

1990

No Picnic: 3 Commando Brigade in the South Atlantic: 1982

T. L. Gatchel

Julian Thompson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Gatchel, T. L. and Thompson, Julian (1990) "No Picnic: 3 Commando Brigade in the South Atlantic: 1982," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 43 : No. 2 , Article 31.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol43/iss2/31>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

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.

JULIO GROSSO
Captain, Argentine Navy
Naval War College

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,

fits very nicely into this large gap in military literature.

In *No Picnic*, the author recounts his participation in the Falklands campaign as commander of 3 Commando Brigade. Although he does not draw such a distinction in the book, his account can be viewed as a description of two separate, but related, operations. The first was the amphibious operation for which Brigadier Thompson was the commander of the landing force. The second operation was the land campaign to seize Stanley. During this phase the author was one of two brigade commanders in a division that had been formed upon the arrival of an army brigade in the Falklands.

Brigadier Thompson's account of the amphibious operation starts with the receipt of a warning order and ends with the Brigade firmly established ashore at San Carlos. The many intervening steps between these two events, such as embarkation, rehearsal (or lack of same), movement to the objective, and the actual landing, are all covered with an attention to professional detail not found in more general accounts of the war. One example that I found particularly interesting was a description of the process by which San Carlos was chosen as the site for the landing. *No Picnic* also forces the reader to think about what assets are required to conduct an amphibious operation. On one hand, the case can be made that the British were lucky to have succeeded in conducting the operation on such a shoestring. On

the other hand, the application of any U.S. standards of required amphibious lift and other support would have dictated that the operation never be attempted.

In his account of the land campaign, Brigadier Thompson continues to describe events with an eye to details that are invaluable to readers with a professional interest in the campaign. The margins of my copy of *No Picnic* are filled with notes pointing out the author's views on such subjects as the amount of artillery preparation required for an attack, the location of control measures, such as lines of departure and assembly areas, and the employment of night patrolling.

Throughout the book, by means of many examples, Brigadier Thompson hammers home his view that the deciding factor in the campaign was the superiority of the individual British fighting man and his training. The professional manner in which the author delivers this message makes *No Picnic* particularly instructive for field and company grade officers. On second thought, I would guess that field marshals and squad leaders would find this book equally interesting.

T.L. GATCHEL
Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps
Naval War College

Larzelere, Alex. *The 1980 Cuban Boatlift*. Washington, D.C.: National Defense Univ. Press, 1988. 543pp. \$16