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The Fight for the Malvinas: The Argentine Forces in the Falklands War

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Martin Middlebrook

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of filler to strike paydirt. Hannah obviously sees himself as a classic "prophet without honor" in his own time and place. His book has the tone of barely subdued sarcasm—that of a person who believes his earlier contributions were unappreciated and who feels compelled to reproduce large portions of his own memoranda to support his case—something which he has the grace to acknowledge may appear "self-serving." (It does.) There are some good points in the book to be sure, especially with regard to the Laotian negotiations. But the conceptual misapprehension permeating it simply lends credence to the belief that the State Department is the last place to look for sound guidance in matters of strategy.

Somewhere there may be good answers to the debate over "Who lost Vietnam?" but *The Key to Failure* is not the place to find them.

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Middlebrook, Martin. *The Fight for the Malvinas: The Argentine Forces in the Falklands War*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1989. 321pp. \$24.95

Martin Middlebrook, Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, has gained international recognition for his nine books on the two world wars.

The absence of the Argentine perspective in his previous book on

the Malvinas, *Operation Corporate*, led Middlebrook to negotiate with the Argentine authorities for interviews with participants in the Malvinas/Falklands war. He was particularly successful with the navy.

The Fight for the Malvinas, which contains sixty-two interviews with members of varying ranks in the Argentine army and navy, is a history of the operations during the war as seen through Argentine eyes.

Middlebrook makes it clear that the Argentine political decision to reoccupy the island was based on the premise that the British would not retaliate militarily. The unreadiness of Argentina's forces illustrates this misperception: Bombs failed to explode, thus betraying the brave pilots of the *Fuerza Aerea*; torpedo failures did the same to submariners; support to the land forces failed to materialize. All these shortcomings stemmed from that one political error.

Quoting from the interviews, the author describes specific operations in detail: The South Georgia crisis (which Middlebrook believes the British mishandled), the seizure of the islands without shedding British blood, the naval battle that never was, the sinking of the cruiser *General Belgrano*, the sinking of the destroyer H.M.S. *Sheffield*, the air battle, the effects of the British task force on Argentine actions, the unopposed British landing on San Carlos, the battle of Goose Green, the "Invincible attack," the bombing of the *Sir Galahad*, the battle of Stanley, and

finally the surrender of "Puerto Argentino."

It is difficult to establish the absolute truth, but Middlebrook made an effort to maintain his objectivity. Though this work is better balanced than his last, throughout the well-written pages the author's opinions can still be detected, and his objectivity falters.

The word "ignominious" is used several times to characterize the restriction of the Argentine fleet to coastal waters after the *General Belgrano* was sunk. It is used when describing the transport of thousands of surrendered troops by British ships, and the final military defeat.

Reality would be better served if some adjectives were spared. Middlebrook contradicts himself in the introduction when he states that very few Argentine soldiers had any regrets about the war; most were proud to have fought in 1982, and the impression was that many would be willing to fight again. A soldier who feels shame does not make these statements.

Unfortunately, Middlebrook fails to mention the significant logistic help provided the British by the United States. Hence, the effectiveness of the Sea Harriers is attributed mainly to the excellence of the airplanes and their skilled pilots; there is no evaluation of their weapon system, but without the Sidewinder AIM-9L air-to-air missile, quickly provided by the United States, the outcome of the battle probably would have been different and consequently the course of the

war. Without that help the end probably would have been the same, but less "ignominious."

The book is a product of unedited information from the Argentine side. Middlebrook does help the reader to understand both the Argentine defeat and the difficulties that the British had to overcome during the war. He points out the brave actions of the men on both sides, on land, at sea and in the air. The pain of both is demonstrated and so is their civilized behavior. Above all, he reveals the deep belief of Argentines, at all levels, that the Malvinas belong to them.

As you read this review you may recognize the Argentine hand in it that may have had difficulty being totally objective.

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Thompson, Julian. *No Picnic: 3 Commando Brigade in the South Atlantic: 1982*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1985. 201pp. \$25.95

A look at most military bookshelves would indicate that field marshals and squad leaders have an abundance of literature from which to study their respective arts. Field grade officers, on the other hand, must search much harder to find books that describe warfare from the perspective of the commander of a battalion, regiment, or brigade. Fortunately, *No Picnic* by Brigadier Julian Thompson, Royal Marines,