstentions on December 14, 1973.<sup>32</sup> Referencing the earlier resolutions, the new measure expressed concern that eight years had elapsed without "any substantial progress having been made in the negotiations." It went on to declare the need to "accelerate negotiations" and urged the countries to "proceed without delay with the negotiations."<sup>33</sup> Despite renewed vigor on the part of both countries, the following decade failed to see the development of real progress. The arrival of a new Argentine government in late 1981 began the final act of negotiations.

On December 8, 1981 a new junta seized power in Argentina. It was led the commander of the Army, General Leopoldo Galtieri who was joined by the heads of the Navy and Air Force, Admiral Jorge Anaya and General Lami Dozo.<sup>34</sup> Within weeks of taking power the junta issued National Strategy Directive 1/82.

The Military Committee, faced with the evident and repeated lack of progress in the negotiations with Great Britain to obtain recognition of our sovereignty over the Malvinas, Georgias and South Sandwich Islands; convinced that the prolongation of this situation affects national honour, the full exercise of sovereignty and the exploration of resources; has resolved to analyse the possibility of the use of military power to obtain the political objective. This resolution must be kept in strict secrecy and should be circulated only to the heads of the respective military departments.<sup>35</sup>

Ironically, the crisis would be brought to a head far from the Falklands on the rugged Island of South Georgia. The British were outraged by the actions of an Argentine merchant, Constantino Davidoff, who was attempting to scrap an abandoned whaling

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<sup>31</sup> Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Freedman, *Origins of the Falklands Conflict*, 30.

<sup>33</sup> "United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3160," United Nations, <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/6413810.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and It's Aftermath*, 153.

<sup>35</sup> Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and It's Aftermath*, 154.

station for the raw materials. After failing to comply with British visa entry procedures, raising the Argentine flag over South Georgia and the arrival of both British and Argentine military forces in the vicinity of the island, things reached the boiling point.<sup>36</sup> At 715 p.m. on the evening of Friday March 26, 1982, the junta ordered the invasion of the Falkland Islands; the war had begun.<sup>37</sup>

## **B. THE WAR**

At about 11 p.m. on the night of April 1, 1982, the first Argentine military forces, 92 marines from the Amphibious Commando Company, landed on East Falkland near Lake Point.<sup>38</sup> The next morning, the invasion elements began to land in force. At 930 a.m. on the morning of April 2, faced with an overwhelming Argentine force, the Governor of the Falklands, Rex Hunt, surrendered.<sup>39</sup> Reaction to the bold move by the Argentines was swift. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had received last minute intelligence reports of the impending invasion and “shortly after midnight on 1/2 April, orders began pouring out of the Ministry of Defence to warships, the Royal Marines and to squadrons of the Royal Air Force;” a task force was dispatched to the South Atlantic with all possible haste.<sup>40</sup> On April 3, a coordinating operation landed Argentine forces on South Georgia via helicopter and they were able to quickly compel the Royal Marine detachment at Grytviken to surrender.<sup>41</sup> That same day, the United Nations’ Security Council adopted Resolution 502. The vote was 10 in favor, one opposed (Panama) and four against (China, Poland, Spain and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics).<sup>42</sup> The resolution contained three critical clauses. First, it demanded the “immediate cessation of hostilities.” Second, it required the “immediate withdrawal of all Argentine forces from

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<sup>36</sup> Anderson, 15-16. Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and It's Aftermath*, 186.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>38</sup> Middlebrook, 26.

<sup>39</sup> Anderson, 20.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> "United Nations Security Council Resolution 505," United Nations, <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/9853788.html>, [Last Accessed September 2007].



the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas).” Finally, it called on the governments of Argentina and Great Britain to “seek a diplomatic solution to their differences.”<sup>43</sup> While this was a major diplomatic victory for the British, it did very little to remedy the situation.

In the weeks that followed the armed forces of both Great Britain and Argentina began to deploy large forces to the area around the Falkland Islands. The first Argentine troops to reinforce the islands were the 8<sup>th</sup> Regiment which left its barracks at Comodoro Rivadavia and began movement via aircraft on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April.<sup>44</sup> By the end of April, Argentina had deployed three (III, IX, and X) of its nine brigades of front-line army troops, along with significant marine forces to the Falklands.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, a large British task force consisting of three nuclear powered submarines, more than 4,000 ground troops, two aircraft carriers and nearly thirty other ships were racing toward the South Atlantic from all over the globe.<sup>46</sup> The Argentine forces would be commanded by Brigadier General Mario Menéndez and the British Task Force was technically commanded by Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse, the Royal Navy Commander-in-Chief Fleet, but in actuality, Rear Admiral John ‘Sandy’ Woodward would lead the operation to recover the Falklands.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> "United Nations Security Council Resolution 505," United Nations, <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/9853788.html>, [Last Accessed September 2007].

<sup>44</sup> Middlebrook, 47.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 47-56.

<sup>46</sup> Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and its Aftermath*, 50-54.

<sup>47</sup> Anderson, 27, 29.



Figure 2. HMS *Sheffield* on fire after being hit by Exocet missile.<sup>48</sup>

Fire between the two forces was first exchanged on April 25. British helicopters forced the Argentine submarine *Santa Fe* to beach on South Georgia.<sup>49</sup> Later, Royal Marines landed on the island and the Argentine defenders surrendered.<sup>50</sup> The next dramatic moment in the conflict came during the afternoon of May 2. The British nuclear powered submarine HMS *Conqueror* torpedoed and sank the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano*; this proud ship had been commissioned into the United States Navy as the USS *Phoenix* on October 3, 1938.<sup>51</sup> Three years later, she survived the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii and served throughout the Pacific Theater for the balance of

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<sup>48</sup> "Official Website of the Royal Navy," Ministry of Defense, <http://www.royal-navy.mod.uk/server/show/ConMediaFile.25062#>, [Last Accessed September 2007].

<sup>49</sup> Anderson, ,8.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>51</sup> Anderson, 38.

World War II.<sup>52</sup> In an ironic twist of fate, the British torpedo fired from HMS *Conqueror* that sent the *Belgrano* to the bottom was a Mark 8, also of World War II vintage.<sup>53</sup> On the 4<sup>th</sup> of May, the Argentines hit back, striking HMS *Sheffield* with an Exocet anti-ship missile, eventually causing her to sink.<sup>54</sup> In the opening salvos of the war, each side had lost a ship.

Over the following three weeks, the Argentine and British forces engaged in a battle to gain control of the seas and air around the Falklands. However, neither side was able to inflict significant damage on the other, nor was any meaningful advantage gained by either side. On May 21, 1982, about 4,000 British troops landed on the northern coast of East Falkland at a place called San Carlos Water.<sup>55</sup> The days after the landing saw some of the most ferocious fighting of the war. The Argentines mounted a series of air attacks against British shipping that, although uncoordinated, were able to inflict substantial damage, sinking six more ships and damaging more than a dozen others.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, British land forces were fighting their way across East Falkland. After sharp battles at Goose Green on May 28<sup>th</sup>, Mount Longdon on June 11<sup>th</sup> and Mount Tumbledown on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of June, the British had routed the Argentine defenders. On June 13, 1982, General Menéndez surrendered nearly 12,000 men under his command.<sup>57</sup> Less than two and half months after the Argentine invasion, the Falkland Islands had been retaken by British forces.

### C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the course of events that led up to the war and the unfolding of the battles that ensued is important to frame any discussion of the broader issues at play. Sir Lawrence Freedman wrote the sanctioned history of the conflict for the British in *The*

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<sup>52</sup> Anderson, 38

<sup>53</sup> Sandy Woodward and Patrick Robinson, *One Hundred Days: The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*, (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1992), 150.

<sup>54</sup> Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and it's Aftermath*, 300.

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and it's Aftermath*, 779.

<sup>57</sup> Anderson, 10.

*Official History of the Falklands Campaign*<sup>58</sup> which is presented in two volumes, the first focusing on the history of the conflict over the islands and the second on the 1982 war. He later teamed up with Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse to examine the political and diplomatic signals exchanged between the belligerents in more detail.<sup>59</sup> Further general history of the combat events that took place can be found in *The Battle for the Falklands*.<sup>60</sup> Several key commanders of British forces have also written about their experiences in the Falklands in works that accurately portray the combat that occurred: Admiral Sandy Woodward, the naval task force commander<sup>61</sup>, Julian Thompson, the commander of 3 Commando Brigade<sup>62</sup>, and Ian Inskip, an officer onboard HMS *Glamorgan*<sup>63</sup>. Argentine perspective on the operations is admirably addressed by Martin Middlebrook's *The Argentine Fight for the Falklands*.<sup>64</sup> This work is especially valuable because it draws upon significant primary sources and several Argentine books in Spanish, including: *Dios y los Halcones, Malvinas—La Defensa de Puerto Argentino, Comandos en Accion* and *Testimonio de su Gobernador*.<sup>65</sup> Additional insight into the origins of the conflict can be found in Virginia Gamba's *The Falklands/Malvinas War: A Model for North-South Crisis Prevention*<sup>66</sup> and a U.S. Army War College paper by Sergio Fernandez.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Freedman, *The Origins of the Falklands Conflict*. Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and it's Aftermath*.

<sup>59</sup> Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse.

<sup>60</sup> Hastings and Jenkins.

<sup>61</sup> Woodward and Robinson.

<sup>62</sup> Julian Thompson, *No Picnic: The Story of 3 Commando Brigade in the Falklands War*, (Glasgow, Great Britain: Fontana/Collins, 1985).

<sup>63</sup> Ian Inskip, *Ordeal by Exocet: HMS Glamorgan and the Falklands War 1982*, (London: Greenhill Books, 2006).

<sup>64</sup> Middlebrook.

<sup>65</sup> Pablo M. R. Cabrallo, *Dios y los Halcones*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Abril, 1983). Oscar L. Jofre, *Malvinas--La Defensa de Puerto Argentino*, (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1987). Ruiz Moreno, Isidoro J., *Comandos en acción*, (Madrid: Editorial San Martín, 1987). Carlos M. Turolo, *Malvinas--Testimonio de su Gobernador*, (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1983).

<sup>66</sup> Virginia Gamba, *The Falklands/Malvinas War: A Model for North-South Crisis Prevention*, (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

<sup>67</sup> Sergio Fernandez, "Malvinas 1982: Symmetrical Misunderstandings and Overreactions Lead the Way to War" (Ph.D. diss., United States Army War College, 2002).

There is a large amount of literature that emphasizes the superiority of the British forces sent to the Falklands. Stewart emphasizes the long tradition of British military excellence and expounds on the importance of rigorous training for British forces.<sup>68</sup> Martin Middlebrook quotes several Argentine soldiers whose close encounters with British ground forces emphasized their ascendancy.<sup>69</sup> Even the British task force commander writes about the relative capacity of the belligerent forces.<sup>70</sup> However, is the superiority of British forces a sufficient explanation for the outcome of the war? Upon close examination, it is not. Milan Vego goes to extraordinary lengths to describe the complex nature of modern military operations as defined by three critical factors and force is only one of the three.<sup>71</sup> Chapter 2 analyzes the belligerents in terms of these factors – force, time and space – in order to gain a much better appreciation of the relative strength of the opposing sides at the start of hostilities. It shows that Argentina could have won the war, but important decisions were made that undermined their chances. This analysis is supported by intelligence analyses and the opinions of various political leaders in Britain and the United States which suggest that, at the outset at least, the outcome of the war was very much in doubt.<sup>72</sup>

The junta's strategic missteps can be grouped into three areas: employment of naval forces, selection and deployment of ground forces and uncoordinated air attacks on the British task force. While these will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, they can be summarized here. Following the sinking of the *General Belgrano* by the British submarine HMS *Conqueror* the Argentine Navy failed to engage or challenge British control of the sea.<sup>73</sup> For example, the Argentines had three very capable diesel electric

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<sup>68</sup> Stewart, 192.

<sup>69</sup> Middlebrook, 181, 196-197, 275.

<sup>70</sup> Woodward and Robinson.

<sup>71</sup> Milan N. Vego, *Operational Warfare*, (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College, 2000), 29.

<sup>72</sup> John Arquilla and Maria Moyano Rasmussen, "The Origins of the South Atlantic War," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 33 (2001): 739-771. Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street years*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993). Alexander Meigs Haig, *Caveat : Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan, 1984).

<sup>73</sup> Edward B. Zellem, "Clausewitz and Seapower: Lessons of the Falkland Islands War" (Ph.D. diss., Air Command and Staff College Air University, 1999).

submarines available that they failed to employ in a meaningful manner.<sup>74</sup> Prime Minister Thatcher understood the importance of the Argentine Navy being removed from the equation in the South Atlantic.<sup>75</sup> The selection and deployment of ground forces to the Falklands represent another set of critical decisions. Despite outnumbering the British assault force by a substantial margin, the Argentine ground troops were not adequately prepared to repulse the attack.<sup>76</sup> However, the very best Argentine troops were not deployed to the Falklands, troops specifically trained and equipped for fighting in cold, mountainous terrain.<sup>77</sup> The Argentine officer chosen to command the defenders of the Falklands was chosen largely for political expediency rather than combat prowess.<sup>78</sup> Finally, Argentine Special Forces were delayed in their deployment and poorly employed.<sup>79</sup> The uncoordinated employment of Argentine aircraft against the British task force eliminated the best chance to stop the invasion and repulse the entire force.<sup>80</sup> Even General Menendez lamented the poor coordination and execution of air attacks in theater.<sup>81</sup> Compounding the uncoordinated employment of air forces was the Argentine failure to extend the runway at Stanley thus allowing the operation of high-performance aircraft from the islands.<sup>82</sup>

Understanding why so many errors were made by the Argentine leadership requires an examination of the context in which their decisions were made. There are ample sources that cite the desire of the junta to divert attention from domestic problems

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<sup>74</sup> Zellem.

<sup>75</sup> Thatcher, 228.

<sup>76</sup> Anderson, 31.

<sup>77</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 764.

<sup>78</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 75.

Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, 147.

<sup>79</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 764.

<sup>80</sup> Zellem, 30.

<sup>81</sup> *Selected Extracts from Conflictio Malvinas: Official Report of the Argentine Army*, trans. CAPT Robert C. Rubel, USN (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College, 2006).

<sup>82</sup> Anderson, 31.

as a primary motivator for the invasion.<sup>83</sup> There is even evidence to suggest that the invasion had the desired effect, at least in the short term.<sup>84</sup> However, this explanation falls short because it is all but impossible to link the motivations behind the initial invasion with the quality of battlefield performance. Instead, the most important factor shaping the junta's strategic decision-making was the limited war culture that predominated among the Argentine military.<sup>85</sup> The risk averseness typical of limited war culture held particular sway because of the dominance of the senior military leadership of the individual services as a constituency to which the junta was almost entirely beholden.<sup>86</sup> The Argentine case is examined through the lens of literature relating to the general topic of strategic culture and its implication on decision making.<sup>87</sup> The importance of limited war culture in explaining the outcome in the Argentine case points to the need to examine the impact of war-fighting culture on battlefield events separate from studies of strategic culture and decisions about when to initiate war.

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<sup>83</sup> T.V. Paul, *Assymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Jack Levy, "Domestic Politics and War," in *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, ed. Robert I Rotbery and Theodore K Rabb. Anonymous (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1988). Carlos Moneta, "The Malvinas Conflict: Analyzing the Argentine Military Regime's Decision-Making Process," in *Latin American Nations in World Politics*, ed. Heraldo Muñoz and Joseph S Tulchin, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984).

<sup>84</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 75.

<sup>85</sup> Miguel Angel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 90-91.

<sup>86</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 762.

<sup>87</sup> Stephen Peter Rosen, *Societies and Military Power: India and its Armies*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996). Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Anatol Rapoport trans. Routledge & Keegan Paul Ltd. (London: Penguin Books, 1968). Jason McClure, "The Falklands War: Causes and Lessons," *Strategic Insights* III, no. II (2004). Andrew Scobell, "Strategic Culture and China: IR Theory Versus the Fortune Cookie," *Strategic Insights* IV, no. 10 (2004). Twomey. Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options*, (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 1977). Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Thomas Cleary. (Boston: Shambhala, 1988).

## II. ASSESSING THE BELLIGERENTS

So it is said that if you know others and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know others but know yourself, you win one and lose one; if you do not know others and do not know yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.

Sun Tzu<sup>88</sup>

Before examining the conduct of the war, errors made by commanders and the context in which those errors were made, it is first necessary to assess the military situation in the South Atlantic. If British forces were so superior to their Argentine adversaries that the outcome of the war was a forgone conclusion, then there is little point in studying the decisions made by the leadership in Argentina. However, this chapter demonstrates that the war for the Falklands *could* have been a close run contest. Milan Vego's *Operational Warfare* will be used as the primary framework for assessing the situation in the South Atlantic Theater.<sup>89</sup> This work is a primary text for students at the United States Naval War College, and as such is a key reference for students of modern warfare.<sup>90</sup> Vego identifies three operational factors: "space, time and force in a given theater of operations."<sup>91</sup> These three elements will provide the backbone for analyzing the relative strength of the Argentine and British positions. The element of force will be examined in terms of ground, naval and air forces. The elements of time and space are not easily manipulated by either side, but play a crucial role in shaping the way that any war is fought. Exploration of the situation will show that both sides were able to claim distinct advantages, none of which were overwhelming enough to predestine the war's result.

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<sup>88</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Thomas Cleary. (Boston: Shambhala, 1988), 82.

<sup>89</sup> Milan N. Vego, *Operational Warfare*, (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College, 2000).

<sup>90</sup> "Joint Maritime Operations Fleet Seminar and NWC-Monterey Programs Syllabus and Study Guide, Academic Year 2006-2007," (Newport, Rhode Island: United States Naval War College, 2006).

<sup>91</sup> Vego, 29.



## A. FORCE

The first factor examined will be force. Force involves physical characteristics such as “number of personnel and weapons and equipment, physical mobility, firepower, command organization, logistics, and quality of weapons and equipment.”<sup>92</sup> These characteristics of force are relatively easy to quantify, but there are other important attributes to consider that are more difficult to measure. These include the “human elements of a force, specifically leadership, morale, discipline, small-unit cohesion, combat motivation, and doctrine.”<sup>93</sup> The Argentine and British forces will be compared across the three primary service components. Different command organizations make some direct comparisons difficult. However, by assessing the overall capabilities in specific functional areas, a reasonably accurate sense of the situation can be obtained.

### 1. Air Forces

Due to the nature of the theater, a small group of islands surrounded by a very large area of open ocean, the air component was vital to both sides during the war. In purely numerical terms, the Argentines held an overwhelming advantage in numbers of fixed wing aircraft available for employment. The total number of Argentine fixed wing aircraft employed was 216 against a British total of just 55.<sup>94</sup> This was a ratio of almost four to one. Additionally, not all of the British planes were readily employable against targets in the Falklands. The British were able to employ Vulcan bombers in strikes against the airfield at Stanley, but the enormous effort required delivered only minimal damage. Early on the morning of May 1, a single Vulcan bomber of the Royal Air Force 101 Squadron, flown by Flight Lieutenant Martin Withers, attacked the airfield at Stanley.<sup>95</sup> It was “an epic flight from Ascension Island which involved seventeen air-to-

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<sup>92</sup> Vego, 59.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>94</sup> John Arquilla and Maria Moyano Rasmussen, "The Origins of the South Atlantic War," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 33 (2001), 755.

<sup>95</sup> Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 1st Americaned. (New York: Norton, 1983), 143.

air refueling operations outward and inbound.”<sup>96</sup> While this certainly was an asset for the British, its impact was very limited. With land based aircraft constrained by the distance from friendly bases, the British were forced to rely on the Sea Harriers (SHAR) deployed onboard their two aircraft carriers, HMS *Invincible* and HMS *Hermes*. When the carriers departed from Britain, they carried just eight and twelve Harriers respectively.<sup>97</sup> Although they would later be reinforced, the new numbers were barely sufficient to make up for combat losses and aircraft that were not operational due to maintenance issues. Against this, the Argentines had an inventory of approximately 65 American made A-4 Skyhawks, 36 Israeli made Daggers (essentially the same aircraft as the French built Mirage V), 14 French built Mirage III, and six British built Canberra bombers.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, the Argentine Navy had five Super Etendards, capable of carrying the Exocet anti-ship cruise missile.<sup>99</sup> In terms of numbers, the Argentines held an overwhelming advantage in fixed wing aircraft.

Some of the Argentine advantage in numbers was offset by British technological superiority. Most notably, the British Harriers were equipped with the latest ‘Lima’ variant of the AIM-9 Sidewinder missile.<sup>100</sup> Writing in 1991, Admiral Sandy Woodward, commander of the British Task Force remarked, “the new American Sidewinder air-to-air missile was one of the most decisive weapons in the combat above the ground, and over the ocean.”<sup>101</sup> The Admiral communicated to his superiors the advantages of the new missile in offsetting the performance and numerical superiority of the Argentine aircraft.

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<sup>96</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 144.

<sup>97</sup> Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and its Aftermath*, 52.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>100</sup> American and British military equipment improvements are generally identified by an alphabetical suffix. In this case, ‘Lima’ is the military designation for L which was a newer version than the G or ‘Gulf’ missiles in the British inventory.

<sup>101</sup> Woodward and Robinson, xvii.

Mirage kills to date have been with AIM 9L with firings at extremities or outside expected 9G brackets. Live combat has proved that SHAR needs improved performance of the AIM 9L to counter Mirage speed superiority. It is essential that further Sidewinders supplied are Lima variant.<sup>102</sup>

Despite this edge in air-to-air weaponry, the British were still at a distinct disadvantage. The Argentines could afford to absorb significant combat losses and still maintain a greater number of aircraft in the theater. However, the British numbers were so limited that losses due to combat, weather or maintenance issues would severely degrade their capability to gain sufficient control of the air to launch an invasion.



Figure 3. Royal Navy Sea Harriers<sup>103</sup>

## 2. Naval Forces

The navies of Great Britain and Argentina differed dramatically on the eve of the war. When the war started the Argentine Navy was comprised of a number of ships that had been built before World War II, operating alongside modern warships that boasted

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<sup>102</sup> SHAR is the abbreviation for Sea Harrier.

<sup>103</sup> "Official Website of the Royal Navy," in Ministry of Defense, <http://www.royal-navy.mod.uk/server/show/ConMediaFile.25062#>, [Last Accessed September 2007].

the newest innovations in weaponry. Representing the older ships was the flag ship of the fleet, the *General Belgrano*. On the opposite end of the naval spectrum, the Argentine fleet boasted the destroyers *Santisima Trinidad* and *Hercules*. These latter two ships were Type 42 expeditionary destroyers, designed and built by Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering, Ltd. in the United Kingdom.<sup>104</sup> These ships were first-rate warships, the Royal Navy task force that sailed from the Britain boasted five sister ships in its company, HMS *Cardiff*, HMS *Coventry*, HMS *Exeter*, HMS *Glasgow* and HMS *Sheffield*.<sup>105</sup> The remainder of the Argentine naval surface forces represented a similar mix, old and new. Three new French built A69 frigates were available for service and as many as 14 of the ships in the Argentine surface fleet were capable of carrying the Exocet missile.<sup>106</sup> The Argentines also had one aircraft carrier, the *Veinticinco de Mayo*, originally built for the Royal Navy in 1945, she was capable of carrying A-4 Skyhawks, S-2 Trackers and Sea King helicopters.<sup>107</sup> The British assessed that the carrier would only be able to carry out “limited air-to-air and air-to surface operations in good weather conditions.”<sup>108</sup> This surface fleet was not as large as the Royal Navy, but it was capable and Admiral Woodward understood the Argentines to have “surface, underwater and air capability and that their fleet was substantial.”<sup>109</sup>

Argentina also had submarine forces available for operations in the Falklands War. Intelligence reports indicate that the Argentines had four serviceable submarines available for tasking and at least three were operating in or near the theater at the time of the war.<sup>110</sup> Of these, it was the two German made Type 209s, *Salta* and *Santa Fe*, that most concerned the British. The tracking and destroying of these submarines was the highest priority for British nuclear-powered attack submarines as they were “causing

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<sup>104</sup> "Official Website of the Royal Navy," in Ministry of Defense, <http://www.royal-navy.mod.uk>, [Last accessed September 2007].

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and it's Aftermath*, 73-74.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>109</sup> Woodward and Robinson, 74.

<sup>110</sup> Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and it's Aftermath*, 214.

much concern to Admiral Woodward and his staff, as well as to the war cabinet.<sup>111</sup> These submarines were extremely capable and “were acoustically superior to a number of the British nuclear hunter-killers.”<sup>112</sup> During the war, the British were never able to confirm that an Argentine submarine had conducted an attack on their surface forces. Most compelling however, is the fact that their mere presence at sea created uncertainty and at least once, “British ships were forced to abandon shore bombardment of the Falklands when their anti-submarine warfare assets detected a possible subsurface contact.”<sup>113</sup>

The force that opposed the Argentines was Great Britain’s Royal Navy. Only the portion of the Royal Navy that were committed to the action in the South Atlantic will be examined, as large portions of the fleet were committed to operations elsewhere that did not impact the fight for the Falklands. The British deployed two aircraft carriers, the larger HMS *Hermes* and the smaller HMS *Invincible*. They were accompanied by a large number of destroyers and frigates, including one Type 82 destroyer, two County Class frigates, the five Type 42 destroyers that were sister ships to the Argentine’s *Santisima Trinidad* and *Hercules*, two Type 22 frigates, seven Type 21 frigates, four Leander Class frigates and two Rothesay Class frigates.<sup>114</sup> In addition, the British deployed a total of five nuclear powered attack submarines and one diesel-electric boat. Additionally, eight amphibious warfare and landing ships were dispatched as part of the group.<sup>115</sup> Finally, there were nearly 60 vessels serving as Royal Fleet Auxiliaries, troop transports or STUFT (Ships Taken Up from Trade).<sup>116</sup> These vessels were responsible for moving the enormous amount of supplies required to maintain the task force as well as providing non-combat services such as refueling and towing. The British held an advantage in numerical and technological terms; their fleet was in the top tier of the world’s navies.

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<sup>111</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 147.

<sup>112</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 756

<sup>113</sup> Edward B. Zelle, "Clausewitz and Seapower: Lessons of the Falkland Islands War" (Ph.D. diss., Air Command and Staff College Air University, 1999), 20.

<sup>114</sup> Hastings and Jenkins, 346-348.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 349-350.

However, intelligence estimates received from the U.S. Navy indicated that the Argentine Navy maintained “technical proficiency” along with “high levels of training and professionalism.”<sup>117</sup> A pitched battle at sea was unlikely, but the Argentine naval forces were fully capable of harassing the British, inflicting significant losses and making it difficult, if not impossible, for the latter to land troops on the Falklands.

### 3. Ground Forces

Comparisons between the air and naval forces of the belligerents reveal some level of parity and advantages held by both sides. However, in the realm of ground forces, no such parity existed. The Argentine ground forces sent to defend the Falklands were no match for the British sent to retake the islands. The British inherited a military tradition of exceptional war-fighting that spanned the centuries, encompassing: “The Charge of the Light Brigade, the Crimea, the Khyber Pass, Waterloo, Trafalgar, the Somme, Ypres, Flanders Field, Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, Burma, Arnhem, Borneo, Aden, Belfast.”<sup>118</sup> These were the warriors of a society that has a bellicose history and a war-fighting tradition grounded on extensive victory in combat. The nature of the British military was such that long periods of service are common, most leaders serve a minimum of nine years and even the lowliest soldier’s term of service was at least four years.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, the intensity of training that the British practiced while on ships sailing for the Falklands is a telling demarcation of the difference between the forces. The troops ran so much around the decks of the ships that the “ship’s plating began to loosen and pop.”<sup>120</sup> Even more impressive than the physical training that the British forces endured was the quantity of weapons training that they conducted. During the task force’s brief “two-week stopover at Ascension Island, British troops used thirty-seven and a half years of training allowance of ammunition in their two-week practice

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<sup>117</sup> Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and its Aftermath*, 73.

<sup>118</sup> Nora Kinzer Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos: Unit Cohesion in the Falklands*, (Washington D.C.: Brassey's (US), 1991), 32.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* 101.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

sessions.”<sup>121</sup> Clearly, the British forces were preparing for the deadly business ahead. This stands in sharp contrast to the experience of an Argentine conscript who said “no one had taught me how to shoot.”<sup>122</sup>

The superiority of the British military was nowhere more evident than in the infantry that the British were able to land on the Falklands. Numerous observations by Argentine military personnel indicate that they knew their adversaries were a better fighting force. Lieutenant-Colonel Piaggi commanded the Argentine defenders at the Battle of Goose Greene. In preparing for the British assault he observed:

I did not think that we could hold out for long, particularly because of my reading of British military history, which showed that they would attack with skill and with at least the necessary strength—and probably more. I had read all about that in books on the Second World War.<sup>123</sup>

When the British attacked early on the morning of May 28, they relied on their “superior tactical training to overcome the dangers of operating in the bare Falklands terrain.”<sup>124</sup> It is a telling statistic that the 450 British infantrymen who attacked the Argentines at Goose Greene took approximately 1500 prisoners.<sup>125</sup> Javier Pereda was a radio operator on the Argentine hospital ship *Almirante Irizar* which transported wounded Argentine soldiers back to the mainland. After speaking with several wounded soldiers, he remarked that “they had a high regard for the professionalism of the British; it was as though the British were fighting a different war.”<sup>126</sup> Even the British task force commander understood the qualitative advantage that his forces enjoyed, writing in his journal with a sense of relief that “Argentina doesn’t breed bulldogs.”<sup>127</sup>

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121 Stewart. 62.

122 Stewart, 90.

123 Martin Middlebrook, *The Argentine Fight for the Falklands*, (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2003) 181.

124 *Ibid.*, 181.

125 *Ibid.*, 196-197.

126 *Ibid.*, 275.

127 Woodward and Robinson, 344.

U.S. Army sociologist Nora Kinzer Stewart has written extensively about the contrasts between the Argentine and British forces that fought in the Falklands War. Her book, *Mates and Muchachos: Unit Cohesion in the Falklands/Malvinas War*, examines in some detail the qualitative differences between the Argentine and British forces deployed to the Falklands. The divergence she observed in their training hints at why British ground forces seemed to win with such ease.

British officers believe in subjecting their men in training conditions to expect the unexpected. Sometimes meals don't arrive. Sometimes ammunition runs out. Officers continually test their men and push them beyond what the trainee or soldier think is his limit.<sup>128</sup>

This stands in stark contrast with the force that these soldiers would face.

With few exceptions, the Argentine Army did not train its men or prepare them for the battle ahead. In the Falklands, officers and NCOs had to show their completely untrained troops how to handle and fire their weapons and to dig their foxholes. Their training was confused at best.<sup>129</sup>

This training made a large impact once British ground forces were ashore in the Falklands. The weather was cold and miserable throughout the campaign and the loss of the *Atlantic Conveyor* meant that helicopter transport was not available, forcing the troops to march from San Carlos Water to Stanley.

## **B. TIME**

In the conduct of warfare, time "is one of the most precious commodities."<sup>130</sup> The factor of time should be considered to be relatively fixed, it can be helpful or harmful to the operational commander, but cannot easily be manipulated to conform to the commander's intentions.<sup>131</sup> For all sides in a war, the unstoppable march of time impacts operations and planning. For a defending force, in this case the Argentines, the goal

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<sup>128</sup> Stewart, 60.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>130</sup> Vego, 47.

<sup>131</sup> Vego, 47.



should be to “delay the decision as long as possible.”<sup>132</sup> Conversely, for attacking forces, the British, “it is critically important that his actions be as short as possible.”<sup>133</sup> In terms of the offensive and defensive, time favored the Argentines, but this was not the only manner in which time was their ally.

Time relative to the weather was also on the Argentine side. The Argentines seized the Falklands during autumn of the Southern Hemisphere and hostilities concluded as winter was arriving. The South Atlantic winter would have precluded many of the operations that the British conducted, including free employment of carrier based aviation assets, both fixed and rotary wing, and amphibious landings. Additionally, the onset of winter would have made conditions for ground forces even more miserable than they already were. Admiral Woodward made this abundantly clear when he contended that had General Menéndez been able to “spin the land campaign out another ten days... that would have finished us, not him.”<sup>134</sup> Additional time would also have provided an opportunity for the Argentines to reinforce their positions and establish a better defense. However, additional time would bring only limited additional forces, particularly naval and air for the British. The bulk of their assets were committed to the task force when it sailed and there were no additional forces to add. Napoleon best described the relationship between the commander and time when he told his Marshals, “ask me for anything but time.”<sup>135</sup> Time can help or hinder a given sides efforts, but it cannot be stopped or slowed and thus its value must be quickly recognized and leveraged or any possible advantage is lost.

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132 Vego, 48.

133 Ibid., 47.

134 Woodward and Robinson, 360.

135 Vego, 47.

### C. SPACE

The factor of space, like that of force, is complex and encompasses many elements including: “land, sea and airspace, including outer space, with all their features, which influence employment and effectiveness of land, sea and air forces.”<sup>136</sup>



Figure 4. Map of Theater<sup>137</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Vego, 33.

<sup>137</sup> Huntingdon College, <http://fs.huntingdon.edu/jlewis/Syl/IRcomp/MapsFalklands.htm>, [Last accessed September 2007].

Space, in terms of geography and operational objectives also favored the Argentines. The distance from London to Port Stanley is five and a half times greater than the distance from Buenos Aires to the Falkland's capital.<sup>138</sup> This meant that every British soldier moving to the operational theater required five times as much fuel, took five times as long in transit, and inflicted five times as much wear and tear on equipment just to arrive in the contested area. It also meant that every bullet, bandage, meal and miscellaneous item of military value had to make the same long journey before a sailor on a ship, soldier on the ground or pilot in the air could employ it. The Argentines were also advantageously placed in terms of the operational objective. They only had to defend a small geographic area and every day they did so helped their cause. On the other hand, the British had to attempt to gain air and sea superiority over the area surrounding the objective, protect a long supply line, and contend with numerous enemy bases near the fight. Having done these things, they had to conduct an amphibious landing that Sir John Fieldhouse described as “the most difficult thing we have attempted since the Second World War.”<sup>139</sup> Thus, the distinct advantage of the British infantry was offset by Argentine parity in terms of naval and air forces. Additionally, the location of the Falkland Islands and the inevitable march of time played to the Argentine advantage.

Opinions and assessments by American and British experts bear witness to the fact that the British victory was not a foregone conclusion. The really critical point is “that Argentina did indeed have reasonable chances of winning a war for the Falklands, a view shared by the British, American and Soviet military analysts—and by the commander of the British expeditionary forces.”<sup>140</sup> Doubts about the outcome of the war went all the way to the top of the British government. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher notes in her memoirs that prior to the Argentine seizure of the Falklands she was advised by the defense minister John Nott that the Ministry of Defence's view was “that the

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<sup>138</sup> Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War : the Falklands Conflict of 1982*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1991), xxiii.

<sup>139</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 754.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* 758.

Falklands could not be retaken once they were seized.”<sup>141</sup> Alexander Haig believed that there was never any doubt of British victory, but tempered his own view by acknowledging that “this was not an opinion that was universally held among the White House staff, the American military, or intelligence analysts—or even by every knowledgeable Briton.”<sup>142</sup> These observations highlight the fallacy of the argument that British military superiority in ground forces assured them of victory. It must be emphasized that the outcome of the war cannot, in and of itself, be used as the explanation for why that outcome occurred. “The fact that Britain did win this war does not imply that it *had* to win; or that the Argentinian perceptions of their winning chances were necessarily mistaken.”<sup>143</sup>

The Falklands War was a resounding victory for the British military, but when the war began this outcome was not guaranteed. The location of the battle space gave Argentina a massive advantage that the British could do very little to counter. Additionally, time was in the favor the Argentines, each day that passed brought the South Atlantic’s brutal winter weather closer. Finally, the Argentine military was superior in certain areas and, despite the overwhelming quality of British ground forces, could have made the war a much more closely contested affair. In the end, it was poor management of the available assets and failure to capitalize on advantages that cost the Argentines the war. These failures were a result of deliberate decisions made at the highest levels of command.

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<sup>141</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street years*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993), 179.

<sup>142</sup> Alexander Meigs Haig, *Caveat : Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Macmillan, 1984), 268.

<sup>143</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 756.

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### III. ARGENTINE CONDUCT OF THE WAR

No one starts a war--or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so--without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it.

**Carl von Clausewitz<sup>144</sup>**

Having established that it was possible, and at the onset even probable, that the Argentines could have won the war, it is necessary to examine why they did not. Identifying their missteps, mistakes and missed opportunities is critical to understanding the battlefield results. Defeat in the Falklands for Argentina was a product of a series of decisions that squandered an initially viable opportunity for a successful military campaign. The most critical aspects of Argentine conduct of the war were crude employment of naval forces, the selection of ground forces deployed to garrison the islands and the uncoordinated use of air power. In the naval realm, the loss of the *Belgrano*, the haphazard nature of submarine operations and ultimately the decision to withdraw major naval units from the fight were pivotal in shaping the course of the war. The ground forces sent to defend the islands, including their commander, did not represent the best that Argentina had available and they performed at a requisite level. Despite some significant successes against the British, the Argentines were never able to mount an air campaign sufficient to cripple the task force's operations. When these decisions, all of which had a direct impact on the British ability to leverage their advantage in ground forces, are taken together, they make clear the path that led to Argentine defeat.

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<sup>144</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret., (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1984), 577.

## A. EMPLOYMENT OF NAVAL FORCES

Perhaps no aspect of the war better exposes the differences between the British and Argentine commanders than their employment of naval forces. Considering the geography of the battle space and the fact that the primary objective was a group of islands this was a deciding factor in determining the outcome of operations.

### 1. Sinking of the *General Belgrano*

One of the most controversial and pivotal actions of the Falklands War was the sinking of the *General Belgrano* by HMS *Conqueror*. The *Belgrano* was the flag-ship for Task Group 79.3, under the command of the ship's captain Héctor Elías Bonzo and included the destroyers *Bouchard* and *Piedra Buena*. These escorts were almost as old as their charge. Both had been constructed by the United States as Allen M. Sumner Class destroyers in the 1940s and sold to Argentina in the 1970s.<sup>145</sup> The *Belgrano* had no sonar fitted and the escort vessels were fitted with the most antiquated of equipment for detecting submarines. Thus, Admiral Anaya had deployed his most prominent surface combatant into an environment where British nuclear-powered attack submarines were likely to be operating without an adequate ability to detect the threat, let alone defend against it. Such a move was foolhardy, bordering on the negligent. Certainly, a submarine attack, especially outside the exclusion zone was unlikely, but prudent naval operations require, at a minimum, the capacity to monitor the operating environment for threats.

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<sup>145</sup> "Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships," in Naval Historical Center [database online]. Available from <http://www.history.navy.mil/danfs/b8/borie-ii.htm>, [Last Accessed September 2007].



Figure 5. *General Belgrano Sinking*<sup>146</sup>

This attack had immediate tactical and long-term operational significance. In the short-term it was sufficient to disrupt the Argentine's planned naval movement against the British task force. The attack was to be a two-pronged assault with the *Belgrano* leading the southern element of a pincer and the Argentine aircraft carrier *Veinticinco de Mayo* leading the northern element.<sup>147</sup> In the long-term it removed the Argentine navy as a significant factor in the war.

The sinking of the Argentinean cruiser, the Argentinean aircraft carrier's inability to launch an attack or counterattack...broke the back of the Argentinean Navy. The Argentinean task force to the north returned to base, where it remained until the end of the war.<sup>148</sup>

In spite of the tremendous victory that the British had gained through the employment of their submarine, the Argentines did not even attempt to reciprocate.

## 2. Submarine Operations

Two Argentine submarines were operational and available for tasking during the war. Argentina had four submarines in the inventory, the *Santa Fe* and *Santiago del*

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<sup>146</sup> In the public domain.

<sup>147</sup> Edward B. Zelle, "Clausewitz and Seapower: Lessons of the Falkland Islands War" (Ph.D. diss., Air Command and Staff College Air University, 1999), 19.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.



*Estero* were Guppy Class diesel powered boats purchased from the United States. The *Salta* and *San Luis* were new German made diesel-electric submarines that “were acoustically superior to a number off the British nuclear hunter-killers.”<sup>149</sup> However, the *Salta* and *Santiago del Estero* were not available for employment due to maintenance issues.<sup>150</sup> This left Argentina with one very capable modern diesel electric submarine and an older, but still dangerous diesel boat. However, their combat record was lack-luster at best. The *Santa Fe* was forced to beach in King Edward Cove on South Georgia after being attacked by British helicopters on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April.<sup>151</sup> The loss of this asset reduced the effective Argentine submarine force to just one. However, the mission of the *Santa Fe* was the most telling. She had been sent dispatched “with 20 men and supplies to deliver to South Georgia.”<sup>152</sup> A vessel that represented a significant threat to the British task force had been dispatched for logistics purposes. Considering that the South Atlantic was an extremely difficult area in which to conduct ASW (anti-submarine warfare) and the impact of the Argentine submarine threat, this was a waste of a valuable asset. The mere threat of an enemy submarine at sea created uncertainty and at least once, “British ships were forced to abandon shore bombardment of the Falklands when their anti-submarine warfare assets detected a possible subsurface contact.”<sup>153</sup> Instead of harassing the British task force, making their operations more difficult and being positioned to conduct an attack, the *Santa Fe* was lost while ferrying supplies far from the objective.

The other operational submarine was more aggressive, but still failed to make a substantial impact on the course of the war. The *San Luis*, made sonar only contact with what she estimated to be a group of Type 42 destroyers and frigates on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. In reality, the ships were HMS *Brilliant*, a Type 22 frigate and HMS *Yarmouth*, a Type 12I

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<sup>149</sup> John Arquilla and Maria Moyano Rasmussen, "The Origins of the South Atlantic War," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 33 (2001), 756.

<sup>150</sup> Steven R. Harper, "Submarine Operations During the Falklands War", (Ph.D. diss., United States Naval War College, 1994), 9.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>153</sup> Zelle, 20.

Rothsay Class frigate. The submarine “closed to about ten thousand yards and at 1005 fired one SST-4 wire guided torpedo.<sup>154</sup> However, the shot was unsuccessful and the *San Luis* was forced to spend almost a full day evading British helicopters sent to attack her.<sup>155</sup>

The *San Luis* reported conducting an attack with a Mark 37 torpedo against a British submarine on the May 8, but no such attack was recorded by the British.<sup>156</sup> The final attempt at an attack occurred on May 10<sup>th</sup> against the destroyers HMS *Arrow* and HMS *Alacrity*. A single torpedo was fired, but failed to score a hit. Later, when *Arrow* retrieved her towed torpedo countermeasure it was damaged. This was taken as evidence that it has successfully deceived the torpedo and thus saved the ship from damage.<sup>157</sup> Ultimately, the *San Luis* made no discernable impact on British task force operations. Her attacks were all directed at assets that were of only minimal value to the enemy. There is no indication that submarines were ever ordered to locate and attempt to sink the British carriers. A single torpedo hit on either of the two carriers would likely have forced a British withdrawal. The submarines of the Argentine navy were “poorly used and were never ordered to execute the classic hunter-killer mission of attack submarines.”<sup>158</sup> One of the best opportunities to inflict significant damage was wasted by the Argentine high command.

### **3. Retreat of the Argentine Navy**

After the sinking of the *Belgrano*, the Argentine Navy never made a significant impact on the war at sea in the vicinity of the Falklands. In the words of Margaret Thatcher, they “skulked in port.”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Harper, 10.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>158</sup> Zellem, 25.

<sup>159</sup> Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street years*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993), 228.

The Argentine navy could have been employed far more effectively, especially in concert with air operations against the British fleet. However, after the loss of the *Belgrano*, Admiral Anaya felt compelled to keep his fleet 'in being', which really meant 'in port.'<sup>160</sup>

When attempting an amphibious landing operation, an attacking force seeks two areas of control, air and sea. Freedom to operate ships and aircraft in the effort to land forces ashore is critical. The removal of the Argentine surface fleet from the area of operations, combined with their substandard attempts at submarine warfare, to give control of the seas to the British task force. This greatly simplified the situation for Admiral Woodward and his commanders. They were able to concentrate their efforts on air defense and the movement of troops from ship to shore. While pulling the fleet back inside Argentine mainland waters did indeed preserve it, the move made the assault on the Falklands much easier for the British. They did not have to dedicate assets, time or energy to defend against an Argentine surface threat. So great was the impact of the withdrawal of the Argentine Navy from the fight that Admiral Woodward described the effects as "all-embracing!"<sup>161</sup>

## **B. SELECTION OF GROUND FORCES**

The ground forces that Argentina sent to defend the Falklands would bear the brunt of the brutality during the war. They were forced to live outdoors, in miserable weather, subjected to bombardment leading up to the landings and finally forced to fight the British in a gritty land campaign. Unfortunately for them and for Argentina's chances of success, they were poorly chosen for their assignment. In the final analysis, they were woefully unprepared for what they would face.

### **1. Failure to Deploy Mountain Troops**

The Argentine defenders on the Falklands outnumbered the British landing force by a considerable amount. By the beginning of May, the Argentine military had

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<sup>160</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 757.

<sup>161</sup> Sandy Woodward and Patrick Robinson, *One Hundred Days: The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*, (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1992), 164.

deployed between 12,000 and 13,000 men to the Falklands to defend against a British assault.<sup>162</sup> This is an impressive figure, especially considering that the British attacked with only a third of that number. However, it is not simply a matter of numbers. The quality of the troops employed, their training, equipment and experience also contribute to the chances of success. Though the Argentine defenders were more numerous than the British attackers, they “were much less prepared to fight in a forbidding climate.”<sup>163</sup> Argentina had two infantry brigades specifically trained and “equipped for cold-weather operations in the extreme south.”<sup>164</sup> These were the VI and VIII Mountain Infantry Brigades. However, they were left in garrison near the border with Chile. In their place, III Brigade was sent; these were troops from the northern areas of the country, known for their warm, subtropical climate. This unit was so poorly equipped that the men had to visit local stores and purchase field items before boarding aircraft bound for the Falklands. This decision “robbed the Falklands garrison of the most suitable troops for fighting in the islands.”<sup>165</sup> On the other hand, many of the British forces had extensive cold weather training.

I could never figure out why the hell we were training in the muck and goo at Salisbury when we were going to fight in Northern Europe. Then when we were in the Falklands, I said to my mates, ‘Blood Hell! This place is just like home.’<sup>166</sup>

Given all of the difficulties associated with infantry combat under any conditions, the Argentine defense of the Falklands would have been strengthened considerably by the addition of troops trained, equipped for and acclimated to operations in cold, mountainous conditions.

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<sup>162</sup> Duncan Anderson, *The Falklands War 1982*, (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2002), 31.

<sup>163</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 756.

<sup>164</sup> Martin Middlebrook, *The Argentine Fight for the Falklands*, (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2003), 56.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>166</sup> Nora Kinzer Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos: Unit Cohesion in the Falklands*, (Washington D.C.: Brassey's (US), 1991), 60.

## 2. Selection of Commander

The officer chosen to command all Argentine forces in the Falklands was Army Brigadier General Mario Benjamín Menéndez, “the fifty-two-year-old commander of the Buenos Aires first army corps.”<sup>167</sup> The choice was made not based on qualification or the probability of military success, but rather on political considerations. “He had not been chosen for his qualities as a fighter but, rather, for a conciliatory temperament that would help him govern the Islands.”<sup>168</sup> When Vice-Admiral Lombardo sent a message to Menéndez on the 8th of April with questions about the progress of military preparations on the islands, Menéndez’s reply was “What the hell are you talking about?”<sup>169</sup> The commander in the Falklands had paid so little attention to the preparation of a defense that he didn’t even understand the inquiry by his superior. Not taking every available moment to prepare undermined whatever advantage the Argentines may have held regarding the operational factor of force. In Menéndez’s defense, many Argentine leaders did not think that the British would launch an operation to retake the islands. However, an aggressive commander with foresight would have taken every available opportunity to reinforce his position and prepare for a counterattack. Even as it became obvious that the British would attempt to retake the islands by force, no change was made.

Given the new circumstances, the possibility was considered of replacing Menéndez with someone more suited to armed conflict. Galtieri decided against. He felt that it would cause undue anxiety among both the armed forces and the Argentine people generally if there were ‘chops and changes’ at the top. In the event, and as he might have predicted, Menéndez proved to a less able military commander than political governor.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 1st Americaned. (New York: Norton, 1983), 75.

<sup>168</sup> Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War : the Falklands Conflict of 1982*, 147.

<sup>169</sup> Middlebrook, 48.

<sup>170</sup> Freedman and Gamba-Stonehouse, 148.

The performance of Menéndez would not improve once the British ground forces were ashore. His static defense of Stanley was unimaginative, outdated and ultimately proved to be unsuccessful. There were ample opportunities for the Argentines to replace Menéndez with a commander more suited to the defense of the islands, but the junta chose not to.

### **3. Deployment and Employment of Special Forces**

Another major mistake made in the ground force selection regarded the employment of Argentina's significant Special Forces capability. Early in the deployment of Argentine military personnel to the Falklands it was nearly impossible to remove the organic Special Forces from front line units. Even when they were redeployed into their Special Forces units, they were employed primarily as military police, a clear waste of a valuable asset.<sup>171</sup> This was most likely done in response to the increasingly desperate condition of the Argentine soldiers. As the conflict wore "conscripts became cold, wet and hungry and were reported to have broken into houses and stolen food."<sup>172</sup> Well, trained and disciplined troops were required to keep the peace and avoid any incidents between the occupying forces and civilians. Argentina could ill afford additional negative publicity in the world press. However, assets that could have been used to slow the British advance were not available. During the entire campaign, only one significant action involving Argentine Special Forces was recorded. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of May, Argentine Special Forces were tasked with a "plan to plant a north-south screen to strike at the British logistics line of communication and to capture British soldiers."<sup>173</sup> The plan did not work and in the ensuing fire-fight, two Argentines killed and an additional five were captured, British forces suffered three wounded. Much like the use of submarines, the Argentine failure to capitalize on the ability of Special Forces to carry out unconventional warfare missions vacated an opportunity to score victories against the British.

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<sup>171</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 764.

<sup>172</sup> Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign: The 1982 Falklands War and It's Aftermath*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 105.

<sup>173</sup> Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, 583.

## C. THE AIR FIGHT

No single factor played a greater hand in determining the outcome of the war than the Argentine failure to inflict sufficient damage on the British task force to force them to withdraw prior to the amphibious assault at San Carlos Water. Once British ground forces made their way ashore, the business was bloody, but the conclusion was no longer in doubt. Both scholars and participants have identified the lack-luster performance of the Argentine attacks on the task force prior to the landings as a critical factor in the British victory.

### 1. Successes and Failures

The combined air assets of the Argentine Navy and Air Force performed reasonably well in combat against the British air arm and in attacks against British ships they inflicted substantial casualties. Indeed, the Super Etendards with their Exocet anti-ship missiles conducted devastating attacks on British shipping, sending HMS *Sheffield* and the transport *Atlantic Conveyor* to the bottom.<sup>174</sup> The successful attack on *Sheffield* would cause “Rear-Admiral Woodward to be more cautious in the use of his ships, forcing his task force to keep further from the Exocet threat and also further from the Falklands.”<sup>175</sup> Additionally, bombing attacks caused serious damage to the frigates *Ardent* and *Antelope*, the destroyer *Coventry* and the landing ships *Sir Galahad* and *Sir Tristram*.<sup>176</sup> During the course of the war, Argentine aircraft were also able to cause mild to moderate damage to an additional 18 ships. In all, 25 ships of the British task force were either damaged or sunk. However, this success did not translate into any meaningful result. They were the result of a large number of attacks, against an enemy fleet that was extremely vulnerable as it moved in close to shore for amphibious landings. Nor were the Argentines able to achieve any air to air kills during the entire war. The

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<sup>174</sup> Gordon Smith, *Battle Atlas of the Falklands War 1982: by Land, Sea and Air*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Penarth, United Kingdom: Naval-History.net, 2006), 23.

<sup>175</sup> Middlebrook, 124.

<sup>176</sup> United States Navy Office of Program Appraisal, "Lessons of the Falklands" (Department of the Navy, 1983), C-1.

British were able to claim 20 confirmed air to air kills, with an additional three listed as ‘probable.’<sup>177</sup> The British lost 12 aircraft to enemy action and the Argentines 103.<sup>178</sup> Clearly, the British got the better of the air fight.



Figure 6. Argentine Super Etendard Firing Exocet Missile<sup>179</sup>

The most salient feature of the Argentine attacks is that they rarely involved a concentration of aircraft and displayed a pronounced lack of coordination. General Menendez lamented, “our own air attacks are executed in an uncoordinated manner; we fail to deliver mass attacks.”<sup>180</sup> He urged his superiors to ensure that all future attacks “be carried out by a minimum of 8 aircraft, which should arrive simultaneously over the Malvinas.”<sup>181</sup> However, there is no evidence that future attacks were better coordinated or involved larger numbers of attacking aircraft. Throughout the war, the air attacks

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<sup>177</sup> United States Navy Office of Program Appraisal, C-2.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., C-1, C-2.

<sup>179</sup> "Official Website of the Royal Navy," Ministry of Defense, <http://www.royal-navy.mod.uk>, [Last Accessed September 2007].

<sup>180</sup> *Selected Extracts from Conflictio Malvinas: Official Report of the Argentine Army*, trans. CAPT Robert C. Rubel, USN.

<sup>181</sup> *Selected Extracts from Conflictio Malvinas: Official Report of the Argentine Army*, trans. CAPT Robert C. Rubel, USN.



never seriously threatened the British carriers. This was their center of gravity. Damage to, let alone the loss of, either would have crippled the British effort to retake the islands. Given the availability of two submarines and a large number of high performance aircraft with sophisticated weapons, it was not beyond the capability of Argentina to locate and attack the carriers in force.

## **2. The Airfield at Stanley**

Whatever advantages the Argentines could claim in terms of aircraft numbers and anti-ship weapons were crippled by the fact that Argentine aircraft operated from bases on the mainland as much as 800 miles from the operational area, rather than from a forward airbase at Stanley. The runway at Port Stanley was 4,700 feet long, which meant it was too short to support high-performance aircraft. There was enormous concern among the British that the Argentines would use steel matting to extend the runway allowing their Skyhawk, Mirage and Dagger aircraft to operate from it. “Argentina had ample supplies of steel matting and enough time to ship it to Stanley, but when air force engineers studied the practicalities they decided it would be too difficult to sustain high-performance jet aircraft from such a primitive airfield.”<sup>182</sup> This theory was proven wrong shortly after the war when the British extended the runway and began to operate their own A-4 Skyhawks from Stanley.<sup>183</sup> This was one of the primary aircraft in the Argentine inventory and the Skyhawks were very successfully employed, even when operating at the extreme range of their fuel capacity. There is no doubt that the “benefits of having an ‘unsinkable aircraft carrier’ in the form of a base on the islands could prove incalculable.”<sup>184</sup> Failure to lengthen the runway at Stanley to accommodate high performance aircraft meant that a primary element of the Argentine force, and one of the greatest advantages, was hamstrung by the tyranny of distance.

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<sup>182</sup> Anderson, 31.

<sup>183</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *The Falklands War*, vol. 4, 41, quoted in Arquilla and Rasmussen, *The Origins of the South Atlantic War*, 765.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 765.

Ultimately, the Argentines lost the Falklands War because their leaders failed to make correct decisions. Positional advantages were not exploited, forces for the campaign were poorly selected and then misemployed, and key assets were withdrawn without ever contributing to the fight. Argentina's chances for winning the war grow "if one considers counterfactually the role of good generalship, at both the operational and grand strategic levels."<sup>185</sup> While Argentine ground forces may have been outclassed by their British adversaries, good commanders, dedicated to victory could have successfully defended the islands.

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<sup>185</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 765.

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#### IV. DECISION MAKING CONTEXT

The expedition to Sicily was not so much a mistake in judgment, considering the enemy they went against, as much as a case of mismanagement on the part of the planners, who did not afterwards take the necessary measures to support those first troops they sent out. Instead, they turned to personal rivalries over the leadership of the people, and consequently not only conducted the war in the field half-heartedly, but also brought civil discord for the first time to the home front...And yet they did not fail until they at last turned on each other and fell into private quarrels that brought their ruin.

#### THUCYDIDES<sup>186</sup>

Argentine defeat in 1982 was not a forgone conclusion, but rather a product of poor management of the war once it actually got underway. The Argentine military leadership failed to capitalize on the country's advantageous geographical position and numerical superiority. In addition, the employment of key resources was suboptimal. Why were these mistakes made? Were the leaders not smart enough to make the correct decisions? Were these decisions the result of bad information about the situation being passed to the leaders? The answer on both accounts is no. The decisions of the ruling military junta were driven by the context in which they were made, which in turn was fundamentally shaped by the war-fighting culture of Argentina.

The driving force in the junta's poor decision making was a war-fighting culture dominated by the ideas, institutions and doctrine of limited war. This war-fighting culture focused on the threat of internal enemies, involved only a small portion of the population and – most critically -- was not prepared to deal with losses of equipment and personnel. The three members of the ruling military junta, Army General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri Castelli, Air Force Brigadier General Basilio Arturo Ignacio Lami Dozo and Navy Rear Admiral Jorge Isaac Anaya, were steeped in a limited war culture that led to missteps in the use of naval and land forces that seriously undermined the war effort. As importantly, the senior military leadership of each service embraced a limited

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<sup>186</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, *Why The West Has Won*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 389.

war culture that valued equipment and personnel as ends in themselves (i.e., prestige) rather than as means to an end (i.e., victory in war). This led them to reject any strategic decisions that carried the potential of excessive casualties or loss of equipment. Since junta members were subject to replacement at the whim of the senior leadership, they were forced to be responsive to the risk-minimizing preferences of the individual services. Taken together, these elements created an environment in which the leadership of Argentina issued orders that undermined the ability of forces in the field to fight and win.

This chapter begins by defining the concept of “war-fighting culture,” which is typically neglected in much of the literature. It then describes the limited war culture that prevailed in Argentina (and in many other countries of Latin America) and identifies the critical missteps made by the junta that can be attributed to this war culture. The second section shows how the structure of decision-making within the regime led the junta to be responsive to the limited war culture preferences of the military leadership in the individual services and it enumerates the strategic missteps this engendered. Finally, the third section discounts prevailing alternative explanations. It explains why inter-service rivalry – a characteristic of the Argentine armed forces most often cited as the reason for its defeat in the war – is not responsible for the negative outcome.

## **A. LIMITED WAR CULTURE**

Although the term ‘war-fighting culture’ is rarely found in most of the current scholarly literature that examines the role of culture in national defense affairs, it is very closely related to strategic culture, but with a more pronounced emphasis on the conduct of war. Strategic culture has been investigated primarily for its explanatory power with regard to decisions about initiating hostilities, but in this thesis the focus is on decisions that affect combat operations. The two foundational works examining strategic culture and limited war, Robert Osgood’s *Limited War* and Thomas Schelling’s *The Strategy of Conflict*, are perfect examples.<sup>187</sup> Both dedicate entire books to studying theories about

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<sup>187</sup> Robert Osgood, *Limited War*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

limited war. However, they focus on national level decision making and assert that little or no knowledge of combat operations is required for the study. Scott Sigmund Gartner emphasizes the lack of scholarly work on war-fighting culture and understanding its impact on the conduct of war.<sup>188</sup> Understanding combat operations and battlefield effects gives concrete meaning to the study of decision making by government leaders. This thesis links the sometimes academic and abstract analysis of national-level decision-making to the reality of the warriors on the ground.

In order to do this, the elements of strategic culture that most closely relate to the actual conduct of combat operations are examined, and subsequently referred to as ‘war-fighting culture.’ The most important of these elements are mutually held conceptions of national leaders “particularly those concerning decisions to go to war, preferences for the offensive, expansionist or defensive modes of warfare and levels of casualties that would be acceptable.”<sup>189</sup> In short, war-fighting culture is how a nation believes it will win the wars that it fights. The Argentine military and its leaders had been shaped by a limited war culture.

This culture traces its roots to the very origins of the country and its neighbors. “The Latin American region was born entire; the countries were each surrounded at birth by states very similar in immediate history and even social structure.”<sup>190</sup> This is one of the major reasons that Latin America has largely been devoid of international wars. Unlike the states of Europe, those of Latin America emerged as relatively equal and, more importantly, did not rely on the fruits of war during the process of maturing. While militarized border disputes were common and military force was often applied in situations of domestic unrest, war with other nations was extremely rare. In fact, between 1930 and 2000, there were only five international wars in all of Latin America; the

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<sup>188</sup> Scott Sigmund Gartner, “Opening up the Black Box of War,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42 (1998): 252-258.

<sup>189</sup> Stephen Peter Rosen, *Societies and Military Power: India and its Armies*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>190</sup> Miguel Angel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 25.

Falklands War was the only one of these in which Argentina was involved.<sup>191</sup> Bolivia and Paraguay fought the bloody Chaco War between 1932 and 1935; Colombia and Peru fought over Leticia during the same timeframe; in 1969, El Salvador and Honduras fought the so-called ‘Soccer War’; and, the border dispute between Peru and Ecuador flared up in 1941 and 1981 and resulted in a short war in 1995.<sup>192</sup> By contrast, the same period saw at least 17 major civil wars in the region.<sup>193</sup> Even more significant, the same period saw at least 87 militarized border disputes that did not escalate into war.<sup>194</sup>

This ‘Limited War Culture’ can be outlined by three basic characteristics. I borrow this definition from Miguel Angel Centeno’s excellent work *Blood and Debt*, which examines the relationship between war and the making of nation-states in Latin America. The major difference between this examination and Centeno’s work is the focus on the battlefield impact of war-fighting culture. Centeno’s effort is directed exclusively at war-fighting culture’s relationship to state development, as opposed to this consideration of war-fighting culture’s relationship to military performance during war. Centeno defines a limited war culture as one focused on internal enemies, with a consequent failure to train forces to fight the soldiers of other nations.<sup>195</sup> Evidence of this in the Argentine case can be seen in the very effective employment of the military to carry out the ‘dirty war’ against dissidents upon taking power in 1976. Second, only a small portion of the national population has a vested interest and direct involvement with the military.<sup>196</sup> Finally, the defining characteristic of a ‘limited war culture’ is a lack of “historically forged institutional or political appetite for the organizational insanity of modern war.”<sup>197</sup> This aspect of ‘limited war culture’ cuts to the heart of explaining why the military leadership of Argentina was so adverse to accepting losses among their best

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<sup>191</sup> Jorge I. Dominguez, “Boundary Disputes in Latin America,” *Peaceworks* 50 (2004), 18.

<sup>192</sup> Centeno, 44.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>194</sup> Paul R. Hensel, “Contentious Issues and World Politics: The Management of Territorial Claims in the Americas, 1816-1992,” *International Studies Quarterly* 45, (2001) 92-93.

<sup>195</sup> Centeno, 90-91.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

military units. Victory in war often requires the sacrifice of significant organizational assets; to win a portion of the organization must be lost. This is most certainly the pinnacle of 'organizational insanity': accepting massive losses in the hopes of achieving victory.

The impact of this war-fighting culture was evident in the employment of submarines and Special Forces during the war. Submarine warfare is aggressive, provocative and extremely violent. This is not a tactic that can be employed in border dispute brinkmanship, nor does it have any value in quelling domestic unrest. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the Argentines failed to employ their available submarines effectively. They had no experience to draw upon and more importantly the challenges that the naval leadership had grown accustomed to meeting did not prepare them for an unrestricted submarine campaign. The idea of Argentina conducting unrestricted submarine warfare in the South Atlantic would have been preposterous before the Falklands War. For the British it might have been an equally unlikely suggestion, but they had trained for such missions against the Soviet Union for decades. A dramatic shift in the employment of these assets would have been very difficult to conceptualize, let alone execute for Argentina. This is because states that "have traditionally been peaceful or fought in limited wars may in time find it practically impossible to ever consider fighting total wars."<sup>198</sup>

Special Forces are unique; they carry out missions that are beyond the capabilities of traditional units. Their focus is on asymmetric warfare, usually employing small units to exploit enemy weaknesses. Their hallmarks are training and discipline. In an army that was lacking in both of these characteristics, it is not surprising that their presence in Special Forces drew the attention of the command authority. Unfortunately, a valuable asset was not directed against the enemy, but used to keep the peace between the conscripts and the residents of the Falklands.<sup>199</sup> The link to a long history of using the military for domestic security is painfully obvious.

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<sup>198</sup> Centeno, 67.

<sup>199</sup> John Arquilla and Maria Moyano Rasmussen, "The Origins of the South Atlantic War," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 33 (2001), 764.



The decision about which units to deploy to the Falklands further highlights the effects of the limited war culture on the conduct of the war. The inexperience with the ‘organizational insanity’ of war made it difficult for the junta to deploy III Brigade to the Falklands. This was one of the best units in their military, well trained, well equipped and prestigious. The question raised is why the Argentine leadership chose to “send conscripts from Argentina’s tropical zone to the Falklands instead of those trained for winter fighting?”<sup>200</sup> The stated explanation of the Junta for not sending these troops to the Falklands was the need to defend against possible aggression by Chile in the Beagle Channel. However, this explanation seems very weak considering that a recent Papal ruling had granted Chile almost all the territory that it sought in the region without having to resort to military force. A long Argentine experience with border disputes had conditioned the leadership’s thinking to overemphasize the importance of protecting the border. While nearly 100 British ships raced toward their forces in the Falklands, the junta continued to see their Chilean neighbors, who had very limited military capacity or political credibility available to support a major border incursion, as a significant enough threat to leave III Brigade in place.

Finally, the selection of General Mario Menéndez to command the defense of the islands can be explained by Argentina’s limited war culture. Given that no command had existed in the Falklands before they were seized, the junta was free to appoint a commander that suited their needs. They chose Menéndez for his ability to administer the islands and keep the peace. However, when it became clear that war would come, he was left in place. He could have been replaced with a more senior or aggressive officer, but he was not. If the bulk of the fleet and the best available ground troops were not risked, why would the very best commanders be? To some extent Menéndez was expendable. His disgrace or failure was not likely to cause too many reverberations within the military polity. One of the most important decisions of the entire Falklands adventure was made on the basis of expediency.

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<sup>200</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 764.

## **B. THE NATURE OF DECISION-MAKING UNDER THE ARGENTINE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME: MILITARY POLITY AS CONSTITUENCY**

Military regimes vary enormously in the way in which decision-making is structured and, consequently, in how effectively they are able to implement political, economic, and social change.<sup>201</sup> The same applies to the making of strategic decisions during wartime. In Argentina, the decision-making structure was organized in a way that exacerbated a fundamental dimension of limited war culture: opposition to the organizational insanity of modern war. The primary constituency of the junta was the senior leadership of the various armed forces. The three members were beholden to the military as a whole and individually to their respective services for their continued political power. The senior leadership of the services, in keeping with limited war culture, viewed their personnel and advanced equipment as sources of prestige (to be preserved), rather than as resources to be expended in pursuit of victory in war.

The organization of the Argentine military regime that ruled from 1976 to 1983 was largely shaped by the military's negative experience with the preceding period of authoritarian rule. From 1966 to 1970, retired General Juan Carlos Onganía ruled over a government in which "most cabinet officials, governors, heads of state banks and enterprises, and other important decision makers were civilians or retired military officials."<sup>202</sup> The result was an authoritarian regime in which the military was almost entirely excluded from the exercise of power. When the military returned to power in 1976, "the rival service chiefs agreed on a ruling formula that guarded against personal rulership by providing for the rotation of the presidency and the dispersal of power among the services."<sup>203</sup> Thus, the individual services were pitted against each other in a battle for political power. Far beyond a simple competition for resources and prestige, they fought over who would exert the most control in the national government.

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<sup>201</sup> Karen Remmer, *Military Rule in Latin America*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 27-32.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.



Figure 7. Galtieri, Anaya and Dozo<sup>204</sup>

This governing structure required that the junta retain the support of their respective services in order to stay in power. The speed with which leaders could be replaced was certainly a motivating factor for the Galtieri-led junta. The junta of Galtieri's predecessor Army General Roberto Eduardo Viola Prevedini had been in office for less than nine months before being ousted by Galtieri in December of 1981. Clearly, when the military became dissatisfied with the performance of senior leaders, they could replace them very quickly. This forced the members of the junta to take steps to ensure that their subordinates supported their continued leadership. If the military wanted to remove the junta, there was no other support base that the junta could turn to. The mechanisms of civilian political power were so emasculated that they were incapable of supporting any regime against the wishes of the military. If these institutions had been capable of acting as an alternative to military support, the junta could have sacrificed all their forces in the war against Britain and relied on civilian support to protect them from the wrath of the military, but this was not the case.

The preferences of senior military officers thus became critical elements in the decision making process. In the case of Argentina, military leaders sought to maintain their institutions intact rather than seeking institutional glory in war. This is certainly a product of the war-fighting culture in which these officers were trained and seasoned. Insight into the preferences of these leaders can be found in an analysis of their

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<sup>204</sup> In the public domain.

professional journals. The focus of the leading Argentine military journal, *Revista del Círculo Militar*, is rarely war fighting. From 1920 to 1990, only two articles were dedicated to a strategic discussion of international war.<sup>205</sup> Since 1982, a large volume of the articles has been dedicated to discussions of the Falklands War, but this is all post-event analysis. In the discussions of the military leaders in a central forum, the most commonly examined topic was organization, commanding more than a third of the articles.<sup>206</sup> Other topics that dominated the professional dialogue of Argentine officers were history, technology, scholarship, domestic issues, and communism. Tactics, strategy and war-fighting were so rarely written about that they barely appear in the statistics.<sup>207</sup> Argentine military officers were not dedicated to developing themselves or their institutions for the purpose of winning the nation's wars. The military leaders of Argentina trained, studied and prepared to maintain and expand their forces, not to fight with them. The forces were not viewed as a means to an end, the tool for obtaining victory on the battlefield, but as an end unto themselves.

In seeking to maintain support from senior military leaders, a series of decisions with disastrous effects on the battlefield were made. The first was Admiral Anaya's decision to withdraw the Navy from the war and keep them safely in port and within Argentine territorial waters. This decision removed a major obstacle for the British and was a direct reflection of the need to preserve the Navy's assets.

The Argentine navy could have been employed far more effectively, especially in concert with air operations against the British fleet. However, after the loss of the *Belgrano*, Admiral Anaya felt compelled to keep his fleet 'in being', which really meant 'in port.'<sup>208</sup>

It is important to note that the motivation was not the preservation of assets for later employment. The fleet never reemerged and there is no evidence of any plans for them to have done so. Further combat with the British task force would almost certainly have

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<sup>205</sup> Centeno, 78.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>208</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 757.

led to additional losses. These losses may have purchased an opportunity for victory, but this was immaterial. The losses would have reduced the size and prestige of the Navy. Subordinate admirals and captains would have seen their commands reduced or eliminated. The devastation of the Argentine fleet, no matter what the outcome of the war would have made it all but impossible for Anaya to maintain the Navy's support for his position. Instead of the likely benefit to the nation driving this decision, the importance of not losing the support of naval commanders was paramount. It is interesting to note that in the run up to the British landings, Anaya "remained committed to defending the Falklands, regardless of the further cost in lives and equipment," but was much less enthusiastic about his "own force" being the one to pay that cost.<sup>209</sup>

A similar course of events occurred regarding the Argentine Air Force. On May 1, the Argentines launched 40 sorties in response to the first major British air and naval strikes against targets in and around Stanley.<sup>210</sup> Three Argentine aircraft were shot down and "Argentine fighters would never again attempt to engage in air-to-air combat."<sup>211</sup> Admiral Anaya had given the British default sea control with the naval withdrawal and now General Dozo did much the same thing with the refusal to dogfight with the British. British aircraft were now freed to operate primarily as hunters, trying to kill the Argentine planes that flew out to attack the amphibious force as it conducted the landings. To be sure, the Argentine Air Force was able to inflict significant damage on British shipping. However, every time attack aircraft took to the skies, they were subject to preying by the Harriers, because no assets were employed to stop the British fighters. Like the decision by Anaya, this was also driven by General Dozo's need to retain the support of the Air Force's senior leadership. Bombing runs, which involved an aircraft conducting an attack and then immediately moving out of the battle area and returning to base, could inflict damage on the enemy and allow the attacking aircraft to safely return

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<sup>209</sup> Lawrence Freedman makes this argument based on British intelligence analysis. See Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign: The 1982 Falklands War and its Aftermath*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 458.

<sup>210</sup> Jeffrey L. Huber, "The Falklands Air War. Lessons Revisited" (United States Naval War College, 1995), 10.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

to its base. In contrast, once a dogfight was joined, it became a fight to the death; either the British or the Argentine pilot would end up in the water. The possibility of escape made attacks on shipping more appealing to the leadership of the Air Force than dogfights. The leadership of the Air Force felt that they could mitigate some of the risks of the war by “the withholding of the most vital organizational assets.”<sup>212</sup>



Figure 8. 500 pound bomb explodes onboard HMS *Antelope*<sup>213</sup>

### C. INTER-SERVICE RIVALRY

Inter-service rivalry is often cited as a critical factor in the Argentine defeat in the Falklands.<sup>214</sup> The military leadership of Argentina was a fractured threesome that reflected a much longer history of rivalry between the three services. Even in an era before the emergence of ‘jointness’ as a preeminent concept in military doctrine, the three distinct services in Argentina exhibited a remarkably low level of cooperation. In the official British history of the campaign, Sir Lawrence Freedman observes that the

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<sup>212</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, , 763.

<sup>213</sup> "Official Website of the Royal Navy," Ministry of Defense, <http://www.royal-navy.mod.uk/server/show/ConMediaFile.25062#>.

<sup>214</sup> Nora Kinzer Stewart, *Mates & Muchachos: Unit Cohesion in the Falklands*, (Washington D.C.: Brassey's (US), 1991). Martin Middlebrook, *The Argentine Fight for the Falklands*, (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2003). Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign: The 1982 Falklands War and It's Aftermath*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2005). Duncan Anderson, *The Falklands War 1982*, (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2002).

Argentines were plagued by “inter-service squabbling, a highly stratified command structure with little vertical bonding, and poor command and control.”<sup>215</sup> Throughout the war, there were issues among the Argentine forces regarding the appropriate assignment of “roles and responsibilities.”<sup>216</sup> The Argentine armed forces were “divided into watertight compartments, each service jealously guarding its rights and privileges.”<sup>217</sup> It is argued that this extreme compartmentalization was especially detrimental to the efforts in the Falklands. An adequate defense against the British assault required the coordination of air, naval and ground assets to deny air and sea control and then oppose the landing force. However, this coordination never emerged and the result was “the Argentine army, navy and air force fought three wars against the British in the Malvinas.”<sup>218</sup>

The case of the airfield at Stanley is a perfect example. Despite the later British demonstration that the runway could be extended to accommodate A-4 Skyhawks and other high performance aircraft, the Argentines never even attempted to base front-line fixed wing aircraft there.

Some evidence exists that the FAA refused to base out of the islands because it would have come under some degree of navy operational control. Indeed, Admiral Carlos Büsser, who led the invasion, points out the FAA pilots rebelled at this notion, even to the point of refusing instruction from naval aviators in how to attack ships at sea.<sup>219</sup>

Although it is true that a gross lack of coordination between the Argentine forces occurred at the operational and tactical levels, this was not decisive in explaining Argentina’s ultimate defeat. Instead, the larger strategic decisions regarding employment of forces made jointly by the junta and by its individual members – described in the

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<sup>215</sup> Freedman, *The 1982 Falklands War and its Aftermath*, 729.

<sup>216</sup> Lawrence Freedman and Virginia Gamba-Stonehouse, *Signals of War : the Falklands Conflict of 1982*, (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1991), 144.

<sup>217</sup> Robert L. Scheina, "Argentine Jointness and the Malvinas," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Summer 1994), 99.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>219</sup> Arquilla and Rasmussen, 766.

preceding sections -- meant that no subsequent amount of coordination between forces could have achieved a victory.

The decision-making process and limited war culture described in this chapter clearly encouraged and enabled the individual services to make strategic decisions that protected service interests. Contrary to conventional inter-service rivalry, however, the Argentine services were not competing for the lion's share of glory in war (and the resulting resources that would go to the service that proved itself most competent). Instead, within a limited war culture environment, each service took a defensive stance to preserve their forces and avoid engagement in a total war. Historical experience shows that services with a total war focus can overcome rivalries in pursuit of a shared goal (victory in war). For example, in World War II the rivalry between the United States Army and Navy was an issue in the Pacific campaign. However, evidence exists showing that both General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz, each larger than life figures in the Army and Navy respectively, subjugated their own interests and the interests of their services to the larger mission.<sup>220</sup> In contrast, services with a limited war culture have no such shared goal. And in the Argentine case, the military's relative marginalization from government under the previous authoritarian regime led them to institutionalize a decision-making process under the military junta that practically guaranteed service interests would override the national interest.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The decisions made by the Argentine leadership with regard to the conduct of the war in the South Atlantic directly affected the outcome of combat operations. Contrary to conventional wisdom, inter-service rivalry and lack of coordination were not the primary causes of defeat in the Falklands. The war had already been lost by the time lack of coordination began to have battlefield effect. A limited-war culture dominated the thinking of the members of the junta and other senior military leaders. The strength of the military constituency reinforced the ideas of this culture by pressuring the junta to

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<sup>220</sup> E. B. Potter, *Nimitz*, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1976), 221. William Manchester, *American Caesar*, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1978), 326.



conform to the desires of the military. The members of the junta had governed within a limited-war culture that emphasized domestic enemies of the state, involved only a small segment of the population and developed institutions that were ill-prepared to deal with the realities of modern warfare. The overall decision making environment produced decisions that directly contributed to military defeat in the Falklands. As the next chapter will show, the link between the context in which decisions are made and the battlefield provides a valuable opportunity that military and political leaders may be able to exploit to their advantage in future conflicts.

## V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, since all decisions must be made in the face of uncertainty and since every situation is unique, there is no perfect solution to any battlefield problem.

### U.S. Marine Corps Doctrine Publication One<sup>221</sup>

The Falklands War was short, just one hundred days, but its lessons and effects are numerous. In the aftermath of the conflict, the Galtieri-led junta was toppled and Argentina began movement toward democratic governance. British military capacity, once the hegemonic force that dominated the planet, had waned in the decades since World War II, but still proved to be a potent force with global reach. In addition, Margaret Thatcher rose to become a key leader in the final years of the Cold War. Militarily, the lessons learned were most relevant to expeditionary warfare. The British had accomplished what many thought was impossible, but was at the very heart of United States Navy and Marine Corps training and doctrine. On the other hand, the Argentine debacle revealed the power of the environment in which decisions are made to influence combat operations.

#### A. SUMMARY

The long-standing dispute over rightful ownership of the Falkland Islands remains unresolved. Beginning with the British occupation in 1833, Great Britain and Argentina have been unable to resolve this conflict. When this disagreement flashed into armed conflict in 1982, the result was a short and bloody war. The British operated at a distinct disadvantage in terms of geography. The task force sailed nearly 8,000 miles to reach the theater of war and operated more than 3,000 miles from the nearest base. Meanwhile, Argentine forces were close enough to the mainland to operate under an umbrella of fixed-wing aircraft operating from their home bases. Argentina also had dramatic

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<sup>221</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Doctrine Publication 1: Warfighting*, (Washington D.C.: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1997), 86.

numerical edges in aircraft available and forces on the ground. Additionally, a moderately sized, yet capable navy, armed with cutting-edge weaponry, was available for tasking. Further solidifying the Argentine position was the coming Southern winter. The onset of foul weather would make the proposed British operations all but impossible. Without serious mistakes by senior officers, the Argentines were well-positioned to win the war and hold onto the Islands. However, serious errors were made by senior leaders and those errors served to undermine all of the leverage enjoyed by Argentina at the commencement of hostilities. A war which, on paper, looked like it should have been won by Argentina turned into what appeared to be a rather easy British victory.

Mismanagement of the war by Argentina began even before the British task force arrived in the South Atlantic. Well-trained soldiers of III Brigade, equipped for winter fighting, were not deployed to the Islands. The opportunity to lengthen the airfield at Stanley allowing for the forward deployed operation of front line aircraft was not taken. Things did not improve once operations began. One submarine was lost conducting a tertiary logistics mission and the other was never ordered to target the enemy center of gravity, the two British aircraft carriers. Special Forces were used primarily as military police and never released to conduct significant action against the British landing force. Additionally, the Argentine air campaign was disorganized and, despite damaging a significant number of British ships, failed to land any blows that seriously affected Admiral Woodward's plan. Finally, the defense of the islands, coveted for nearly 150 years was placed in the hands of a general not known for combat effectiveness, but appointed primarily as a civil administrator. The result of all these decisions was a campaign that focused on risk avoidance at the cost of combat effectiveness.

Simply establishing that bad decisions made by the junta caused the battlefield defeat of Argentine forces does not add much to the analysis of the conflict. Understanding why these decisions were made is much more important. The thinking of the junta members was shaped by a long-standing 'Limited War Culture', which was reinforced by their beholdenness to the senior leadership of each service, who themselves were guided by the risk-averseness that characterizes limited war culture. Unable to unify the three military branches, even in the midst of a war, the service chiefs were

primarily, if not exclusively concerned with preserving their own positions in the junta and hence their own forces. These divisions were reinforced by the fact that the leaders were not beholden to any civilian body; their constituency was comprised entirely of other military officers. Thus, Anaya withdrew the fleet and Dozo refused to engage in air-to-air combat with the British. The net result of these decisions was the surrender of sea control and enough air supremacy for the amphibious landings to be carried out effectively. The war-fighting culture of Argentina, reflecting the broader historical trajectory of Latin America, had developed leaders whose strategic perspective left them ill-prepared to fight a nation that had a long, bellicose history and that played a front-line role in NATO. Events unfolded so quickly that the Argentine military had no time to change or rethink existing ideas regarding limited engagements, domestic security and border disputes. Thus, the best troops for the mission were not deployed, valuable assets in the form of submarines and Special Forces were underemployed and an historic quest for *las Islas Malvinas* was placed in the hands of a leader chosen for his prowess at establishing law and order.

## **B. IMPLICATIONS**

Beyond what has already been discussed, two implications drawn from this analysis seem particularly important. First, preparation and positioning before the onset of a crisis are pivotal. In the British case, NATO training exercises, an officer corps grounded in an historical legacy of expeditionary warfare and ability to suffer combat losses without compromising the mission paved the road to victory. In the Argentine case, a military used primarily for regional posturing and domestic repression, combined with a leadership that was highly sensitive to combat losses for political reasons and that articulated a ‘theory of victory’ that could not be molded to fit the current crisis, led inexorably to defeat. In relation to both military establishments and their leadership, the battle for the Falklands did not last long enough for serious changes to any of these factors to be made. The lesson is that in conflicts of short duration there will not be any opportunity to radically shift the direction of either the military or the national leadership.

The fight will have to be conducted with what is available, physically and intellectually. In this case, the British were positioned to win and, despite their numerous advantages on paper, the Argentines were positioned to lose.

The second conclusion is that the value of technology on the modern battlefield is relative. Argentina had highly advanced technology available for employment by their forces: high-technology fighter and attack aircraft, ultra-quiet German diesel submarines and the devastating Exocet anti-ship missile. On the other side, the British had the new variant of the Sidewinder missile, two aged, but still powerful aircraft carriers and nuclear-powered submarines. The difference was that the British technology was employed against the perceived weaknesses of the Argentines. Their submarines attacked a very old ship and sent the Argentine fleet running for shore. The Sidewinder demolished aircraft which had little chance to engage in dog fighting since they were operating at the edge of their fuel capacity and the carriers enabled the British to place their Harrier jump-jets in close proximity to the islands. This latter factor was of particular importance because despite the Argentines' occupation of the island they did not forward deploy aircraft there. On the Argentine side, their technological advantage in some areas (or at least parity) was blunted by the strength of the British or by their own misdirection of their capabilities. For example, Argentina's front-line aircraft consistently flew into the teeth of air defense ships and Harriers, instead of attacking Britain's more vulnerable supply ships, amphibious transports and carriers. Likewise, Argentine submarine operations targeted British combat vessels and made no attempts to strike at the softer targets. After the war, a British SAS officer remarked that the Argentines suffered from the same problem that "afflicts many Third World armies, of concentrating on acquiring expensive technology rather than applying basic training and skills."<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, 1st American ed., (New York: Norton, 1983), 324.

### C. GENERALIZABILITY OF THE FINDINGS

The applicability of conclusions across a broader group of cases depends on several factors being present: limited war culture and an authoritarian regime in which key strategic decisions are made by leaders responsive to a fragmented military constituency steeped in a limited war culture. Even among nations that meet these criteria, these factors will only be relevant if national-level decision-making has an impact on the battlefield. They will not be relevant where battlefield performance is primarily a product of military capabilities operating independent of orders. That is, if the forces are not sufficiently trained, equipped and positioned to achieve combat victory then examination of decision-making is of little value. Second, if national leaders are so far removed from the fight, or battlefield events outpace their decision making process to the extent that their decisions have little or no impact on the conduct of the war itself, then it makes little sense to examine the factors that shape national-level decision making.

Future research on this subject might fruitfully focus on three areas. First, to what extent has limited war culture led to defeat on the battlefield for countries other than Argentina? Wars that are most like the Falklands War are a good starting point for further analysis. These would include wars of a short-duration, with a decisive victory by one side, and the losing side being a nation with an authoritarian regime. Wars where the victory is less than decisive are problematic because the closer run the contest is, the more operational and tactical decisions, luck and small unit performance overshadow broader national-level decisions in shaping the outcome. Good candidates for study are the Suez War of 1956, the Six-Day War of 1967, the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Gulf War of 1991 and the opening chapter of the Gulf War of 2003.

Second, to what extent does the structure of decision-making within an authoritarian regime shape the relative influence that a limited war culture exerts over decision makers? In the Argentine case, the responsiveness of the junta leaders to the risk averse senior leadership in the individual services was a key factor determining the overall influence that limited war culture had. Would we expect the limited war culture

of the military leadership to exert a similar influence over strategic decision-making in authoritarian regimes that are civilian in nature or that have a contentious relationship with the military?

Third, to what extent can regime type mitigate the effects of war-fighting culture? A comparative study of the impact that limited-war culture has in democratic regimes vice those that are authoritarian in nature would explore the relationship between war-fighting culture, regime type and battlefield outcomes. Are democratic regimes better able to respond to situations in which the prevailing concepts regarding military action are insufficient? It is likely that regime type will have more of an impact in conflicts of longer duration, when democratic processes would have more of a chance to influence outcomes. Related to this, it is important to determine the mechanism through which regime type influences outcomes. In particular, to what extent does public opinion shape the tactics and operations employed in war?

#### **D. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The primary recommendation that flows from this study involves the importance of exploiting the political situation at the lowest possible level of command. In war, perfect information will never be available to national leaders or military commanders. Nevertheless, what political information is available should be distributed as far down the operational chain of command as possible. Experts on the political situation of the enemy should be available at the operational and tactical levels wherever possible. The reason for this is simple: exploitation of battlefield situations can have a dramatic impact on the overall conduct of the war. Two particular examples illustrate this point. The first is the sinking of the *General Belgrano* by HMS *Conqueror*. The fractured nature of the junta and the importance of avoiding devastating casualties for Admiral Anaya made the sinking much more pivotal than its tactical value would indicate. A commander who had some understanding of the situation would be more aggressive and take greater risks to ensure the sinking occurred. As it was, the impact of destroying a single enemy vessel was not foreseen. In this case, the British were lucky. They did not attack the *Belgrano* with the intent of forcing the Argentine Navy to retreat, but this was the result. The

removal of the entire Argentine fleet from further combat operations would have been well worth the loss of *Conqueror* if that had been the cost required. Operational commanders should seek out the opportunity for military blows that yield non-linear impacts through political ramifications. The second case involves the encounter between the British Harriers and Argentina's FAA forces on May 1. Inflicting one day of air-to-air losses on the Argentines caused them to avoid this type of fight for the balance of the war. A British commander with a greater awareness of the centrality of limited war culture to Argentine decision-making would have risked a large number of assets and pressed the attack harder in order to eliminate air-to-air threats for the remainder of the campaign. War is fluid and unpredictable. Tactical encounters with strategic effects can be better exploited if leaders at the tactical level can appreciate the larger effects that their actions could precipitate.

The dominant lesson to emerge from this analysis is that the environment in which decisions at the highest levels of government are made can have a decisive influence on combat operations. It is possible to analyze and critique decisions at different levels of command, but the impacts of these decisions will rarely be so nicely contained. In the early twenty-first century, military leaders should view political intelligence as a tool with value equal to intelligence on enemy capabilities and limitations. In the case of the Falklands War, British military action was predominantly in accordance with their existing doctrine, but they were fortunate that this doctrine aligned well against the weaknesses of the Argentine state and its defense forces.

As the Argentine case highlights, detailed post-conflict analysis and access to classified material is not necessary for an understanding of the factors that shape national-level decision-making. The broad strokes of a nation's strategy are usually easily accessible and the mechanisms of its government well-known. Diplomats, intelligence specialists and military analysts could have determined the nature of the Argentine war-fighting culture (as well as the responsiveness of the junta leaders to the senior military leadership) before the Falklands War and exploited this information to the warfighter's advantage.



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